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Summit **TIMES**

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Covid claims one more life, infects 60 others in Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 SEPT:

Sikkim's Covid death toll inched up to 381 on Wednesday with the virus claiming one more life in the past 24 hours in the State. This death was reported from STNM Hospital and is the second COVID death reported so far this week.

Meanwhile, as per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department, 60 new Covid cases were picked up from the testing of 691 samples on Tuesday, giving Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 8.6%.

Of the new cases, 34 were detected in RT-PCR testing of 360 samples and 26 from rapid antigen testing of 328 samples. While 30 of the new cases were registered in East District, 20 were in West District and 10 in South

District.

The tally of confirmed Covid cases in Sikkim has now reached 31,074.

In the meantime, 41 more people were discharged from home and facility isolation yesterday to further improve the number of fully recovered cases here to 29,741.

There are currently 642 active Covid cases in the State, most of whom are recovering under home or facility isolation and only a handful hospitalized. Of those in hospital, only seven are currently admitted in ICU facilities at STNM Hospital, Central Referral Hospital, and Namchi District Hospital.

On the other hand, Sikkim administered 3,126 doses of Covishield vaccine in the State on Tuesday, of whom 3,031 people completed their vaccination schedule with the second dose and 95 received their first jab.

CM chairs meeting for Film City at Yangang



GANGTOK, 22 SEPT

[IPR]: Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang chaired a meeting convened to discuss the proposed Film City at Yangang and the Global Film Festival scheduled for December later this year.

The meetig, held at the CM's official residence, Mintokgang, was attended by Minister, Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, BS Panth, Advisor, IPR Department, Birendra Tamling, Chairperson, Sikkim Film Promotion Board, Pooja Sharma, Secretary, IPR Department, Siporah G Targain, Principal Chief Engineer, Tourism and CA Department, Prakash Chettri, Director, IPR

Department, Benu Gurung, and other officials.

A detailed presentation on the project was made before the Chief Minister.

The Chief Minister appreciated the efforts of both the Departments and the Sikkim Film Promotion Board and suggested 'Eco Heritage Film Village' as the name for the upcoming infrastructure.

On the occasion, the Chief Minister released a book, 'Sikkim - 100 Film Shooting Destinations', produced by the Sikkim Film Promotion Board.

A documentary film, 'Bhumchu,' produced by the IPR Department was also screened on the occasion.

NIC building inaugurated at secretariat complex; CM acknowledges seamless e-services provided during pandemic

GANGTOK, 22 SEPT [IPR]: Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang inaugurated a National Informatics Centre (NIC) and National Knowledge Network (NKN) here at Tashiling Secretariat complex today.

The Chief Minister expressed gratitude towards members of NIC at both State and Central level. He expressed pleasure on being part of the inauguration of NIC and NKN buildings which will be beneficial to the people of Sikkim.

The CM acknowledged the contribution of NIC Sikkim during the Covid-19 pandemic as they were the only active e-Government service and he hailed the e-services of NIC which reached the remote parts of the State during the pandemic.

He expressed hope that the convenience provided by the e-services would make the lives of citizens of Sikkim much more plain sailing. He requested the line departments to take this opportunity to serve the people of Sikkim by enhancing various e-services in the State.

In the end, the CM thanked the DG, NIC, Dr Neeta Verma, for participating in the programme and hoped that Pakyong and Soreng along with all the blocks of the State will be able to establish NIC branches which will ease the lives of the citizens living in the rural areas.

He assured that the Government will leave no stone unturned in its commitment of providing best



e-services in every part of the State.

Earlier, Secretary, Building and Housing Department, Rajen Sharma gave a brief technical report of the NIC floor and NKN floor.

Additional Chief Secretary, Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, Government of Sikkim, Dr. K. Jayakumar, gave a power point presentation of NIC

Sikkim e-governance initiatives.

He informed that the objective of Ease of Doing Business is to give simple regulations for business and stronger protection of property rights.

Further, he talked on issues such as ease of renewals and issuance cost and inspections. In the end, he invited

the line departments and Government agencies for a training workshop on EoDB.

Senior Technical Director, NIC, Dr LP Sharma, gave a brief history of NIC Sikkim. He also talked about the activities of NIC Sikkim which included Network, Video Conference services provided by NIC during State and Central level meetings, e-governance services, NIC Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) services during elections and Artificial Intelligence (AI) based landslide alert.

During the programme, virtual inauguration of Online Central Inspection System was conducted by the CM. Distribution of memento to Development, VC and Networking team, Security and Housekeeping staff for their unconditional support during Covid-19 pandemic was also done through the hands of the HCM.

The Chief Minister was accompanied by Minister for Education Kunga Nima Lepcha, Minister for Building and Housing Sanjit Kharel, Chairman, IT Department, Navraj Gurung, ACS Tourism Dr K Jayakumar, Secretary, Building and Housing Department, Rajen Sharma, DIG-Range Prawin Gurung, and officials of NIC Sikkim and NIC HQ, New Delhi.

Further, the Chief Minister was joined by Director General, NIC, New Delhi, Dr Neeta Verma, District Collector-East, Ragul K, HoDs, NIC representatives from four districts of Sikkim through virtual mode.



CHAMLING TURNS 72

GANGTOK, 22 Sept: Sikkim Democratic Front celebrated the 72nd birthday of its president, former Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, in grand manner here at the SDF headquarters on Wednesday. Senior leaders and ardent party workers and supporters from different parts of the State attended the celebration and greeted Mr Chamling with khadas and garlands. A digital interaction programme, "Sambodhan," of the party was also launched on the occasion.

Govt officials trained on facilitating ease of doing business in Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 SEPT:

A five-day training-workshop on "Ease of Doing Business" concluded today at the Tourism Department conference hall here with 15 department and state agencies whose officials were trained at the workshop, making online presentation via video-conferencing to the CM about their road-maps to deliver ease of doing business and streamlining online services. The workshop was held in collaboration with National Informatics Centre, a press release from the Tourism Department informs.

The workshop sought to reiterate the importance of services to be delivered online for industries, firms, entrepreneurs, enterprises and societies in the course of their establishment, conduct of operations, submitting compliances

and pursuing their mandate for providing products/services and contributing to the economy of the State, the release explains.

70 officials from 15 Departments and state agencies attended the workshop and were trained on conceptualizing, designing and developing Digital Software Applications for online operations for the ease of industries, establishments and firms investing and operating in Sikkim.

The scope of the workshop was further expanded to include citizen-friendly roll out of online services to make it possible for rural folk to get some basic official work completed online at neighbourhood citizen service centres. The release adds that the vision of the Chief Minister to reach internet connectivity and e-enabling services at the

Block level was highlighted during the workshop. Senior NIC officers shared their perspective on how the EoDB agenda can be implemented using NIC services and platform.

Dr K Jayakumar, Additional Chief Secretary, had earlier shared the manner in which process flow design, enterprise architecture of solution can be developed and also how software design can be developed using unified modified language and user stories. The officials who completed the workshop received certificates attesting Level-1 competency standards for EoDB implementation.

Medhari Skills University also participated by sharing their inputs and offering a post graduate level MBA course in Enterprise Operations Management for those Officers who are interested, the release adds.

SKM's constituency-level coordination meetings reach Gnathong-Machong



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 SEPT:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's series of constituency-level coordination meetings reached Gnathang Machong today with a session held at Pakyong.

The meeting, an SKM press release informs, was chaired by the party's secretary general, Minister Arun Upreti, and was also attended by MLAs Bishnu Psd Sharma and Em Psd. Sharma, Political Secretary to the CM, Jacob Khaling, Confidential Secretary to the CM, Bikash Basnet, SKM gen sec (HQ) Pawan Gurung, area in-charge Tshering Bhutia, OSD to the CM Bhanu Pradhan, youth chief convenor Sahadev Sharma, advisors, chairpersons and representatives of the CEC, CLC, zonal members, an SKM press release informs.

The party's Zone-2 office on Machong Road at Pakyong bazaar was also inaugurated on the day.

Also on the day, familiar SDF face on social media, Tenzing

Bhutia, popularly known as DJ Bolo, who had recently resigned from the former ruling party, formally joined the SKM. The release goes on to inform that 452 families switched sides from the SDF and joined SKM today. Among them were 20 sitting panchayats, two zilla panchayat members, two former zilla panchayats, one ex-panchayat and other prominent members of SDF party.

In his joining address, "DJ Bolo" explained that he was convinced to join SKM after seeing the humility and down-to-earth nature of Chief Minister PS Tamang and lashed out against his former party and leader alleging that SDF had no respect for hardworking party cadre and that while in office, the former CM entertained only the elite. This, he said, was in stark contrast to the present Mintokgang which was always open for the underprivileged.

He also took a dig at the former CM and remarked that for the 25 years that he was

Chief Minister, Pawan Chamling celebrated his birthday only with the elite and was noticing party workers only now. Mr Chamling celebrated his birthday at the party HQ in Gangtok today. The party's area in-charge, retired DIG of Sikkim Police, Tshering Bhutia, in his address remarked that although SKM couldn't win Gnathang-Machong in 2019, the government has not deprived people of development.

In 2024, Gnathang Machong will be resoundingly won by SKM, he added.

Mr Khaling, in turn, explained that because of the pandemic, the party could not hold meetings for two years and was now resuming its strengthening activities and also informing people more actively about the SKM government's initiatives.

The constituency level meetings were also to gather grievances from grassroots to inform policy interventions in the coming days, he said.

States to provide ₹ 50,000 compensation for each Covid death: Centre

NEW DELHI, 22 SEPT [NDTV]: The families of those who die of Covid will receive ₹ 50,000 ex gratia from the state governments, the Centre informed the Supreme Court today. Significantly, compensation will be paid against not only the deaths that have already occurred but for future ones, too, the court was told.

The funds will be paid by state governments, sourced from their respective disaster response funds, and will be channelled through the District Disaster Management Authority or the district administrations, the government said today.

Support for marketing & publicity, training options and simplified paperwork highlighted as interventions required to enhance export prospects for local entrepreneurs

GANGTOK, 22 SEPT [PIB]: Department of Commerce, under the Ministry of Commerce & Industry is organizing Vanijya Saptah from 20 to 26 September across the country to commemorate the monumental occasion of 75th anniversary of Indian Independence by organizing various events to showcase the potential of our exporters and manufacturers during this week. As part of celebrating Vanijya Saptah, a panel discussion was held at the Conference Hall of Udyog Bhawan, Upper Tadong, on 22 September on Export Prospects & Challenges of various sectors in Sikkim. HK Sharma, Secretary, Department of Commerce and Industries, chaired the meeting.

The Secretary, in his presidential address, informed that Dept has identified Tourism, Large cardamom, Handicrafts, Handlooms, Dalley Chilli, Tea, Kiwi, Trout fish, etc as the exportable products from the state of Sikkim.

Ravi Kumar, Director MSME, Department of Commerce and Industries, highlighted the various initiatives and schemes of the Commerce and Industries Department for training, financial support and handholding of the entrepreneurs of various sectors. He invited the representatives of line Depts and Entrepreneurs to present the prospects

and challenges in export of products belonging to various sectors.

DR Sharma, Assistant Director MSME-DI, Govt. of India mentioned about various schemes are being implemented by Govt. of India like common facilitation centre, industrial estate development and all the incentive schemes for exporter to promote their product in export market. He suggested to identify a basket of products of Sikkim which are suitable for exports.

Deepak Verma, GM, Zuventus Healthcare Ltd., East Sikkim suggested to identify the unique selling proposition of Sikkim products as well as preparation of roadmap on production scaling up and marketing strategies for development of Industries in the State.

Mr Verma also suggested to make a list of schemes available under various Depts indicating the eligibility, assistance level etc. and give wide publicity among the budding entrepreneurs and requested to develop online portal of the said schemes in single window so that the needy entrepreneurs can choose the schemes based on their eligibility and requirement to reduce the initial hardship.

Priyanka Pradhan from Choten group Marchak highlighted their success story on developing of their new product of Yacon syrup



and the challenges in marketing of their new product. She suggested extending assistance for budding entrepreneurs particularly for promoting brands through digital, online and social marketing also.

