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Summit **TIMES**

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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422 retired govt servants drawing pension from two schemes, there could be more

GOVT INVITES "DOUBLE-PENSIONERS" TO VOLUNTARILY WITHDRAW NAMES FROM ONE LIST

SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 20 AUG:

Secretary, Social Justice & Welfare Department, Tshewang Gyachho, today appealed to government pensioners who are also drawing pensions under the Social Security Scheme [SSS] of the department to voluntarily withdraw their names from the SSS since such duplication is not allowed as per rules.

He informed that the matter has come to the notice of the Department and if such beneficiaries drawing benefits from two sources did not withdraw their names voluntarily, then the department would do so since the process was already underway to screen the beneficiaries list for duplication.

Addressing a press conference here this evening, Mr Gyachho mentioned that the government has been providing financial assistance to the people having no



source of income under Social Security Schemes like old age pension, disability pension, widow's pension and others.

Although beneficiaries under these schemes need to provide an undertaking that they were not receiving any other pensions, the department has received many complaints that some government pensioners have also been enjoying benefits under this scheme.

On the same, the Secretary stated after enquiring and checking with the Pension section of Finance Department and with Aadhaar Card seeding, the department has discovered that some government pensioners were also drawing pensions under the SSS in the State.

Thus far, the department has found 422 such beneficiaries and

work was underway to sift the names out.

The Secretary also informed today that scholarship provided to students from the Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes and Economically Backward Classes pursuing post-matriculation courses or post-secondary courses within and outside the state will be released at uniform rates as fixed by the Fee Regulatory

Committee constituted from the academic session of 2021-22.

He mentioned that earlier there were differences in scholarships provided to students studying in the empanelled and non-empanelled colleges and after receiving many complaints, the department took this decision. The department has also taken out a notification on 18 August 2021 regarding the same.

However, the Secretary clarified that the scholarship will remain unchanged for students who are already studying in colleges from academic session 2020 or earlier until they finish their courses.

He urged students not to get worried as this decision will be implemented from the 2021-22 academic session. He informed that the department will launch its portal with full information next month, where students can also register and renew their scholarship applications online.

For only the third time in second wave, Sikkim reports less than 100 new cases for two consecutive days

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 20 AUG:

Sikkim recorded 82 new cases of Covid-19 in the last 24 hours taking the State's tally of confirmed cases to 29,157. This is the second consecutive day that Sikkim has reported less than 100 cases, something that has happened only twice during the second wave [since 22 April, 2021], once right at the beginning on 26 and 27 April and then again on 20 and 21 June, two months back.

The 82 new cases were picked up from the testing of 846 samples yesterday, giving Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 9.6%.

What should lift some more of the gloom is news that there were no Covid deaths in the past 24 hours and the State's Covid death-toll continues to hold at 364, of which 228 deaths [63%] occurred in the second wave alone.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim

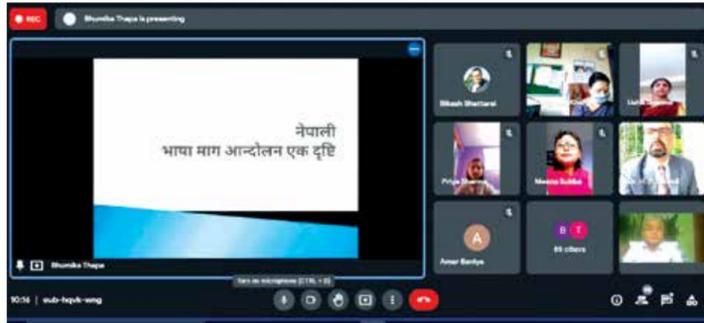
issued by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme [IDSP] of the Health Department, 45 persons tested positive in RT-PCR testing of 446 samples and 37 more cases were found in rapid antigen testing of 396 samples.

Of the 82 new cases, 25 were registered in East District, 25 in West District, 31 in South District and 01 in North District.

In the meantime, 181 more persons were discharged from home and facility isolation on Thursday in the State after making full recoveries to further improve the figure of recovered cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim to 26,807.

There are currently 1,706 active Covid cases in Sikkim, of whom only 105 [6%] have symptoms severe enough to require hospitalisation. 12 of the patients in hospital are in ICU at STNM Hospital and Central Referral Hospital.

Tadong School goes online to celebrate Nepali Bhasa Diwas



ARPAN PRADHAN
GANGTOK, 20 AUG:

Nepali Bhasa Manyata Diwas moved online today for a special celebration organized jointly by Tadong Senior Secondary School and the recently-formed, Bal Sahitya Prakashan, on 20 Aug, 2021.

Poet Amar Bania Lohoro graced the occasion as chief guest accompanied by Usha Sharma, Meena Subba, Sangeeta Khadka as special guests. The celebration was also joined by students and language teachers from Tadong, Singtam, Rangpo, Assma Lingzey, Gyalshing and Ranka senior secondary schools as well as language textbook officials of Education Department.

The celebration opened with Bhumika Thapa, a student of Tadong School, making

a presentation, 'Nepali Language Movement - A Vision'.

Also as part of the celebration, multilingual literary magazine, Bal Vatika, was released today. The publication includes articles in Nepali, Bhutia, Lepcha, Limbu, Rai, Mukhiya, Tamang, Magar, Newar, Gurung, Serpa, Sanskrit and Hindi, all contributed by school students.

Students of Tadong Senior Secondary School who excelled in Nepali, Lepcha, Bhutia and Hindi language Central Board of Secondary Education exams were felicitated as part of the celebrations. Prime among them, Jamuna Bishwakarma, who topped the language exam in class XII board exams was awarded the "Raghunath - Trilochan Dhakal Smriti Award" which comprised a certificate, memento and

Rs 10,000 in cash.

Other students felicitated on the day were Rinamit Lepcha, Dawa Namgyal Bhutia and Baby Kumari of class XII and Anisha Chhetri of class X, the topper of Lepcha, Bhutia, Hindi and Nepali of class X.

Speaking on the occasion, poet Amar Bania Lohoro congratulated Bal Vatika's Editor-in-Chief, Tribhuwan Dhakal, for the first issue of the magazine and the entire editorial board of different languages for their work.

Appreciating the initiative of the school to felicitate language toppers, he congratulated the students and wished them well for the future.

Principal Sangeeta Khadka also congratulated the students of Bal Sahitya Prakashan Parivar and language exam toppers.

Anit Thapa to launch new party

SMRITA KHAWAS
DARJEELING, 20 AUG:

Political affiliations in the Darjeeling Hills have been fluid for a while, the environment further muddled by the resignation of Binoy Tamang from the breakaway GJM faction he had headed. While Anit Thapa, his former ally and former chairperson of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration, announced that GJM-2 was still alive even after Mr Tamang's departure, the situation had clearly become untenable, and Mr Thapa today announced that the central committee of GJM-2 has decided to



launch a new party by the first week of September. Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Thapa announced that the central committee held a meeting here today to discuss future plans and unanimously decided that they would launch a new party and unveil the name and party colours within the first week of September.

A new political dispensation is

desperately required in Hills, Mr Thapa contended, one that will not rely on false promises and agitations to keep the people distracted while constricting their democratic space and suffocating their aspirations.

The new party, he announced, will correct the balance and serve the people as they should always have been represented, he added.

MLA and DC tour Thingling-Khechuperi GPU, discuss beautification for Khecheopalri lake

PRITAM LAMA
GYAKSHING, 20 AUG:

A team of West District Administration led by DC Karma R. Bonpo and also joined by area MLA Sangay Lepcha visited Khechuperi lake today and discussed various initiatives for the lake's beautification and development.

The MLA and district officials were on a tour of Thingling-Khechuperi GPU of Yuksam-Tashiding sub-division to oversee developmental projects and requirements of the area. The team decided that lake's periphery will be provided a protection wall, footpaths and streetlights from the entrance gate till the parking lot.

DC and MLA also visited Khechuperi Senior Secondary School and

interacted with the school head and took firsthand information and Primary Health Sub-Centre before holding a meeting with Gram Panchayats and departmental officials at Thingling-Khechuperi Gram Panchayat Kendra.

The Gram panchayat apprised the MLA and District Collector on various requirements and demands. With nearly 80 percent of the residents of the GPU directly or indirectly relying on agriculture and dairy farming, the Gram Panchayats sought development and support for this sector. The MLA assured to look said into the matter. The departmental officials also assured swift action on pending issues from their respective departments.

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GSI mobile app towards making GSI digitally accessible to masses

DELHI, 20 AUG (PIB): Geological Survey of India, the 170-year old premier Geological Institution under the Ministry of Mines has decided to make itself accessible to the masses and make its presence felt digitally by launching the GSI Mobile App (Beta Version) in the year 2020 and upgrading it periodically. Through the App, people will become more enlightened about various facets of GSI activities. It is also in line with the Digital India campaign initiated by the Central Government.

The App is available for Android platform as of now and can be downloaded from Google Play Store. Since its launch on August 27, 2020 the App has been downloaded by thousands of people across the country and also received 4.5 stars in reviews and a rating of 3+ in Google Play Store.

The App is divided into various sections where it talks about the legacy of GSI, the in-house publications of the organisation, various case studies on different missions of GSI, the picture gallery etc. E-news division updates masses about the latest news as far as the organization is



concerned in terms of work and the career opportunities as well as the training facilities that are available with GSI. It also deals with various maps, videos and downloads of GSI work. The e-book section would give the masses an idea of the exploration works done by GSI. It connects the YouTube, Facebook and Twitter pages of GSI from the app as well. This App will be further upgraded for higher versions of Android OS and for iOS compatible mobiles (i-Phones) and many more features will be added in the near future.

Besides bringing the activities and achievements of GSI to the general public, the purpose of such an App is to draw the attention of the student community towards the subject of Geology and its importance in nation building. GSI requests the users and common people to come up with suggestions as to what

more they would like to know about GSI. Such suggestions can be sent to pr@gsi.gov.in / prmccll@gsi.gov.in.

The Geological Survey of India (GSI) was set up in 1851 primarily to find coal deposits for the Railways. Over the years, GSI has not only grown into a repository of geoscience information required in various fields in the country but has also attained the status of a geoscientific organisation of international repute. Its main functions relate to creating and updating of national geoscientific information and mineral resource assessment. These objectives are achieved through ground surveys, air-borne and marine surveys, mineral prospecting and investigations, multi-disciplinary geoscientific, geo-technical, geo-environmental and natural hazards studies, glaciology, seism tectonic study, and carrying out fundamental research.

