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SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Covid claims one more in Sikkim; Percentage of fully vaccinated eligible population crosses 60

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 23 SEPT:

Covid claimed a life in the State in the past 24 hours, taking Sikkim's toll to 382. This was the third Covid death recorded in the State thus far this week. Also today, the proportion of fully vaccinated [eligible population] Sikkimese crossed the 60% mark.

Meanwhile, Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 since testing began on 28 Feb, 2020, reached 31,136 with

62 fresh cases the virus reported in the last 24 hours. Over the same period, there were also 57 Covid patients who made full recoveries and were discharged from home and facility isolation, taking the total number of people who have beaten the virus in Sikkim to 29,798.

Of the 644 currently active cases of Covid-19 in Sikkim, only 57 are with symptoms severe enough to require hospitalization while the rest

are on their way to recovery under home or facility isolation. Of these 57, only seven are under 18 years of age and six are in ICU. Only one of the six in ICU is under 18 years of age.

Clearly, both, infections and hospitalizations have gone down substantially, and what should come as even more reassuring news is that vaccine-coverage has expanded substantially in the State. With the 14,129

doses of Covishield administered on Wednesday [542 first dose and 13,587 second dose], 60.93% of the adult population of Sikkim is now fully vaccinated.

As for the Covid updates from the past 24 hours, the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of Health Department this morning, the 62 new cases were picked up from the testing of

640 samples yesterday, giving Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 9.6%.

While 32 of the new cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 286 samples, 29 more tested positive in rapid antigen testing of 349 samples and one case was detected in TruNat testing of five samples.

Of the 62 cases, 30 were reported in East District, 18 in West District, 13 in South District and one in North District.

2 dead in Assam protests; Man beaten with sticks caught on camera

NEW DELHI, 23 SEPT

[NDTV]: Two civilians were killed and nine policemen injured today when an anti-encroachment drive in Assam's Darrang district blew up into a brutal clash between the police and people protesting eviction. On camera, policemen in riot gear and armed with guns and sticks chased and attacked protesters and even firing shots.

In horrifying visuals, a cameraman filming the clash attacked a protester who had earlier followed him with a stick. The protester, beaten by policemen, lay motionless as the cameraman kept attacking him until he was restrained.

The state government has ordered a probe - to be headed by a retired High Court judge - into today's violence.

Some 800 families were evicted in the drive against encroachments at Dholpur on Monday. The state wants to repossess 4,500 bighas of government land for an agricultural project.

The police said local people attacked them with stones today and they had to use force.

"Nine of our policemen were injured. Two civilians were also injured. They have been shifted to hospital. Now things are normal," Superintendent of Police Sushanta Biswa Sarma said.

Mr Sarma, who was at the site of the clash, added, "We couldn't complete the eviction because of the situation. We will assess later. We are returning as of now."

But when asked about the footage of the local being shot and then beaten, he said "The area is big. I was on another side. I will find out and

assess the situation."

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, reacting to the police brutality, targeted the state's BJP government and tweeted, "Assam is on state-sponsored fire".

"I stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the state - no children of India deserve this," he added.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had tweeted after the eviction drive on Monday, "I am happy and compliment district administration of Darrang and Assam Police for having cleared about 4500 bigha, by evicting 800 households."

Reports say the government decided in June to repossess the land for a farming project and had served notices to alleged encroachers.

The Chief Minister had also visited the area. In a tweet during the visit, he said, he was there to "inspect the riverine areas that were encroached by illegal settlers near Dholpur Shiva Mandir. 120 Bighas land of the temple under encroachment of illegal occupants in the area have been freed by @assam-police and district administration. Such squatters would be evicted from all parts of Assam to protect our land and the Assamese identity from encroachers and intruders."

Mr Sarma also wrote: "We also offer prayers at Shiva temple to seek lord Shiva blessings. A short temple management and local people to set up a Manikut, builder guest house and boundary wall. All steps should be taken to turn temple into a tourist attraction."

The tweet is no longer on his timeline.

Documentary film on Bhumchu screened at int'l film festivals

SUMMIT REPORT

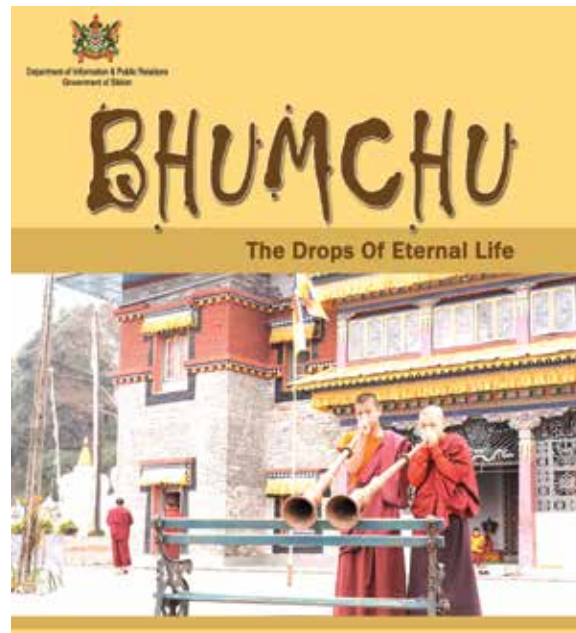
GANGTOK, 23 SEPT:

A documentary film on Bhumchu directed by Abanti Sinha and produced by the Information & Public Relations Department was screened at the Lift-Off Sessions at the Pinewood Studios, UK, on 20 September, an IPR press release informs.

"Bhumchu - The Drops of Eternal Life," will be screened at Lift-Off Sessions again on 04 October, the release adds.

Earlier, the documentary film was screened at the Noble International Film Festival and Awards, Bangalore, on 21 September.

The release adds that the film has also been selected for screening at 21 River to River Flor-



ence India Film Festival in Florence, Italy, and the Cine Making International Film Festival 2021 at Dhaka, both in the month of December, 2021.

It may be recalled

that a special screening of the documentary film, a presentation of Dreamscape Films, was organized for the Chief Minister at Mintokgang on 22 September.

PM CARES "not a government fund", Prime Minister's Office tells High Court

NEW DELHI, 23 SEPT

[PTI]: The PM CARES Fund is not a Government of India fund and the amount collected by it does not go to the Consolidated Fund of India, the Delhi High Court has been informed.

An affidavit filed by an Under Secretary at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) who is discharging his functions in the PM Cares Trust on honorary basis, has said the trust functions with transparency and its funds are audited by an auditor - a chartered accountant drawn from the panel prepared by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

The affidavit was filed in response to a petition seeking a direction to declare the PM CARES Fund a 'State' under the Constitution to ensure transparency in its functioning.

A bench of Chief Justice DN Patel and Justice Amit Bansal has fixed the matter for further hearing on September 27.

"To ensure transparency, the audited report is put on the official website of the trust along with the details of utili-

sation of funds received by the trust," says the affidavit filed by Pradeep Kumar Srivastava, Under Secretary at the PM's Office.

"I state that when the petitioner is claiming to be a public-spirited person and seeking to pray for various reliefs only for transparency, it does not matter whether PM Cares is a 'State' within the meaning of Article 12 of the Constitution of India," the officer said in the affidavit.

Irrespective of whether the trust is a 'State' or other authority within the meaning of Article 12 of the Constitution or whether it is a 'public authority' within the meaning of provisions of the Right to Information Act (RTI), it is not permissible to disclose third party information, it added.