MS Ramalingam, Deputy Director Spices Board highlighted the export opportunities for Spices in Sikkim particularly the value added products including consumer package of spices. In regard to challenges of market access issues for export of large cardamom to Bangladesh and Pakistan markets, he informed that Spices Board Head Office had already flagged the issue before the Commerce Ministry.

Jiwan Sharma, General Manager SIMFED highlighted the prospects of export

of agri products from Sikkim and informed that availability of price information in various markets would help the farmers to choose the markets for selling and suggested to create a Market Intelligence Cell to disseminate the price and other trade related details of the various products at regular intervals.

Kesang Diki Barfungpa, Joint GM, Sikkim Milk Union highlighted the scope for increasing the milk production and suggested that scaling up of production is very much essential for any unit to survive and do better.

Srijana Chettri, Under Secretary, UDD detailed the support extended to the formation of sector bases SHGs and sought the assistance of line Depts in providing Training and handholding them

in terms of financial support as well as helping them in taking part in Exhibition to showcase their products, Certification of products and market linkage.

Reena Rai, Studio MAATO, a budding Entrepreneur from Pakyong, elaborated the success story of handmade ceramic products and suggested to provide handholding support as most of the Sikkim entrepreneurs are first generation entrepreneurs. She mentioned that documentation and red tapism create a buzz among the budding entrepreneur thus simplification of process utmost necessary in the schemes as condition of Sikkim is not similar with states in plain and also the cost of production including raw materials are high.

Dewakar Basnet,

representative of CII Sikkim Chapter suggested for developing the single window for all the schemes to be implemented in Sikkim and suggested Corporate groups operating in Sikkim to support young entrepreneurs to take up various subsidiary product industry required for their units operated in Sikkim. He also suggested to include Sikkim product as gift items of corporate group especially among the Pharma companies present in the states. He emphasized handholding by state govt. in showcasing the Sikkim products by exhibiting in airports, various cities, etc.

Shashikant Gupta, Handicraft Promotion Officer Handicrafts Service Centre, Ministry of Textiles, Govt. of India presented the various schemes including training for youth and

establishment of raw material bank for various handloom and handicraft products.

VG Bhat, DGM, NABARD informed about the credit facilities and assistance available for entrepreneurs under various schemes. He also mentioned that NABARD could help the entrepreneurs / artisans in obtaining registration of Geographical Indication of Sikkim based unique Products.

HK Sharma, Secretary, Dept. of Commerce and Industries, Govt. of Sikkim, in his concluding remarks, highlighted the ongoing programmes of Govt of Sikkim and Govt of India, available for the entrepreneurs. He also informed that District Export Plan will be prepared by the DICs in consultation with concerned DM for sending to Govt of India for approval. Draft MSME policy document has been prepared and sent to Govt and most of the suggestions made by the members are included in the MSME policy document. Secretary suggested to form what's app group of the officials and the entrepreneurs to find out the way to tackle the various obstacles faced by the entrepreneurs and also to get suggestions from entrepreneurs to take up with appropriate authorities.

Topden Zangpo, Deputy Secretary, MSME, Dept of Commerce & Industries proposed the vote of thanks.

CS takes stock of AKAM activities

GANGTOK, 22 SEPT [IPR]: Chief Secretary SC Gupta chaired a meeting today at Tashiling Secretariat to review activities accomplished and proposed under Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav in Sikkim.

The Chief Secretary in his opening remarks highlighted the importance of the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav and the activities expected from each Department, as per the directives of the Government of India.

He said that the objective of this meeting is to draw up a calendar of proposed events department wise over the next eleven months. The activities should be sent to the Culture Department which is the



Nodal Department. He highlighted the five key areas of the campaign, viz. freedom struggle, ideas at 75, achievement at 75, action at 75, and resolve at 75.

Special Secretary, Culture Department, KD Rechung, made a detailed presentation describing the campaign and the priority areas to be covered.

Thereafter, all Departmental Heads presented the activities carried out in the respective departments so far under AKAM and future calendar of events. They also shared their ideas and suggestions.

Each Department was directed to organize at least one iconic event every month under AKAM for the next

eleven months. The departments were asked to prepare a calendar of the identified events.

The meeting was attended by Heads of Departments, Officers of Culture Department, and Rajya Sainik Board.

The meeting was also joined by the District Collectors of all the four districts through video conferencing.

Supreme Court rejects Chhattisgarh Government's pleas in Toolkit case

NEW DELHI, 22 SEPT [PTI]: The Supreme Court today refused to entertain two separate appeals of the Chhattisgarh government against orders of the high court granting a stay on investigation in an FIR registered against senior BJP leader and former Chief Minister Raman Singh and the party's spokesperson Sambit Patra for their tweets in connection with the alleged fake toolkit case.

"Let the Chhattisgarh High Court decide the case," a bench headed by

Chief Justice NV Ramana said. The bench, also comprising justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli, said that the present cases cannot be granted separate treatment as there are many cases pertaining to the toolkit issue that are pending in various high courts.

"Don't waste your energy here. We are not inclined to entertain the special leave petitions. We dismiss the SLPs," the bench said when senior advocate AM Singhvi, appearing for the state, wanted to refer to records

of the case. The Supreme Court requested the Chhattisgarh High Court to decide expeditiously the pleas related to the fake toolkit case, saying the matters be decided without being influenced by earlier observations.

The Chhattisgarh High Court on June 11 passed two separate orders and granted interim reliefs in the same FIR lodged against Singh and Patra while noting that averments in the FIR reflected that "by the tweets, Congressmen are aggravated which clearly

indicates that no public peace or tranquillity is being adversely affected and it is purely political rivalry between two political parties".

On May 19, an FIR was lodged based on the complaint of Akash Sharma, the president of the National Students' Union of India's (NSUI) Chhattisgarh unit, with the allegation that Singh, Patra and others had circulated fabricated content on social media platforms using a fake letterhead of the Congress by projecting it as a toolkit developed by the party.

Preparations gather steam at Soreng for grand birth anniv celebrations to remember Late Nar Bahadur Bhandari

SORENG, 22 SEPT [IPR]: In continuation with the meeting held on 20 Sept with regard to the 81st birth anniversary celebrations of former Chief Minister, the late Nar Bahadur Bhandari, another sub-division level coordination meeting was convened today at the Sarwa Jayanti Rangasala Manch, Government Senior Secondary School, Soreng.

The meeting was chaired by MLA Aditya Goyal, who is also the patron of the organizing committee.

Attending the program were ADC Dev-Soreng, Gayas Pega, SDM (Soreng), Ranjan Rai, SDPO (Soreng), Mahendra Pradhan, officials from associate departments along with the HoDs of schools and colleges and the chairpersons of the Government of Sikkim.

SDM (Soreng), in his welcome address, highlighted a few major points regarding the celebration such as proper maintenance of Covid protocol, roles and responsibilities of respective committees etc. He also informed that the celebration is being held under the directions of the Chief Minister.

The meeting was then addressed by Binod Basnet, Chairman



Skill Development. He provided comprehensive details and information about the functions and events that are being planned.

During the open house discussion that followed, issues such as the importance of appointing a liaison officer and concerns regarding the size and capacity of the stage where guests are to be seated were discussed.

It was also suggested that manpower shortage may be solved with the help of SKM's constituency-level committee representatives. The house also proposed the construction of booths for the distribution of face masks and hand sanitizers in and around the venue for better safety measures along with Medical emergency and Fire services.

The MLA, in his address, urged everyone present not to consider their specific roles and responsibilities as a burden but to regard them as an opportunity to showcase the spirit of

Soreng as a New District. He said that the ceremony can become a calendar event to be celebrated in grand manner every year.

He informed that the CM is delighted to be a part of the organizing committee and that will actively participate in providing assistance when requested. He suggested advertising through social and print media about the event along with information on different competitions that are to be held.

Ideas such as spreading positive messages through T-Shirts and slogans were also proposed by him.

He reiterated the responsibilities of respective committees and urged them to proceed further without any delay. In his concluding remarks, he said that the distribution of invitation has to be done at the earliest.

The vote of thanks was proposed by RO/AD (Soreng), BB Rai, during which he informed that the next review meeting will be held on 27 September.

Problem isn't Covishield but India's vaccine certificate, says UK

NEW DELHI, 22 SEPT [PTI]: Covishield is now an approved vaccine on the UK's revised guidelines for travel after a furious India warned of "reciprocal measures", but double-vaccinated Indians still have to quarantine because of "vaccination certification issues", according to UK officials.

Officials have implied the problem is not Covishield but doubts over vaccine certification in India. Responding to the new sticking point, a top health official told NDTV there are "no issues" with the Indian vaccine certificate.

The updated UK travel guidelines say, "Formulations of the four listed vaccines, such as AstraZeneca Covishield, AstraZeneca Vaxzevria and Modern Takeda, qualify as approved vaccines." The site explains that from 4 am, October 4, those who have taken vaccines from a "relevant public health body" in specific countries will be considered "fully vaccinated". That list does not include India.

This suggests that Indians vaccinated with two doses of Covishield, produced by Serum Institute of India (SII), will still need to quarantine even though India is now on the Amber list.

A British High Commission statement yesterday said: "We are engaging with the Government of India to explore how we could expand UK recognition of vaccine certification to people vaccinated by a relevant public health body in India." Certification after Covid jabs in India is a centralised national system managed through the CoWin app and portal.

RS Sharma, the CEO of the National Health Authority, told NDTV there are "no issues" on CoWin with Covid certification.

"The system is entirely WHO (World Health Organisation) compliant. We continue to have discussions with the International Civil Aviation Organisation as well. The UK High Commissioner visited me on September 2. They wanted to understand the CoWin system, the technical aspects. A resource has been allocated to them for this purpose and two further conversations have happened with their team. These were technical-level conversations," Dr Sharma said.

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CM attends prayers for world peace at Rinchenpong

GYALSHING, 21 SEPT [IPR]: The Vishwa Shanti Puja Aayojak Samiti organized a 3-day Vishwa Shanti Puja (Prayers for World Peace) at Ngagyur Rinchen Chholing Gumpa at Meghi Dara, Rinchenpong, on Tuesday.

Being the last day of the ceremony, the occasion was graced by Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang as chief guest accompanied by Lok Sabha MP Indra Hang Subba, Ministers Sonam Lama, LN Sharma and Bhim Hang Limbu, MLAs Sunita Gajmer and Aditya Golay, Advisor to the CM, Rohit Raj Maharaj, Political Secretary to CM, Jacob Khaling, DIG (Sikkim Police), Prawin Gurung, DC-West Karma R. Bonpo, Senior SP Tashi Wangyal Bhutia,



chairpersons and advisor to the Government of Sikkim, other officials and members of the local community.

The programme included the felicitation of the Chief Minister by Sangay Yongden Gyatso Rinpoche and the Gumpa Community. The State Government allotted a sum of Rs 50

lakh to the monastery. The Chief Minister announced the establishment of Guru Padma Sambhava Studies and Meditation Centre at Dentam.

The CM was also felicitated by the Namthang-Rateypani Rodhi Ghar Committee and Dentam Gumpa Association.

The Chief Minister

announced that West District will be converted into a tourism corridor.

The Chief Minister announced that Uttarey and Chewa Bhanjyang would be converted into a business hub along the international border with Nepal.

The programme included a discourse by Rinpoche Sangay Yongden Gyatso.

SKM's Garib Jankalyan Prakostha convenes general meeting



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 22 SEPT:

The Garib Jankalyan Prakostha, a cell of the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, convened its general meeting at the Chief Minister's residence at Lumsey here today. The meeting was attended by around

35 members from all the districts, a press release informs.

The meeting discussed future plans of the organisation, grievances and progress made thus far.

Also today, appointment letters were handed over

to care-takers, staff nurses, co-ordinators and drivers by the Prakostha's chief patron, Prabhakar Golay, advisor Deepesh Bhandari, chief coordinator Manoj Lama and medical advisors.

The Prakostha also

decided to organise district-level meetings in the near future and resolved that patients from all the districts, especially those from the BPL category, will get the first priority in receiving assistance from the Prakostha, the release adds.

Governor joins webinar on "Pardesh-Chunautiya aur Sambhavnaey"

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 22 SEPT:

Governor Ganga Prasad attended a webinar segment of the three-day seminar, "Pardesh-Chunautiya aur Sambhavnaey," organized by Chanakya Varta and Hansraj College, a press release from Raj Bhavan informs.

