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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Sikkim Police breaks silence on forged FIR incident, explains how case was closed

COPY IN CIRCULATION APPEARS TO BE OF ORIGINAL COMPLAINT, NOT THE ONE PROCESSED FOR INVESTIGATION

SAGAR CHETTRI

GANGTOK, 24 AUG:

DIG-Range, Sikkim Police, Prawn Gurung, informed a press conference today that the FIR posted with a forged signature which has become the most talked-about incident over the past few days was being investigated to get to the bottom of who hatched this conspiracy and leaked incomplete information about it. Interestingly, it also appears that the leaked FIR shared by SNS and also being circulated on social media appear to be copies made before it was received and processed by the police. This adds a new dimension to the whole drama.

He confirmed the timeline related to said FIR and informed that it is dated 06 July and arrived at the SP-East's office by speed-post on 09 July and complained about an incident purported to have happened on 11 November, 2020. The SP was on leave at the time and became privy to the FIR on 12 July and marked it down to the SDPO. On 15 July,



the investigating officer tried to contact the person recorded in the FIR as the complainant, and on 16th, the said person rejected the FIR as forged and informed the IO that neither were contents of the complaint true nor was it sent by her. This is something that even the person to whom the FIR has been attributed to has already clarified.

On 22 July, the case was closed upon completion of enquiry, he added. And that is how the mat-

ter remained until a few days back when Sikkimey Naagarik Samaj brought up the issue and accused Sikkim Police of having covered-up the FIR. The DIG reiterated that this was not the case and that the a preliminary enquiry, as prescribed by law, was carried out and the matter closed after the person named as the complainant denied having written it.

The matter has attracted a lot of chatter in Sikkim, and the person

to whom the FIR is attributed and the person named as the accused in it, have both filed individual FIRs on SNS for having dragged their names into the controversy based on a forged document.

While Sikkim Police has registered these FIRs and registered a case against three office bearers of Sikkimey Naagarik Samaj- Tseten Tashi Bhutia, Bharat Basnet and Passang Sherpa, it is not clear what sleuthing skills

have been deployed to finding out who hatched the original conspiracy, posted the allegedly forged FIR and then leaked it.

The DIG also informed that the SNS office-bearers have already visited the Thana and recorded their statements.

He also claimed that the police have registered a separate case and the matter was under investigation to find out who wrote and sent the said FIR and who leaked

it on social media.

Interestingly, he also stressed that the copy of the FIR being circulated on social media had not leaked from the police and that this was obvious from the absence of any official notings on the copy in circulation. The FIR received by the police has notings by the different officers who processed it while the one in circulation appears to a copy of the original document before it was posted.

Daily cases climb above 100 after five days; No new Covid deaths

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 AUG:

Sikkim's run of five consecutive days of new cases remaining below hundred was broken today with 137 new cases being reported in the past 24 hours. What is reassuring on the other hand is that there were no new Covid deaths over the same period. Sikkim had been reporting less than 100 new cases every day since 19 August.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim issued by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department this morning, the 137 new cases were picked from the screening of 907 on Monday, giving Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 15%.

Of the new cases, 57 were registered in East District, 65 in West District, 14 in South District and one in North District. On the other hand, the number of Covid deaths held at 367 with no new fatalities being reported among Covid patients in the last 24 hours.

While 51 of the new cases were picked up in RT-PCR testing of 321 samples, the remaining 86 were reported in rapid antigen testing of 580 samples. Sikkim's tally of the confirmed cases currently stands at 29,477.

In the meantime, today's numbers serve up another first after a long time – fewer recoveries than new cases. 96 people were discharged from home and facility isolation on Monday after making full recoveries. Sikkim's count of recovered cases has accordingly further improved to 27,281.

There are currently 1,548 active cases of Covid in the State, most of whom are recovering under home or facility isolation and only around 100 have symptoms severe enough to require hospitalization. Of those is hospital, 12 are currently under treatment at ICU facilities of STNM hospital and Central Referral Hospital. Only nine new COVID patients were hospitalized in the state.

With no 'responsible' agency bothered, SPYF demands reliable public transport for Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 AUG:

Sikkim Progressive Youth Forum has reminded the Transport Minister that unlike other states which have either railways or a reliable public bus transport system for affordable travel, commuters in Sikkim have been left unserved in this regard and was in desperate need for a reliable and affordable public transport system.

An SPYF press release informs that the organization has written to the Transport Minister demanding that state-run buses be deployed to connect all major towns, Gangtok be serviced by city-runners plying every 15 minutes and govt-approved rates be strictly enforced for local taxis and maxi-cabs.

The release rues that most of the buses pur-

chased by SNT have been hired out to private companies while the lay people have been left no option but to rely on more expensive private taxis.

The release further highlights that the pandemic-induced economic downturn and spiraling fuel prices have been brutal on the people, and making the situation worse was that those entrusted with the "responsibility to represent the common people and those enjoying the pelf of power have been totally indifferent towards the plight of the common people."

Given that Sikkim has one of the worst public transportation systems in the entire country, the least that the Transport Minister could ensure for the people was acquiescing to SPYF's demands, the release conveys.

Covid vaccine slots can now be booked via WhatsApp



NEW DELHI, AUG 24 (PTI): Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Tuesday said that COVID-19 vaccine slots can now be booked via WhatsApp.

Elaborating on the process, he said one needs to send 'Book Slot' to MyGovIndia Corona Helpdesk on WhatsApp, verify and then follow the requisite steps.

"Paving a new era of citizen convenience. Now, book #COVID19 vaccine slots easily on your phone within minutes. Send 'Book Slot' to MyGovIndia Corona Helpdesk on WhatsApp, Verify OTP and follow the steps...Book today: wa.me/919013151515," Mandaviya tweeted.



WHEN A FOOTBALLER AND AN EVERESTER SUPPORT BLOOD DONATION

A blood donation camp was organized on Tuesday at Somabria Senior Secondary School as a tribute to Sahid Durga Malla. A press communiqué from Sanju Football Academy informs that its mentor, footballer Sanju Pradhan, and Everest Manita Pradhan supported the initiative as brand ambassadors. Apart from SFA, other organizations that were party of the initiative were: Service To Mankind, Jan Kalyan Samaj, Amar Jyoti Sangh, EPCS Church, Fambong, The Voice, Thambong, IFBPCS, Daramdin, United Academy, Daramdin, Sikkim Newar Guthi, Sombarey Sakha, Project Purpose, Gangtok, and Thambong Gaon Samaj.

Urban Dev Secy takes stock of Namchi Smart City projects

NAMCHI, 24 AUG [IPR]: Urban Development Department Secretary, MT Sherpa, who is also Cum State Mission Director for Namchi Smart City Ltd, reviewed the status of projects under the Smart City Mission at a meeting held today at the NSCL conference hall and also inspected several on-going project sites in and around Namchi.

While interacting with NSCL officials, the Secretary urged them to work earnestly to achieve the goals of the Smart City Mission in timely manner and prepare a roadmap for future sustainability of the city.

He stressed that the success and sustainability of any



project largely depends on coordination and cooperation between the public, Government functionaries and all stakeholders.

Additional Chief Town

Planner, Nodal Officer Naveen Rai, gave a brief presentation on the Namchi Smart City Project and gave the timeline of various flagship projects undertaken by the NSCL.

He stated that 160 Smart City project works have been earmarked at different wards of Namchi Municipal Council. He also highlighted details of projects which are either complete and functional or on the verge of completion such as the Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC), Integrated Water Supply Distribution, Rain Water Harvesting, Smart Pedestrian Walkway Network, Smart Roads Project, besides other projects being executed by NSCL in convergence with other Departments.

Earlier, the CEO, Smart City, gave a brief overview of the project.

The Secretary also took a

meeting with officials of Urban Development Department at the Kishan Bazar Complex during which various sections, including Engineering, Town Planning, Trade License, Accounts, Administration etc. were represented for briefing and interactions.

Thereafter, the Secretary accompanied by CEO Thupden Gyatso Bhutia, ACE Thinley Chankapa, Addl CTP Naveen Rai, and other officials of both Smart City and UDD visited various ongoing and proposed projects under NSCL and UDD in and around Namchi, including the Public Utility Building, Kishan Bazaar, Alley Gumpa Crematorium, ICC , Bhanu statue, Bhaichung Stadium etc.

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Article 371F; 8th May Agreement and Assembly Seat Reservation

JB PRADHAN

Social or Digital Media has provided a fertile platform for Sikkimese people from diverse background to air their views on most of the subject matter that are of concern and interest to Sikkim and Sikkimese. From the principle of Parliamentary democracy, Political rights and equality, Article 371F of the Constitution of India, Sikkim Subject Certificates, Old Laws and reservation of Assembly seats for Limboo and Tamang and the Nepali of Sikkimese origin are some of the subject matter that dominates the debate perennially.

The recent battle of words, albeit without much wits, between the Sikkim Nagarik Samaj (SNS) and the Sikkim Republican Party (SRP) have exposed how divided the Sikkimese Society stands today. Nevertheless, we must allow and appreciate such debate and counter views, as debate, discussion and deliberations on such an important and sensitive issues are crucial and necessary, as it will shape the future of Sikkim and the coming generations.

It is also praiseworthy to note that not only political parties are resorting to press conference to express their views and to counter allegations but social / non political organization, individuals claiming to champion the cause of Sikkim and the Sikkimese people are resorting to such medium. Social Media is galore with 'press conference' or now popularly referred to as 'peres conference'.

Unfortunately for Sikkim and the Sikkimese people, that such high voltage debate on important issues takes place not in the temple of democracy i.e. legislative assembly, but outside in the lobby of a hotel or studio or some office room. To further add to our misery, those who know and are supposed to speak, do not speak and those who do not know speak abundantly.

Be that as it may, one thing is clear that our fellow Sikkimese are exercising their rights of freedom of thought and expression. However, at this juncture after 46 years of freedom and democracy we need to ask ourselves – 'what is the way forward'?

Sikkim has been ruled (have consciously taken the liberty to use the word 'ruled' instead of 'governed') by great leaders who have been christened as "Father of democracy, Architect of Modern Sikkim and Yug Purush".

BHANDARI :

Bhandari, Architect of modern Sikkim ruled Sikkim for almost 15 years. He was a great orator and a defiant leader. He confronted Indira Gandhi, considered to be the most powerful Prime Minister and Iron Lady of India, on many issues including merger of Sikkim. He never minced words when levying allegations against her. He ruled Sikkim with 100% majority (32 out of 32) in the State Assembly. However, in spite of having such a great orator and brave leader with 100% majority for 15 years, the Assembly seats provided by the Maharaja to his Sikkimese Nepali Subjects could not be restored.

CHAMLING:

The next 25 years Sikkim was ruled by another great leader Pawan Kumar Chamling, christened as Democrat and Yug Purush. He not only had the distinction of having 100% majority (32 out of 32) seats in the State Assembly, but also an extraordinary distinction of being the longest serving Chief Minister in India, a feat previously held by a giant leader from West Bengal Jyoti Basu. During his reign in 2003, Limboo and Tamang (LT) community were declared as Scheduled Tribes (ST). In spite of being declared ST, their rights for seat reservation in the Legislative Assembly under the Constitution were denied. Perhaps the LTs of

Sikkim are the only ST in India without any ST seat in the Assembly. In the said 25 and 15 years, neither the Nepali Assembly seats were restored nor ST seats under Article 332 of the constitution was provided for the LTs.

