



**HINDI CINEMA PREFERS TO MAINTAIN
A CONSPICUOUS SILENCE ON
CASTE ISSUES: AMOL PALEKAR**
pg 08

**WHY I NO LONGER THINK
WE CAN ELIMINATE COVID –
PUBLIC HEALTH EXPERT**
pg 04

**INDIAN IDOL WINNER TO GET
GRAND WELCOME IN HOMETOWN**
pg 08



SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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**Afghan woman
news anchor
barred from
work after
Taliban
takeover**

KABUL, 19 AUG [AFP]: An Afghan woman journalist has said she was barred from working at her TV station after the Taliban took control of the country, and pleaded for help in a video posted online.

Wearing a hijab and showing her office card, well-known news anchor Shabnam Dawran said "our lives are under threat" in the clip on social media.

Under the Taliban's regime from 1996 to 2001, women were excluded from public life, girls could not attend school, entertainment was banned and brutal punishments were imposed.

Female journalists have also been targeted by the militants in a wave of assassinations in recent months leading up to their takeover of the country.

However, since seizing power in a lightning offensive the Taliban have claimed women will have rights, including to education and work, and that the media will be independent and free.

One Taliban official even sat down for a one-on-one interview with a woman journalist on TV to press the point.

But Dawran, who has worked as a journalist for six years in Afghanistan for state-owned broadcaster RTA, said this week she was barred from entering her office while male colleagues were allowed in.

"I didn't give up after the change of system and went to attend my office, but unluckily I was not allowed despite showing my office card," she said in the video.

"The male employees, those with office cards were allowed to enter the office but I was told that I couldn't continue my duty because the system has been changed."

Dawran then pleads with viewers, saying: "Those who are listening to me, if the world hears me, then please help us as our lives are under threat."

Among those to share the footage was Miraqa Popal, an editor at Tolo News, a 24-hour channel in Afghanistan.

"Taliban didn't allow my ex-colleague here in @TOLONews and famous anchor of the State-owned @rtapashto Shabnam Dawran to start her work today," Popal wrote in a tweet on Wednesday that was shared thousands of times.

In a tweet on Tuesday, Popal posted a picture of a woman news presenter on Tolo, with the caption: "We resumed our broadcast with female anchors today."

Daily new cases below 100 and one more Covid death in Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 AUG:**

The second wave has been so brutal for Sikkim that every time the number of daily new cases falls below 100, it comes as a relief. And today was one of those days when the Daily Report of Covid-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department informed that 94 new cases were detected in the State in the past 24 hours. While new cases have dropped below 100 over the past two weeks, they have always done so on Mondays when the numbers

picked up on Sundays, when the testing labs screen much fewer samples, are released. Today was the first time in months that the number has fallen below 100 on a week day.

The 94 new cases were detected from the screening of 819 samples on Wednesday giving Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 11.4%.

Unfortunately, the State also lost one more life to Covid over the same 24 hours taking the state's COVID related death toll to 364. This new death was reported from STNM Hospital, Gangtok.

While 51 of the new

cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 334 samples, 42 new cases were found in rapid antigen testing of 479 samples and one more person tested positive in TruNat testing of six samples.

Of the 94 cases, 37 were registered in East District, 31 in West District, 21 in South District and 05 in North District. Sikkim's tally of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 has now reached 29,075.

With 146 more persons getting discharged from home and facility isolation on Thursday after making full recoveries, the number of re-

covered cases has also climbed to 26,626.

There are currently 1,806 active cases of Covid in the state, only 108 of whom have symptoms severe enough to require hospitalisation. Of these, ten were admitted to hospital in the past 24 hours and 12 are in ICU.

With the IDSP providing slightly more granular data now, it is also learnt that of the 108 Covid patients in hospital, five are under-18, all of whom were admitted yesterday.

The report also provides an update on COVID vaccination in the State and informs that 22,022 healthcare

workers [11,763 first dose and 10,259 second dose], 32,098 frontline workers [17,503 first dose and 14,595 second dose], 2,95,215 above-45 year olds [164,302 first dose and 130,913 second dose] and 318,758 people in the 18 to 45 age-group [311,922 first dose and 6,824 second dose] have received the Covishield vaccine in the State thus far.

In absolute numbers, a total of 6,68,093 persons have received the vaccine thus far in Sikkim – 5.05 lakh having received only the first dose and 1.63 having received both doses.

Sikkim bags two National Teacher Awards for 2021



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 AUG:**

The Ministry of Education recognises meritorious and well-performing teachers with the National Teachers' Award every year and two teachers from Sikkim were among the list of teachers so felicitated this year. Sikkim was among the few states to have two teachers in honour-roll. Among the 44 feted teachers for the year 2021 are: Primary School Teacher Mingma Sherpa currently posted at Government Primary School at Lum, North Sikkim, as Headmaster in-Charge; and PGT Physics, Prem Das Chhetri, currently teaching at Sir TNSSS, Gangtok

Mingma Sherpa has been recognised for enhancement of enrolment and retention of children in the school system, preparation of low cost and no cost Teaching Learning Materials, activity-based learning and Innovative Pedagogy process initiated under his leadership. Under his guidance, seven class-V students have been selected for the prestigious CM's Meritorious Scholarship Scheme.

Mr Chhetri meanwhile has guided students to different national and international level competitions in Science & Innovation and has conducted free winter coaching for students and also conducts free online classes open to all students during the pandemic. He has also designed the online admission system for all the Senior Secondary Schools of Sikkim.

Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang has ex-



pressed happiness on this exemplary achievement and congratulated the awardees, a press release conveys.

The CM, while congratulating the awardees has also expressed hope that they will continue to inspire and guide young minds and contribute towards enhancing the education sector in the State.

The CM has further expressed that it has been their hard work and outstanding performance with total dedication and commitment that the State of Sikkim is able to perform better in the education sector.

The Minister for Education, Kunga Nima Lepcha has also congratulated the awardees and highlighted that such awards not only recognize their efforts but also encourage them to perform better in the days ahead.

He has further expressed hope that all other teachers will be inspired by the achievement of awardee teachers.

Additional Chief Secretary, GP Upadhyaya has also congratulated the awardee teachers. He has mentioned that Sikkim has been consistently maintaining the national record of getting more than one award for the past few years. Total of 02 awards for Sikkim from total of 44 awards at the national level and of this importance is a rare achievement for the State of Sikkim, he has mentioned. He has also thanked the panel of officers of the Department for a fair and rational selection and recommendation of award winners to the Ministry of Education.

AH&VS signs MoU with SBI and Doyen Enterprise to establish Rainbow Rooster poultry farming

GANGTOK, 19 AUG (IPR): The Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services (AH&VS) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the State Bank of India (Sikkim State) and Burdawan based promoting consultancy Doyen Enterprise to conduct Rainbow Rooster poultry farming, in a meeting chaired by the Minister Lok Nath Sharma, at his chamber at Tashiling Secretariat today.

The meeting also had the presence of Secretary AH&VS Dr Sangey D Bhutia.

The Department, SBI and the promoting consultancy Doyen are intended to jointly support the flow of credit to rural households of West Sikkim under Gyalshing Bermiok constituency in the pilot phase to set up a semi-intensive backyard



poultry farm and provide the necessary support to ensure sustainability and profitability of poultry farms.

While interacting with the departmental officials, the Bankers and representatives of Doyen Enterprise, the Minister Lok Nath Sharma stressed the output-oriented performance with the smooth conduct of all activities as per the framed parameters. The pilot phase of the Rainbow Rooster farming will be conducted within

the Gyalshing Bermiok constituency in the first phase and subsequently, the programme shall be extended further based on the performance and benefits to be provided to the farmers.

State Regional Manager, State Bank of India, SD Lama and LDM, SBI, Gopal Lama briefed on the provision of banking services to ensure financing to the interested poultry growers. Banks are also assured to provide requisite financial

turn to pg02

Pocket guidebook on birds of Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 AUG:**

A pocket guidebook on the birds of Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary in West Sikkim was released by Forest Minister Karma Loday Bhutia here at the Forests Department head-office in Deorali on Wednesday. The release function was also attended by Lok Sabha MP Indra Hang Subba. The book contains

details about 100 species of birds found in Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary and has been written by Nosang M Limboo and has been funded by the Wildlife Division [West].

The Minister shared that this guidebook will be the perfect souvenir for tourists and visitors and provide information on avi-fauna found in Sikkim to amateur bird enthusiasts.

Unfortunate that CM did not raise ILP demand during Delhi tour, says Bhaichung

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 AUG:**

Hamro Sikkim Party working president, Bhaichung Bhutia, has called it "unfortunate" that Chief Minister, PS Tamang did not raise the demand for Inner Line Permit for Sikkim during his recent Delhi tour.

"The Center invited all the coalition leaders to meet the new cabinet and the Hon. Prime Minister. It is unfortunate that Mr Goyal did not think of raising the demand for Inner Line Permit for Sikkim. The recent ONORC was a great bargaining point for him to demand the ILP. Most North East states having international borders already have the ILP in place and Assam being a BJP ruled state has not implemented the One Nation One Ration Card scheme due to heavy Bangladeshi Influx," Mr Bhutia states in a press release issued today.

"The CM has virtually given New Delhi the green signal for further dilution

of Article 371F in Sikkim if not now, then surely in the longer run," he alleges.

Further adding that hardly any Sikkimese will make use of the ONORC scheme outside the state, Mr Bhutia alleges that the SKM Government is only misleading people on the scheme.

The SKM Government knows that they are already guilty of diluting Revenue Order No.1 and Article 371F, the HSP working president further alleges.

"This is not the first time our CM has made the trip to Delhi and given several other demands in writing. Unfortunately, he has never made these letters available in the public domain nor is the public aware of any official response to the letters submitted by him.

It is evident from this trip that this government cannot be trusted to safeguard the interests of the Sikkimese people but continue to pursue their own benefit," the release further adds.



NEAR KRISHI BHAWAN
ABOVE WESTSIDE,
TADONG

MEGA SALE

13th - 22nd
AUGUST

Setting the Stage for India's Gold Quest

ANURAG SINGH THAKUR

The sight of our Prime Minister offering choorma to Neeraj Chopra, ice-cream to PV Sindhu, laughing with BajrangPunia, telling Ravi Dahiya to laugh more and hearing the experiences of MirabaiChanu brought a smile on every Indian's face. What was equally encouraging was that he spent time with each and every athlete who took part at Tokyo Olympics. The next day, he interacted with the Paralympic contingent, discussing their inspiring life journeys.

These gestures indicate a different side to NarendraModi - a person who is passionate about sports and a person willing to go the extra mile for India's athletes. Before the Tokyo Games began, NarendraModi held an extensive review meeting to take stock of our preparedness in Tokyo.

Those who have seen NarendraModi closely can vouch for the passion he personally has towards supporting a culture of sports and games among the youth. As CM of Gujarat, he began the KhelMahakumbh initiative which boosted grassroots level sports participation in a state that is not historically known for sporting excellence. There is also a method to which NarendraModi has supported sports and sportspersons, which would make me argue he is India's first and foremost 'Sportsperson's Prime Minister'!

A few days ago, a 2013 video went viral. In that video, NarendraModi was addressing a group of college students in Pune, where he lamented that India has a large and talented population as well as a history of sporting excellence but Olympic after Olympic we struggle to raise our medal count. He said that there is no reason a nation like ours should remain deprived of Olympic success. But, according to him, the issue was not the players but our inability to create the right supporting atmosphere whereby sports gets the support and dignity it merits. The women's and men's Hockey team has gone on record saying that the Prime Minister's phone calls after their defeats played a key role in boosting their morale. Back in 2019, when Neeraj Chopra suffered a grave injury, PM Modi wished him a speedy recovery, which was widely appreciated.

When it comes to sports, the Prime Min-

ister has understood the root of the problem - that sports generates much interest but when it comes to incentives and participation, there is a wide gap. When he remarked after meeting the Olympic winners, "Seeing the recent successes in sports, I am confident there will be a shift in parental attitude towards sports." There was both fact and optimism in this remark. When parents see India's medal count rising, one hopes they will surely be more open to their children pursuing sports. But, more importantly when they see all arms of the Government, the corporate sector support our players, they will realise that sports makes for an attractive and honourable career.

