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# Summit TIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## Don't fret over positivity rate, instead insist on Covid-appropriate behavior at all times: Dr Pempa T Bhutia

**SAGAR CHETTRI**  
GANGTOK, 16 JUL:

Director General-cum-Secretary, Health Department, Dr Pempa T Bhutia, today explained that main reason behind the still high positivity rate in Sikkim was the low number of testing being carried out and called on the people not to get too worried about the Covid situation just on the basis of this statistic.

Addressing a press conference here today, Dr Bhutia informed that the low number of daily tests were because of hesitation among the people to get tested. What was even more worrying about this trend was that people were instead opting for self-medication which is ill-advised in any medical condition and especially so when it comes to Covid.

He appealed to people not to self-medicate and get tested if they feel they have been exposed

to the virus so that they receive proper medical attention and follow-up.

There have been Covid fatalities in the state because people opted for self-medication and arrived at the hospital too late, he stressed.

To contain Covid, people need to get tested in time so that not only do they receive medical attention in time but also so that they get briefed on Covid protocols and don't spread the virus.

"These days, while it is noteworthy that people follow Covid protocols and isolate themselves if they develop symptoms, there is still a very high number who avoid doctors and medicate themselves. We have to stop this practice and the Chief Drug Inspector has been directed to stop over-the-counter sale of COVID medicines," Dr Bhutia said.

The Health Secretary pointed out that Sikkim has the best doc-

tor and nurses-to-population ratio in the country and people should use this to their advantage and consult doctors in time and follow their instructions.

As for the Covid scenario, he added that while daily infections are still in three-digits, hospitalizations have fallen and this, he said, was probably an effect of vaccination.

While vaccinated people could still get infected, chances of them developing serious health complications are low, he said, and the low number of hospitalizations can be explained to that, he added.

While providing comparative data of the first and second wave in the State, Dr Bhutia informed that Sikkim recorded 6,428 cases out of 86,548 samples screened and a positivity rate of was 7.4% in the first wave while in the second wave so far, 16,364 cases have been detected from the

89,105 samples screened giving a positivity rate so far of 18.37%.

While 136 COVID deaths were recorded in the first wave, the second wave has claimed 181 lives so far.

That said, the fatality rate was lower this time.

Dr Bhutia pointed out that while the case fatality rate was 2.12% in the second wave, it works out to 1.11% for the second wave.

He further detailed that while 112 [82%] of the Covid deaths in the first wave were with co-morbidities, in the second wave 51% of the deaths were of patients with co-morbidities.

While giving details of infections among 18 to 44 year olds, he informed that in the first wave, 4,181 new cases [65%] were in this age-group and in the second wave, they make up 64% of the infections.

As for infections among those below 18 years of age, the age-group not yet cleared for vaccination, Dr Bhutia informed there were only 469 [7.3%] infections in the age bracket in the first wave and that in the second wave 2,742 under-18 year olds have tested positive [16.76%]. While in the first wave, there were two Covid deaths in the age-group, the second wave has thus far claimed the lives of three under 18 year olds. As for hospitalization, he informed that 48 children were admitted in the first wave and only 11 have been admitted so far in the second wave.

On the recent allegation of SDF spokesperson on Health Department on misguiding the Governor, he explained the case fatality rate was 1.03% and the positivity rate was 11.8% in June 2021 and 7998 samples were tested from 01 to 09 July and 1421 were found

positive for COVID and the positivity rate comes to 17.7% and case Fatality rate stands at 0.35%. On the same, he mentioned that these figures were submitted to the Governor during the meeting on 10 July.

On COVID-19 vaccination, he informed that 85% of the health-care workers have received at least the first dose while 75% were fully vaccinated. 74% of the frontline workers have received at least the first dose and 60% have taken both the shots.

He added that 92% of the above 45 year olds have received at least the first dose and 58% have covered their schedule. In the 18-45 age-group, 89% have already received their first dose.

As for worries over the Delta-Plus variant of the virus, he shared that while this variant was a concern, no cases have been detected in the State thus far.

### India records 38,949 fresh Covid cases

**NEW DELHI, JUL 16 (PTI):** India recorded 38,949 new COVID-19 cases, which took the infection tally to 3,10,26,829, while the death toll reached 4,12,531 with 542 more fatalities, according to Union health ministry data updated on Friday.

The active cases have declined to 4,30,422 and comprise 1.39 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate stands at 97.28 per cent, the data updated at 8 am showed.

It said that a decrease of 1,619 has been recorded in the number of active cases in a span of 24 hours.

The ministry said 19,55,910 tests were conducted on Thursday, taking the total cumulative tests conducted so far for detection of COVID-19 in the country to 44,00,23,239, while the daily positivity rate was recorded at 1.99 per cent.

The positivity rate has been less than three per cent for 25 consecutive days, it said.

The weekly positivity rate stands at 2.14 per cent, according to the health ministry.

The number of people who have recovered from the disease has increased to 3,01,83,876, while the case fatality rate has risen to 1.33 per cent, the data stated.

The vaccine doses administered so far has reached 39.53 crore under the nationwide inoculation drive against COVID-19. India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20 lakh-mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16 last year.

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## Wild boars tearing up hard work of farmers at Tirpai



**ARPAN PRADHAN**  
GANGTOK, 16 JUL:

Crop damage by wild animals has left farmers of Tirpai under Sadam-Suntaley in South Sikkim exasperated. The village is located about an hour's walk from the main road, and has been facing the problem of crop damage by wild boars for a while now.

After a video sent by one of the farmers

flashed on social media platforms, Summit TIMES went to Tirpai to find out more.

Farmers inform that wild boars tear through two to three "Bharis" of standing maize on a daily basis which leads to a huge loss.

50-year-old, Lew Ram Dahal informs that the farmers of this area have been facing this problem for the past 5 years. De-

spite registering their complaints with the local authorities, panchayats, concerned departments, nothing has been done yet, farmers claim.

Mr Dahal has expressed his sadness saying that despite putting in hard work every day for a livelihood, farmers fail to reap the benefits of their labour because of the wild boars.

"We are fed up of

complaining to the authorities as no one listens to us," says Mr Dahal.

Their crops are being damaged also by wild rabbits, porcupines, and deer but it is the wild boars that are causing large scale damage.

Mr Dahal says that the only solution is to set up fencing to stop these animals from entering the fields.

turn to pg02

## Binay leaves, but GJM-2 remains; Names Anit as prez for now

**SMRITA KHAWAS**  
DARJEELING, 16 JUL:

Following the resignation of Binay Tamang from his post as president and the party, the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha's breakaway faction today named Anit Thapa as the temporary president until party elections are held and a new president chosen.

This was decided at a GJM-2 central committee meeting held in Kurseong today.

Party spokesperson, Keshavraj Pokhrel, insisted that the faction has not been dissolved.

Anit Thapa was officiating as general secretary of GJM-2 thus far and



claimed that "99%" of the party's leaders along with supporters were present at the Kurseong meeting today.

While he was unanimously selected the caretaker president the faction is yet to formalize a name itself, the GJM -Binay faction no longer applicable since

Binay Tamang has resigned from the party as well.

He also dismissed suggestions that their faction was planning to merger with GJM-Bimal faction, highlighting that their group received more votes than the other side at the recent assembly elections.

## Emotional Bimal receives party flag returned by Binoy



**SUMMIT REPORT**  
DARJEELING, 16 JUL:

Gorkha Janmukti Morcha president Bimal Gurung received the party flag from Binoy Tamang today. Mr Tamang, it may be recalled, had resigned from his post as president of the breakaway faction of GJM yesterday and also quit the party.

Yesterday, he had an-

nounced that he will be returning the party flag to its "original owner" and an emotional Mr Gurung received the flag today and thanked Mr Tamang.

"I am very thankful to Binoy Tamang for sending me our party flag. When this flag was created, there were only 6-7 of us to mark the

moment and one of them was Binoy Tamang. I suffered a lot and struggled a lot to maintain the identity of this flag and today I got this flag back from Binoy Tamang. I wish him a bright future and want to tell him as well as everyone that our party's doors are always open for everyone," he said.

## Covid cases cross 23K mark in Sikkim, one more death takes toll to 319

**SUMMIT REPORT**  
GANGTOK, 16 JUL:

Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 crossed the 23,000-mark today to reach 23,080 with 151 new cases of novel coronavirus being detected in the last 24 hours.

Of the 151 new cases, 92 were registered in East District, 44 in West District, 14 in South District and 06 in North District.

In the meantime, 152 more persons were discharged from home and facility isolation on Thursday after recovering fully from Covid to further improve

the count of recovered cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim to 20,181.

On the other hand, the State recorded one more COVID death when a patient passed away in home isolation in South District. Sikkim's COVID death toll now stands at 319.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department, the 151 new cases were detected from the testing of 855 samples on Thursday. The State's daily test positivity rate was accordingly registered at 17.6%.

As per the report, 79 cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 467 samples and 72 more persons were found positive in rapid antigen testing of 385 samples.

From among the 151 new cases, only nine were admitted to hospital and the rest sent to home and facility isolation. There are currently 2,320 active cases of coronavirus in the State, of whom five were admitted in ICU facility of STNM hospital and seven in the ICU at Central Referral Hospital. In all, there are 96 Covid patients with symptoms severe enough to require hospitalization.

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# Excise Dept launches e-Abkari Software

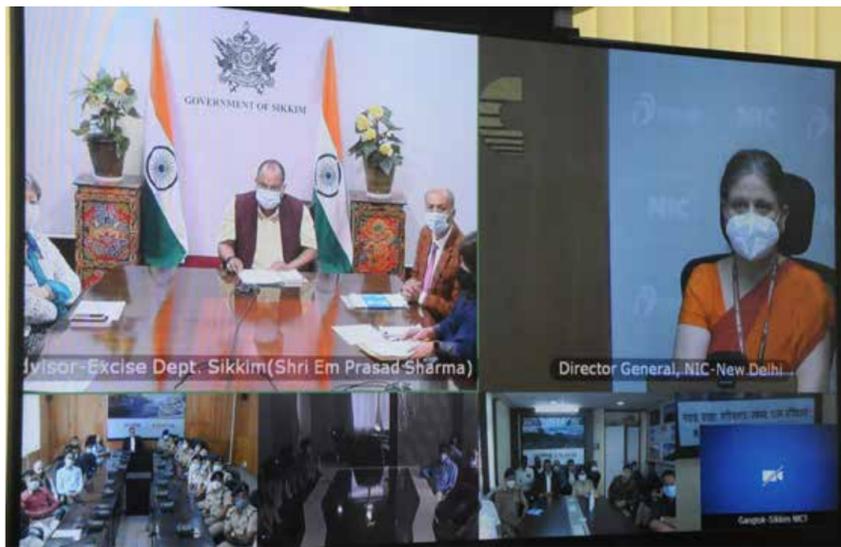
**GANGTOK, 16 JUL (IPR):** MLA cum Advisor, Excise Department, Em Prasad Sharma, digitally launched e-abkari Software at Samman Bhawan today.

The event had the presence of Secretary, Excise Department, Kuber Bhandari, Sectary, CMO, Tenzeen Kizom, Commissioner, Excise Department, Binita Chettri, SIO NIC Gangtok, Birendra Chettri and officials from NIC and Excise Department.

The event was virtually joined by Director General, NIC, New Delhi, Dr Nita Verma, SIO NIC West Bengal, officials from four districts of Sikkim, team of officers of Headquarters and vendors who are instrumental in generating revenue and press and media personnel joining from National Information Centre, Gangtok.

Advisor, Excise Department, Em Prasad Sharma, in his address, extended gratitude on behalf of the Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang, to the Excise Department, NIC Sikkim and NIC West Bengal for the contribution, comprehension and co-ordination to launch the e-Abkari software in Sikkim. He mentioned that through this initiative, Excise can administer service to all the taxpayers and stakeholders, which will be more user-friendly and efficient, thereby promoting ease of doing business, which is one of the major thrust areas of e-governance for the State.

