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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Sikkim ends brutal week with lower test positivity rate but 15 Covid deaths

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 01 AUG:**

Sikkim today ended a brutal Covid week [26 Jul-01 Aug] which saw it lose 15 lives to the virus. By comparison, the previous week – 19 to 25 Jul – saw much fewer fatalities at six.

To get some more context, while the week ending today saw substantially more tests at 12,359 samples screened against the 10,951 tests carried out in preceding week, this week also saw fewer new cases, 1,594, compared to the 1,768 new cases reported last week. Since Covid deaths are known to occur from

between 10 to 20 days since infection, the fatalities seen this week could be from infections which had set in a week or more prior, and the drop in new cases hopefully suggest that infections are now on their way down.

While this week saw a test positivity rate of 12.89%, the previous week had posted a much higher test positivity rate of 16.14%. Sikkim will be hoping that this graph will continue dropping through the new week and fatalities will also come down.

Meanwhile, as per the Daily Report of Covid-19

in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department at 8 AM this morning, 206 new cases were recorded here in the last 24 hours taking the State's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 to 26,754.

On a more somber note, the State also recorded another Covid death over the same 24 hour period when a Covid patient passed away in home isolation in rural East Sikkim. Sikkim's COVID death toll has now reached 345.

209 of these 345 Covid deaths have occurred in the second

wave since 22 April alone.

Apart from a month-old Covid-positive baby [who also had congenital complications] that Sikkim lost this week, there was a 29-year-old female, three people in their thirties, a person in the early forties, one 90-year-old, three in their eighties, three in their seventies, and a 65 year old that Covid took away from their families this week.

Out of the 206 new cases, 65 were registered in East District, 100 in West District, 37 in South District and four in North District.

These 206 new cases were picked up from the testing of 1,640 samples on Saturday giving Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 12.50%.

In the meantime, Sikkim's figure of recovered cases improved to 22,686 with the discharge of 206 more from home and facility isolation upon completion of their required isolation on Saturday.

There are currently 3,454 active cases of coronavirus in the State, of whom 10 were currently under treatment at ICU facilities of STNM hospital and Central Referral Hospital.

SKM condemns “foolish arguments” being used to mislead people against ONORC in Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 01 AUG:**

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha has asserted that opposition to the flagship programme of the country, the One Nation One Ration Card scheme was very unfortunate.

The party argues that this programme was beneficial for migrant workers and underprivileged families in the state and has welcomed the decision of the State government to give justice to the underprivileged members of the society by implementing the programme in Sikkim.

An SKM press release issued by its secretary, Ranjana Pradhan, states that 16,500 families under Antyodaya Anna Yojana and around 3,24,081 beneficiaries under Priority Households have been receiving essential items at reasonable prices, hence to protest it by making different excuses was to protest against the special privileges provided

to these around 4 lakh underprivileged families.

The release states that there was no loss for Sikkim and its people if migrant workers are benefited with this plan and adds that this would also provide an accurate figure of the number of migrant workers in the State.

The release mentions that migrant workers will be benefited with this scheme until they are in the state and their benefits would be cancelled as they leave the state and they can again take benefits of the programme at their next migrated state.

The release asserts that to claim that the implementation of One Nation One Ration Card would dilute Article 371F was a very foolish argument.

It adds that SKM and its government guarantee the safeguarding of Article 371F. On the same, the party appealed to the people not to get misled or deceived on this issue.

SDF opposes implementation of ONORC in Sikkim, claims it will cause influx and demographic change

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 01 AUG:**

Sikkim Democratic Front spokesperson, MK Subba, today contended that the implementation of One Nation, One Ration Card [ONORC] would increase influx into Sikkim and change the demography of the State.

He demanded that the State government immediately call an all-party meeting along with members of the civil society, intellectuals and all stakeholders to discuss ONORC's implementation in Sikkim and even call a special session of the Legislative Assembly to discuss the matter.

He urged that the Centre rethink and reconsider extending ONORC to Sikkim out of respect for the sanctity of Article 371F and the distinct identity of the State.

Addressing a press conference on Sunday, Mr Subba argued that the 1,420 fair price



shops in Sikkim cannot be put in the same pools as the 5,45,642 FPS across the country and the 91,799 ration cards issued in Sikkim cannot be mixed with 22,64,16,664 ration cards of the country without causing irreparable harm to Sikkim.

He alleged that with the SKM Government's implementation of ONORC, Sikkim has been completely submerged into the mainstream.

He lashed out at the state government for not discussing the matter with political parties and stakeholders before implementation and questioned why the government took such a unilateral decision without considering the consequences.

Mr Subba stated that different states and union territories had submitted affidavits to the Supreme Court on the measures taken by

them for migrant workers during the pandemic and added that although Sikkim had not witnessed horrors suffered by migrant workers elsewhere, the State government has not responded till date to the apex court.

He alleged the government does not have any record of migrant workers or of measures taken for them in the State during the pandemic.

Mr Subba stated that

the ration card was a very important document and was an identity, residence and domicile proof on the basis of which voting rights can also be claimed. He mentioned that ration cards were issued only to Sikkim Subjects and COI holders and voter ID holders in Sikkim.

While mentioning that the clause 40 of the National Food Security Act gives the power to the state to make rules, he said the power has been given power to the state but the state has not done any work but gone ahead and mixed Sikkim with the entire nation.

He said if the state government had placed their side properly, then Sikkim would may have been exempted from the implementation of ONORC. He alleged that there were lots of encroachments on the special status of Sikkim after the formation of the SKM government in the State.

Bhaichung tears into SKM Govt's handling of pandemic, accuses it of arrogance and incompetence



**SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 01 AUG:**

Hamro Sikkim Party [HSP] working president, Bhaichung Bhutia, today accused the State government of having completely failed in its task of managing Covid in the State. He further rued that the SKM Government clearly had no ready plans to provide relief to different affected sections during the latest lockdown.

Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Bhutia pointed out that HSP had extended support to SKM government officially in the hope that it will work for the people of Sikkim especially during the pandemic.

Unfortunately, the SKM government disastrously mishandled the COVID situation as a result of which, everyone, from drivers to farmers to small business owners and other sections suffered enormously during the lockdown, Mr Bhutia alleged.

“The state government never felt it necessary to invite opposition parties, intellectuals, experts and other stakeholders to talk or discuss the Covid situation. Instead, the SKM burned effigies of those who tried to offer suggestions to the government,” Mr Bhutia said, in an obvious reference to how he was

targeted by SKM supporters recently.

For a party which promised change and was democratically elected by the people, SKM has displayed arrogance and dictatorial streaks, he added.

Mr Bhutia stressed that he and his party have only praise and respect for healthcare workers. In this regard, he highlighted while the State Government was “playing politics” by making it difficult for political parties and civil organizations to work on Covid relief, it was the lay people and the health-workers who were suffering as a result. The people were denied extra aid by the government's arrogance and the health-workers, a helping hand to alleviate the pressure on them.

While granting that the pandemic must have upset many plans to the State Government to deliver on its promises, Mr Bhutia argued that there were many issues on which the SKM Government could have still worked and made progress.

On issues of immediate concern, he said that the SKM government should immediately work on its promise to scrap the Land Transfer Act of 2005 to protect Revenue Order No 1 and take immediate action

to reserve seats for Limboos and Tamangs in the state assembly.

He also remarked that the SKM government has visibly failed to bring women to leadership roles and squandered many opportunities when it could have done so.

As for the upcoming Rs 580 crore hospital in Namchi, Mr Bhutia pointed out that this 300-bed hospital project was initiated by the Sikkim Democratic Front government as an upgradation of Namchi District Hospital.

He added that the SKM government cancelled the original project, shifted the proposed project to the veterinary ground and increased the outlay to Rs 580 crore.

“My main concern is the timing and location of this hospital especially when the state is already struggling due to the pandemic. Is this the right time to invest around Rs 580 crore on a new hospital which may take around four years to complete instead to upgrade the existing PHCs and PHSCs and other hospitals,” he questioned.

He mentioned that HSP would meet the Governor to discuss pertinent issues of the State and also confer with opposition parties and organizations to find solutions for the people of Sikkim.

Chamling recounts “historic achievements” of SDF govt, accuses SKM of giving Sikkim nightmares

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 01 AUG:**

Sikkim Democratic Front president, former Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, recounted what he sees as the “historic achievements” of the SDF government during his 25-year chief ministership and dismissed those who claim that nothing good happened during those 25 years as “frustrated” SKM supporters and “opportunists” who benefitted from SDF and are now looking to milk the SKM Govt for privileges.

The neutral commentators who cannot see the “massive heap of evidence” of his government's achievements should get their eyes checked, the former

CM writes in his weekly musings on Facebook. This third category of his critics, he brackets as “self-righteous, self-styled analysts who deliberately refuse to accept reality.”

Mr Chamling then goes on to recount the achievements of his government and concludes, “least known Sikkim became nationally and even globally well-known state during our 25 years of governance. If that's nothing, we have nothing else to say to convince the desperate nay-sayers.”

He then accuses the SKM Government of being unable to protect Article 371F with the resoluteness of the SDF Government and alleges, “Some leaders from outside Sikkim are open-



ly saying that Article 371 F has to be abrogated. Some are demanding all the special privileges reserved for Sikkim Subject Certificate and COI holders to be extended to all Aadhar card holders.”

He rues that the federal system has “experienced a shock-

ing and disturbing change in Sikkim.”

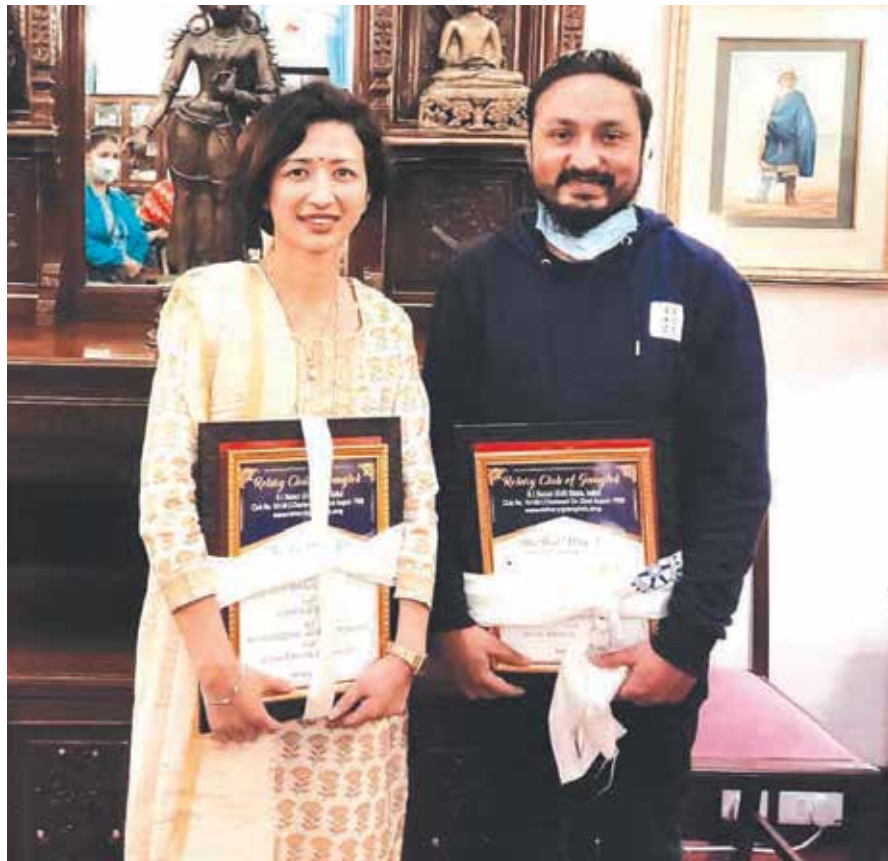
“Never had such a ridiculous thing happened in Sikkim,” he writes while concluding, “Everything changed since the last election. Sikkim is experiencing a nightmarish pariwartan/ change since 2019.”