Amongst the various ways we may further enhance India's sporting success is by looking at encouraging our states towards a 'One State - One Sport' outlook; they can prioritise one particular game or a few to promote (while not ignoring others) based on the available talent pool, natural interest, climatic conditions and available infrastructure in their region. Not only will this bring a focussed approach but also allow for optimum utilisation of existing resources in the state.

Further, we must also on-board corporate India to adopt 'One Sport - One Corporate'. Across the world, corporates are at the forefront in extending support to budding talent, building leagues, enhancing the fan experience, marketing as well as merchandising to enhance the financial kitty of players. The success of corporates with Cricket over the years is a case study to point. Additionally, the sponsorship pattern has transitioned from FMCG brands to new FinTech unicorns. This can be a win-win for players, corporates and the game itself.

Another important aspect to promote and amplify sports and talent acquisition in the country is by building a grassroots sporting culture. For this, it is imperative to expand the calendar of various games at the local, state and national level. India needs 'Regional Leagues' in every sport that will provide an opportunity for young athletes to hone their skills through the year at various levels, build a competitive spirit as well as enhance the sports ecosystem and infrastructure in the country. I also believe our

University system can be transformed into an oasis for Olympic excellence.

These measures will fill the gap between interest and participation going forward.

One of the things that has helped Indian sports is the emphasis on quality and global standards. The conventional route was bureaucratic and tiresome; this has changed in Modi government, where even the Prime

ViewPoint

Minister prefers to directly receive feedback from the players themselves. While meeting the Tokyo 2020 contingent, he asked them to keep sharing their views on ways to strengthen sporting infrastructure. Be it Mirabai or Mary Kom, the PM has personally ensured they got the best treatment during their injuries.

One of the other issues impacting Indian sports is (ironically) the rise of modern technology. NarendraModi has addressed this in his book 'Exam Warriors' and also during his 'ParikshaPeCharcha' Townhall programmes. He talked about giving as much importance to the playing field and the play station. Modi has not dismissed the advent of modern technology. He has sought a healthy balance where the human elements of sports- teamwork, togetherness are maintained. Furthermore, the National Education Policy also consists of mechanisms that will make sports education an attractive option. In the years to come Manipur will get India's first sports university, which will be a boon to athletes and specially harness the rich sporting legacy in the Northeast.

Tokyo 2020 was an Olympics of many firsts for India. We won our first Gold in athletics, the Hockey team did wonders and there were successes in other sports such as discus throw, golf, fencing, etc. The Target Olympic Podium Scheme, Khelo India and the Fit India Campaign have laid the foundations for greater success. New India has fire in their belly; our sports carry the full support of the government and Prime Minister in their quest for sporting excellence.

[the writer is Minister for I&B and Youth Affairs & Sports]

Awareness prog held on energy efficient appliance loan



GYALSHING, 19 AUG [IPR]:

An awareness programme on energy conservation and energy efficient appliance loan, organized by the Department of Power in collaboration with SISCO Bank under the aegis of Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), Ministry of Power, was held at the District Administrative Centre, Rabdentse, today.

The programme was led by SE Cum Nodal Officer SDA (State Designated Agency), Pemba Lepcha along with AGM/ SISCO Bank, Smt. AnujaPradhan; DE (State Designated Agency), Smt. SigrathaPradhan and JE (State Designated Agency), Miss NawangChoden Lepcha.

The main aim of the programme was to generate awareness and sensitize the gathering regarding energy conservation & energy efficient appliance loan and to make general power consumers aware of importance of energy conservation, as it is a matter of fact that 65% of existing power generation is through fossil fuel which

is a non-renewable energy which is causing pollution in the environment so it is all about consuming power judiciously.

Addressing the house, Pemba Lepcha briefed about the Energy Conservation Act, 2001 and informed that the Act is enacted all over India. He also briefed about the State Energy Conservation Fund and urged the use of heating appliances in a disciplined manner. He stated that by reducing specific energy consumption, people should be made aware of their responsibilities.

He informed that SDA (State Designated Agency) Sikkim has signed an MoU with SISCO bank for disbursement of loan for which maximum of Rupees 1 lakh will be provided to the potential loanee to purchase energy efficient electrical appliances with 5 stars label product i.e., Refrigerator, AC, Geyser, TVs, Laptops, Microwave, Washing Machine etc.

Further, he informed about the energy conservation loan schemes and said that the Group

C and D category (Regular) employees can avail the benefit. Additionally, he mentioned that interested people may contact nearby SISCO Bank.

The team also elucidated the doubts amongst those present in the programme. They informed that the applicant has to submit a salary certificate of a total 35% take home salary to avail this scheme. The total 36 EMI will be deducted by SISCO bank with 0% interest. However, SISCO bank is a co-operative bank and provides loan to members only so it is mandatory that 1% of total loan shall be levied to the borrower to provide membership to the bank and will provide share subscription to the borrower for which debenture will be provided annually.

As informed by Lepcha, the team also covered the Office of Sub-Divisional Magistrate and Block Administrative Centre, Dentam. He also informed that the next awareness campaign will be held on 20th of August at Soreng.

Around 12 lakh metric tonnes sugar diverted to ethanol in past two seasons

NEW DELHI, 19 AUG

[NDTV]: In order to judiciously use excess sugar, mills have been encouraged by the government to divert extra sugarcane to ethanol which is blended with petrol. Subsequently in the last two sugar seasons of 2018-19 and 2019-20, around 3.37 lakh metric tonnes and 9.26 lakh metric tonnes of sugar has been diverted to ethanol.

In the current sugar season of 2020-21, more than 20 lakh metric tonnes of the sweetener

is expected to be diverted. In the ensuing sugar season 2021-22, about 35 lakh metric tonnes of sugar is estimated to be diverted, while by 2024-25 about 60 lakh metric tonnes of sugar is targeted to be diverted to ethanol, official sources said.

This will help in addressing the problem of excess sugarcane as well as the delayed payment issues, as farmers will get payments on time, a statement issued by Ministry of Food and Con-

sumer Affairs said.

At the same time though, as the adequate ethanol distillation capacities would be added only by 2024-25, therefore export of sugar will continue for another two to three years.

Blending ethanol with petrol not only serves as green fuel, but also helps in saving a lot of foreign exchange.

Also the revenue generated from sale of ethanol by mills helps sugar mills in clearing cane price dues of farmers.

Landslide blocks NH-10

GANGTOK, AUG 19 (PTI): A landslide has blocked National Highway 10, snapping the arterial road link between Sikkim and West Bengal on Thursday, an official of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) said.

Following heavy rain, a massive amount of rocks and slush rolled down the hill and blocked the highway at 29th Mile area in neighbouring West Bengal, around 60

km from the Himalayan state's Rangpo border,

Efforts are on to clear the debris and open the highway at least for one-way traffic, but rain and a continual flow of debris are hampering the work, said the BRO official.

Vehicles are taking a detour to reach their destinations.

The area witnessed landslides and blocking of the highway at least thrice this monsoon.

States preparing for next Covid wave with focus on children

MUMBAI, 19 AUG [REUTERS]:

Several states are building facilities with more paediatric beds, plus oxygen, due to concern that children returning to school without being vaccinated will be among the most vulnerable during a third wave of coronavirus infections.

Health administrators have taken heed of trends in the United States, where a record number of children have been hospitalised as the coronavirus Delta variant, first detected in India, has surged through unvaccinated populations.

During the second wave of infections in India that peaked in April and May, hundreds of thousands of people died for want of oxygen and medical facilities, and now there are concerns that another third wave will gather during the

winter months.

"We don't know how the virus will behave, but we cannot afford to be unprepared this time around," Suhass Prabhakar, who heads the Paediatric Task Force in Maharashtra, said.

"No mother should have to run around looking for a hospital bed when her child is sick."

The Maharashtra government has stockpiled medicines and built facilities for additional paediatric beds and oxygen provisions in new centres in Mumbai and Aurangabad.

Built on empty stretches of land or in repurposed stadiums, the Mumbai facilities have a total of 1,500 paediatric beds, most of them with oxygen.

"We can upgrade this capacity to double if needed," Suresh Kakani, a senior official with Mumbai's civic body said.

Former Legislators visit ailing colleagues in Gyalshing



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 AUG:

Executive committee members of Former Legislators' Federation of Sikkim, headed by their president, DB Thatal, visited Gyalshing in West Sikkim to call on ailing former legislators Ugen Pintso Bhutia, SB Subedi and PL Subba at their respective residences on 18 Aug, a press release informs.

Mr Thatal was accompanied by vice presidents CB Subba, CK Mohra and general secretary Norzong Lepcha.

The team enquired after the health of the ailing former legislators and shared that the State was facing great hardships due to the pandemic.

The members also apprised them about the activities of FLFS.

The former legislators also shared their experience and tireless efforts in bringing Sikkim to its present shape and overall development of the State, the release adds.

The release explains that the former legisla-

tors are suffering from various ailments and have to undergo treatment quite often and need special medical care.

The visiting FLFS members also informed them about the recent allotment of office space at the Old MLA Hostel for FLFS and plans for the celebration of the foundation day of FLFS in December in grand manner and the various commitments of the State Government towards the welfare of former legislators.

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AH&VS signs MoU..

service as and when required as per the existing guidelines. The Bank also came out with the commitment to work for the development of the state.

Additional Director Animal Husbandry and Veterinary West District, Dr Narad Cintury threw light on the MOU.

Doyen Enterprise came out with its commitment to broadly fulfill the role and responsibilities with utmost sincerity and determination.

Representatives assured to execute Rainbow Rooster farming within the guided parameters for strengthening the poultry farming and empowering the rural women, economically.

Additional Directors: Dr DP Pradhan, Dr Sandeep Gurung, Credit Linkage Consultant Pradeep Bhandari also placed their inputs on the exercise to be taken up further.



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Arthur Pazo felicitated on World Photography Day

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 AUG:

Vivid Kala Akademi Sikkim [VIKAS] in association with Journalists Union of Sikkim [JUS] celebrated World Photography Day 2021 here at the JUS office on Thursday. On the occasion, the organisers felicitated eminent photographer from Sikkim, Arthur Pazo, for his contributions in the field of photography.

The citation for Mr Pazo was read out by JUS publicity secretary, Dichen Ongmu.

Mr Pazo is from Gangtok and is a self-taught photographer who started his career as a general assignment freelance photographer at the age of 26 in the year 1981. With his base in Kathmandu from 1989 to 2006, he was hired by various reputed local and international publications and also worked in Sikkim.

Mr Pazo, who was



present as the chief guest today, shared his experience as a professional photographer and touched on other important instances related to his photography career.

He also spoke about the difficulties and issues faced during his early days in photography and pointed out how the present generation has better tools and support

of artificial intelligence.

There was however much more competition among photographers now and hence they need to keep abreast with the latest technologies and keep working on their skills. He also assured to provide all possible support and guidance from his side towards those keen to pursue a career in photography.

V I K A S president, Kiran Rasaily, spoke about the inception of photography in the state.

The programme, which was conducted by a JUS member Prabinkhaling, had started with a welcome address by JUS general secretary, Sujal Pradhan and concluded with vote of thanks proposed by JUS president, Bhim Rawat.

COVID-19: India logs 36,401 new cases

NEW DELHI, AUG 19 (PTI): India has added 36,401 new COVID-19 infections, taking the total tally of cases to 3,23,22,258, while the death toll has climbed to 4,33,049 with 530 more fatalities, according to Union health ministry data updated on Thursday.

The national recovery rate has improved to 97.52 per cent, the highest since March last year, according to the data updated at 8 am.

The ministry said that active cases have declined to 3,64,129, the lowest in 149 days, and comprise 1.13 per cent of the total infections, the lowest since March last year. A reduction of 3,286 cases has been recorded in the active COVID-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours. The ministry said that 18,73,757 tests were conducted on Wednesday, taking the total tests conducted so far for detection of COVID-19 in the country to 50,03,00,840.

The daily positivity rate has been recorded at 1.94 per cent and it has been less than three per cent for the last 24 days, it said.

The weekly positivity rate has been recorded at 1.95 per cent and it has been below three per cent for the last 55 days, according to the ministry.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease has increased to 3,15,25,080, while the case fatality rate stands at 1.34 per cent, the data stated.