He mentioned that it will enable the general public to apply and renew their license from the comfort of their homes, thus, reducing the risk of exposure to corona virus. He mentioned that the Chief Minister has taken a personal interest in expanding NIC from District Centres to Block Level and has also written to the Prime Minister for the requisites support. He also requested the DG NIC to extend



all support to the State Government in this regard. He said that Chief Minister has mentioned that many data centres for the State Government is on the verge of completion and with these data centres, the State will have no difficulty in the coming days to start and launch many projects of National and State importance.

He mentioned that Excise Department, in spite of the lockdown has managed to generate sustainable amount of revenue of which Rs. 206.03 crores in terms of excise duty and Rs. 6.04 crores in terms of education, for the year 2020 to 2021.

He mentioned that since the formation of the present government, several works have been implemented under the Excise Department. The vendor commission has been increased from 5% to 7% which will increase the profit of the vendors, it will motivate the vendors to increase the volume of their business. He also mentioned that licenced microbreweries incentives have been increased which will enhance the revenue of the state and provide employment opportunities. He informed

that Excise Department is also promoting home-made wines and traditional drinks which is mostly consumed by the tourists in homestays across the state. These drinks are produced by the locals from available agricultural produce, so this will ultimately upgrade the rural economy of the State.

The Advisor expressed hope that e-Abkari will significantly reduce service delivery time for State excise related service and provide uniform and unified service experience to all the stakeholders.

Director General NIC, Dr Nita Verma in her address mentioned that NIC Sikkim was set up in the year 1999 along with 4 district centres, and besides setting up offices, NIC also set up Satellite networks in Sikkim back in the year 1991, with this network the State Government was connected with district administration for exchange of information and for communication. She mentioned that over the years NIC Headquarters has worked very closely with the State Government and extended support not only in expanding infrastructure, but also developing several IT

solutions to the support the State Government in its digital initiatives. She extended her full support from NIC's side to the State Government in going completely digital with e-office, e-files and all the other features.

She mentioned that the e-Abkari software, is one of their flagship product, derived by NIC West Bengal under the guidance of West Bengal State Government. She informed that over time it had evolved into a standard product and has been used by quite a few states till now and is very glad to see it being implemented in Sikkim, today. She informed that the e-Abkari software is basically focused on managing excise, it brings a lot of transparency and accountability in the system as the complete supply chain is now visible right from the raw material to the bottling and packing of excise products. She also mentioned that it is going to be very convenient for the retailers and all the stakeholders who will be availing the service. She mentioned that on one hand it helps the State Government in maximising revenue and

increasing compliance, and on the other hand it enables ease of doing business for all the business set-ups in Sikkim. She mentioned that e-Abkari had all the best features of digital software like connected voice systems, connected with QR code, it is also connected to the State Government receipt portals and banks for transactions. She assured that with the support of NIC West Bengal and proactiveness of NIC Sikkim on the ground, e-Abkari will be implemented in a full-fledged manner in Sikkim.

Lastly, she hoped that the Government as well as the citizens and particularly businesses will be hugely benefitted by this initiative. She concluded her address by extending her gratitude to the Chief Minister for his support in all of NIC projects and assured to continue working hand-in-hand with the State Government in its digital transformation journey.

It is to be mentioned that the benefits of the e-Abkari project are a simple, transparent, arear free business driven process involved, which will allow easy participation of stakeholders in full advantage. The process will be largely benefitted by the public in terms of non-requirement of frequent visits to the office for service delivery. It integrates seamlessly with prevalent systems and devices. The implementation of the e-Abkari project will benefit the general public in terms of ease of doing business.

Earlier, the welcome address was delivered by the Secretary, Excise Department, Kuber Bhandari.

The programme also saw a presentation on e-Abkari software by SIO NIC Gangtok, Birendra Chettri.

The programme concluded with a vote of thanks proposed by Commissioner Excise Department, Binita Chettri.

## "Shocked" Court denies bail to Jamia Shooter in hate speech case

Chandigarh, 16 Jul [NDTV]: In a significant and welcome ruling, a Haryana court on Friday rejected the bail plea of a 19-year-old man arrested this week for allegedly making hate speeches - he allegedly made comments urging the abduction and killing of girls from a particular religious community at a gathering attended by Haryana BJP spokesperson and Karni Sena president Suraj Pal Amu.

The accused is the same person who fired on anti-citizenship law protesters near Delhi's Jamia Millia University in January last year, injuring one student. He was then only 17 years old.

The Gurgaon court said its "conscience was utterly shocked" on viewing a video recording of the incident, and that Indian society needed to tackle "... these kind of persons... who, if given a chance, would organise a mass murder to kill innocent lives based on their own religious hatred..."

"The accused standing before the court is not a simple, innocent young boy knowing nothing... rather (his actions) show that (with) what he has done in the past... now become capable of executing his hatred without fear... and that he can move the mass to involve his hatred."

The court slammed the idea that 'free speech' and 'freedom of expression' meant controver-

sial and incendiary comments, such as those allegedly made by the accused, were acceptable.

"Freedom of speech is an integral part of any democratic country... however, this freedom has reasonable restrictions. None can be allowed to ignite fire... because he has freedom of speech and can direct hatred towards a particular group or religious community," the court declared.

The court also reminded the police and state government of its constitutional duty - "to ensure that citizens of India, of any religion, faith or caste, should not feel unprotected... and that such hate-mongers cannot walk freely without fear".

"The act of the accused, i.e., hate speech qua instigating abduction and killing of girls from a particular religious community, is itself a form of violence, and such people and inflammatory speeches are an obstacle to the growth of a true democratic spirit," the court stressed.

The accused was arrested on Monday and charged with attacks upon the religion of a particular group and for deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage a group's religious feelings.

Arrested in January last year for firing upon a crowd of anti-CAA protesters in Delhi, he was out on bail.

## DC chairs meeting on Covid-appropriate behaviour implementation in North Sikkim

**MANGAN, 16 JUL (IPR):** As per the direction of the Chief Minister, Government of Sikkim, a follow-up meeting with all Block Development Officers and Village Covid Management Committees of all blocks, North District, was organized by the Additional District Collector (Development), RDD Mangan at DAC Meeting Hall, Mangan today. The meeting was chaired by District Collector (North), Tenzing T Kaleon.

The main agenda of the meeting was to share information about government's decision on strict implementation of Covid appropriate behaviours at the grassroots level.

ADC (Dev), Mangan spoke in detail about the points and decisions taken during the high level meeting on July 15 at Gangtok. He briefed the gathering about the significance of the role of Block Development Officers, as they are the medium to generate awareness among the people in the village as well as disseminate information from the government to the rural masses. He also spoke about the essential duties of BDOs in documentation, counselling and their responsibility to ensure that COVID 19 guide-

lines issued by the government are followed strictly.

District Collector (North) conveyed the guidelines of the Government and informed about the role of Village Covid Management Committees. He urged them to work seriously and diligently with the aim to make North District a 'Zero Covid Zone'. He reiterated the five mantras - 'Trace, Track, Testing, Vaccination and practicing Covid appropriate behaviours', requesting all to abide by them. He also directed to conduct IEC programmes in all sections of the society.

Suggestions from Zilla/Gram Panchayat, Block Officials and VCMC committees were also noted. The District Collector appreciated the feedback and suggestions and assured his support and guidance.

Block Development Officers from Block Administrative Centre Mangan, Passingdang (Dzongu) and Kabi along with the subordinate staffs attended the meeting. It also had the attendance of the Zilla Panchayat Members, Gram Panchayats, Village Covid Management Committees of all Gram Panchayat Units.

## SKM releases new music video by party's rapper Bimal Neopaney

**SAGAR CHETTRI  
GANGTOK, 16 JUL:**

A Sikkim Krantikari Morcha song by rapper Bimal Neopaney, 'COVID Ko Bela Rajneeti Na Khela' was released here at the SKM party headquarters on Friday. The song is written, composed and sung by Bimal Neopaney and directed and edited by Aadarsh Chhetri of AS Presentations.

The release function had SKM vice-president [HQ] Uttam Lepcha as the chief guest and SKM general secretary [HQ] Pawan Gurung as the guest of honour, other leaders and workers of SKM party. On the occasion, the party also felicitated the singer.

Mr Neopaney is from Aho in East District and very popular for his two songs, Bom Bom Bolay Ayo Golay and Dalle Khorsani. He has also given songs like Sikkim Ama Ko and few other songs.

Speaking to media persons, he mentioned that the song has mainly highlighted politics by opposition parties and some individuals during this pandemic period. He



alleged that a section has continuously been criticizing the government on every occasion and has never appreciated any good work of the government.

"Instead of supporting the state government in such difficult times, the former Chief Minister is just playing politics and criticizing and accusing the government," he alleged.

Mr Neopaney contended that criticizing the government during such a difficult time was like pointing fingers at the tireless work of

the health workers and further appealed to everyone to work together in such a difficult time.

Earlier, SKM secretary, RK Walung mentioned that songs like Bom Bom Bolay Ayo Golay and Dalle Khorsani have also helped to bring change in the State. On behalf of the party, he also congratulated Mr Neopaney for his songs and for his new music video.

The function ended with the presentation of vote of thanks by SKM secretary, Pankaj Giri.

## DC South chairs meeting on COVID prevention

**NAMCHI, 16 JUL (IPR):** A co-ordination meeting of District Task Force was conducted at DAC conference hall, today. The meeting was chaired by DC (South), M Bharrani Kumar, ADC (South), Satyan Pradhan, ADC (DEV), Dr. C.P. Rai, CMO (South), Dr. D.C. Sharma, SDMs, BDOs and official of various line departments.

Addressing the meeting, the DC (South) instructed various measures to be taken up to



curb the spread of positive cases in the entire district. He said that strict measures need to be adopted by the official's and other stakeholders.

The DC also directed the officials to strictly implement the COVID-19 restrictions issued recently by the State Government which includes

ban on socio-religious activities, issuing of fine for non-cooperation of covid appropriate behaviour by the public, suspension on allocation of special pass except for police and health personnel and other Covid-19 limitation furnished by the State Government.

Furthermore, the DC also requested the health department to cover the covid vaccination drive for the left out eligible categories as early as possible.

## Wild boars...

It is learnt that fencing had been sanctioned but the construction work was stopped and delayed due to various reasons. Mr Dahal also said that the panchayats continue to ignore their plight.

"It is as if we are working the fields, just to feed wild boars," says Anupa Dahal, daughter of the farmer.

All they want now is fencing to protect their fields from the wild boars.

"Departmental officers have visited our fields many times but no solution has been offered till now. We don't want compensation from the department but a permanent solution and that is fencing which will benefit the whole village of Tirpai," says another farmer, Jit Bahadur Pradhan.

"We are farmers - that is all we know. It is the only source of income for us but our crops are being damaged before harvest. Making an earning out of farming has become a dream. We are also feeling neglected by the authorities," said Begum Rai.

## India records...

It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one crore-mark on December 19 last year.

India crossed two crore cases on May 4 and three crore cases on June 23.

The 542 new fatalities included 170 deaths from Maharashtra and 87 from Kerala, the ministry said.

In total, 4,12,531 deaths have been reported in the country, including 1,26,560 from Maharashtra, 36,037 from Karnataka, 33,606 from Tamil Nadu, 25,022 from Delhi, 22,705 from Uttar Pradesh, 17,970 from West Bengal and 16,212 from Punjab.

The ministry said that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being corroborated by the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

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# SRM AP students create record with StartUp OurEye.ai

**AMARAVATHI, 15 JUL:** The first batch B-Tech students of SRM University AP founded OurEye.ai, an automated, end-to-end video intelligence solution for enterprises to monitor surveillance camera recordings, leveraging pre-existing CCTV-IP infrastructure.

OurEye received USD 35,000 from Sanjay Mehta led 100X.VC, and currently comprises 23-member team including the three co-founders - Sourav Sanyal, Miran Junaidi and Saurabh Ghanekar, all final year Computer Science students of SRM University - AP.

Being used by 11 companies across 17 outlets, the start-up generated over USD 120,000 to fuel their mission of bringing cameras to life, said the OurEye team.

OurEye.ai is about creating a whole new world of remote auditing and monitoring with pre-existing CCTV-IP infrastructure. It is a real-time video analytics platform that enables enterprises to supercharge their business with video analytics.