In his address, the Governor gave a brief insight into the history, culture, natural diversity, democratic transition and other aspects of India and urged every indi-



vidual to work together for the development of the country.

He further stressed on inclusive growth in future that India is poised

to achieve with greater participation of educated youth.

Keynote speakers from Australia, New Zealand, Russia, Germany

and Bulgaria shared their views.

The Governor also paid tribute to Late Kanti Devi Jain and remembered her contributions.

Agri Minister leaves on tour of Ladakh and Delhi to explore collaborations to support organic farming

SILIGURI, 2 SEPT [IPR]: Minister for Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services Department, Lok Nath Sharma, left for the union territory of Leh Ladakh and Delhi today on a week-long tour.

He is accompanied by Dr S Anbalagan, CEO, Sikkim Organic Farming Development Agency (SOFDA), and Sudhir Giri, CEO, Sikkim State Organic Certification Agency

(SSOCA).

The SSOCA is a Sikkim Government Undertaking and is the vision of the Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang, to explore areas of cooperation and to extend support to organic farming initiatives in the State.

The Minister and his team will be visiting Leh Ladakh to develop Organic Farming ties and discuss various areas of cooperation in the field of agriculture in gener-

al and organic farming. They will also visit a few villages to get first hand information in this region.

The Minister will be meeting Lt Governor and Chief Executive Members of Kargil, Leh Ladakh region and discussing various issues on agriculture and animal husbandry.

In Delhi, the Minister will meet the Union Minister for Agriculture.

The vision of the Chief Minister is not only

to undertake organic certification in the state but also to provide support to the farmers in the areas of post harvest management and marketing to bring about sustainable livelihood options to the farmers.

The Government also looks to extend support to other states in the field of organic farming. This visit is not only to share the experiences of Sikkim but also to explore the possible areas of cooperation in this field.

India's oldest Mosque basks in past glory after renovation; Set to reopen

Thrissur, 22 Sept [PTI]: India's first mosque and the oldest in the sub-continent is all set to welcome back devotees and general public after regaining its past glory and grandeur.

The classic beauty and humble style of the "Cheraman Juma Masjid", dating back to 629 AD, was restored after a painstaking renovation and conservation process spread over nearly 30 months under the state-run Muziris Heritage Project (MHP).

Located at Kodungallur taluk in this central Kerala district, the heritage structure was recreated in tune with its original character and aesthetics, at a cost of ₹ 1.14 crore, PM Noushad, Managing Director of MHP, said.

Besides the renovation and

conservation initiative, which started in May 2019, a two-storey Islamic Heritage Museum was also constructed in the mosque campus spending nearly ₹ one crore and its internal refurbishment is going on now, he noted.

After submitting the letter of completion to the government, the MHP authorities are now awaiting Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's date to reopen the oldest mosque for visitors.

"It is expected to happen any day. We are waiting for a convenient day of the Chief Minister for the inaugural function. If the COVID-19 situation is completely under control, it may happen within the next two week," Mr Noushad told news agency PTI.

According to local tradition, Cheraman

Perumal, as the king, went to Arabia where he met the Prophet and embraced Islam in the early 7th century. From there, he had sent letters, along with Malik Ibn Dinar, as a Persian scholar who travelled to India.

Dinar is believed to have built the masjid in 629 AD, five years after the king's death.

Mr Noushad said they focused more on conserving the existing portions of the old structure and recreate its appearance in the past based on the old photographs.

"We demolished the additional concrete structure added to the main building in 1974. We recreated the old structure of the mosque with a tile roof as seen in the old photographs," he said.

Luckily, several

portions of the basic structure were found retained as such, he said, adding that such portions had been renovated and conserved.

Besides the MHP's conservation effort, a multi-crore construction project is also underway at the mosque under the aegis of the mosque management.

An underground prayer hall, being constructed, is envisaged to accommodate at least 2000-3000 devotees.

A total of ₹ 15-20 crore is expected for the same, the MD explained.

"It's structural work and internal plastering is over. Flooring and beautification work is pending and expected to be completed soon," he added.

The MHP, entrusted with the heritage

to book advertisements in SummitTimes call 03592-208698 9734152541 9647102692 advertise@summittimes.com

SGSS president brings up power supply woes with departmental officers

SUMMIT REPORT SINGTAM, 21 SEPT:

Shantinagar Gaon Sudhar Samiti president, Krishna Chettri, met Karma Bhutia, Divisional Engineer and Bhanu Bhakta Sharma, Superintendent Engineer, of the

Power Department stationed at Topakhani here today to discuss issues related to electricity supply in the area, a press release informs.

The SGSS president spoke about frequent electricity failures in

Shantinagar despite consumers here paying their dues in timely manner.

A survey of the walkway lights along Rani Khola was also discussed along with installing a board near the station office with

contact numbers for emergencies.



Gangtok

GAZETTE EXTRAORDINARY PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY
Thrusday 19th August, 2021 No. 239

GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
SOCIAL JUSTICE & WELFARE DEPARTMENT
SAMAJ KALYAN BHAWAN, TADONG, GANGTOK

No. 73/SJ&WD/2021

Dated: 18/08/2021

NOTIFICATION

The State Government is pleased to announce that from the academic session 2021-22, the empanelled and non-empanelled colleges under scholarship schemes shall stand abolished. The Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes and Economically Backward Classes students pursuing Post-Matriculation courses or Post-Secondary courses within and outside the State shall be provided scholarship at uniform rate as fixed by the Fee Regulatory Committee constituted vide Notification no: 70/SJ&WD/2021 dated 20.07.2021.

By order and in the name of the Governor,
Tshewang Gyachho, SCS,
Secretary to the Government
File no. GOS/501/SJEWD

R.O. No. 217/IPR/Pub/Classi./21-22
Date 22.09.2021

STATE POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD SIKKIM FOREST AND ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT

GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

DEORALI, GANGTOK - 737102

F.No. 351/SPCB/3181

Dated: 8.9.2021

NOTICE

As per the provisions of Section 25 of water (Prevention & Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 and Section 21 of Air (Prevention & Control of Pollution) Act, 1981, no person/s can establish or operate any enterprise, industrial units without obtaining prior Consent to Establish or Operate which are liable for causing environment pollution. The units include any type of enterprises/establishments e.g. Health care Establishment (Hospital, Clinics, Clinical labs, blood bank etc), Pharmaceutical units, Fabrication units, factories, Vehicle cleaning facility (car spa), Automobile workshop/ Garages, Hydro-electric project and industrial units, Hotels, Resorts, restaurants, Hot mix plant, DG Sets, Mobile tower, petrol pumps, photo studios, Dairy, Bakery, Laundry and jewellery shops, poultry farms (5000 birds & above) etc.

Therefore, notice is hereby given to all units to apply for Consent to Establish/Operate online at www.skocmms.nic.in without fail. Failure to obtain Consent may result in legal action in exercise of power vested under Section 5 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, Section 33 A of the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 & under section 31 A of the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 by the State Pollution Control Board Sikkim for contravention of the relevant provisions of the Acts.

For further enquiry please contact the office of the State Pollution Control Board, Sikkim Deorali Gangtok, East Sikkim.

Email: spcbsikkim@gmail.com

Member Secretary
State Pollution Control Board, Sikkim
Department of Forest & Environment,
Government of Sikkim
Deorali, East Sikkim.
R.O. No. 192/IPr/Pub/Classi./21-22
Date: 10.9.2021

When Mountains Sweat, Pay Heed

And also make the young notice and learn

Not just experts, even lay people and mass media are now noticing the change in weather patterns all over the world. The mountains are getting warmer, the plains getting colder and weather hitting extremes at unexpected times, flooding is more severe and also more often at the wrong time. All these are symptomatic of Climate Change, a fact that cannot be denied or wished away anymore irrespective of what the intentionally ignorant leaders would have us believe.

Even as the debate continues over the developed world's attempts at browbeating the third world nations to sacrifice more to manage the world environment, and even as the largest consumer-polluter per capita has hightailed its way of commitments to the Earth, regions close to ice need to get more concerned and start undertaking studies and working solutions on their own. Ice caps – the polar caps and the glacial fields – feel the impact of climate change first. North and West Sikkim are crisscrossed by many glaciers which are the frozen fountains of life for the State. Most times, people do not realise the importance of glaciers to Sikkim since life does not directly depend on glacier-fed rivers in Sikkim and people tap instead into mountain springs for water. But such disconnect is only superficial and at the end of the day, the water cycle goes back to glaciers. Hence, the cultivation, the rivers and the hydel potential in them are all sourced from these glaciers and now that hydro-power has so much invested in it as the economic deliverer for the State, it becomes imperative that the source of this potential is studied better and understood in more detail.

Sikkim has had its glaciers studied, and while the commissioning of the study was welcome, it has to be a continuing effort and a dedicated glacier watch needs to be set up which extends to more ice bodies than are currently being "observed". Some of Sikkim's glaciers have reportedly increased in size, but even that is not necessarily good news. Elsewhere, Himalayan glaciers are receding at the rate of 10 to 15 metres on an average every year. The longest glacier in the Eastern Himalaya – the 26KM long Zemu in north Sikkim is believed by many to not be in the best of healths. This glacier also feeds the Teesta on which the futures of many hydel projects rest. The glaciers of West Sikkim have also been in fast recession for nearly a century now and most of them are hanging high on the slopes and no longer course into a valley now; their section in the valley now just a litter of glacial debris.

Given the fact that 70 percent of the world's fresh water is frozen in glaciers, it is surprising that not enough is being done to save them and try and contain their recession. This is probably because the scientists and decision-makers prefer the plains and share their data only among their clique and have seldom made their findings coherent enough for the immediate stakeholders to understand. But the problem is already too clear and present to waste time pointing fingers. The findings of the study of glaciers commissioned by the State Government should now be considered for inclusion in school curriculums so that the young can grow up learning how things are and then hopefully develop a connection with the canaries of climate change and learn to take better care of the water towers.

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China is Financing Infrastructure Projects Around the World – Many Could Harm Nature and Indigenous Communities

BLAKE ALEXANDER SIMMONS, KEVIN P. GALLAGHER & REBECCA RAY

THECONVERSATION.COM

China is shaping the future of economic development through its Belt and Road Initiative, an ambitious multi-billion-dollar international push to better connect itself to the rest of the world through trade and infrastructure. Through this venture, China is providing over 100 countries with funding they have long sought for roads, railways, power plants, ports and other infrastructure projects.

This mammoth effort could generate broad economic growth for the countries involved and the global economy. The World Bank estimates that recipient countries' gross domestic product could rise by up to 3.4% thanks to Belt and Road financing.

But development often expands human movement and economic activity into new areas, which can promote deforestation, illegal wildlife trafficking and the spread of invasive species. Past initiatives have also sparked conflict by infringing on Indigenous lands. These projects were often approved without the recognition or consent of local Indigenous communities.

In a newly published study, our team of development economists and conservation scientists mapped the risks Chinese overseas development finance projects pose for Indigenous lands, threatened species, protected areas and potential critical habitats for global biodiversity conservation. We found that more than 60% of China's development projects present some risk to wildlife or Indigenous communities.

DIVERSE PROJECTS AND RISKS

Our study examines 594 development projects financed by the China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China. We created a database to track the characteristics and locations of projects that these two "policy banks" supported between 2008 and 2019. During this period, the banks committed more than US\$462 billion in development finance to 93 countries – roughly as much as the World Bank, the traditional global

leader in development finance, committed in that time.

Nearly half of all projects financed by these two banks are located within potential critical habitats. These are areas that might be essential for conservation and require special protection considerations, according to the International Finance Corporation, a unit of the World Bank that promotes private investment in developing countries.

One in three of the projects fall within existing protected areas, and nearly one in four overlaps with lands owned or managed by Indigenous peoples. In total, we calculate that China's development finance portfolio could impact up to 24% of the world's threatened amphibians, birds, mammals and reptiles.

The greatest risks lie in South America, Central Africa and Southeast Asia. All of the projects that China's policy banks are financing in Benin, Bolivia and Mongolia overlap with existing protected areas or potential critical habitats. More than 65% of Chinese development projects in Ethiopia, Laos and Argentina are located within Indigenous lands.