Cumulatively, 56.64 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered under the nationwide vaccination drive so far. India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7 last year 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. 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.

Diesel price cut by 20 paise, petrol unchanged



NEW DELHI, AUG 19 (PTI): Diesel price on Thursday was cut by 20 paise per litre - the second straight day of reduction, but petrol rates remained unchanged.

Diesel price in Delhi was reduced to Rs 89.47 per litre from Rs 89.67 a litre, according to a price notification by state-run oil companies.

The reduction comes on the back of a similar cut on Wednesday.

Just like on Wednesday, the petrol price wasn't revised on Thursday. In Delhi, petrol continued to be priced at Rs 101.84 a litre.

The price cut follows international oil prices tumbling to their lowest level since May after the

US Federal Reserve signalled it was set to start tapering asset purchases within months, hurting commodities and lifting the dollar.

While Brent declined USD 2.13 to USD 66.10 a barrel, West Texas Intermediate fell USD 2.39 to USD 63.07 a barrel.

India is near 85 per cent dependent on imports to meet its oil needs and so benchmarks local fuel rates to international oil prices.

Wednesday's reduction in diesel rates came after 33 days of status quo in rates as oil companies followed what is known as moderation policy which calls for not passing on extreme volatility in

rates to consumers.

Incidentally, this status quo coincided with the Parliament session where the opposition parties tried to corner the government on various issues including the hike in fuel prices.

Petrol and diesel price was last hiked on July 17.

Prior to that, the petrol price was increased by Rs 11.44 a litre between May 4 and July 17. Diesel rates had gone up by Rs 9.14 during this period.

The price hike during this period pushed petrol prices above Rs 100-a-litre-mark in more than half of the country while diesel crossed that levels in at least three states.

SU faculty serves as resource person for refresher course on cultural studies

GANGTOK, 19 AUG (PIB):Head of Department of Hindi, Dr Hardeep Singh, Sikkim University was invited as a resource person by UGC-HRDC, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar in the ongoing two-weeks long online refresher course in languages, literature and

cultural studies (Indian, English and foreign languages). Dr Hardeep Singh in his lecture emphasised on three threats that the researchers are facing today - plagiarism, fabrication and falsification. He also mentioned that without integrity and truthfulness, the efforts

in the field of research will be undermined. The UGC has introduced new PhD coursework - ethics in research and publication, he said. Only value-based research can be the foundation of a new and purposeful society. He also mentioned about many forms of plagiarism like

cloning, control+c, remix, mosaic, data-based plagiarism, self-plagiarism, inadvertent plagiarism etc. He emphasised that to uphold the academic integrity, original work from students has to be ensured and even the most sophisticated potential misconduct has to be stressed upon.

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OFFICE OF THE DIVISIONAL ENGINEER II ROADS & BRIDGES DEPARTMENT GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM SORENG, WEST SIKKIM

Memo No:

With reference to Memo No : 459/GOS/R&B(GEN) 20-21/53/Plg Dated: 12/07/21 & For and on behalf of the Governor of Sikkim, Divisional Engineer II (Soreng), Roads & Bridges Department Government of Sikkim, invites sealed tenders under single bid system from the eligible contractors of Class III Grade enlisted with Sikkim Public Works Department vide Notification No.515/R&B/PWD/Secy. Dated: 12/06/2018, for the Construction of following roads through competitive bidding within the territorial jurisdiction of **concerned GPU where the work is to be executed.**

Dated:

Sl.No	Name of Work	Cost put to Tender(Rs)	Earnest Money @2.5%(Rs)	Cost of tender form(Rs)	Completion Time
1	Construction of road from Nayabazar Soreng road at Gelling Deoralidara to Gelling School in West Sikkim	1,28,33,127.00	3,20,828.00	5000.00	18 Months

Date, Timing and Venue details of Tender are as follows:

Sl.No	Name of Constituency	Date of Submission of application with bank receipt for issue of Tender documents(Excluding tender form)	Date of issue of tender form on submission of TDR(as Earnest money)	Last date of submission of Tender form	Date & Time of opening of Tender	Tender Venue
1	Zoom Shalghari Constituency	06/09/2021(10:00 am to 4:00pm)	07/09/2021 (10:00 am to 4:00pm)	08/09/2021 (10:00 am to 12:00 Noon)	08/09/2021 (1:00 Pm to 4:00 Pm)	Office of the Divisional Engineer II, R&B Deptt. Soreng

CONDITIONS OF CONTRACT:

- Tender is open only to the eligible Contractor/Firms of appropriate Class/Concerned GPU and ULB Area.
- The intending tenders/Contractors should apply in writing for issue of tender documents. The application would be invariably be signed by the contractor himself/herself. The tender documents will not be issued to any person other than the INTENDING TENDER. The application shall be submitted initially for the work listed above with all required documents.
- The applicants should enclosed attested copies of the a) **Validated/Updated Contractor Enlistment Certificate along with the application along with the attested copy of COI, Adhar card, Voter card and residential certificate of the Panchayats of the Concerned GPU, b) GST Clearance certificate. It is mandatory to produce the Original validated/Updated Enlistment Certificate during sale/issue of the Tender documents for verification.**
- The prescribed Non-Transferable Tender Documents (excluding the Tender form) can be obtained during the period specified in (from the Divisional Engineer II, Roads & Bridges Department Soreng) on production of requisite bank deposit slip in favour of R&B Department vide BR head 0059-80-800-01(Roads Bridges Department)
- Earnest money deposit @ 2.5% in State Bank of Sikkim shall be in the form of deposit receipt of schedule bank which includes deposits in the form of temporary deposit receipt (TDR) in favour of Sr. Accounts Officer, Roads & Bridges Department Galysing west Sikkim. Tender form shall be issued only on production of toward 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 tenderer and the name of the work superscripted on it, supporting documents listed at Sl.No 3(a&b) along with other relevant documents be enclosed with the offer.
- Sealed tenders may be deposited in the Tender box in the Office of the Divisional Engineer II, Roads & Bridges Department Soreng Division on the date and within time indicated above.
- Tender shall be opened by the Tender Opening Committee as prescribed by the Government in the presence of the tenderers on the date and time indicated above.
- The tenderer should sign on every page of the tender documents as acceptance of the general direction and condition of the 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 applicable Taxes and Levies. Over writing and correction should be avoided and if made should be authenticated. In complete/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 documents, rates as per approved Schedule of Rates will be taken as correct. For items outside the SOR, the rates shall be as per the technically checked estimate/analysis. Decision of the Principal Chief Engineer cum Secretary or 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 is entertained whatsoever. If any claim is made, it shall be as per the agreement rates.
- The Department reserve the rights to hold payments to the contractor unless test certificates are not produced by the contractor when called upon to do so.
- 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 labours at site.
- The offer shall remain valid for a period of 90 days. The work should commence within 15 days from the issue of the work order.
- All the conditions as mentioned in the NIT shall be deemed to a part of the agreement to be entered with the contractor. Security deposit shall be collected by deductions from the running bills of the contractor @ 5% of the value of work done.
- The department reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders without assigning any reasons thereof.
- The recoveries of royalties on Forest produce shall be as per the rates notified by the Government from time to time and applicable on the date of payment. In no case, claim of any contractor for deduction as per rates incorporated in the analysis of rates or Schedule of Rates on the date of tender shall be acceptable.
- Subletting of contract work is against the norms and if it comes to 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.
- In case the man powers employed by the contractors are from outside the State or neighbouring countries, it shall be the responsibility of the contractors to get them registered with the labour department, Government of Sikkim as per the relevant Labour Laws.
- Use of explosives shall be regulated as under:-
 - Transportation, handling, storage and use of Explosives(if necessary) shall be in accordance with the provisions of the India Explosive Act and General guidelines, Circular issued by the department and other competent authorities on the subject from time to time.
 - The rules and regulations issued by the Sikkim Public Works Department or any other competent authority shall strictly be adhered to with regard to transportation, storage; handling and use of explosives shall be maintained by the contractor.
- The contractor shall also make arrangement to have photographs of the works taken at least at three stages of the construction period i.e beginning, middle and completion stage.
- Damage to properties in and around the work site must be avoided at all cost. The contractor shall be held responsible for any acts of negligence and shall be made to make good the damages.
- It is accepted to the tenderer to have inspected the site before submitting his/her bid. There may be possible site difficulties for which the tenderer should have their own correct assessment before submitting the bid.
- The cost of stock materials supplied from the Department store will be deducted from the contractor's bill as per rules.
- The bidders shall produce a **Certificate of Residence from the concerned Gram Panchayat Unit where the work is to be executed.**

R.O. No. 150/IPR/Pub./Class./21-22
Date: 18.08.2021.

Divisional Engineer II
Roads & Bridges Department
Soreng Division

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Objects in the Rearview Mirror

About history lessons, again... because history tends to repeat itself

History, they say is written by the victor who decides which aspects of the vanquished history suits his greater plans and which bits are best left untold or nudged into the domain of myths and fantasy. The same has held true for the history taught in schools in India. The curriculum is embarrassingly North India-centric, so much so that even though students learn by rote the names of all those who made it emperor in the Slave Dynasty, ask them about what the northeast was up to in the meantime and they draw a blank. It is accepted that prior to the advent of the East India Company, there was no concept called India as a single country. The region was a collection of empires, kingdoms and princely states; each with its own intrigues and their own histories. That said, the subcontinent did share a common culture, one evidence of which is how the religious geographies were not limited to state boundaries and myths, music, fashion, language and food habits were shared and intermingled.

Returning to the theme, the history we learn in school is actually the composite histories of the areas which came together to form the Union of India in 1947 and later? Well, not really. The focus is too limited to the areas which either the British researched well or were studied in detail by later day historians. Only the histories of areas which were on the ascendent in the 19th century and since are taught. Take a close look at the number of MPs each state has and the number of pages devoted to those areas in books teaching Indian History in schools will be directly proportional to that number. But that's not history. In fact, in the hands of the Right Wingers, history is even being distorted into fiction and chauvinistic re-imaginings. Unfortunately, even these distortions are limited to a region which is only one part of the country.

Before moving further, it is important to make clear why we study history at all. The main reason is to get a better understanding of where we belong - where we fit into the larger scheme of things. There has been much talk about making Sikkim join the mainstream which is why it is not enough to just study Sikkimese history in schools in Sikkim. Sikkim needs to figure in the history books studied elsewhere in the country. In junior school (even in Sikkim), students learn of what Confucius meant to China even before they are taught when and how Sikkim joined India. Ask a child, even in Sikkim, which dynasty ruled Sikkim and chances are that you will get the wrong answer. One is not suggesting going parochial here, but Sikkim does have a history that's worth learning. Few dynasties have ruled for the three hundred years that the Namgyal dynasty has to its credit. The British rule which hogs the history books lasted less than a hundred years and stretched 200 years if we include the East India Company's real interference in affairs of kingdoms here. Surely the British intrigues with Tibet should make for interesting reading as should the Gorkha adventures in Sikkim under those who followed after Prithvi Narayan Shah. If kids can learn of the distant Great Wall of China, why can't the story of the Lepcha tower of pots be told to them? There are some who might argue that most of what is passed off as Sikkimese history is actually myth. Well, it will remain so till some keener study is conducted on it and shared more widely at all levels of comprehension.

WRITE US:

Readers are invited to comment on, criticise, run down, even appreciate if they like something in this paper. Letters carrying abusive/indecorous language and personal attacks, except when against people responsible in this newspaper (who are fair game), will have to be ignored. Letters which carry forward a conversation or initiate a dialogue will command immediate attention and receive prominence. Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

Why I no longer think we can eliminate COVID – public health expert

ANDREW LEE
theconversation.com

Around the world, countries are having to strike a balance between COVID-19 cases and restrictions. In the UK and the US, daily new cases number in the thousands, but restrictions and limitations are being lifted. In contrast, New Zealand has started a short national lockdown to contain just a handful of cases.

For the past 20 months, New Zealand, Australia and several other east Asian countries have pursued tough policies aiming to completely eradicate COVID-19. The hallmarks of these “zero COVID” approaches are strict border controls and quarantine arrangements as well as the early introduction of lockdowns when discovering cases.