That after more than 40 years, the issue of reservation of assembly seats for Nepali of Sikkimese origin has descended into an abyss. If powerful leaders and government in the past with 100% majority failed, it is doubtful that any political party or organization with negligible public support can do anything much.

Sikkimese of Nepali origin have no one to blame. Except for the 1st chief minister all other four chief ministers have been from the Nepali community. Out of which, two of them ruled for 15 and 25 years i.e. (40 years out of 46 years of statehood) respectively, with 100% majority i.e. (32 out of 32) in the State Assembly. Instead of pointing fingers at others, we need to introspect and find a way forward where the future of coming generation and all Sikkimese are secured and protected. Only a matured and a conscious society can safeguard the future of a coming generation.

The practice of bestowing titles on politicians and leaders must stop. It is for the future generation to judge and confer such titles. Gandhi, Nehru, Shastri and other leaders received such honour and accolades after they were gone. It is only the future generation, which is the true adjudicator for conferring such honour, otherwise it would simply be a flattery and sycophancy.

BURMAN COMMISSION and 40 ASSEMBLY SEATS:

The Burman Commission report perhaps may have delayed the reservation of Assembly seats for LTs in Sikkim. Recommendation for increasing the Assembly Seats to 40 from 32 is pleasingly attractive. However, we need to ask ourselves – 'is it practical in the national scenario?' Sikkim has qualified to be state in the Indian union only for the reason that it was a kingdom prior to its merger. In the normal Indian/National scenario, even now, with a population of around 6 to 7 lakhs Sikkim may not fulfill the parameters of being a District. Therefore, recommendation and demand for increasing the Assembly seats to 40 from 32 was/is much ado about nothing and only a stratagem and a political gimmick.

LEGALLY SPEAKING:

ARTICLE 371F; ST or LT ASSEMBLY SEATS:

Much has been written, discussed and debated about the special provision and importance of Article 371F to Sikkim. Article 371F falls in Part XXI of the constitution of India. The said chapter, Part XXI of the constitution is captioned as – "TEMPORARY, TRANSITIONAL AND SPECIAL PROVISIONS". You don't need to have a great legal sense or mind to know the meanings of the word 'temporary and transitional'. Part XXI is not a permanent feature of our constitution. It is only a special provision for a transitional period.

The Sikkimese people must understand that provisions in Article 371F are in the nature of 'enabling provision'. It does not confer 'legal right' which are enforceable in a court of law. For instance, a particular community of Sikkim cannot approach a court to enforce their right under Clause (f) Article 371F demanding reservation of seats in the Assembly. However, on the other hand the STs can approach the court for seat reservation under Article 332 as was done in the case of LTs of Sikkim. The Parliament or the central government has the option to either reserve seats in the state assembly as ST seats or as LT seats. The latter reservation would be saved by the enabling provision namely clause (f) of Article 371F.

ASSEMBLY SEATS – LT or ST?

LTs are legally entitled to reservation of seats in the legislative Assembly under Article 332 of the constitution of India and not under the enabling provision namely, clause (f) of Article 371F. However, if the Parliament so decides to reserve Assembly seats for LTs as LT seats instead of ST seats, then the same will be deemed to be valid/legal in view of Clause (f) of Article 371F. In the absence of such 'enabling provision' the same would be unconstitutional. However, in the present political scenario, where the National policy is towards securing equality for all with one nation one citizen and uniform civil code, the possibility of the Central government/Parliament reserving Assembly seats in the name of particular a community is bleak.

On the other hand, if Assembly seats for LTs are reserved as ST seats then all other STs in the state will be eligible to contest from the ST seats. Moreover, this will create two categories of STs. One with exclusive Assembly seats and the other with ST seats only. This is a tricky situation and the Central Government will have ample scope for maneuvering to suit its policy. The state governments in the past ought to have seriously pursued the issue of reservation of seats in the Assembly. Considering the situation, it is apt to quote Winston Churchill – 'Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it'.

May 8th AGREEMENT:

May 8th Agreement is also treated as an important, solemn document and revered by all Sikkimese. It was executed between the Chogyal, Government of India and the Political parties of Sikkim on 8th May, 1973. It is said that the principles therein are reflected and contained in Article 371F. Unfortunately, even this agreement is not legally enforceable. Clause (m) of Article 371F provides that – 'neither the Supreme Court nor any other court shall have the jurisdiction in respect of any dispute or other matter arising out of any treaty, agreement, engagement or other similar instrument relating to Sikkim which was entered into or executed before the appointed day and to which the Government of India or any of its predecessor Governments was a party, but nothing in this clause shall be construed to derogate from the provisions of article 143.'

Article 143 provides for a Presidential reference i.e. the power of the President to consult Supreme Court on question of facts or law of public importance. In such cases, the Supreme Court exercises advisory jurisdiction and the same is neither binding nor such opinion can be treated as a judicial precedent. The significance and value of 8th May Agreement perhaps can be ascertained only from Presidential reference as and when the need arises or the President finds it fit.

THE WAY FORWARD:

46 years have passed by. The Sikkimese people are not only insecure but stand divided. The policy of divide and rule is a very potent, tried and tested weapon. The Britishers successfully applied it and ruled India for around 200 years. It is not difficult for Sikkimese populace of 06 lakhs to come together and find a reasonably good solution on sensitive issues to safeguard the interest of Sikkim and Sikkimese people. If peace and harmony is to prevail in the society, the bond and trust needs to be strengthened. There is no alternative lest we all perish in the Indian ocean.

To sum up, I seek to reproduce a quote by Martin Luther King –

"We must learn to live together as brothers or

We will perish together as fools."

[the writer is a Senior Advocate]

UDID enrolment at Singtam

GANGTOK, 24 AUG [IPR]:

The UDID outdoor publicity and enrolment drive initiated by the Department of Social Justice and Welfare reached Singtam in East District today.

The enrolment programme was held at the Singtam Nagar Panchayat community hall and had the presence of Joint Secretary, SJ&W Department, Abinash Rai, Chief Medical Officer, East, Dr Tempa Gyaltzen, and other officers of the two departments

During the pro-

gramme, participants were briefed about the nationwide project being implemented with a view to create a national database for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and issue Unique Disability Identity Cards to all people with disabilities.

The issued card will not only bring transparency, efficiency and ease of delivering the Government benefits to the PwDs but also ensures uniformity.

It may be informed that the online enrolment will be done by

the officials of SJ&WD in coordination with the Health Department/ District Hospital, after the submission and verification of the mandatory documents.

It was informed that a total of 337 beneficiaries were enrolled today. All the left-out beneficiaries can enroll at the office of the Chief Medical Officer, East, District Hospital Singtam.

Officials informed that the next enrolment drive for UDID will be held at Mangan on 26 August.

Amit Shah to inaugurate Indian Dairy Cooperative Conclave in Gangtok



SUMMIT REPORT

NEW DELHI, 24 AUG:

Union Home and Cooperation Minister, Amit Shah, will inaugurate the Indian Dairy Cooperative Conclave scheduled to be held in Gangtok in Nov/December, an official press release informs.

National Cooperative Dairy Federation of India (NCDFI) chairperson, Mangal Jit Rai, is report-

ed to have extended the invitation to Mr Shah at a meeting in New Delhi and received a positive response.

Mr Rai states that the conclave is being organised on the theme, "Resilient Indian Dairy Cooperatives - Exploring the Challenges and Opportunities," to discuss various trends in the dairy cooperatives sector and chalk out future strategic

policy direction.

The conclave will be attended by as many as 2,000 delegates representing various segments of the dairy cooperative sector, international organizations like Food and Agriculture Organizations of United Nation (FAO), ILO, Central and state governments, and para-statal organisations involved in dairy cooperative development.

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

The Novel Coronavirus (nCoV) is new strain of Coronavirus that originated in Wuhan, China. Notorious for mutating quickly and acquiring new qualities, it is a rising epidemic that was previously not identified in humans.

Symptoms of nCoV	Precautions to Prevent nCoV
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fever ● Difficulty in breathing ● Dry Cough ● Severe acute respiratory syndrome ● Pneumonia - like symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wash your hands often with soap. ● Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer ● Observe good personal hygiene. ● Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands. ● Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms. ● Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats. ● Avoid travel to nCoV affected places. ● Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.
Treatment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition. ● No vaccinations available as of now ● Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected 	



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-Toll free no. 104

District surveillance Officer

EAST : 7028372100

WEST : 9583297809

NORTH : 9641957468

SOUTH : 7407691463

New STNM

AMS : 9434711402

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

LTVC writes to Governor demanding 15% job reservation for LTs

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 AUG:

The Limboo Tamang Voluntary Committee [LTVC] has couriered a memorandum to the Governor demanding that job reservation of Limboos and Tamangs be reverted to 15% from the 13% it has been reduced to.

An LTVC press release claims that the DoP Secretary had informed the organization two and a half years back that a committee will be

formed to look into this demand, and since nothing has happened since, the Governor was being petitioned.

The release goes on to claim that after emailed applications seeking an appointment with the Governor went unanswered, LTVC couriered its memorandum to the Governor today.

The release also announces that if the matter is still not settled, LTVC will move the High Court.

Pakyong District Formation committee convenes third review meeting

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 24 AUG:

The Pakyong District Formation Committee convened its third meeting at the ADC Office at Pakyong today, a press release informs. Pakyong, it may be recalled, is slated to become a district in April 2022, and today's meeting, attended by MLAs Bishnu Khatiwada and Em Prasad Sharma and advisors, chairpersons, party in-charges, ADCs of Pakyong and Gangtok, and SDMs of Pakyong, Rango and Rongli, BDOs, officials from



line departments, "was convened to discuss the major needs," the release informs.

Open discussions were held, the release adds, with the MLAs heralding district status

for Pakyong as a monumental development and crediting Chief Minister PS Tamang for it.

VIT – the only Private Institution of India in Shanghai Ranking 2021

SUMMIT REPORT
VELLORE, 24 AUG:

The Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) has been ranked 801-900 among world Universities in the 2021 Shanghai Ranking also known as Shanghai ARWU (Academic Ranking of World Universities). Shanghai Ranking has published a list of 1000 top Universi-

ties of the world this year where 14 Indian universities from India have made it in the list.

Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bangalore has been listed in the 401-500 brackets globally while it tops the list of Indian universities. As per the Shanghai Ranking website, VIT is the only Private institution of In-

dia which has made it to the list this year. Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) has been ranked by the Shanghai Ranking since 2019.

The ranking is based on research publications in top quality journals, highly cited researchers, top rated international awards and prizes. Shanghai Ranking is rec-

ognized by the Government of India as one of the ranking agencies for Institution of Eminence (IoEs).

VIT Chancellor, Dr G Viswanathan said, this is because of the hard work and quality maintained by our faculty members, research scholars and UG/PG students in teaching and research.

Meat stalls in Gyalshing inspected for quality and hygiene

GYALSHING, 24 AUG (IPR): As per a press release issued by the Additional Director-cum-Nodal Officer, Dr Narad M Cintury, Dept of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services (AH&VS), West, a joint inspection was conducted by Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services Department, Directorate of Fisheries, Police Department, Gyalshing Municipal Council and UD & HD Department at Gyalshing Bazar, on 23 Aug, 2021.