This transforms and solves numerous operational problems across a variety of sectors such as F&B, Hospitality, Workplace Safety, and Manufacturing.

SRM University AP President, Dr P Sathyanarayan said that the university has "a clear charter to advance and promote entrepreneurial and start-up ecosystem and culture to transform the state and country".

"It is gratifying to see that we were the first in the country to strike an

alliance with UC Berkeley, SECT and Jacobs, for Design, Innovation and Entrepreneurship", he said.

"Our vision is that SRM AP should become the pride of Amaravathi like what UC Berkeley and Stanford are for Silicon Valley. With immense pleasure, I recognise and award Sourav, Miran and Saurabh, the Co-Founders of OurEye.ai, the start-up an award of Rs 5 lakhs", he added.

"Miran, Saurabh and Sourav, students of the

maiden batch of SRM-AP, are not only setting an example to fellow students but will be quite involved with the University in establishing and creating an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem. Such successes certainly reaffirm our commitment to entrepreneurship and the idea of promoting start-ups, which are so critical to define the character and future of the university, region and the nation" expressed Prof VS Rao, Vice-Chancellor of the University.

## Largest wildfire in Oregon expands further; new evacuations

**PORTLAND (US), JUL 16 (AP):** Firefighters scrambled on Friday to control a raging inferno in south-eastern Oregon that's spreading miles a day in windy conditions, one of numerous conflagrations across the US West that are straining resources.

Authorities ordered a new round of evacuations Thursday amid worries the Bootleg Fire, which has already destroyed 21 homes, could merge with another blaze that also grew explosively amid dry and blustery conditions.

The Bootleg Fire, the largest wildfire currently burning in the US, has now torched an area larger than New York City and has stymied firefighters for nearly a week with erratic winds and extremely dangerous fire behavior. Early on, the fire doubled in size almost daily and strong winds from the south on Thursday afternoon yet again pushed the flames rapidly to the north and east.

The fire has the potential to move 4 miles (6 kilometers) or more in an afternoon and there was concern it could merge with the smaller, yet still explosive Log Fire, said Rob Allen, incident commander for the blaze. That fire started Monday as three smaller fires but exploded to nearly 5,000 acres (2,000 hectares) in 24 hours and was still growing, fanned by the same winds, Allen said.

Firefighters were all pulled back to safe areas late Thursday due to intense fire behavior and were scouting ahead of the main blaze for areas where they could make a stand by carving out fire lines to stop the inferno's advance, he said. Crews are watching the fire, nearby campgrounds "and any place out in front of us to make sure the public's out of the way, Allen said.

## FPO awareness and registration at village adopted by MP



**SUMMIT REPORT NAMCH, 16 JUL:**

Agriculture Technology Management Agency [ATMA] under the Agriculture Department organized a Farmers Producer Organization (FPO) registration and awareness programme on 15 July here at Basghari Tourism Hall, Damthang GPK and

Chemchey School hall under Damthang Jaubari GPU.

120 farmers are now expected to submit their documents for registration.

Panchayat President, Panchayats from different wards of the GPUs, JD Agriculture, Dy PD ATMA, Poklok Kamrang Area In-charge, KB Rai, Assistant

Manager of NIC and subordinates of Agriculture and Horticulture Department from the concerned area were present.

The FPO is being funded by NABARD and Damthang Jaubari GPU is a Sansad Gramin Adarsh Yojana (SAGY) village adopted by the State's Lok Sabha MP under the scheme.

## 93rd ICAR Foundation Day celebrated

**GANGTOK, 16 JUL (IPR):** The 93rd ICAR Foundation was celebrated in grand manner at ICAR-NRCO, Pakyong, Sikkim. Indian Council of Agricultural Research was established in 16 Jul, 1929. Staff

of the institute witnessed the address of the Director General, ICAR through virtual mode followed by nationwide launch of tree plantation. To mark the celebration tree plantation in the campus was inaugu-

rated by Director (Acting), Dr Rampal and another 20 saplings were planted by the staff inside the institute. Fifty tree saplings of Sikkim Mandarin were also distributed to the farmers of Dikling region.

# SPU appointed exam centre for CA Exams

**SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 16 JUL:**

For the convenience of conducting Chartered Accountant Examination for students appearing in Sikkim during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) has appointed Sikkim Professional University as its first Examination Centre in the state of Sikkim, a press release informs.

"We are very enthusiastic and proud to have the first ever exam centre in our own state of Sikkim



since November 2020 Examination. In view of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, it was very difficult to conduct the examination in the month

of July 2021, but with the support of Sikkim Professional University and the entire CA Team of Sikkim Chapter of ICAI, the examination is being

conducted successfully by following the COVID-19 SOPs at its Tadong Campus," said Convenor of Sikkim Study Circle ICAI, CA JyotiSomani.

## GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM SOCIAL JUSTICE AND WELFARE DEPARTMENT

5<sup>th</sup> Mile, Tadong, Gangtok

### NOTICE INVITING RE-TENDER

Memo No:62/GOS/SJ&WD/ EC/2021-22

Dated: 15/07/2021

The Assistant Engineer, (East) Social Justice & Welfare Department, Government of Sikkim, Samaj Kalyan Bhawan, Lumsey, Tadong East District, Sikkim on behalf of Governor of Sikkim, invites sealed tender in percentage Rate basis from the eligible contractors of appropriate class Vide notification no 584/R&B/PWD/Secy. Dated 08.10.2018 Vide notification No. 515/R&B/Pwd/Secy. Dated 12.06.2018 notification No. 104/R&B Dated 08.10.2020 for the work (s) listed under:-

Sl. no.	Name of work	Value put to Tender (in Rs.)	Completion Time (in months)	Amount of Earnest Money @ 2.5% for issue of tender form (Rs.)	Amount of Bank receipt for cost of tender document (Rs.)	Constituency / GPU/ Ward.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.	Extension of Playground and Construction of Pavilion & Gallery at Central Pendam S.S.S in East Sikkim.	95,70,238.00	18 months	2,39,256.00	5,000.00	Central Pendam GPU.  18 <sup>th</sup> West Pendam Constituency.

**Time Schedule is as follow:-**

- Date for submission of application: 16.07.2021 to 11.08.2021 (within office working hours).
- Last date for issue of tender form: 13.08.2021 (within office working hours).
- Date and Time for submission of Tender: 17.08.2021 (10.00 am to 1.00 pm).
- Date and Time of opening of Tender: 17.08.2021 at 2.00 pm.
- Place of Tender : Central Pendam GPU, 18<sup>th</sup> West Pendam Constituency, East Sikkim.

Note: The details of tender documents including tender form can be obtain from the office of the Assistant Engineer- East SJ&WD on production of receipt of deposit made to the respective GPU.

**CONDITIONS OF CONTRACT:**

- Tender is open only to the eligible Contractors / Firms of appropriate Class/Area.
- The intending tenders/contractors should apply in writing for issue of tender documents. The application would invariably be signed by the contractor himself/herself. The tender documents will not issued to any person other than the INTENDING TENDER.
- The applicants should enclose attested copies of the (a) Valid GSTIN Registration Certificate, (b) Latest Income Tax Clearance Certificate as per the Indian Income Tax Act and (c) Validated Contractor Enlistment Certificate, and Professional Tax Clearance Certificate along with the application. It is mandatory to produce the original validated/updated Enlistment Certificate during sale/issue of the Tender Document for verification (d) PAN Card.
- The prescribed Non-Transferable Tender Documents (Excluding the Tender Form) can be obtained during the period specified in (As above from the office of the Divisional Engineer of Social Justice & Welfare Department, Samaj Kalyan Bhawan, Lumsey, Tadong, East District, Sikkim, on production of receipt deposit to the revenue of the respective GPU for cost of tender documents.
- Earnest Money Deposit @ 2.5% in the State bank of Sikkim in the form of deposit receipt of schedules bank which includes in the form of temporary deposit receipts fixed deposits receipts in favour of the Sr. Accounts Officer of the Department Tender Form shall be issued only on the production of the deposit receipt to the contractors who has obtained the tender documents, on production of deposit receipts of 2.5% earnest money.
- The Tender documents, including the Tender Form with quoted offer should be placed in a sealed cover with the name of the Tenderers and the name of the work superscripted on it. Supporting documents listed at SL3 (a), (b) and (c) above should be enclosed with the offer.
- Sealed Tenders may be deposited in the Tender Box in the concerned GPK on the date and time indicated above.
- Tenders will be opened by a Tender Opening Committee as prescribed by the Government in the presence of the tenderer on the date and time indicated above.
- The Tender should sign on every page of the tender documents as Acceptance of the General Direction and Conditions of Contract and other laid down norms. The rate quoted should be both in figures and words and should be inclusive of GST and all other Taxes and Levies. Over writing and correction should be avoided and if made should be authenticated. Incomplete/Conditional tenders shall be rejected forthwith.
- In case of any discrepancy in rate(s) printed In the Schedule of Rates and Quantities issued with the tender document, rates as per approved Schedule of Rates will be taken as correct. For items outside the SOR, the rates shall as per the technically checked/estimate/analysis. Decision of the Addl. Chief Engineer cum Secretary/Head of the Department will be final in this regard.
- The Work Value, scope and quantum of work are subject to change, the contractor shall execute the work as per the directives of the Department. No claim on this account shall be entertained whatsoever. If any extra claim is made, it shall be as per the agreement rates.
- Avoidable damages due to negligence of the contractor shall be at his own risk and cost. The department shall not be liable for payment of such damages (if any), including accidents to laborer at site.
- The offer shall remain valid for a period of 90 days. The work should commence within 15 days from the date of issue of work order.
- The department reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason thereof.
- Subletting of contract work is against the norms and if it comes to the notice, the original contract shall be cancelled and appropriate action shall be initiated as per the rules.
- The Department also reserves the right to increase, decrease, alter or modify the item of works as indicated in the NIT without assigning any reason thereof.
- The contractor will have to pay all taxes and duties as applicable and notified by the State/Central Government and no claim shall be entertained in this regard whatsoever.
- The rate quoted shall be inclusive of prevailing taxes.
- The department reserves the right to reject the incomplete tender without any reasons there-off.
- The Contractor has to submit the work program / bar Chart in the initial stage.

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B	Scientist 'B'	01	02	01	01	04	09	Pay Matrix Level - 10
C	Administrative Officer	--	01	--	--	--	01	Pay Matrix Level - 07
D	Technical Assistant	--	--	01	01	01	03	Pay Matrix Level - 05
E	Upper Division Clerk	--	02	--	01	01	04	Pay Matrix Level - 04
F	Draftsman	--	01	--	--	01	02	Pay Matrix Level - 04
G	Lower Division Clerk	--	01	--	01	01	03	Pay Matrix Level - 02
H	Driver	--	02	--	01	--	03	Pay Matrix Level - 02
I	Field-cum-Laboratory-Attendant	01	02	--	01	01	05	Pay Matrix Level - 01
J	Field Attendant	--	01	--	--	01	02	Pay Matrix Level - 01
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>02</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>02</b>	<b>06</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>34</b>	

The detailed Notice for the above posts, including educational qualifications, age limits, commencement of online registration, last date for online registration, last date for submission of application, application fee, etc. is available on our website [www.wihg.res.in](http://www.wihg.res.in). Interested Candidates can download the details and apply through the link <http://www.wihg.in> given on the website of Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, Dehradun ([www.wihg.res.in](http://www.wihg.res.in)). No other means/mode of application will be accepted.

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# SummitTIMES

## For an Alternate Highway

*It is important to keep this demand alive*

Sikkim has been demanding an alternate highway for quite some time now. The demand ebbs and flows with the intensity of the monsoons and given the manner in which the clouds have been playing, the demand will jump right back on priority in the coming weeks; Or maybe not, given that being cut-off from the rest of the world is not such a bad thing during these times of a pandemic. That does not, however, mean that Sikkim's requirement for an alternate highway is not significant any longer. Unfortunately, the Centre is yet to relent with any clear commitments even though the demand is valid and urgent. Yes, there is the railway project being hammered through, but that is brutalising NH-10 even more. Delhi has made token gestures towards granting another road for Sikkim several times, but its agencies appear satisfied with snaking up more roads on already serviced hills and black-topping stretches which rarely suffer wear and tear. Apart from the fact that Sikkim is too small a player in national politics, the Centre's indifference is also in line with its short-sightedness displayed in many other important infrastructural projects at the national level. Sikkim's roads become important only when China becomes aggressive and it dawns on the babus in Delhi that a strategic location is infrastructurally under-serviced.