GSI's chief role includes providing objective, impartial and up-to-date geological expertise and geoscientific information of all kinds, with a focus on policy making decisions, commercial and socio-

economic needs. GSI also emphasises on systematic documentation of all geological processes derived out of surface and subsurface of India and its offshore areas. The organisation does so by using the latest and most cost-effective techniques and methodologies, including geophysical and geochemical and geological surveys.

GSI's core competence in survey and mapping is continuously enhanced through accretion, management, co-ordination and utilization of spatial databases (including those acquired through remote sensing). It functions as a 'Repository' or 'clearing house' for the purpose and uses latest computer-based technologies for dissemination of geoscientific information and spatial data, through cooperation and collaboration with other stakeholders in the Geoinformatics sector.

GSI, headquartered in Kolkata, has six regional offices located in Lucknow, Jaipur, Nagpur, Hyderabad, Shillong and Kolkata and state unit offices in almost all states of the country. Currently, GSI is an attached office to the Ministry of Mines.

Ayushman Bharat Golden Cards issued in Poklok Nandugaong BAC

NAMCHI, 20 AUG (IPR): Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) which is also known as Ayushman Bharat is a nationwide scheme launched by Prime Minister of India focusing on the poorest of the poor of rural lives. This scheme covers a health insurance of Rs.5/- lakhs for whole family. Once the applicant is given golden card, every medical treatment including medicine, etc. will be covered free of cost within this scheme. Focusing on this scheme, Poklok

Nandugaong BAC successfully started to issue Golden Card to the grameens of three GPUs whose name have already been enrolled in this scheme from 19 Aug, 2020. It is pertinent to mention here that Poklok-Nandugaong BAC has become first BAC to issue such cards to their local grameens. A short programme was organized at BAC today and the beneficiaries of this scheme were handed over card by President of Poklok-Denchung GPU, Gyalpo Lepcha in presence of BDO. During



the short programme BDO Tenzing Bhutia thanked Mr Lepcha for giving his valuable presence. He also thanked Addl District Collector (Dev) Namchi for giving BAC the colour printer. The main role behind the successful

implementation of this scheme was Rohit Rai, Anjana Rai and other office staff.

Mr Bhutia added that with the use of this golden card, the villagers will be able to get medical facilities without spending a single penny.

Sadbhavana Diwas at Tashiling Secretariat

GANGTOK, 20 AUG (IPR): Sadbhavana Diwas was observed at Tashiling Secretariat today. Chief Secretary, SC Gupta administered 'Sadbhavana Diwas' pledge to all the Heads of Departments, officers and staff who were assembled in front of Tashiling Secretariat, duly following Covid-19 protocols.

Every year, the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Late, Rajiv Gandhi is observed as Sadbhavana Diwas on 20 August. The theme of Sadbhavana Diwas was to promote National Integration and Communal Harmony among people of all



religions, languages and regions.

Similarly, the Information and Public Relations Department, Government of Sikkim, also observed

'Sadbhavana Diwas' at Soochana Bhawan. The Sadbhavana Diwas pledge was administered to all the officers and staff of IPR Department by Secretary, Siporah G

Targain.

Like wise, Sadbhavana Diwas was also observed in all the State Government Departments throughout the State.

Directorate of Fisheries gets a conference hall

GANGTOK, 20 AUG (IPR): Minister for Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services Department, Lok Nath Sharma inaugurated the newly established conference hall at the Office of the Directorate of Fisheries, near Paljor Stadium today. He also launched Fish Farmer Producers Organization (FFPOs) PMMSY e-portal on fisheries of Sikkim and fish farming training manuals.

The programme also had the presence of the Secretary Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services, Dr Sangey D Bhutia, Director, Directorate of Fisheries, Jaswant Singh and officials.

The programme was also joined virtually by Chief Executive, National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB)-Hyderabad, Government of India Dr Suvarna C from Chennai and GM NABARD, Diwakar Hegde from Regu, East Sikkim.

The Minister in his address marked the launching programme as a historic milestone towards the strengthening of the fisheries sector in Sikkim. He said that the State Government has been working tirelessly to bring notable progress in fisheries in the State. He also thanked the NFDB-Hyderabad for its consistent financial support.

The initiative of the

launching of PMMSY e-portal, dedicated to the State of Sikkim, will certainly save time for the farmers and expedite the process digitally for immediate solutions, he stated. The Minister also shared the vision and planning of making the state self-sufficient in terms of production of indigenous varieties, particularly relating to the high demand of Trout and Carp fish and its supply outside, once the futuristic goals are achieved through proactive participation.

Chief Executive, NFDB Dr Suvarna C congratulated and applauded the State of Sikkim for enthusiastic support in the implementation of PMMSY by launching an e-portal. She also acknowledged the formation of FFPOs in the state. Dr Suvarna also drew light on the advantages of climatic conditions in the Himalayan state for fish farming and assured to provide continuous support for the development in this sector.

The General Manager, NABARD, Diwakar Hegde virtually addressed the participants and expressed happiness on the formation of FFPOs with the support of NABARD and also defined organisations as the key social capital of tremendous importance.

It may be mentioned



here that the PMMSY e-portal has been designed to facilitate online applications for applying on different fish farming schemes of the government. It will help in reducing the time and paperwork for both fish farmers and officials. The fish farmers can directly login from their mobile through the portal (pmmsy.sikkim.gov.in) and can apply from home only. The objective for developing the e-portal is to encourage fish farmers and unemployed youth to take up entrepreneurship activity in the field of fisheries. The e-portal provides services of online application, scrutiny, validation of documents, issuing of work orders and subsidies through Direct Benefits Transfer (DBT). The PMMSY e-portal has been developed under Sikkim-Single Sign On (Sikkim-SOS)

of the Department of Information Technology.

PMMSY provides for the creation of Fish Farmers Producer Organizations / Companies (FFPOs/Cs) under the central sector component that would help to economically empower the fishers and fish farmers and enhance their bargaining power. The main objective of FFPOs is to build capacities of fishers and fish farmers to develop entrepreneurial skills for making the FFPOs economically viable and self-sustaining and develop a vibrant and sustainable income-oriented fisheries value chain.

It may be further mentioned that through the support of NABARD, two units of FFPOs at Regu in East Sikkim and Sribadam in West Sikkim will be developed by

Directorate of Fisheries with technical support from SIMFED, Gangtok.

Training Manual on fish farming of carp and trout were also launched by the Minister, which will be helping the farmers in successful culture of fish thereby augmenting the fish production in the state.

The Director of fisheries, N Jaswant informed that a total of 363 fishermen from the state of Sikkim have been registered under NFDB-PMMSY- Group Accidental Insurance Scheme (GAIS) where the beneficiaries will be benefitted from Rs.25,000/- against accidental hospitalization, Rs.2,50,000/- against permanent partial disability and 5 lakhs against death or permanent total disability.

SDAC observes Sadbhavana Diwas

NAMCHI, 20 AUG (IPR): Sadbhavana Diwas was observed at South District Administrative Centre [SDAC] today. This day marks the 77th birth anniversary of India's Former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. Alongwith DC (South), M Bharani Kumar; SSP (South), Thakur Thapa and other

officials accompanied by staff of DAC took the Sadbhavana Diwas pledge.

While addressing the gathering DC (South), M Bharani Kumar highlighted the contributions of the late Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi towards integration and development of our

nation. He also urged the gathering to live with peace and mutual respect, to resort from any means of violence and spread the message of communal harmony.

Additionally, DC, M Bharani Kumar also extended his warm wishes as today the 29th Nepali Bhasa Manyata Diwas is also observed.



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Sikkim Univ celebrates Nepali Bhasa Manyata Diwas

GANGTOK, 20 AUG (PIB): Nepali language was recognized as one of the official languages of the country and included in the VIIIth Schedule of the Indian Constitution on 20 Aug, 1992. On the occasion of the 30th Nepali Bhasa Manyata Diwas, the Department of Nepali, Sikkim University organized a virtual programme on 20 Aug, 2021 which was graced by the presence of Vice-Chancellor, Professor Avinash Khare as the chief guest. Retired Chief Engineer, Govt of Sikkim and President of Sikkim Akademi, SR Subba was present as the special guest on the occasion. Shri Subba remembered

the contributions of all those who worked and fought for the recognition of Nepali language as one of the official languages of India. He also spoke on the use of Nepali language and also highlighted on the present-day status of Nepali language. He encouraged the young students to work towards preserving and propagating the language and making serious efforts towards maintaining the originality of the language. On this day a book was released by the Vice-Chancellor Professor Avinash



Khare. The book titled 'Golsimal' is a collection of local folk stories compiled by Professor, Dr Pushpa Sharma, Department of Nepali, Sikkim University. Poetry recitation and solo song was also presented on this day. Students of the department of Nepali actively participated in the programme.

Vice-Chancellor, Prof Avinash Khare in his address as the chief guest of the occasion mentioned the contributions of many eminent Nepali litterateurs and also spoke on the importance of preserving the language. He also congratulated Dr Pushpa Sharma on compiling

local folk stories.

Head of Department of Nepali and Dean, Prof Kabita Lama, School of Languages and Literature, Sikkim University in her closing address spoke on various issues related to preserving the language and proper usage in daily life. She also spoke on the importance of the mother tongue and also highlighted on the challenges that Nepali language is facing in making it a more potentially viable language.

Rashtriya Sadbhavna Diwas observed at Teesta-V Power Station

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 20 AUG:

The Teesta Hydroelectric Project Stage-V Power Station of NHPC observed "Rashtriya Sadbhavna Diwas" to commemorate the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister the Late Rajiv Gandhi at its administrative building premises at



Balutar today. General Manager (I/c), Sanjay Darbari, administered the Sadbhavna Pledge to the officers and staff of the Power Station.

Thanka painting workshop at DHH

Gangtok, 20 Aug [IPR]: Culture Department, in collaboration with the North East Zone Cultural Centre (NEZCC), Dimapur, conducted a 5-day thanka-painting workshop at the Directorate of Handloom and Handicraft here at Zero Point from 16 to 20 Aug.

The main aim of the workshop was to provide opportunities for the development of traditional artistic skills to the younger generation and to explore talent in various forms.