RAJA SABHA MP CALLS ON TRIBAL AFFAIRS MINISTER

Raja Sabha MP, Hishey Lachungpa, called on Union Minister for Tribal Affairs, Arjun Munda, in New Delhi on Saturday. An official communiqué informs that the MP pressed for early mitigation and possible solution for tribal Status for the 11-plus leftout communities of Sikkim, seat reservation of Limboos and Tamangs in Sikkim Legislative Assembly and regularisation of tribal Lands as per FRA. The Union Minister assured to respond positively to the matters, the release adds.

Rotary felicitates media heroes while installing new office bearers



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 01 AUG:

Dachen Ongmu of Sikkim Express and Pankaj Dhungel of East Mojo were felicitated as "media heroes" by Rotary Club of Gangtok "for the stupendous work they have been doing in the field of journalism."

The felicitation coincided with the 54th installation ceremony of Rotary Club here on 30 July, a press release informs

Mira Oberoi was installed as the new president of the Club in Gangtok while three new members - Noorjahan Khatoun, Mousmi Gupta and Deepak Agarwal were inducted.

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2 new COVID-19 cases push Andamans tally to 7,537

PORT BLAIR, AUG 1 (PTI): Two new COVID-19 cases were reported in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the last 24 hours which pushed the tally in the union territory to 7,537, a health official said on Sunday.

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

COVID-19 free, the official said.

Two more persons recuperated from the disease in the last 24 hours taking the total number of COVID-19 recoveries to 7,400, he said.

The COVID-19 death toll in the union territory remained at 129 as no fresh fatality due to the disease was reported in the last 24 hours.

The union territory administration has tested 4,40,870 samples for COVID-19 till date and the cumulative test positivity rate is 1.71 per cent.

A total of 2,96,254 people have been inoculated, of which 2,02,481 have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine and

93,773 have received both doses of the vaccine, he said, adding that the total population of the union territory is around 4 lakh.

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

- Fever
- Difficulty in breathing
- Dry Cough
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome
- Pneumonia - like symptoms

Treatment

- Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition.
- No vaccinations available as of now.
- Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected.

Precautions to Prevent nCoV

- 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.

If you seek help, you may call :

-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

Road reserves cannot be chained-up as private parking lots: Sikkim Police

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 01 AUG:

DIG-Range Pravin Gurung appealed to the people today to support the ongoing initiatives of Sikkim Police to reform traffic management and thereby provide better and safer road in the State.

He asserted that it was not only the responsibility of the police and that everyone needs to work together for proper traffic management and to make road safe for pedestrians and smooth for vehicular movement.

Addressing a press conference here this afternoon, the DIG shared that the State government was very con-



cerned and serious about road safety and has taken several decisions to reform traffic management in the State.

On the same, he added that Traffic Police has already started work prioritizing pedestrian safety, parking facilities, pollution reduction, solid waste management

on roadsides and other activities.

He mentioned that after receiving complaints and reports, the police carried out a survey of road reserves and confirmed that people were using these as private parking lots by putting chains and locks to mark out private parking in

what are public space.

The Traffic Police survey detected around 300 such instances and public announcements were made in these areas asking people to take down the chains and fences.

When these appeals went ignored, cops were forced to take matters into their own hands and remove the illegal diversions.

The DIG admitted that although many people might feel dismayed at present, in the long run it will be to the benefit of the people.

He added that it will still take some time for the people to adapt to the changes.

Responding to media queries, the DIG said, "We

are not saying that these spaces cannot be used to park vehicles. What we are saying is that these are public places and cannot be taken away for exclusive private parking by erecting roads and putting chains."

He informed that similar initiatives have been underway simultaneously in other parts of the State along with Gangtok.

He informed that police have also been taking action of removing abandoned vehicles from public places.

However, he added that this was not the responsibility only of the police but also of other government departments and individuals.

Drunken quarrel between brothers ends in murder

SUMMIT REPORT MANGAN, 01 AUG:

A reportedly inebriated quarrel between two brothers at Ramthang in North Sikkim on Friday night ended with one of

them dead and the other behind bars on charges of murder.

A bleeding 60-year-old Bikash Limboo was brought to Phodong PHC on Friday night and

declared brought dead. He had allegedly been stabbed by his younger brother, Subash Limboo, 52, following an argument at home. Both were reportedly in an inebriated

state at the time.

The accused is reported to have surrendered at Phodong Police Station where he is said to have confessed to his crime.

Premchand's birth anniv celebrated at Sikkim University

GANGTOK, 01 AUG [PIB]:

The Department of Hindi, Sikkim University, organized a national webinar on Saturday to commemorate the 141st birth anniversary of Munshi Premchand. The programme was organized in collaboration with 'Gagananchal', a Hindi Journal of ICCR, Ministry of External Affairs, Govt. of India.

The chief guest for the programme was Prof Avinash Khare, Vice-Chancellor, Sikkim University.

Prof. Khare in his address elaborated on the

production of Hindi cinema based on the writings of Premchand and mentioned the names of 'Sewasadan', 'Mazdoor', 'Shatranj Ke Khiladi' to name a few. Dr. Kailash Kaushal, Professor, Dept. of Hindi, Jodhpur University mentioned that no Hindi syllabus is complete without the inclusion of the writings of Premchand.

The keynote speaker Dr. Ashish Kandhway, Editor, 'Gagananchal', very rightly mentioned that no other writer matched Premchand in terms of language, style

and simplicity of presentation.

Prof. Subhash, Head of Dept. of Hindi, Kurukshetra University pointed out that Premchand stressed on the development of culture and he depicted the real picture of India and human nature in his novels and stories. Prof. Ram Swaroop Bhatt from Hamburg University, Germany said that that many writings of Premchand are being translated in German language.

Prof. Ash Bahadur from the Department of

Limbu mentioned that he still remembers a story of Premchand- 'Gulli Danda' tht he had read during his school days many many years ago.

Dr. Shri Ram, Librarian, Sikkim University proposed for a data-based centre for Hindi and other languages. Dr. Dhriti Roy from the Department of Chinese, Sikkim University, Dr. Ram from Calcutta University, Dr. Jayshree from Kerala University and many other scholars from Punjab, Sikkim, Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi attended the National Webinar.

STA organizes orientation training on new EVS and English textbooks

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 01 JUL:

Sikkim Teachers' Association, West District, in collaboration with STA, Gyalshing BAC, carried out orientation training on "New Text Book through virtual mode" on 31 July, Saturday, for two subjects - EVS and English, a press release informs.

The orientation

training was chaired by Additional Director, Education Department, Gyalshing, KC Gyatso, and was also attended by Deputy Director, Education Deptt, West, PL Subba, STA, CEC, President KB Bhandari, Executive Members of STA, DEC, West along with Executive Members of BAC, Geyzing.

More than 70 teach-

ers of Gyalshing BAC and some from other BACs attended the session, the release informs.

Tshering Wangdi Bhutia, Lecturer DIET, East, was the resource person for EVS and English was dealt by Larissa Lepcha, SCERT and Roshan Pradhan, PGT, English, Deorali SSS.

The orientation

training was much needed, the release states.

The resource persons made comprehensive presentations covering all features of the new textbook.

The programme began with welcome address by Raju Limboo, Vice President, STA, Geyzing BAC, who is also the Headmaster, Nambu JHS.

Gorkha League's SP Sharma begins indefinite fast demanding Raju Bista bring up Darj issues in Parliament

SMRITA KHAWAS

DARJEELING, 01 AUG:

Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League [Bharti faction] general secretary, SP Sharma, began a indefinite hunger-strike [fast-unto-death] against the Lok Sabha MP for Darjeeling, Raju Bista, demanding that he bring up the issue of Darjeeling Hills in the ongoing monsoon session of Parliament. Since Mr Bista is yet to do so, the ABGL [B] general secretary began his protest hunger-strike.

Representatives from different political parties visited him today to extend solidarity to his protest. Addressing me-

dia-persons at the protest site, Mr Sharma said, "We have been choosing MPs from outside the Hills for several terms but the promises have not been fulfilled thus far. The present MP has already completed half his term but whatever he had promised has not been fulfilled. We just want our MP to clarify why he has not brought up the issue thus far. We want a deadline. And that deadline cannot be 2024. It has to be before 2024. He cannot deliver, he should resign."

Ajoy Edward of Gorkha National Liberation Front shares: "I visited SP Sharma. We believe



our motive is the same - to solve the problem of Darjeeling Hills or to get a PPS or separate state - then why do we keep obstructing each other. I came here to inform that

I am leaving for Delhi tomorrow and it would be beneficial if he could participate in a meeting there instead of going on a fast-unto-death here. We don't want any more

need his leadership not his sacrifice."

Gorkha Janmukti Morcha youth leader Nobal Rai added, "We are always in support of SP Sharma. We believe that until and unless we unite we will not get what we want."

Gorkha Janmukti Morcha-2 spokesperson Keshav Raj Pokhrel, in turn, added, "We are supporting SP Sharma because of the demand he has taken up about tribal status for 11 communities. The BJP government has not fulfilled our demand till now even though the West Bengal CM has recommended it twice to the central government."

Film-crews return to Darjeeling locations



SUMMIT REPORT

DARJEELING, 01 AUG:

Shooting for movies and web series have begun in Darjeeling following relaxations in Covid restrictions and the Hills are slowly returning

to normal. The film-crew of a Tamil movie is in Darjeeling for a 5-day shoot. The 50-member crew is vaccinated and arrived here with RTPCR tests attesting to their Covid-negative status, it is informed.

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AIIMS chief on "Super-Spreader Events", booster doses and vaccines

NEW DELHI, 01 AUG

[NDTV]: The pandemic is not yet over, AIIMS chief Dr Randeep Guleria reminded on Saturday as he spoke to NDTV about the link between the spike in fresh Covid cases in the hill states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh amid tourist rush. He also shared that there's not enough evidence yet on the need of booster jabs.

"Like we have been saying that the pandemic is not over and we need to prevent events that can turn out to be super spreader. We really need to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour. If you have a super-spreader event, the effect usually is evident after three weeks or so because that's the usual period. That's why we are still concerned about non-essential travel," he shared.

After a meeting with top officials of 10 states,

the Union Health Ministry on Saturday urged in a statement that all non-essential travel should be avoided. In the last few weeks, visuals capturing the rush at tourist spots had sparked fresh worry about the spread of the virus, also prompting Prime Minister Narendra Modi to send out an appeal to people.