It said that all donations received by the trust are received via online payments, cheques or Demand Drafts and the amount received is audited with the audited report and the expenditure of trust fund displayed on the website.

"The trust functions on the principles of transparency and public good

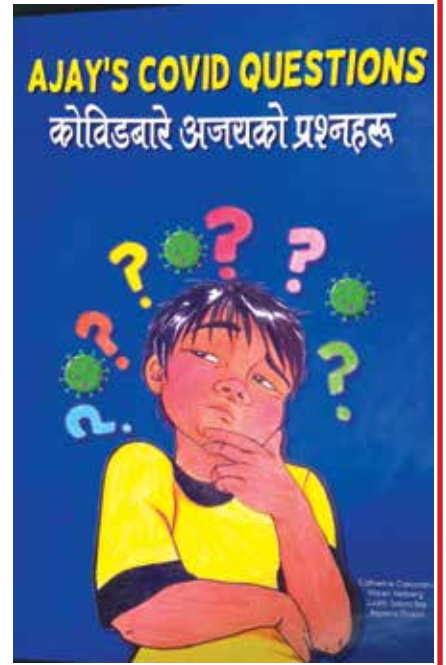
Finally, a book that speaks to children and explains Covid

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 23 SEPT:

The pandemic has been devastating for people around the world, and if anyone remembers the early days of the virus, they will remember how traumatic uncertainty and ignorance can be. A year and a half later, we know more about Covid and this has helped calm nerves and return some optimism. A year and a half later, however, children remain largely unattended to when it comes to explaining Covid and the current situation. They are told what to do, but not enough efforts have been made to speak to them or address the questions.

It is in this environment that "Ajay's COVID Questions," a book that speaks to children [as against talk down to them], released in Darjeeling yesterday, comes as a welcome development.



The Nepali translation of the book was launched yesterday by DLR Prerna, a Darjeeling-based NGO. This short children's book, focuses on helping children learn about COVID safety while also helping them understand and process emotions they may be experiencing during these unsettling times. Written by Maren Heiberg, Ajay's COVID Questions is illustrated by Judith Saloni Rai and translated by Arpana Thapa.

Ms Heiberg is a local children's book author whose "The Adventures of Pandi" is available at most bookstores here. When asked about the book, she said, "When I was asked to be involved in this project I was excited to do it. To help children explore their feelings about the pandemic and give them tools to express themselves is extremely important. I loved the concept of doing it through a story book."

Ajay's COVID Questions is set in Darjeeling and tells the story of Ajay who is feeling frustrated by the pandemic and the various changes it has forced on his life. Through sharing with family, he begins to realise it is okay to feel angry and learns that he can find healthier ways to express and deal with all these uncomfortable feelings.

The illustrator, Ms Rai, says this about the project: "I had a good time working on the illustrations in this book. Seeing how Covid has affected us globally as well as locally makes this book very special as it helps us re-

late to the present situation. I'd like to thank the people concerned for giving me an opportunity to be a part of this project."

Describing how the concept for the book came about, Catherine Canavan, Project Officer, Tealeaf Mansik Swastha, said: "Our work focuses primarily on promoting children's mental well-being. Since the pandemic began we have been engaging different mediums through which to support children during this challenging time. We wanted to provide children with their own personal resource which could help them understand and cope with COVID 19. Through this story we hope to convey the message to children that it is okay to feel a lot of different and conflicting emotions while also guiding them on some basic strategies to help manage these emotions in a healthy way."

Tealeaf [Teachers Leading the Frontline] Mansik Swastha is a behavioural health intervention aimed at improving children's mental well-being by task shifting child mental health care to Primary School Teachers.

Arpana Thapa, translator and Project Officer at Tealeaf Mansik Swastha, adds, "For me personally, it was a very important project as there were not many local sources that explained COVID to children in a simple manner. So creating a child friendly story about COVID, and that too in our local language, felt like it was much needed."

This book will be distributed for free among communities that DLR Prerna works in and will be made available to purchase as well, it is informed.

DLR Prerna is a community-based, participatory-focused organisation with over two decades of experience partnering with rural communities in the Darjeeling Himalaya addressing issues of equity, sustainable agro-ecology, water and sanitation and community health. Through their partnership with Broadleaf Health and Education Alliance, DLR Prerna have extended their work to engage directly with promoting the health and mental well-being of rural school going children.

Chetan Bhagat releases trailer for new book

NEW DELHI, SEP 23

[PTI]: Bestselling author Chetan Bhagat on Thursday released the trailer of his upcoming book "400 Days".

The book, published by Westland, is the third story from the Keshav-Saurabh series after "The Girl in Room 105" and "One Arranged Murder". It will be released on October 8.

The trailer, though not cinematic like the previous instalments from the series featuring actor Vikrant Massey, saw Bhagat narrat-

ing the plot himself about a missing girl Siya and her mother Alia Arora's determination to find the young girl and seeking help for the same from Keshav Rajpurohit. "I feel '400 Days' is my best book ever, maybe because I wrote it with full focus as we were all in a lockdown. In '400 Days' I've tried to explore themes of a missing child, dangers of the internet and infidelity," Bhagat had said during the launch of the book cover on Tuesday. According to the publishers, revolving

around a kidnapping and a forbidden love story, "400 Days" is a riveting read filled with mystery and romance unlike no other.

"From India's highest-selling author comes a page-turner that will not only keep you glued to the story but also touch you deeply. The book presents an unputdownable tale of suspense, human relationships, love, friendship, the crazy world we live in and, above all, a mother's determination to never give up," they said in a statement.

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UNFAIR FARES ON NAMCHI-SILIGURI ROUTE

People travelling by share-jeps from Namchi to Siliguri continue to be charged the Covid-inflated fares which are not only too high, but also unfair since these are clearly not the authorized rates. The "syndicate" at the Namchi taxi stand has abandoned the passengers and does not maintain a ticket counter for Siliguri and Melli. As a result, passengers need to haggle at the stand, and since only the desperate are travelling to Siliguri in a jeep in these present times, the situation is being exploited and passengers forced to pay Rs 600 for a seat to Siliguri. For Melli, they are made to shell out Rs 300. In Namchi, the drivers claim that the fares have been hiked by the State Government while at the Siliguri stand, drivers insist that local vendors have increased their commission, hence the hiked fares. The hiked fare, for some reason, is being charged only for the Namchi-Siliguri [with Melli on the way] route. Fares for destination elsewhere in Sikkim have reverted to the pre-Covid rates. [from BIKASH CHETTRI]

Soap-making training at Tanzi Bikmat



NAMCHI, 23 SEPT [IPR]: The inaugural function for hands-on training on soap-making for Tanzi Bikmat Van Dhan Vikas Kendra (VDVK) by Multi Technology Testing Centre & Vocational Training Centre, College of Agricultural Engineering & Post Harvesting Technology-Central Agricultural University, was held at Tanzi Bikmat GPU today. The training was titled, "Enhancement of Livelihood through produc-

tion of household commodities like dish soap and beauty bar".

The training was in continuation to the Entrepreneurship & Skill Development Program (ESDP) under Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana (PMVDY), which had commenced on 30 Aug, 2021.