On average, risks to Indigenous lands are greatest from extraction and transportation projects, such as mines, pipelines and roads. The greatest threats to nature are energy projects, including dams and coal-fired power plants. For example, a cascade of seven hydropower dams along the the Nam Ou River in Laos has displaced Indigenous communities that depended on local ecosystems for their livelihoods.

HOW THE WORLD BANK ADDRESSES THESE RISKS

China may be the world's largest country-to-country development lender, but it's not the only funding source for emerging economies. The World Bank, an international organization funded mostly by wealthy nations, has been a leading source of development finance over the last 40 years – but its approach is markedly different from China's.

In the 20th century, critics assailed the World Bank for funding projects that caused environmental

damage and social conflict. But in the past 30 years it has enacted a series of environmental and social reforms that are designed to steer lending toward more inclusive and sustainable development projects. Just this year, the bank committed to aligning its lending with the Paris Agreement on climate change by 2023.

China's rapid economic growth since the 1980s has made it one of the world's top polluters. Now its leaders are working to improve their country's environmental performance.

China has created a national system of protected areas and has pledged to make its domestic economy carbon-neutral by 2060. But it has made no such reforms in its foreign lending.

Comparing projects financed by the World Bank from 2008-2019 with our list of Chinese loans, we found that on average China's projects pose significantly greater risk to nature and Indigenous lands, primarily in the energy sector.

The World Bank also has a concerning proportion of loans in high-risk areas. Notably, the roads, railways and other transportation projects that it financed during this period pose risks to biodiversity that are nearly equivalent to those posed by similar projects financed by China.

For example, in 2016 the World Bank financed a major road project across the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including Indigenous peoples' territory, opening them up to the loss of property and livelihoods, as well as violence. A formal internal investigation found that "serious harm" had occurred and directed the World Bank to manage future projects more carefully.

MAKING DEVELOPMENT FINANCE SUSTAINABLE

China has an opportunity with the Belt and Road Initiative to improve infrastructure networks around the world in a way that is both sustainable and inclusive. Recently it published the inter-ministerial "Green Development Guidelines for Overseas Investment and Cooperation," a set of voluntary guidelines

produced by Chinese experts from universities, governmental and non-governmental organizations and international experts, including two of us (Kevin Gallagher and Rebecca Ray). This report urges Chinese investors to respect host country environmental standards. When those standards are lower than China's, the guidelines recommend using international environmental standards.

Nonetheless, China has not enacted binding environmental performance requirements for the projects it finances overseas. Nor has it ended support for high-risk projects like coal-fired power plants.

Currently China is preparing to host the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity – the main global agreement that commits nations to protect species and ecosystems around the world. Sessions will take place online in October 2021 and in person in Kunming in the first half of 2022. This event is a unique opportunity for China to address social and environmental risks from its global development activities.

We believe that China would be wise to adopt new recommendations set forth by its Ministry of Ecology and Environment, in collaboration with international experts, including two of us (Kevin Gallagher and Rebecca Ray), that would require compulsory environmental management systems for projects supported by public Chinese banks to prevent and mitigate risks. This would raise the bar for Western lenders, who also need to improve their standards but fear losing business to Chinese lenders.

By minimizing harmful impacts from the projects it funds, we believe China could make the Belt and Road Initiative a win-win for itself, host countries and the global economy.

[Blake Alexander Simmons is Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Boston University; Kevin P. Gallagher is Professor of Global Development Policy and Director, Global Development Policy Center, Boston University; Rebecca Ray is Senior Academic Researcher in Global Development Policy, Boston University]

Afghanistan: Taliban face many obstacles to governing – not least their violent methods

KAMBAIZ RAFI THECONVERSATION.COM

Afghanistan has been nicknamed the "graveyard of empires" in reference to the failure of colonial attempts to govern it. Yet this often distracts from the sombre fact that anyone – whether insiders or outsiders – who has tried to establish control over the whole country has met with resistance. The speed at which the US-backed government was recently removed seems to speak to this perennial ungovernability. This is what the country's new dominant force, the Taliban, are beginning to rediscover.

If the country made any progress towards institution building in the two decades following the ousting of the Taliban in 2001, it was only with considerable international help, financially, administratively and militarily. But these efforts suffered from deep flaws, some of them structural.

For instance, the political system established by 2001 Bonn Agreement was quasi-monarchical, giving too much power to the president. Its highly centralised hierarchy easily disintegrated after the recent fall of the capital, Kabul.

Power centralisation was worsened by President Ashraf Ghani's tendency to concentrate authority in the presidential palace. This led many disgruntled Afghans to deride Ghani's government as a "three-man republic" – alluding to the role by him and his two influential associates, his national security adviser, Hamdullah Mohib, and chief of staff, Fazel Mahmood Fazli.

In the wake of Taliban's takeover, there were hopes that some state capacities could be sustained if the new administration was inclusive and outward-looking enough to court international recognition and assistance. But the caretaker cabinet, announced on September 8, showed these hopes were in vain. Many in the cabinet, including its prime minister and interior minister, are on international sanctions lists.

ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY

With humanitarian aid fast depleting, Afghanistan faces the urgent threat of hunger and serious disruption of most economic activities, according to UN estimates.

Voices inside and outside the Taliban have been calling for foreign assistance. But international funds managing aid expenditure in the past 20

years – led by the World Bank, United Nations Development Program, Nato and the Asian Development Bank – have now been dismantled, and direct engagement with the Taliban by former donors appears unlikely.

Some assistance has been provided by the UN, as well as Pakistan and China. But this pales in comparison to what the western-backed Afghan governments received.

Before the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan's fiscal and monetary policy required close technical cooperation by the World Bank and IMF, which have suspended operations, citing uncertainty over how their various programmes would be able to continue.

This cooperation was central to the post-2001 governance system. It may have entailed technical dependencies that handicapped Afghanistan's development, but it ensured relatively centralised state fiscal and monetary management. This is unlikely to be restored without another outside source of help.

The technocratic deficit has been made worse because of the number of educated people who have fled the country or gone into hiding because of a fear of reprisals from Taliban militants.

Also of concern is the future of the currency. The Afghani is pegged to the US dollar and faces looming depreciation owing to shortages of currency reserves and a lack of skilled monetary management following the Taliban takeover. The US government has frozen access to Afghanistan central bank's reserves, held in the Federal Reserve in New York.

This, coupled with a huge trade deficit that is likely to now worsen given the serious disruption of previous limited productive activity, means that importing vital goods will further drain its reserves. This will cripple the economy unless a benefactor state (Qatar, Pakistan or potentially China) comes to the Taliban's support.

During the first Taliban regime, the Pakistani rupee and Iranian Rial were in wide use as alternative currencies for importing from those countries – the source of most of Afghanistan's imports. Pakistan's finance minister, Shaukat Tarin suggested the same might happen this time when it comes to bilateral trade. The future of the Afghani itself is uncertain, given that Afghani

banknotes are printed in Germany, which is yet to recognise the Taliban administration.

Meanwhile, especially while the Taliban are struggling for international recognition, foreign policy will be heavily influenced by Pakistan. During the first Taliban regime, most international organisations working with Afghanistan relocated to Pakistan. Qatar, given its role in facilitating US-Taliban negotiations, has been vying with Pakistan for influence in Afghanistan, but Pakistan's role in Afghan foreign policy runs deep, aided by geographic proximity.

HARSH MEASURES

Confusion due to lack of governance might propel the Taliban to return to methods that characterised their bitterly unpopular first regime. There is evidence that some of the brutal and oppressive measures are returning, which is likely to alienate an already frustrated population.

The country has changed in 20 years of western-backed government. The population is younger – and women, in particular, have enjoyed a great deal more control over their own lives. Despite a Taliban ban, there have been protests across the country by womens' rights and democracy advocates. Repressive measures can only do so much to subdue a defiant public.

Militarily, the Taliban's early sense of triumph might prove premature. Armed resistance by the pro-democracy National Resistance Front (NRF) continues, and violent terror attacks by the Islamic State of Khurasan (ISIS-K), which belittles the Taliban as too soft and "nationalistic", are on the rise.

The obvious solution would have been to foster the idea of an inclusive republic. This could help to attract the thousands of educated workers needed for technical jobs who have fled or are in hiding. Providing the sort of liberties that have proven popular among most Afghans would be a sign of good faith too.

This could risk the loyalty of the Taliban's most extreme elements, but its advantages could outweigh downsides. Most importantly, it could rally NRF's support if its fundamental demands, including some form of electoral politics, were guaranteed. Sadly, the Taliban have so far shown they do not prefer this path.

[the writer is Independent Researcher in Political Economy, UCL]

OTT firm files FIR against piracy of content in Assam

GUWAHATI, SEP 22 (PTI): Hyderabad-based streaming platform Reeldrama Production, which offers dedicated Assamese content, on Wednesday said miscreants were engaging in piracy of its programmes, and police complaints have been filed against them.

The-Top) company has identified several offenders and it is taking action against them. "This is a serious issue that we are facing now and it is piracy. Our contents are being pirated and streamed on various unauthorised platforms. It is detrimental to not only the company but the entire Assamese film industry," she added. It has already filed complaints with the

Guwahati Police against two identified offenders, Dasgupta said. "The law-enforcing agencies are taking action. But, we appeal to the people not to encourage piracy. It affects everyone in the society, she added. An FIR has been registered at Dispur Police Station in Guwahati under Section 420 (cheating and dishonesty) of the IPC and 66D (cheating by personation via

using computer resource) of the IT Act. The content-mix of Reeldrama, which was rolled out in January this year, includes contemporary and old movies, short films, web series in various genres, and a wide range of shows on music, comedy, poetry, cookery and devotion, it said. The company had on Wednesday released a new original web series -- 'Mrityunjoy', directed by Nanan

Pachani. The OTT platform will soon release seven more original shows. Since the commencement of our journey, we are witnessing a solid growth in consumption of Assamese content. We want to offer a platform for Assamese filmmakers to showcase their talent and help them reach out to the worldwide audience through Reeldrama," Dasgupta said.

Pondy reports 117 new COVID-19 cases, 2 deaths



PUDUCHERRY, SEPT 22 (PTI): Puducherry posted 117 fresh coronavirus cases during the last 24 hours ending 10 am on Wednesday raising the overall tally to 1,25,735. The fresh cases were identified at the end of examination of 5,097 samples and the cases were spread over Puducherry 73, Karaikal 29, Yanam one and Mahe 14. Two more persons hailing from Karaikal region and having co

morbidities including diabetes succumbed to the viral infection raising overall toll to 1,834. Director of Health and Family Welfare Services G Sriramulu said the active cases were 945 of whom 142 were in hospitals and the remaining 803 were in home isolation. While 92 patients recovered and were discharged during last twenty-four hours the overall recoveries stood at 1,22,956.

The Department of Health has tested 17.51 lakh samples so far and found 14.85 lakh out of them to be negative. The Director noted that the test positivity rate was 2.30 percent while fatality and recovery rates were 1.46 percent and 97.79 percent, respectively. He also said 9,32,694 doses have been administered so far and they included 6,68,389 first dose while the remaining 2,64,305 were second shot.

Stopped near Mamata Banerjee's home, BJP leader calls cops 'Pishi Service'

Sukanta Majumdar's charge was sharply countered by the Trinamool with party leader Tapas Roy saying, the BJP's new state boss was "as uncouth as old one".



Kolkata: On the very second day of his job, the BJP's new Bengal chief had a run-in with the police as he campaigned in Kolkata's Bhowanipore area for his party's candidate who is contesting a by-poll against Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in her neighbourhood. "West Bengal Police Service has become West Bengal 'Pishi' Service," Sukanata Majumdar told the media, using the Bengali term for aunt that the BJP uses to taunt Mamata Banerjee with charges of nepotism over promoting her nephew Abhishek Banerjee in the party. The police, however, said the Chief Minister's residence falls under a high-security area and the BJP leader had too many people with him. Local news channels showed an angry exchange between Dr

Majumdar and a police officer. The Trinamool reacted sharply to the charge with party leader Tapas Roy saying, the BJP's new state boss was "as uncouth as old one". Known for frequent controversial comments and coarse language, BJP's Bengal unit chief Dilip Ghosh was replaced late on Monday and given a position in the national leadership, in a reshuffle that came amid a string of defections from the party

to the ruling Trinamool Congress. BJP's MP from Balurghat in north Bengal, 41-year-old Sukanta Majumdar was asked to take over as the Bengal unit chief. Since the Bengal Assembly elections earlier this year in which the BJP had said it was going to win 200 seats but got only 77, four MLAs and an MP have returned to Trinamool. On Wednesday, he was campaigning for

Priyanka Tibrewal, a 41-year-old lawyer at the Calcutta High Court, who will contest against Mamata Banerjee in the September 30 by-polls for the Bhabanipur constituency. Mamata Banerjee, who took charge as Chief Minister for the third time after the Trinamool Congress's mega victory in the state election, needs to win the Bhabanipur by-poll as an MLA to retain the top post. The

results will be out on October 3. She had lost to her former aide-turned-rival Suwendu Adhikari in Nandigram even though the Trinamool managed to improve its previous tally by two seats to 213 out of 294. The Bhabanipur poll is seen as extremely critical for the BJP, which is heavily invested in defeating Mamata Banerjee after it failed to oust her in the state polls.