India has set a goal of vaccinating 108 crore adults by the end of this year. However, several states are still reporting about the shortage of vaccines, including Bharat Biotech's Covaxin. Will the country face a hurdle in achieving the goal? On this, Dr Guleria said, "I don't think it will have a big impact. Also other doses from other giants like Zydus are also expected soon. In coming weeks and months, we will be able to meet our targets. But I would just



encourage people to get vaccinated. Vaccine is the only way we can come out of this pandemic."

While many experts are also talking about booster doses to check the spread of virus, Dr Guleria said there is not enough data about booster jabs yet. "Firstly, there is not evidence yet that we need to have a booster jab."

"Secondly, it's unfair that when a large number of people have not got their first dose, for in-

stance in Africa, that people are taking the third jab, with very little evidence. No one is safe till everyone is safe. If new variants are detected in one part of the world, they might spread to other parts. So we need to make sure that the pace of vaccination is satisfactory in most parts of the world," he further underlined.

He also used the example of China which is witnessing the worst outbreak after Wuhan.

Ready to withdraw FIR against Assam CM: Mizoram govt

AIZAWL, AUG 1 (PTI):

The Mizoram government is ready to withdraw the FIR filed against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Chief Secretary Lalnunmawia Chuango said on Sunday.

Even Chief Minister Zoramthanga did not approve the inclusion of Sarma's name in the FIR, he said.

"In fact, our chief minister did not really approve of mentioning the name of the Assam chief minister in the FIR. He suggested to me that we should look into it," he told reporters.

Chuango said that he will discuss the matter with police officials concerned and remove the name of the Assam chief minister if there is no legal validity to sub-

stantiate the allegations against him.

"I will hold discussion with the police officer who filed the FIR, and if there is no legal fit, we would like to remove the name of Assam chief minister from the FIR," he said, adding that he was unaware of the development when the criminal case was filed against Sarma.

The chief secretary, however, did not mention whether the cases filed against six Assam officials and 200 unidentified police personnel will be withdrawn.

The Mizoram Police booked Sarma, four senior Assam Police officers and two officials on different charges, including 'attempt to murder', 'criminal conspiracy' and

'assault'.

The FIR was registered at the Vairengte police station by its officer-in-charge Lalchawimawia on July 26 soon after the violent clash with the Assam Police.

At least seven people from Assam, including six police personnel, were killed in the violence amid the border dispute between the two North-eastern states.

The four senior Assam Police officers named in the FIR are Inspector General of Police (IGP) Anurag Aggarwal, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Cachar Devoiyoti Mukherjee, Cachar's Superintendent of Police Cahndrakant Nimbalkar, and Officer-In-Charge of Dholai Police Station Sahab Uddin.

Cachar Deputy Commissioner Keerthi Jalli and Cachar Divisional Forest Officer Sunnydeo Chaudhary were also booked.

Besides, the Mizoram Police also registered criminal cases against 200 unidentified personnel of the Assam Police.

The four senior Assam Police officers and two officials were asked to appear before the investigating officer at the Vairengte police station on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the Assam Police also summoned Mizoram's Rajya Sabha MP K Vanlalvena and six others officials, including Kolasib's Deputy Commissioner H Lalthlangliana and Superintendent of Police Vanlalfaka Ralte, for questioning on Sunday.

Mamata Banerjee's nephew Abhishek to visit Agartala

KOLKATA, 01 AUG

[NDTV]: Trinamool Congress general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, after wrapping up Mamata Banerjee's Delhi visit this week, will be in Tripura's capital Agartala on Monday.

The visit comes just days after 23 members of poll strategist Prashant Kishor's organisation I-PAC, or the Indian Political Action Committee, claimed they were detained in Tripura.

The members, in Agartala to carry out surveys for Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool in the BJP-ruled state where elections are due in 2023, were granted unconditional anticipatory pre arrest bail after being confined to their hotel for at least two days.

The police detained them in a hotel citing violations of COVID-19 norms on Sunday night. Their Covid reports came negative on Tuesday night.

The I-PAC incident



appears to have pushed Trinamool's Mission Tripura ahead of 2023.

Earlier, Ms Banerjee had dispatched a team of Trinamool Congress ministers to Agartala to meet with the team.

"Khela has started in Tripura," Bengal Minister Bratya Bose, who visited Tripura, had said referring to his party's popular election slogan "Khela Hobey (Game On)".

Senior MPs Derek O'Brien and Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar had also gone to the Tripura capital and

condemned what they said was the BJP government's attempt to harass the I-PAC team for doing their job.

"It is their democratic right to come to Agartala for work. The BJP is trying to throttle democracy. The BJP is scared of the Trinamool coming to Tripura," Mr Derek O'Brien said.

The BJP played the incident down. Chief Minister Biplab Deb said "Guests are our god and always welcome. Though in Covid times we have to take care."

Mamata Banerjee had personally condemned the incident which took place in Agartala while she was on her visit to Delhi.

Mamata Banerjee's Delhi visit, first since her Bengal win, have raised speculation about a possible united opposition before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Terming her Delhi visit "successful", Ms Banerjee said she will "return to the national capital once every two months".

Supreme Court to hear petitions demanding probe into Pegasus row on Thursday

NEW DELHI, 01 AUG

[NDTV]: The Supreme Court on Thursday will hear a clutch of petitions seeking a special investigation into the Pegasus scandal involving allegations that opposition politicians, journalists and others were targets of Israeli spyware.

A two-member bench, headed by Chief Justice NV Ramana, will hear the petitions. Justice Surya Kant is the second judge on the bench.

Senior journalists N Ram and Sashi Kumar, CPM MP John Brittas and advocate ML Sharma have petitioned the top court to direct the government to disclose

whether it has obtained a licence for the spyware or used it - directly or indirectly - to conduct surveillance of any kind.

The petition says a global media investigation involving several leading publications has revealed that more than 142 persons in India were identified as potential targets for surveillance using Israeli firm NSO's Pegasus spyware, which is sold only to governments.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, ace poll strategist Prashant Kishor, two serving Union Ministers, ex-Election Commissioner, 40 journalists among others were found to be on alleged leaked list of

potential targets.

The forensic analysis of several mobile phones, according to the petitioners, belonging to people listed as potential targets by the Security Lab of Amnesty International have confirmed security breaches.

The media organisations, including The Wire, have reported that 300 phones from India were revealed to be on the list of potential targets on the leaked database of NSO, which supplies the spyware. It is not established, however, that all the phones were hacked.

Since the start of the monsoon session of Parliament on July 19, the

opposition has been demanding a discussion and an independent inquiry led by a Supreme Court judge into the snooping scandal.

Dismissing demands for a probe, the government has maintained that there has been no unauthorised interception by its agencies, adding that allegations regarding government surveillance on specific people has no concrete basis or truth associated with it whatsoever. Government sources on Saturday said more than ₹ 133 crore in taxpayer money has been lost because of Parliament disruptions in the monsoon session

India's 'R-Value' inching up, cause of concern: AIIMS Chief to NDTV

NEW DELHI, 01 AUG [NDTV]:

India's 'R-Value' is inching up, and it's a cause of concern, AIIMS Chief Dr Randeep Guleria told NDTV on Saturday, stressing on the need of aggressive containment strategies in the parts of the country that are witnessing a surge in fresh Covid infections. His remarks come amid concern over a third wave.

"Starting from .96, and going all the way up to 1, the rise in R-Value is a cause of concern. Simply put, this means that the chances of infection spreading from a per-

son, who has Covid, to others have gone up. The areas which are witnessing this surge should bring in restrictions and employ "test, track, and treat" strategy to break the chain of transmission," Dr Guleria explained. The R-Factor is an indicator of the effective reproductive number of a virus.

India on Friday recorded 44,230 fresh infections, the highest single-day surge in three weeks. The fresh spike in cases has been worrying in Kerala and some north-eastern states. Forty-six districts in the

country have a positivity rate of more than 10 per cent, the government said on Saturday.

This week, reports quoting the US health authority - the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - said that Delta variant of the coronavirus may cause more severe illness than all other known versions of the virus and spread as easily as chickenpox.

Explaining this, Dr Guleria said: "Measles or chicken pox used to have R factor of 8 or more, which means one person

could infect eight others. That suggests that coronavirus is highly infectious. We saw that during the second wave in India, because entire families were getting infected. This happens with chicken pox also. In a similar manner, when one person has Delta variant, the whole family is vulnerable."

With a large majority of fresh Covid cases coming from Kerala, there's a need to evaluate the surge in infections, Dr Guleria further stressed.

"In the beginning, Kerala had set a

precedent for others by managing the pandemic well. They also had an aggressive vaccination drive. Yet despite that, are witnessing a spike in a way that's different from other parts of the country. This needs to be evaluated. Also, is there a variant behind the surge? Are containment strategies being aggressively followed - all this needs to be evaluated," the AIIMS chief explained.

Neighbouring states like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu also need to adopt aggressive testing strategy to break the chain of transmission, he added.

Looking Out for the Young

Get them justice and also help them heal

The Centre, in a manifestation of its couldn't care less attitude, recently informed the Parliament that it has no information on whether there was a spike in child abuse cases during the insensitively imposed and aggressively policed string of lockdowns over the past 15 months. Public memory is short, and the Sarkar is probably banking on the nightmare of the Covid Curfews to blur in the haze of people struggling to get their lives back; hence, any admission of any unforeseen [ignored, rather] consequences of the lockdowns are best not officially acknowledged. This is why deaths due to lack of Oxygen in hospitals remain officially unacknowledged and futures scarred because babus did not have the awareness to realize that locking up children without adequate mechanisms in place to keep predators at bay will remain an insensitivity bordering on criminal neglect, but an official misstep which will get swept under the carpet.

That said, quite deep into the Covid disruption, agencies responsible for the care of children realized their responsibility and started addressing the risk of child abuse in an environment when predators and victims had been shut indoors and cops kept busy with issuing challans and enforcing covid protocols. Anecdotal references lead one to believe that sexual assault of minors in Sikkim spiked over the 15 months. Every time a minor becomes a victim, the society should hang its head in shame because the young should always be considered as being under the collective care of the society. Every such incident tears into a growing cluster of holes through which too much innocence is bleeding out. It is obviously not enough to hyperventilate on social media or scream in the public domain demanding that the perpetrators be lynched. While it is necessary to be worried and important to be concerned, no durable solution can be fashioned by hysterical over-reaction. Decisions need to be better informed and it is imperative that the society first understand the situation and its own failings and then collaborate to keep the young out of harm's way. The lack of instinctive awareness that lockdown created a situation in which children could be harmed is one example of such a failing.