Since we are speaking of connectivity, a look at the plight of the aviation sector is a revelation in itself of Delhi's inexcusably poor planning. With private players taking to the skies with gusto, the planners are now actually devising ways to make take-offs more difficult, the destruction of the sector by Covid notwithstanding. Licensing is kept ludicrously exorbitant and the only reason available seems to be the fact that the infrastructure is not up to speed. How the infrastructure is overworked for a bare 600 flights per day in the whole country when one airport in Singapore handles 3,200 in the same 24 hours is something that the planning pundits need to be asked. The Frankfurt airport, only slightly bigger than Delhi or Mumbai, handles 20 times more flights. The planners knew that when the skies were opened for private companies, they would put planes on the runways, but no one seems to have realized that the infrastructure needed to be upgraded; as a result, we now have traffic jams above busy airports. We won't know this in Sikkim where the only airport in its territory has temperamentally erratic schedules.

Returning to the road connectivity situation - The nation has the second largest road network in the world, its 3.32 million kilometres of roads stretching longer than even China's. The quality, however, remains woefully poor, compromising the very connectivity that roads bring. India has only 2,000 km of expressway network against China's 30,000 km. 35 per cent of our national highways are single lane! This is easily understood when one realizes that India spends only \$2.5 billion on roads a year whereas China allocates \$25 billion. They have their priorities figured out, the bosses in Delhi, by comparison, are still trying to figure out the tricks of coalition politics, leaving them little time to plan coherently.

It is this scenario that thwarts Sikkim's hopes of getting itself an alternate highway which is promised often but still not scratched out. For India, 65% of its freight moves on roads and 85% of the passenger traffic. For Sikkim, these figures are 100%. Without the roads, Sikkim becomes an island caught in a typhoon. Sikkim has to plan ahead. Even though the airport has come through, it flies in only a small sliver of the tourist or domestic traffic. Everyone still drives into Sikkim. And it's not just people that Sikkim's roads carry, they also ferry supplies for people here. The army, deployed in rather strong numbers for a peaceful Sikkim, also moves very heavy on Sikkim's roads, and then there is the freight load for the many hydel and industrial projects. When viewed against this reality of vehicular traffic, the collapse of Sikkim's roads should surprise no one. The existing alignment is mostly of 1903 vintage, when it was carved out for mule trains. It was not very sturdy even a century back and its collapse under the ever-increasing load was bound to happen. The nature of traffic Sikkim receives makes it important to devise new options; the existing alignment should not be taxed with both passenger and freight traffic and load has to be divided. The only way this can happen is if Sikkim gets an alternate highway. There will be those who will suggest that widening will solve Sikkim's problems. Even from a layman's point of view, this is ill-advised, and is being proven every day with the new troublespots BRO gifts the highway every few months with its 'back-cutting' works. The hills cannot adjust to more back-cutting and widening will only lead to more landslides.

An alternate highway is advisable because the load will get distributed, more areas will get connected, and at least one road will remain open all year-round. In case of blockages, the repairs can be more permanent because the engineers will not have to race against time whenever the road slips. The State has already made enough noises about the need for an alternate highway but has met with little success. It has to start looking at other options to avoid its infrastructural requirements if it wants to avoid a situation where the very roads that drive in development and opportunities become the bottlenecks that strangle it.



## Why have South Africans been on a looting rampage? Research offers insights

GUY LAMB  
*theconversation.com*

The looting of businesses, shopping centres and warehouses in South Africa over the past week, particularly in the KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng provinces, has taken place at an unprecedented scale. It has affected both poor and middle-class areas. Private as well as government property has been damaged and destroyed. People have been injured and lives have been lost.

A variety of narratives have emerged in an effort to explain the looting frenzy. Some have accused die-hard supporters of former president Jacob Zuma of fuelling the unrest. Others have intimated that the looting is a consequence of state capture and the high level of criminality in South Africa.

There have been suggestions that the current disorder is akin to a rebellion of the poor brought about by acute food insecurity.

Research findings on looting, nonetheless, suggest that such phenomena are rarely caused by one thing. Rather, it's often the outcome of various factors.

Looting in South Africa has taken place intermittently for decades in the context of an ongoing crisis of poverty, inequality and unemployment. It occurred under apartheid and continued to take place after democracy 1994. But it has traditionally been largely confined to marginalised urban and peri-urban areas.

Incidents of looting have often been synonymous with outbreaks of xenophobic violence and service delivery protests. These have overwhelmingly happened in townships and informal settlements in which shops and businesses owned by foreign nationals have been plundered.

A study on xenophobic violence and the spaza shop sector by myself and researchers from the

Safety and Violence Initiative showed that looting was often a highly localised phenomenon. That is, foreign-owned spaza shops (small, informal retail outlets) were vulnerable to looting in communities where a combination of factors were at play. Among them were intense xenophobic attitudes, ineffective measures to regulate competition among shop owners, dysfunctional community leadership and the alienation of foreign shop owners.

We noted in our study the uncomfortable reality that a key driver of looting was that it was perceived by the looters to be socially acceptable. And it was often encouraged and endorsed within social and community networks.

Our findings echo those in a number of publications on looting in the US and England.

However, as underscored in our report, looting does not spontaneously emerge. It usually comes about due to instigation by influential individuals or groups who actively articulate that looting against specific targets is permissible and justifiable.

### THE DRIVERS

In political violence literature, the process of active encouragement is often referred to as brokerage. A good example was during the storming of the Capitol building in Washington DC. Trump supporters were actively encouraged to engage in acts of sedition by leaders of extremist groups.

Brokerage has been a central feature of the current looting spree in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. Supporters of Jacob Zuma have been actively encouraging South Africans to engage in acts of violence and civil disobedience.

Individuals who are more prone to violence and criminal offending tend to initiate the looting. Ordinary people may then join. Acts of looting are often contagious and develop a life of their own. This is due to group dynamics where acts of looting by

some may encourage others.

In addition, collective disorder offers a degree of camouflage and impunity for criminal actions.

The absence of capable guardians, such as police and private security, can also contribute to looting by ordinary people.

Another important observation from the xenophobic violence study was that the looting of spaza shops tended to be more widespread in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. This was due to the greater prevalence of groups and networks willing to engage in various forms of collective violence. Action taken included protests, extortion, political assassinations, taxi conflicts and hostel violence. This mainly entails violence between groups of residents over control of hostels, which are often badly maintained.

Recent reports have suggested that groups and networks like this have contributed to igniting and accelerating the present spate of looting.

The intensity of the ongoing looting in parts of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng signifies a convergence of brokerage, an upsurge in attitudes that looting is socially allowable, and a willingness of certain pro-violence groups and networks to actively facilitate looting across the two provinces.

But these factors don't adequately account for the significant shift of the looting into middle class retail areas and commercial properties.

The grand scale and bold nature of suggests well-resourced "hidden hands" that have expertise in provoking and instigating civil disorder.

### POOR STATE OF SECURITY

A report published in December 2018 revealed deeply troubling findings about state security in South Africa. The report was drawn up by the high-level review panel on the country's State Security Agency.

*[the writer is Criminologist / Lecturer, Stellenbosch University]*

## How stress affects the body – and how practice can help athletes react better under pressure

ANDREW WILKINSON  
& JAMIE BARKER  
*theconversation.com*

It isn't easy being a professional athlete. Not only are the physical demands greater than most people could handle, athletes also face intense psychological pressure during competition.

This is something 18-year-old British tennis player Emma Raducanu wrote about on social media following her retirement from Wimbledon. Though the young player had been doing well in the tournament, she began having difficulty regulating her breathing and heart rate during a match, which she later chalked up to "the accumulation of the excitement and the buzz."

She isn't the first athlete to experience the physical effects of stress, with English footballer Marcus Rashford revealing he'd also had a similar experience in the past.

There are many reasons why stress can cause such powerful bodily reactions. But with training, this response can be changed so that a person reacts positively under pressure.

### EVALUATING STRESS

Performance stress is almost unavoidable. But there are many different factors that dictate just how our minds and bodies respond to stressful events.

Typically, stress is the result of an exchange between two factors: demands and resources. A person might feel stressed about an event if they feel the demands on them are greater than they can handle. So for an athlete, demands include the high level of physical and mental effort required to succeed, their levels of

uncertainty about the event or their chance of succeeding, and any potential dangers to their health (such as injury) or their self-esteem.

Resources, on the other hand, are a person's ability to cope with these demands. These include factors such as confidence levels, how much control they believe they have over the situation's outcome, and whether they're looking forward to the event or not.

Each new demand or change in circumstances affects whether a person responds positively or negatively to stress. Typically the more resources a person feels they have in handling the situation, the more positive their stress response. This positive stress response is known as a challenge state.

But should the person feel there are too many demands placed on them, the more likely they are to experience a negative stress response – known as a threat state. Research shows that challenge states lead to good performance, while threat states lead to poorer performance.

So in Raducanu's case, a much larger audience, higher expectations and facing a more skillful opponent, may all have led her to feel there were greater demands being placed on her – but she didn't have the resources to tackle them. This led to her experiencing a threat response.

### CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS

Our challenge and threat responses essentially influence how our body responds to stressful situations, as both affect the production of adrenaline and cortisol (also known as "stress hormones").

During a challenge state, adrenaline increases the amount of blood

pumped from the heart and expands the blood vessels. This is good for the body, as adrenaline allows more energy to be delivered to the muscles and brain. This increase of blood and decrease of pressure in the blood vessels has been consistently related to superior sport performance in everything from cricket batting, golf putting and penalty taking.

But during a threat state, cortisol inhibits the positive effect of adrenaline, resulting in tighter blood vessels, higher blood pressure, slower psychological responses (such as poorer decision making), and a higher heart rate. In short, a threat state makes people more anxious – they make worse decisions and perform more poorly.

In tennis players, higher levels of cortisol have been associated with more unsuccessful serves, and greater levels of anxiety.

That said, anxiety is also a common experience for athletes when they're under pressure. Anxiety can increase heart rate and perspiration, cause heart palpitations, muscle tremors and shortness of breath, as well as headaches, nausea, stomach pain, weakness and a desire to escape in more severe cases. Anxiety can also reduce concentration and self-control (such as being able to stay calm), and cause overthinking.

How intensely a person experiences anxiety depends on the demands and resources they have. Anxiety may also manifest itself in the form of excitement or nervousness depending on the stress response.

### COPING MECHANISMS

Negative stress responses can be harmful to both physical and mental health – and repeated responses can

increase risk of heart disease and depression.

But there are many ways athletes can ensure they respond positively under pressure. Positive stress responses can be promoted by encouraging feelings of confidence and control through the language we and others (such as coaches or parents) use. Psychologists can also help athletes change how they see their physiological responses – such as helping them see a higher heart rate as excitement, rather than nerves.

Psychological skills – such as visualisation – can also help decrease our physiological responses to threat. This may involve creating a mental picture of a time when the athlete performed well, or picturing themselves doing well in the future. This can help create feelings of confidence and control over the stressful event.

Recreating competitive pressure during training can also help athletes learn how to cope with stress. An example of this might be scoring athletes against their peers to create a sense of competition. This would increase the demands players experience compared to a normal training session, while still allowing them to practice coping with stress.

It is therefore possible to learn to have a better reaction to stressful situations. Learning this skill may be just one of the many reasons athletes are able to perform many of the feats they do.

*[Andrew Wilkinson is PhD Candidate, Sport and Exercise Psychology, Loughborough University; Jamie Barker is Senior Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Psychology, Loughborough University]*

## Earthquake of 3.4 magnitude hits Assam

**GUWAHATI, JUL 16 (PTI):** An earthquake of 3.4 magnitude hit several districts of Assam on Friday morning, an official bulletin said.