The chief fuest for the inaugural program was Deputy Registrar of Cooperative Societies, Sewan Rai, Department of Cooperation, Namchi;

other guest included Assistant Project Manager under State Rural Livelihood Mission and Departmental Officials. The hand on training program was meant for the SHG members under the VDVK and is part of the Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana, a flagship program of Tribal Co-operative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs-Government of India.

Aveek Sarkar re-elected PTI Chairman

NEW DELHI, SEP 23 (PTI): Aveek Sarkar, the Editor Emeritus and Vice Chairman of the Ananda Bazar Group of Publications, was on Thursday re-elected Chairman of Press Trust of India (PTI), the country's premier news agency.

Sarkar's re-election for a two-year-term was ratified by PTI's Board of Directors at their meeting.

K.N. Shanth Kumar, Director of The Printers (Mysore) Pvt. Ltd. which brings out Deccan Herald and Kannada language daily Prajavani, was elected as the Vice-Chairman.

Sarkar, 76, started training as a journalist while he was a student, just out of school. After graduating from the University of Calcutta, he went to Britain where he came under the tutelage of the legendary editor of The Sunday Times, Sir Harold Evans.

He was schooled in journalism by such iconic figures as Edwin Taylor

in design and Ian Jack in sub-editing.

As Chief Editor of the Ananda Bazar Group, Sarkar was the moving force behind the transformation of the group's publications, which include Bengali language daily Anandabazar Patrika and English daily The Telegraph, both of which he personally edited.

In addition, the Kolkata-based group also runs six television news channels in various languages, of which the most prominent is the Hindi-language ABP News. The group also publishes a large number of magazines.

Sarkar was the founding Managing Director of Penguin India, the Indian counterpart of Penguin Books, the founding Editor of Business Standard and also the pivotal figure behind the acquisition of STAR News by the ABP Group in 2003.

Besides Aveek Sarkar and Shanth Kumar, the PTI Board members are Vijay Kumar Chopra (Punjab Kesari), Vineet Jain (Times of India), N. Ravi (The Hindu), Vivek Goenka (the Express Group), Mahendra Mohan Gupta (Dainik Jagran), Riyad Mathew (Malayala Manorama), M.V. Shreyams Kumar (Mathrubhumi), R. Lakshminath (Dinamalar), Hormusji N. Cama (Bombay Samachar), Praveen Someshwar (Hindustan Times), eminent economist Prof. Deepak Nayyar, former Foreign Secretary and NSA Shivshankar Menon, veteran journalist and former Chairman of Business Standard T.N. Ninan and former Executive Director of Tata Sons Ltd. R. Gopalakrishnan.

Nima Theeng quits BJP

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 23 SEPT:

Dr Nima Tamang Theeng has tendered his resignation from all posts and primary membership of Bharatiya Janata Party.

In his resignation letter addressed to the BJP president, New Delhi, he explains that the decision to quit the party comes from his conviction that a national party was not suited for state politics here.

"...Regional Party is good for the common welfare of State like Sikkim. National Party's policy matter is conflict with the interests of State. It was nice experience working with BJP," he writes in his resignation letter.

Mr Theeng was Sikkim State Convener, International Relations, in-charge of Shyari constituency and executive member of the state unit of the BJP.

Odisha to host men's Junior Hockey World Cup in Nov-Dec

BHUBANESWAR, SEP 23 (PTI): Odisha was on Thursday named the host of this year's FIH men's hockey Junior World Cup in November-December, reaffirming the state's growing stature as a hub for the sport.

The event will be staged at the city's Kalinga Stadium here from November 24 to December 5.

Odisha and Uttar Pradesh had both expressed interest in hosting the marquee event but the former was picked for being the national team's title sponsor as well. Lucknow had hosted the tournament's last edition in which India claimed the top honours in 2016.

At the upcoming tourney, 16 hockey playing nations will vie for the top honours. The state has earlier hosted the senior World Cup in 2018, the FIH World League in 2017 and the Champions Trophy in 2014.

"It is a short notice for making the arrangement for such an event, especially during the pandemic period. However, since the country's prestige is at stake, we have readily agreed to host it," Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik said during a programme to announce the host city.

"I hope the reigning Indian team will take advantage of the home condition and emerge victorious again," he added.

During the function, the CM also unveiled the logo and trophy of the event. Odisha is Indian hockey's sponsor as well, a role that was widely appreciated after the men's team won a bronze and the women's team finished a creditable fourth in Tokyo Olympics earlier this year.

The official an-

nouncement was made in the presence Odisha Sports and Youth Services Minister Tusharkanti Behera, International Hockey Federation (FIH) President Dr Narinder Batra and Hockey India Secretary General Rajinder Singh.

The teams which will participate in the event are hosts India, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, South Africa, Egypt, Belgium, England, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, USA, Canada, Chile and Argentina.

Australia has opted out due to travel restrictions because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Odisha is also set to host the 2023 FIH senior men's World Cup in Bhubaneswar and Rourkela.

"Odisha is the hub for hockey in the country and the Odisha state government will continue to do everything in our capacity to help the sport grow further and achieve further laurels on the world level," Patnaik said.

"We look forward to welcoming 16 top teams from across the world to participate in the FIH Odisha Hockey Men's Junior World Cup Bhubaneswar 2021. We are delighted to be hosts of this prestigious tournament. Our priority will be to ensure a safe environment to compete during these challenging COVID times," he added.

FIH chief Batra said Bhubaneswar's good infrastructure will ensure that the tournament will be held smoothly.

"The FIH Odisha Hockey Men's Junior World Cup Bhubaneswar 2021 is the pinnacle of tournaments for U-21 and is a very important fixture in the FIH calendar," he said.

Adhoc teachers to host National Education Day celebration with CM as chief guest



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 23 SEPT:

All Sikkim Adhoc Teachers & Temporary Employees Association [ASATTEA] is gearing up to celebrate National Education Day 2021 in grand manner on 11 November with a special event at Saramsa in East District. A celebration committee was formed during an executive meeting of the association on 21 September, it is informed.

Addressing a press conference here this afternoon, chief coordinator of the committee, Rajesh Dahal, mentioned that Chief Minister PS Tamang has consented to attend as the chief guest.

He added that the celebration would be "historic" as the CM is

expected to make important announcements regarding the new education and teacher recruitment policy.

The ASATTEA celebration committee has Education Minister KN Lepcha as chief patron, while Minister Sanjit Kharel, Political Secretary to the CM, Jacob Khaling, chairperson Housing Board, Karma Tashi Bhutia and Lakpa Moktan have been appointed patrons.

He added that other committees have also been formed and coordinators appointed to ensure a grand National Education Day celebration.

The celebration committee has decided to invite all legislators, chairpersons and ad-

sors of the government along with the Chief Secretary and heads of government departments.

Celebration committee president, Yogesh Sharma, adds that the association has also decided to invite representatives from Sikkim Teachers Association, associations of temporary employees and fresh candidates appearing for interviews.

He added that it was important for them to attend the celebration to listen to the historic announcements to be made by the CM.

He informed that tripartite talks were also scheduled to be held between the CM, Education Department and ASATTEA to discuss various issues.

Trainers trained on Acts and laws for protection of women



WANGCHUK BHUTIA MANGAN, 23 SEPT:

A 3-day Training of Trainers on the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, Human Trafficking and other acts and laws for women was organised by the Sikkim State Commission for Women from 21 to 23 September at the conference hall of Samaj Kalyan Bhawan, Lumsey.