Advisor, Culture Department, Bhim Kumari Sharma was present as chief guest for the concluding session and congratulated the organizers for the workshop.

250 registered for UDID cards in Namchi

NAMCHI, 20 AUG [IPR]: An enrollment drive for Unique Disability Identity Card [UDID] for Persons with Disability (PwD) in South District was held at the Namchi District Hospital conference hall today. 250 PwDs were registered for UDID cards today.

The program was organised under the aegis of the Social Welfare Division of the Social, Justice and Welfare Department in coordination with the Department of Health and Family Welfare.

The enrollment drive was conducted by a team which included CMO [South], Dr DC Sharma, Joint Secretary (SJWD) Abinash Rai, Joint Commissioner (SJWD) MB Chettri, DMS Dr SN Adhikari, UDID State Coordinator Sameer Pradhan and Deputy Director Nakul Rawat and other officials and staff.

Thus far, 2,081 UDID cards have been issued.

This card is a single authentic document for identity and verification of PwDs through which they can access various benefits and other government schemes pan India.

PwDs can also apply online for the cards or visit District Hospitals or the Office of the Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, SJWD, 5th Mile, Lumsey, Gangtok.



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
SOCIAL JUSTICE AND WELFARE DEPARTMENT
CHILD PROTECTION SCHEME
GANGTOK

No. 255/SJ&WD/CPS/2021 **Dated: 19/08/2021**

INVITATION FOR QUOTATION

Interested bidders are invited to submit quotation for installation and commissioning of integrated video conference system in the Juvenile Observation Home (East and South districts) and Juvenile Justice Boards (East and South districts). The quotation must have the following configuration:-

1	All-in-one Conference Solution * POLY STUDIO X 30 * Partner Premier, One Year, Poly Studio X30
2	Beetel Cloud-way (application software license)
3.	Display-Smart LED TV with HDMI-43 inch Samsung /L9. L&K SMART TV.

The interested bidder must be empanelled / registered with the Information and Technology Department, Government of Sikkim (copy of valid empanelment/ registration proof to be enclosed).
The sealed quotation must be submitted to the following address by 15th September, 2021 before 4.30 pm:
* Special Secretary-cum-Director, CPS,
Social Justice & Welfare Department
Lumsey, Tadong – 737101.
The date of opening of quotation shall be 16th September, 2021 at 11.00 am in the chamber of Special Secretary-cum-Director, CPS. The interested bidder may have their presence on the scheduled date and time.
The department reserves the right to accept or reject the quotation.

Sd/-
Joint Secretary-cum- Programme Manager, CPS.

Ro. No. 154/IPR/Pub/Classi./21-22dt. 20.8.2021



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
SIKKIM STATE COMMISSION FOR WOMEN
GANGTOK

No. 375/SSCW/2021-22 **Dated: 17/08/2021**

The Sikkim State Commission for Women seeks applications for one (1) post of Project Coordinator for the Project funded under the Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India from experienced Professional for a period of 22 months on purely contractual basis or co-terminus with the Project. The selected candidate will not have any right towards claim for regularization or extension of his or her service.

Eligibility:-

- The applicant should possess a Degree in Law/Social Work/Sociology/ Gender Studies with minimum of 3 years experience in Project Management under Government or Private Organizations.
- The applicant should have a Certificate of Identification.
- The applicant should have the relevant working experience in the field of Gender issues.
- The minimum age of the applicant should be 30 years and the upper age limit should not exceed 45 years.

Additional Required Skills and Experience:-

- Proficiency in computer applications (Microsoft Office and Web VC Expert)
- Excellent documentation skills.
- Fluency in English, Hindi and Nepali.
- Presentation and Communication Skills.
- Should be able to understand the relevant stakeholders within the State with the ability to engage with them, build trust and be a bridge between the stakeholders and the Commission.
- Ability to organize events and should have good networking skills.
- Attention to details, ability to deliver tasks on time with limited supervision.
- Ability to deliver trainings and coordinate workshops.

Interested candidates can Walk in Interview for the said post on 25th August 2021 between 11 am and 4 pm, Venue: Office of the Sikkim State Commission for Women, Old Secretariat, Opposite Super Market, Near National Highway, Gangtok, East Sikkim.

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

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

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

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

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

CONDITIONS OF CONTRACT:

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

Divisional Engineer II
Roads & Bridges Department
Soreng Division

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

A World Beyond Models

Keener minds will invest deeper thinking... and deliver

It is not really possible for a person to understand what shapes another's culture unless s/he spends years in an active dialogue with that culture. If this statement were true, and it is, then one would expect development projects - which by definition aim to change the environment or the condition or even behaviour of a people - to be based on a deep understanding not only of obvious cultural differences, but of the underlying values and perceptions which shape a culture. But that would be too utopian to expect, won't it? Unfortunately, more and more development projects are conceived, planned and even executed by people whose schedule is so tight that they have to rely on a technique which allows them to turn projects at a rapid rate. They opt for what experts call the "bottleneck approach". Developmental analysts look for the bottleneck which is blocking their version of development from reaching the people. They then juxtapose.

Let's take the oldest failure (this might be highly contentious) of free India - its system of a quota for every ill. Analysts, when India got Independence, racked their brains why the adivasis and the dalits were not assimilating into the mainstream faster. Denial of equality, and through it, lack of education and opportunities was the obvious answer. So a quickfire solution was worked out - reservations. And sure enough many tribals started getting into premier institutes and then started landing cream jobs. Exulted with the results, the planners forgot part-B of their plan - social reform to ensure equality at all level and improving infrastructure in tribal areas. Education in the remote regions remained dismal and the reservation kept getting extended. The fact that seven decades on the reservation still exists is proof that the magic formula failed. This, not because the model was flawed, but because we failed as a society to end prejudices and casteism; the bottleneck still constricts access and acceptability.

What appears scary at this juncture, especially for Sikkim, is that the same bottleneck approach continues to be applied. People with little understanding of the uniqueness of each problem continue to dish out immediate remedies. Most times, those in positions of responsibility analyse the obvious and formulate solutions at the same simplistic level. Take Sikkim's hydel potential for example. Everyone knows that mountain streams are torrents of potential hydel power. Anyone will tell you that Sikkim needs to generate revenue. So a simple solution is offered - generate electricity. One wonders how much thought had gone into for whom this power is being generated and at what cost to the environment and socio-cultural balances on ground. As a result, even after some mega projects have already been commissioned, the State is still discovering hidden costs by way of local resentments and unaccounted for damages. Of course, better planning and projection by the project implementers and those tasked with the responsibility of oversight would not have caught so many people off guard so many times, but that's in the past now and should be noted down as necessary undertakings for future projects. Meanwhile, what should be borne in mind is that continuing engagement between the projects and the affected people should not be dictated by the needs of the implementing agency alone (in the garb of nation-building) and the ability of the people to absorb the changes and their need to remain masters of their own community and areas is respected as well.

The same would apply to tourism, the other thrust area. Entering into an enterprise without a clear plan and target in mind can clutter the mind and scuttle the project, neither of which Sikkim can afford. Sikkim is today poised at a stage where each decision will have far-reaching implications. While one can understand the pressures on the government since people in Sikkim take caution to be inaction, one would still advise informed dialogue before any venture. Most of what Sikkim has done since 1975 is implement central schemes with gusto. While this might speak volumes of the administration's ability to carry out orders, it does not reflect much innovation. As much as Sikkim needs the workhorses, it also needs imaginative and concerned thinkers. Some brilliant ideas have been seeded - skill development, Organic Sikkim, CATCH, CMRHM to name but a few - but even the fanboys will admit that in execution, these have achieved only a fraction of what the vision had seen possible. The new world order is such that it demands creativity, that's what Sikkim needs to promote and nurture.

Bat pups babble and bat moms use baby talk, hinting at the evolution of human language

AHANA AURORA FERNANDEZ

THECONVERSATION.COM

"Mamama," "dadada," "bababa" - parents usually welcome with enthusiasm the sounds of a baby's babble. Babbling is the first milestone when learning to speak. All typically developing infants babble, no matter which language they're learning.

Speech, the oral output of language, requires precise control over the lips, tongue and jaw to produce one of the basic speech subunits: the syllable, like "ba," "da," "ma." Babbling is characterized by universal features - for example, repetition of syllables and use of rhythm. It lets an infant practice and playfully learn how to control their vocal apparatus to correctly produce the desired syllables.

More than anything else, language defines human nature. But its evolutionary origins have puzzled scientists for decades. Investigating the biological foundations of language across species - as I do in bats - is a promising way to gain insights into key features of human language.

I'm a behavioral biologist who has spent many months of 10-hour days sitting in front of bat colonies in Panama and Costa Rica recording the animals' vocalizations. My colleagues and I have found striking parallels between the babbling produced by these bat pups and that by human infants. Identifying a mammal that shares similar brain structure with human beings and is also capable of vocal imitation may help us understand the cognitive and neuromolecular foundations of vocal learning.

VOCAL LEARNING IN OTHER ANIMALS

Scientists learned a great deal about vocal imitation and vocal development by studying songbirds. They are among the best-known vocal learners, and the learning process of young male songbirds shows interesting parallels to human speech development. Young male songbirds also practice their notes in a practice phase reminiscent of human infant babbling.

However, songbirds and people possess different vocal apparatus - birds vocalize by using a syrinx, humans use a larynx - and their brain architecture differs. So drawing direct conclusions from songbird research for humans is limited.

Luckily, in Central America's tropical jungle, there's a mammal that engages in a very conspicuous vocal practice behavior that is strongly reminiscent of human infant babbling: the neotropical greater sac-winged bat, *Saccopteryx bilineata*. The pups of this small bat, dark-furred with two prominent white wavy stripes on the back, engage in daily babbling behavior during large parts of their development.

Greater sac-winged bats possess a large vocal repertoire that includes 25 distinct syllable types. A syllable is the smallest acoustic unit, defined as a sound surrounded by silence. These adult bats create multisyllabic vocalizations and two song types. The territorial song warns potential rivals that the owner is ready to defend their home turf, while the courtship song lets female bats know about a male bat's fitness as a potential mate.

Of particular interest to me and my colleagues, the greater sac-winged bat is capable of vocal imitation - the ability to learn a previously unknown sound from scratch by ear. It requires acoustic input, like human parents talking to their infants, or in the case of the greater sac-winged bat, adult males that sing.