There was no immediate report of any loss of life or damage to property, it said.

The earthquake took place at 8.39 am and the epicentre was at Nagaon in central Assam, the National Center for Seismology said.

The depth of the earthquake was 10 km, it said. According to the bulletin, the place of occurrence was 40 km west of Tezpur on the northern bank of Brahmaputra river. Panic-stricken people ran out of their homes as the quake struck the state.

Northeastern states fall in the high seismic zone and earthquakes frequently hit the region.

A 6.4 magnitude quake had shaken the region on April 28.

## Mizoram reports 456 new COVID-19 cases, 1 more death

**AIZAWL, JUL 16 (PTI):** Mizoram's COVID-19 caseload on Friday jumped to 26,207 as 456 more people, including over 100 children tested positive for the infection, a health department official said.

The state also reported one more COVID-19 fatality, which took the death toll to 117, he said.

The 456 new cases were reported from various districts with Aizawl reporting the highest at 271, followed by Kolasib at 62 and Lunglei district at 58.

Eighty-seven fresh cases were confirmed by RT-PCR tests, 26 cases were detected through TrueNat methods and the remaining 343 cases were detected through Rapid Antigen tests, the official said, adding that 14 patients have travel history and the rest were found to have contracted the disease locally.

The single-day positive rate is 10 per cent as the fresh cases were detected from 4,537 samples tests.

Mizoram now has 5,612 active COVID-19 cases, while 20,478 people have recovered from the infection. The COVID-19 recovery rate is 78.13 per cent and the death rate is 0.44 per cent. The state has tested over 5.46 lakh samples till date.

According to state immunisation officer Dr Lalzawmi, more than 5.96 lakh people have been inoculated till Thursday, of which 1.17 lakh people have received both doses of COVID-19 vaccine. Meanwhile, the Mizoram government on Thursday extended the existing COVID-19 guidelines till midnight of July 17.

The existing guidelines, which eased certain lockdown restrictions has come into force from June 30 and was initially scheduled to be lifted on midnight of July 15.

# Nepal's proposed policy to ban small importers sparks individual rights concerns

**PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA KATHMANDU, 16 JUL [KATHMANDUPOST]:** A government panel has suggested allowing only traders with strong financial credentials to engage in import trade, raising questions if such a policy to weed out small importers would violate their right to do business.

Firms need to state their paid-up, issued and authorised capital while registering with the Office of the Company Registrar, but the Nepal Revenue Advisory Board has suggested issuing import licences only to those individuals or firms that can import goods valued over a certain threshold annually.

According to the board's report, this provision will limit the number of importers and make it easier to identify them and track their transactions. If only a few resourceful people or firms are involved in the import business, it will be easier to screen their imports, it says.

According to the report, when a limited number of firms import specific products in large volumes, the cost of goods will also come down. With the reduced cost, the tendency among importers of undervaluing the prices of the goods deliberately to pay less tax will also decrease, it says.

In order to address these issues, the report calls for amending the existing commerce policy and other relevant laws. The budget for the fiscal year 2021-22 presented by the outgoing KP Sharma Oli-led government,



however, has made no such announcement as suggested by the board. Experts and officials admit that despite the report's good intentions to ensure proper monitoring of the transactions of importers, the recommendations may infringe on the constitutional rights of individuals to engage in trade. Article 17 of the constitution ensures that Nepali citizens have the freedom to practise any profession, carry on any occupation, and establish and operate any industry, trade and business in any part of Nepal.

Former minister and finance secretary Bidyadhar Mallik said that instead of stopping small traders from engaging in the import business, measures should be taken to control those who

engage in illegal trade. "If you limit the number of importers, you may assign the task of importing goods to a handful of people," said Mallik. "Without competition, they can put any price tag on their imports."

According to him, local people in the bordering regions also import goods on a small scale, and barring them from importing goods may hit their livelihoods.

According to the report, a total of 21,683 firms were involved in importing goods in the fiscal year 2019-20, and there are traders who have imported goods worth as low as Rs1,714 and as high as Rs156.29 billion in a year. Some traders are involved in both importing goods and selling in the retail market. This has broken the regular

chain of trade. As there are a large number of importers, the failure of the tax administration to monitor small-scale importers, non-transparent modes of payment and importers disappearing from the scene are among the factors that lead to inadequate revenue collection for the government, the report says.

Over the last few years, there has also been a tendency of one person registering several import firms under several names and discontinuing business after evading massive amounts in taxes, the report adds.

The Department of Revenue Investigation in the fiscal year 2019-20 had filed cases against several importers for evading taxes amounting to Rs7.49 billion by registering

multiple firms under various names, it points out.

Ram Prasad Acharya, director general of the Department of Revenue Investigation, said the major concern is that the government should be able to plug revenue leakage. The department is also represented in the discussions at the Revenue Advisory Body.

According to Acharya, there is a growing tendency of importing goods by registering firms in the name of dummy owners who have nothing to do with the actual business. "When revenue leakage from such firms is identified, the real culprits run away while innocent people under whose names the firms have been registered face charges."

According to him, there are several such cases in the

ongoing fake value added tax (VAT) bill scandal which the department has been investigating.

The issue is not that small importers should be barred from the import business, said Acharya. "We want to make sure that only genuine people are in the business so that illegal activities can be controlled and revenue losses reduced."

He admitted that not allowing small traders to engage in import businesses might go against the constitution and laws.

Even though the government requires importers to obtain an Exim Code to engage in import business and deposit a bank guarantee, imports are taking place in the name of sham importers, according to the report.

In order to control malpractices, the board has recommended making due diligence of the individuals or firms applying for an import licence mandatory.

A system should be developed at both the customs and tax offices that will help monitor the transactions of the traders.

When traders open bank accounts, their income source and financial capacity should be specified in the Know Your Customer form. "Currently, we have to find out whether somebody is a real importer by carrying out investigative work. But if they are identified before they enter the import business, it will help control revenue leakage to a large extent," said Acharya.

## Odisha reports 2,070 new COVID-19 cases, 64 more deaths



**BHUBANESWAR, JUL 16 (PTI):** Odisha on Friday reported 2,070 new COVID-19 cases, which took the tally to 9,49,929, while 64 more fatalities pushed the toll to 4,925, a senior health department official said.

Of the 2,070 new cases, 1,195 were reported from quarantine centres, and the rest detected during contact tracing, the official said.

Khurda district, of which state capital Bhubaneswar is part, recorded the maximum number of new cases

and fatalities at 446 and 22 respectively. Other districts which reported more than 100 fresh cases include Cuttack at 319, Balasore at 176, Jajpur at 136 and Puri at 109.

Deogarh reported the least number of cases at three.

Of the 64 fatalities, 10 were recorded in Bargarh, eight in Balasore, seven in Sundergarh, six in Ganjam, and two each in Kandhamal and Sambalpur.

One patient each succumbed to the infection in Boudh, Kalahandi,

Kendrapara, Mayurbhanj, Nuapada, Puri and Rayagada.

This apart, 53 other COVID-19 patients in the state died due to comorbidities.

Odisha currently has 21,742 active cases, while 9,23,209 patients, including 2,563 on Thursday, have recovered from the highly infectious disease.

The positivity rate stands at 6.36 per cent.

Over 1.49 crore samples have been tested in state thus far, including 70,244 on Thursday.

Meanwhile, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) has declared two apartments in the state capital as containment zones after detection of multiple cases there.

Both the apartments have been put under surveillance of the civic body and the police.

The BMC will provide essential commodities and necessary medical support to the families residing in those areas through authorised vendors, sources in the civic body said.

## 2 new COVID-19 cases in Andamans

**PORT BLAIR, JUL 16 (PTI):** The union territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands reported only two new COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours, pushing the tally to 7,501, a health department official said on Friday.

The two cases were detected during contact tracing, the official said.

The COVID-19 death toll in the archipelago remained at 129 as no fresh fatality due to the contagion was reported

in the last 24 hours, the official said.

The union territory now has 13 active COVID-19 cases and all the patients are in the South Andaman district while the other two districts - North and Middle Andaman and Nicobar - are now COVID-19 free.

A total of 7,359 people have recovered from COVID-19 in the union territory so far, he added.

The Andaman and Nicobar administra-

tion has tested 4,22,876 samples for COVID-19 till date and the cumulative test positivity rate is 1.77 per cent, the official said.

A total of 2,48,150 people have been inoculated so far, of which 1,72,087 people have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine and 76,063 people have received both doses of the vaccine, he said, adding that the union territory has a total population of 4 lakh people.

## Assam reports 1,992 new COVID-19 cases, 27 death

**GUWAHATI, JUL 15 (PTI):** Assam recorded 1,992 fresh COVID-19 cases on Thursday, taking the states total tally to 5,42,445, according to a National Health Mission (NHM) bulletin.

In the last 24 hours, 27 fatalities were also recorded, pushing the COVID-19 death toll to 4,937.

Of the 27, five deaths were reported from Jorhat district, four from

Dibrugarh and two each from Cachar, Darrang, Kamrup Metro, Karbi Anglong, Morigaon, and Sonitpur. One death each was reported from Barpeta, Biswanath, Hojai, Kamrup Rural, Kokrajhar, and Tinsukia, the bulletin said.

The current death rate is 0.91 per cent and the number of COVID-19 positive patients dying due to other causes

is 1,347. The new COVID-19 cases detected during the day included 263 in Kamrup Metro, 157 in Golaghat, 135 in Lakhimpur, and 125 in Dibrugarh.

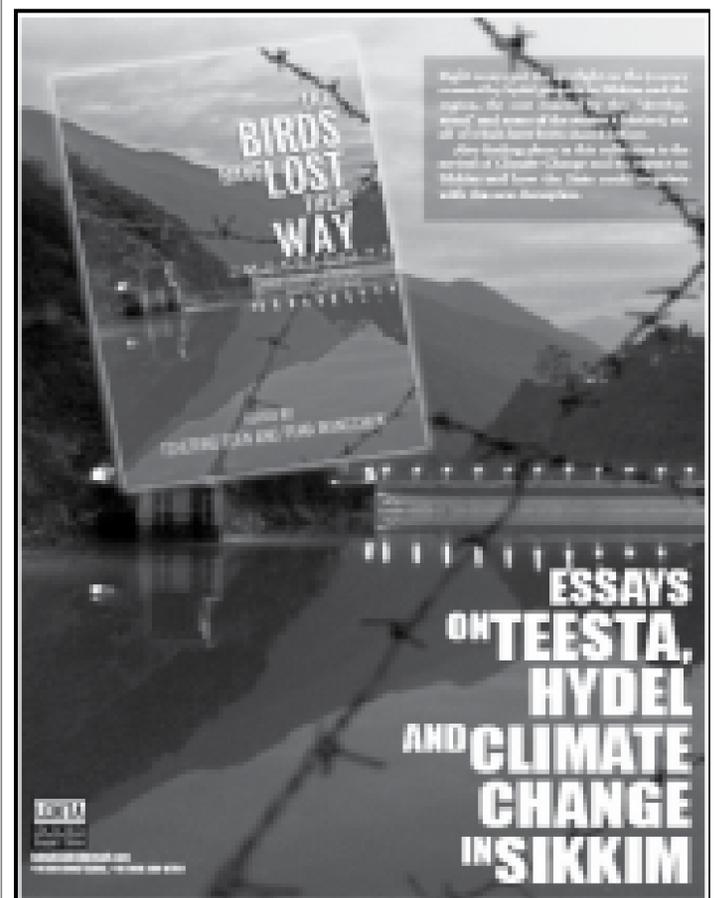
The days positivity rate was 1.65 per cent, as per the NHM bulletin.

As many as 2,498 patients were discharged from hospitals in the last 24 hours, pushing the number of recovered

cases to 5,17,041 with an overall recovery rate of 95.32 per cent. Altogether 1,20,908 COVID-19 tests were conducted during the day, with the cumulative tests figure touching 1,66,47,522.

The number of active cases in the state is 19,120.

So far, 85,41,055 people have been vaccinated, of whom 14,69,569 have received both doses.