The team was led by Dr Pramada Gurung (VO, Gyalshing), Dr Shraddha S Tirwa (VO, Gyalshing), Duchan Lepcha (AD, Fisheries), Keshangla Sherpa (SI, UD&HD), Tashi Bhutia (Accountant, GMC) and police personnel.

The inspection was

mainly conducted for monitoring the meat quality, meat stall hygiene and to ascertain whether the meat vendors were complying with the notified selling price of different categories of meat in the district. On inspection, it was found that many shops had not displayed the rate and trade licence at their respective meat shops. Hence, they were instructed to display the rate and trade licence along with Buddhist holidays Calendar circulated by Ecclesiastical Department for strict observance of prohibition of killing of animals throughout the state of Sikkim and strictly to comply with it.

Furthermore, the team inspected various animal feed shops to ensure that only feed and



feed supplements were being sold. The shopkeepers were informed not to sell any antibiotics and prescription drugs without proper licence.

A total of 11 meat shops and 3 animal feed shops were inspected.

The programme was conducted upon the di-

rection of Additional Director, Narad M Cintury (AH & VS), West.

ViewPoint

Pandemic and Civil Liberties

SALEM LEPCHA

The Covid-19 pandemic dislocated the long held societal norms of community living and galvanized the world into anxieties and trepidations. The rapidity with which the time tested old social norms got displaced by the new protocols of lockdowns, face-masking and social distancing is remarkable. This whole eventuality drove masses into panic and cornered them against their will inside the silos of fear, built probably, upon their own ignorance.

Its aftermath has taken disparate forms, ranging from dichotomy amongst scientific communities (no universal consensus on its actual origin or its existence), lull in economic activities, psychological laterals (spike in cases of mental illness among the Covid-positives), and civil rights issues and to the sense of distrusts and now muffled rumblings against heavy handedness of the state. In this milieu, what has made itself obvious is that the people under the siege of fear become a 'willing slave' to arbitrary actions of the power that be. The ensuing deliberation is an endeavor to understand the phenomenon from layman's perspective.

DELUSION OF MADNESS

When mass psychosis engulfs the greater portion of the society; beyond certain threshold, people's compliance to the fiat becomes close to absolute. Carl Jung, a famed Swiss psychologist, defines mass psychosis as, roughly put, an epidemic of madness that occurs when a society loses touch with reality and descends into delusions. At least that's what a perceptive individual can glean from the behaviors that got molded into norms post Covid. It's baffling to observe how public's common sense is stripped off of its ability for reasoning at the face of crisis. Various literatures on human psychology have attested to a great degree that people's capacity for reasoning takes a hit in an ecosystem of fear. Analogous to frenzied mob that has no conscience, the society burdened under the mass-psychosis loses its innate capacity to reason and hence is rendered vulnerable to the mercy of the whim. What one ridicules in his privacy, he condones it in social spaces or at least appears to be.

One observer puts it this way, "When an individual is flooded with negative emotion, such as fear and anxiety, he or she is very susceptible to a descent into the delusions of madness". A case thus, can be made wherein it can be argued that the atmospher of fear is what weakens the common-sense as is reflected in the sudden descent of society into inflated-hysteria due to pandemic related fear and anxiety. Fear primes a population for 'menticide' which historically has served the backdrop for the totalitarian states to coerce the compliance out of its citizens at a great cost often at the cost of gradual attrition of civil liberties.

INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM

The idea that individual's interests and safety should be subservient to that of the collectives or society is an old charmer. A seemingly abstract terms like majority or collective or society when imparted with an identity of an 'entity' that exists in reality is what philosophy labels as "fallacy of misplaced concreteness". As the push for global vaccination drive approaches its crescendo, those holding their ground

against 'mandatory inoculation' is destined to be put under duress and clamped up with possible legal troubles from the states to coerce them to change their stand under the presupposition for 'greater good of society'- majority over minority, that is.

It's therefore, pertinent to ask, who exist for whom? Does society exist for individual or its individual who exists for society? One way of looking at it is exploring the idea of 'locus of pain or suffering', which by any stretch is not going to be a lifeless society, or invisible majority or senseless collectives. Carl Jung points out: "Society is nothing more than a term, a concept for the symbiosis of a group of human beings. A concept is not a carrier of life."- Practice of Psychotherapy. Rather the locus of an idea, pain, suffering or experimentation will be an individual- a living, moving and a capacity-for-pain individual. The unintended consequences of vaccines (which is possible since vaccine is in 'experimental' stage) would need a host for it to manifest and it will be served by no other than an individual's physiology and his psyche. As such, one can conclude that the individual commands greater value vis-à-vis society or a collective, more so in the context of vaccination drive.

TUG OF WAR: BODILY AUTONOMY OR STATE'S MONOPOLY

Any social or political unit, be it, a family, society, community or a nation derives its legitimacy from individuals. Their existence as a social unit or political construct is incumbent upon the social needs of an individual coupled with his consent. From this lens one needs to view the idea of 'mandatory vaccination'. Considering the doubts over 'efficacy of vaccines' coupled with the 'immunity from liability' clause that vaccine makers are seeking from the government, it behooves well for one to consider the pros and cons properly before consenting for the jab.

The sacrosanct idea of personal decision making (in this case, to be vaccinated or not) therefore, is best left under sovereignty of an individual without being co-opted by the power elites- be it the state, doctors, bureaucrats or anyone who are in the reign of things-by their mandates. But, the greater cause of concern is the willful submission of people at the hour of crisis to the chimera of 'greater-good', at the expense of adverse consequences that may follow upon inoculation. This submissive disposition of the masses is further accentuated when a sense of uncertainty remains. As new SARs variants emerge one after the other as one school of thought suggests, the sense of closure is pushed further prolonging the uncertainties.

It's clear from the above analysis that the impact on the collective intellect and the entropy that's gradually emerging in state-citizens interface is a cause of concern. It remains to be seen how this tussle between public's bodily autonomy and state's mandates plays out in the coming days. But, one thing is certain, that the world is in for a great geopolitical and economic churn which by all estimations is going to be of substantial repercussions. On the face of it, the litmus test awaits individuals who contrary to the prevailing narratives would fortify their reasoning against the mass psychosis and chose to live by it at the risk of being labeled: neurotic.



HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE DEPARTMENT GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

No: 01/H&FWD/EC/21

Dated: 24.08.2021

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

On behalf of the Governor of Sikkim, Additional Chief Engineer, Health & Family Welfare Department, Government of Sikkim invites percentage rate bids in two system through e-procurement from appropriate contractor class registered with the SPWD, Government of Sikkim. The bids should be submitted online through the website www.sikkimtebder.gov.in for the work as listed below:

Package No.	Name of works	Bid security 2.5% of the bid value (Rs. In Lakhs)	Bid value (Rs. In Lakhs)	Cost of tender/ bid form (Rs. In Lakhs)	Completion period
1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Construction of Urban Primary Health & Wellness Center (UPH&WC) in Darap, West Sikkim	7.51	300.54	0.50	18 months.

The bidders should have necessary portal enrolment with his/her own Digital Certificate. The Bank Receipt/Demand Draft & EMD in the form of hardcopy for tender fee is to be submitted to the Sr. Accounts Officer, Health & FW Department latest by 23.09.2021 by 4.30 pm. Those bids even if submitted online but whose hard copy is not received by the Sr. Accounts Officer within the given time frame will not be considered for bidding.

The date and time of pre-paid meeting, submission of completed bid document is as under:

i)	Publishing of Online Tender in e-procurement portal	:	25 th August, 2021
ii)	Uploading of bidding documents in e-procurement portal	:	25 th August, 2021
iii)	Last date & time for seeking clarification regarding bids	:	14 th September, 2021 till 1500 Hrs.
iv)	Last date for online Submission of completed bids	:	25 th September, 2021 till 1600 Hrs.
v)	Date of opening of Technical bids	:	27 th September, 2021 at 1100 Hrs.
vi)	Place of opening of bids	:	Office of Additional Chief Engineer, Health & Family Welfare Department, Government of Sikkim, Secretariat Block-B, East Sikkim.

For all details on the bid visit www.sikkimtender.gov.in.

R.O. No. 155/IPR/Pub/Classi./21-22

Date: 24.08.2021

Sd/-

**Additional Chief Engineer
Health & Family welfare Department
Government of Sikkim.**

सख्या / भा०ति०सी०पु० / 11वीं वाहिनी / शि०पा० / पब्लिक ऑरेशन / 2021-

कार्यालय सेनानी 11वीं वाहिनी
भारत तिब्बत सीमा पुलिस बल
गृह मंत्रालय / भारत सरकार
मार्फत-99 सेना पत्रालय

दिनांक-

-: नीलामी सूचना :-

11वीं वाहिनी, भा०ति०सी०पुलिस बल पैगोंग नार्थ सिक्किम द्वारा दिनांक-27.08.2021 को 1000 बजे टी०सी० जंगल साल्गाडा में 906 लीटर बन्ट ऑयल की नीलामी की जानी है। यह नीलामी सूचना भा०ति०सी०पु० बल की वेबसाइट से भी डाउनलोड/पढ़ सकते हैं।

नीलामी की शर्तें निम्नानुसार हैं :-

- नीलामी दिनांक-27.08.2021 को प्रातः 1000 बजे की जायेगी सामान का निरीक्षण उसी दिन 0900 बजे से 1000 बजे तक टी.सी. जंगल, साल्गाडा कैम्प परिसर में किया जायेगा।
- बोलीदाता को बोली शुरू होने से पूर्व जमानत के तौर पर धरोहर राशि रु० 2500/- (रुपये दो हजार पौंच सौ मात्र) जमा करवाना होगा जो उसी दिन नीलाम प्रक्रिया समाप्ति के उपरान्त वापस कर दिए जायेंगे।
- उच्च बोलीदाता को अपने खर्च पर भण्डार को उसी दिन पूरी राशि जमा करने के उपरान्त टी०सी० जंगल साल्गाडा (पश्चिम बंगाल) से ले जाना होगा अन्यथा नालामी के बाद उच्च बोलीदाता द्वारा स्टोर को न ले जाने पर स्टोर को किसी भी कारण से हुई हानि या क्षति के लिये वाहिनी जवाबदार नहीं होगी। इसके अतिरिक्त उच्च बोलीदाता यदि नीलाम भण्डार को ले जाने में असमर्थ रहता है तब दूसरे दिन से रु० 500/- प्रति दिन अतिरिक्त चार्ज जगह के लिए भुगतान करना होगा।
- किसी भी प्रकार की कोई शर्त या ऑफर स्वीकार नहीं किया जायेगा।
- अन्य शर्तों को नीलामी स्थल पर ही नीलामी से पूर्व बताया जायेगा।
- विभाग द्वारा किसी भी प्रकार का एन०ओ०सी०, आर०सी० या अन्य कोई दस्तावेज दिया/जारी नहीं किया जायेगा।
- अरनेस्ट मनी नीलामी से पहले जमा की जाएगी, जिसको सफल बोलीदाता द्वारा लगाई गई अरनेस्ट मनी की धनराशि को कम कर शेष राशि को जमा करना होगा एवं अन्य बोलीदाता को बोली समाप्ति के उपरान्त वापस कर दी जाएगी।
- बोलीदाता के पास स्क्रीप डीलर रजिस्ट्रेशन सर्टिफिकेट होना अनिवार्य है। रजिस्टर्ड बोलीदाता हो इस नीलामी में भाग ले सकेंगे। नीलामी के समय आवश्यक दस्तावेजों डीलर रजिस्ट्रेशन सर्टिफिकेट एवं पहचान पत्र (लैटर आई०डी०, पैन कार्ड, आधार कार्ड या अन्य एड्डस प्रुफ इत्यादि) की मूल प्रति साथ लाना अनिवार्य होगा तथा सफल बोलीदाता द्वारा भण्डार की नीलामी के उपरान्त दस्तावेजों की स्वप्रमाणित छायाप्रति टी०सी० जंगल साल्गाडा कार्यालय में जमा कराना होगा।
- नीलामी के उपरान्त सफल बोलीदाता द्वारा लगाई बोली पर जी०एस०टी० दर, जो भी लागू हो सहित की राशि को बालान के माध्यम से जमा कर प्रति इस कार्यालय में 03 कार्य दिवसों में जमा करनी होगी।

भवदीय

सेनानी

11वीं वाहिनी, भा०ति०सी०पु० बल

davp 19112/11/0084/2122

Halla Bol!