So far they've helped minimise infections and deaths. The economic impacts experienced by countries adopting these approaches have also been less severe than those who have not. New Zealand has said it intends to continue its COVID-19 eradication strategy indefinitely.

Is this sustainable? In an ideal world, completely eliminating COVID-19 is what all countries would aim to do, and earlier on in the pandemic I supported this strategy. But now the pandemic has evolved, the approach makes less sense.

AN IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

Many countries now have high levels of the virus circulating and aren't aiming to eradicate it. And it's unlikely countries with few infections, such as New Zealand or Australia, can continue to keep COVID-19 at bay indefinitely in a world where the virus circulates.

There will always be the risk of importation by infected travellers from other regions. And in a globalised world, isolating a country from most others long term would likely be too costly and unpopular to maintain. Plus, it requires a degree of luck. Vietnam, Thailand and South Korea, once cited as zero COVID success stories, have struggled to contain the virus when it's been imported despite various border controls being in place.

The fact that the virus is mutating may explain why they've found it harder to keep it at bay. The virus is becoming better at spreading in humans.

The alpha variant is around 50% to 100% more transmissible than the original virus that emerged in late 2019, and delta around 50% more transmissible than alpha. The more infectious the virus becomes, the more that has to be done to enforce suppression.

There are other factors to consider too. The virus can infect both domestic and wild animals. If humans give the virus to animals, such that new viral reservoirs are created, then the virus could then potentially spill back into humans after being suppressed.

On top of this, a large proportion of human infections are asymptomatic. These infections are difficult to detect early and so are likely to spread. Both factors raise the likelihood of COVID-19 being reintroduced at some point – unless high levels of restrictions in zero COVID countries persist.

But how long will people continue to support a zero COVID approach if it means periodically entering lockdown to handle a small numbers of cases? In Australia, people appear to be growing tired of repeated restrictions, especially as the virus seems to be taking hold anyway. Trust in the government's COVID-19 response is waning and stress is building. That said, support is still there for New Zealand's strict approach.

THE ROLE OF VACCINES

An important counterpoint is that countries such as Australia and New Zealand still have low vaccine coverage. Relaxing current policies may see the virus spread quickly and cause large amounts of disruption, illness and death that could be avoided.

And although zero COVID policies are costly, one thing this pandemic has taught us is that in the short term, adopting a stringent approach leads to the least damage to the health and wealth of societies. In countries with low levels of infection and low vaccine coverage, there's a very good case for continuing with maximum suppression.

But it's less clear what the optimal long-term solution is. The virus has yet to settle into its ecological niche, so it's unclear what behaviours it will eventually fall into. There are several possible outcomes, and they depend on to what degree vaccines block people from catching and spreading the

virus, as opposed to simply stopping them from getting ill.

If vaccines protect well enough against infection, and enough of the population is vaccinated, then cases should subside to low levels. It may then be possible to achieve eradication of COVID-19 across much of the world through immunisation, much like measles. There will remain the risk of the virus being reintroduced from areas where cases are higher or of the virus persisting in unvaccinated groups – which is how measles behaves today.

However, it's not known how long vaccine protection lasts, and substantial inequity in global vaccine distribution is a significant barrier to widespread suppression of COVID-19. Increasingly, the view of public health experts is that reaching population-level immunity is unachievable at the present time.

The other possibility is that vaccines do not sufficiently block the spread of infection. In this scenario, the virus would continue to circulate, but with severe disease, hospitalisations and deaths reduced. We would see periodic outbreaks and probably seasonal epidemics, similar to flu. This is the more likely scenario. The focus then would be less on trying to stop the spread of infection and more on protecting vulnerable individuals through immunisation.

Accepting that COVID-19 will become endemic – as many already are – and preparing for that eventuality may be the only realistic endgame strategy for all countries. As such, countries with low levels of infection and immunity, like Australia and New Zealand, should urgently immunise their populations. This is key if they want to avoid the considerable COVID-19 mortality and morbidity seen in Europe and the Americas.

But once this is done, continuing with recurrent lockdowns could be both socioeconomically disruptive and challenging to maintain public support for. Together with the virus being more transmissible, the near impossibility of having completely closed off borders long term, and the fact that other countries aren't pursuing zero COVID, these factors likely will make completely eliminating the virus unachievable.

[the writer is Reader in Global Public Health, University of Sheffield]

Warrior, servant, mother, unifier – the Virgin Mary has played many roles through the centuries

ERIC M. VANDEN EYKEL
theconversation.com

In a recent article in the Jesuit magazine “America,” author Whitney Bauck pointed out that the Virgin Mary has become “an icon for pop stars and social justice warriors.”

Visitors to the website of designer Brenda Equihua, for example, will find outerwear with a colorful image of Mary displayed on the back. These coats feature prominently in the closets of numerous celebrities. The Puerto Rican singer Bad Bunny wears one in his “Cuidao por Ahí” music video,” and rappers Lil Nas X and Shelley FKA DRAM, among others, have likewise been spotted wearing theirs in various settings. Equihua keeps a full list of such appearances on her website.

While Mary may be enjoying renewed popularity as of late, this is not the first time she has been “in the spotlight.” In fact, because of the enormous and consistent impact that she has had on both Christians and some non-Christians for nearly 2,000 years, it's difficult to conceive of a time in which Mary wasn't a prominent figure.

As a scholar of early Christian literature who has done extensive research on traditions about Mary, I argue that the early interest in Mary came from her role as mother of Jesus, and that ancient authors transformed her into a sort of mythological figure by putting special emphasis on her virginity.

But others also came to emphasize Mary as an important character in her own right. For nearly 2,000 years, different Christian groups have understood Mary in various ways: as a servant, a warrior, an advocate, a leader, an exemplar, or as some combination of these.

MARY THE MOTHER

The four New Testament Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – are the earliest sources that mention Mary.

She is a minor character in Matthew, and never speaks, even at the time of Jesus' birth. She has a slightly more pronounced role in Luke, which is the only other New

Testament Gospel that mentions the birth of Jesus. In Luke, she talks with an angel, visits a family member and speaks words of prophecy. She also visits Jerusalem on two occasions: once for a purification ritual in the temple, and a second time to celebrate Passover.

In Mark, she seeks out Jesus while he is preaching, and she is also mentioned in passing by people in Jesus' hometown. The first of these scenes also appears in Matthew and Luke.

Finally, she appears twice in the Gospel of John. The first is at a wedding where the wine has run out, and the second is at Jesus' crucifixion, where she stands nearby while he dies.

Apart from one fleeting reference to her in the Book of Acts, Mary appears nowhere else in the New Testament.

Because Jesus is the chief focus of the New Testament Gospels, it is not surprising that they contain so few biographical details about Mary. She is present as a supporting character because she was integral to how these ancient authors thought about her son. The fact that Jesus has a mother, for example, reminds readers that Jesus was, at a basic level, a human being.

MARY THE VIRGIN

The Gospel authors also use Mary to stress that Jesus was a particularly noteworthy person.

Matthew and Luke accomplish this by “mythologizing” the story of his birth, by emphasizing that Mary was a virgin when he was conceived, and that her pregnancy was of divine origin rather than the result of human sexual activity.

The theme of the virgin mother impregnated by a god is not uncommon in the ancient world, and early readers of Matthew and Luke would have understood Mary's pregnancy in the context of other well-known stories of “divine children” born to virgin mothers.

The Roman poet Ovid, for example, writes that the mythical hero Perseus was born from a divine-human relationship between the god Zeus and Perseus' mother Danaë.

The Greek historian Plutarch makes a similar claim about Romulus and Remus, the legendary twins whose virgin mother Rhea Silvia insisted that her pregnancy was the result of divine intercourse with Ares, the god of war.

Because Matthew and Luke use Mary's purported virginity in order to make claims about what they see as the importance of her offspring, this detail is only important for them until Jesus is born. Matthew, for example, alludes to the consummation of Mary and Joseph's marriage after Jesus' birth when he writes that “[Joseph] had no marital relations with [Mary] until she had borne a son.”

By contrast, some later, Christian authors highlight Mary's virginity as something that defines her even after Jesus' birth. In the late-second century, for example, an anonymous Christian author wrote an influential collection of stories about Mary's birth and early life. This text is known to scholars today as the “Proto-Gospel of James,” and in it, Mary remains a virgin even after Jesus is born.

The Proto-Gospel is important for how scholars understand Mary for a number of reasons. Not least of those is that it evidences an early fascination with Mary not only as the mother of Jesus, but as an important character in her own right. Jesus is a character in this text, but he is a relatively minor one, appearing only toward the end. The author's primary focus is the life of the Virgin.

MARY THE MIRROR

Like so many biblical characters, the way that a group understands Mary has much to do with how that group understands itself.

On one level, this plays out clearly in artistic representations of Mary. In the Basilica of Saint Mary Major in Rome, for example, fifth-century mosaics portray Mary as a noble woman dressed in Roman imperial clothing, which reflects the historical context in which these mosaics were made.

On the other side of the world, in Mexico City, is the famous 16th-

century icon of Mary known as Our Lady of Guadalupe. According to legend, Mary appeared in 1531 to an Aztec man named Juan Diego, and she left this image of her imprinted on his cloak. Visitors to Our Lady of Guadalupe will note Mary's darker complexion, which is indicative of the icon's Spanish-Mexican context. Historically, it has been a powerful and unifying symbol of Mexican identity.

A more recent example is the artist Ben Wildflower and his popular woodcut of Mary, in which she clenches her raised fist and stomps on a serpent while surrounded by the words “Fill the hungry. Lift the lowly. Cast down the mighty. Send the rich away.” When asked about Mary's presence in his art, Wildflower commented: “Mary is who I want to be in the world.”

This phenomenon is at work also in the values that are imposed on Mary, and which sometimes seem at odds with one another. Mary has been upheld both as an exemplar for motherhood, for example, but also as a model for a more strictly ascetic, virginal life.

Her temperament is another detail that frequently shifts according to context. Mary is hailed by some Catholics as “Queen of Peace” and is frequently upheld as a paragon of free submission to the divine will. Yet, there are also medieval manuscript illustrations that show her in a more active and perhaps even violent role, punching and wrestling with demons.

Drawing from this image of the seemingly “violent” virgin, some online retailers have begun to sell merchandise featuring the slogan “Hail Mary, full of grace, punch the devil in the face.”

As Christians and non-Christians encounter Mary in various media and settings, they may do well to recall the myriad ways that she has been used to unite and comfort, but also to divide and convict. As I see it, she will no doubt continue to fascinate in both new and familiar ways for years to come.

[the writer is Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Ferrum College]

Bengal post-poll violence: CBI, special team to probe cases, says court

The BJP had alleged that after the Trinamool's sweeping victory its goons attacked women members, killed workers, vandalised houses and looted shops and offices belonging to party members

Kolkata: Allegations of rape, murder and crimes against women after the Bengal election will be probed by the Central Bureau of Investigation, or CBI, the Calcutta High Court said Thursday afternoon.

Other criminal cases related to the post-poll violence, will be investigated by a special Bengal Police team led by SumanBalaSahoo, an IPS officer of DG rank, and include Kolkata Police Commissioner Soumen-Mitra and senior officer Ranbir Kumar. The court will track the SIT's progress.

Both teams have been directed to submit reports in six weeks.

A five-member bench headed by acting Chief Justice Rajesh Bindal ruled on petitions seeking an impartial probe into the post-poll violence.

The Trinamool has expressed its unhappiness over the judgement, with LokSabha MP Saugata Roy quoted by news agency ANI as saying



the Bengal government could "appeal to a higher court". "I'm unhappy with verdict. If in every law and order matter, which is entirely within a state's jurisdiction, the CBI comes... it is transgression of the state's right. I'm sure the (Bengal) state government will judge the situation and take a decision to appeal to a higher court, if necessary," he said.

The BJP, however, has welcomed the court's decision, with Union Minister Anurag Thakur being quoted by ANI as saying that "there is no place for violence in a democracy".

The court had earlier directed the National Human Rights Commission, or NHRC, to carry out a preliminary inquiry.

Last month the court,

in its strongest remarks so far, told the state government it was in "denial mode", and that the NHRC's interim report indicated enough evidence to establish post-poll violence.