Arunachal logs 64 fresh COVID-19 cases, one new fatality



ITANAGAR, SEP 22 (PTI): Arunachal Pradesh's COVID-19 caseload rose to 54,190 on Wednesday as 64 more people tested positive for the infection, while one more fatality pushed the death toll to 273, a senior health official said. A 51-year-old man from Papumpare district died at the Dedicated Covid Hospital (DCH) at Chimpu, near here on Tuesday due to acute respiratory distress syndrome with Covid

Pneumonia, State Surveillance Officer, Dr Lobsang Jampa said here. Arunachal Pradesh now has 413 active COVID-19 cases, while 53,504 people have recovered from the disease thus far, including 61 in the last 24 hours, the official said. The COVID-19 recovery rate now is 98.73 per cent while the percentage of active cases is 0.76, Jampa said. Lower Subansiri district has the highest

number of active cases at 64, followed by Tawang (58), Lower Dibang Valley (46) and West Kameng (45). The state has tested over 11,23,514 lakh samples for COVID-19 to date, including 3,557 on Tuesday, Jampa said, adding that the positivity rate stood at 1.79 per cent. A total of 11,01,854 people have been inoculated in the state thus far, State Immunisation Officer Dr Dimong Padung said.

Manipur police arrests terrorist with huge explosive materials

Superintendent of Police, Imphal West, S Ibomcha Singh told PTI that police arrested the militant from Lairikyengbam Makha Leikai area under the jurisdiction of Lamphel police station of the district on Tuesday. Imphal: Manipur Police arrested one active cadre of proscribed insurgent outfit People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak-Progressive (Prepak-Progressive) from Imphal West district and seized huge IED

materials from his possession, a senior officer said. Superintendent of Police, Imphal West, S Ibomcha Singh told PTI that police arrested the militant from Lairikyengbam Makha Leikai area under the jurisdiction of Lamphel police station of the district on Tuesday. Police seized huge improvised explosive device (IED) materials from the possession of the arrested insurgent including one set of IED fitted in a tin of

fish cane, one airgun rifle, four PEK cakes, three electronic circuits, one remote control device, three detonators, batteries, soldering equipment used in assembling IED bombs and a mobile phone, the SP said. During interrogation, the arrested militant disclosed that he was involved in an IED attack at Manipur Chief Minister's bungalow gate in 2013 and also a restaurant in Imphal, the SP said.

The militant had threatened one person living at Lairikyengbam Makha Leikai area by lobbying two handgrenades which exploded at a paddy field near his house in the early hours of Tuesday, Singh said. The arrested militant along with the seized IED materials was handed over to Lamphel police station in Manipur's Imphal West district for further investigation and legal action, the SP added.



British govt did not advise ECB against Pakistan tour: High Commissioner

ISLAMABAD, SEP 22 (PTI): The British government did not advise the England and Wales Cricket Board to cancel its men's and women's teams' tour of Pakistan on security grounds, the UK's High Commissioner here has said and promised to "redouble" efforts to make the T20 series happen in 2022. Christian Turner, the British High Commissioner to Pakistan, said the ECB decided on its own to cancel the T20 tour next month and he shared the "deep sadness" of Pakistani fans.

"This was a decision made by the ECB, which is independent of the British government, based on concerns for player welfare," Turner said in a video on his Twitter handle. "The British High Commission supported the tour, did not advise against it on security grounds, and our travel advice for Pakistan has not changed." The ECB on Monday withdrew its men's and women's teams from the tour of Pakistan, citing increased concerns about travelling to the region. It

also cited player fatigue ahead of the T20 World Cup in the UAE as one of the reasons for the decision. Turner said he intends to make sure England tour Pakistan in the later part of next year. "I have been a champion of international cricket's return to Pakistan and will redouble my efforts in advance of England's Autumn 2022 tour. "My thanks to all at the PCB (Pakistan Cricket Board) who have worked so hard in support of that. I hope that we'll soon hear the roar of full

cricket stadiums again. In the end, cricket will be victorious." The tour, which would have been the first by an England women's team and the first by their male counterparts since 2005, was in doubt after New Zealand pulled out of their limited-overs series in Pakistan on Friday citing a security threat. The England men's matches, which were intended to act as a warm-up for the T20 World Cup in the UAE, were scheduled to be played in Rawalpindi on October 13 and 14.

VIDEO NEWS SECTION

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Rohit and Hardik are recovering very well: Boult



ABU DHABI, SEP 22 (PTI): Mumbai Indians pacer Trent Boult is not sure if skipper Rohit Sharma and all-rounder Hardik Pandya would feature in their next IPL game on Thursday but said both of them are recovering well.

West Indies' Kieron Pollard had led the side against Chennai Super Kings in the absence of Rohit, who has a dodgy knee while Pandya also missed the game due to a niggle.

"They are both recovering very well. In terms of their selection for the next game, I'm

not too sure what's going on there. But day by day, they are improving," Boult said during a virtual press conference on the eve of their game against Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR).

"They are obviously two vital players in the XI for Mumbai. And we're desperate to get them back. So, fingers crossed that they'll be pretty good to go over the next couple of games," added the New Zealand pacer.

Boult said Rohit was "sorely missed" in the game against CSK but defended the team management's decision

to rest the star opener.

"He is right up there in terms of experience and runs achieved in this format. So, it was a big hole but it was a good decision to make sure he is 100 per cent with the amount of cricket coming up.

"If he comes to the eleven, it will be brilliant, but we want to make sure he is 100 percent fit," said Boult.

The defending champions have a better record against KKR in the cash-rich league but Boult believes that history does not matter in this format.

"It is more about starting afresh, every game is such a big game, every match is important now. History is history, it is nice to have previous results against them, but they are a quality side and we would not take them lightly," said the left-arm pacer.

Boult, 32, also felt that competing in the IPL was good preparation ahead of the T20 World Cup, which will be held in the UAE and Oman in October-November.

"You could probably not have any better build-up to the tournament like the T20 World Cup. The focus is on what's on for the next couple of weeks, but in terms of preparation, it is very good.

"Conditions can change quite quickly but having to deal with the heat and humidity is a big challenge at this stage. It is going to be interesting to see how conditions move over the course of the next few weeks," Boult signed off.

MI eye improved batting effort against rejuvenated KKR



ABU DHABI, SEP 22 (PTI): Defending champions Mumbai Indians would look for inspiration from skipper Rohit Sharma, who is set to return to action, when they take on a rejuvenated Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League match here on Thursday.

Mumbai were without the services of Rohit and star all-rounder Hardik Pandya in their 20-run defeat to Chennai Super Kings on Sunday as both were rested as a precautionary measure due to having niggles. However, head coach Mahela Jayawardene has said Rohit should be fit and available for selection for the match against KKR.

KKR, on the other hand, have registered a dominating nine-wicket win over Royal Challengers Bangalore in their opening game of the second leg of the league.

Mumbai, who are currently placed fourth

in the table with eight points, began their second leg campaign in a typical slow manner but with only half the tournament left to play, the defending champions need to win to stay in the top half of the league table.

Rohit, who has been in fine touch of late, will be expected to continue in the same vein and help his side make amends of the inept batting performance against CSK. Apart from Saurabh Tewary, who hit an unbeaten half century, none of the other batsmen were able to capitalize on their starts against CSK, failing to chase down 156.

On the other hand, the comprehensive win would have boosted KKR's confidence. Having struggled in the first leg, KKR looked a completely different unit, in the manner in which they defeated RCB.

The Eoin Morgan-led side, placed sixth in the points table, fired

on all cylinders with mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy and star all-rounder Andre Russell wreaking havoc with the ball before openers Shubman Gill and debutant Venkatesh Iyer chased down the 93-run target with 10 overs to spare.

Skipper Morgan had said that KKR would be dangerous opponents with nothing to lose in the second leg and the team certainly looked menacing against RCB. They will hope to continue playing in a similar aggressive fashion and win the title just like 2014 edition when they notched nine victories in a row.

They will also hold the edge over their rivals having already experienced the conditions at the Sheikh Zayed Stadium against RCB.

The Teams (from): Kolkata Knight Riders: Eoin Morgan (captain), Dinesh Karthik, Gurkeerat Singh Mann,

Karun Nair, Nitish Rana, Rahul Tripathy, Shubman Gill, Harbhajan Singh, Kamlesh Nagarkoti, Kuldeep Yadav, Lockie Ferguson, Pawan Negi, M Prasad Krishna, Sandeep Warrier, Shivam Dube, Tim Southee, Vaibhav Arora, Varun Chakravarthy, Andre Russel, Ben Cutting, Shakib Al Hasan, Sunil Narine, Venkatesh Iyer, Sheldon Jackson, Tim Seifert.

Mumbai Indians: Rohit Sharma (captain) Quinton de Kock, Ishan Kishan, Suryakumar Yadav, Aditya Tare, Anmolpreet Singh, Chris Lynn, Saurabh Tiwary, Anukul Roy, Arjun Tendulkar, Hardik Pandya, Krunal Pandya, James Neesham, Jayant Yadav, Kieron Pollard, Marco Jansen, Yuvraj Singh, Adam Milne, Dhawal Kulkarni, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohsin Khan, Nathan Coulter-Nile, Piyush Chawla, Rahul Chahar, Trent Boult.

Match starts at 7:30PM IST.

Seven female Afghan taekwondo athletes resettle in Australia

MELBOURNE, SEP 22 (AP): A sports association official says seven female taekwondo athletes who fled Taliban-controlled Afghanistan have resettled in Melbourne. Australian Taekwondo's chief executive Heather Garriock said Wednesday the women are completing quarantine this week. Although most of the athletes were not identified, there were no female Afghan taekwondo athletes scheduled to compete at the Tokyo Olympics.

Garriock said former Australia national soccer captain and humanitarian advocate Craig Foster worked with the Australian government, Australian Taekwondo and Oceania Taekwondo on a high-

risk evacuation from Afghanistan after the Taliban re-took control of the country. No other details of the evacuation were provided.

Taliban officials have since been quoted as saying that women will not be allowed to compete in sport.

We're really pleased the ladies are safe and incredibly grateful for the assistance of the Australian government and Oceania Taekwondo in getting them out of Afghanistan, Garriock said.

The lives of these women were in danger.

As a sport, we needed to pull together and do something to help. The Australian taekwondo community is incredibly welcoming,

and these ladies will be welcomed with open arms.

Garriock who played women's soccer for Australia at two Olympics contacted Foster to help in relocating the athletes to Australia.

Craig is a passionate advocate for multiculturalism and refugees, so it was only natural that he was the first person I contacted to discuss what needed to happen," Garriock said.

One of the athletes, Fatima Ahmadi, was quoted as saying that she was grateful for the assistance of all parties who supported their evacuation.

I feel so good about arriving in Australia. We are safe here

without any danger, she said.

Australian Taekwondo helped us a lot and I am so thankful. We are now waiting to do some useful things for Australia and repay your help.

Players from Afghanistan's women's soccer team are among dozens of athletes reportedly given visas to live in Australia.

The Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in mid-August. In recent days, the new Taliban government issued several decrees rolling back the rights of girls and women. Across Afghanistan, women in many areas have been told to stay home from jobs, both in the public and private sectors.