The only other non-human mammal that scientists have documented babbling is the pygmy marmoset, a small South American primate species that is not capable of vocal imitation. The greater sac-winged bat offered the first possibility to study pup babbling in detail in a species that can imitate the vocalizations of others. But just how similar is bat babbling to human infant babbling?

HUNDREDS OF HOURS OF BAT BABBLING

To answer that question, I monitored the vocal development of wild pups in eight colonies. During the day, *S. bilineata* find shelter and protection in tree crevices and outer walls of buildings. They're very light-tolerant, and adults like to stay several centimeters apart from one another, making it easier for us to observe and record particular individuals.

To be able to recognize specific bats, I marked their forearms with colored plastic bands. I followed 20 pups from birth until weaning. Starting around 2.5 weeks of age, and continuing until weaning around 10 weeks old, pups babble away between sunrise and sunset in the day roost. It's very loud, audible even to the human ear because some babbled syllables are within our hearing range (others are too high for us to hear). For each pup, I recorded babbling bouts - some of which lasted as long as 43 minutes - and the accompanying behaviors throughout their entire development. In contrast, adult bats produce vocalizations that last no more than a few minutes.

Scientists have known for a while that pups learn how to sing by vocally imitating adult tutors while babbling. But our new study provides the first formal analysis that their babbling really does share many of the features that characterize babbling in human infants: duplication of syllables, use of rhythm and an early onset of the babbling phase during development.

Just as human infants produce sounds that are recognizable as what are called canonical adult syllables - those with mature features that sound like what an adult speaker produces - bat pups' babbling consists of syllable precursors that are part of the adult vocal repertoire. And just as human babbling includes what are probably playful sounds produced as the infant explores their voice, bat babbling includes so-called protosyllables that are only produced by pups.

Moreover, pup babbling is universal. Each pup, regardless of

sex and regional origin, babbled during its development.

BABY TALK, FROM MOM TO PUP During my first field season, I noticed that during babble sequences, mothers and pups interacted behaviorally and vocally. Mothers produced a distinct call type directed at pups while babbling.

We humans alter our speech depending on whether we are addressing infants or adults. This infant-directed speech - also known as motherese - is a special form of social feedback for the vocalizing infant. It's characterized by universal features, including higher pitch, slower tempo and exaggerated intonation contours. The timbre - the voice color - also changes when people speak "motherese" compared to when talking to other adults. Timbre is what makes a voice sound a bit cold and harsh or warm and cozy. Could it be that female bats also changed their timbre, depending on whom they directed their calls to?

The results were clear: For the first time, we'd found a non-human mammal that changes the color of voice depending on the addressee. Bats also use baby talk!

Our results introduce the greater sac-winged bat as a promising candidate for cross-species comparisons about the evolution of human language. Babbling is like a behavioral readout of the ongoing vocal learning happening in the brain. When pups babble, they imitate the adult song - and provide us with insight about when learning is taking place. It offers the unique possibility to study the genes that are involved in vocal imitation.

And since bats share their basic brain architecture with people, we can translate our research findings from bats to humans. I'm fascinated that two mammal species that are so different share striking parallels in how they reach the same goal: to acquire a complex adult vocal repertoire - namely, language.

[the writer is Postdoctoral Researcher in Behavioral Ecology and Bioacoustics, Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin]

We throw away a third of the food we grow - here's what to do about waste

KAMRAN MAHROOF & SANKAR SIVARAJAH

THECONVERSATION.COM

The COVID pandemic has shown the fragility of our global food supply chains, with many supermarkets and restaurants in almost every country having experienced food shortages. Millions of people in the UK alone have experienced severe food insecurity during COVID-19, according to a recent report by the country's Foods Standards Agency. But food shortages were prevalent long before the pandemic.

At the same time, one-third of all food produced each year is squandered or spoiled before it can be consumed. Research also suggests that high-income countries waste as much food as sub-Saharan Africa produces.

This food waste then ends up in landfills to rot - which releases greenhouse gases. And when this is combined with the amount of energy it takes to produce, manufacture, transport and store this food, it contributes a staggering 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide to our planet. To put that in context, if food waste was a country, it would be the third-highest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world, after the US and China.

But the good news is there are numerous techniques, technologies and policies that together could help reduce global food waste at every point in the process of producing and consuming it.

WHY IS FOOD WASTED?

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation for the United Nations, lack of infrastructure, limited knowledge on storage and food handling, combined with unfavourable climatic conditions, can lead to a lot of food spoilage and waste in low-income countries.

On the other hand, in high-income countries, aesthetic preferences and

arbitrary sell-by dates mean food easily becomes waste. Cosmetic blemishes, produce that is too ripe, too big, too little or even the wrong shape can lead to perfectly good fruits and vegetables going to waste.

As the global population continues to increase, it places real pressure on world food production. Indeed, the industry will need to grow by at least two-thirds by 2050 to ensure adequate nutrition for everyone in the world.

Yet, despite the dire need to become more resourceful, food waste and loss is at an all-time high. Making it clear that unless prompt action is taken, food shortages will soon become a long-term reality.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The key to tackling this issue is to have a resilient and resourceful "farm-to-fork" approach to help reduce food waste and to ensure the future of food security. Here are some things that can help combat food waste:

AI DRONES AND PRECISION FARMING

Collaboration with food producers and more investment in technological applications and overall infrastructure at the earlier stages of the food supply chain can drastically improve food waste and loss in low-income countries.

This is important because plant diseases and pests - along with poor harvesting techniques - can be a big factor in the high levels of food waste at this point in the food supply chain.

Our research also indicates that artificial intelligence (AI) powered drones can help farmers become more resourceful and reduce the overuse of pesticides in food production. This

is important because pesticides can adversely affect the food ecosystem. They pollute water, deplete soil fertility and contaminate turf - all of which can result in food loss and waste. This approach also enhances crop yield and reduces operational costs as well as improves the health of livestock. So it's also better for the environment.

TARGET SHOPPERS' WALLETS

A big part of the food waste problem is changing how we shop and view food and our mindset around what constitutes waste. But research shows the best way to tackle food waste among consumers is to highlight the potential money that can be saved as well as the "feel-good factor", or moral value, of doing a good thing for the environment.

A recent study with households in London, UK and Ontario, Canada, found that a two-week money-based intervention - called "reduce food waste, save money" - helped participants to throw away 30% less food. Participants were given local information on food waste and costs, along with tips on how to improve food planning, efficiently purchase, store, and prepare food - and how to use leftovers to create new meals.

Similarly, new technology can help commercial kitchens reduce food waste by directly connecting behaviour changes to increased profits. For example, the Winnow software system calculates the costs of discarded food, correlating food waste to sales. This AI-powered system has allowed Ikea stores to reduce food waste by 50% in 2020,

saving 1.2 million meals in the process.

CIRCULAR APPROACHES AND UPCYCLING

A more creative approach to food waste comes via a circular food system, which prevents food waste from being discarded. It can, for example, be converted into renewable energy. Waste can even be transformed into more food for humans (for example, tofu from leftover soybeans), as well as animal feed.

PERSONAL CHANGES

While the problem of food waste can feel quite out of your hands as a consumer, there are things you can do to help.

Things like supporting businesses or restaurants that use waste foods in their products or meals. Planning your meals around sell-by dates. Not throwing out food if it's a bit wilted or bruised and only buying what you need - especially on special occasions where food can often go uneaten and to waste.

You can also show supermarkets that "wonky" fruit and veggies are just as good as the "normal" shaped produce by buying these over the perfect looking pears or potatoes.

Ultimately, it's not going to be any single thing that solves food waste, but a collective approach can enable us to make the changes that need to happen.

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COVID-19: Active cases lowest in 150 days

NEW DELHI, AUG 20 (PTI): India logged 36,571 new coronavirus infections, taking the total tally of COVID-19 cases to 3,23,58,829, while the national recovery rate improved to 97.54 per cent, the highest since March 2020, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Friday.

The death toll climbed to 4,33,589 with 540 fresh fatalities, according to the data updated at 8 am.

The active cases have declined to 3,63,605, the lowest in 150 days, and comprise 1.12 per cent of the total infections, the lowest since March 2020, the ministry said.

A reduction of 524 cases has been recorded in the active COVID-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours.

As many as 18,86,271 tests were conducted on Thursday taking the total cumulative tests conducted so far for detection of COVID-19 in the country to 50,26,99,702.

The daily positivity rate was recorded at 1.94 per cent. It has been less than three per cent for the last 25 days.

The weekly positivity rate was recorded at 1.93 per cent. It has been below three per cent for the last 56 days, according to the ministry.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 3,15,61,635, while the case fatality rate stands at 1.34 per cent, the data stated.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 2020, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

India crossed the grim milestone of two crore on May 4 and three crore on June 23.

Cumulatively, 57.22 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered under the nationwide vaccination drive till Friday morning.

The 540 new fatalities include 197 from Kerala and 154 from Maharashtra.

A total of 4,33,589 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 1,35,567 from Maharashtra, 37,088 from Karnataka, 34,639 from Tamil Nadu, 25,079 from Delhi, 22,789 from Uttar Pradesh, 19,246 from Kerala and 18,337 from West Bengal.

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

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

Bangladesh factories open as economic worries trump virus

DHAKA, BANGLADESH (AP): Bangladesh is suffering through its deadliest surge of the pandemic, but you wouldn't know it looking at its factories, markets and malls.

The South Asian nation home to 165 million people has done away with most virus restrictions, allowing businesses to reopen to enthusiastic crowds following weeks of strict measures put in place following the arrival of the highly contagious delta variant.

The move at a time when deaths and new infections are still rising and vaccination rates remain low has alarmed health experts, who warn that the country can't handle more cases when the health care system is already overwhelmed. But those in favor of reopening say the risks of staying closed are even greater, including pushing tens of millions of people back into poverty in what was already one of the world's poorest nations.

Ending the lockdown kicked off earlier this month with the reopening of the country's prized garment factories after a two week closure. Then last week most other businesses, as well as public transportation, were also allowed to start operating after being closed for nearly five of the previous six weeks. From Thursday, tourist spots, resorts and hotels could also open.

At the Snowtex Outerwear Ltd. factory on the outskirts of Dhaka, the company's 15,000 workers now walk through a "disinfectant tunnel" in which they are sprayed with sanitizer



before they get to work turning heaps of fabric into clothing sold in countries around the world.