It is unlikely that pedophilia has only recently arrived in Sikkim. But isn't that what the rise in crimes against children seems to suggest? Since no experts seem to be stepping up and doing any explaining for the society, we begin the discussion by throwing in our hypothesis. Child sexual abuse is neither the exclusive shame of any particular society, nor is it absent from any society either. Sikkim is no different. Ask around your circle of close friends, and in all probability there will definitely be some who suffered such abuse at some stage of their childhood. Yes, it is really that common. What has changed in the recent decades in Sikkim is that the joint family system has splintered into nuclear units. Children are invariably preyed upon by people they, and more importantly their families, know and trust. Earlier, the predators were mostly relatives, which made speaking up difficult for the victims and criminal charges even after the abuse was reported difficult to be filed because of family issues and all such illogical excuses. The extended family has now been replaced by neighbours and acquaintances. They gain access to the children through the same chains of familiarity as was the case of extended families, but when the abuse is reported, there is no family council to hush up the matter and more and more parents now make it a point to report such cases. It is possible that the spike in the number of such cases is more because these cases are reaching the police in higher frequency nowadays and not necessarily because the average of such abuses has grown. The arrival of POCSO Act and concerted awareness drives, have also helped mark child abuse as a necessarily cognizable offence.

Again, this is not to suggest that nothing can be done about abuse of children because the problem has been around forever. What is being attempted is an effort to first accept that this is not a recent problem and hence not a challenge that can be resolved by the law & order machinery alone. What is required is a longer collaboration to understand situations which put children at risk and then build stronger defences around them – defences which do not choke out their childhood but are still robust enough to keep them safe. What we also need to establish at the earliest is the collective response to such incidents. As mentioned earlier, it is not enough to register our disgust online because what the victims need more desperately is our support to recover from the trauma. There has to be a checklist of things to do for the victims the moment an abuse comes to light. The victims are too young to understand the concept of revenge which most people demand in such situations; what they and their families need more urgently is counseling to make sense of and overcome their situation. Sikkim can keep deliberating over how it will keep its young safe, but before it comes to a consensus on that, it should first institute processes which extend the psychological salve that such hurts need.

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Mark Zuckerberg Wants to Turn Facebook Into a 'Metaverse Company' – What Does That Mean?

DANIEL BROBY
THECONVERSATION.COM

Mark Zuckerberg wants to reinvent Facebook. He has been telling analysts and journalists that he wants the company to lead the way to a completely different internet. He said:

“In the coming years, I expect people will transition from seeing us primarily as a social media company to seeing us as a metaverse company ... In many ways the metaverse is the ultimate expression of social technology.”

So what does the Facebook chief executive mean by “metaverse company”? And what will the company look like if and when it gets there?

WHERE IT COMES FROM

The term “metaverse” is used to describe the vision whereby the internet will evolve into a virtual world. The idea was first conceptualised in 1992 by the American novelist Neal Stephenson in his science fiction classic, Snow Crash. It foresees the internet as a 3D virtual living space, where individuals dip in and out, interacting with one another in real time.

Many in Silicon Valley still view the metaverse as the future. For example, Google is heavily invested in augmented reality (AR), which is where you use technology to look at the real world but with digital 3D objects layered on top. And rumours swirl that Apple is building products like glasses for experiencing virtual spaces.

But Facebook appears the most committed of all to this new vision. In his quest to turn Facebook into a metaverse company, Zuckerberg is seeking to build a system where people move between virtual reality (VR), AR and even 2D devices,

using realistic avatars of themselves where appropriate. Here they will work, socialise, share things and have other experiences, while still probably using the internet for some tasks such as searches which are similar to how we use it now.

Owning not only the Facebook platform but also WhatsApp, Instagram and VR headset maker Oculus gives Zuckerberg a big head start in making this a reality. Collectively, these brands give Facebook an unbeatable number of customer relationships, and all the important knowledge for creating a desirable virtual world: how people behave online, their personalities, likes and dislikes, gait, eye movement and even emotional states.

To help build the metaverse, Facebook's engineers will have to make a success of immersive realism. Imagine a computer game with 2.9 billion avatars and the artificial intelligence that harvests all known information on them. The company has created a division called Reality Labs, whose researchers are working on creating the defining quality of the metaverse, namely “presence” – the feeling of being in a space with others. Unsurprisingly, this team is heavily staffed by people with gaming backgrounds.

Facebook is also ploughing money into software to enable activities like “teleporting” into another place like an office so that it seems as if you are really there, as well as physical kit like AR glasses and more advanced VR headsets.

METaverse NECESSITIES
Zuckerberg has said that he expects Facebook to have made this transition within the next five years, and for devices like headsets and AR glasses to be ready for heavy daily

mainstream use by the end of the decade.

To succeed, Facebook is going to have to make its VR offering interoperable with metaverse systems being created by other companies online. It is also going to have to be scaleable, so that it can cope seamlessly with more and more people becoming part of it. Those are costly propositions, but integrating the technology makes sense.

Facebook has already been the subject of an antitrust case for anti-competitive practices. The lawsuit failed, but the US is still working on regulations that could force Facebook and other tech giants to scale back. Clearly the company has many enemies – not least from the Cambridge Analytica scandal in which users' data was harvested without their consent, and what it said about how Facebook has handled privacy.

Creating a metaverse product that is fully interoperable with everything else in the metaverse will not only potentially reassure some about Facebook's intentions, it will also make it harder for them to break it up in future. Once it is in place, competitors will find it extremely expensive to create rival systems. Facebook's metaverse system will also be more valuable the more people that are part of the network. This is based on the idea of network effects, which is what built Facebook and America's other online giants into trillion-dollar companies in the first place.

Changing the business model is not a light decision. With many of its customers sitting at home for more than a year due to COVID, Facebook has been firing on all cylinders. It has just reported a 57% increase in second-quarter advertising sales,

a 7% rise in monthly active users (that's 170 million more of them), and a near-doubling in net income to US\$10.4 billion (£7.4 billion). As at the end of June, the company was sitting on US\$64 billion of cash.

At present, advertising dominates the Facebook social-networking business model, but the move to becoming a metaverse company raises the possibility of new revenue sources. Currently users share thoughts, pictures, posts, activities, events and interests in a two-dimensional way without paying for it (at least not in the traditional sense).

But users might be willing to pay for the enhanced interactivity that will be available in the metaverse, perhaps to enter certain private areas or to do certain things, like teleports for more than a few minutes at a time or whatever. Zuckerberg has said he believes Facebook will make money from the sale of certain virtual goods and experiences. Will we be paying for the most stylish avatar clothes in future, for example? Or to see the latest movie in a virtual cinema?

And in this new world we will probably be interacting with one another even more than we do already. This points to even more revenue opportunities for the gatekeeper.

In summary, creating a virtual world for users to interact with their friends and family is not just a fancy vision, it is a commercial necessity. Mark Zuckerberg created the first social media platform that became a global standard. Now, in virtual reality, he is trying to pull off the same trick again.

[the writer is Director, Centre for Financial Regulation and Innovation, University of Strathclyde]

Tokyo Olympics: why the stories of elite athletes make for such great childrens' books

ELEANOR SPENCER-REGAN
THECONVERSATION.COM

Whether it's Tom Brown, the principled captain of the cricket team in Tom Brown's School Days, or Darrell Rivers playing lacrosse in Enid Blyton's Malory Towers, or Harry Potter making the Quidditch team in his first year at Hogwarts, the sporting hero has long been a stalwart of children's literature.

The most popular child protagonists often possess innate – or unexpected – athletic ability. They exhibit good sportsmanship, winning and losing with grace and good humour. They model determination and dedication.

It is no surprise then that children find real-life athletes mesmerising too. From skateboarder Sky Brown – Team GB's youngest Olympian to date, aged 13 – to record-breaking swimmer Adam Peaty, players on the Olympic stage appear as superheroes, seemingly able to defy the laws of gravity or swim faster than Aquaman.

Their exploits chime with the way children seek to push physical boundaries, wanting to always climb higher, jump further, run faster and hold their breath underwater for longer. As the runaway success of Marcus Rashford's book, You Are a Champion, demonstrates, books by and about real-life sporting heroes are as instructive as they are exhilarating.

INSPIRATIONAL FIGURES

Tapping into the celebrity author trend in children's literature, numerous athletes have penned their own books. Research has looked at how those by female athletes – from softball champion Jennie Finch's Throw Like a Girl to football player and Olympic gold medalist Alex Morgan's Breakaway – seek to empower young girls.

While Rashford's guide to dreaming big and being the best you can be is aimed at older children and young people, tomes for the youngest readers have garnered acclaim too. In Ready Steady Mo! and the Go, Mo, Go! series UK distance runner Mo Farah has written with popular children's author Kes Gray, he has used rhyming verse and illustrations designed to appeal to beginners:

Run on the pavement,
Run on the grass,
Run in the playground,
Perhaps not in class!

The emphatic repetition creates an almost onomatopoeic sense of Farah's swift footsteps as he runs away from sea monsters, yetis and dinosaurs.

In his 2009 book, How to Train with a T. Rex and Win 8 Gold Medals, US Olympian Michael Phelps, meanwhile, presents the kind of facts small children are drawn to: swimming the length of nearly 11 Eiffel towers in a single Olympic Games; and eating enough broccoli to fill the



back of a pick-up truck. Much has been written on the importance of non-fiction in children's literature, in terms of satisfying curiosity and promoting analytical thought.

DISCIPLINE AND DETERMINATION

Lucy Semple's When I Grow Up – Sports Heroes is a colourful illustrated book which follows sports stars from childhood to the Olympic podium. As well as showing that they were once children too, the book helps young readers appreciate that the 19.30 seconds it took Usain Bolt to win the 200m in Beijing 2008 was the culmination of decades of hard training and self-sacrifice.

And in one of her Ultimate Sports Heroes series, Melanie Hamm tells the story of how the heptathlete Katarina Johnson-Thompson became a world champion. Hamm does not sugar-coat the injuries and disappointments the Liverpoolian suffered early in her career but instead emphasises that it is exactly those moments of darkness and despair that have since propelled Johnson-Thompson to glory.

These are stories of discipline and resilience. Psychotherapists suggest that they can provide children with concrete examples of how to handle adversity.

TRIUMPHING OVER ADVERSITY

In Flying High, Michelle Meadows relates the inspirational journey of US gymnast Simone Biles through a regular ABCB rhyme scheme. As the most decorated gymnast of all times completes the Biles – one of the moves now named after her – at the Gymnastics World Championships, we see that:

Her signature move shows
phenomenal flair:
two breathtaking flips
high up in the air.
Simone is on a roll,
watch her go, go go!
She's the best in the world

three years in a row.

Research shows that rhyming texts help children to better remember the sequence of events in a narrative. Parents can take advantage of rhyme to make reading aloud more interactive by pausing before reading the rhyming word to allow young children to fill it in.

Correctly anticipating the missing rhyming word gives children a sense of accomplishment and makes them more likely to recall that word for use in the future. By reading for pleasure about the medal-winning performances of an Olympic gymnast, children are also becoming more agile and confident in their use of language.

BODY POSITIVITY AND ROLE MODELS

Team GB synchronised swimmers Kate Shortman and Izzy Thorpe revealed last week that they have been bullied online for their “big shoulders, small boobs and small bums”. This is sadly something that happens a lot, so it is clear that inspiring body positivity and a sense of sporting potential in young girls is crucial.

Children's books including Meadows's book about Biles, as well as Jeanette Winters's celebration of Venus and Serena Williams in Sisters, aim to do just that.