# Made in India to make its presence felt at Olympic Stadium during Tokyo Games athletics events

**NEW INDIA, JUL 16 (PTI):** India may not be anywhere close to being an athletics superpower but equipment manufactured by the country's companies will be visible all across during the field events of the Olympics Games at Tokyo's Olympic Stadium.

Out of the six companies listed by the sport's governing body World Athletics to provide implements for shot put, discus and hammer throw events, three -- Anand Track and Field Equipment (ATE), Bhalla International and Nelco -- are based in India.

They will provide shot put (7.26kg), discus (2kg) and hammer (7.26kg) during the Olympics, which opens on July 23.

These implements are kept in a holding rack at the competition site for the participants to choose from.

"We are providing six implements each in shot put, discus throw and hammer throw. So, for men and women's events together, we are providing 36 implements dur-



ing the Tokyo Olympics," AdarshAnand of ATE told PTI.

"Our implements have been in use in the Olympics since 1992 Barcelona Games till now. In fact, our journey with athletics started in Tokyo during the 1991 World Championships," he added.

The company has a registered office in Meerut and also a factory in New Delhi.

Bhalla International is also providing 36 im-

plements, six each for the men's and women's shot put, discus throw and hammer throw.

"Our brand got the award for high quality products during the 2016 Rio Olympics. It is a proud privilege for our company and also for the country to have a presence in the Olympics," company representative AshutoshBhalla said.

Many of the competing athletes come with their own implements

customised for themselves, like a Neeraj Chopra would use a Nemeth or a Nordic brand javelin. But some athletes will use the implements kept at the racks of the competition site.

Three Indians, who are competing in the Tokyo Olympics, will use home made brands.

"Tajinder Singh Toor and KamalpreetKaur will use our shot put and discus. Also, I am expecting competitors of other countries to use our im-

plements," Anand said. "Over the years, athletes of more than 40 countries -- from Europe and the USA -- have been using our implements in various top-level competitions all over the world," he added.

Veteran SeemaPunia will be using the discus manufactured by Bhalla International, also a Meerut-based company and one of the biggest sports goods equipment exporters in the country.

"SeemaPunia is using our discus and I am expecting some other competitors also," Bhalla said.

But the implements are not provided to the Organising Committee in lieu of money.

"It is a kind of advertisement. Our products are seen at the biggest sporting event in the world and athletes will come to know about our brand and our quality and they can try out in future," said Bhalla.

A good quality shot put, discus or hammer is priced anywhere between Rs 6000 to Rs 10,000.

# "Naomi Osaka" docuseries takes intimate look at tennis star



**LOS ANGELES, JUL 16 (AP):** Those looking for definitive answers about Naomi Osaka and how she copes with the demands of her career and fame shouldn't expect to find them in a new Netflix docuseries about the four-time Grand Slam champion.

It's the tennis star's unresolved questions that are the heart of "Naomi Osaka," director-producer Garrett Bradley said of the series that was taped over a two-year period starting with the 2019 U.S. Open. Production concluded in early 2021 before Osaka's withdrawal from the French Open.

The three-part series debuting Friday is a contemplative, intimate look at a young athlete finding her way.

Film of major tournaments, wins and losses, is interwoven with scenes of Osaka's time with family and her boyfriend, the rapper Cordae; her training and business demands; Osaka's reflections on her career, multiracial identity and the death of mentor Kobe Bryant, and her decision to protest police killings of Black men and women.

"It was really important for me to not go into the project with an agenda or really even with an opinion," Bradley, a 2021 Oscar nominee for the documentary "Time," said.

"I really tried to open myself up to her world and where she was at, and tried to understand the sort of essence of who she was."

As filming progressed, she said, it became clear that the series' foundation would be the conundrums faced

not only by Osaka but society at large.

Those inquiries are "connected to value systems and self-definition, and how one can create a more holistic understanding of themselves in any given environment that they find themselves in," said Bradley, whose fellow producers include LeBron James, under the umbrella of his Spring-Hill production company.

Osaka, 23, who was not made available for an interview, withdrew from the French Open last May, citing "huge waves of anxiety" before speaking to the media and revealing that she has suffered long bouts of depression.

She also skipped the just-ended Wimbledon, with her agent saying she wanted personal time, but is expected to compete in the upcoming Tokyo Olympics for her native Japan. Osaka was just a few years old when she, her sister and their Japanese mother and Haitian father moved to the United States.

In a Time magazine essay published July 8, Osaka wrote that, "Believe it or not, I am naturally introverted and do not court the spotlight. I always try to push myself to speak up for what I believe to be right, but that often comes at a cost of great anxiety."

"I do hope that people can relate and understand it's O.K. to not be O.K., and it's O.K. to talk about it. There are people who can help, and there is usually light at the end of any tunnel," she said, thanking Michelle Obama, Michael Phelps and other public figures for offering support.

The Netflix docu-

series includes footage of Osaka and her sister, Mari, on the court as youngsters, with the tennis star recalling spending at least eight hours a day at practice, adding, "I was just tired."

Mari Osaka, 25, also played professional tennis but said in a social media post in March that she was retiring from the sport because it was "a journey which I didn't enjoy ultimately."

The docuseries sketches a portrait of Naomi Osaka as thoughtful and driven to succeed but struggling to cope with her sport's demands and her future.

At one moment of self-reflection she says, "So what am I, if not a good tennis player?"

Filmmaker Bradley cautions that the series should not be seen as definitive, but rather a snapshot of a brief period in a life that continues to "evolve and grow."

"This moment that we captured was her in the process of a learning curve, which I think she directly articulates really beautifully, (that) there are elements of fame that are hard to be prepared for," Bradley said.

"The sustenance that she finds is in accepting where she is currently in this moment, and certainly in her family and in her loved ones, but also is in finding her own voice. And that includes choosing when to use it and when not to."

Asked how she perceived Osaka's emotional well-being, Bradley said she considers her "an incredibly strong and really brilliant person."

"She's in control of her own narrative, and I think that's a beautiful thing," she said.

# Braves acquire OF Joc Pederson in trade with Cubs

**CHICAGO (AP):** The Atlanta Braves acquired Joc Pederson in a trade with the Chicago Cubs on Thursday, bolstering their outfield after losing Ronald Acuña Jr. to a season-ending knee injury.

Atlanta sent minor league first baseman Bryce Ball to Chicago for Pederson, who is batting .230 with 11 homers and 39 RBIs in 73 games. The 29-year-old Pederson spent his first seven seasons with the Los Angeles Dodgers before signing with the Cubs in free agency in February.

The Braves are looking to return to the playoffs, but their pursuit of a fourth straight NL East title took a hit when Acuña tore the ACL in his right knee during Saturday's 5-4 victory over Miami.

Atlanta hit the All-Star break in third in the division, four games back of the first-place New York Mets.

Pederson could be in the lineup when the Braves return to the field Friday night against Tampa Bay. The lefty-batting slugger played in the postseason in each of the previous six years with Los Angeles, batting

.382 with two homers in 16 games in the Dodgers' run to the World Series title in 2020.

Atlanta assumes the \$1,935,484 remaining of Pederson's \$4.5 million salary. The deal includes a \$10 million mutual option with a \$2.5 million buyout and allows Pederson to earn \$125,000 each for 500, 525, 550 and 575 plate appearances.

The Pederson deal could be the first of many for Chicago before the July 30 trade deadline. The Cubs dropped 13 of 15 before the break, moving the team into sell mode after it was once on top of the NL Central.

All-Stars Kris Bryant and closer Craig Kimbrel, along with slugging infielders Javier Báez and Anthony Rizzo, are among the top names that could be headed out of Chicago. Báez, Bryant and Rizzo are eligible for free agency after this season.

Ball, 23, was selected by Atlanta in the 24th round of the 2019 amateur draft. The 6-foot-6 Ball batted .207 with six homers and 30 RBIs in 53 games for High-A Rome this year.

# US-Australia basketball game canceled because of protocols

**LAS VEGAS (AP):** The United States' men's basketball exhibition game against Australia scheduled for Friday night in Las Vegas has been canceled because of health and safety protocols.

USA Basketball cited "an abundance of caution" in making the decision Thursday night. The U.S. women's game against Australia will be played as scheduled Friday in Las Vegas.

The decision to cancel the game came hours after Washington Wizards star Bradley Beal was

ruled out of the Olympics after being placed into health and safety protocols. The team also said Detroit Pistons forward Jerami Grant also was in health and safety protocols "out of an abundance of caution." The Americans are still scheduled to play Spain on Sunday before heading to Tokyo, with their opening game against France set for July 25.

The U.S. lost its opening two exhibition games to Nigeria and Australia and beat Argentina in the third Tuesday night.

# Messi moves closer to signing new contract with Barcelona

**BARCELONA, SPAIN (AP):** Lionel Messi and Barcelona are closer to signing a new deal that would keep the Argentine star at the Spanish club through the end of his playing career.

A person with knowledge of the negotiations between club and player told The Associated Press on Friday that Messi was prepared to accept Barcelona's offer of a five-year contract at 50% of his previous salary. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the negotiations.

In his previous contract, signed in 2017, Messi earned a massive 138 million euros (\$163 million) per season.

The person with knowledge of the negotiations did not indicate the other aspects of the contract still being worked out between the club and Messi's father, Jorge Messi, who acts as his agent. Barcelona as a club has officially said nothing publicly about the details of the negotiations with the soccer great. The 34-year-old Messi joined Barcelona two decades ago at age 13. Last August he stunned Barcelona by announcing that he wanted out after the 2019-2020 season ended without a title and his relationship with then club president Josep Bartomeu deteriorated.

The return of Joan Laporta to the club's presidency in March has been key in bringing Messi back into the fold.

Laporta ran Barcelona when Messi had his breakout as a teenager.

A significantly lower salary for Messi is critical to keeping him at the financially troubled club following the losses sustained by the pandemic and some questionable management. Laporta admitted that a lower salary cap for Barcelona due to reduced revenues complicated his task to make all the pieces fit. Messi's previous contract with Barcelona expired on June 30, making many Barcelona fans nervous that he could be lured away to big spenders like Paris Saint-Germain or Manchester City.

Even Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman acknowledged last week that he was concerned.

"Messi? When things don't get resolved, you have to be worried," Koeman said. "Laporta told me to remain calm because we are working hard so that he remains with us for years to come. I have complete faith in our president to work this out."

The six-time Ballon d'Or winner is currently on vacation after leading Argentina to the Copa America title last weekend, ending a long wait for a major title for his nation.

Messi has enjoyed a glittering career at Barcelona. He has won 35 club titles in 17 seasons, including four Champions Leagues, and set club records for goals (672) and appearances (778).

# TMC raises pitch for holding by-polls in Bengal

**NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, JUL 15 (PTI):** The Trinamool Congress on Thursday raised the pitch for conducting by-polls to vacant assembly seats in West Bengal at the earliest, as a parliamentary party delegation met the Election Commission in Delhi with the demand, while party supremo Mamata Banerjee sought the same in Kolkata.

The TMC is keen on the bypolls as West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who lost the Assembly election from Nandigram, will have to get elected in the next six months to continue as the chief minister. In that case, the bypolls must be conducted by November 5.

In a memorandum submitted to the poll body, the party stated that with the decreasing number of coronavirus cases in the state, conditions are conducive for conducting the bypolls with Covid appropriate protocols in place.

Banerjee told reporters in Kolkata that the EC had recently sought to know if Bengal was ready to conduct polls to two vacant Rajya Sabha seats, and the chief secretary, in his reply, gave assurance that the state could also hold bypolls to the seven assembly constitu-

encies, while adhering to all COVID-19 guidelines. "With the COVID-19 positivity rate having come down to 1.5 per cent in Bengal, the situation is conducive to conduct the by-elections as most of the poll-bound areas haven't reported any fresh infection of late," she said.

A high-level TMC delegation comprising six MPs appealed to the poll panel to conduct bypolls in West Bengal at the earliest.

The six-member TMC delegation included MPs Derek O'Brien, Sukhendu Sekhar Roy and Sudip Bandyopadhyay. "The number of COVID-19 cases is at least 17 times lower now with fewer than 831 cases reported till July 14.