Not just noise, Sikkim needs deeper deliberations on sexual harassment

Politics, unfortunately, has lost all empathy. This human trait was lost the moment politics became about power. For anyone looking for sensitivity or nuance in the current social-media virality to hit Sikkim – that nasty business featuring allegations of sexual harassment and trading of allegations, there can be only one bit of advice – crawl back into the cave of make-believe where politics actually meant anything more than a pursuit of power. Every person, party and agency involved in this episode has presented itself in very poor light, but that was expected given their respective track-records; but what has been inexcusably unfortunate is the contemptuous misogyny being casually, or may be calculatedly, thrown at the person dragged into this mess, and who, despite having explained as having nothing to with the police complaint, continues to be dragged into it, but more on that later.

As for the “case,” most people with WhatsApp and a tendency to gravitate towards conspiracies and whispers have known for more than a month that an explosive allegation was about to be leveled against a “powerful” local leader who has his share of bhakts and haters. The promised explosion never happened until a few days back when it was thrown into the public domain by Sikkimey Naagarik Sansthan. It has been open house since then and typically for Sikkim, there is much noise but no real discussions. To begin with, it was ethically wrong to go public with a complaint of sexual abuse without having checked with the victim first. It is not enough to claim that the victim was not named if copies of the FIR were shared without even the fig-leaf of the signature or name blocked. Given that these whispers had already been circulating for more than a month, there is no excusing the half-baked manner in which it was made public. What happened as a result was that the person being presented as the victim of sexual harassment ended up becoming a target of victim-shaming and her name dragged through the usual muck of offensive comments targeted at women. It was almost as if groups which had stoked this story were disappointed when it did not deliver the bang expected of it and shot off another salvo. This led to a situation where the person being projected as the victim had to convene a press conference to clarify that she had nothing to do with the complaint which she rejected as a forgery. That is where the story should have ended. But it did not. This was too scandalous a story, for an otherwise staid Sikkim, to go back into the bottle until everyone, their uncle and aunt had left a comment either exposing their bias or going after the supposed victim for not having given them the showdown they all wanted. As mentioned earlier, if there is a victim in this episode, it is the person who has already disowned the complaint but continues to be commented upon. The rest of the players, including the police, only reaffirmed their ineptitude.

But now that the topic of sexual harassment has arrived in the public domain, it is important that it is discussed more meaningfully. Irrespective of which side of the political spectrum one sits on, what the public reaction to this episode has revealed is that sexual harassment, the kind in which a person with power and influence forces sexual favours, does not surprise anyone. People might get disgusted by it, even condemn it, but it does not surprise them that such things happen. And this is not to suggest that the present episode might have occurred because that was settled the moment the person projected as the victim and the complainant rejected the complaint as a forgery. What one is talking about here is what the general response to the allegation says about Sikkim and whether women are really looked out for here. Think about it, for a state with as few “officially” reported incidents of sexual harassment at the workplace as Sikkim, a majority of the people here should have been shocked by the allegations and the uproar would have been about how such a thing could have happened. But that is not really how Sikkim reacted. One does not notice surprise or shock in people’s response to the allegations; it is almost as if people see nothing new in such abuse of power. And this should force the society at large to finally stare into the mirror which reflects their engagement with empowering women enough to say no and report uncomfortable advances especially when they are made by people leveraging their power and influence in society, office or politics. The fact that not too many people with no skin-in-the-game were not wondering “how could this happen,” proves that Sikkim has grown inured to such offences and if those in office are genuine in their commitment towards women’s empowerment, one aspect they need to look into is creating institutions [“real” institutions, not the token kind that governments make so much noise about] which women can approach with complaints and expect justice without being harangued or ignored, or worse still, “victimized.” Think about it, how should a society react if a crime does occur and the “victim” backs out? Accuse the victim of selling out or looking within and wondering where it failed in convincing victims that the society has their backs?

The present episode has unfortunately been bereft of nuance or even an iota of self-awareness, and if one is looking towards the same players to address the larger issues the nature of the allegations or official and public reactions to it have flagged, then one is looking in the wrong direction. Sikkim has to look inwards, question itself and then build public consensus to force the political will to notice what women go through here, at home and at workplaces, and then build institutions to support them and their right to dignity.

Students are returning to school with anxiety, grief and gaps in social skills – will there be enough school mental health resources?

SANDRA M. CHAFOULEAS & AMY BRIESCH

THECONVERSATION.COM

Even before COVID-19, as many as 1 in 6 young children had a diagnosed mental, behavioral or developmental disorder. New findings suggest a doubling of rates of disorders such as anxiety and depression among children and adolescents during the pandemic. One reason is that children’s well-being is tightly connected to family and community conditions such as stress and financial worries.

Particularly for children living in poverty, there are practical obstacles, like transportation and scheduling, to accessing mental health services. That’s one reason school mental health professionals – who include psychologists, counselors and social workers – are so essential.

As many kids resume instruction this fall, schools can serve as critical access points for mental health services. But the intensity of challenges students face coupled with school mental health workforce shortages is a serious concern.

KEY ISSUES

As school psychology professors who train future school psychologists, we are used to requests by K-12 schools for potential applicants to fill their open positions. Never before have we received this volume of contacts regarding unfilled positions this close to the start of the school year.

As researchers on school mental health, we believe this shortage is a

serious problem given the increase in mental health challenges, such as anxiety, gaps in social skills and grief, that schools can expect to see in returning students.

Anxiety should be expected given current COVID-related uncertainties. However, problems arise when those fears or worries prevent children from being able to complete the expected tasks of everyday life.

Meanwhile, school closures and disruptions have led to lost opportunities for students to build social skills. A McKinsey & Co. analysis found the pandemic set K-12 students back by four to five months, on average, in math and reading during the 2020-2021 school year. Learning loss also extends to social skills. These losses may be particularly profound for the youngest students, who may have missed developmental opportunities such as learning to get along with others.

And it’s important to remember the sheer number of children under 18 who have lost a loved one during the pandemic. A study published in July 2021 estimates that more than 1 out of every 1,000 children in the U.S. lost a primary caregiver due to COVID-19.

HIRING MORE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

Hiring more school psychologists may not be simple. The National Association of School Psychologists recommends a ratio of 1 psychologist for every 500 students. Yet current estimates suggest a national ratio of 1-to-1,211. It’s like having to teach a class of 60 instead of 25

students.

Shortages are particularly severe in rural regions. There are also not enough culturally and linguistically diverse school psychologists.

Scarcity of school mental health personnel affects important student outcomes from disciplinary incidents to on-time graduation rates – especially for students attending schools in high-poverty communities.

To address these shortages, legislators have proposed federal bills that aim to expand the school mental health workforce. Meanwhile, local school districts and state education agencies are using American Rescue Plan funds to increase mental health training, hire additional mental health staff or contract with community mental health agencies.

PREPARING ALL SCHOOL PERSONNEL

We believe increasing the number of mental health providers in schools is important. Workforce increases, however, must be coupled with attention to readying all school personnel to cope with students’ anxiety, grief and gaps in social skills.

For example, when it comes to anxiety, schools can help students build both tolerance of uncertainty and coping skills through strategies such as seeking support, positive reframing, humor and acceptance. School mental health professionals can train other staff members on simple strategies to use in a nurturing relationship. Long-term benefits such as sense of belonging can happen when each student has an in-

formal mentoring relationship that offers emotional nurturance and practical help.

More schools have adopted social-emotional learning curriculums in recent years. However, additional time may be needed to teach and reinforce basic skills such as taking turns and sharing.

In addition, school mental health personnel can assist with defining a clear process for identifying who needs help, and be ready to share resources about grief and how kids respond to loss.

PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Even with these efforts, schools cannot be expected to identify and meet all young people’s mental health needs. Strong partnerships with families and communities are critical.

Seeking input from families may offer valuable information about student experiences. This might be done, for example, by adding questions to beginning-of-the-year student forms. Knowing how families are experiencing loss or insecurities, for example, can help school mental health personnel plan for and target supports.

The youth mental health crisis requires a comprehensive response. We believe the priority should be ensuring equitable access to a mental health professional through school settings.

[Sandra M. Chafouleas is Professor of Educational Psychology, University of Connecticut; Amy Briesch is Associate Professor of School Psychology, Northeastern University]

Where do Afghanistan’s refugees go?

TAZREENA SAJJAD

THECONVERSATION.COM

Images of thousands of Afghans desperately trying to flee their country following a hasty U.S. withdrawal have provoked an international outcry.

As of Aug. 22, 2021, some 6,000 U.S. troops were working to evacuate U.S. military, American citizens and Afghans who are approved for Special Immigrant Visas. SIVs are a special program to protect Afghans who risked their lives working for U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

Germany, France, Italy and the U.K. are conducting smaller evacuation efforts for their nationals and some Afghans.

The pace of these poorly planned evacuations has been slow. They are taking place amid chaos in Kabul, where crowds are being confronted by violence from members of the now-ruling Taliban and U.S. forces and facing checkpoints that are near-impossible to pass.

Shaharzar Akbar, who leads the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, called the situation “failure upon failure.”

As a scholar specializing in forcible displacement and refugees, I see this harrowing scene unfolding within a broader context of Afghanistan’s long-standing displacement crisis. This includes an unequal sharing of refugees between the developed world and economically disadvantaged countries.

A MUTED US ROLE

The U.S. Refugee Act of 1980 standardized the procedures for admitting refugees – people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution – and put in place a rigorous vetting process. But over the past 40 years, U.S. acceptance rates for refugees worldwide have fallen significantly – from 200,000 admitted in 1980 to less than 50,000 in 2019.

Over the past 20 years, the U.S. admitted more than 20,000 Afghan refugees – an average of roughly 1,000 per year. But during the 2020-2021 fiscal year, just 11,800 refugees from around the world settled in the U.S. – among them were only 495 Afghan Special Immigrant Visa recipients. That number seems tiny compared to the approximately 20,000 Afghans who are currently in the pipeline waiting for a SIV and the additional 70,000 Afghans — including applicants and their immediate family members — who are eligible to apply.

EUROPE HOSTS FEW AFGHAN REFUGEES

For decades, Afghans have also migrated or fled to Europe. Between 2015-2016, 300,000 of them arrived on the continent. They were the second-largest group of refugees and asylum-seekers after Syrians. Asylum seekers are people seeking refugee status, but whose claim has yet to be evaluated.