Books like Rachel Ignatofsky's Women in Sport: Fifty Fearless Athletes Who Played to Win, meanwhile, celebrate the female sporting role models young girls often lack, from Canadian ice hockey goaltender Manon Rhéaume to Columbian BMX cyclist Mariana Pajón.

Jaded adults might question whether the games should go on. But the stories Olympians have to tell still have the power to enthrall. And the very values the Olympics purport to embody – excellence, friendship and respect – remain closely aligned with those we hope our children will glean from the books they read.

[the writer is Vice-Principal and Senior Tutor of St Chad's College, Durham University]

Darchula incident exposes persisting issues between Nepal and India, again

ANIL GIRI & MANOJ BADU

KATHMANDU, 01 AUG [KATHMANDUPOST]: Even a day after a youth from Darchula went missing in the Mahakali river after an improvised cable crossing was reportedly dismantled by a member of India's Sashastra Seema Bal, Nepal's reaction has been limited to "investigation is underway". On Saturday afternoon, the Ministry of Home Affairs in a statement urged all to exercise caution while reporting the incident.

A team of local security agencies including representatives from the District Administration Office, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and National Intelligence Department had already left for the incident site, according to the ministry.

"Since the incident site is very far from the district headquarters, a five-hour walk, the team will return to the district headquarters only on Sunday. Only then will we know the facts and reality behind the incident," the ministry stated.

The District Administration Office, Darchula, also issued a similar statement.

"We have written to our Indian counterpart to apprise us of the truth and facts related to the incident and initiate action accordingly," read the statement, issued by Jyotsana Bhatta Joshi, assistant chief district officer.

"Since the incident is under investigation, we request all not to disseminate any misleading and baseless information that could hamper the relations between the two countries."

A team from the Armed Police Force, Nepal Police and National Investigation Department has been dispatched to the incident site, the statement added.

Friday's incident has once again brought some cruel facts to the fore—how Darchula residents continue to live in a state of statelessness, how their survival is, by and large, completely dependent on the Indian side and how authorities in India continue to harass Nepalis, sometimes leading to their deaths, like in Friday's case.

Darchula is a remote district in

the northwestern ridge of Nepal. After the erstwhile KP Sharma Oli government released a new Nepal map in May last year showing Kalapani, Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh of the district as Nepali territories, Darchula has been in the news lately. The decision has also emerged as an irritant in Nepal-India ties.

But the death of a Nepali national on Friday has shaken not only the district but the entire country.

Jaya Singh Dhami, 33, of Khalang, Malghat in Byas Rural Municipality of the district, on Friday was trying to cross the Mahakali river using an improvised cable crossing known locally as tuin, the only means to get to the district headquarters Khalanga from where he was planning to travel to Kathmandu.

According to locals and eyewitnesses, a member of India's Sashastra Seema Bal detached the metal cable from a tree supporting the cable crossing just when Dhami had almost reached the other side.

According to Nabin Singh Dhami, an eyewitness, Jaya had almost made it to the other side when he suddenly fell along with the cable after it was detached from a tree on the Indian side. The incident took place at around 8:30am.

"People from our side of the river kept on shouting, pleading not to detach the cable," said Dhami. "We begged, but no one listened to our pleas. And suddenly Jaya fell into the swollen river."

Bikram Nankali, another eyewitness, said that local people tried to rescue Jaya but he was quickly swept away.

Officials and observers say such incidents have been occurring over the years, but Friday's incident must serve as a wake-up call for the authorities in both Nepal and India—more so in Kathmandu—to find a lasting solution.

"If the incident did take place in the manner the media has reported, then it's an absolutely inhuman act on the part of the Indian official in question," said Deep Kumar Upadhyay, a Nepali Congress leader

and former ambassador to India.

But, according to Upadhyay, Nepali authorities must also introspect what leads to such incidents.

"Does the Nepali state indeed consider people from the remote district as its own?"

Since the disputed areas over which Nepal and India have sparred for decades fall in Darchula, for Kathmandu and Nepali political parties it is just a strategic issue. People of Darchula have for decades been neglected by the Nepali state. Even to reach their district headquarters, people have to first reach India. For villagers, the only means to get to the Indian side, across the Mahakali river, is a tuin crossing or inflated tubes, which they use as boats.

People of Darchula have long said that unless the state pays attention to their plight and the conditions they live in, lip service by political parties in Kathmandu and their pronouncement of reclaiming territory mean little, as more residents could meet the fate of Jaya.

The absence of the state has made Darchula people depend entirely on India—not only when they have to travel to their own district headquarters or to Kathmandu but also when they have to buy daily essentials.

Home Ministry spokesperson Phanindra Mani Pokharel told the Post on Saturday that the government is serious about this particular incident and other similar incidents that have been reported from the bordering areas where Nepalis face trouble and are harassed by Indian security personnel.

"In this particular case, our local administration has taken the matter up with their Indian counterpart," said Pokharel.

On Saturday, around a dozen youths from the village scoured the banks of the Mahakali river in search of Jaya Singh.

According to Kalyan Singh Dhami, another eyewitness, locals could see Jaya's head for a while after he fell into the river but soon after, the river swallowed him. "We have not been able to find him yet,"

said Kalyan.

Jaya has a mother and two children—a five-year-old son and an 18-month-old daughter. According to local people, he is the family's sole breadwinner.

According to Harak Singh Karki, Jaya's neighbour, Jaya had returned home last year following the Covid-19 pandemic after working for two years as a security guard in Qatar. Before that he had worked in the Nepal Army.

"He had taken a loan to build his house," said Karki. "He was going to Kathmandu on the way to Qatar again. If only the state had built a bridge over the river, his family would not have to suffer."

According to Karki, locals of Darchula for years have been living with such a plight.

"I hope after this incident the state will realise the hardships we face," said Karki. "Using a tuin to cross the river is our compulsion."

Meanwhile, Anand Swarup, district magistrate of Pithoragarh, has written to his Nepali counterpart Siddha Raj Joshi, chief district officer of Darchula, explaining that the Sashashtra Seema Bal was not involved in the incident.

According to Chief District Officer Joshi, Swarup has said that Jaya Singh fell into the river when he was untying the cable after crossing the river and India's Sashastra Seema Bal was not involved in his fall.

Chief District Officer Joshi had written to Swarup on Friday after the incident.

The Indian Embassy in Kathmandu declined to comment saying the Sashashtra Seema Bal would make its position clear soon.

"We are not in a position to say anything at this point of time, as an investigation is underway," an embassy official told the Post. "Officials from both sides are also discussing the matter and local authorities from our side have responded to their Nepali counterparts."

Harassments of Darchula residents by Indian authorities have been reported quite often of late. Kathmandu-Delhi ties reached a new low after India started building a new road via Lipulekh to Kailash Manasarovar in the Ti-

bet Autonomous Region of China. When Nepal took exception and released a new map of its own showing Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura as parts of its territory, both countries were in a state of cartographic war.

India, however, continued building the road, creating troubles for the people living on the Nepali side.

In light of frequent disputes along the border areas, the government has formed several mechanisms at the local level either to address them locally or report them back to Kathmandu so issues can be taken promptly up with India, according to a former official at the Ministry of Foreign Ministry.

"But nothing much has happened," said the official who in the past headed the India Division at the ministry, requesting anonymity. "Our local officials do not report the incidents to Kathmandu promptly. Incidents are reported quite late, and by that time much damage is done."

According to officials, when incidents happen, usually the local administration communicates to its Indian counterpart. And when the Home Ministry is made aware of any incident, it then requests the Foreign Ministry to take the matter up with India.

Yagya Bahadur Hamal, who headed the India Division at the Foreign Ministry for two and a half years and recently retired, said that the Nepali side needs to continuously follow up on the matters and try to find a lasting solution instead of just writing diplomatic notes.

"We should build trust and seek solutions to every kind of dispute—big or small," Hamal told the Post. "We are said to have been following up various issues, including boundary row, with India. But where is the result?"

Friday's incident in Darchula has put the Sher Bahadur Deuba government, which came into being a little over two weeks ago, under immense pressure.

Five student unions on Saturday submitted a memorandum to Deuba demanding immediate

action, including summoning the Indian ambassador to discuss the matter.

A Home Ministry official said that the government has not sent any diplomatic note to India as yet, as it is awaiting details from the ground.

"After we get the report from the ground, we will decide on further action, including taking the matter up with India at the highest level," the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told the Post.

Observers say disputes and disagreements are common between neighbouring countries and such things are even more common between neighbours like India and Nepal that share a long open border. But disputes and disagreements between the two governments should not cause problems on the ground and harm to, and deaths of, citizens.

"We have several outstanding issues with India and in most cases, we write diplomatic notes and we are done," said Madhu Raman Acharya, a former foreign secretary and ambassador. "When Sushil Koirala was prime minister, he had raised the issue of unfair treatment of Nepali citizens on the border with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi."

Indian authorities had then instructed Sashastra Seema Bal not to harass Nepalis and treat them in a fair manner.

"So such issues between Nepal and India should be handled from the highest political level," said Acharya.

Former ambassador Upadhyay says a holistic approach is needed for resolving such incidents.

"Piecemeal measures are not going to work and such incidents will continue unless both the countries sit down and hold serious talks," Upadhyay told the Post. "And since our countrymen face the problems the most in remote places like Darchula, firstly the state needs to pay attention to the citizens' plight and then the government should communicate to India about our expectations, what we want and our common interests."

No vehicular movement from Assam so far despite "lifting blockade": Mizoram

AIZAWL, 01 AUG [PTI]:

Officials in Mizoram claimed on Saturday that no vehicle has entered the state from Assam since the boundary clash despite the neighbouring state's assertion that the "economic blockade" staged by several groups on National Highway 306 has been lifted.

Seven people, including six Assam Police personnel, have been killed and scores injured in a clash along the Mizoram-Assam inter-state border on July 26.

"No vehicle has entered Mizoram from Assam from Monday to Saturday," Kolasib Deputy Commissioner H Lalhlhlangiana told PTI.

Mr Lalchawimawa,

officer-in-charge of Vairengte police station, close to which the border check-gate is located, echoed the DC but said that some trucks from Mizoram, however, have left for Assam.

"No vehicles have entered Mizoram from Assam till 3 pm on Saturday. However, few trucks from Mizoram have left for Assam," he said.

The officer claimed that there is no restriction on traffic movement in Mizoram and vehicles from the state are entering Assam every day even after the clash.

He said that the situation along the inter-state border is under control and peaceful now.

The Centre has de-

ployed more troops of central armed forces in the border areas.

The Mizoram government had on Friday written another letter to the Union Home Ministry alleging economic blockade in Assam and seeking the Centre's intervention to lift it.

In the letter, Mizoram Home Secretary Lalbiak-sangi alleged that several vehicles carrying COVID-related materials like test kits were stranded on NH 306 in the Lailapur-Dholai area in Assam.

Mizoram also sought the restoration of railway tracks damaged in three locations in Assam.

Assam, however, has claimed that no group

is currently staging any blockade on NH 306 in the state.

Meanwhile, the Mizoram government has opened alternate routes to bring essential commodities from Tripura and Manipur.