Nandita Bhatt, Director, Martha Farrell Foundation, was present as the main resource person and addressed issues of gender violence and sexual harassment of women at the workplace.

Advocate Tashi Rapden spoke on POCSO Act and issues of human trafficking while Advocate Gulshan Lama spoke on the Domestic Violence Act.

The 21 trainees were

from police, panel advocates, SLSA, NGOs, one-stop centres, panchayats, SIRD and media.

The trainers will be deputed as resource persons to further reach the grassroots when programs for self help groups are organised in the coming months.

The State Commission for Women plans to sensitise more than 3,200 SHG members and students.

For bail, Bihar man has to wash clothes of all women in his village

PATNA, 23 SEPT [AFP]: A man accused of attempted rape has been given bail on condition that he wash and iron the clothes of all women in his village for six months.

Lalan Kumar, 20, will have to buy detergent and other items needed to provide six months of free laundry services to about 2,000 women in the village of Majhor in Bihar, under the ruling made Wednesday.

Kumar, who washes clothes for a living, was arrested in April on charges including attempted rape, Santosh

Kumar Singh, a police officer in Madhubani district, told AFP.

No date has been set for his trial.

"All the women in the village are happy with the court decision," Nasima Khatoon, the head of the village council, told AFP.

"It is historic. It will boost respect for women and help to protect dignity," added Khatoon, one of the village dignitaries who will monitor Kumar.

Women in the village said the order had made a positive impact by making crime against women

a subject of discussion in their community.

"This is a remarkable step and a different kind of punishment that sends a message to society," said Anjum Perween.

The rape laws in the country were overhauled after a 2012 gang rape in New Delhi but the number of offences remains high, with more than 28,000 rapes reported in 2020.

The police have long been accused of not doing enough to prevent violent crime and failing to bring sexual assault cases to court.



Minister attends meet on revamped distribution sector scheme

GANGTOK, 23 SEPT [IPR]: Minister for Energy & Power Department, MN Sherpa, attended the region wise meeting through video conferencing chaired by Union Minister of Power and New & Renewable Energy, RK Singh today. The meeting was joined by Power Ministers of the North East States and was convened to discuss the recently launched reforms-linked results-based Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme.

Promod Bhandari wins South district photography contest

NAMCHI, 23 SEPT (IPR):

The office of South District Magistrate organized an online photography contest on child portraits from 10 to 25 Aug on the District Magistrate's Instagram social media profile. This contest was organized mainly to recognize photography skills among the public at large.

The winners were decided based on the number of likes on their pictures. The first position was grabbed by Promod Bhandari with 1,133 likes, followed by Anmol Rois and Dinesh Chettri in second and third position with 921 and 338 likes, respectively. They were given prizes on behalf on the South District Magistrate.



Amitav Ghosh's 'Jungle Nama' released as audiobook

NEW DELHI, SEP 23 (PTI): Amitav Ghosh's "Jungle Nama", the verse adaptation of an episode from the legend of Bon Bibi, a tale popular in the villages of the Sundarbans, has now been released as an audiobook with music and voice of US-based Ali Sethi.

HarperCollins India said this is an exclusive collaboration among three of the most influential figures from the world of arts.

"With verses from Amitav Ghosh, illustrations from Salman Toor and now with music and voice of Ali Sethi, 'Jungle Nama' evokes the mystery and majesty of the Sundarbans in a way that is unique and unforgettable," it said.

According to Ghosh, he wanted to have a musical version of "Jungle Nama" right from the start.

"I consider myself fortunate that it came about through a collaboration with a musician of the calibre of Ali Sethi. Not only is Ali rigorously trained in Hindustani classical music, he is also thoroughly versed in many genres of Western music such as Broadway musicals, rap and so on," he said.

"On top of all that, he has a really beautiful voice. Ali's reading of 'Jungle Nama' is mesmerising, and I am sure that the music he has composed and performed for the au-

diobook will enchant listeners for a long time to come," Ghosh added.

Lahore-born Sethi said Ghosh's retelling of this "magical folktale is full of the wisdom and wonder one has come to expect of him - an ecological parable that playfully imparts important lessons about greed, wanderlust, and the power of restraint".

The music, he said, "draws constantly on our syncretic raga traditions".

Udayan Mitra, executive publisher at HarperCollins India, said this is much more than the usual audiobook: it is an artistic collaboration of the very highest order between Ghosh and Sethi.

"One might say that

the interplay between text and music that we find on the audiobook of 'Jungle Nama' parallels, on an aural register, the way in which Salman Toor's artwork complemented the text in the print version of the book," Mitra said.

"Jungle Nama" also lies at the heart of Ghosh's novel "The Hungry Tide". It is the story of the avaricious rich merchant Dhona, the poor lad Dukhey, and his mother; it is also the story of Dokkhin Rai, a mighty spirit who appears to humans as a tiger, of Bon Bibi, the benign goddess of the forest, and her warrior brother, Shah Jongoli.

The original print

version of this legend, dating back to the 19th century, is composed in a Bengali verse meter known as 'dwpodi poyar'.

"Jungle Nama" is a free adaptation of the legend, told entirely in a poyar-like meter of 24 syllable couplets that replicate the cadence of the original.

This is the first book-in-verse by Ghosh, who was born in Calcutta in 1956, and grew up in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. He has also authored acclaimed works of fiction and non-fiction like "The Shadow Lines", "In an Antique Land", "The Glass Palace", "The Ibis Trilogy", "The Great Derangement" and "Gun Island".

Defence Ministry places ₹ 7,523 Cr order for 118 battle tanks

NEW DELHI, 23 SEPT [PTI]: The Defence Ministry on Thursday sealed a contract to procure 118 Main Battle Tanks (MBTs) Arjun for the Indian Army at a cost of ₹ 7,523 crore, in a major move to boost its combat capabilities.

The defence ministry placed the order for the Arjuna Mk-1A tanks with the Heavy Vehicles Factory (HVF), Avadi, Chennai.

The MBT Mk-1A is a new variant of Arjun Tank designed to enhance fire power, mobility and survivability, infused with 72 new features and more indigenous content from the Mk-1 variant

"The Ministry of Defence (MoD) placed an order with Heavy Vehicles Factory (HVF), Avadi, Chennai for supply of 118 Main Battle Tanks (MBTs) Arjun Mk-1A for the Indian Army on September 23," the ministry said in a statement.

"The order, worth ₹ 7,523 crore, will provide further boost to the "Make in India" initiative in defence sector and is a big step towards achieving "Aatmanirbhar Bharat", it said.


The ministry said the tanks would ensure effortless mobility in all terrains, besides precise target engagement during day and night.

It has been designed and developed by the Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) by incorporating numerous upgrades on Arjun MBT, the in-service main battle tank with the Indian Army.

"The MK-1A is equipped with accurate and superior firepower; all-terrain mobility and an invincible multi-layered protection provided by an array of advanced technology systems. It can take on the enemy during day and night conditions and in both static and dynamic modes," the ministry said.

It said the production order to Heavy Vehicles Factory will open up a large avenue in defence manufacturing for over 200 Indian vendors including MSMEs, with employment opportunities to around 8,000 people.

"This will be a flagship project showcasing the indigenous capability in cutting edge defence technologies," the ministry said.