"We understand that we must protect lives. But we must not forget about the livelihoods of millions of workers in the industry," said S.M. Khaled, the managing director of the company, which exports \$250 million of goods a year.

Bangladesh's clothing factories, part of the world's second-largest garment industry, have been exempted from most of the lockdowns, other than the two weeks that ended at the beginning of the month and another 11 days at the beginning of the pandemic last March. Nevertheless, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association estimates the industry lost \$3 billion in orders last year.

Some garment factories closed and at least 300,000 workers were laid off, often without severance, according to the Bangladesh Center for Workers' Solidarity. Many of those who kept their jobs had to take

pay cuts.

Nearly 25 million more people in Bangladesh have been driven into poverty since the pandemic began, according to a report by the Power and Participation Research Center and Brac Institute of Governance and Development. Bangladesh had about 32 million people living in poverty in 2019, according to the Asian Development Bank.

Health experts say they are sympathetic to the economic cost of lockdowns, but easing restrictions shouldn't happen when just the recorded daily cases are averaging 10,000 and daily deaths have climbed above 250. They say the true case numbers are likely far higher as well.

"In such a situation, there is no logic to withdraw the lockdown," said Be-Nazir Ahmed, a public health expert and former chief of the government's Health Directorate.

He said easing restrictions now will only cause more suffering as more people get sick,

the health care system falters and lockdowns are then reimposed.

Ahmed urged leaders to listen to epidemiologists and look at transmission data while making such decisions.

"That will ultimately save the people, save the economy, save businesses," he said.

This isn't the first time health experts have clashed with authorities over lockdowns. Last month they were appalled when the government suspended to lockdown for eight-days so that people could celebrate the Islamic festival Eid al-Adha.

Junior Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain said last week that the government had to reopen the economy due to the needs and livelihoods of the people.

Caught in the middle of all of this are ordinary Bangladeshis, most of whom are not vaccinated and many of whom fear both catching the virus and not having any work.

"If we stay at home, we will starve," said garment worker Sadia Akhter. "If the government can arrange

the vaccine for us, we won't have any trouble. We will be able to work properly then."

Just 4% of Bangladeshis have been fully vaccinated against the virus. After commencing in January, vaccination efforts took a hit after India stopped supplying AstraZeneca to cater to rising cases at home. That prompted Bangladesh to mainly look to China to fill the unexpected shortfall.

The government has said it has deals in place to procure 210 million doses of vaccines by early next year, which would help vaccinate 80% of the population.

A return to normalcy can't come soon enough for many. Munni Begum has been out of work since last year, when the garment factory where she worked closed.

Begum's husband is a rickshaw driver but doesn't earn enough to support their family of four. The adults sometimes have to skip meals so their children can eat.

"We have to starve in order to feed our children," Begum said. "Corona has become a curse in my life."

Encounter in J-K's Pulwama, two militants killed



SRINAGAR, AUG 20 (PTI): Two Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) militants part of a hit squad of the outfit responsible for civilian killings -- were killed in an encounter with security forces in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district on Friday, officials said here.

Security forces launched a cordon and search operation at Khrew in Pampore area of the district following information about the presence of militants there, the officials said.

They said the search operation turned into an encounter after the ultras opened fire at the security forces who retaliated.

In the ensuing encounter, two militants were killed, the officials said.

Incriminating material including arms and ammunition have been recovered from the site of the encounter, they added.

One of the killed terrorists was identified as Musaab Mustaq of Khrew. He was involved in the killing of Javid Ahmad Malik at Lurgam. This was a hit squad of HM responsible for civilian killings in South Kashmir, Kashmir Zone Police said on its Twitter handle.

The police said the identification of the second terrorist is being ascertained.

Senior NRL official held for molesting colleague

GOLAGHAT (ASSAM), AUG 20 (PTI): A senior official of Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL) in Assam's Golaghat district was arrested on Friday for allegedly molesting a junior colleague, a police officer said.

He was apprehended in Guwahati on Thursday night by a police team from Golaghat and taken into custody the morning after.

The accused tested

positive for COVID-19 during a routine health check-up and was subsequently moved to the isolation ward of Golaghat Civil Hospital, the police officer said.

The senior NRL official has been arrested on the charge of molesting a female colleague. The woman had filed the case in Golaghat a couple of days ago, he added.

3 new COVID-19 cases push Andamans tally to 7,553

PORT BLAIR, AUG 20 (PTI):zin the union territory to 7,553, a health official said on Friday.

The three new cases were detected during testing at the airport. All passengers arriving by flight have to undergo a

mandatory RT-PCR test before they are allowed entry into the islands.

The archipelago now has five active COVID-19 cases and all five patients are in the South Andaman district. The other two districts - North and Middle

Andaman and Nicobar - are COVID-19 free, the official said.

A total of 7,419 people have recovered from COVID-19 so far, he said.

The COVID-19 death toll in the union territory remained at

129 as no fresh fatality due to the disease was reported in the last 24 hours.

So far 4,67,535 samples have been tested for COVID-19 and the cumulative test positivity rate is 1.62 per cent.

A total of 3,30,925 beneficiaries have been inoculated in the union territory so far, of which 2,31,047 people have received the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and 99,878 have received both doses of the vaccine, he said.

Three held for abducting man in Jammu: Police

JAMMU, AUG 19 (PTI): Three men were held for allegedly abducting a man here on Thursday, police said.

Sachin Kumar of Rajpura Mangotrian was on his way home when Vishu Sharma, along with four unidentified men, forcibly took him away in an SUV from a spot near Shakti Nagar, according to a complaint lodged at the Bakshi Nagar police station.

The accused allegedly abused and thrashed Kumar with iron rods and also recorded it in their mobile phones, the police said.

The accused allegedly had pistols and sharp-edged weapons in their possession. Sharma allegedly put a pistol on Kumar's head and threatened to kill him.

It was also alleged that the accused took away Kumar's wallet containing Rs 4,500 and a gold chain weighing around eight grams, and threw him out of the car.

The police arrested Sharma, Munish Kumar Thapa and Vishal Mehra, they said.

The vehicle used for the commission of crime was also seized, police said.

Nadda arrives on 2-day visit to Uttarakhand

DEHRADUN, AUG 20 (PTI): BJP president JP Nadda arrived on a two-day visit to Uttarakhand on Friday to galvanise party workers ahead of the 2022 state assembly polls.

He was received by Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami and Pradesh BJP president Madan Kaushik as he arrived at the Jolly Grant Airport at around 10.30 am.

Despite light rains, party workers lined up on either side of the road at Bhaniyawala, Chiddarwala, Nepali Farm and Raiwala to welcome Nadda as he proceeded for a hotel in Haridwar where he is slated to hold a slew of meetings.

Nadda is to hold around half a dozen meetings with party legislators, members of Dhami cabinet, heads and office bearers of the Pradesh BJP, its different cells and 'morchas' during his visit.

He will also hold a dialogue with army personnel and seers during his visit.

The BJP president will discuss party's strategy for the 2022 assembly elections in the state which are just a few months away, party sources said.

The main challenge before the BJP this time is to repeat its own electoral performance of 2017 when it had won 57 out of a total of 70 assembly seats in Uttarakhand.



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Bio-bubble putting players under mental strain, they need break ahead of T20 WC: Rizwan



KARACHI, AUG 20 (PTI): Living in the bio-bubble is putting the players under "mental strain" and they need a break from international cricket to be fresh for the upcoming T20 World Cup in UAE, Pakistan's Test vice-captain Muhammad Rizwan said.

"It is not easy remaining in the bio-bubble all the time and we have been playing a lot of cricket in the last one year and more. It is good for us but at the same time it becomes a mental strain on the players as well," he said during a virtual session on Thursday.

Rizwan, a wicketkeeper-batsman, said the senior players wanted to be rejuvenated for the World Cup scheduled to be held from October 17 to November 14 in UAE.

Sources close to the Pakistan team confirmed that head coach, Misbah-ul-Haq and chief selector, Muhammad Wasim had discussed resting captain

Babar Azam, Rizwan and fast bowlers Shaheen Shah Afridi and Hasan Ali for the ODI series against Afghanistan in Sri Lanka.

The Pakistan and Afghanistan boards are expected to release dates of the three matches this week after indications that the new Taliban controlled government in Kabul has given a go ahead to the series.

If the four main players do take a rest from the series, it will be a first in Pakistan cricket that so many senior players have taken a break from any series at home or abroad.

Pakistan lost the opening Test against the West Indies by one wicket and Rizwan said it was disappointing.

"The bottomline is we lost the Test after coming so close to winning it and it hit us and we are now looking to bounce back strongly in the second Test," he said.

Rizwan also said that time has come to

see which players in the team were able to make an impact to the eventual result when playing in pressure situations.

"I think it is also important to look at players who make small but game changing contributions in a match. We need such impact players."

Rizwan said playing short two-Test series in recent times has been challenging for the team because it is difficult to give a proper run to players and judge them.

He was referring to the continued poor form of opener, Imran Butt in the first Test.

Rizwan said it is not easy to build a consistent team in such short series although he isn't worried about how Pakistan will fare in the ICC World Test Championships as a lot of cricket still remains to be played.

"Our main focus now is to level this series by winning the second game and getting equal points from it.

CARNOUSTIE, AUG 20 (PTI): Indian golfer Aditi Ashok opened the women's British Open with a steady one-under 71 to lie tied 22nd at the challenging Carnoustie Links here.

Aditi, who had finished fourth at the Tokyo Olympics, scored four birdies against three bogeys and three of those birdies came in a fine stretch between 10th and 14th.

The Indian is four shots behind the three co-leaders -- World No. 1 and Olympic gold medallist Nelly Korda, Korean Sei Young Kim and Sweden's Madelene Sagstrom.

The trio produced a matching five-under 67 each in the opening round.

Three-time Ladies European Tour winner, Aditi, who qualified for her 19th Major through the Final Qualifying at Panmure Golf Club, showed a lot maturity and patience, so crucial while playing the Links.

"I played good today, I think I drove the ball well and that was definitely a key to scoring well. I started off good with a birdie on the first as I hit a 7 iron to 10 feet and holed the putt," Aditi said.