The Afghan population across the European continent remains small and unevenly distributed. Up until the Taliban takeover of Kabul in August 2021, many Afghans were facing deportations. Germany is the largest European host, followed by Austria, France and Sweden.

For the first three months of 2021 about 7,000 Afghans were granted permanent or temporary legal status in the European Union. They are distributed between Greece, France, Germany

and Italy, with smaller Afghan contingents in other EU states.

Australia – based on its 2016 census – has approximately 47,000 Afghans who are permanent residents, some of whom began arriving as early as 1979. Approximately another 4,200 Afghans have received temporary protected status.

DISPLACED WITHIN AFGHANISTAN

This still leaves an enormous number of Afghans who are displaced without a permanent home. More than half a million have already been displaced by the violence so far in 2021 according to the U.N. refugee agency. Some 80% of nearly a quarter of a million Afghans forced to flee since the end of May are women and children.

As of 2021 and prior to the current crisis, at least 3.5 million Afghans remained uprooted within Afghanistan because of violence, political unrest, poverty, climate crisis and lack of economic opportunity.

AFGHAN REFUGEES IN PAKISTAN

The vast majority of Afghan refugees do not settle in the West.

Pakistan, which shares a 1,640-mile land border with Afghanistan, has long absorbed the largest number of Afghan refugees even though it is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol. Within two years of the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, following the conflict ignited by the rise of the Mujahideen, 1.5 million Afghans had become refugees. By 1986, nearly five million Afghans had fled to Pakistan and Iran.

Since March 2002, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR, had repatriated nearly 3.2 million Afghans, but in April 2021, the United Nations reported that more than 1.4 million Afghan refugees remained in Pakistan due to ongoing violence, unemployment and political turbulence in Afghanistan.

Iran also remains a significant host for Afghans, with nearly 800,000 registered refugees and at least two million more who are unregistered. Smaller numbers of Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers are in India (15,689), Indonesia (7,692) and Malaysia (2,478).

Turkey – the world’s largest refugee host, with over 3.8 million registered Syrian refugees – has 980 registered Afghan refugees and 116,000 Afghan asylum-seekers.

AS IT STANDS TODAY

The latest figures from the AP show that more than 47,000 Afghan civilians and at least 66,000 Afghan military and police forces have died in the 20-year-old Afghanistan war

The security situation in the country had been deteriorating in recent years. According to Brown University’s Cost of War Project, an increasing numbers of Afghans have been killed as a result of



crossfire, improvised explosive devices, assassinations by militant groups including the Taliban, night raids by U.S. and NATO forces and U.S.-led airstrikes.

Even prior to the Taliban takeover of Kabul, civilian casualties had risen by 29% in the first quarter of 2021 compared with the same period in 2020. A U.N. report from July 26, 2021 found a 37% increase in the number of women killed and injured, and a 23% increase in child casualties compared with the first quarter of 2020.

With the Taliban takeover of Kabul, there is a growing concern for the safety of Afghanistan’s women and girls, ethnic minorities, journalists, government workers, educators and human rights activists. Many Afghans desperate to leave remain outside Kabul and far from any airport.

U.S. evacuations will likely end once all Americans are out of Afghanistan. A few other western countries have committed to taking in small numbers of refugees, including Canada (20,000) and the U.K. (20,000 over 5 years).

Still, adoption of hard-line policies and anti-refugee sentiments across much of Europe means that relatively few Afghans will find sanctuary on the continent. Austria and Switzerland have already refused to take in large numbers of Afghans. Turkey, already straining with refugees, said it does not want to become “Europe’s refugee warehouse.”

Other countries committing to take in Afghans temporarily in small numbers include Albania, Qatar, Costa Rica, Mexico, Chile, Ecuador and Colombia. Uganda, which already hosts 1.5 million refugees, mainly from South Sudan, has also agreed to take in 2,000 Afghans temporarily.

Ultimately, most Afghans able to leave the country will do so not in an aircraft, but on foot into Pakistan and Iran. Pakistan, already strained by its own economic and political struggles, will once again likely be the largest host for the most recently displaced Afghans.

But given that border crossings in the region are difficult and dangerous, the vast majority of uprooted Afghans will remain within Afghanistan’s borders. Their considerable humanitarian needs, economic and political challenges, security concerns and resistance to the Taliban will shape the next chapter of the country’s history.

[The writer is Senior Professorial Lecturer of Global Governance, Politics and Security, American University School of International Service]

Bengal Forest Department celebrates 25th birthday of Royal Bengal Tiger 'Raja'

Raja, a male Royal Bengal Tiger is the oldest tiger in captivity in the state and hails from Sunderbans. Kolkata: The 25th birthday of Raja, a male Royal Bengal Tiger currently lodged at South Khayerbari Animal Rescue Centre in north Bengal was celebrated in a grand manner on Monday by the state forest department and state zoo authority, a senior forest official said.

He is the oldest tiger in captivity in the state and hails from Sunderbans.

The forest department on its website has posted updates about Raja, conducted an online quiz on tigers, and an online drawing competition for children.

Asked if a cake will be cut on this special occasion, the official smiled.

"There will be Happy Birthday posters and balloons outside his enclosure," he added.

The animal had been rescued after being injured in a crocodile attack while crossing a creek in Sajnekhali area of Sunderbans, the official told PTI.

"After rescuing him



on this date in 2008, we had assessed that he was then 12 years old. We celebrate August 23 as his birthday," the official said.

He said treating Raja, who spent his time in the wilderness for 12 years of his life, was a challenge as one of his limbs was severed in the crocodile attack.

Initially, he was treated in Alipore Zoo hospital, and later shifted to the South Khayerbari Animal Rescue Centre in

Alipurduar district, 800 km from Kolkata.

"Credit goes to Raja for adjusting to the situation and to the diet of mutton with liver. At times, chicken is given to add variety. He should also be credited for learning to walk with a prosthetic limb in place of the severed one, under the watch of our keepers, other forest personnel who were guided by a four-member team of vets," he said.

When asked for the reason behind christening him 'Raja', who responds to the name when addressed by keepers, the official said "he looks majestic and Royal. Hence he is called Raja, the king of the jungle."

"As I said, it was a challenge for us to bring him back to the prime of health after his grave injury and also to make a wild animal, who was used to roaming around in the wild and preying

on deer and monkeys, adapt to the conditions in captivity. We are happy that we were successful on both counts," he added.

State Forest Minister Jyotipriyo Mallick is known to take keen interest in the tiger.

Raja is the solitary tiger in the rescue centre that presently houses several leopards.

The South Khayerbari Animal Rescue Centre is under Jaldapara Forest division.

5.1 magnitude quake in Bay of Bengal

CHENNAI, AUG 24 (PTI): A 5.1 magnitude undersea earthquake over 300 km from here in the Bay of Bengal was reported on Tuesday, the National Center for Seismology said.

The quake, reported at 12.35 pm, was at

a depth of 10 km in the Bay of Bengal and was about 296 km south-east of Kakinda, Andhra Pradesh and 320 km east north-east of Chennai, it said. While there were no immediate reports of any damage, the tremors

were felt in some parts of the city, residents said.

People living in areas like Adyar and neighbouring Thiruvannamipur said they felt mild tremors, with some Twitter users saying they could even see the furniture 'shaking'.

4 girls flee govt-run shelter home in Assam



SILCHAR (ASSAM), AUG 24 (PTI): Four girls, including three minors, have fled a government-run shelter home in Silchar town of Assam's Cachar district, officials said on Tuesday. The girls reportedly escaped from Ujjwala Shelter Home on Monday

morning by breaking the lock of the main door, in-charge of the facility Gaurab Chanda said.

The facility operates under a project of the Women and Child Development Ministry.

Chanda said he has lodged an FIR at Rangirh police station.

He claimed that the girls, three of whom were 17 years of age, have eloped with their lovers.

Police have started enquiry. They will be brought back soon, Cachar Superintendent of Police Ramandeep Kaur told PTI.

Devasthanam board won't be allowed to harm interest of priests: Uttarakhand Chief Minister

The Devasthanam Board, which came into existence during the tenure of Trivendra Singh Rawat, controls the management of 51 temples, including Chardham.

Dehradun: Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Tuesday said the Devasthanam Board will not be allowed to harm the interest of priests and "hak-hakookdharis", who have traditional rights on resources in and around the temples, at any cost.

The Devasthanam Board, which came into existence during the tenure of Trivendra Singh Rawat, controls the management of 51 temples, including Chardham.



Dhami gave the assurance to a delegation of priests, "hak-hakookdharis" and members of Panda Samaj led by Devprayag MLA Vinod Kandari and former MLA from Kedarnath Shaile Rani Rawat.

Senior BJP leader Manohar Kant Dhyani

has been asked to submit his recommendations to the state government only after listening to pilgrimage priests (teerth-purohitis) and knowing their apprehensions, Dhami said.

"The state government will listen to all stakeholders and ad-

dress their concerns. The Devasthanam Board will not be allowed to hurt the interest of teerth purohitis, hak hakookdharis and Panda Samaj," Dhami said.

"There should be no communication gap. A solution will be found through talks. All doubts

will be addressed and amendments made wherever required," he told the delegation.

Before the implementation of Badrinath master plan begins, everyone concerned will be heard, he assured.

Teerth purohitis, hak hakookdharis and members of Panda Samaj have been agitating for months demanding dissolution of the Devasthanam Board, saying it infringes upon their rights.

2 new cases push COVID-19 tally of Andamans to 7,559



PORT BLAIR, AUG 24 (PTI): The COVID-19 tally of Andaman and Nicobar Islands rose to 7,559 on Tuesday as two more people tested positive for the infection, a health bulletin said.

Both the new patients have travel history, it said.

The Union territory now has 10 active cases, while 7,420 people have been cured of the dis-

ease, and 129 patients have succumbed to the infection so far.

The administration has tested over 4.72 lakh samples for COVID-19 thus far, the bulletin said, adding that the positivity rate stood at 1.60 per cent.

A total of 3.34 lakh people have been vaccinated to date, of whom over 1 lakh have received both doses.

Suspected arms dealer killed in Assam police encounter

KARIMGANJ (ASSAM), AUG 24 (PTI): A suspected arms dealer, who was arrested along with an accomplice, died in a police encounter in Assam's Karimganj district when he allegedly tried to flee custody, an officer said on Tuesday.

With this incident, the toll due to purported police encounters in the state rose to 21 since the new BJP-led government under Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma assumed charge in May, while at least 31 people were injured as they allegedly attempted to es-

cape from police custody.

According to the police officer, the suspect, Nurul Islam, was being taken to Niralagaon in Badarpur on Monday night in search of one more of his accomplices when he allegedly tried to escape.

Police had to open fire on Islam, who died after sustaining bullet injuries, the officer added.

Islam was arrested along with another suspected arms dealer by a joint team of the police and the BSF in Badarpur on Monday. Four 7.65 mm pistols along with

magazines and one pen pistol were recovered from their possession.

The frequent police encounters in the state have prompted opposition parties to allege that the Assam Police has turned trigger happy under the Himanta Biswa Sarma government.

A section of the civil society has also accused the police of indulging in "open killings".