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
URBAN DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
GANGTOK

NO.255/UDD/Secy. Dated: 21.09.2021

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Gangtok Smart City Development Limited (GSCDL) is undertaking the work "Improvement of Pedestrian Walkway/ Footpath from Vajra Cinema Hall, Bauwakhini to Ranipool, East Sikkim".

It has been reported that requests are being received for modifications which are either not within the scope of work or works are in advance stage resulting in cost and time overrun. Such a situation tend to cause delay in implementation. Since, the quality of infrastructure and timely implementation of projects are essential for creating robust amenities for ensuring ease of living in the cities; kind and active cooperation is solicited from all stakeholders including members of public, especially from those having their dwelling houses adjacent to pedestrian walkways.

This notice is hereby issued for information of all concerned that if any changes or suggestions are to be incorporated, requests may be made by either sending mail to the following email addresses or by submitting an application to the Office of the Divisional Engineer, Gangtok Smart City Development Ltd. within fifteen (15) days of issue of this notice:-

- gangtoksmartcity@gmail.com
- ctosmartcity.gangtok@gmail.com
- sesmartcity.gangtok@gmail.com
- degscdl@gmail.com
- ae3smartcity@gmail.com

Gangtok Smart City Development Ltd. shall not entertain any request for modification after the stipulated time.

Further, in case of any illegal obstruction of the work, the necessary actions as per law will be initiated against persons causing such obstruction.

Sd/-
Secretary
Urban Development Department

Test your fitness at EastMojo's Fit for Life contest



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 23 SEPT:

Digital media house, EastMojo, in association with Futsal Association of Sikkim, has announced plans to organize 'Fit for Life', an online fitness event in Northeast India, with the objective of promoting fitness activities among people. The event carries cash prizes of up to Rs 15,000. Interested participants can send in entries till 02 October.

Details regarding the event were shared today by FAS president Dr Remon Chettri, general

secretary Benoy Upreti and executive member Karma Dadul.

They informed that the competition invites two-minute videos with anything to do with fitness from pushups, pull-ups, burpees, lunges or anything under the broad range of fitness from running, cycling.

Interested participants can register at Eastmojo.com/Fitforlife on East Mojo's website.

Interested participants must ensure that their videos shared on social media carry the hashtag #Fitforlife tagging East Mojo and

Futsal Association of Sikkim and once registered, based on likes, subscription and comments, judging will be carried out.

Around 300 entries have already been received.

The competition will be judged by a technical advisor for FAS and one from the media fraternity and people from Northeast to decide the winners of the competitions.

The State government has welcomed the initiative and the Sports & Youth Affairs Department is on board as the title sponsor.



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
SOCIAL JUSTICE & WELFARE DEPARTMENT
MILE LUMSEY, TADONG
GANGTOK

Memo No. 23/GOS/184/SJ&WD/EC/2021-22 Dated: 26.8.2021.

RE-AUCTION NOTICE


The social Justice & Welfare Department located at Lumsey in East Sikkim shall be auctioning a non-functional Biscuit Manufacturing Plant on 'AS IS WHERE IS' basis. The lowest value for the available has been kept as Rs. 6,02,000/- (Rupees six lakhs two thousand) only.

- Interested parties inspect the material from 31/08/2021 to 10/09/2021 during office hours and sealed quotations may be sent to the office of the undersigned on or before 16/09/2021 till 1.00 pm along with security deposit (5% of Rs.6,02,000/-) Rupees Six lakhs two thousand) only in the form of TDR/FDR for an amount of Rs.30,100/- (Rupees thirty thousand one hundred) only drawn in favour of CAO, SJ&WD, for a validity period of 3(three) months.
- The quotations shall be opened on 16.09.2021 at 2.00 pm in presence of the interested bidders and the highest bidder shall be allowed to lift the materials after the production of Demand Draft drawn in favour of the Managing Director, Extruder Food Processing Plant for the rate quoted.
- Form for quotation can be obtained from the office of the Superintending Engineer (N/E) on submission of Bank Receipt (drawn from the State Bank of Sikkim on Head of account 0235.60.800.03 other receipts) for an amount of Rs. 2500/- (Rupees two thousand five hundred) only.
- The last date for obtaining form for quotation is on 15/09/2021 (during office hours).
- Certificate of Identification (as a proof of Sikkim Subject) should be invariably submitted with the quotation).
- Further, the materials, should be lifted within a period of one month from the issue of the lifting order, failing which the TDR shall be forfeited and offer shall be given to the second highest bidder. Rate quoted below the set back value shall be summarily rejected. The second highest bidder shall be given one month's time to lift the materials after duly depositing the quoted amount. If he/she fails to lift the materials within stipulated time, his/her TDR shall be forfeited and fresh tender as deem fit by the government will be taken up.
- The Department reserves the right to reject the bid without assigning any reason thereof.

Sd/-
Additional Chief Engineer
Social Justice & Welfare Department
Government of Sikkim
Gangtok.

R.O. No. 159/IPR/Pub/Classi./21-22 Date: 26.08.2021

SIKKIM



GOVERNMENT **GAZETTE**

EXTRAORDINARY
PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY

Gangtok Thursday 19th August, 2021 No. 239

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

No. 73/SJ&WD/2021 Dated: 18/08/2021

NOTIFICATION

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

By order and in the name of the Governor.

Tshewang Gyachho, SCS,
Secretary to the Government
File no. GOS/501/SJEW

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

It's Everyone's Responsibility

The minors need to kept safe and allowed their childhood

It is not easy to grow inured to issues that demand our involvement. We ease into such somnolence after years of consciously looking the other way until we reach a stage where most people prefer to remain silent spectators even when they are witness to obvious maltreatment. We deflect guilt by pretending sympathy at discussions around the dinner table and convincing ourselves that it is not 'proper' to get involved in what transpires beyond our private spaces. Soon, with this distancing sets in indifference, and with that everything that a society stands for starts falling apart. The collapse is already happening all around us and this is because the society is not striving to make things better for the underprivileged and the marginalised. It is in societal impassivity as this that the government has to step in and make specific laws protecting the ignored, marginalized, underprivileged and even children; sections for whom the society should be looking out, but does not. Had the society remained involved, these sections would not have suffered so much that legislations had to be brought in to ensure humanity.

And with that setting up, we segue again into a problem that refuses to get contained. And no, "catching" the culprit, although necessary, is not the same as keeping the children safe. One of the most difficult demands of putting together a newspaper is filing reports about abuse against minors. Apart from the disturbing chore of piecing together details to highlight the level of depravity that made a victim out of a child who has not even begun understanding the life around her/him, there is the fear of over-sensationalizing the incident in a way that might force the incident and the reaction to it on a tangent that is not necessarily what the situation demands. There is also the worry of underplaying it so much that it trivializes the issue. But that is an uncertainty that challenges journalists; what is that befuddles the society at large so completely that it remains insensate to the trauma of the young victims? It is one of those moments in the process of putting out a newspaper when we regret being the bearers of news [since we have to confront all the gory details] and not receivers [readers do have the benefit of not reading beyond the headline and a sanitized retelling of the incident]. What is even more disturbing is to realize that we continue to fail in keeping our children safe. And make no mistake, this is a societal failing, not a failure of the law and order machinery.