Lalrozama, Deputy Commissioner of Mamit district, which shares border with Tripura, said that essential commodities including fuel and LPG, are coming in from the neighbouring state.

A sizeable number of traders from Tripura have entered Mizoram on Saturday and the administration is making efforts to ensure smooth traffic movement between the two states, he added.

Assam's all-party delegation to visit Delhi amid border row with Mizoram

SILCHAR, 01 AUG [PTI]:

A 19-member all-party delegation of Assam assembly, headed by Speaker Biswajit Daimary, on Saturday decided to visit Delhi and urge the Centre to resolve the state's boundary dispute with Mizoram at the earliest.

The delegation visited Lailapur close to the inter-state border where the clash took place on July 26 in which six Assam Police personnel were killed, and later held a meeting at Silchar.

"It was decided at the meeting that an all-party delegation will meet the central government authorities and urge them to resolve the border dispute at the earliest as well as ensure that the constitutional boundaries were maintained," an official release said.

The delegation members unanimously decided to support the Assam government in all measures it takes to "protect the border" at any stage of the ongoing dispute in the interest of the people of the state.

The speaker also



appealed to everyone to remain united to protect Assam's land and its people.

"Just as all parties in Mizoram are united in protecting the borders of their state, all parties in Assam must also be united," Mr Daimary said.

He said that there is a need to formulate new policies or enact laws in the interest of inter-state border security to ensure that not an inch of the state's land was encroached upon.

Besides Mr Daimary, the delegation comprised Deputy Speaker Numal Momin, BJP MLAs Jayanta Malla Baruah, Bhuban Pegu, Rupak Sarma and Krishna Kamal Tanti, Congress members Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha, Misbahul Islam Laskar, Siddeque Ahmed and Khaliluddin Mazumder.

Other members of the delegation were AGP's Ramendra Narayan Kalita and Prodig Hazarika, AIUDF's Zakir Hussain

Laskar, Suzamuddin Laskar and Karimuddin Barbhuiya, UPPL's Lawrence Islary, BPF's Charam Boro, CPI(M)'s Manoranjan Talukdar and Independent MLA Akhil Gogoi.

Cutting across party lines, 15 MLA from the three Barak Valley districts of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi have assured full support to the Assam government in dealing with the inter-state border situation.

Jharkhand reports 32 new COVID-19 cases, 2 fresh deaths

RANCHI, AUG 1 (PTI):

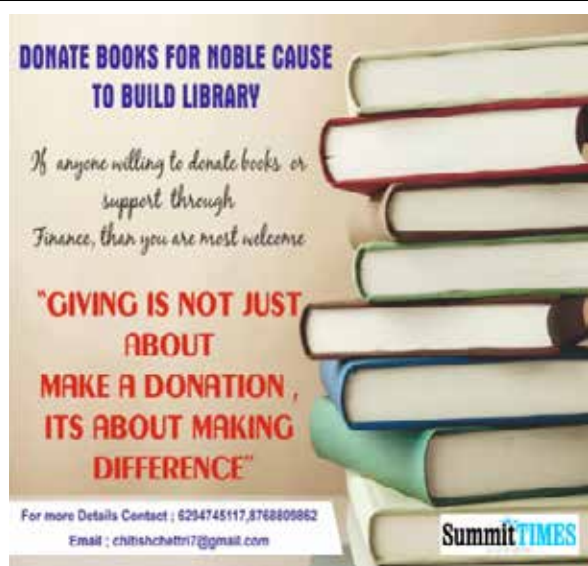
Jharkhand reported 32 new COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours, which pushed the tally to 3,47,137, a health department bulletin said.

The COVID-19 death toll rose to 5,128 in the state with two fresh fatalities due to the contagion reported from East Singhbhum and Bokaro, it said on Saturday.

Of the 32 new cases, Ranchi reported six cases followed by East Singhbhum (3).

Jharkhand currently has 260 active COVID-19 cases while 3,41,749 people have recovered from the disease so far in the state, it said.

In the last 24 hours, a total of 50,954 samples have been tested for COVID-19 in the state, the bulletin added.



Series against India will determine where we are: England spinner Leach

LONDON, AUG 1 (PTI): England spinner Jack Leach feels his team's performance against India in the upcoming five-match Test series will determine where it stands in terms of growth and he is personally confident of doing well, having played against them in an away assignment earlier this year.

The left-arm spinner had taken 18 wickets when England toured India in February and March this year.

Leach said his success in that series makes him confident of doing well in the upcoming contest, beginning at Trent Bridge in Nottingham from Wednesday.

"The belief that I can bowl at these guys and do well," Leach was quoted as saying by 'The Guardian' when asked what he can take from the tour of India.

"If the wicket is better it is just adapting your skill slightly. I enjoy bowling spin in England. The wickets generally are quite dry and there is definitely a role to play.

"Playing against India, who are such a strong side, in a five Test-match series, will tell us a lot about where we're at."

Leach is keen to do well so that he can cement his place in the side, which is set to clash with Australia in the Ashes series later this year.

"I guess I'm still trying to work my way into the team on a consistent basis. That's my main thought: making sure my game is in a good place so I can be in the team and performing consistently," he said.

Team's star all-rounder Ben Stokes recently



announced that he has taken an indefinite break to "prioritise his mental wellbeing".

It is believed that a few other players may also skip the series but Leach is determined to compete.

"My way of doing

things is taking one little part at a time and I'm very focused on this India series. If I don't play well, might not be where I'm going in the winter (Australia). It's about taking care of what is in front of you.

"There's been a little

est level.

"It's something I'd be very excited about, Australia in Australia. It's the ultimate test and something you grow up looking at and thinking: 'Wow, it's amazing,' (But) I'll just think about what's in front of me: Test matches against India."

Leach though said the entire England team supports Stokes in his decision.

"All the lads are behind Ben and supporting him where we can. He has shown courage and bravery to prioritise his mental health. He is a focal part of our team and we will miss him.

"His priority is to take some time out from the game to get better. We can't wait to welcome him back in the near future and winning games of cricket for England," he said.

I will continue to shoot in three events, including 25m: Manu Bhaker

ABHISHEK HORE

NEW DELHI, AUG 1 (PTI): Seeking to steer away from "negativity", Indian pistol ace Manu Bhaker says she will continue to shoot in three events, including the 25m, vowing to make a strong comeback after enduring a hat-trick of heartbreaks in her maiden Olympics.

Speaking to PTI after arriving from Tokyo, the 19-year-old Manu said there was negativity around her shooting and preparations in the run-up to the Olympics, due to the conflict with former coach Jaspal Rana, who had insisted that she withdraws from the 25m pistol event.

"I will continue to shoot in 25m event," Manu said as she readied to leave the Indira Gandhi International Airport on Saturday.

While the controversy and the negativity around her dispute with Rana did have an impact on her performance, wanting to win medals at all cost made it worse, the Youth Olympics and

Commonwealth Games gold medallist said.

Besides being "leg pulled", Manu said she was regularly told to "withdraw" from 25m as she was not "up to the mark" in that event.

Manu had earned her Tokyo quota during the ISSF World Cup in Munich.

"Yes, there was negativity as my mother and father were also forced to get involved in this whole issue. Questions like why my mother is with me in Bhopal (for training and trials) and why is my father accompanying would be asked by him. So, there was negativity."

Among other things, there were technical problems which "were not addressed" by the former coach.

She also made it clear that she did not send any message to Rana during the ISSF World Cup in Delhi in March this year, saying that it was sent by her mother who was "getting worried" about her daughter.



The message Rana received was, "Ab to mil gayee na tassalli" (now you must be content) after Manu settled for a bronze when she was expected to win a gold medal.

Rana paraded at the Karni Singh shooting ranges with the message imprinted on the back of his white T-shirt, forcing the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) to intervene.

Given the circumstances, the shooter said the NRAI and its president Raninder Singh did all they could to arrive at the best possible solution as the Games approached, including bringing in former India shooter Ronak Pandit as her coach.

"The NRAI was looking for the best solution available to the whole problem, to all the problems, and they also took

us into confidence," she said.

On the brighter side, Manu said she has come back with plenty of learnings from her first appearance at the Olympics.

"I definitely gained a lot of experience. Got lot of warmth from people, from my teammates. It will, hopefully, help me in future to prepare and perform. I am young and have a long career ahead.

I tried my best this time," Manu, a multiple World Cup gold medallist, said.

Manu also said that she will be better prepared to handle tricky situations in the future.

One of India's biggest hopes at the Tokyo Olympics, Manu could not come back with what she had dreamed of, failing to reach the finals in her three events, the first of which was marred by a major weapon malfunction.

As the country's shooters continued to belie expectations with their disappointing show in Tokyo, the head of the sport's national governing body promised a major revamp in coaching and support staff.

"Definitely the performances have not been on expected lines and I have spoken of an overhaul of coaching and support staff," National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) president Raninder Singh said as the shooters continued to fail at the Akasa Range.

Chennaiyin FC signs Kyrgyz forward Mirlan Murzaev

CHENNAI, AUG 1 (PTI): Two-time Indian Super League (ISL) champions Chennaiyin FC (CFC) on Sunday announced the signing of Kyrgyzstan forward Mirlan Murzaev on a one-year deal ahead of the upcoming season.

The forward becomes the first Kyrgyz player to feature in India's premier football league.

I'm just very very happy to join Chennaiyin FC. I can't wait for the training, and season to start. I look forward to representing all the fans from Tamil Nadu, the 31-year-old said in a media release.

The six-feet tall striker is the second international recruit for the Chennai-based franchise ahead of the 2021-22 season. His addition will bolster CFC's frontline with Jobby Justin and

Rahim Ali already part of the squad.

An experienced campaigner, Murzaev is currently the top goal-scorer for Kyrgyzstan and also the second most capped player with 48 international appearances.

Murzaev had struck a hat-trick last month against Myanmar during Kyrgyzstan's 8-1 victory in the qualifying match for the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

CFC co-owner Vita Dani said, "As a leading scorer of his national team and with 100-plus career goals, the signing of Mirlan gives us a significant attacking boost and solidity in the front."

CFC's head coach Bozidar Bandovic said, "My thoughts on signing Mirlan are very simple. Two words in fact. Quality. Personality.

Gutsy Satish Kumar's debut Olympics ends with loss to world champ in QFs



Tokyo, Aug 1 (PTI): A bruised Satish Kumar (+91kg) put up a gutsy performance against reigning world champion Bakhodir Jalolov but it was not enough to upstage the rampaging Uzbek as the Indian boxer made a quarterfinal exit from the Olympic Games here on Sunday.

Taking the ring with multiple stitches on his forehead and chin after sustaining cuts in the pre-quarters, Satish lost 0-5 but the scoreline was not reflective of his brave performance.

Satish sustained two cuts during his pre-quarterfinal showdown against Jamaica's Ricardo Brown.

The 32-year-old Army man stood his ground, occasionally managed to land a shot with his right hand but Jalolov dominated the proceedings all through, relying on his imposing demeanour and excellent counter-attacking game to sail through.

Satish's forehead cut expectedly opened up during the third round but he fought through

even with that.

Jalolov, a 27-year-old footballer-turned-boxer, acknowledged his rival's bravery at the end of the bout after securing his maiden Olympic Games medal.