The report proved to be hugely controversial because it indicted Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her government, and accused them of "appalling apathy". It also backed a CBI probe into "grievous offences like murder and rape", and called for such cases to be tried outside Bengal.

The NHRC claimed the situation then was a "manifestation of law of ruler instead of rule of law", and that "local police has been grossly derelict, if not complicit, in this violence"; it said

police failed to file FIRs for alleged rape and murder cases.

The incendiary report did not go unanswered; Ms Banerjee lashed out at the NHRC for "disrespecting the court" and pursuing the "political vendetta" of the BJP by leaking its report.

"The BJP is now using impartial agencies to settle political scores and malign our state. NHRC should have respected the court. Instead of leaking findings to the media, it should have first submitted the same to the court," she said.

The NHRC, however, denied Ms Banerjee's charge that its report was leaked, and pointed out that the report was available with "all concerned parties as per directives

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma's peace committee offer rejected

According to the police, CheristerfieldThangkhiew allegedly attacked the police with a knife when his home was being raided, provoking a retaliatory shot in which he was killed.

Shillong: Supporters of former insurgent leader, CheristerfieldThangkhiew, who was killed in an alleged police encounter on August 13, have refused to be part of the peace committee - set up by Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma to probe the death of the leader - unless the police officers involved in the operation are suspended.

"We have decided not to be part of the peace committee of the government until it suspends the two top cops responsible for the raid," said Donboklang, an activist from MawlaiKyntonMassar, where the alleged encounter took place.

According to the po-



lice, CheristerfieldThangkhiew allegedly attacked the police with a knife when his home was being raided, provoking a retaliatory shot in which he was killed. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma has backed the state police.

"We have been able to reach out to community elders; headmen, civil society and build trust and so we are able to relax the curfew. We have ordered a judicial inquiry on the killing of the former militant leader. People sometime don't realise the effort police puts in to maintain peace and secu-

rity," said Conrad Sangma. Other members who were part of the meeting with the Chief Minister on Wednesday said the buck stops with him.

"It is time that the Chief Minister show that he has the capability to lead the state," said MarbudDKhar, part of delegation that met the Chief Minister. The opposition, too, has targeted the Chief Minister. "Even before the probe (has begun), the Chief Minister is defending the police, this is not acceptable," said leader of the opposition DrMukulSangma.

Ruins of Ancient Temple found in Bhargavi River bed in Odisha

The four-member team of the Rediscover Lost Heritage, which is currently listing the archaeological monuments of the Ratnachira Valley, found the ruins near the mouth of the Bhargavi river in Balanga area, 31 km from Puri city.

Bhubaneswar: A heritage research group team on Thursday claimed that it had stumbled upon the possible ruins of an ancient temple of 13-14th century Common Era in Odisha'sPuri district.

The four-member team of the Rediscover Lost Heritage, which is currently listing the archaeological monuments of the Ratnachira Valley, found the ruins near the mouth of the Bhargavi river in Balanga area, 31 km from Puri city.

Project coordinator Deepak Nayak said the remains of the ancient temple were found scattered, both inside the river bed and the surrounding areas. The temple may date back to 13th-14th century Common Era or earlier, considering the iconography of the antiquities, MrNayak said in a release.

Many of the blocks have also been carted away by the villagers for construction. A stairway from the river bed to the steep bank has around two dozen of these carved ancient temple blocks, it stated. According to team leader Anil Dhir, the Ratnachira Valley is a treasure house of many archaeological wonders, most of them being obscure and unknown as they have not been documented.

Legend has it that Lord Rama had drawn the Ratnachirariver to

quench Sita's thirst, using her pearl ring to chart its course. The ancient river, which now runs dry for most of the year, has many myths and legends with flourishing heritage on both sides of its short stretch.

The team found broken images, pillars, door jambs and a multitude of minor broken artifacts. They also discovered carved stone panels, some of which have been affixed in the sides of the nearby Akhandalamani temple, which was made about a century ago.

"We came across an intricately carved lintel section of a broken door jamb. The central figure is a beautiful Goddess Gajalaxmi image," MrNayak said.

"Nagakanya images were seen in many carved stone blocks, besides a lot of fine filigree work of the older temple," he added.

The team discovered that there was a large cluster of blocks in the middle of the river that appears to be the foundation of the ancient temple, according to the statement. There are hundreds of huge sunken stone slabs documented on the bank, possibly once used in the temple's construction.

Some of the stone slabs -- sandstone and laterite -- have consistent and identical holes on both their sides, suggesting the use of iron clamping. Many were damaged and ruined by machinery used for sand mining, it added.

"Considering the bulky size of the stone slabs, one can imagine it was not a small temple but a mid-sized or bigger temple," MrDhir said.



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Namgyal Institute of Tibetology Gangtok, Sikkim Ph: (03592) 281525 / 280822

ADMISSION ANNOUNCEMENT FOR 2021-22 ACADEMIC SESSION BACHELOR OF SOWA-RIGPA MEDICINE AND SURGERY (BSRMS) COURSE (Affiliated with Sikkim University and recognized by the Ministry of AYUSH)

The Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (NIT) is pleased to invite applications for the Bachelor of Sowa Rigpa Medicine and Surgery (BSRMS) Course (popularly known as Amchi Medicine in Sikkim) for the academic session 2021-22. This course is recognized by the Ministry of AYUSH, GOI, and affiliated with Sikkim University (SU). The course is open to students who have completed class XII with sound knowledge of Tibetan grammar, literature, composition and Buddhist philosophy. The medium of instruction is in Tibetan/Bhoti therefore having a good knowledge of Tibetan language is the top criterion for the course.

Interested candidates who fulfill the following criteria may apply for admission. The course will begin from 29th September, 2021* (tentative).

- Total number of seats – 15 (fifteen)**
 - 60% of the seats will be reserved for local candidates holding COI/SSC subject to their qualifying admission test. In case of any seats left vacant in this category these will be made available to the general candidates.
 - 40% of the remaining seats will be available for general candidates from other parts of the country and the world.
- Eligibility Criteria.**
 - Minimum qualification class XII passed preferably with science (Physics, Chemistry & Biology) or any other equivalent degrees recognized by States/UT/Central Governments.
 - Buddhist nuns and monks should produce certificate from their monastic colleges and institutions (Sheda) with a recommendation letter from their respective monasteries/institutions.
 - The candidate must produce identification documents such as COI, Voter card, Aadhaar card or Passport. They can also submit other supporting documents.
 - As the medium of instruction and all of the course content is in Tibetan language, having a good knowledge of Tibetan language is the top criterion for the course. Those who fail to meet the required standard in Tibetan language can undergo one year preparatory course in Tibetan grammar, composition and literature before they become eligible to sit for the qualifying exam in the first year Sowa-Rigpa course of the next academic session. Candidates who undergo complete one year preparatory course, however, will receive grace marks.
- Important Dates (Test, Interview and Admission):**
 - Tuesday, August 31, 2021: Last date for submission of duly filled application form.
 - Monday, September 13, 2021* (tentative) – Written tests and Interview or Viva Voce test will be conducted on the same day.
 - Venue: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (NIT).
 - Time – 10:00 am 1 PM (written), 2 pm to 5 pm (Interview).
 - Friday, 17 September 2021 (tentative): Declaration of Result.
 - Subjects to be tested – Tibetan reading, speaking, writing, grammar, composition, letter writing etc and a composition in English.
 - The prescribed application form may be downloaded from the website <http://tibetology.net/>

Mr. Pema Wangyal Rinzaing
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Namgyal Institute of Tibetology
Gangtok, Sikkim
Ph : (03592) 281525 / 280822

Namgyal Institute of Tibetology Gangtok, Sikkim Ph: (03592) 281525 / 280822

ADMISSION ANNOUNCEMENT FOR M.A. COURSE IN BUDDHIST AND TIBETAN STUDIES (ENGLISH MEDIUM) (Affiliated with Sikkim University)

The Namgyal Institute of Tibetology was established under a Charter of Incorporation as Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology on 1st October. 1858 by the then Maharaj Kumar Palden Thondup Namgyal, as a repository for Buddhist arts, artifact, texts and scriptures. Since its establishment it has made valuable contribution in the field of Research and preservation / conservation especially in the area of Buddhist Studies, local culture and Himalayan tradition.

The Institute invites applications for two years MA Course in Buddhist and Tibetan Studies (English Medium) for the academic session 2021-2022. The course is affiliated to Sikkim University (SU), a Central University recognized by University Grants Commission (UGC). The MA degree certificate will be granted by Sikkim University. Those desirous of pursuing the course may apply in a prescribed form and submit the application along with copies of required documents on or before 31st August, 2021.

The course is open to students who have completed graduation (Bachelor Degree) in Buddhist studies or in Art/Science or in allied subjects. The 2 years course will begin from 27th September, 2021, Monday*(tentative) for a limited number of students. Interested candidates who fulfill the following criteria may apply for admission:

- Total number of seats – 15**
 - 60% of the seats will be reserved for Sikkim Subject students based on COI holders. If not filled, seats will be given to students from other parts of the Country and the World.
 - Remaining 40% of seats will be available to the candidates from other parts of the Country and the World.
- Eligibility criteria for admission:**
 - Graduate (Bachelors Degree) or its equivalent in any stream from any University or Institution/college recognized by Sikkim University (SU) or by the Government of Sikkim or the Government of India.
 - The candidates should be well versed in English language (Written & spoken).
 - The local candidates are required to produce identification documents such as COI, SSC, Voter Card, Aadhar Card, Passport (any one).
 - The candidates coming from outside the State or from other countries must produce identification documents such as voter card or Aadhar card or Passport/visa as may be applicable.
 - Admission form can be obtained from the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology office or can be downloaded from the website – www.tibetology.net.
 - Application form must be submitted with the self attested copies of the following documents: bio-data, academic certificates, medical certificates and migration certificate.
 - The last date for submission of the application is 31st August, 2021. Candidate may also submit their application online to the email address given below.
- An interview will be conducted to select the candidates at the place and date indicated hereunder OR through web conferencing such as Skype, Zoom, Webex and so forth.**
 - Venue : Namgyal Institute of Tibetology.
 - Date : 14th September, 2021, Tuesday*(tentative)
 - Time : 11 AM*(tentative)

Note: Any change in time, date and venue of the interview will be intimated well in advance. The details of the video call will be sent via emails incase the interview is to be conducted online.

D. Candidate will be intimated about the result by 20th September, 2021*(tentative).

E. The prescribed application form including syllabus for the fource and other allied information, are available on the website www.tibetology.net. For any other queries, please contact the undersigned.

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* May change as per Sikkim University notification.

Naomi Osaka tested by Gauff, wins 3-setter in tour return

MASON, OHIO (AP): Two days after a thoughtful exchange with a local sports columnist, Naomi Osaka delivered a more relevant statement on the court.

She's back. Down a set and a break to 17-year-old Coco Gauff, the second-ranked Osaka fought back to pull out a 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 win at the Western & Southern Open on Wednesday, her first WTA Tour event since the French Open in late May.

Osaka appreciated being tested so quickly.

"It's definitely been a while since I played a tough opponent in a three-set match," she said. "It was definitely really tough, but I feel really good right now. I'm super excited to play another match." Citing discomfort with post-match news conferences, the four-time Grand Slam champion withdrew from Roland Garros and skipped Wimbledon. She was eliminated in the round of 16 at the Tokyo Olympics after lighting the Olympic cauldron in her native Japan.

The 23-year-old Osaka is outspoken on many social issues and announced during Monday's pre-match media session that she would be donating her tournament prize money to earthquake-ravaged Hai-



ti, her father's homeland. Cincinnati Enquirer columnist Paul Daugherty asked how she balanced her discomfort with news conferences and her need to speak out.

Osaka paused in thought and, declining the moderator's suggestion to move on from the topic, asked Daugherty to repeat the question. She responded with what the writer later described as the best answer he's ever heard in 34 years of covering sports.

"Um, I mean, for me, I feel like this is something that I can't — I can't really speak for everybody," she said. "I can only speak

for myself, but ever since I was younger, I have had a lot of media interest on me, and I think it's because of my background as well as, you know, how I play, because in the first place, I'm a tennis player."