Crimes against minors continue to occur [a few get reported, many get swept under the carpet and too many remain secrets with victims and traumatize them throughout their lives] because Sikkim, as a society, blindsides its children. Secure years while growing up are the least that can be guaranteed to the young, and despite its small size, the society here continues to come up wanting in this regard. The solution is not in lynch mobs to punish the accused, nor even in over-protective cushions created by paranoia. As a society we need to start realizing that children here are in harm's way, as parents and hopefully because we are also responsible citizens, we need to educate the young and ourselves on the ways and means that the young can be kept safe. Child abuse is no longer rare in Sikkim and minors suffer sexual abuse in numbers which are distressing. Still more are denied their basic rights and continue to work as domestic servants in homes across the state, invariably working in conditions which are deplorable.

As per the 2011 Census, there were 64,111 children aged 0-6 in Sikkim. This is also the most vulnerable age-group when it comes to abuse. Given that Sikkim has a population of 6.11 lakh, this means that there are more than 9 people above the age of six to look out for the minors. Pedophiles form a tiny, very tiny, sliver of this remaining population. And no, it is not being suggested that we form nine-abreast wall of bodyguards around the children, but ensure that these nine are adequately informed about warning signs and wrong behavior and are effectively reassured that when they spy a predator, he will be taken one and taken away.

Long COVID: Double vaccination halves risk of developing long-lasting symptoms

CLAIRE STEVES
THECONVERSATION.COM

In unvaccinated people, around one in 20 who get symptomatic COVID-19 experience symptoms for at least eight weeks. Around one in 50 have symptoms that drag out for three months or more.

We wanted to know whether COVID-19 vaccines might protect against developing long-lasting symptoms. To find out, we looked at data provided by more than a million regular contributors to the COVID Symptom Study, a project in which members of the public log their symptoms via an app to help with research.

Our latest analysis of the study's data, covering around 2 million vaccine doses, shows that vaccines significantly reduce the risk of catching COVID-19, with only 0.2% of those fully vaccinated later testing positive for the virus.

Even if you're unlucky enough to catch the virus after being vaccinated, your chances of falling seriously ill or dying are slashed. Double-vaccinated people are 31% less likely to experience acute COVID-19 symptoms and 73% less likely to be hospitalised – a result that's borne out in the relatively low hospitalisation and death rates we're seeing now even as tens of thousands of people are still testing positive every day in the UK.

Reassuringly, for those who did fall ill with COVID-19 after being vaccinated, only around 5% went on to have symptoms that lasted for more than four weeks, meaning their chances of developing long COVID were cut by half. One of the best ways to reduce your risk of getting long COVID is to get fully vaccinated as soon as possible.

However, we did notice that frail older people and those living in more socially deprived areas were more likely to be infected and fall ill

with COVID-19 after being vaccinated, especially if they had only had one vaccine dose. This suggests that we should prioritise further vaccination efforts and public health measures such as masking and social distancing among these groups, especially where infection rates are high and people are mixing and moving around.

VACCINES AND LONG COVID

As the UK vaccination programme rolled out, we also started to notice anecdotal reports from people living with long COVID that their symptoms seemed to improve after being vaccinated.

The patient-led LongCovidSOS group chose to investigate this by surveying over 800 long COVID patients early in 2021. More than half of those surveyed noticed an overall improvement in their symptoms after vaccination, which then appeared to be sustained in about half of this group. Around a quarter of the overall respondents reported no difference and one-fifth said their symptoms had got worse. These findings have been released as a preprint, so haven't yet been reviewed by other scientists, but they've been backed up by data from the COVID Symptom Study, which we'll be publishing soon.

However, while there does seem to be some kind of link between receiving a COVID-19 vaccine and improvements in long COVID, it's not clear exactly how the two are connected. It could be that the immune response triggered by the vaccine has a direct impact on symptoms.

Alternatively, it could just be that time has continued to pass since these people were originally infected and they're experiencing a natural recovery from the virus. Or it could be a bit of both. Either way, more research is needed to tease out what's going on.

What we can say is that



COVID-19 vaccines certainly aren't harmful for people with long COVID. What's more, because we know that it's possible to be reinfecting with the virus, there's a risk that catching it a second time could exacerbate symptoms for people living with long COVID and set them back even further. It's therefore vital that we encourage anyone with long COVID who has not been vaccinated to do so as soon as possible, to help protect themselves and those around them.

A SERIOUS THREAT

Although the chances of developing long COVID after being vaccinated are small, this is a numbers game and a small percentage of a big number can still be substantial. As long as we are seeing tens of thousands of cases every day, we can still expect to see a substantial number of people living with lingering

symptoms over the coming months.

This is particularly important for younger people, who may be less worried about hospitalisation or death, yet who can still be susceptible to the debilitating long-term effects of the virus. A lot can happen in a few months when you're young, and long COVID can mean that people miss out on life-changing opportunities, like sitting an exam or taking up a new job, as well as the social activities that bring joy and wellbeing to life.

We'll probably all be living with COVID-19 for some time to come. But with a combination of vaccination and public health measures where necessary, we can help to make sure that as few people as possible have to directly live with its life-limiting long-term effects.

[the writer is Reader in Ageing Research, King's College London]

Work-Life Balance: What really makes us happy might surprise you

LIS KU
THECONVERSATION.COM

Finding the right work-life balance is by no means a new issue in our society. But the tension between the two has been heightened by the pandemic, with workers increasingly dwelling over the nature of their work, its meaning and purpose, and how these affect their quality of life.

Studies suggest people are leaving or planning to leave their employers in record numbers in 2021 – a "great resignation" that appears to have been precipitated by these reflections. But if we're all reconsidering where and how work slots into our lives, what should we be aiming at?

It's easy to believe that if only we didn't need to work, or we could work far fewer hours, we'd be happier, living a life of hedonic experiences in all their healthy and unhealthy forms. But this fails to explain why some retirees pick up freelance jobs and some lottery winners go straight back to work.

Striking the perfect work-life balance, if there is such a thing, isn't necessarily about tinkering with when, where and how we work – it's a question of why we work. And that means understanding sources of happiness that might not be so obvious to us, but which have crept into view over the course of the pandemic.

Attempts to find a better work-life balance are well merited. Work is consistently and positively related to our wellbeing and constitutes a large part of our identity. Ask yourself who you are, and very soon you'll resort to describing what you do for work.

Our jobs can provide us with a sense of competence, which contributes to wellbeing. Researchers have demonstrated not only that labour leads to validation but that, when these feelings are threatened, we're particularly drawn to activities that require effort – often some form of work – because these demonstrate our ability to shape our environment, confirming our identities as competent individuals.

Work even seems to make us happier in circumstances when we'd rather opt for leisure. This was demonstrated by a series of clever experiments in which participants had the option to be idle (waiting in a room for 15 minutes for an experiment to start) or to be busy (walking for 15 minutes to another venue to participate in an experiment). Very few participants chose to be



busy, unless they were forced to make the walk, or given a reason to (being told there was chocolate at the other venue).

Yet the researchers found that those who'd spent 15 minutes walking ended up significantly happier than those who'd spent 15 minutes waiting – no matter whether they'd had a choice or a chocolate or neither. In other words, busyness contributes to happiness even when you think you'd prefer to be idle. Animals seem to get this instinctively: in experiments, most would rather work for food than get it for free.

EUDAIMONIC HAPPINESS

The idea that work, or putting effort into tasks, contributes to our general wellbeing is closely related to the psychological concept of eudaimonic happiness. This is the sort of happiness that we derive from optimal functioning and realising our potential. Research has shown that work and effort is central to eudaimonic happiness, explaining that satisfaction and pride you feel on completing a gruelling task.