Satish had earlier scripted history by just qualifying for the Games as he was the first super heavyweight from India to achieve the feat.

Jalolov is also a three-time Asian champion, all those gold medals coming in succession to him since 2017.

With this the Indian men's boxing campaign came to an end in the Games.

Lovlina Borgohain (69kg) remains the lone pugilist in fray after having made made the semifinals to secure India's first and only boxing medal of the ongoing edition.

On Saturday, it was a major disappointment for India when world number one Amit Panghal (52kg) bowed out of the event following a 1-4 loss to Rio Games silver-medallist Yuberjen Martinez of Colombia.

Pak authorities finalise law to award provisional provincial status to Gilgit-Baltistan: Report

SAJJAD HUSSAIN

ISLAMABAD, AUG 1 (PTI): Pakistani authorities have finalised a law to award provisional provincial status to strategically located Gilgit-Baltistan, a media report said on Sunday.

India has clearly conveyed to Pakistan that the entire union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, including the areas of Gilgit and Baltistan, are an integral part of the country by virtue of its fully legal and irrevocable accession.

India maintains the Government of Pakistan or its judiciary has no locus standi on territories illegally and forcibly occupied by it.

Dawn newspaper

reported that under the proposed law by the Ministry of Law and Justice, the Supreme Appellate Court (SAC) of Gilgit-Baltistan may be abolished and the region's election commission is likely to be merged with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

Sources in the law ministry told the newspaper that the draft of the bill titled '26th Constitutional Amendment Bill' had been prepared and submitted to Prime Minister Imran Khan.

In the first week of July, the prime minister had assigned the task of preparing the law to federal Law Minister Barrister Farogh Naseem.

According to the sources, the draft bill

has been prepared after careful reading of the Constitution of Pakistan, international laws, the United Nations' resolutions especially those related to a plebiscite on Kashmir, comparative constitutional laws and local legislation.

The stakeholders, including the governments of Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, had been consulted on the proposed constitutional amendment, the report quoted sources as saying.

The proposed law suggests that due to sensitivity attached to the region, it could be given provisional provincial status by amending Article 1 of the Constitution that related to the prov-



inces and territories, the sources said.

They added that a set of amendments would be introduced to give the region representation in Parliament, besides the establishment of the provincial assembly in the territory.

The sources are confident that the constitutional amendment is in accordance with the international practice of merger of territories and

it will not adversely affect the Kashmir cause in any manner, the report said.

The Pakistan government and the Opposition had reportedly discussed the move prior to last year's meeting of the political leadership with the Pakistan Army chief.

According to an Opposition leader, Gilgit-Baltistan has acquired great significance in the region due to the China-Pakistan Economic

Corridor (CPEC) that is now a jugular vein for the country.

The CPEC, which connects Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Balochistan with China's Xinjiang province, is the flagship project of Beijing's ambitious multi-billion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

India has protested to China over the CPEC as it is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

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Mexico to hold referendum on accountability of ex-presidents

MEXICO CITY, AUG 1 (AP): A referendum in Mexico on Sunday is going to cost Mexico about USD 25 million, few like the poorly written, yes-or-no question on the ballot, and the vote is being held in the middle of a third wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

To top it off, critics say the referendum question is so obvious that it's offensive to submit it to a vote.

So why is Mexico holding a nationwide referendum on whether ex-presidents should be tried for any illegal acts they may have committed? Mexico has no formal amnesty for former leaders, and there is nothing in current law saying they can't be brought to justice if there is evidence they have committed a crime.

As opponents say in a slogan, The law must be applied, Not put up for a vote.

To comprehend the exercise, one has to understand President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who pushed for the referendum.

A populist, he likes large crowds, and the pandemic has prevented him from holding the kind of mass rallies of hundreds of thousands of people he used to have regularly in Mexico City's main plaza when he was a candidate.

He needs 40 per cent of registered voters to participate about 37 million people to participate Sunday or the referendum won't be binding.

While the president is unlikely to get that many out to vote, he has to draw at least several million, and he has pulled out the stops to mobilize voters.

The people want participative democracy, not just representative democracy, López Obrador said last week. You have to have faith in the people, you have to have confidence in the people and their free choice, not be afraid of the people.

Jos Antonio Crespo, a political analyst at Mexico's Center for Economic Research and Training, called the referendum strictly an exercise in politics and media exposure, noting the outcome of the ballot question isn't in doubt.

The question isn't whether the yes option will win, we know that 90% or more will vote yes, said Crespo.

The question is, how many people will go out to vote? A lot of us don't want to be used in a manipulation. It will be an indicator of how many people still support López Obrador, of how much capacity he has to mobilize people.

After two unsuccessful runs for the presidency which he says he was cheated out of López Obrador won on the third try in 2018, promising revenge is not my strong suit and forging a cordial transition with former president Enrique Peña Nieto.

Crespo, like many Mexicans, believes López Obrador struck a non-aggression pact with Peña Nieto, agreeing not to go after him in return for promises of a clean presidential race in 2018.

Six months after Myanmar coup, battle for diplomatic recognition

JOHN LIU & RORY WALLACE

YANGON/TAIPEI, 01 AUG [ALJAZEERA]: In Myanmar's commercial capital Yangon, people are scrambling for hospital beds and looking for oxygen for their COVID-hit family members and friends. Bodies are piling up in cemeteries. With economic desperation and a deadly virus ravaging the population, neither the military, despite its de facto power, nor the parallel government, with its international influence, has managed to turn the tide of the pandemic or break the political deadlock.

The military, or Tatmadaw, has sought to control the country in the wake of the February 1 coup, which triggered mass protests and a civil disobedience movement. More than 900 people have been killed and thousands arrested.

The National Unity Government, meanwhile, formed out of the remnants of Aung San Suu Kyi's overthrown administration in exile or hiding, has also made little headway in its attempt to regain control of the country.

Now the two sides are gearing up for a critical diplomatic battle in the United Nations where the Credentials Committee is scheduled



to convene in September and each side is positioning for recognition.

Myanmar's UN representative Kyaw Moe Tun has maintained his allegiance to Aung San Suu Kyi's administration, demonstrating his loyalty in a speech to the General Assembly in February.

The military's attempts to remove him have so far been in vain, but this month Aung Thurein, who left the military this year after 26 years, was nominated by the regime's foreign minister Wunna Maung Lwin to replace Kyaw Moe Tun.

On the ground in Yangon and the Bamar hinterland, even though the NUG has little sway, the population needs little reminding of why the soldiers and generals are

unfit to rule, NUG cabinet member Dr Sasa told Al Jazeera in an online interview from an undisclosed location.

"They are a failed coup and a failed regime," said Sasa, the NUG's international cooperation minister and spokesperson. "They cannot perform any functions of a government... in health-care, in education, in the economy."

Sasa's criticisms are reflected by the World Bank's latest economic report on July 26, which warned that Myanmar's economy faces a contraction of 18 per cent this year and a doubling of poverty as a result of the combined impact of the coup and COVID-19.

The bank warned that the crises would lead to "damaging implications

for lives, livelihoods, poverty and future growth," a scathing assessment of the military regime.

The economy is "in free fall", said a Yangon-based foreign investor who has invested millions of dollars in Myanmar. "The junta is unable to govern in every sense of the word. They have also failed to manage the economic disruption brought by the pandemic-induced lockdown measures, on top of the political turmoil."

But the World Bank's dire warnings have also increased pressure on the NUG – which has yet to collectively spell out its humanitarian aid policies or clarify how international partners should channel assistance in military-controlled areas.

As the political cri-

sis drags on and the health crisis deepens the window for the NUG to secure an active role, beyond releasing statements and announcing policies it cannot implement, is also narrowing.

The unity government was formed in secret in mid-April by 20 elected legislators – primarily from Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party.

Some are in exile while others have taken refuge in border areas controlled by ethnic armed groups long opposed to Myanmar's central government.

Sasa says those remaining in the country include a vice president and prime minister and "several" cabinet colleagues "tapping into virtual diplomacy while being connected with local communities".

He says the cabinet has no plans to go completely into exile and the NUG "is an e-government" because "our office is in the computers".

Seeking to make its mark and gather support abroad, the NUG has set up offices in Prague and near Washington, DC. It also has a representative who speaks at the UN and others in some Myanmar embassies who are competing against military appointees.

Europe's vaccine passes reveal some pockets of resistance

VERONA (ITALY), AUG 1 (AP): Shouts of Liberty! have echoed through the streets and squares of Italy and France as thousands show their opposition to plans to require vaccination cards for normal social activities, such as dining indoors at restaurants, visiting museums or cheering in sports stadiums.

Leaders in both countries see the cards, dubbed the Green Pass in Italy and the health pass in France, as necessary to boost vaccination rates and persuade the undecided.

Italian Premier Mario Draghi likened the anti-vaccination message from some political leaders to an appeal to die.

The looming requirement is working, with vaccination requests booming in both countries.

Still, there are pockets of resistance by those who see it as a violation of civil liberties or have concerns about vaccine safety. About 80,000 people protested in cities across Italy last weekend, while thousands have marched in Paris for the past three weekends, at times clashing with police.

European nations in general have made strides in their vaccination rates in recent months, with or without incentives. No country has made the shots mandatory, and campaigns to persuade the undecided are a patchwork.

Denmark pioneered vaccine passes with little resistance. Belgium will require a vaccine certificate to attend outdoor events with more than 1,500 people by mid-August and indoor events



by September.

Germany and Britain have so far resisted a blanket approach, while vaccinations are so popular in Spain that incentives are not deemed necessary.

In France and Italy, demonstrations against vaccine passes or virus restrictions in general are bringing together otherwise unlikely allies, often from the political extremes.

They include far-right parties, campaigners for economic justice, families with small children, those against vaccines and those who fear them.

Many say vaccine pass requirements are a source of inequality that will further divide society, and they draw uneasy historic parallels.

We are creating a great inequality between citizens,' said one protester in Verona, who identified himself only as Simone because he said he feared for his livelihood.

We will have first-class citizens, who can access public services, the theater, social life, and second-class citizens, who cannot. This thing has led to apartheid and the Holocaust."

Some protesters in Italy and France have worn yellow Stars of David, like those the Nazis required Jews to wear during World War II.

Holocaust survivors

call the comparison a distortion of history.

They are madness, gestures in poor taste that intersect with ignorance,' said Liliana Segre, a 90-year-old Holocaust survivor and Italian senator for life.

It is such a time of ignorance, of violence that is not even repressed any more, that has become ripe for these distortions.

Similar comparisons during protests in Britain have been widely condemned. One of the most prominent anti-lockdown activists, Piers Corbyn, brother of former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, was arrested earlier this year after distributing a leaflet making the comparison, depicting the Auschwitz concentration camp.

The French health pass is required at museums, movie theaters and tourist sites, and comes into effect for restaurants and trains on August 9. To get it, people must be fully vaccinated, have a recent negative test, or proof they recently recovered from COVID-19.

Italy's requirements are less stringent. Just one vaccine dose is required, and it applies to outdoor dining, cinemas, stadiums, museums and other gathering places from Aug. 6. Expanding the requirement to long-distance transport is being considered.