The CM has, however, maintained that the state police has "full operational liberty" to fight against the criminals within the ambit of law.

Taking suo moto cognisance of the encounters, the Assam Human Rights Commission (AHRC) had on July 7 asked the state government to institute an enquiry into the circumstances that led to the death and injury of the accused in police encounters since May.

Earlier, a New Delhi-based lawyer from Assam, Arif Jwadder, had filed a complaint with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) against the Assam Police for the series of encounters.

Encounter in J-K's Sopore, three militants killed

SRINAGAR, AUG 24 (PTI): Three militants were killed in an encounter with security forces in Sopore area of Baramulla district in Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday, police said.

Security forces launched a cordon and search operation at Pethseer in Sopore

area late on Monday night following information about presence of militants there, a police official said.

He said the search operation turned into an encounter in the early hours of Tuesday as the ultras opened fire.

Three ultras were

killed in the exchange of fire with security forces, the official said, adding the identity and group affiliation of the slain were being ascertained.

Meanwhile, Inspector General of Police, Kashmir zone, Vijay Kumar said the total number of ultras killed in this

year has crossed 100.

"Today, by the collective efforts of @JmuKmrPolice, @ChinarcorpSI, @crpfndia and people of #Kashmir have led to #neutralisation of more than 100 #terrorists in the year of 2021 so far in Kashmir division," Kumar said in a tweet.

VIDEO NEWS SECTION

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FC Bengaluru United to make debut at Durand Cup



BENGALURU, AUG 24 (PTI): FC Bengaluru United is set to make its debut at the prestigious Durand Cup after being invited to compete in the tournament, scheduled to be played in Kolkata from September 5 to October 3.

Bengaluru United is one of the sixteen teams invited to play in Asia's oldest football competition, which is returning after a one-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It's a great honour for FC Bengaluru United

to be invited to participate in the Durand Cup and we couldn't be more delighted," said Gaurav Manchanda, Owner, FC Bengaluru United in a media release.

"The Durand Cup is a marquee event in the Indian footballing calendar, and we are proud to be part of it. It is also a testimony to the growing potential of FC Bengaluru United.

"We have been on the ascendancy over the last three years and being part of such a prestigious tournament can only help propel us forward

on our growth journey," FC Bengaluru United are in Group A along with tough opponents Mohammedan Sporting Club, Central Reserve Police Force Football Club and Indian Air Force.

The I-League 2nd Division side displayed stellar form in domestic competitions earlier this year, which saw them being crowned BDFA Super Division Champions.

"We are prepared to bring through strong performances to merit our inclusion," said Richard Hood, Head Coach,

FC Bengaluru United.

"As professionals we constantly seek opportunities to compete at the highest levels possible and in the short history of our club this presents a big platform to everyone involved, especially the players out on the pitch to fulfil the ambitions of United."

The sixteen teams in the Durand Cup include five clubs from the ISL, six clubs from the Indian Armed Forces, three clubs from the I-League and two clubs from the I-League 2nd Division.

Test NASCAR's unvaccinated as a protocol compromise

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP): More than a year ago, NASCAR was one of the first major sports to resume competition in the pandemic, touting strict protocols as it headed back to the track.

The one thing NASCAR wouldn't do back then was test its competitors for COVID-19, citing the short supply of tests just two months into the pandemic.

Fifteen months later, NASCAR still doesn't test its drivers and crews — even though tests are easily available and daily testing could help the series as it barrels toward the playoffs with separate rules for the vaccinated and unvaccinated.

There's been little attention on the hesitancy throughout the NASCAR garage, where only five Cup Series drivers have publicly disclosed they've received at least one shot. Joey Logano, one race away from launching his bid for a second championship, only got his shot last week because driver Corey LaJoie was sidelined under protocols that seemed to catch the drivers off guard.

LaJoie couldn't race because he had close contact with someone else who had tested positive for the virus under protocols that have been updated to follow CDC guidelines since vaccines became widely available. Drivers wondered why a negative test wasn't good enough for LaJoie to race, raising enough questions that NASCAR held a Friday call to clarify its policies.

Following the CDC recommendations led to the creation of separate guidelines depending on

vaccination status. An unvaccinated driver who has close contact exposure must quarantine seven days and receive a negative test on Day 5 before they can return to the garage.

That means an unvaccinated driver will miss a race following close contact exposure, their title hopes dashed. A vaccinated driver can return to the garage with proof of a negative test taken 3-5 days after the close contact. There is no automatic benching, no requirement to miss a playoff race.

The drivers don't think different rules depending on vaccination status is fair, and since LaJoie's benching they are unlikely to be forthcoming about possible exposures and contact tracing. But there is a simple compromise available for NASCAR: daily testing.

Want to get in the garage? Show your proof of vaccination or arrive early enough to be rapid tested each day.

There is no reason why it can't be done as Roger Penske proved this spring leading into the Indianapolis 500. Penske didn't force anyone to be vaccinated, he simply said if you aren't, then you better build time into your schedule each day to be tested before he'd let you into Gasoline Alley.

IndyCar had some hesitant drivers and Penske gave them a choice. The alternative was certainly inconvenient for anyone trying to get to work on time, but it worked. IndyCar confirmed Monday all of its drivers are all fully

vaccinated and the entire paddock is at more than 90%. The clinics run at Indianapolis Motor Speedway have vaccinated more than 92,000 people.

An IndyCar driver has yet to miss a race because of a positive COVID-19 test or contact tracing or any other virus-related protocol. The series is also open to guests and fans in the garage; masks are only required indoors and the industry is functioning business as usual.

In NASCAR, LaJoie was the fourth Cup driver since the start of the pandemic to miss a race because of COVID-19 protocols. He sat out Sunday at Michigan, where Kyle Busch was without his spotter and Brad Keselowski and Denny Hamlin were each down a tire changer either because of confirmed positive tests or NASCAR virus protocols.

All of this as NASCAR inches back toward stricter procedures. Drivers are canceling appearances and some teams have halted guest access in their suites. Penske and his executives stayed home Sunday rather than make the 90-minute drive from Bloomfield Hills to Michigan International Speedway to watch Ryan Blaney win for Team Penske in their own backyard.

Busch, Hamlin and Keselowski are all qualified for the playoffs, which begin Sept. 5 at Darlington Raceway in South Carolina, and all learned at Michigan that NASCAR's protocols can have a trickle-down effect on an entire team.

When LaJoie wasn't

permitted to race, Logano decided Team Penske has too many employees counting on the success of the No. 22 team for the driver to jeopardize it for everyone over his vaccination status.

NASCAR has said it doesn't want to mandate vaccines and that's unlikely to change. But the leaders can make it harder on those resisting the shot by making the unvaccinated pass an on-site test before accessing the garage. If a testing program seems cost prohibitive, NASCAR should bill each person who requires testing.

This goes beyond the drivers. Everyone who wants access to the garage should be held to the same set of guidelines, either proof of vaccination or a test at the track.

The right to make your own choice is often cited in the heated debate over vaccinations, and daily testing not only preserves the right to choose not to be vaccinated but also makes the garage a little safer. Everyone wants a return to some sort of normalcy and NASCAR was getting there through June and July, when pit road reopened to sponsors, and guests and drivers mingled again with the fans.

But as the number of positive virus cases has surged due to the delta variant, NASCAR looked at its vaccination rates and decided it had to start tightening the rules again. Nobody wants to miss a race, no team wants its season upended, and NASCAR certainly doesn't want an outbreak that could lead to a possible shutdown.

Indian para athletes primed for unprecedented medal haul in Tokyo Paralympics

TOKYO, AUG 24 (PTI): The best ever Olympics just went by for India and the country looks good for its best ever Paralympics with an unprecedented 54 inspirational athletes eyeing a medal haul that might just surpass the double digit figure for the first time at the showpiece, starting here on Tuesday.

The likes of star javelin thrower Devendra Jhajharia and high jumper Mariyappan Thangavelu -- both 2016 Rio Paralympics gold winners -- will lead the biggest ever contingent with India expecting at least 15 medals, including five gold.

India is competing in nine sports in the Paralympics, which is being held under strict safety and health protocols due to the COVID-19 pandemic that has led to few countries pulling out.

The expectation of unprecedented success would not be wide off the mark as at least four Indians are ranked top of the world while six are at number two and around 10 are at number three in global standings.

India has won 12 medals in total in Paralympics since it first took part in 1972 and if the projected success materialises, the country could be among the top 25 in the medal tally this time, as against 43rd in 2016 with 2 gold, 1 silver and 1 bronze.

With the government loosening its purse strings for para-athletes and many of them preparing well at various Sports Authority of India facilities across the country, the Paralympians look set to add to the euphoria of sporting success following the best ever medal haul in the Olympics which ended on August 8.

India secured seven medals, including one gold and two silver medals, during the Olympics.

Jhajharia, who lost his left hand due to electrocution as a child, is going strong even at 40 and is aiming for a hat-trick of gold medals in the F-46 category after finishing



on top of podium in 2004 and 2016. He is current world record holder in the event.

F-46 classification is meant for athletes who have upper limb deficiency, impaired muscle power or impaired passive range of movement.

Mariyappan, who was permanent disabled at the age of five when a bus crushed his right leg below the knee, is another para athlete seeking to defend the gold he had won in 2016 in T63 high jump, though he is currently ranked world number 2.

He will also hold the country's flag during the opening ceremony on Tuesday.

World champion Sandeep Choudhary (F-64 javelin throw) is the third gold medal contender from the 24-strong para athletics team. He is world number one and world record holder also.

Other medal prospects from para-athletics are reigning world champion Sundar Singh Gurjar and Ajeet Singh (also in F-46) and Navdeep Singh (F41) -- all para-javelin throwers.

The Paralympic Committee of India is hoping to win 10 medals from para athletics.

Para-athletes are given a classification depending on the type and extent of their disability. The classification system allows athletes to compete against others with a similar level of ability.

Badminton will make its debut at the Paralympic Games in Tokyo and India have some of the brightest medal prospects.

World No. 1 and multiple-time world champion Pramod Bhagat is a top gold medal contender in men's SL3 event.

World No. 2 shuttler Krishna Nagar (SH6) and Tarun Dhillon (SL4) are other para shuttlers who are expected to do well. The experienced Parul Parmar, a two-time former world championship gold medalist, and young Palak Kohli (SL3-SU5), whose one hand did not develop properly at birth, will carry high hopes of returning with a medal in the women's category.

India is also banking on its shooters and archers to rise to the occasion in Tokyo. 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).

The other sports Indians are participating in are Para Canoeing, Para Swimming, Para Powerlifting, Para Table Tennis and Para Taekwondo.

India's campaign begins from August 25 with para table tennis players Bhavina Patel and Sonal Patel in action. As both are not strong contenders for a podium finish, India's first medal is expected to come on Friday when para archery events begin. Once

para athletics events begin on Saturday, a medal rush is expected to start.

With the Paralympics -- set to be declared open by emperor Naruhito -- being held in the backdrop of surging COVID-19 cases in Tokyo and other parts of Japan, the health and safety protocols have been strict.

Just like in the Olympics, only six officials are allowed to take part in the opening ceremony on Tuesday and five athletes, including flag bearer Mariyappan, will form the 11 member Indian group.

The other athletes are discus thrower Vinod Kumar, javelin thrower Tek Chand and powerlifters Jaideep and Sakina Khatun.