Parag describes Tyagi's final over as number one' spell

DUBAI, SEP 22 (PTI): Rajasthan Royals all-rounder Riyan Parag lavished praise on young pacer Kartik Tyagi, who helped his team pull off a two-run win over Punjab Kings in their IPL match, saying it was the number one spell he has seen in his cricketing career.

I think, 100 percent, it is the number one spell I have ever seen in my cricketing career. But then I hope he (Kartik) does it in the rest of the games and wins us more matches, Parag said at the post-match media conference on Tuesday.

Tyagi bowled a sensational last over as Rajasthan Royals pulled off an incredible two-run win over Punjab Kings in an IPL thriller here.

Punjab Kings required four runs off the final over but Tyagi dismissed Nicholas Pooran (32) and Deepak Hooda (0) and gave away only one run to snatch the win for his team.

Parag said that he pushed pacer Mustafizur Rahman to take the game to the 20th over.

We were in the driving seat after the first innings, but then I think, we were poor in the field and then the game was slipping away from us.

Then in the 19th over, I told Mustafizur (Rahman), don't let it finish in this over and we have a chance with Kartik bowling the 20th and those boys were insane, defending eight runs off the last two overs, that is just incredible, the Assam player said.

Parag also said that he had kept the helicopter shot in his armoury as he bats in the death overs, where bowlers mostly bowl yorkers.

I think, this is such a shot (the helicopter shot) which should be in your armoury because I mostly bat in the death and most of the bowlers perfect the yorkers, so I am just keeping an



option. If it is a yorker or is in my line, then I can use helicopter (shot).

It did not pay off well today, but I am confident that in the next match, I get the same ball, I will try the same thing, added the 19-year-old Guwahati born right-handed batsman.

He admitted that he had an off day in the field. It was just a bad day, we rate ourselves as really good fielders, I rate myself as one of the best fielders and it's at

the end of the day even I am human. I can drop a catch too.

But we have got two practice sessions after this and work really hard on that and hopefully from the next match (we are) even better fielding side, he quipped.

Rajasthan were bundled out for 185 in exactly 20 overs after they were going strong at 169 for 5 in 17 overs and according to Parag it was a bad day for the lower-middle order.

Captain Samson fined Rs 12 lakh for RR's slow over rate against Punjab

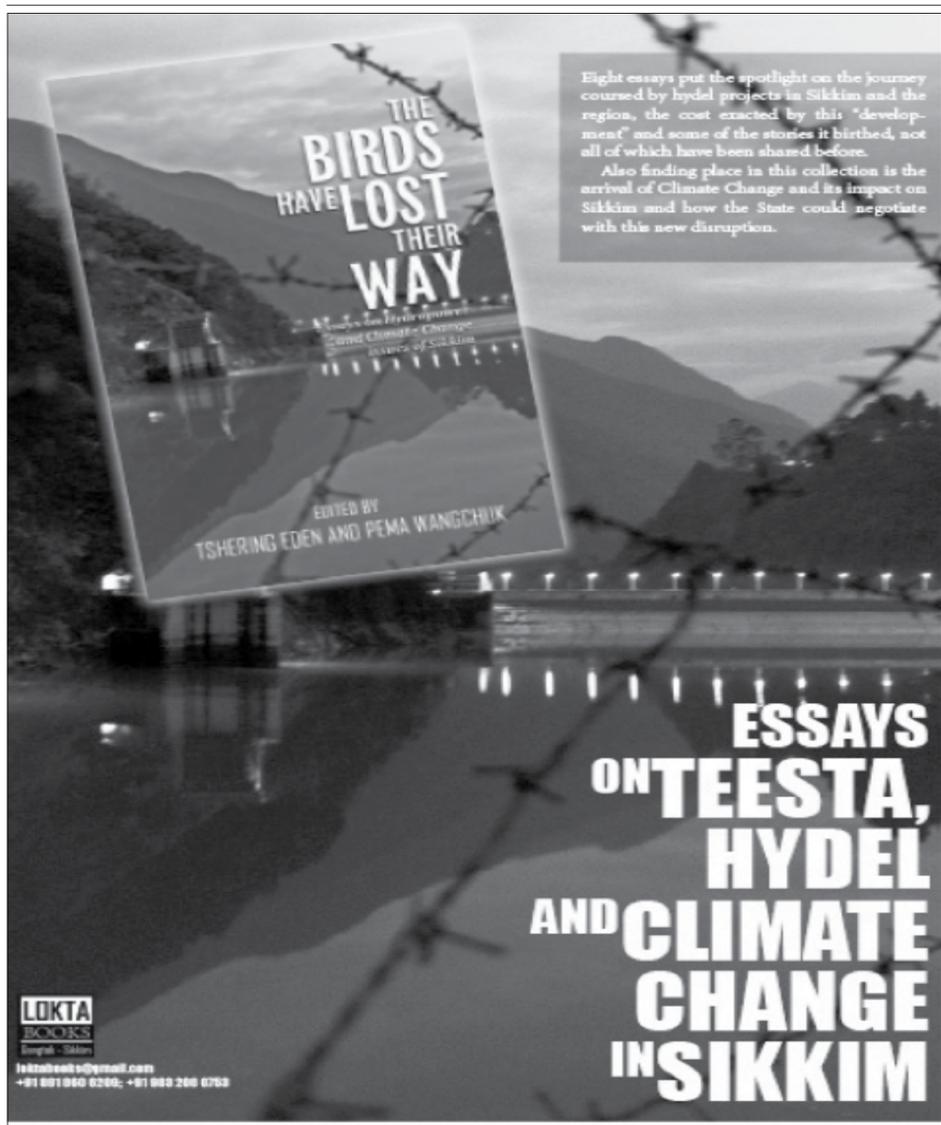
DUBAI, SEP 22 (PTI): Rajasthan Royals captain Sanju Samson has been fined Rs 12 lakh for his side's slow over rate during their two-run win over Punjab Kings in an Indian Premier League match here.

The Royals pulled off an

incredible two-run victory over Punjab Kings with fast bowler Karthik Tyagi dismissing Nicholas Pooran and Deepak Hooda and giving away only one run in the final over to snatch the win for his team at the Dubai International Stadium on

Tuesday. "Rajasthan Royals captain Sanju Samson has been fined after his team maintained a slow over rate during their VIVO Indian Premier League 2021 match against Punjab Kings at the Dubai International Stadium, Dubai on

September 21," the IPL said in a statement. "As it was his team's first offence of the season under the IPL's Code of Conduct relating to minimum over rate offences, Mr Samson was fined Rs 12 lakh," the statement added.



Eight essays put the spotlight on the journey caused by hydel projects in Sikkim and the region, the cost exacted by this "development" and some of the stories it birthed, not all of which have been shared before.

Also finding place in this collection is the arrival of Climate Change and its impact on Sikkim and how the State could negotiate with this new disruption.

ESSAYS
ON TEESTA,
HYDEL
AND CLIMATE
CHANGE
IN SIKKIM

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Germany's diversity shows as immigrants run for parliament

BERLIN (AP): Ana-Maria Trasnea was 13 when she emigrated from Romania because her single, working mother believed she would have a better future in Germany. Now 27, she is running for a seat in parliament.

"It was hard in Germany in the beginning," Trasnea said in an interview with The Associated Press. "But I was ambitious and realized that this was an opportunity for me, so I decided to do whatever I can to get respect and integrate."

Trasnea, who is running for the center-left Social Democrats in Sunday's election, is one of hundreds of candidates with immigrant roots who are seeking a seat in Germany's lower house of parliament, or Bundestag. While the number in office still doesn't reflect their overall percentage of the population, the country's growing ethnic diversity is increasingly visible in politics.

"A lot has changed in Germany in the last few decades. The population has become much more diverse," says Julius Lagodny, a Cornell University political scientist who has researched migration and political representation in Germany. "Young immigrants are not only striving for political offices across almost all parties in Germany, they are demanding them. There's a whole new sense of assertiveness now."

There are about 21.3 million people with migrant backgrounds in Germany, or about 26% of the population of 83 million. The current parliament has 8.2%, or 58 of 709 lawmakers with immigrant roots. The 2013-17 parliament had only 5.9%, or 37 out of 631 lawmakers, according to Mediendienst Integration, an organization tracking migrant issues in Germany.

Of the 6,227 candidates running for parliament, 537 have immigrant roots, said Julia Schulte-Cloos, a political scientist from Munich's Ludwig Maximilian University specializing in political behavior and discrimination of minorities in Germany and Europe.

Schulte-Cloos said the share of Bundestag candidates with immigrant roots has risen continuously since 2005.

Even though the number elected to parliament is expected to rise again this time, it will still fall short of 26% of Germany's population with what is officially termed a "migrant background" — defined as a person either born abroad or with at least one parent who was.

In Berlin, where about 35% of residents have foreign roots, immigrant candidates for Bundestag can be found in many parties.

Joe Chialo, 51, whose parents are from Tanzania,

is competing for a seat for outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel's center-right Christian Democrats in Berlin's Spandau neighborhood. Hakan Demir, 31, whose grandfather emigrated from Turkey 50 years ago, is trying to become the Social Democrats' new lawmaker in the Neukoelln neighborhood, one of the most diverse in Germany.

Outside the capital, Ezgi Guyildar, the 35-year-old daughter of Kurdish refugees from Turkey, is running with the progressive Left Party in the western city of Essen.

Their motivations include concern over global warming, seeking more rights for women and families, raising the minimum wage and improving the status of immigrants.

All four candidates, who are seeking a seat in parliament for the first time, told AP they sometimes experienced discrimination and racism, especially as children. But they also stressed their gratitude for coming to Germany and said they appreciated the education they received, leading to opportunities they might not have had otherwise.

Chialo, a music industry manager tapped by Merkel's would-be successor, Armin Laschet, as one of his advisers, is the son of Tanzanian diplomats. He was born in Bonn and raised in boarding schools after his parents went on to other diplomatic duties abroad.

"In the beginning, my brother and I were the only two Black kids at a school with 1,000 students," Chialo said. "The sentence, 'Oh look, there's a Negro,' tells you how unusual we and also many other Black people of my age were at the time in Germany."

Trasnea, who works for Berlin's education department and is running in the city's Koepenick-Treptow district, can't forget how other teenagers in high school threw stones at her and accused her of coming to Germany only to collect welfare.

Guyildar remembers how kids had snatched on her and other children for speaking Turkish in the schoolyard, which was not allowed. Demir is still embarrassed when he remembers lying to classmates from academic families that his father was a chemical technician, ashamed of his real job as an unskilled worker at a chemical company.

As an adult living in the ethnically diverse Berlin neighborhood of Neukoelln, Demir sees political advantages in his background.

"People from more than 150 nations live in this district — it's a great mix and very diverse," said Demir, who previously worked for another immigrant lawmaker, Karamba Diaby. "Of course, when I notice somebody wants to speak Turkish, I do that and that right away creates a kind of intimacy which is important during the election campaign. It makes people feel involved."

Apple, Google raise new concerns by yanking Russian app

BERKELEY (US), SEP 22 (AP): Big Tech companies that operate around the globe have long promised to obey local laws and to protect civil rights while doing business.

But when Apple and Google capitulated to Russian demands and removed a political-opposition app from their local app stores, it raised worries that two of the world's most successful companies are more comfortable bowing to undemocratic edicts and maintaining a steady flow of profits than upholding the rights of their users.

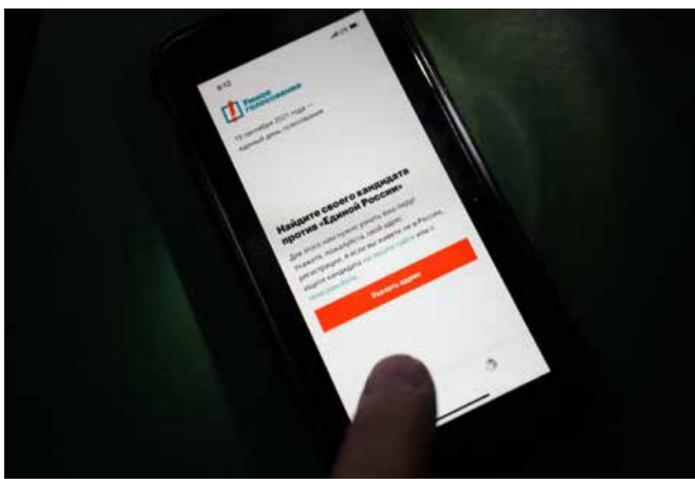
The app in question, called Smart Voting, was a tool for organizing opposition to Russia President Vladimir Putin ahead of elections held over the weekend. The ban levied last week by a pair of the world's richest and most powerful companies galvanized supporters of free elections and free expression.