"Had bogeys on 6th and 7th as both drives ended in the pot bunkers, and after that



I realised that mistakes are there on this course to be made, it's just about staying patient and keeping composure and I think I did that well today, even though I had two bogeys I came back from it.

"I had a nice hole out bunker shot on the 10th but the bunker shot was totally about 7 yards so it was like a 20 footer from the bunker. But yeah that was nice to hole that out."

Aditi, who started the tournament with a birdie turned in one-over after bogeys on sixth and seventh. After the turn she

found some rhythm and it helped.

"Then I got into a good rhythm and hit a 5 iron to 12 feet on 13th hole and holed that putt. On the 14th I hit a 9 iron which almost went in the hole I think ended up 4 feet past and I holed that putt for a birdie," she said.

"Obviously finishing stretch at Carnoustie is pretty difficult but I had a 3 wood coming in to the last 3 holes, managed pars on 16, 17 but bogeyed 18.

"But it was still a good round, I think. The 18th was the second toughest hole on the course.

Obviously a dropped shot is never good but I think it was okay."

Major winner Korda made eight birdies on her way to a share of the lead.

Four players are one stroke back on four-under-par 68 including 2018 Women's Open champion Georgia Hall, who was joined on four-under-par by Scottish amateur Louise Duncan who carded a round of 68 which included an eagle on 14.

American Andrea Lee and 2021 US Women's Open champion Yuka Saso are also tied for fourth place.

Arsenal completes signing of Odegaard from Real Madrid

LONDON (AP): Arsenal completed the signing of midfielder Martin Odegaard from Real Madrid on Friday.

The 22-year-old Norway international was on loan in the second half of last season and returns on a long-term contract after Arsenal paid a fee reported to be 35 million euros (\$41 million).

"You've seen the numbers and what we did after Christmas when Martin was in the team ... the team performed at a completely different level," Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said Friday. "He made us better, we needed more options, alternatives, creativity. He has a unique talent for the way we want to play."

Odegaard scored two goals in 20 appearances for the north London club last season. The team did not disclose details but it was reported to be a five-year contract.

Real Madrid had signed Odegaard as a teenager and sent him out on various loan deals, including to Vitesse Arnhem and Real Sociedad before Arsenal.

Odegaard won't be available for Sunday's match against Chelsea. Arsenal opened the Premier League season with a 2-0 loss at Brentford.

A deal for Sheffield United goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale was close, Arteta said.

Small draws at Asian youth and junior boxing championship guarantees big medal haul for India

NEW DELHI, AUG 20 (PTI): India were assured of a whopping 21 medals in the Asian Youth and Junior Boxing Championships for men and women in Dubai after the unveiling of draws as COVID-19 related travel restrictions hampered participation in the continental showpiece.

India would be represented by a contingent of 73 -- two squads for men (junior and youth) and two squads for women (junior and youth) -- in the tournament featuring over 250 boxers.

Among the 21 in the medals rounds, nine have made the final directly.

The Indians have left in batches after technical issues with their COVID-19 test reports disrupted the original travel plans.

One batch of 23 left last night, another 25 boarded the flight to Dubai this morning, while 25 more will leave this evening.

"The 25 who are left are mainly members of the support staff and a couple of boxers who are to compete later, all the junior boxers who are scheduled to compete tonight have reached Dubai," a contingent source told PTI.

Rohit Chamoli (48kg), Mohammed Usman (50kg), Nikhil (54kg) Anshul (57kg), Preet Malik (63kg), Ankush (66kg), Gaurav Saini (70kg), Naksh Beniwal (75kg), and Rishab Singh (81kg) are scheduled to compete in their opening bouts in the evening.

Wins would assure them of medals in the tournament.

Women boxers were

the biggest beneficiaries of the small draws and in the youth competition, five have made the finals directly to be guaranteed at least a silver, while four are in the last four-stage assuring them of a bronze.

Deepika (81kg), Khishi (75kg), Neha (54kg),

Tamanna (50kg) and Nivedita Karki (48kg) are the direct finalists.

Lashu Yadav (70kg), Sneha Kumari (66kg), Preeti Dahiya (60kg), and Simran Verma (52kg) have found a place in the semifinals.

Among the youth men,

Amin Singh (+92kg) and Vishal (80kg) are assured of a bronze after having made the semifinals already.

In the junior competition, Kirti (+81kg), Pranjal Yadav (75kg), Mahi Raghav (63kg) and Aanchal Saini (57kg) are the finals courtesy the small size of

their draws.

The direct semifinalists are Sanjana (81kg), Rudrika (70kg), Supriya Rawat (66kg), Nikita Chand (60kg), Aarsoo (54kg), Tanu (52kg), Devika Satyajit (50kg), Vishu Rathee (48kg) and Muskan (46kg).

India will win at least 15 medals including 5 golds at Tokyo Paralympics: Chef-de-Mission

NEW DELHI, AUG 20 (PTI): India's Chef de Mission for the Tokyo Paralympics, Gursharan Singh believes the country will produce its best ever performance this year, returning with at least 15 medals including five golds.

India will field its largest ever contingent with 54 athletes set to compete in nine sports including Para Archery, Para Athletics, Para Badminton, Para Canoeing, Shooting Para sport, Para Swimming, Para Powerlifting, Para Table Tennis and Para Taekwondo.

"I am confident that these would be our best ever Paralympic Games. Our Para-athletes have worked very hard in the past years and shown great results in international competitions. They are raring to go for the Games," Singh, secretary general of the Paralympic Committee of India, said in a release.

"We are expecting around 15 medals including 5 golds at these Games. We have high medal hopes in Para Athletics, Para Badminton, Para Shooting and Para Archery."

India has a total of 12

medals including four gold in 11 Paralympic appearances.

The first batch of the Indian team, led by PCI President Deepa Malik, have arrived in Tokyo.

T Mariyappan, who is India's flag bearer at the Games, has also arrived in Tokyo and there will be a lot of expectations from the para high jumper to clinch his second Paralympic gold in Tokyo.

Mariyappan made a brilliant leap of 1.86 metres at the recent National selection trials.

"It was one of my best performances (at selection trials) since Rio 2016," said Mariyappan, who had suffered a permanent disability to his right leg in a road accident.

"I had an ankle injury in 2017 and it took some time to heal. It's been a while since I had been looking to get my old rhythm back. And I believe I have got it back now. I feel I am ready for the Games. I will aim for the gold."

Apart from Mariyappan, India will have medal hopes from their Para Javelin throwers led by

two-time Paralympic champion Devendra Jhajharia (F46).

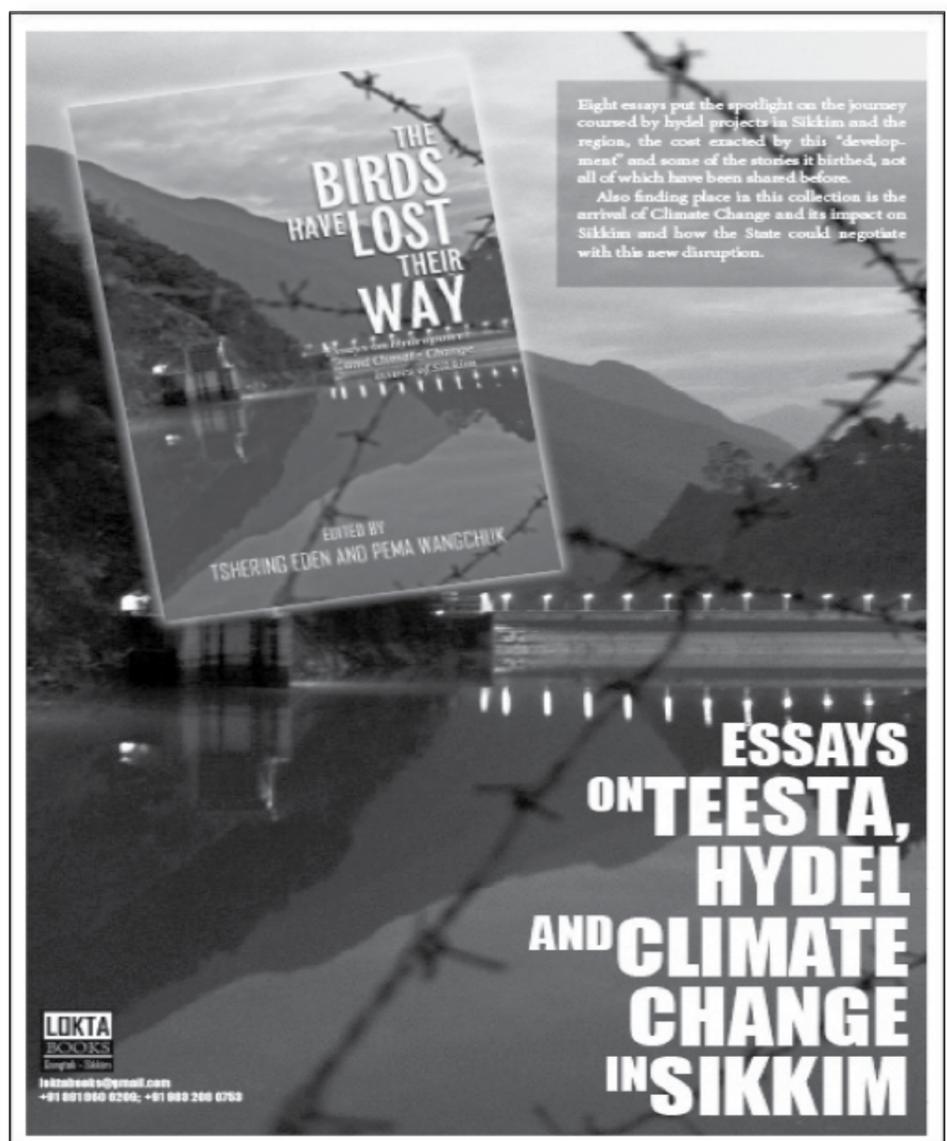
Reigning world champion Sundar Singh Gurjar and Ajeet Singh (also in F46), world champion and world record holder in F64 Sandeep Chaudhary and Navdeep Singh (F41) are others who would be ones to watch out for in Para Javelin.

India is also banking on its shooters and badminton players to rise to the occasion in Tokyo.

World no. 1 and multiple-time world champion Pramod Bhagat will lead India's Para Badminton contingent with the gold medal hopes resting on him in the men's SL3 event.