"That's why a lot of people are interested in me, so I would say in that regard, I'm quite different to a lot of people, and I can't really help that there are some things that I tweet or some things that I say that kind of create a lot of news articles or things like that, and I know it's because I have won a couple of Grand Slams, and I have gotten to do a lot of press conferences

that these things happen, but I would also say, like, I'm not really sure how to balance the two. Like I'm figuring it out at the same time as you are, I would say."

While Osaka appeared comfortable during the exchange, her agent, Stuart Duguid, described Daugherty on Twitter as a "bully."

In other matches, top-ranked Ash Barty needed a second-set tiebreaker to beat Heather Watson, 6-4, 7-6 (3) in a match postponed from Tuesday by rain. Three-time Grand Slam champion Angelique Kerber upset fourth-seeded ElinaS-

vitolina. SimonaHalep, the 12th seed, withdrew with a right thigh injury.

Men's top seed Daniil Medvedev cruised to a 6-2, 6-2 win in 59 minutes over wild card Mackenzie McDonald, and three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray was eliminated by ninth-seeded Hubert Hurkacz.

Both Olympic singles gold medalists, Alexander Zverev and Belinda Bencic, and men's No. 2 seed StefanosTsitsipas all advanced in straight sets. Two-time Slam champion GarbineMuguruza and fifth-seeded Karolina Pliskova also won in straight sets.

Without Messi, Griezmann gets chance to shine at Barcelona

MADRID (AP): As Barcelona continues adjusting to life without Lionel Messi, Antoine Griezmann gets his best chance yet to take a leading role at the Catalan club.

Griezmann will be making his 101st appearance with Barcelona when the club visits Athletic Bilbao in the second round of the Spanish league on Saturday. The French striker finally has the opportunity to take center stage and become a protagonist in Messi's absence.

"I hope I get to play another 100 games and carry on giving everything to make history with this club," Griezmann said. "I want to keep helping the team both on and off the pitch, in attack and defense, and enjoying being at Barca."

He had some key performances while Messi was still on the team but has never fully met the high expectations that came when he signed from Atlético Madrid for 120 million euros (now \$140 million) in 2019, a year after he was the man of the match in the World Cup final won by France.

The 30-year-old Griezmann, who has 35 goals with Barcelona, used to play a secondary role even to Luis Suárez and youngsters such as OusmaneDembélé and AnsuFati. At times, he wasn't even a regular starter and had few minutes off the bench.

Now he has the competition of Barcelona's biggest offseason signing, Dutch international Memphis Depay, but coach Ronald Koeman has already hinted they will not be fighting against each other for a starting spot. Koeman said after the preseason that he "liked the connection" between Griez-



mann and Depay.

Both played well in the team's 4-2 opening victory against Real Sociedad, which marked the start of Barcelona's first season without Messi after 17 years. The Argentina star joined Paris Saint-Germain after Barcelona failed to give him a new contract because of its financial struggles.

Other forwards for Barcelona this season include Sergio Aguero and Martin Braithwaite, who scored twice against Sociedad.

"It was very important to get a win," said Griezmann, who is 14 goals from equaling Thierry Henry as the club's highest scoring Frenchman. "It was a good game and hopefully we can now get another win against Athletic."

Barcelona has won 12 of its last 15 league matches against Athletic, which opened with a 0-0 draw at Elche on Monday.

Real Madrid will also be counting on a French striker when it tries to add to its winning start in a visit to Levante on Sunday. KarimBenzema, the team's top scorer last season, picked up from where he left off and scored twice in the 4-1 win at Alavés on Saturday.

New coach Carlo Ancelotti also saw a good

performance by Eden Hazard, who struggled with injuries throughout last season. He will still be missing a few players, including injured veterans Marcelo and Toni Kroos.

Levante was the last team to beat Madrid in the league, winning 2-1 in the Spanish capital in January. Madrid has won only two of its last four league matches against Levante.

Defending champion Atlético Madrid also won its opener, 2-1 at Celta Vigo, and now it hosts Elche with an expected crowd of more than 20,000 at the Wanda Metropolitano Stadium after Spanish health authorities allowed the league to restart with up to 40% of fans in stadiums.

Atlético coach Diego Simeone may have trouble setting up his defense as some players are still recovering from injury and after Mario Hermoso was sent off in the match against Celta.

Suárez, Atlético's leading scorer last season after joining from Barcelona, began on the bench in the opener but is expected to be in the starting lineup on Sunday after having an extra week to regain his best form following the preseason.

Olympic gold medallistNeeraj Chopra meets Haryana CM



CHANDIGARH, AUG 19 (PTI): Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra on Wednesday met Haryana chief minister Manohar-LalKhattar and said he would continue to work hard to make the state and the country proud by his achievements.

Chopra, who could not attend a felicitation function organized by the state government on August 13 due to illness, said only sports-related topics were discussed during his meeting with Khattar.

"It is a great feeling that today I am meeting the Chief Minister. I will try my level best to make Haryana and the nation proud in the upcoming sports events," Chopra said.

Khattar said Chopra, who won gold in javelin throw in Tokyo Olympics earlier this month, has not only brought laurels for the country but also for his native village, family and Haryana.

He said Chopra's family has a big contribution towards this achievement.

It is because of the contribution of the family, Chopra had made the nation and Haryana proud, the chief minister

said.A detailed discussion was held about Chopra's coach and his national and international record in javelin throw event, according to an official release.

The CM honoured Chopra by presenting him a shawl, a memento and the holy book Shrimad Bhagavad Gita.

Khattar also honoured Chopra's uncle Bhim, who accompanied him. Bhim invited the CM to come to their native village Khandra to which Khattar assured that he would soon make a programme for the same.

The CM said developing Haryana as a sports hub is the priority of the state government. For this, athletes like Chopra will certainly play a pivotal role to inspire the younger generation, the CM said.

He said the Centre of Excellence for Athletics being set up in Panchkula would prove to be effective for the promotion of sports.

Sports Minister Sandeep Singh was also present on the occasion.

Chopra later called on Haryana Director General of Police (DGP) Prashanta Kumar Agrawal at police headquarters.

Sandesh Jhingan joins HNK Sibenik, to play in Croatia's top tier league

NEW DELHI, AUG 19 (PTI): SandeshJhingan will become the first India international footballer to play in the Croatian top-tier league Prva HNL after completing a move from ATK Mohun-Bagan to HNK Sibenik.

Named India's footballer of the year last month, the 28-year-old is already in Croatia and watched Sunday's home win against HrvatskiDragovoljac.

"We expect good things from him as we have followed him on different platforms where we were able to see his past performances," said Francisco Cardona, CEO of HNK Sibenik.

"Although we know the adaptation process might take him a few weeks, we are confident that with his quality and leadership, he will become an important member of the team.

"He made a very good impression on the staff and fans of the club when he was watching the last home game from the stands. He showed passion and energy for the team," Cardona added.

Jhingan was excited to have the opportunity to move to HNK Sibenik in the Prva HNL in Croatia.

"I think I am at a stage of my career where I really want to test myself in the highest-level possible and I think this is the perfect platform for me. As I have said, it has been my desire to play in Europe and I have taken up this challenge upon myself," the top defender said.

"A big thankyou to the head coach Mario Rosas and the owners and man-



agement for giving me the opportunity to come here. I cannot wait to get going and look forward to giving 100 percent at every given opportunity," Jhingan added.

Founded on December 1, 1932, HNK Sibenik returned to the premier division last season under a new management. The club finished sixth in the league, just two positions below qualification to European competitions.

The club is located in Sibenik, the Dalmatian region of Croatia, a city with breath-taking fortresses protecting it for centuries and a beautiful Cathedral of St. James, included on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

"We are very happy that Sandesh is with us. We know he will help us achieve the goals that we have set for ourselves during the season. His stint here will help him grow as a player and person," said HNK Sibenik coach Mario Rosas.

The Spanish coach was all praise for Jhingan's decision to move out of his comfort zone.

"We hope that he will continue to be an example for Indian footballers. He has demonstrated his ambition and competitiveness by wanting to get out of his comfort zone and show what Indian footballers are capable of," said Rosas.

Jhingan started his youth career at St. Stephen's Football Academy in Chandigarh and got a break in the top division with United Sikkim in 2011.

Sandesh, as a young 21-year-old footballer first broke into prominence during the inaugural edition of the Indian Super League (ISL) when he was adjudged the Emerging Player of the League in 2014. A feat that helped him earn a place in the senior India national team making his debut in 2015 against Nepal at the FIFA World Cup 2018 qualifiers.

The defender has two ISL runners-up medals with Kerala Blasters FC where he spent six years and moved to ATK MohunBagan in 2020 after missing the previous season due to injury.

Leicester extends contract of winger Harvey Barnes to 2025

LEICESTER, ENGLAND (AP): Leicester winger Harvey Barnes signed a contract extension Thursday to keep him at his boyhood club until June 2025.

The 23-year-old England international had been one of Leicester's best players in 2020-21, scoring 13 goals in all competitions before undergoing knee surgery that ruled him out of the European Championship.

"I've been here for so many years now, it feels like home," Barnes said. "For

me, it was a no-brainer. Of course, I wanted to extend my stay here." He's been with Leicester since the age of 9 and rose through the club's youth academy.

Barnes made his debut for England in a win over Wales in a friendly match last October and looked to have a decent chance of making Gareth Southgate's squad for Euro 2020.

Leicester beat Wolverhampton 1-0 in its season opener and will play at West Ham on Monday.

Indonesian police arrest elephant poacher, ivory buyers

BANDA ACEH, INDONESIA (AP): Indonesian police say they have arrested an elephant poacher in Aceh province along with four people who bought ivory from an animal he killed.

The elephant was found without its head on July 11 at a palm plantation in East Aceh, police said. Local police worked with the Aceh Natural Resource Conservation Center to investigate the death.

"The team found indications that the elephant had been given poison before it was killed. The team also found the elephant's head without its tusks

300 meters (1,000 feet) away," East Aceh Police Chief EkoWidiantoro told reporters Thursday.

Police arrested a suspect on Aug. 10 who admitted he had tried to kill elephants five times since 2017 by poisoning them, but had succeeded only twice, including the recent death, Widiantoro said. On July 19, he and a partner poisoned mangos near a herd of wild elephants and executed a weakened elephant two hours later with an axe, he told police. The partner is still on the run.

The suspect said he sold the ivory to someone in East Aceh, who sold

it to four buyers in Aceh and West Java provinces. The last buyer, a craftsman in West Java, made the ivory into a dagger and cigarette pipe, Widiantoro said.

All of the buyers were arrested and are being held at East Aceh police station along with the poacher, he said. They face up to five years in prison and a fine of 100 million rupiah (\$7,000) if found guilty.

In the last seven years, 46 dead elephants have been found in Aceh, Indonesia's westernmost province. Many were attributed to illegal hunting and conflicts with humans.

Hezbollah says Iranian fuel tanker to sail to Lebanon soon

BEIRUT (AP): The leader of the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group said Thursday that an Iranian fuel tanker will sail toward Lebanon “within hours,” warning Israel and the United States not to intercept it.

The delivery organized by Lebanon-based Hezbollah, would be an apparent violation of U.S. sanctions imposed on Tehran after former U.S. President Donald Trump pulled his country out of a nuclear deal between Iran and world powers three years ago.

Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said in a televised speech that the tanker, carrying diesel fuel, will be followed by others to help ease Lebanon’s crippling fuel shortage that has paralyzed the country for weeks.

Nasrallah did not say how Lebanon will pay for the fuel but in a previous speech he said Tehran could be paid in Lebanese pounds. The currency has lost more than 90% of its value since the country’s economic crisis began in October 2019.

“I would like to say that at the moment the tanker sails — within hours — and moves in the sea, it will be considered in Lebanese territory,” Nasrallah said. He said the West was imposing an undeclared siege on Lebanon, causing the current crisis.

Hezbollah and its allies accuse the U.S. and some Arab gulf nations of punishing Lebanon because of Hezbollah’s military activities in other countries, including Syria and Iraq.

“I tell the Americans and the Israelis that this is Lebanese territory,” Nasrallah said about the tanker, without elaborating on what his group will do if it is intercepted. Neighboring Syria has blamed Israel for mysterious attacks that have targeted oil tankers heading from Iran to Syria this past year.