There has been a steady decline in the number of daily cases recorded....

"Hence, it is conducive to hold the bye-polls to the aforementioned constituencies at this time. Going by the steady decline, it is expected that by the time the bye-elections are announced and conducted, the number of daily cases will decrease further. During this time, appropriate Covid safety norms as may be prescribed by the Election Commission of India (ECI), may be adopted during campaigning," the party

said in the memorandum. In a jibe at the BJP, which claimed that Banerjee is desperately waiting for the bypolls as she needs to get elected to the Assembly to retain the CM's chair, the TMC boss said the saffron party is opposed to the demand as it knows well that it won't be able to clinch any seat.

"We have placed our demands before the EC following all constitutional norms. There is nothing illegal about it.

If an emergency situation arises, the EC will accordingly take a decision. But isn't COVID-19 under control in the seven seats now? Several wards of Bhabanipur haven't reported any case over the past few days" she said.

Banerjee is expected to file nomination from Bhabanipur, which was vacated by winning TMC candidate Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay, days after the results were declared.

In its memorandum, the party also said that if general elections could be held at the height of the pandemic, bypolls too could be held at a time when cases were significantly lower.

In March-April 2021, wherein polls were conducted in eight phases spread across the month, there was a steep

rise in daily Covid cases in West Bengal. From the middle of April 2021, at the peak of the elections, the daily cases rose from approximately 6,000 cases to 17,000 cases. "Despite the rise in Covid cases and our repeated requests, the remaining phases of the polls were not clubbed together, as the ECI concluded that it was safe to conduct elections.

"Constitutional principles mandate that voters from the aforesaid assembly constituencies have the fundamental right to elect a representative of their choice to represent them in the Legislative Assembly of the State," the memorandum stated.

Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay is slated to contest by-election from Khardah, which fell vacant after the TMC's Kajal Sinha succumbed to COVID-19.

In Gosaba too, TMC MLA Jayanta Naskar died of COVID-related complications last month.

Polls were countermanded in Jangipur and Samserganj following the death of candidates, also due to the viral disease.

In Dinhatra and Santipur, the winning BJP nominees quit as MLAs as they wanted to retain parliamentary berths.

# Europe floods: Death toll over 110 as rescues continue

**BERLIN (AP):** At least 110 people have died in devastating floods across parts of western Germany and Belgium, officials said Friday, as rescue operations and the search for hundreds still unaccounted for continued.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said he was "stunned" by the devastation caused by the flooding and pledged support to the families of those killed and to cities and towns facing significant damage.

"In the hour of need, our country stands together," Steinmeier said in a statement Friday afternoon. "It's important that we show solidarity for those from whom the flood has taken everything."

Authorities in the German state of Rhineland-Palatinate said 60 people had died there, including at least nine residents of an assisted living facility for people with disabilities. In neighboring North Rhine-Westphalia state officials put the death toll at 43, but warned that the figure could rise further.

Rescuers were rushing Friday to help people trapped in their homes in the town of Erftstadt, southwest of Cologne. Regional authorities said several people had died after their houses collapsed due to subsidence, and aerial pictures showed what appeared to be a massive sinkhole.

"We managed to get 50 people out of their houses last night," said Frank Rock, the head of the county administration. "We know of 15 people who still need to be rescued."

Speaking to German broadcaster n-tv, Rock said that authorities had no precise number yet for how many had died.

"One has to assume that under the circumstances some people didn't manage to escape," he said.



Authorities said late Thursday that about 1,300 people in Germany were still listed missing, but cautioned that the high figure could be due to duplication of data and difficulties reaching people because of disrupted roads and phone connections.

In a provisional tally, the Belgian death toll rose to 12, with 5 people still missing, local authorities and media report early Friday.

The flash floods this week followed days of heavy rainfall which turned streams and streets into raging torrents that swept away cars and caused houses to collapse across the region.

The governor of North Rhine-Westphalia state, Armin Laschet, has called an emergency Cabinet meeting Friday. The 60-year-old's handling of the flood disaster is widely seen as a test for his ambi-

tions to succeed Merkel as chancellor in Germany's national election on Sept. 26.

Steinmeier called for greater efforts to combat global warming.

"Only if we decisively take up the fight against climate change will we be able to limit the extreme weather conditions we are now experiencing," he said.

Experts say such disasters could become more common due to climate change.

"Some parts of Western Europe ... received up to two months of rainfall in the space of two days. What made it worse is that the soils were already saturated by previous rainfall," said Clare Nullis, spokesperson for the World Meteorological Organization.

It was too soon to blame the floods and preceding heat wave on global warming rising global tem-

peratures, she said, but added: "Climate change is already increasing the frequency of extreme events. And many single events have been shown to be made worse by global warming."

Malu Dreyer, the governor of Rhineland-Palatinate state, said the disaster showed the need to speed up efforts to curb global warming.

"Climate change isn't abstract anymore. We are experiencing it up close and painfully," she told the Funke media group.

She accused the Laschet and Merkel's center-right Union bloc of hindering efforts to achieve greater greenhouse gas reductions in Germany, Europe's biggest economy and a major emitter of planet-warming gases.

Thousands of people remain homeless after their houses were

destroyed or deemed at-risk by authorities, including several villages around the Steinbach reservoir that experts say could collapse under the weight of the floods.

Defense Ministry spokesman Arne Collatz said the German military had deployed over 850 troops as of Friday morning, but the number is "rising significantly because the need is growing." He said the ministry had triggered a "military disaster alarm," a technical move that essentially decentralizes decisions on using equipment to commanders on the ground.

Across the border in Belgium, most of the drowned were found around Liege, where the rains hit hardest. Skies were largely overcast in eastern Belgium, with hopes rising that the worst of the calamity was over.

Italy sent a team of civil pro-

tection officials and firefighters, as well as rescue dinghies, to Belgium to help in the search for missing people from the devastating floods.

The firefighters tweeted a photo of one team working in Tillif, south of Liege, to help evacuate residents of a home who were trapped by the rising waters.

In the southern Dutch province of Limburg, which also has been hit hard by flooding, troops piled sandbags to strengthen a 1.1 kilometer (0.7 miles) stretch of dike along the Maas river and police helped evacuate some low-lying neighborhoods.

Caretaker Prime Minister Mark Rutte said Thursday night that the government was officially declaring flood-hit regions a disaster area, meaning businesses and residents are eligible for compensation for damage. Dutch King Willem-Alexander visited the region Thursday night and called the scenes "heart-breaking."

Meanwhile, sustained rainfall in Switzerland has caused several rivers and lakes to break their banks. Public broadcaster SRF reported that a flash flood swept away cars, flooded basements and destroyed small bridges in the northern villages of Schleithem and Beggingen late Thursday.

Erik Schulz, the mayor of the hard-hit German city of Hagen, about 50 kilometers (31 miles) northeast of Cologne, said there had been a wave of solidarity from other regions and ordinary citizens to help those affected by the devastating floods.

"We have many, many citizens saying 'I can offer a place to stay, where can I go to help, where can I registered, where can I bring my shovel and bucket?'," he told n-tv. "The city is standing together and you can feel that."

## Pakistan made a mistake by removing Sarfaraz, Arthur after 2019 WC: Latif

**KARACHI, JUL 16 (PTI):** Former Test captain and wicketkeeper Rashid Latif believes Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has made a big mistake by removing Sarfaraz Ahmed and Mickey Arthur as skipper and coach of the national team after the 2019 World Cup.

"Why was Mickey Arthur removed... what was the reason for his sacking? The team had done well under him and it was progressing well. Check the records and you can see but he was removed because of politics," Latif said on the YouTube Cricket Baaz channel.

He said Sarfaraz also didn't deserve to be booted out. PCB had sacked Arthur one month after Pakistan failed to reach the semi-finals of the World Cup because of their net run rate, while Sarfaraz was removed as captain of all three formats after the national team suffered a white-wash against a weak Sri Lankan side in a T20 series at home in October-November 2019. Sarfaraz and Arthur had combined well to take Pakistan to the Champions Trophy title in 2017.

"I don't blame Misbah-ulHaq, perhaps he didn't want to be head coach. He was young and inexperienced as a coach so why appoint him? It is the PCB to be blamed for what has happened," Latif said. He after Sarfaraz and Arthur's removal, the team had undergone changes which had not worked well for Pakistan cricket.

## Flash flooding sweeps Arizona; 1 rafter dead in Grand Canyon

**FLAGSTAFF (US), JUL 16 (AP):** One person who went missing from a Colorado River rafting trip in the Grand Canyon during a flash flood was found dead Thursday in frigid water while a second person was found alive, a park spokeswoman said.

The flood was part of monsoon storms that have inundated Arizona this week, including in Flagstaff where city streets were left a muddy mess as water mixed with logs and debris swept through. Cleanup was underway Thursday with the threat of more rain looming.

At the Grand Canyon, a torrent of water rushed through a slot canyon and washed away the camp where two commercial rafts with 30 passengers pulled off the river to stay Wednesday evening, said Grand Canyon spokeswoman Joelle Baird.

Authorities initially believed that two people had been swept into the river and launched a search by air, ground and water to find them. One was found at the camp that the group had abandoned to seek a safer place to sleep, Baird said. The other was found dead in the water next to the camp that flooded, she said.

The motorized trip operated by Arizona Raft Adventures was scheduled to last more than a week. A company spokeswoman on Thursday referred questions to John Dillon, the executive director of the Grand Canyon River Outfitters Association that represents the outfitters permitted in the canyon.

Dillon said he hasn't yet spoken to company officials, one of whom is on another trip on the river. He said while the outfitters were pleased to hear one rafter was found, they're saddened by the death of the other.

Our hearts our broken that people on the trip lost somebody, people at home lost some-



body, he said. That matters more than anything else.

A park helicopter took two paramedics to the river late Wednesday to treat and stabilize the injured rafters after receiving a satellite phone call from someone on the trip asking for help. Seven passengers who were injured were airlifted out of the canyon, Baird said. She wasn't sure of the extent of their injuries.

Baird said the park will help the other rafters who want to cut their trip short get off the river, she said.

The flood hit the camp set up about 40 miles (64 kilometers) downstream from where the rafts launched at Lees Ferry near the Arizona-Utah state line, turning the normally greenish-colored river into a muddy brown. Forecasters had issued a flash flood watch for the area Wednesday, but it's not clear whether the rafting guides were aware.

Radar showed about an inch (2.5 centimeters) of rain along that stretch of the Colorado River, according to the National Weather Service.

Park officials did not imme-

diately release the name of the rafter who died. At least two other people have died this year on Grand Canyon rafting trips that draw tens of thousands of tourists, locals and researchers annually.

James Crocker, 63, of Colorado died after he fell into the river at the top of a rapid in June. Members of his private boating groups pulled him out of the water but couldn't revive him.

Deborah Ellis, 60, of Idaho died after the commercial raft she was on hit rapids and flipped in late April. An autopsy report released to The Associated Press in response to a public records request determined she drowned.

The entire Southwest, which has been desperate for rain after two years of dismal monsoon activity, has been hammered lately with storms. More rain is in the forecast.

In Tucson, a fire department swift water team rescued a father and his two daughters from the roof of their vehicle Wednesday after they drove into a usually dry wash and got stranded in the floodwaters, said Golder Ranch Fire District spokesman

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### CORONAVIRUS PRECAUTIONS & SAFETY TIPS

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**LOCKDOWN HAS BEEN LIFTED, BUT UNFORTUNATELY, THE THREAT OF COVID-19 HAS NOT YET SUBSIDED.**

As we adapt to the new normal, here is a reminder of the precautions you must take-

#### WEAR A MASK

Always wear a mask to prevent droplets from going outside

#### GET A FLU VACCINATION

Get your flu shot to develop an immune response before flu season begins, particularly if you have comorbidities

#### WASH YOUR HANDS

Wash your hands often, for about 20 seconds each with soap & carry a sanitizer

#### MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING

Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arm's lengths) from other people

#### GET TESTED

Get tested if you have symptoms of COVID-19. Stay at home until you get the result.