The Indian contingent will be the 17th to enter the Olympic Stadium after Iran.

In view of the surging COVID-19 cases, fans have been banned from the Paralympics, just like the preceding Olympic Games, though the organisers are still trying to allow children in some venues.

The Olympics had seen more than 11000 athletes from 205 countries (plus Olympic Refugee Team) competing in 339 events in 33 sports.

The Paralympics will feature around 4500 athletes from 163 countries but competing in 540 events in 22 sports.

The number of events are more in Paralympics as there are different classifications depending on the level of disability.

Boucher apologises for singing offensive songs with his teammates

JOHANNESBURG, AUG 24 (PTI): Former South Africa wicketkeeper and current head coach Mark Boucher has apologised for being part of the group that sang offensive songs and used nicknames for coloured teammates in his playing days.

After he was accused of racism by some of his teammates, including Paul Adams, Boucher submitted a 14-page affidavit to Cricket South Africa's Social Justice and Nation-Building (SJN) committee, reported ESPNcricinfo.

Adams, in his testimony to SJN, had claimed Boucher was among the teammates who made racial slurs on him in a song. Boucher said he did not give Adams any nickname.

In his response to the allegations, Boucher said he and his teammates should have been more sensitive.



"I apologise unreservedly for any offensive conduct, real or perceived, that has been attributed to me," Boucher wrote in his affidavit.

"We, the team, coaching staff, selectors and CSA, during the period in question, should have been more sensitive and created an environment

where all members of the team could raise and talk about these issues without allowing them to fester, as they clearly have."

"...With the benefit of hindsight and maturity, appreciate that I may have said or done things as a young man that offended some of my teammates. For this

I apologise sincerely and unreservedly."

He also said that he "deeply regrets and apologises for the part I played in joining in with my team-mates in singing offensive songs or using offensive nicknames".

Boucher played 147 Tests and 295 ODIs for South Africa.

Greece to put new restrictions on unvaccinated individuals

ATHENS, GREECE (AP): Greece’s government plans to impose new testing requirements and attendance restrictions on people who are not vaccinated against COVID19, the health minister announced Tuesday. From Sept. 13 until March 31, all private and public sector workers without a certificate proving vaccination or recovery from COVID19 within the last six months will have to undergo one rapid test per week, Health Minister Vassilis Kikilias said.

Two tests per week will be required for people working in academia, tourism, restaurants, cafes, bars, and in entertainment productions, as well as school and university students, he said.

The tests will be conducted at private facilities, with the 10-euro cost to be paid by the tested individuals. The government intends to cover the costs of testing school students.

Stressing that more than 90% of the COVID-19 patients in Greece’s intensive care units are unvaccinated, Kikilias said that entertainment venues and businesses serving food



and drinks will only admit customers who are vaccinated or recently recovered from the disease, with verification checks conducted at entrances through an app that scans health certificates.

Unvaccinated people will be able to enter indoor movies, theaters, museums, archaeological sites and gyms only with proof of a negative rapid test conducted up to 48 hours before. Venues will have the right to admit only vaccinated customers, the minister said.

Masks will be mandatory for everyone in indoor public areas and in outdoor crowded areas.

Proof of vaccination, recovery, or a negative rapid test within the past 48 hours will also be required to travel by plane, train, boat or long-distance bus for anyone age 12 and over. For children ages 5-12, a self-test is acceptable, with the results uploaded to a government website.

Kikilias also stressed there would be no grace period for the previously announced suspension from work as of Sept. 1 of health care and care home workers who refuse to get vaccinated.

Greece has been seeing a steady increase in confirmed coronavirus cases and deaths, as well as hospitalizations and intubations, over the past several weeks. ICU beds for COVID-19 patients are more than 68% full, while regular COVID 19 wards are 45% full, health ministry figures show.

More than 11 million vaccine doses have been administered, with 5.6 million people now fully vaccinated. Vaccines are freely available for anyone over 12.

“Thanks to the vaccine, we will not convert our hospitals again to prioritize those who are seriously ill with COVID,” Kikilias said, adding that hospitals will continue caring for all cases.

“The contrary would be both unfair and unethical towards the majority of citizens who have been vaccinated and are suffering from other illnesses, and of course have a right to proper care,” he said.

Greece, which has a population of around 11 million, has reported over 560,000 confirmed cases and 13,422 deaths in the pandemic.

Ukraine leader stresses NATO, EU ties on Independence Day



KYIV, UKRAINE (AP) — Ukraine’s president on Tuesday urged closer ties between the ex-Soviet nation and NATO and the European Union in a speech marking the 30th anniversary of Ukraine’s independence.

Ukraine celebrated its independence day on Tuesday with a military parade and massive festivities in the capital Kyiv. Opening the parade, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that a strong Ukraine is “a country that dreams ambitiously and acts decisively.”

“Such a country becomes NATO’s Enhanced Opportunities Partner; such a country is officially supported by others when it applies to join the European Union,” Zelenskyy said.

Ukraine didn’t officially become independent until the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991. But like most of the 15 former Soviet republics, it declared its sovereignty immediately after the failed hard-line coup against reformist Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

On Aug. 24, 1991, the Ukrainian parliament adopted the Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine, reestablishing the country’s independence after more than 70 years of being part of the Soviet Union. Less than four months later, Boris Yeltsin and leaders of other Soviet republics declared the Soviet Union defunct and Gorbachev stepped down on Dec. 25, 1991.

The 30th anniversary of Ukraine’s independence came as the country is locked in a bitter tug-of-war with Russia, which in 2014 annexed Crimea and has since been backing a separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine, and Kyiv’s efforts to shore up support among Western nations.

“Territories may be occupied, but one can’t occupy the people’s love for Ukraine. One can create a desperate situation and make people get (Russian) passports, but one can’t issue passports for their Ukrainian hearts,” Zelenskyy said Tuesday. “If some people in Crimea and Don-

bass (region in eastern Ukraine, controlled by Russia-backed separatists) are afraid to talk about it, it doesn’t mean they are afraid to think about it. They will come back, because we’re family.”

Delegations from 46 countries and blocs, including 14 presidents, attended the parade in Kyiv. The day before, they took part in the Crimean Platform summit called by Ukraine to build up pressure on Russia over the 2014 annexation of Crimea that has been denounced as illegal by most of the world.

The center of Kyiv on Tuesday turned into a large venue for concerts and other festive events marking the anniversary. Thousands of people flocked to the central Maidan square, which over the past 30 years has been a rallying point for Ukrainians.

The popular uprising of 2013-2014, which ousted pro-Russia President Viktor Yanukovich and triggered the years-long confrontation with Moscow, started on Maidan square.

Leaked footage shows grim conditions in Iran’s Evin prison

DUBAI, AUG 24 (AP): The guard in a control room at Iran’s notorious Evin prison springs to attention as one by one, monitors in front of him suddenly blink off and display something very different from the surveillance footage he had been watching.

Cyberattack, the monitors flash. Other guards gather around, holding up their mobile phones and filming, or making urgent calls. General protest until the freedom of political prisoners” reads another line on the screens.

An online account, purportedly by an entity describing itself as a group of hackers, shared footage of the incident, as well as parts of other surveillance video it seized, with The Associated Press. The alleged hackers said the release of the footage was an effort to show the grim conditions at the prison, known for holding political prisoners and those with ties abroad who are often used as bargaining chips in negotiations with the West.

In one part of the footage, a man smashes a bathroom mirror to try to cut open his arm. Prisoners and even guards beat each other in scenes captured by surveillance cameras. Inmates sleeping in single rooms with bunk beds stacked three high against the walls, wrapping themselves in blankets to stay warm.

We want the world to hear our voice for freedom of all political prisoners, read a message from the online account to the AP in Dubai.

Iran, which has faced criticism from the United Nations special rapporteur over its prison con-



ditions, did not immediately respond to a request for comment sent to its U.N. mission in New York. Iranian state media in the country have not acknowledged the incident at Evin.

However, several embarrassing hacking incidents have struck Iran amid ongoing tensions over its accelerated nuclear program and as talks with the West over reviving the atomic accord between Tehran and world powers remain on hold.

Four former prisoners at Evin, as well as an Iranian human rights activist abroad, have told the AP that the videos resemble areas from the facility in northern Tehran. Some of the scenes also matched photographs of the facility previously taken by journalists, as well as images of the prison as seen in satellite photos accessed by the AP.

The footage also shows rows of sewing machines that prisoners use, a solitary confinement cell with a squat toilet and exterior areas of the prison. There are images of the prison’s open-air exercise yard, prisoners’ bathrooms and offices within the facility.

Much of the footage bears timestamps from 2020 and this year.

Several videos without the stamp show guards wearing facemasks, signaling they came amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Though there is no sound in the videos, they speak to the grim world faced by prisoners at the facility. One sequence shows what appears to be an emaciated man dumped from a car in the parking lot, then dragged through the prison. Another shows a cleric walking down the stairs and passing by the man, without stopping.

Guards in another video are seen beating a man in a prisoner’s uniform. One guard sucker-punches a prisoner in a holding cell. Guards also fight among themselves, as do the prisoners. Many are crammed into single-room cells. No one wears a facemask.

The account that shared the videos with the AP calls itself The Justice of Ali, a reference to the Prophet Muhammad’s son-in-law who is revered by Shiites. It also mocks Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

It claimed to have hundreds of gigabytes of data from what it described as a hack conducted several months ago. It did not answer questions about who was involved in the leak.

The account linked the timing of its leak to the recent election of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, a hard-line acolyte of Khamenei involved in the execution of thousands in 1988 at the end of the Iran-Iraq War.

The Evin prison is a stain on Raisi’s black turban and white beard, the message on the screens in the prison control room also read.

Iran, long sanctioned by the West, faces difficulties in getting up-to-date hardware and software, often relying on Chinese-manufactured electronics or older systems. The control room system seen in the video, for instance, appeared to be running Windows 7, for which Microsoft no longer provides patches. That would make it easier for a potential hacker to target. Pirated versions of Windows and other software are common across Iran.

In recent months, Iran’s railroad system was targeted by an apparent cyberattack. Other self-described hacker groups have published details about Iranians alleging hacking on behalf of theocracy. Meanwhile the most-famous cyberattack the Stuxnet virus that destroyed Iranian centrifuges at the height of Western fears

over Tehran’s program is widely suspected to have been an American and Israeli creation.

Evin prison was built in 1971 under Iran’s Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. It housed political prisoners then and later, after the 1979 Islamic Revolution swept the shah from power.

While in theory under the control of Iran’s prison system, Evin also has specialized units for political prisoners and those with Western ties, run by the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, which answers only to Khamenei. The facility is the target of both U.S. and European Union sanctions.

After Iran cracked down on protesters following the disputed 2009 re-election of hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, many of the arrested protesters ended up in Evin. Lawmakers later pushed for reforms at Evin, following reports of abuses at the prison which led to the installation of the closed-circuit cameras.

Problems continued, however: Reports by U.N. Special Rapporteur Javvad Rehman repeatedly named Evin prison as a site of abuses of prisoners. Rehman warned in January that Iran’s entire prison system faced long-standing overcrowding and hygiene deficiencies” and insurmountable obstacles for responding to COVID-19.

Prisoners of conscience and political prisoners have contracted COVID-19 or experienced symptoms, with many denied testing or treatment or suffering unnecessary delays in receiving test results and treatment, he wrote.