This is bad news for democracy and dissent all over the world," said Natalia Krapiva, tech legal counsel for Access Now, an internet freedom group. We expect to see other dictators copying Russia's tactics."

Technology companies offering consumer services from search to social media to apps have long walked a tightrope in many of the less democratic nations of the world.

As Apple, Google and other major companies such as Amazon, Microsoft and Facebook have grown more powerful over the past decade, so have government ambitions to harness that power for their own ends.

Now this is the poster child for political oppression," said Sascha Meinrath, a Penn State University professor



who studies online censorship issues. Google and Apple have bolstered the probability of this happening again."

Neither Apple nor Google responded to requests for comment from The Associated Press when the news of the app's removal broke last week; both remained silent this week as well.

According to a person with direct knowledge of the matter, Google faced legal demands by Russian regulators and threats of criminal prosecution of individual employees if it failed to comply.

The same person said Russian police visited Google's Moscow offices last week to enforce a court order to block the app. The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

Google's own employees have reportedly blasted the company's cave-in to Putin's power play by posting internal messages and images deriding the app's removal.

That sort of backlash within Google has become more commonplace in recent years as the company's ambitions appeared to conflict with its one-time corporate motto, Don't Be Evil," adopted by

cofounders Larry Page and Sergey Brin 23 years ago.

Neither Page nor Brin whose family fled the former Soviet Union for the U.S. when he was a boy are currently involved in Google's day-to-day management, and that motto has long since been set aside.

Apple, meanwhile, lays out a lofty "Commitment To Human Rights" on its website, although a close read of that statement suggests that when legal government orders and human rights are at odds, the company will obey the government.

Where national law and international human rights standards differ, we follow the higher standard," it reads. "Where they are in conflict, we respect national law while seeking to respect the principles of internationally recognized human rights."

A recent report from the Washington nonprofit Freedom House found that global internet freedom declined for the fifth consecutive year and is under unprecedented strain as more nations arrested internet users for nonviolent political, social, or religious speech than ever before. Officials suspended

internet access in at least 20 countries, and 21 states blocked access to social media platforms, according to the report.

For the seventh year in a row, China held the top spot as the worst environment for internet freedom.

But such threats take several forms. Turkey's new social media regulations, for instance, require platforms with over a million daily users to remove content deemed offensive within 48 hours of being notified, or risk escalating penalties including fines, advertising bans and limits on bandwidth.

Russia, meanwhile, added to the existing labyrinth of regulations that international tech companies must navigate in the country, according to Freedom House.

Overall online freedom in the U.S. also declined for the fifth consecutive year; the group said, citing conspiracy theories and misinformation about the 2020 elections as well as surveillance, harassment and arrests in response to racial-justice protests.

Big Tech companies have generally agreed to abide by country-specific rules for content takedowns and other issues in order to operate in these

countries. That can range from blocking posts about Holocaust denial in Germany and elsewhere in Europe where they're illegal to outright censorship of opposition parties, as in Russia.

The app's expulsion was widely denounced by opposition politicians. Leonid Volkov, a top strategist to jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny, wrote on Facebook that the companies bent to the Kremlin's blackmail.

Navalny's ally Ivan Zhdanov said on Twitter that the politician's team is considering suing the two companies. He also mocked the move: Expectations: the government turns off the internet. Reality: the internet, in fear, turns itself off.

It's possible that the blowback could prompt either or both companies to reconsider their commitment to operating in Russia. Google made a similar decision in 2010 when it pulled its search engine out of mainland China after the Communist government there began censoring search results and videos on YouTube.

Russia isn't a major market for either Apple, whose annual revenue this year is expected to approach USD 370 billion, nor Google's corporate parent, Alphabet, whose revenue is projected to hit USD 250 billion this year. But profits are profits.

If you want to take a principled stand on human rights and freedom of expression, then there are some hard choices you have to make on when you should leave the market," said Kurt Opsahl, general counsel for the digital rights group Electronic Frontier Foundation.

India at that time termed it as "completely unacceptable", saying Turkey should learn to respect the sovereignty of other nations and reflect on its own policies more deeply.

Erdogan in his address to the General Debate on Tuesday said: We maintain our stance in favour of solving the ongoing problem in Kashmir for 74 years, through dialogue between the parties and within the framework of relevant United Nations resolutions.

The Turkish President, a close ally of Pakistan, had repeatedly raised the issue of Kashmir in his address to the high-level General Debate.

He had also raised the Kashmir issue during his visit to Pakistan last year.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) at that time has said Erdogan's remarks reflected neither an understanding of history nor of the conduct of diplomacy and that they will have strong implications on India's ties with Turkey.

It said India rejected the repeated attempts by Turkey to justify the cross-border terrorism "practised so blatantly" by Pakistan.

In his address on Tuesday, the Turkish President also referred to China's minority Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang and Myanmar's Rohingya during his address.

Erdogan said that within China's territorial integrity perspective, we do believe that more efforts need to be displayed regarding the protection of the basic rights of the Muslim Uyghur Turks.

The US and the EU besides many other countries have accused China of committing genocide against the Uyghurs in resource-rich Xinjiang and called for an international probe by human rights groups.

We also support ensuring the safe, voluntary, dignified return of Rohingya Muslims, who are living in difficult conditions in camps in Bangladesh and Myanmar, back to their motherland, Erdogan said.

Ravaged by war, Syrian rebel area struggles with virus surge

BEIRUT (AP): Coronavirus cases are surging to the worst levels of the pandemic in a rebel stronghold in Syria — a particularly devastating development in a region where scores of hospitals have been bombed and that doctors and nurses have fled in droves during a decade of war.

The total number of cases seen in Idlib province — an overcrowded enclave with a population of 4 million, many of them internally displaced — has more than doubled since the beginning of August to more than 61,000. In recent weeks, daily new infections have repeatedly shot past 1,500, and authorities reported 34 deaths on Sunday alone — figures that are still believed to be undercounts because many infected people don't report to authorities.

The situation has become so dire in the northwestern province that rescue workers known as the White Helmets who became famous for digging through the rubble of bombings to find victims now mostly ferry coronavirus patients to the hospital or the dead to burials.

"What is happening is a medical catastrophe," the Idlib Doctors Syndicate said this week as it issued a plea for support from international aid groups.

Idlib faces all the challenges that places the world over have during the pandemic: Its intensive care units are largely full, there are severe shortages of oxygen and tests, and the vaccination rollout has been slow. But extreme poverty and the ravages of Syria's civil war have made the situation in Idlib uniquely terrible. Half of its hospitals and health centers have been damaged by bombing, and the health system was close to collapse even before the pandemic. A

large number of medical personnel have fled the country seeking safety and opportunities abroad. Tens of thousands of its residents live in crowded tent settlements, where social distancing and even regular hand-washing are all but impossible. And increasing violence in the region is now threatening to make matters worse.

Large parts of Idlib and neighboring Aleppo province remain in the hands of Syria's armed opposition, dominated by radical groups including al-Qaida-affiliated militants who have struggled to respond to the outbreak, which intensified in August, apparently driven by the more contagious delta variant and gatherings for the Muslim feast of Eid al-Adha.

Cases and deaths have also been increasing in recent weeks in government-held areas and those under the control of U.S.-backed

Kurdish-led fighters in the east, but the situation appears to be worse in Idlib, though it's hard to measure the true toll anywhere.

In response, the political arm of the insurgent group that runs Idlib has closed some markets, forced restaurants to serve outdoor meals only, and delayed the opening of schools by a week.

But most residents are daily laborers who could not survive if they stopped working, making full lockdowns impossible.

"If they don't work, they cannot eat," said Idlib resident Ahmad Said, who added that most people cannot even afford to buy masks.

What's more, a population that has suffered through so much already is often too weary to follow restrictions that have tested people even in easier circumstances.

"It is as if people have gotten used to death," said Salwa Abdul-Rahman, an opposition

Turkish President Erdogan again makes reference to Kashmir in UNGA address

UNITED NATIONS, SEP 22 (PTI): Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has again referred to the issue of Kashmir in his address to world leaders at the high-level UN General Assembly session.

Last year also, Erdogan in his pre-recorded video statement to the General Debate had made a reference to Jammu and Kashmir.

India at that time termed it as "completely unacceptable", saying Turkey should learn to respect the sovereignty of other nations and reflect on its own policies more deeply.

Erdogan in his address to the General Debate on Tuesday said: We maintain our stance in favour of solving the ongoing problem in Kashmir for 74 years, through dialogue between the parties and within the framework of relevant United Nations resolutions.

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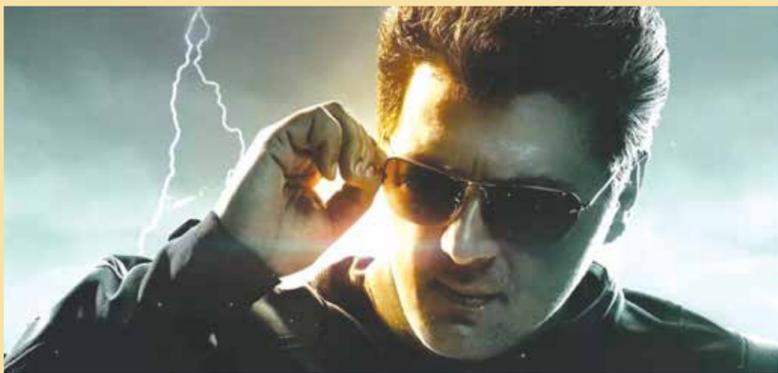
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Ajith Kumar-starrer 'Valimai' to release in theatres in January 2022



MUMBAI, SEP 22 (PTI): Film producer Boney Kapoor on Wednesday announced that his upcoming film "Valimai", starring South star Ajith Kumar, will release theatrically during the festival of Pongal in January 2022.

The Tamil-language action thriller film is written and directed by H Vinoth and produced by Zee Studios and Kapoor under Bayview Projects LLP.

The 65-year-old producer, known for backing Bollywood films like "Mr India", "No Entry", "Judaai", "Wanted" and "Mom", took to Twitter to share the news of the film's release date.

"Happy to announce that #Valimai will hit the screens on Pongal 2022. #ValimaiFromPongal" he wrote. Earlier, the film was reportedly scheduled for release in November 2020, coinciding with Diwali. However, the film's shoot was suspended due to COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the delay of its release. The film also stars Huma Qureshi and Kartikeya Gummakonda.

Willie Garson, 'Sex and the City' star, dies at 57 following cancer battle

LOS ANGELES, SEP 22 (PTI): Actor Willie Garson, best known for popular TV series "Sex and the City" and "White Collar", has passed away. He was 57.

Garson died after a battle with cancer, his longtime manager John Carrabino confirmed to Deadline.

The actor's adopted son, Nathen Garson, shared the news of his father's passing on Instagram on Tuesday.

"I love you so much papa. Rest In Peace and I'm so glad you got to share all your adventures with me and were able to accomplish so much. I'm so proud of you. I will always love you, but I think it's time for you to go on an adventure of your own. You'll always be with me," he wrote.

Calling him "the toughest, funniest and smartest person I've known", Nathen Garson said he hopes his father will be at peace now.

"I'm glad you shared your love with me. I'll never forget it or lose it," he added in the post.

On the HBO series "Sex and the City", Garson received popularity for his role as Stanford Blatch, a stylish talent agent who was columnist Carrie Bradshaw's (Sarah Jessica Parker) best friend outside of the three women, played by Cynthia Nixon, Kristin Davis and Kim Cattrall.

He reprised his role for the spinoff films "Sex and the City" and "Sex and the City 2", and was set to appear in the upcoming reboot series for HBO Max "And Just Like That".

Nixon, who played Miranda Hobbes in the series, said Garson was "a source of light, friendship and show business lore".

"We all loved him and adored working with him. He was endlessly funny on-screen and in real life," she wrote on Instagram.

Mario Cantone, who played Garson's on-screen husband Anthony Marentino in the series, said he couldn't have asked for a better partner on television.