Among others, World no. 2 shuttler Krishna Nagar (SH6) and Tarun Dhillon (SL4) are other para shuttlers who are expected to do well.

In archery, India will have Rakesh Kumar and Shyam Sundar (compound), Vivek Chikara and Harvinder Singh (recurve) and woman archer Jyoti Baliyan (compound individual/mixed event).



Greek PM, Turkish president to discuss Afghan developments

ATHENS, GREECE (AP): Greece's prime minister and Turkey's president are to speak on Friday evening to discuss "the latest developments in Afghanistan," the Greek prime minister's office announced, as both countries raise concerns about a potential major influx of people fleeing Afghanistan after the Taliban's takeover.

Greece has repeatedly said it will not allow a repetition of 2015, when hundreds of thousands of people crossed to Greek islands from the nearby Turkish coast before heading through Greece and the Balkans north toward more prosperous countries in the European Union.

Greece's prime minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, would be speaking with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at 7:30 p.m. local time (1630 GMT), Mitsotakis' office said.

On Thursday, Erdogan called on European nations to shoulder the responsibility for Afghans fleeing the Taliban, warning that Turkey will not become Europe's "refugee warehouse."

The previous day, Greek Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi said that the current priority was to evacuate EU and Afghan citizens who had worked with EU forces



there, but that Greece "does not accept to be the gateway for irregular flows into the EU."

Speaking on Greece's Skai TV, he noted that Greece does not border Afghanistan, and "there are countries to the east of us who could provide initial protection where necessary." Turkey, he added, was a safe country for Afghan citizens.

The comments have come amid an increase in recent weeks in the number of Afghans making their way into Turkey across the border from Iran.

Greece's defense and citizens' protection ministers, as well as the chief of the National Defense General Staff, were to visit the Evros border region on Friday.

Greek authorities have constructed a

new steel wall to block commonly used crossing points along the Evros River that forms much of the land border between Greece and Turkey. Plans to build the roughly 26-kilometer-long wall were finalized in October 2020.

In neighboring Turkey, anti-migrant sentiment has been running high as it grapples with economic woes, including high unemployment, that have been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, and there is little appetite in the country to take in more people.

"We need to remind our European friends of this fact: Europe — which has become the center of attraction for millions of people — cannot stay out of

(the refugee) problem by harshly sealing its borders to protect the safety and wellbeing of its citizens," Erdogan said.

"Turkey has no duty, responsibility or obligation to be Europe's refugee warehouse," Erdogan said.

Erdogan said his country is home to 5 million foreign nationals — including 3.6 million Syrians who fled the civil war in the neighboring country and 300,000 Afghans. Around 1.1 million are foreigners with residence permits, he said.

In 2016, Turkey and the European Union signed a deal for Turkey to stop the hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees heading toward Europe, in return for visa-free travel for

Turkish citizens and substantial EU financial support.

Erdogan has frequently accused the EU of not keeping its side of the bargain, while the deal led to thousands of asylum-seekers languishing in squalid refugee camps on the eastern Greek islands.

The migration issue has also led to flare-ups in tension between Greece and Turkey, neighbors and NATO allies who have come to the brink of war several times since the mid-1970s. In March 2020, Turkey announced its borders into the EU were open, and encouraged thousands of migrants to head to the Greek border, triggering chaotic scenes as Greece shut its border crossings with Turkey.

US says food aid runs out this week in Ethiopia's Tigray



NAIROBI, KENYA (AP): The United States is warning that food aid will run out this week for millions of hungry people under a blockade imposed by Ethiopia's government on the embattled Tigray region.

Samantha Power, the administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, said in a statement late Thursday that less than 7% of the needed food aid has been reaching the Tigray region of some 6 million people, and USAID and other aid groups "have depleted their stores of food items warehoused in Tigray" after nine months of war.

"This shortage is not because food is unavailable, but because the Ethiopian Government is obstructing humanitarian aid and personnel, including land convoys and air access," she said. USAID has warned that up to 900,000 people in Tigray face famine conditions in what has been called the world's worst hunger crisis in a decade. The Associated Press has reported that scores of people have starved to death.

Ethiopia's government, on the defensive after resurgent Tigray forces retook much of the region in June, has accused humanitarian workers of arming and supporting the fighters, and aid workers have described intense searches and confiscation of personal medication, cash and communications equipment as they try to enter the region on rare convoys or

power, a terrorist group after a political fallout turned into fighting. Caught in the middle are civilians. Thousands have died.

An aid worker who recently visited the Tigray region told the AP that conditions are so dire, and resources so constrained, that at least one large aid group's staffers had been forced to begin rationing their own food, let alone have enough means to help others.

With bank services still cut off along with telephone and internet access, aid groups are running out of money, the aid worker said.

And while access inside Tigray is safer and easier than before the turn in the war in June, fuel is in such short supply that it's only available on the black market and diesel prices are five times higher than before, the aid worker said, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

If the cash and fuel shortages can't be resolved, aid work "will grind to a halt," the aid worker said, adding that some groups already had stopped some work altogether.

While the aid worker saw shops stocked with supplies, many people didn't have the means to buy them. "One definition of famine is not a lack of food, it's the lack of access to food," the aid worker said, adding that farmers had largely missed the crucial planting season.

The latest U.N. humanitarian update on Tigray, released on Thursday, said 100 trucks of supplies — 90 of them with food — must enter Tigray every day to help meet the needs of more than 5 million people. But just 316 trucks had entered the region between July 12 and last Sunday.

Now hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced in the Amhara and Afar regions, creating a new humanitarian crisis, as Tigray forces say they are trying to secure their own region and pressure Ethiopia's government to end the fighting. Ethiopia's government, however, has called on all able citizens to stop the Tigray forces "once and for all."

Malaysian royals meet over new PM, likely choice stirs anger



KUALA LUMPUR, AUG 20 (AP): Malaysian state royals are meeting Friday at the national palace to discuss the appointment of a new prime minister, with the likely choice stirring public anger and warnings of more political instability. Former Deputy Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob is poised to take the top job after reportedly gaining the support of 114 lawmakers, a slender majority.

Ismail's appointment would see the return of the United Malays National Organization, which ruled Malaysia since independence from Britain in 1957 before it was ousted in 2018 over a multibillion-dollar financial scandal.

The pick also would essentially restore the ruling alliance of Muhyiddin Yassin,

who resigned as prime minister on Monday after less than 18 months in office.

King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah met with the lawmakers who reportedly back Ismail on Thursday, and his meeting with nine other ethnic Malay state rulers Friday is expected to discuss the outcome.

The king's role is largely ceremonial in Malaysia, but he appoints the person he believes has majority support in Parliament as prime minister and the state rulers can advise him on such appointments.

Ismail's 114 reported votes exceed the 111 needed for a simple majority but is close to the backing Muhyiddin had and was unable to keep. Ismail is from UMNO, the larger party in the

alliance, leaving him on firmer ground, but he still needs Muhyiddin's party for enough support to lead.

Angry Malaysians have launched an online petition to protest Ismail's candidacy, with more than 340,000 signatures collected so far. Many believe Ismail's appointment will only return the status quo, with its perceived failed response to a worsening pandemic.

Malaysia has one of the world's highest infection rates and deaths per capita, despite a seven-month state of emergency and a lockdown since June. Daily new infections have more than doubled since June to hit a record 22,928 on Thursday, bringing the country's total to nearly 1.5 million cases. Deaths have surged to above 13,000.

Sydney lockdown extended, masks required outside



SYDNEY, AUG 20 (AP): A lockdown in Australia's largest city was extended through September and tougher measures to curb the coronavirus's delta variant were imposed Friday, including a curfew and a mask mandate outdoors.

New South Wales state, which includes Sydney, reported 642 locally acquired infections in the latest 24-hour period, the fourth consecutive day of tallies exceeding 600.

Sydney has been locked down since late June after the more contagious delta variant was detected in a limousine driver who became infected while transporting a U.S. cargo aircrew from Sydney Airport.

Since then, 65 people have died from COVID-19 in New South Wales, included four overnight.

The Sydney lockdown was to end on Aug. 28, but the state government announced it will continue until Sept. 30.

The entire state has been in lockdown since last week because the virus had spread from the city.

A curfew will apply from 9 pm to 5 pm from Monday in the worst-affected Sydney suburbs. Wearing masks will be

compulsory across the state outside homes. Previously, masks weren't compulsory in all circumstances outdoors.

Elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region: New Zealand's first virus outbreak in six months has spread from the largest city of Auckland to the capital, Wellington.

Health authorities said Friday that three people in Wellington who recently visited Auckland had tested positive. They said the outbreak had grown to 31 cases.

The government also expanded the lockdown that had been put in place Tuesday after the first community case was found in Auckland. All of New Zealand will remain in lockdown until at least next Tuesday. Previously it had been a three-day lockdown for the nation and a seven-day lockdown only for certain areas.

Genome testing has linked the outbreak to an infected traveler who returned from Sydney earlier this month and was quarantined, although health authorities don't yet know how the virus escaped quarantine. New Zealand is continuing to pursue an elimination strategy aimed at wiping out the virus entirely.

China tightens control over companies' data on users

BEIJING, AUG 20 (AP): China is tightening control over data gathered by companies about the public under a law approved Friday by its ceremonial legislature, expanding the ruling Communist Party's crackdown on internet industries.

The data protection law follows anti-monopoly and other enforcement actions against companies including e-commerce giant Alibaba and games and social media operator Tencent that caused their share prices to plunge.

The law, which takes effect Nov. 1, follows complaints companies misused or sold customer data without their knowledge or

permission, allowing it to be used for fraud or unfair practices such as charging higher prices to some users.

The law curbs what information companies can gather and sets standards for how it must be stored. The full text of the law wasn't immediately released, but earlier versions also would require customer permission before data can be sold to another company.

The data protection law is similar to Europe's General Data Protection Regulation, which limits collection and handling of customer data. But unlike laws in Western countries, the Chinese legislation

says nothing about limiting ruling party or government access to personal information.

The ruling party has been accused of using data gathered about Uyghurs and other members of predominantly Muslim ethnic groups in the northwestern region of Xinjiang to carry out a widespread campaign of repression.

In April, Alibaba was fined a record 2.8 billion for anticompetitive practices.

This month, the government said online education companies are no longer allowed to receive foreign investment or operate as for-profit businesses.