A negative test with-

in 48 hours or proof of having recovered from the virus in the last six months also provide access.

Vaccine demand in Italy increased by as much as 200per cent in some regions after the government announced the Green Pass, according to the country's special commissioner for vaccinations.

In France, nearly 5 million got a first dose and more than 6 million got a second dose in the two weeks after President Emmanuel Macron announced that the virus passes would be expanded to restaurants and many other public venues. Before that, vaccination demand had been waning for weeks.

A full 15per cent of Italians remain resistant to the vaccine message: 7per cent identifying themselves as undecided, and 8per cent as anti-vaccine, according to a survey by SWG. The survey of 800 adults, conducted July 21-23, has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

The biggest reasons for hesitating or refusing to get vaccinated, cited by more than half of respondents, are fears of serious side effects and concerns that the vaccines have not been adequately tested. Another 25per cent said they don't trust doctors, 12per cent said they don't fear the virus, and

8per cent deny it exists.

This leaves some hard-to-penetrate segments of the population.

About 2 million Italians over 60 remain unvaccinated, despite being given precedence in the spring. Thousands remain unprotected in Lombardy alone, the epicenter of Italy's outbreak.

The city of Milan is dispatching mobile vans with vaccines and other supplies to a different neighborhood every day. They reach out to the reluctant with flyers and social media posts, vaccinating 100-150 people a day with the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Rosi De Filippis, 68, got the shot after pressure from a daughter.

In any case, it became sort of mandatory,' De Filippis said. In the beginning, we didn't know everything we know today. So I decided to go ahead with it.

Businesses in Italy and France are grudgingly accepting the passes, amid concern over how private companies can enforce public policy. Denmark's experience suggests compliance gets easier with time -- and rising vaccination rates.

The first couple months weren't good, recalls Sune Helmgård, whose restaurant in Copenhagen serves hearty classic Danish fare. In the spring, vaccination rates were still low and customers couldn't always get tested in time.

But with more than 80per cent of eligible Danes having received at least one shot and more than 60per cent fully vaccinated, Helmgård's business is back to pre-pandemic levels.

How Netanyahu plans to bring down Israel's new government

THOMAS O FALK JERUSALEM, 01 AUG [ALJAZEERA]: On top of all the challenges Israel's new Prime Minister Naftali Bennett already faces in trying to hold an unlikely, ideologically-diverse ruling coalition together, analysts say he also has to deal with a concerted attempt by his predecessor Benjamin Netanyahu to sabotage the government's work and bring it down.

On June 13, Israel's parliament swore in a new eight-party coalition government – led by right-wing nationalist Bennett – featuring an alliance of left-wing, centrist and right-wing parties, as well as a party representing Palestinian citizens of Israel.

It brought an end to the 12-year premiership of Netanyahu, the most dominant Israeli politician of his generation, who had failed to form a government after Israel's March 23 election – its fourth in two years.

Netanyahu's ongoing corruption trial, on charges he denies, has only deepened his desperation to return to power, and as the Knesset's new opposition leader and the head of Likud, the largest party in parliament, he and his allies have been using a range of political tactics to frustrate the government.

"Netanyahu and Likud are determined to undermine the ability of this government to function properly," Donna Robinson Divine, Morningstar professor emerita of Jewish Studies at Smith College, told Al Jazeera.

"They are deploying every Knesset rule and procedure to oppose anything the government proposes."

"They have added to the disorder in what is typically not an entirely civil discourse. So, Netanyahu's approach is to set up all sorts of roadblocks to the reforms and legislation the coalition wants," she said.

"Netanyahu has embraced three strategies in his desperate attempt to enable his own return to power and by doing so, perhaps, escape yet again having to face an assort-

ment of criminal charges against him," Ian Lustick, professor of Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania, told Al Jazeera.

He said the first strategy is to use a variety of procedural devices, insults, and personal smears to create an image of the new government as illegitimate or fraudulent.

"This includes disrupting Knesset sessions, refusing until recently to vacate the prime minister's house, and insisting that his followers continue to refer to Netanyahu as prime minister," Lustick said.

Netanyahu has also undermined Bennett's authority by acting as if he were still in power, including when he recently informed the public that he had called the CEOs of the pharmaceutical companies Pfizer and Moderna to acquire new supplies of COVID vaccine doses for Israel.

Secondly, Lustick said Netanyahu and his allies have sought to use filibusters to frustrate and delay government legislation and to create tensions within the governing coalition by tabling a succession of bills on controversial subjects designed to exploit their ideological divisions; particularly between Bennett, a former settler leader and hard-right religious nationalist who has called for the annexation of most of the occupied West Bank, and other parties.

"Legislative and political manoeuvres are deployed to create tensions within the governing coalition by raising issues related to issues such as settlements, the rights of [Palestinian citizens of Israel], or how vehemently to oppose US outreach to Iran, that have the potential to strain the coalition by forcing it to unite on a position that either its left or right flanks – or both – find difficult to accept," said Lustick.

Thirdly, the opposition is also making efforts to cajole or entice members of the coalition, including Defence Minister Benny Gantz, to desert it in favour of a deal that would result in a new government featuring Netanyahu.

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The Big Pic



BRIGHT AND BREEZY! Actress Jennifer Garner is spotted during a sunny day in Brentwood.

Kiara Advani to star opposite Ram Charan in Shankar's next film

Actor Kiara Advani has been roped in to feature opposite south star Ram Charan in acclaimed director Shankar's pan-India film, the makers announced on Saturday.

The project will mark the second collaboration between Advani and Charan after their 2019 Telugu action movie "Vinaya Vidheya Rama".

Producer Sri Venkateswara Creations announced Advani's casting on the occasion of her 29th birthday.

"Joining us on this super exciting journey is the talented and gorgeous @advani_kiara! Welcome on board #HappyBirthdayKiaraAdvani #RC15 #SVC50," the tweet read.

The actor, whose next release is biographical drama "Shershaah", said she is both excited and nervous to work with the experienced artistes from the Indian film industry.

"I am excited as well as nervous to work with renowned and experienced names of our film fraternity. I am eagerly waiting to begin the shoot and hoping that this incredible opportunity is translated wonderfully on



screen," Advani said in a statement.

The film will release in three languages Telugu, Tamil and Hindi.

It is jointly produced by Dil Raju and Shirish Garu under the banner of Sri Venkateswara Creations.

Besides this film, Advani also has Karan Johar-produced film "Jug Jugg Jeeyo" and Anees Bazmee-directed comedy "Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2".

Charan will next be seen in S S Rajamouli's period action drama "RRR" and in Telugu film "Acharya" alongside his father Chiranjeevi.

"You're Hot": Nick Jonas is smitten by Priyanka Chopra's new pic from Citadel sets

Priyanka Chopra, who is currently shooting for Russo Brothers' Citadel in London, on Saturday, took the Internet by storm as she shared a stunning selfie on Instagram. The picture features the 39-year-old actress in a white dress. Keeping the caption of the post simple, Priyanka Chopra just wrote: "#Selfie-mode #Citadel." Priyanka looks as gorgeous as ever in the picture and we absolutely love it.

Looks like there's someone else too who is smitten by Priyanka Chopra's stunning selfie. Yes, you guessed it right, we are talking about Priyanka's husband, singer Nick Jonas, who has been staying at his home in America while Priyanka has been in London.

Nick Jonas showered love on Priyanka's self-

ie by dropped a fiery comment on it. "You're hot," he wrote in the comments section of the post. Not just that, Nick also added a heart-eyed emoji to his comment.

Priyanka has been in London for quite some time now. She even ringed into her 39th birthday last month in London. But looks like distance doesn't affect Priyanka and Nick's romance at all.

Last month, Nick marked Priyanka's birthday with an adorable Instagram post. He shared a beautiful solo picture of Priyanka on Instagram and wrote: "Happy birthday my love. You deserve all the happiness in the world. Today and every day. I love you."



Bob Odenkirk says he had 'a small heart attack', thanks well-wishers for outpouring of love

Emmy-nominated actor Bob Odenkirk has thanked his family, friends and well-wishers for being a constant support as he recovers from "a small heart attack" he suffered on the set of AMC series "Better Call Saul". The 58-year-old star collapsed on location Albuquerque, New Mexico, on Tuesday while filming the sixth and final season of the "Breaking Bad" prequel.

In a statement posted on Twitter on Friday night, Odenkirk said he will take some time to be perfectly fine and return to work.

"Hi. It's Bob. Thank you. To my family and friends who have surrounded me this week. And for the outpouring of love from everyone who expressed concern and care for me. It's overwhelming. But I feel the love and it means so much.

"I had a small heart attack. But I'm going to be ok thanks to Rosa Estrada and the doctors who knew how to fix the blockage without surgery. Also, AMC and Sony's support and help throughout this has been next-level. I'm going to take a beat to recover but I'll be back soon," he wrote.

Earlier this week, representative for Odenkirk said the actor was in stable condition, and his son, Nate Odenkirk, assured fans that his father is "going to be okay".



The actor's colleagues -- Bryan Cranston, Aaron Paul, Michael McKean and Michael Mando had also sent best wishes to him through social media.

The final season of "Better Call Saul" is most likely air in the first quarter of 2022.

TikTok Star Anthony Barajas dead at 19 after movie theater shooting



TikTok has lost a rising star.

Anthony Barajas, who accumulated almost a million followers on the social media platform, died after sustaining injuries from a recent movie theater shooting in California, the Corona Police Department confirmed—while also adding that a murder investigation is underway.

The internet personality passed away on Saturday, July 31 at the age of 19.

"The Corona Police Department has been notified that Anthony Barajas passed away early this morning," the police department stated in a press release. "We extend our thoughts and condolences to his family and friends."

On Tuesday, July 27, local law enforcement arrested Joseph Jimenez, 20, for his alleged involvement in the movie theater shooting in Corona, Calif.

Joseph was charged for murder, attempted murder and robbery, per a press release from the Corona Police Department at the time. In Saturday's statement, authorities said they are "working with the Riverside County District Attorney's Office to add an additional count of first-degree murder against Joseph Jimenez."

Keeley Hawes to lead BBC One miniseries 'Crossfire'

British star Keeley Hawes is set to headline BBC One's upcoming miniseries "Crossfire", touted as a story of survival and resilience.

The 45-year-old actor, known for featuring in critically-acclaimed shows "Bodyguard" and "Line of Duty", will also executive produce the series.

According to Deadline, the show is written by "Apple Tree Yard" author Louise Doughty.

Set in a luxurious resort in the Canary Islands, "Crossfire" follows Jo (Hawes), who is enjoying a dream vacation with her family and friends.

Sunbathing on her balcony, the tranquility is thrown into turmoil when shots ring out across the complex from gunmen wreaking revenge.

With the unsuspecting and vulnerable holidaymakers and hotel staff forced to make split-second life or death decisions, regrets will linger long after the final shots are fired.

The three-part thriller will be produced by Fremantle-backed Dancing Ledge Productions and Hawes' Buddy Club Productions.

Executive producers also include Laurence Bowen and Chris Carey for Dancing Ledge, Lucy Richer for the BBC and Doughty.



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.