"I'm devastated and just overwhelmed with sadness. Taken away from all of us way too soon. You were a gift from the gods," Cantone wrote on



Instagram.

Michael Patrick King, executive producer of "Sex And The City" and "Just Like That...", said Garson had been working "even while he was sick".

"His spirit and his dedication to his craft was present every day. His multitude of gifts as an actor and person will be missed by everyone," King said in a statement.

"Willie Garson was in life, as on screen, a devoted friend and a bright light for everyone in his universe. He created one of the most beloved characters from the HBO pantheon and was a member of our family for nearly twenty-five years. We are deeply saddened to learn of his passing and extend our sincere condolences to his family and loved ones," an HBO spokesperson said in a statement.

After "Sex and the City" ended in 2004, Garson continued his career performing on the small screen in USA Network's "White Collar". He played protagonist Neal Caffery's (Matt Bomer) genius and conman best friend Mozzie from 2009-14.

Bomer paid an emotional tribute to Garson on Instagram.

"I still haven't wrapped my head around a world without you in it where I can't call you when I need to laugh, or be inspired. The last thing you did when we said goodbye was pull down your mask (I hate covid), smile, and wink at me," Bomer wrote alongside a series of

photos of him and Garson.

"Save a place for me, because you know I want to be at your table up there," he added.

"White Collar" creator Jeff Eastin paid condolences on Twitter, calling Garson "the best of us".

NBCUniversal, parent company of USA Network, remembered the actor as a "fan favorite", no matter what project he was on.

"Nowhere was that more true than on White Collar, where he took the character of Mozzie, an outcast conspiracy theorist, and made him lovable to the core. He will be missed," the company said in a statement.

Before heading to Hollywood, Garson was a theatre student at Wesleyan University and received a master of fine arts from Yale Drama School. He began his television career starring in small roles on popular 1980s and '90s shows such as "Family Ties", "The X-Files", "Twin Peaks", "Monk", and "Friends".

But it was his seven episode-appearance in "NYPD Blue" as Henry Coffield that got him attention in 1996.

Two years later, he took on one of his career-defining roles in "Sex and the City".

On the film front, he starred in "There's Something About Mary", "Groundhog Day" and "Being John Malkovich".

Most recently, he voice starred in "Big Mouth" and had a recurring role on "Supergirl" from 2019-20.

You can never fully meet the expectations of people, says 'Kota Factory' director Raghav Subbu

NEW DELHI, SEP 22 (PTI): "Kota Factory" director Raghav Subbu says it was "intimidating" to take on the second season of the web series after its first chapter received a favourable response from the audience.

The show offers an insight into the life of students in Rajasthan's Kota, a major coaching hub of the country for competitive examination preparations, and was a surprise hit when it debuted on YouTube in 2019.

It is now set to return with its second season, which will premiere on

Netflix on Thursday. Going by season one's response, it was intimidating to jump into season two because you automatically feel the need to not ape or mimic what worked in season one. As a director, I was looking to see

that this show progresses organically into what it was supposed to be and not what it should be," Subbu told PTI in a Zoom interview.

The director said he had absolute clarity about one thing -- that he can never fully meet the expectations of the audience.

"I believe that expectation is the biggest killer and you can never meet it. I'll keep trying for the rest of my life but I can never say that I have my finger on this craft. And I think the day you say that I know everything is the day you die," he added.

The second season of "Kota Factory" will see Vaibhav (Mayur More), a young student on his journey to Maheshwari - one of the leading training institutes, and how he tries to balance his friendships, his relationship with his mentor Jeetu Bhैया

(Jitendra Kumar) and the looming pressure of getting into an IIT.

The show's aim is to show "beauty in the ordinary", he said.

"Things that people liked about 'Kota Factory' season one was not just the fact that it's somebody going to a city and just giving an exam, wanting to go make it to the IIT. There were so many things that we highlighted with the show, like the theme of loneliness."

Subbu said life in the town of Kota is slow, which is also the reason why "Kota Factory" has a slow pace of storytelling.

"The show is slow because life in Kota is slower than in other urban cities. So it's a slow town. Kids study there all the time and it's just about ambition. We are trying to

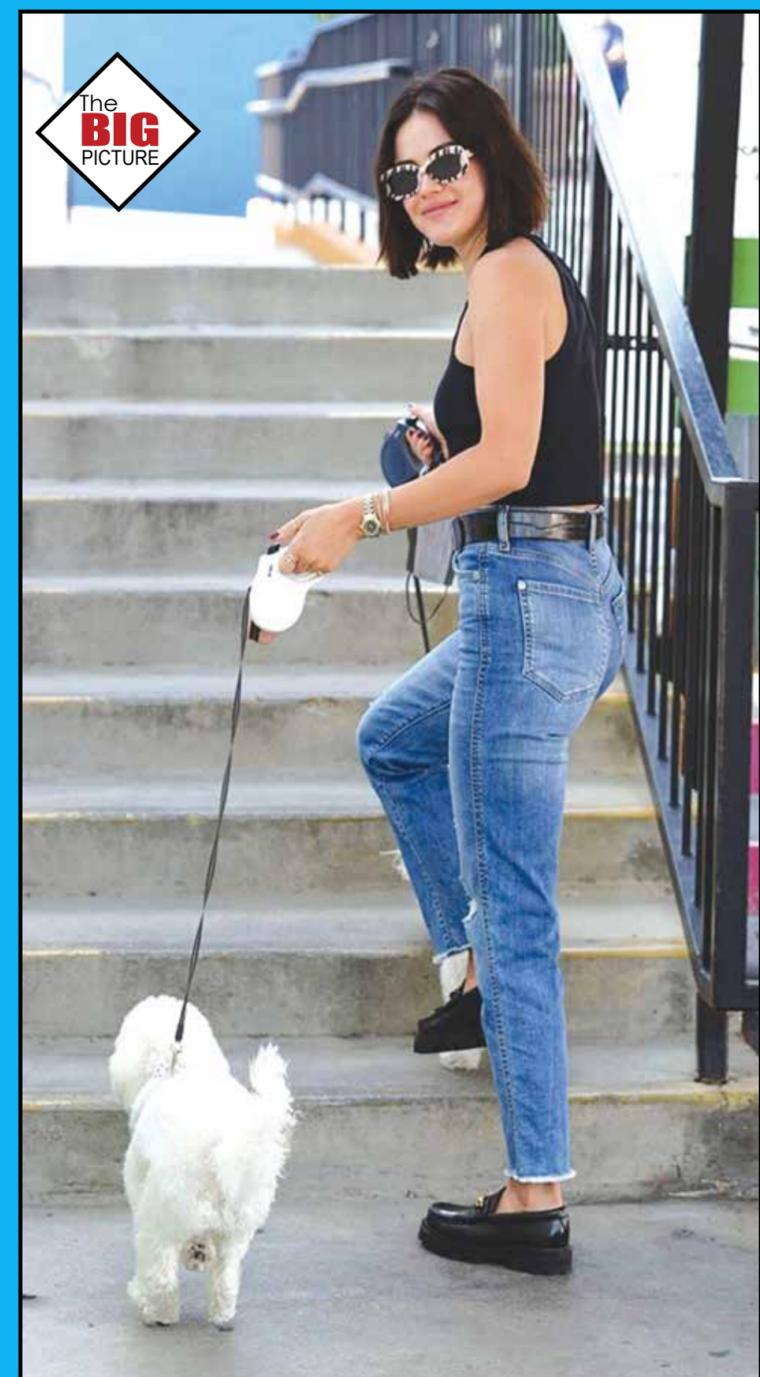
bring that soul into the show."

Asked about the black-and-white setting of the show, Subbu said people generally have this notion that a monochrome background means the work of art is either a period drama or has darker elements in it.

But he has tried to present something entirely different and unique with "Kota Factory", he promised.

"The point of art is to question things. I wanted to do a spin on something that is so set in stone. (The general idea is) it's either like a 'Sin City', which has a very graphic novel kind of feel or a period piece like 'The Artist'.

"We have these associations that we have in our head when it comes to everything. As a director and as a creator, I want to challenge those things."



GROOVY SHADES! The actress, Lucy Hale takes a stroll with her pup on a sunny day in LA.

ARIES:

Leo Tolstoy once said, "Everybody thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself." This is a Universal truth that is being revealed to you by your guides. So, turn your gaze inwards, Aries. Pay attention to what your mind, body, and soul are telling you in this moment. The light of awareness will help transform the darkness and render you with the courage required to take a step in the right direction.

Tip: It's time to turn your gaze inwards.

TAURUS:

It's time for a quick check in. What is your motivation behind the given action? Are you merely acting in a certain way because you want to receive appreciation for your contribution? Consider changing your approach, just for today. Focus on how you can serve better rather than what you can get out of this. Focusing on the higher goals will help you put forth your best work yet.

Tip: Ask yourself how you can serve better, beautiful.

GEMINI:

What happens when we don't pay attention to the signs our body gives us? With time, our

ailments begin to worsen. Word for the wise: prioritise health and wellness today. Consult a medical practitioner or healer, if need be. Make sure you take time off from your routine. While you're at it, give your mind a break too. Keep that to-do list aside for a minute and detox from the drama online.

Tip: Pay attention to your health.

CANCER:

Every experience we attract into our Universe is for a reason, and the circumstances that you have attracted now are a reminder that the only way out is in. Consider this as a time of inner alchemy, Cancer. A time of confronting the dark parts that have been limiting your growth and keeping you from realising your highest potential. Your mantra for the day: 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.

LEO:

It doesn't always get easier, Leo. But, you get more resilient with time, and that renders you with the capacity to deal with the innumerable challenges that life throws at you. The good thing is, you are not firefighting alone. The Universe is blessing

you with the kind of soul connections that uplift you and help you believe in your power like never before.

Tip: Your soul tribe is showing up for you, wild one.

VIRGO:

Virgo, we are conscious beings with the power to make conscious choices. The real question is: what are the choices *you* will make today? Marinating in the misery will only keep you chained to the darkness. Transmuting those shadows, on the other hand, will propel you towards the light, beautiful. Remember, your heart is an alchemist. An alchemist blessed with the capacity to turn the wounds into wisdom.

Tip: It's time to transmute the darkness.

LIBRA:

Sometimes, things work out seamlessly. At other times, you face blocks no matter how much you try to move ahead. The latter may be true for you right now, Libra. So, pay attention to what isn't working out. Pay attention to who isn't showing up. Truth be told, they're just not that into you.

Tip: The signs don't lie, beautiful.

SCORPIO:

We've got a classic retrograde season drama at hand, Scorpio. They didn't want you when they

had you. Now that you've moved on, they feel inspired to give things another chance. Here's the truth, though: they haven't changed at all and they're unlikely to commit for the long haul. Don't play with fire unless you want to get your hands burnt.

Tip: Look past the illusions, beautiful.

SAGITTARIUS:

If somebody finds your personality intimidating, this is on them and not on you, Sagittarius. Don't let their shadows be the reason you play it down or pretend to be somebody you're not. It's time to bring your most authentic self to the table minus the fear of being judged. It's time to let go of that cloak of invisibility and step into your true power, beautiful one.

Tip: Take that cloak of invisibility off.

CAPRICORN:

Not receiving the love and attention we desire as children tends to wound our sense of self. As a result, we go about our days seeking validation from other people. Could this be true in your case, Capricorn? Are you trying to fill that void within through your physical interactions? Become aware of this pattern and how it is

playing out. Remembering that everything you seek is within you will help you bring about a significant shift.

Tip: Everything you seek is within you.

AQUARIUS:

Some may call you vain, but you understand that honouring the physical is just as important as paying attention to the spiritual. Today, you are celebrating your body, practicing self-care rituals and draping yourself in fabrics that bring out your inner god(ess). Some of you may be feeling called to make bold wardrobe choices as well. Express yourself in a manner that you feel called to as you release the fear of judgement.

Tip: It's all about honouring the physical in the Aquarius HQ.

PISCES:

Ah, the classic Destiny versus Free Will debate! Which team have you played for so far? What are you giving power to today? The cards are bringing your attention to the truth that while some things are predetermined, there is a lot of room to play. So, make the right choices, beautiful one. You are being supported to create a paradigm shift.

Tip: Exercise the power of free will.