On the other side of the work-life balance stands hedonic happiness, which is defined as the presence of positive feelings such as cheerfulness and the relative scarcity of negative feelings such as sadness or anger. We know that hedonic happiness offers empirical mental and physical health benefits, and that leisure is a great way to pursue hedonic happiness.

But even in the realm of leisure, our unconscious orientation towards busyness lurks in the

background. A recent study has suggested that there really is such a thing as too much free time – and that our subjective wellbeing actually begins to drop if we have more than five hours of it in a day. Whiling away effortless days on the beach doesn't seem to be the key to long-term happiness.

This might explain why some people prefer to expend significant effort during their leisure time. Researchers have likened this to

compiling an experiential CV, sampling unique but potentially unpleasant or even painful experiences – at the extremes, this might be spending a night in an ice hotel, or joining an endurance desert race. People who take part in these forms of "leisure" typically talk about fulfilling personal goals, making progress and accumulating accomplishments – all features of eudaimonic happiness, not the hedonism we associate with leisure.

THE REAL BALANCE

This orientation sits well with a new concept in the field of wellbeing studies: that a rich and diverse experiential happiness is the third component of a "good life", in addition to hedonic and eudaimonic happiness.

Across nine countries and tens of thousands of participants, researchers recently found that most people (over 50% in each country) would still prefer a happy life typified by hedonic happiness. But around a quarter prefer a meaningful life embodied by eudaimonic happiness, and a small but nevertheless significant amount of people (about 10-15% in each country) choose to pursue a rich and diverse experiential life.

Given these different approaches to life, perhaps the key to long-lasting wellbeing is to consider which lifestyle suits you best: hedonic, eudaimonic or experiential. Rather than pitching work against life, the real balance to strike post-pandemic is between these three sources of happiness.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer in Psychology, De Montfort University]

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8 new COVID-19 cases push Andamans tally to 7,615



PORT BLAIR, SEP 23 (PTI) Andaman and Nicobar Islands reported eight new COVID-19 infections, three more than the previous day's count, which pushed the number of active cases in the union territory to 20, a health official said on Thursday.

All the eight new cases were detected during testing at the Veer Sa-

varkar Airport here, he said.

Passengers arriving by flight have to undergo a mandatory RT-PCR test at the airport before they are allowed entry into the islands.

The eight new COVID-19 cases pushed the tally to 7,615 of which 7,466 people have recovered from the disease, including

five on Wednesday, he said.

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

The union territory administration has so far tested 5,37,184 samples for COVID-19 and the cumulative test positivity rate is 1.42

per cent, he said.

A total of 4,29,830 beneficiaries have been inoculated so far, of which 2,87,442 have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine and 1,42,388 have received both doses of the vaccine, the official said, adding that the total population of the union territory is around four lakh.

Arunachal Pradesh reports 51 new COVID-19 cases

ITANAGAR, SEP 23 (PTI): Arunachal Pradesh's COVID-19 caseload rose to 54,241 as 51 more people tested positive for the infection, a senior health official said here on Thursday.

The COVID-19 death toll in the frontier state remained at 273 as no fresh fatality was report-

ed in the last 24 hours, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Dr Lobsang Jampa said.

Arunachal Pradesh now has 442 active COVID-19 cases, while 53,526 people have recuperated from the disease thus far, including 22 in the last 24 hours, the official said.

The COVID-19 recovery rate in the state now is 98.68 per cent while the percentage of active cases is 0.81 and the positivity ratio stood at 1.77 per cent, Jampa said.

Lower Subansiri district has the highest number of active cases at 65, followed by Tawang (59), West Kameng (47),

Tirap (45) and Lower Dibang Valley (44).

The state has tested 11,26,393 lakh samples for COVID-19 till date, including 2,879 on Wednesday, Jampa said.

A total of 11,11,651 people have been inoculated in the state thus far, State Immunisation Officer Dr Dimong Padung said.

Bhabanipur bypoll case: HC allows EC to file affidavit

KOLKATA, SEP 23 (PTI): The Calcutta High Court on Thursday allowed the Election Commission (EC) to file an affidavit regarding the contents of the notification issued by it for the Bhabanipur bypoll.

The court was hearing public interest litigation that urged it to step into the poll process in the constituency, as the EC allegedly mentioned that a constitutional crisis would arise if the by-election to Bhabanipur was not held, which the petitioner claimed the poll body cannot.

The advocate representing the EC sought a short adjournment to file an affidavit regarding the contents of two paragraphs of the notification issued for the election, in view of the arguments raised by Bikash Bhattacharya, the senior counsel for the petitioner.



A division bench comprising Acting Chief Justice Rajesh Bindal and Justice Rajarshi Bharadwaj adjourned the hearing in the PIL till Friday when it will be taken up again.

The West Bengal government had during an earlier hearing on September 13, submitted that the chief secretary of the state had only written to EC, requesting

that the bypoll be held and the commission had accepted the request.

It had submitted that the state has no role in the decision to hold the bypoll and that it is the sole preserve of the EC.

Bypoll to Bhabanipur was necessitated following the resignation of Trinamool Congress MLA Sovandeb Chattopadhyay to facilitate Chief Minis-

ter Mamata Banerjee's election to the assembly.

Banerjee lost in Nandigram, as per the results of the assembly election declared by the EC in May.

According to the constitutional provision, a person has to get elected within six months of taking oath as a chief minister or a minister. She took oath as chief minister for the third consecutive term on May 5.

COVID-19 recoveries surpass fresh cases in West Bengal

KOLKATA, SEPT 23 (PTI): Single-day recoveries in West Bengal on Wednesday outnumbered fresh COVID-19 cases by four, as the coronavirus tally in the state increased to 15,63,393, a health department bulletin said.

The state now has 7,724 active cases, while 15,36,978 people have recovered from the disease, including 687 since Tuesday.

Thirteen more COVID-19 deaths were reported in the state, as the toll mounted to 18,691.

Of the fresh fatalities, five were registered in North 24 Parganas district, three each in Kolkata and Howrah, and one each in Hooghly and Nadia, it said.

The state logged 683



fresh cases in the last 24 hours, the bulletin said.

As many as 37,181 samples were tested in the state since Tuesday,

taking the total number of such clinical examinations to 1,78,34,823, the bulletin added.

Meanwhile, 5,58, 820

people have been administered COVID-19 vaccines thus far, an official of the health department said.

Odisha logs 644 new COVID-19 cases, 7 fresh fatalities



BHUBANESWAR, SEP 23 (PTI): Odisha Thursday reported 644 new COVID-19 cases, including 72 children, taking the tally to 10,22,594 while seven fresh fatalities pushed the coronavirus death toll to 8,157, a health department official said.

The new cases were detected in 24 of the state's 30 districts, with 375 reported from different quarantine centres while the remaining 269 were local contact cases.

Khurda district of which the state capital Bhubaneswar is a part

reported the highest 283 new cases followed by Cuttack (77) and Balasore (34). The new cases included 72 children and adolescents whose rate of infection stands at 11.18 per cent, he said.

Health and Family Welfare department said seven COVID-19 deaths were reported from Angul, Cuttack, Jajpur, Khurda, Nabarangpur, Puri and Sundergarh districts which pushed the death toll to 8,157.