Hong Kong quarantine exemption for Nicole Kidman draws flak

HONG KONG (AP): Hong Kong's granting of a quarantine exemption to Hollywood star Nicole Kidman is drawing criticism from lawmakers as the city tightens entry restrictions for international travelers to control the coronavirus.

Kidman, who reportedly flew to Hong Kong last week from coronavirus-hit Sydney, was exempted from a weeklong quarantine and was spotted in the city this week filming a new Amazon Prime Video series titled *Expats*, according to local media reports.

The government said in a statement Thursday that it had granted the exemption "for the purpose of performing designated professional work."

It said the work was "conducive to maintaining the necessary operation and development of Hong Kong's economy."

Some Hong Kong lawmakers criticized the decision.

"Nicole Kidman's exemption case is not just about politics, it involves the health security issue and is a matter of unfairness," said lawmaker Priscilla Leung.

Leung said she herself was not exempted from quarantine when a family member was infected with the coronavirus.

Kidman's exemption sets a precedent for other celebrities in the future, said lawmaker Michael Tien.

"(Even) our athletes who came back from the Tokyo Olympics were required to have seven days of quarantine," he said.

Kidman's exemption comes as the Hong Kong government has tightened entry requirements for travelers, adding 15 countries including the U.S. to the high-risk category and requiring vaccinated travelers from medium-risk countries to spend 14 days in quarantine effective Friday.

Previously, those traveling from medium-risk countries could quarantine for just seven days in a designated hotel if they had a valid vaccination record and a positive COVID-19 antibodies test.

Authorities say Kidman is obliged to comply with virus rules in Hong Kong, and is required to submit an itinerary and travel in a private vehicle to avoid contact with the public.

"With this exemption, it doesn't mean that she can go anywhere she wants," Edward Yau, Hong Kong's secretary for commerce and economic development, said Friday.

Reactions from residents were mixed.

"I think the quarantine period cannot be shortened, because we all know that you can still test positive even after 14 days of quarantine, and even if you are vaccinated," said Sum Yip, a nursing student. "If the government shortens the quarantine period, it cannot protect the people."

Czech film festival to honor Michael Caine, Ethan Hawke

PRAGUE (AP): The international film festival is returning to the Czech spa of Karlovy Vary after it was delayed by the coronavirus pandemic.

The 55th edition of the festival will honor Oscar-winning British actor Michael Caine for his outstanding contribution to world cinema at its start on Friday night.

Caine won two Academy Awards for best supporting roles in "Hannah and Her Sisters" in 1987 and "The Cider House Rules" in 2000.

He will also present "Best Sellers" (2021), a comedy in which he stars, at the festival.

Organizers will also honor U.S. actor, director and writer Ethan Hawke.

Actor Johnny Depp will present two movies he produced: "Crock of Gold:



A Few Rounds with Shane MacGowan" and "Minamata." Depp's planned presence at Karlovy Vary and a decision by the The San Sebastian International Film

Festival in Spain to award the actor its highest honor in September have been criticized by British domestic abuse charities.

Last year, Depp lost a libel case against a British newspaper that accused him of domestic violence, with a judge ruling the allegations were "substantially correct."

The Karlovy Vary International Film Festival runs through Aug. 28 under strict conditions for the visitors, who must cover their face with a quality respirator. They also need to be vaccinated, or have recovered from Covid-19 or have tested negative for the coronavirus.

The festival's grand jury will consider 12 movies for the top prize, the Crystal Globe.

Ed Sheeran says new 'coming of age' album coming in October

LOS ANGELES (AP): No more break for Ed Sheeran.

The British pop star announced Thursday that his upcoming studio album "=", which is pronounced "Equals," will release on Oct. 29. He unveiled his 14-song track list, which includes his recently released single "Bad Habits."

Sheeran said his new album is "really personal." He said his life changed in the past few years after marriage and the birth of the couple's daughter.

"I see it as my coming-of-age record, and I can't wait to share this next chapter with you," the singer-songwriter said in a statement.

The four-time Grammy winner took a break from work and social media in late 2019 after two years of touring in support of his best-selling album "+" or "Divide."



The new album was written and recorded across London, Sweden and Los Angeles.

Next month, Sheeran will perform

in a concert to kickoff the NFL season opener between the reigning Super Bowl champion Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Dallas Cowboys in Florida.

Cinema halls reopen in MP



BHOPAL, AUG 20 (PTI): After 16 months, single-screen cinema halls and multiplexes reopened in Madhya Pradesh on Thursday with the screening of Akshay Kumar-starrer "Bell Bottom".

In state capital Bhopal, six single-screen theaters and five multiplexes reopened.

The response of viewers on the first day was tepid given that the coronavirus pandemic has not abated fully yet, said one cinema hall owner.

The state government had last month allowed cinema halls to reopen with 50 per cent capacity.

Central Circuit Cine Association president J P Chowksey said the response to "Bell Bottom" was around 30 per cent in Indore.

According to him, there are about 300 single-screen theatres in the state.

Closure due to the pandemic inflicted huge losses on cinema hall owners, he added.

Japanese martial artist film star Sonny Chiba dies at 82

TOKYO (AP): Japanese actor Sonny Chiba, who wowed the world with his martial arts skills in more than 100 films, including "Kill Bill," has died. He was 82.

Chiba, known in Japan as Shinichi Chiba, died late Thursday in a hospital near Tokyo where he had been treated for COVID-19 since Aug. 8, Tokyo-based Astraia, his management office, said in a statement Friday. It said he had not been vaccinated.

Chiba rose to stardom in Japan in the 1960s, portraying samurai, fighters and police detectives, the anguished so-called "anti-heroes" trying to survive in a violent world. He did many of the stunt scenes himself.

His overseas career took off after his 1970s Japanese film "The Street Fighter" proved popular in the U.S.

American director Quentin Tarantino listed the work as among his "grindhouse," or low-budget

kitsch cinema, favorites.

Tarantino cast Chiba in the role of Hattori Hanzo, a master swordsman in "Kill Bill."

Chiba appeared in the 1991 Hollywood film "Aces," directed by John Glen, as well as in Hong Kong movies.

Chiba's career also got a boost from the global boom in kung fu films, set off by Chinese legend Bruce Lee, although critics say Chiba tended to exhibit a dirtier, thug-like fighting style than Lee.

"A true action legend. Your films are eternal and your energy an inspiration. #SonnyChiba #RIP," American actor Lewis Tan said on Twitter.

New York-based writer and director Ted Geoghegan called him "the great Sonny Chiba."

"Watch one of his films today," Geoghegan tweeted, followed by images of a fist and a broken heart.



ALOHA MOMENT! Actress Rachel Bilson took a dip in a chic one-piece in Hawaii.

ARIES:

When we're low on energy, everything around us begins to trigger us. We tend to attract conflicting situations, which in turn make our shadows come out and play. Watch your tendency to pick fights with those around you. Watch your tendency to create mountains out of molehills.

TAURUS:

Taurus, you're being reminded of Rumi's immortal words: "The wound is where the light enters." You've been to hell and back over the past few months, and you've found a way to turn your wounds into wisdom. Now, it's time for you to step into the role of a healer and lightworker, and share the wisdom you have acquired with those around you.

GEMINI:

You're no rookie, Gemini. You're an alchemist and a sorceress. You've got magick coursing through your veins. The art of turning thoughts into things is something you have practiced over many lifetimes. So instead of affirming the negative, turn your attention towards the life you want

to create for yourself. Your crystal-clear intentions coupled with unyielding faith in the forces will help you make space for miracles.

CANCER:

The worst is behind you, Cancer. We repeat: the worst is behind you. You attracted seemingly dark experiences into your life because you were meant to learn important lessons that help you evolve on a soul level. So, honour and acknowledge the past as you remember that this too shall pass.

LEO:

Our body is blessed with its own intelligence, and is constantly communicating with us through different sensations. Today, you're being asked to tune into your body temple. To start a dialogue about what needs to be healed and integrated. Trust the messages you receive in moments of silence as you act upon them without delay. Remember, food is medicine. Providing your body with the right kind of nutrients "and" eliminating items that trigger your system will help you heal

on every level.

VIRGO:

Like everything else in our reality, the process of manifestation requires you to find a balance between 'doing' and 'being'. Yes, this sounds contradictory. Take a moment to hear us out anyway. The first and most important step is for you to set crystal-clear intentions. The second? Taking inspired action. What happens after isn't in your hands.

LIBRA:

Here's the thing, Libra: you're inherently a peace-loving person. But, in your need to maintain order, you sometimes avoid confrontation. Understand how this pattern is detrimental to your own growth and evolution. Observe how you could be rejecting your own feelings at this moment.

SCORPIO:

Here's the thing, Scorpio: you'll always find something to dislike about every given situation. You'll always find somebody to blame for what's going on in your emotional landscape. You know what takes an insane amount of courage? The willing-

ness to rise above the murky waters and view matters from a higher vantage point. So, step away from the scene of crime. Take the timeout you need, beautiful. Distance has an uncanny way of providing us with much-needed perspective

SAGITTARIUS:

Listen up, Sagittarius! You can't always be in yang mode, even if you want to. The law of balance states that you must make peace with the yin side of human existence as well. That you learn to 'be' as much as you 'do' without letting those hectic to-do lists get the better of you.

CAPRICORN:

Here's the thing, Capricorn: playing the blame game isn't going to resolve matters. Making a conscious effort to understand things from the other person's perspective is the only way to heal the given situation. So, step away from the scene of crime, for just a second. Listen to what the voice of wisdom within has to say. Yes, there is a way to find an amicable solution. Your angels and spirit guides are holding space for a peaceful

negotiation.

AQUARIUS:

Big things do not happen overnight. We repeat: big things do not happen overnight. It takes patience and persistence to get to a desired destination, which is something you are beginning to understand on a soul level. So, focus on that vision board, beautiful, and do what it takes to show up as the best version of yourself every single day. Remember, the key to your fulfilment lies in making the journey just as fulfilling as the destination.

PISCES:

What happens when we're hung up on the pain narrative? We refuse to acknowledge how the other person could be affected by our words and actions. Something to think about, Pisces. What the cards are urging you to examine: your role in the grand scheme of things. Just for today, let go of the judgements and biases. Observe the situation from a higher perspective. This will help you understand their side of the story "and" bring in the energy of compassion.