US WWII veteran reunites with Italians he saved as children

BOLOGNA, ITALY (AP): For more than seven decades, Martin Adler treasured a black-and-white photo of himself as a young American soldier with a broad smile with three impeccably dressed Italian children he is credited with saving as the Nazis retreated northward in 1944.

On Monday, the 97-year-old World War II veteran met the three siblings — now octogenarians themselves — in person for the first time since the war.

Adler held out his hand to grasp those of Bruno, Mafalda and Giuliana Naldi for the joyful reunion at Bologna’s airport after a 20-hour journey from Boca Raton, Florida. Then, just as he did as a 20-year-old soldier in their village of Monterenzio, he handed out bars of American chocolate.

“Look at my smile,” Adler said of the long-awaited in-person reunion, made possible by the reach of social media.

It was a happy ending to a story that could easily have been a tragedy.

The very first time the soldier and the children saw each other, in 1944, the three faces peeked out of a huge wicker basket where their mother had hidden them as soldiers approached. Adler thought the house was empty, so he trained his machine

gun on the basket when he heard a sound, thinking a German soldier was hiding inside.

“The mother, Mamma, came out and stood right in front of my gun to stop me (from) shooting,” Adler recalled. “She put her stomach right against my gun, yelling, ‘Bambinis! Bambinis! Bambinis!’”

“That was a real hero, the mother, not me. The mother was a real hero. Can you imagine you standing yourself in front of a gun and screaming ‘Children! No!’” he said.

Adler still trembles when he remembers that he was only seconds away from opening fire on the basket. And after all these decades, he still suffers nightmares from the war, said his daughter, Rachele Donley.

The children, aged 3 to 6 when they met, were a happy memory. His company stayed on in the village for a while and he would come by and play with them.

Giuliana Naldi, the youngest, is the only one of the three with any recollection of the event. She recalls climbing out of the basket and seeing Adler and another U.S. soldier, who has since died.

“They were laughing,” Naldi, now 80, remembers. “They were happy they didn’t shoot.”

She, on the other

hand, didn’t quite comprehend the close call.

“We weren’t afraid for anything,” she said.

She also remembers the soldier’s chocolate, which came in a blue-and-white wrapper.

“We ate so much of that chocolate,” she laughed.

Donley decided during the COVID-19 lockdown to use social media to try to track down the children in the old black-and-white photo, starting with veterans’ groups in North America.

Eventually the photo was spotted by Italian journalist Matteo Incerti who had written books on World War II. He was able to track down Adler’s regiment and where it had been stationed from a small detail in another photograph.

The smiling photo was then published in a local newspaper, leading to the discovery of the identities of the three children, who by then were grandparents themselves.

They shared a video reunion in December, and waited until the easing of pandemic travel rules made the trans-Atlantic trip possible.

“I am so happy and so proud of him. Because things could have been so different in just a second. Because he hesitated, there have been generations of people,” Donley said.

The Big Pic



BUSINESS BOMBSHELL! Christine Quinn wore a lavender suit with a matching bra as she headed off to film *Selling Sunset* in Los Angeles.

'Thalaivii' to hit cinemas in September



MUMBAI, AUG 24 (PTI): Biographical drama "Thalaivii", based on the life of actor and former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu J Jayalalithaa, is set to release theatrically on September 10.

The multilingual film, featuring Kangana Ranaut in the lead, was earlier scheduled to release in April but was pushed due to the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic in the country.

Zee Studios posted the film's poster along with its new release date on its official Instagram page.

cial Instagram page.

"With a personality queen size, Jayalalithaa's story has always belonged to the big screens! Embark on her inspiring journey from being a cine star to becoming one of the most influential CMs in theatres near you on 10th September," the caption read.

Directed by Vijay and written by KV Vijayendra Prasad, "Thalaivii" also stars Arvind Swami, Madhoo, Prakash Raj, Jisshu Sengupta, Bhagyashree, and Poorna.

Apart from "Thalaivii", Ranaut, 34, will also be seen in action film "Dhaakad" and "Tejas".

I'm a realist, don't get swayed by success: Manoj Bajpayee

NEW DELHI, AUG 24 (PTI): As somebody who has seen several ups and downs in his close to a three-decade-long career in the entertainment industry, actor Manoj Bajpayee says he has learned to not let his professional achievements or failures define him as an artiste.

The 52-year-old actor, who has received praise for the second season of his web series "The Family Man", said he tries to make career choices that offer him as well as his audience a "unique" experience.

"It's been 26 years in the industry and I have been through so many emotions, excitement, success, and failures. All this has just become a part of my life. They don't define my craft or me as an actor or person. I'm a realist and don't get swayed by success or depressed by failures," Bajpayee told PTI.

An Amazon Prime Video show, "The Family Man" first premiered in 2019 and marked the critically-acclaimed actor's successful foray into digital space.

The show is an addition to Bajpayee's ever-growing list of memorable performances, which includes films like "Satya", "Shool", "Gangs of Wasseypur" franchise, "Special 26", "Aligarh" and "Bhonsle".

His portrayal of a middle-aged investigation agent Srikant Tiwari in the action-drama series, created by filmmaker duo Raj Nidimoru and Krishna DK, has raised the bar of the audience's expectations from him, but the actor said he does not feel pressured by that.

"Audience expectations are welcome,



they should expect good work from me as I also do the same from myself. I believe in having the strict discipline and doing a good job every time I step out to work. But I don't feel compelled by the expectations.

"When I choose a project, I always look for what new things I can offer as a performer and how I can make this whole experience unique for myself. And if I'm excited about something I'm doing, that excitement gets transferred to the audience. This is what I'm known for and people's appreciation has proved that I'm on the right path," he said.

The actor was recently honoured by the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne 2021 (IFFM) with the best actor award in a series for The Family Man 2.

He said he has had a humbling ex-

perience to see his character get recognised globally. The actor credited the show's writers for creating a memorable character in Srikant Tiwari.

"It's so amazing that a series which started in 2019 is still going and creating so much buzz all over the world. It's among the four most popular shows in the world and we are getting so much honour because of this series. It's so humbling," he added.

Bajpayee, who was recently seen in ZEE5 thriller "Dial 100", said he is currently in the middle of rehearsals for a project and will soon leave for Kerala for shooting.

"I will be shooting back-to-back projects till July next year. I've to finish my pending commitments and then only I will sign new projects," he said.

Mayim Bialik to guest host 'Jeopardy!' after Richards' exit

LOS ANGELES (AP): "Jeopardy!" is back to guest hosts after the resignation of Mike Richards, and actor Mayim Bialik will return as the first one up.

Sony Pictures Television announced Monday that Bialik will take the podium long occupied by the late Alex Trebek for three weeks of episodes.

The 45-year-old "Big Bang Theory" and "Blossom" actor was one of many guest hosts who filled in for two-week stints in the past season after the death of Trebek, who hosted the show for 37 seasons. Trebek died in November at age 80 of cancer.

When Richards was announced as the new host on Aug. 11, producers also revealed that Bialik would have an ongoing role as emcee for



"Jeopardy!" prime-time and spinoff series, including a new college championship.

Sony's news release Monday said other guest hosts would follow Bialik and made no mention of a permanent replacement.

Richards, the show's executive producer, had been announced as host just nine days earlier when he stepped down Friday after a report of past demeaning comments he had made about women, homeless people and others on a podcast. Rich-

ards selection after a parade of celebrity contenders was met by a chorus of criticism.

The episodes that Richards taped last week will air when the show returns for its 38th season starting Sept. 13.

Mahesh Manjrekar 'on the road to recovery' following bladder cancer surgery

MUMBAI, AUG 24 (PTI): Actor-filmmaker Mahesh Manjrekar has undergone a surgery after being diagnosed with urinary bladder cancer.

The 63-year-old actor is back home following the medical procedure at the H N Reliance Foundation Hospital here last week.

There were reports that the actor was discharged post surgery.

"Yes, I did get operated on, and I'm on the road to recovery," Manjrekar confirmed to PTI.

The veteran is known for directing acclaimed films like the 1999 drama "Vaastav: The Reality", National Award winning "Astitva" (2000) and the Amitabh Bachchan starrer "Viruddh... Family Comes First".

Manjrekar has also directed the upcoming Salman Khan starrer, "Antim: The Final Truth".

THE DAY AHEAD

ARIES:

You have a dynamic personality, Aries. With today's celestial energy, you should try to avoid expending your energy on pointless conversations. Try to be a little more pragmatic. Consider any possible compromises very carefully. If you stand strong, you will reach your objectives much more quickly.

TAURUS:

Today you could learn a lot from other people who are similar to you, Taurus. They have the ability to get involved easily and go straight to the heart of any problem. The world is in constant flux. You have to question yourself if you want to attain your objectives. Try to be open-minded, adapt to the situation, and act before it's too late.

GEMINI:

The stars will compel you to clarify your position within the collective, Gemini. You have a lot of power when you're part of a group, but you're sometimes clumsy about communication. You can't always succeed. The planets' positions will have a beneficial impact, and you will tend to put your life under the microscope.

CANCER:

Your mind is extra clear today, Cancer. Make sure you're helping yourself as well as others. Take care of any tasks that require a great deal of brainpower. You have a tremendous ability to figure out any mental problem. Communicate with confidence. Contact people you haven't heard from in a while. They will be pleasantly surprised to hear from you.

LEO:

You have the tendency to plan everything, Leo. You need to feel in charge of things. Today you should try to listen to others around you. Let yourself go for a while, even though you aren't used to it. Furthermore, you need to develop your personality. You can do this by opening up to others.

VIRGO:

You're attracted to eccentric individuals with very strong personalities. But realize that behind this attraction lies a very strong need for freedom, Virgo. In your life, freedom is more fantasy than reality. The time has come for you to do some soul searching. Try not to hide from the realities of your life.

LIBRA:

Today will destabilize you, Libra. You're trying to rebuild your life on new foundations. Perhaps should you try to change your point of view. Also, you need to preserve your perception, because it will allow you to adapt to all situations. You need to be fully alert and prepared at all times. Try not to become discouraged.

SCORPIO:

You have a tendency to get very involved in your projects, Scorpio. Today the stars will compel you to clarify your situation. It's already clear that you aren't afraid to work long hours to ensure that your projects end in success. But your entourage will probably have difficulties keeping up with you. You're too full of energy.

SAGITTARIUS:

Today the stars advise you to get back into the swing of things, Sagittarius. You will forget your past frame of mind and be able to prepare for a new adventure. Your vitality will be as strong as it has ever been. You will probably meet someone who has a beneficial influence in the days to come.

CAPRICORN:

There's a certain quality in your personal relationships that motivates you in life, Capricorn. This is one of the reasons why your emotions play an important role in the scheme of things. You're guided by your emotions. Today you will be in the best disposition to meet a lot of people who will give new impetus to your life.

AQUARIUS:

This period is full of difficulties and you will tend to question yourself, especially today. You will start thinking about your personality. Your ego risks bruising, and you will have the greatest difficulty turning your intention into real action. Your sensitivity prevents you from materializing your ideas.

PISCES:

It would be fair to say that you love being recognized, Pisces. Today will enable you to show off your leadership skills. You will organize the day. You will accept your responsibilities and your smarts will help you welcome the day's challenges. But stay humble and keep your actions simple, especially after intense emotions.