For weeks, Lebanese have been waiting in long lines at petrol stations to fill their car tanks. Diesel shortages amid severe power cuts have shut down thousands of private generators, leading to shortages of bread. Some hospitals have warned that patients could die because of the diesel shortage.

The shortages are blamed on smuggling, hoarding and the cash-strapped government’s inability to secure deliveries of imported fuel.

Lebanon has for decades suffered electricity cuts, partly because of widespread corruption and mismanagement. The Mediterranean nation of 6 million — including 1 million Syrian refugees — is near bankruptcy. The situation deteriorated dramatically last week after the central bank decided to end subsidies for fuel products. The decision will likely lead to a hike in the prices of almost all commodities in Lebanon.

Nasrallah said his group does not aim to “defy anyone,” by arranging the fuel shipment from Iran, but added that “we cannot stand idle amid the humiliation of our people whether in front of bakeries, hospitals, gas stations and darkness at night.”

Afghans protest Taliban in emerging challenge to their rule

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN (AP): Afghan protesters defied the Taliban for a second day Thursday, waving their national flag in scattered demonstrations that were met with renewed violence by the militants who are facing growing challenges to their rule.

A U.N. official warned of dire food shortages in this nation of 38 million people reliant on imports and experts said the country was severely short on cash, highlighting that the Taliban face the same problems as the civilian government they dethroned without the level of international aid it enjoyed.

In light of these challenges, the militants have moved quickly to suppress any dissent, despite their promises that they have become more moderate since they last imposed draconian rule on Afghanistan. Many fear the Taliban will succeed in erasing two decades of efforts to expand women’s and human rights and remake the country.

On Thursday, a procession of cars and people near Kabul’s airport carried long black, red and green banners in honor of the Afghan flag — a banner that is becoming a symbol of defiance since the militants have their own flag. At another protest in Nangarhar province, video posted online showed one demonstrator with a gunshot wound bleeding, as onlookers tried to carry him away.

In Khost province, Taliban authorities instituted a 24-hour curfew Thursday after violently breaking up another protest, according to information obtained by journalists monitoring from abroad. The militants did not immediately acknowledge the demonstration or the curfew.

Protesters also took the streets in Kunar province, according to witnesses and social media videos that lined up with reporting by The Associated Press.

The demonstrations — which come as Afghans mark the Independence Day holiday



that commemorates the 1919 treaty that ended British rule — were a remarkable show of defiance after the insurgents violently dispersed a protest Wednesday. At that rally, in the eastern city of Jalalabad, demonstrators lowered the Taliban’s flag and replace it with Afghanistan’s tricolor. At least one person was killed.

Meanwhile, opposition figures gathering in the last area of the country not under Taliban rule talked of launching an armed resistance under the banner of the Northern Alliance, which allied with the U.S. during the 2001 invasion.

It was not clear how serious a threat they posed given that the militants overran nearly the entire country in a matter of days with little resistance from Afghan forces.

The Taliban so far have offered no specifics on how they will lead, other than to say they will be guided by Shariah, or Islamic, law. They are in talks with senior officials of previous Afghan governments. But they face an increasingly precarious situation.

“A humanitarian crisis

of incredible proportions is unfolding before our eyes,” warned Mary Ellen McGroarty, the head of the U.N.’s World Food Program in Afghanistan. Beyond the difficulties of importing food, she said that drought has seen over 40% of the country’s crop lost. Many who fled the Taliban advance now live in parks and open spaces in Kabul.

“This is really Afghanistan’s hour of greatest need, and we urge the international community to stand by the Afghan people at this time,” she said.

Hafiz Ahmad, a shopkeeper in Kabul, said some food has flowed into the capital, but prices have gone up. He hesitated to pass those costs onto his customers but said he had to.

“It is better to have it,” he said. “If there were nothing, then that would be even worse.”

Two of Afghanistan’s key border crossings with Pakistan, Torkham near Jalalabad and Chaman near Spin Boldak, are now open for trade. Hundreds of trucks have

passed through, Pakistani Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed has said. However, traders still fear insecurity on the roads and confusion over customs duties that could push them to price their goods higher.

Amid that uncertainty and concerns that the Taliban will reimpose their brutal rule, which included largely confining women to their homes and holding public executions, many Afghans are trying to flee the country.

At Kabul’s international airport, military evacuation flights continued, according to flight-tracking data. However, access to the airport remained difficult. On Thursday, Taliban militants fired into the air to try to control the crowds gathered at the airport’s blast walls. Men, women and children fled. Fighter jets later roared overhead, but no airstrike accompanied their pass.

Overnight, President Joe Biden said that he was committed to keeping U.S. troops in Afghanistan until every American is evacuated, even

if that means maintaining a military presence there beyond his Aug. 31 deadline for withdrawal.

Indirectly acknowledging the resistance they face, the Taliban on Thursday asked preachers to urge congregants to remain in the country and counter “negative propaganda” against them.

The Taliban have also urged people to return to work, but most government officials remain in hiding or are themselves attempting to flee. Questions remain over Afghanistan’s \$9 billion in foreign reserves, the vast majority now apparently frozen in the U.S. The International Monetary Fund, meanwhile, said the militants for now would not be allowed to access loans or other resources.

The head of the country’s Central Bank warned that the supply of physical U.S. dollars is “close to zero,” which will batter the currency, the afghani, and raise the prices of much-needed food.

“The afghani has been defended by literally planeloads of US dollars landing in Kabul

on a very regular basis, sometimes weekly,” said Graeme Smith, a consultant researcher with the Overseas Development Institute. “If the Taliban don’t get cash infusions soon to defend the afghani, I think there’s a real risk of a currency devaluation that makes it hard to buy bread on the streets of Kabul for ordinary people.”

Still, Smith, who has written a book on Afghanistan, said the Taliban likely won’t ask for the same billions in international aid sought by the country’s fallen civilian government — large portions of which were funneled off by corruption.

“You’re much more likely to see the Taliban positioning themselves as sort of gatekeepers to the international community as opposed to coming begging for billions of dollars,” he said.

That could limit the power of the international community’s threat of sanctions.

There has been no armed opposition to the Taliban. But videos from the Panjshir Valley north of Kabul, a stronghold of the Northern Alliance militias that allied with the U.S. during the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, appear to show potential opposition figures gathering there. That area is in the only province that has not fallen to the Taliban.

Those figures include members of the deposed government — Vice President Amrullah Saleh, who asserted on Twitter that he is the country’s rightful president, and Defense Minister Gen. Bismillah Mohammadi — as well as Ahmad Massoud, the son of the slain Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud.

In an opinion piece published by The Washington Post, Massoud asked for weapons and aid to fight the Taliban.

“I write from the Panjshir Valley today, ready to follow in my father’s footsteps, with mujahideen fighters who are prepared to once again take on the Taliban,” he wrote.

Gulf Coast’s beloved ‘Redneck Riviera’ now a virus hotspot

GULF SHORES, ALA. (AP): Tourists and servers alike dance atop tables and in the aisles at one restaurant on the “Redneck Riviera,” a beloved stretch of towns along the northern Gulf Coast where beaches, bars and stores are packed. Yet just a few miles away, a hospital is running out of critical care beds, its rooms full of unvaccinated people fighting for their lives.

On maps that show virus “hot spots” in red, this part of the U.S. coast is glowing like a bad sunburn. And a summer of booming tourism that followed the lockdowns and travel restrictions of 2020 is making the turn toward fall with only a few signs of slowing down.

Health officials believe the spike is due to a combination of some of the nation’s lowest vaccination rates, unabated tourism, a disregard for basic health precautions and the region’s carefree lifestyle, all combining at a time when the mutated virus is more contagious than ever and conservative states are balking at new health restrictions.

On a recent afternoon, one shopper after another walked through the mouth of a giant, fake shark into a Gulf Shores souvenir shop. Mini-golf courses, bars, go-kart tracks, hotels and condominium towers were full. The National Shrimp Festival, which draws as many as 250,000 people to the Alabama coast, is set for October despite the COVID-19 explosion.

Inside The Hangout restaurant, where dancing on tables is encouraged, “Cotton Eye Joe” received a raucous reception from the largely unmasked customers.

“Where did you come from, where did you go? / Where did you come from, Cotton Eye Joe?” the speakers blared.

The revelry came as just 12 miles (19 kilometers) to the north, South Baldwin Regional Medical Center was treating more than three dozen COVID-19 patients, nearly 90% of whom weren’t vaccinated, said spokesperson Taylor Lewis.

“After Memorial Day it was, ‘Everything is back to normal, go to the beach, take off

your mask,’” said Dr. Bert Eichold, the chief public health official of Mobile County, just west of Gulf Shores. Mobile County’s COVID-19 positivity rate has skyrocketed to nearly 30%, and the county has the most new cases in the state.

Lisa Hastings, a Louisiana native and nurse visiting the Alabama coast with her two sisters, looked at the situation in two ways. She was a little unsettled by the wide-open scene from a professional standpoint, but she also doesn’t hold it against anyone who wants to get out and have fun, vaccinated or not.

“I think people are kind of over being afraid and so they’ve got to live their lives,” said Hastings, who is vaccinated. Nearby, a tourist from Illinois railed that the pandemic is fake and vaccinations are just another method of government control.

Some have decided against both getting vaccinated and wearing face masks, choosing instead to party without precautions at places like the Flora-Bama, a massive beachfront bar on the Alabama-Florida line. There, bands play to big crowds fueled by alcoholic drinks including the sugary Bushwacker, a coastal favorite.

Lulu’s, a popular Gulf Shores restaurant owned by Lucy Buffett, the sister of singer Jimmy Buffett, is among those that recently had to shut down for a week because the virus was racing through workers.

At The Dock, a beachfront restaurant that serves cold beer and seafood beside the public beach in Pensacola, Florida, manager Justin Smith said the tourist season has been busy and his staff has managed to stay healthy, at least so far. While more vaccinations could help, Smith said he’d never require his staff to get inoculated.

“I’ve been here 18 years. It ain’t gonna happen,” he said.

Outbreaks caused by the coronavirus are threatening to overwhelm the region’s health care system and traditions. Panama City Beach, Florida, cited the pandemic in canceling an annual country music festival

set for early September, and New Orleans has clamped down on mask-wearing and called off multiple events.

While urging people to get vaccinated, state leaders including Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey have resisted imposing new restrictions, even as hospital beds fill up. On Monday, officials said 1,560 patients needed intensive care treatment in Alabama, where hospitals have just 1,562 ICU beds.

Hospital executives joined together in Pensacola last week to plead for more vaccinations while also knocking down false rumors about vaccines and masks. In an area dominated by Christian conservatives, Mayor Grover C. Robinson IV made a direct appeal for churchgoers to get shots.

“Two of our hospitals are Christian affiliated,” he said. “One of the first things it says all throughout the Bible is, ‘Do not be afraid.’”

More people are getting initial vaccine doses than a few weeks ago, but it hasn’t been enough so far to stop the spread of COVID-19. Of 11 coastal counties in Mississippi, Alabama and Florida, Okaloosa County in Florida has the region’s highest share of fully vaccinated residents at 41.3%, statistics show. Many are around one-third, and all are below the national average of nearly 51%.

Natalie Fox, a nursing executive with USA Health in Mobile, said medical workers are tired after more than a year of fighting the pandemic. Still, people sick with COVID-19 — the vast majority of them unvaccinated — keep arriving.

“We’re kind of getting patients from all over because everybody’s dealing with this increased strain,” she said.

It didn’t take a mandate for Rhonda Landrum, a 50-year-old health care worker from near Mobile, to get a shot recently after watching all three of her unvaccinated daughters contract COVID-19. People aren’t taking the pandemic seriously, she said, and it’s just not safe to be out in public without the vaccine.





NOT A CARE IN THE WORLD! With a Starbucks in hand, Heidi Klum appeared to be in good spirits while out in Los Angeles.

Indian Idol winner to get grand welcome in hometown

CHAMPAWAT, AUG 19 (PTI): This small town in Kumaon region of Uttarakhand is gearing up to extend a grand welcome to Indian Idol winner Pawandeep Rajan when he returns to his hometown on August 26 for the first time after winning the music reality show.

"Welcome gates will be erected all along the route right from Banbasa town to Tanakpur and Champawat where Pawan-deep will be given a grand reception," Champawat MLA Kailash Gehtori said after chairing a meeting here on Wednesday to discuss the arrangements.