#### COVER YOUR MOUTH & NOSE WHILE SNEEZING, OR COUGHING

Before stepping outside, make sure to carry a handkerchief or a packet of tissues.

#### FOLLOW PRECAUTIONS BEFORE STEPPING OUT

Carry your sanitizer, water bottle and, most importantly, avoid crowded areas.

#### CHECK YOUR TEMPERATURE

Monitor your temperature on regular basis

## Cannes nod a shot in the arm, says Bangladesh filmmaker Abdullah Mohammad Saad

**NEW DELHI, JUL 16 (PTI):** The 74th Cannes Film Festival is inching towards its finale and the much-coveted awards are hours away from being handed out. One filmmaker who is in with a fair chance of springing a surprise is Bangladesh's Abdullah Mohammad Saad, the only South Asian with a title in the competitive Un Certain Regard section.

Saad's sophomore venture, "Rehana Maryam Noor", which premiered in early in ongoing festival, made a strong impression. The fate of the 20 films that constitute the section will be decided by a five-member jury headed by English filmmaker Andrea Arnold.

PTI caught up with Saad to talk about his film, the first-ever from Bangladesh to make it to the Cannes Film Festival's official selection.

For me, it's a great honour and a huge inspiration, he says.

The only Bangladeshi film to have been screened in Cannes before "Rehana Maryam Noor" was Tareque Masud's "Matir Moina" ("The Clay Bird"), but it was in Directors' Fortnight in 2002.

The director sees the Cannes slot for "Rehana Maryam Noor" as a major shot in the arm, as much for him as for Bangladeshi cinema as a whole.

"Making a film requires so much sacrifice. So, when something like this happens, it really helps you to carry on," says the 36-year-old director who debuted in 2016 with the critically-acclaimed "Live From Dhaka".

For my country, it meant a lot. Especially because it's our 50 years of independence. I am sure our filmmakers will keep making brilliant films and we will be regular in the Cannes selection from

the next year, he adds. How did Saad pack so much power in a film as understated as "Rehana Maryam Noor"? "It's really hard to explain, he says. I guess it is because I always prefer to leave space for my audiences to have their own interpretation. I don't try to confirm any particular feelings nor convince them how much they think about my characters.

Besides Saad, team "Rehana Maryam Noor" was led on the Cannes red

to actors, Saad says: I try to be specific with my actors and not give them too much information or over-explain an idea. Actors have an innate ability to understand what really a scene requires. I just try to build on that and keep chasing until we hit all the important notes.

There wasn't much improvisation, he continues. We rehearsed for nine months. Although it's hard to make sudden changes in a tightly knit



**NYC STRUT!** The supermodel, Gigi Hadid looks super stylish in all white and tinted shades while out for a stroll in New York.



carpet by the film's lead actor Azmeri-Haque Badhon, whose performance as the eponymous character has drawn unstinted praise from critics.

Talking about how he zeroed in on Badhon, Saad says: During the look test, she was exactly what I had been imagining Rehana to be since the time I started writing the film.

He adds: I could feel that she connects with Rehana personally. That's when I became sure of her. She was absolutely committed to this film from day one, opened her heart and soul, and gave it her best. Asked about his approach

screenplay, I like to be open while directing on set. If a better approach comes up, I embrace it.

Did the "Rehana Maryam Noor" idea emerge from real-life experiences? Yes, it did, Saad replies. I write from my personal experiences and things that I have been observing closely in my life.

On the cinematic influences on him, Saad mentions no specific names. He says: The idea of wanting to become a filmmaker grew into me very slowly. But later when I started to watch films regularly, I became fond of a lot of filmmakers.

## Film personalities pay tributes to 'inspiration' Surekha Sikri: She was a top-class performer

**MUMBAI, JUL 16 (PTI):** Veteran filmmaker Shyam Benegal, Neena Gupta and Manoj Bajpayee among others on Friday paid tributes to three-time National Award-winning actor Surekha Sikri and remembered her as one of the greatest talent of the entertainment industry.

Sikri, known for her nuanced performance in Tamas, Mammo, Badhaai Ho, died following a cardiac arrest at a hospital in suburban Mumbai this morning. She was 75.

Benegal, who has worked with Sikri in Mammo, Sardari Begum and Zubeidaa, said it was a delight to see Sikri perform.

For the 1994 feature film Mammo, also starring Farida Jalal, Sikri was awarded the National Film Award.

I am very sorry to hear about her demise. She was an extremely successful actor in theatre and I had seen her plays in Delhi and that's how I was introduced to her work. She gave outstanding performance in three of my films.

"She was such a brilliant actor that whatever role you gave her she would own it. She played both sympathetic and non-sympathetic roles with elan. She was a top-class, highly competent actor," Benegal told PTI. The critically-acclaimed film-



maker said Sikri was a director's actor and a disciplined artiste. One of the things about theatre actors is that they are disciplined and she was also a very disciplined person. She would come on sets absolutely prepared. She never wasted her time or her. She was a director's actor. She was a huge asset on any film, he added.

Off-camera, Benegal said she was a

"quiet person".

Gupta, who played daughter-in-law to a Sikri's character in 2018 sleeper hit Badhaai Ho, said she is deeply saddened by the veteran actor's demise.

Today morning I got this very sad news that Surekha Sikri is no more. I want to share my grief with you all. I feel so sad that she is no more, Gupta said in a video

message on Instagram.

Gupta, 62, recalled being enamoured by Sikri's performance during her days in National School of Drama (NSD).

I remember when I was a student in the National School of Drama and how we would sneak in and watch her act. I think I want to become an actress like her. This was many many years ago, she said.

Prior to "Badhaai Ho", Sikri and Gupta had worked on TV show Saat Phere - Saloni Ka Safar. Gupta said she learnt a lot by just watching the veteran actor. I would just keep watching her when she would do her scenes. And there was so much I learnt (observing her) and there was so much more to learn as well. What commitment she had, she said adding that Sikri kept giving her cues till she got a perfect shot.

The film, also starring Ayushmann Khurrana, Gajraj Rao and Sanya Malhotra, had Sikri winning her third National Film Award for best supporting actress.

Bajpayee, her co-tar from "Zubeidaa", remembered her as a "graceful person" who gave her 100 per cent to the craft of acting.

Very Sad news! One of the greatest talents Surekha Sikri passed away leaving behind so many great performances

in theatre and cinema!! She was a treat to watch on stage. Can't forget some of those memories of her act in theatre. Great craft and a graceful person!! RIP, he wrote.

Filmmaker Zoya Akhtar, Janhvi Kapoor and Vijay Varma, who worked with Sikri on her last project "Ghost Stories", paid homage to the actor on Instagram.

"It was an honor to work with you," Akhtar said. Kapoor wrote, "Surekha Mam, a true legend. RIP"

"What a force of nature she was. A true artist. A big loss to cinema. Heartbroken," Varma said. Actor-producer Pooja Bhatt said she was a force of nature.

She was a force of nature if ever there was one. Hence I won't say rest in peace but RAGE in peace Surekhaji. As you did, during your time on earth!, she tweeted.

Actor Dia Mirza said Sikri was an artist par excellence who inspired generations of performers and will continue to do so.

There is no one like her. Absolutely no one. What an extraordinary woman. An artist par excellence. Those eyes and that smile. Her craft will inspire generations of performers. Was lucky to have the chance to witness her magic in person #RIPSurekhaSikri, she said in a tweet.

### Aries:

Maybe you're not the victim in this story. Maybe things are happening for, and not to you. Recognise each experience you have attracted into your reality as a soul lesson. This will help you grow, transform, and move to the next level. The cards are also urging you to find a balance between 'doing' and 'being'. Allow things to flow into your life rather than chasing them. Surrendering is a beautiful feeling, my dear Aries.

Tip: You are not the victim in this story.

### Taurus:

Taurus, it's time to get out of that funk in a systematic manner. But, we're not propagating the path of indulgence this time around. What we are proposing is the warrior's way of life, one that requires you to adopt discipline. Starting this week, consider waking up with the sun, practicing yoga (or any other form of bodywork that you resonate with deeply), and eating a wholesome breakfast before you get to work. Activating the flow of good prana through your energy channels will help restore balance on a mind, body, and soul level.

Tip: Work with your body in a systematic manner.

### Gemini:

You are at a turning point, Gemini. Taking a step in the right direction will change the course of your life permanently. So, trust what your instincts are guiding you

towards (even if the course of action makes no sense on paper). Choosing the path less trodden will liberate you in more ways than one. Yes, you will be considered an outcast in some circles. Yes, some of your own people may label you in ways that make you uncomfortable. Make peace with the discomfort as you vow to honour your soul purpose.

Tip: It's time to strip away the illusions. It's time to let go of all that is false within and without.

### Cancer:

Weekly reminder, Cancer: you "cannot" heal or fix anybody. You cannot do the work for them either. Accept where you are in your journey as you accept that they are in a different place. The experiences they have attracted are a part of their learnings, which in turn are enabling them to rise on a soul level. The best thing you can do at this point is practice detachment. That way you will be able to offer unconditional love and support without getting entangled.

Tip: Practice the art of detachment.

### Leo:

It's one of those days, Leo. One of those days where everything and everybody seems to be working against you. One of those days when the further you move, the further the destination begins to feel. Accept where you are in your journey. Accept that the soul lessons you have

attracted are helping you transcend. Trust that no matter what your physical reality is showing you at this moment, you are closer to that big breakthrough moment than you have ever been.

Tip: It will all be worth it in the end.

### Virgo:

You are where you need to be, Virgo, and you are meant to have the experiences you have called in at this moment. Experiences that are helping you break out of the cocoon and undergo the process of metamorphosis. So, get comfortable with the uncomfortable. Show up for what you believe in even when it's hard to. One day, you will look back at this as a defining moment in your life that set the stage for bigger and better things to make their way to you.

Tip: You are in the midst of a massive metamorphosis.

### Libra:

The truth is, you cannot heal or fix anybody. This is a time of stripping away the false illusions and letting go of the outmoded beliefs. This is a time of redirecting your energy towards yourself and your own healing, minus the guilt that previously weighed you down. Remember, inner alignment is the key to returning to that state of balance.

Tip: It's time to honour your own energy.

### Scorpio:

Growth is seldom a linear process. It comes with its own

twists and turns. Twists and turns that take you to the dark places within your psyche and your soul. Dedicate yourself to the shadow work, Scorpio. Honour this as a time of plucking the weeds out of your garden. Know that you have the power to push through despite the discomfort, and that your guides are holding space for you to become the most magnificent version of yourself.

Tip: Get comfortable with the uncomfortable.

### Sagittarius:

2 + 2 doesn't always equal 4. Sometimes it's 17. At other times, it's 22. Pay attention to how your logical mind is interfering with your intuitive processes. The truth is, you are having massive downloads at this moment, both in the form of words and images. It's a good idea to honour what Spirit is showing you and take a step in the right direction. Can you imagine what your life will look like six months from now if you decided to follow divine inspiration?

Tip: Trust the downloads and visuals you are receiving at the moment.

### Capricorn:

When we first fall in love with somebody, it is the light aspects of their personality that encapture us. It is only when we get to know them intimately that the shadows reveal themselves. What do you do when you are confronted by the so-called darkness, Capricorn? What do

you do when your head starts interfering in matters of the heart? It's time to get some distance, beautiful. To accept where you are in your journey and to accept that they are in a different place. The gift of unconditional love and acceptance will help you make your way back to that beautiful place.

Tip: It's time to shift your perspective.

### Aquarius:

If you feel like your mind is on overdrive and that you're being pulled in ten different directions, it's time to take a breather. It's time to come back to the present moment. Having a spiritual practice that grounds you will prove to be beneficial at a time like this, Aquarius. So will spending time in Mother Nature's company.

Tip: Practice grounding techniques that help you return to the present moment.

### Pisces:

Healing is seldom a linear process. There are good days and bad days. And the bad days are usually followed by the good days. So, trust the light at the end of the tunnel, and let this light guide you forward. This is a time of healing, Pisces. A time of letting go of the past baggage and finding your freedom. Working with a mentor or guide that you trust could provide you with the perspective that is needed to start over.

Tip: Trust the healing process.