Members of Lion's Club, Champawat Vyapar Mandal and Ramlila committee attended the meeting, he said.

"We are all elated at the success of Pawan (as he is fondly called by locals). It is for the first time that a talent from the district has made it big at the national level. We are keen to give him a rousing reception," says Neeraj Singh, a member of the Ram Lila committee.

Pawandeep Rajan (23), who hails from Champawat, won the 12th edition of Indian Idol on August 15.

"It is a dream come true for his folk musician father Suresh Rajan who began teaching Pawan the fundamentals of music at the

tender age of 3," said Pankaj Upreti, a music teacher at Champawat PG college.

His consistent hard work and the musical legacy inherited from his father took Pawan to the top, he said.

Music lovers of Uttarakhand as well as viewers of the programme across the



country were with him from day one and remained with him till the end, the music teacher said.

An appeal from Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami wishing him success also seems to have worked in favour of him, Upreti said.

Gushing over Pawandeep's achievement, Lakshman Singh Bisht, a professor of Hindi at Kumaon University, said Pawandeep had nothing but his talent and simplicity when he left Champawat but he returns a winner.

Hindi cinema prefers to maintain a conspicuous silence on caste issues: Amol Palekar

MUMBAI, AUG 19 (PTI): Caste as an issue is rarely commented on in Hindi cinema as it is not conventionally entertaining, believes veteran actor Amol Palekar, who is returning to films after a considerable gap of 12 years with 200 - Halla Ho , a true story of Dalit women who attacked a rapist in an open court.

The film, directed by Sarthak Dasgupta and co-written by Dasgupta and Gaurav Sharma, touches upon the issues of sexual violence, caste oppression, corruption, and legal loopholes through the eyes of 200 Dalit women.

Palekar, known for 1970s Hindi films like Rajnigandha ,Chitchor , Chhoti Si Baat, Golmaal , said producers usually shy away from such "disturbing" topics.

The script of this film dealt with caste issues which have remained invisible in Indian cinema. Such themes are disturbing and not conventionally 'entertaining'. Producers have shied away from backing such projects all through our cinematic journey, Palekar told PTI in an email interview.

Caste issues have successfully featured in Marathi and Tamil cinema with films such as Nagraj Manjule's "Fandri" and "Sairat" and Pa Ranjith's "Kaala" and "Sarpatta Parambarai", respectively.

In Hindi mainstream cinema, caste has largely stayed invisible, barring Neeraj Ghaywan's "Masaan" and "Geeli Pucchi", a short in the Netflix anthology film "Ajeeb Daastaans".

Palekar said the Hindi film industry still refuses to come out of "Brahminical aesthetics".

Hindi cinema still prefers to maintain a conspicuous silence about caste issues. Our film industry refuses to come out of the Brahminical aesthetics. Themes of the caste divide used to get introduced through a love story. Though oppression was shown the relief used to appease the majority, he said.

Plight of women used to be a sub-text. With the advent of OTT (over-the-top) platforms, female-centric themes are being handled; female characters are getting meaningful, lead roles. All this is a very heartening change, he added.

Citing the example of films such as Aamir Khan-starrer Lagaan ,Taapsee Pannu's Pink and Thappad , the

76-year-old actor, who has straddled theatre, films, TV and art, believes cinema as a medium has stupendous power to appeal to the masses.

"We saw how Lagaan' was loved by all, we saw how Pink' or Thappad' addressed misogyny. Such films addressed issues which made all of us face our hypocrisy, he said.

Palekar said as a director he has often made films with strong female characters that have challenged the conventional dictates of patriarchy but stressed that there was a need for more such subversive content to be made.



The actor is hopeful that 200 - Halla Ho which is about the fight of women against oppression, will certainly impress the audience.

My film Anaahat' dealt with issues of female sexuality, yet another banned theme. We need more and more subversive content. Depiction of collective strength and the power it yields will certainly inspire the audience. Small ripples will also be very effective, he said.

200 - Halla Ho' gives that strong sense of empowerment that will inspire the audience. The projection of an assurance that injustice can be ended through collective protest' will bring constructive change in our lives, I hope. We as filmmakers ought to transcend objectification of victimhood... we as artistes ought to offer constructive resolves, he added.

Palekar is making a comeback to acting after a decade with the film. The key reason behind his absence from the big screen, the actor said, is a dearth of challenging roles.

As an actor, I am a comet who sur-

faces once in a decade. Most roles offered to older actors are insignificant in terms of the theme of the film. I always accepted roles only if those challenged me as an actor or if it contributes to the scheme of the film.

"Acting just for the sake of earning money was never my pursuit. What fun is playing a superfluous role of someone's father or a grandfather? I prefer to hide than to get overexposed," the actor, whose last release was the 2009 Marathi film Samaantar which he also directed, said.

When Palekar was approached for

200 - Halla Ho , the actor said he was pleasantly surprised and even suggested the makers to cast an actor from the Bahujansamaj for the role of a retired Dalit judge but they were keen on having him.

I am never a part of anything which is regressive. I liked the role for multiple reasons. The film celebrates the protest of 200 women against patriarchy and caste atrocities. They were the heroes and I was just a supporting character who supported their protest rather than merely remain as a bystander, he said.

200 - Halla Ho also features Sairat star Rinku Rajguru, "Asur" actor Barun Sobti, "Jogwa" actor Upendra Limaye, "Abhay" actor Indraneil Sengupta, "Soni" actor Saloni Batra and Sahil Khattar, a popular YouTuber and host, who plays the rape accused.

The film is said to be based on the aftermath of the killing of the gangster and mass rapist Bharat Kalicharan aka Akku Yadav by 200 Dalit women in 2004.

200 - Halla Ho releases on the streaming platform ZEE5 on Friday.

'Modern Love' a nice opportunity for actors to do really good acting: Tobias Menzies

New Delhi, Aug 19 (PTI): British star Tobias Menzies believes that the short form anthology format of Amazon series "Modern Love" gives actors an opportunity to deliver nuanced performances.

Menzies stars in "Modern Love" after a two season stint in "The Crown" in which he delivered a critically-lauded performance as Prince Philip, the late UK royal and husband of UK monarch Queen Elizabeth.

The 47-year-old actor is also popular for playing Jonathan "Black Jack" Randall in "Outlander", while in HBO's "Game of Thrones", he ap-

peared as Edmure Tully. In the second season of "Modern Love", Menzies stars opposite actor Sophie Okonedo in the eighth episode, titled "A Second Embrace, with Hearts and Eyes Open".

"I really liked the format because it's unusual in that it's short, half-hour and they're vignettes. So you just get a burst of atmosphere, almost. The stories are not that long. I also think it's a really nice opportunity for good actors to do really good acting.

"I saw some performances in (the first season) which I just really enjoyed. The atmosphere is a really

nice, relaxed, collaborative experience. So, I suppose the mixture of those things are just slightly different than a lot of other stuff out there," Menzies said in a roundtable interview with global journalists, including PTI.

"A Second Embrace, with Hearts and Eyes Open" features Menzies as Van, who casually rekindles his relationship with his ex-wife Elizabeth (Okonedo). But their complicated life gets a messy further when one of them is diagnosed with an illness.

At the core of the episode's story is the theme of second chances and healing,

something that Menzies believes is definitely possible in real life. "I think second chances are definitely possible. That's why I think it's quite a romantic episode actually. The idea of second chances, of being able to go back and maybe heal something, maybe the mistakes you've made, it's hard not to be moved by that idea because I'm sure everyone has stuff in their lives that you probably regret.

"I guess that's what the episode is digging into, that kind of area. I certainly hope I'll get some second chances," he said.

Aries:
Given your circumstances, the only way out is in, Aries. This is a time of inner alchemy. A time of confronting the dark parts that have been limiting your growth and keeping you from realising your highest potential. So, resist nothing. Accept everything. Know that our pain and suffering teaches us more than joy and happiness ever will.

Tip: The fire of transformation has been awakened.

Taurus:
You're many things, Taurus, and mediocre is not one of them. This phase of your life is all about awakening to your higher purpose. Introspecting on your role in raising the collective consciousness. So, how do you feel called to serve? How do you feel like you want to make an impact in the big, bad world? Now is the time to recommit to the chosen path and embrace that warrior spirit.

Tip: How do you feel called to make an impact?

Gemini:
When you're doing *this* well for yourself, people are bound to talk about you, Gemini. But, you always have the power to decide whether or not you want to engage with their energy. So, choose your thoughts carefully as you draw boundaries wherever necessary. When in doubt, remember the mantra 'success

is the best form of revenge'. As long as you stay dedicated to your mission and keep doing what you are here to do, there is no reason you won't make it to the top, beautiful.

Tip: Disengage from the drama and draw boundaries wherever necessary.

Cancer:
Given that there's so much on your mind, inner peace is beginning to seem like a fictional concept. But, how much is *too* much, Cancer? Do you repeatedly want to give the dark thoughts power over you? The cards are urging you to hit the pause button and redirect your attention towards activities that make you feel centred. Grounding techniques such as yoga, meditation, and spending time in nature will prove to be especially beneficial at a time like this.

Tip: It's important to stay grounded at a time like this, moon child.

Leo:
What do you do when your material existence becomes far too mundane for an imaginative mind like yours? You board the flights of fantasy, Leo. Art, music and poetry have your undivided attention today. But it's not just about consuming content that makes you feel good. You're also in the mood to create something that will inspire a collective change. Listen

to what your heart is telling you, beautiful, as you learn to honour your creative urges.

Tip: Listen to what your heart is telling you.

Virgo:
We meet oh-so-many people on a regular basis. Yet, there are only a few who manage to leave a lasting impact on us and become a catalyst of growth in some way. Who are these people in your life, Virgo? What are the important life lessons you have learned through them? It's time to integrate these learnings *and* express your gratitude towards them.

Tip: Celebrate your soul squad.

Libra:
This is a wonderful time in the Libra HQ. You're feeling secure in your material resources and are building your reserves in a slow but organic manner. Yes, the profits are increasing steadily too, bringing you the affirmation that you are on the right track. Some of you could be giving investments a serious thought. It's a good idea to consult an expert in the given field who can help you achieve the desired goals.

Tip: The profits are increasing in a steady manner.

Scorpio:
At any point of time, we have two options: to choose the familiar or to take the path less trodden.

We have no doubts about what your next move is going to be, Scorpio. So, make the most of the given opportunities. Embrace your power. Embody courage. Make a bold move that previously intimidated you. You are— and have always been—a trailblazer, beautiful.

Tip: It's time to believe in the impossible and go after what you truly desire.

Sagittarius:
"Nothing touched by fire remains untransformed, only after fire burns you is found true liberation." A quote from the Rigveda to reflect upon, dear Sagittarius. This is a period of intense transformation. A period of letting go of all that is false within and without, and becoming your true and most authentic self. Yes, your power will make those around you uncomfortable. It will also drive a few away. Don't let that stop you from becoming a force to be reckoned with.

Tip: This is a period of intense transformation for you.

Capricorn:
It's a 'good vibes only' kind of day in the Capricorn HQ. Joy and laughter surround you, and the presence of the little ones in the tribe is reminding you to look at the lighter side of life. While some of you could be planning to have children of your own,

others are welcoming a new member into your family. Those who have already been blessed by the Gods of Fertility may find themselves redecorating the nursery or playroom.

Tip: Spend time with the little ones in your tribe.

Aquarius:
Playing it safe has its perks, but it's not a game you want to play. This chapter of your life is about owning your power fully and standing in your light. Yes, you will have to let go of the familiar. Yes, you will have to take many risks, despite the dangers that going against the grain of Society entails. But, courage has always been your superpower. So, embrace your warrior spirit as you march forward and onwards, bae.

Tip: Following the crowd is overrated.

Pisces:
In a world that glorifies quick action and instant gratification, you believe in taking things slow. In mulling over an idea or concept before putting it into practice. But how much introspection is *too* much introspection? Could your need to act mindfully be detrimental to you in the long run? Something to think about, dear Pisces. What the cards are urging you to do today is follow your instincts and make a great change. Trust that everything will fall into place eventually.

Tip: Follow your instincts and make a great change.