This apart, 53 other COVID-19 patients have also died due to comor-

bidities, he said.

Odisha currently has 5,713 active COVID-19 cases while 10,08,671 patients including 445 on Wednesday, recovered from the highly infectious disease.

The state has thus far conducted over 1.95 crore sample tests including 72,193 on Wednesday. Odisha's positivity rate stands at 5.2 per cent.

Odisha has so far administered over 2.87 crore COVID-19 vaccines doses of which 77,10,601 beneficiaries have taken both doses.

14 Maoist militia members surrender in Telangana

HYDERABAD, SEPT 23 (PTI): Fourteen people who worked for the banned CPI (Maoist) party surrendered before the police in Bhadradi Kothagudem district on Thursday.

Among the 14, three are minors, which includes a girl, who had worked as militia members for the banned CPI (Maoist) party, police said.

Though they were not willing to work for the party, they were forced to join it and attend training, a senior police official said.



The banned CPI (Maoist) Party forced them to attend meetings, collect ration and essential commodities from the villagers. They were vexed with the attitude of Maoist party cadre and turned themselves in to join the mainstream,

Bhadradi Kothagudem District Superintendent of Police Sunil Dutt said.

The senior police official appealed to all militia members to contact their relatives or the Police and surrender in order to lead a normal and better life.

4 injured in building wall collapse in Kolkata: Police

KOLKATA, SEPT 23 (PTI) Four people were injured as the wall of a building in eastern Kolkata's Kareya area collapsed on Thursday morning, following a loud noise, suspected to be that of a blast, police said.

The incident happened around 6.30 am in Ahiripukur 1st Lane, they said.

"Locals heard a loud sound from the building and informed the police. On reaching the spot, we found that a wall on the ground floor of the four-storied building collapsed and four inhabitants were injured," a senior police officer said.

The injured persons were admitted to a hospital, he said.

Forensic experts were examining the spot, he said, adding that an investigation was started.

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I respect team's decision to let Pant stay as captain: Iyer



DUBAI, SEP 23 (PTI): Shreyas Iyer says he relished captaining the Delhi Capitals in the IPL but completely respects the team management's decision to let Rishabh Pant stay as leader of the pack till the end of the 2021 season.

Iyer had led the Capitals to the summit clash of the 2020 season but he missed the first phase of this year's season due to a shoulder injury and the management asked Pant to captain the side.

The 26-year-old returned to the side before IPL's resumption after the COVID-19 forced break but the Capitals chose not to change the leader again, keeping Pant in the captain's chair.

The young Mumbai batsman, who hit a blistering 47 in team's win on Wednesday night, said he understands team's policy and has no complaints.

"When I was given the captaincy, I was in a different frame of mind and my decision-making and temperament level was very good and I benefited from it in the last two years," Iyer said at the post-match press conference.

"This is part of the decision-making from the franchise or whatever decision they took, I respect the fact and Rishabh is leading the side well from the start of the season and they thought that he should be continued till the season end and I completely respect the decision," he added.

The 26-year-old said he continues to enjoy the pressure situation as he thrives in such circumstances.

"And no drastic change has come that my focus has increased in batting, when I was captain, I like to soak in the pressure, when there is pressure, there are more challenges and, in such situations, I perform, that is my mind-set.

"Even today (Wednesday) when I went in, there was pressure to win the game. The wicket was playing uneven, so the mind-set is the same that being a main part of the team, you have to finish the match and whenever I play, my mindset is

that I play till the last ball and see to it that I make the team win."

The aggressive batsman it is a "really good feeling" to contribute in team's win in his first match post comeback.

"I wouldn't say that I'm satisfied because the hunger has just gone up and the appetite keeps on increasing every match you play, so yeah, not satisfied or not contained," he said after DC demolished Sunrisers Hyderabad by eight wickets.

Iyer said the injury period was difficult for him but he had the right people around him.

"I have a very close-knit family and friends and they never made me feel that I was going through an injury.

"When I got injured, it was really difficult for me to adapt (to) the fact that I was injured because I keep doing so many activities here and there and I never think about that situation and that occurred, so it was really tough for me to adapt.

"They kept me busy and in a positive frame of mind and never made me feel that I am going through an injury.

"When the rehab started and I started gaining strength, that feeling was really amazing and that put me in a really good frame of mind that I will come back positive and strong," shared the top-order batsman.

Delhi Capitals is at the top of the table and Iyer said the key now is to maintain the momentum.

"When we came in here, we were still on the top of the table and we have to maintain the same rhythm that we created in the first half of the leg and the mindset has been really positive in the dugout," he said.

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Herculean task for Indian women's team to counter Australia and save series

MACKAY (AUSTRALIA), SEP 23 (PTI): Outplayed in every aspect of the game so far, the Indian women's cricket team desperately needs its top order to strike form and its bowlers to show some spark against an in-form Australia in the second ODI here on Friday. India badly needs Shafali Verma and Smriti Mandhana to fire to put pressure on Australia after receiving a nine-wicket hammering in the opening match of the three-game series.

Both the openers have the firepower to take on the rival attack and they need to ensure that Ellyse Perry and Darcie Brown do not dominate them the way did in the series-opener.

The pace duo set the tone for the hosts in the warm-up game in Brisbane as well as in the first ODI here on Monday by cleaning up the Indian top-order as Australia recorded their 25th straight triumph in the format, a world-record winning streak.

Once the aggressive Shafali and Smriti are back in the hut without contributing much, the Indian team is left to do the damage control instead of pushing the ac-



celerator button.

One of these openers needs to bat deep and the middle order, led by skipper Mithali Raj, also has to show more intent in scoring runs at a decent pace.

Flamboyant vice captain Harmanpreet Kaur, who missed the opening game due to a thumb injury, is still unavailable and in her absence the team needs Deepti Sharma to do more.

The team's batting coach Shiv Sunder Das confirmed that Harmanpreet has not yet recovered.

"Right now she (Harmanpreet) is not fit. She's not available for the next game, that's the current status," the coach said at the pre-match press conference.

The 21-year southpaw Yastika Bhatia gave a good account of herself on debut in the previous

game.

The confidence of scoring 35 runs against a world-class attack would help her continue in the same vein.

The team, since landing in Australia, has not crossed the 250-run mark and any score less than that is not good enough to trouble the hosts.

The Australian top-order is packed with proven performers like

Rachael Haynes, Alyssa Healy and captain Meg Lanning.

Haynes has scores of 65 (warm up game) and 93 not out so far while Healy (77 in first ODI) too has a half-century to her name. Haynes, though, was rendered doubtful for the game after taking a blow on her right elbow during a training session.

The Indian bowlers,

led by veteran Jhulan Goswami, need to make early inroads as merely containing the batters won't do the job.

If the Indian team fails to win Friday's game, it would lose its third straight series, having suffered defeats against South Africa and England.

Teams (From):

India: Mithali Raj (Captain), Harmanpreet Kaur (vice-captain), Smriti Mandhana, Shafali Verma, Punam Raut, Jemimah Rodrigues, Deepti Sharma, Sneha Rana, Yastika Bhatia, Taniya Bhatia (wicket-keeper), Shikha Pandey, Jhulan Goswami, Meghna Singh, Pooja Vastrakar, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Poonam Yadav, Richa Ghosh, Ekta Bisht.

Australia: Meg Lanning (captain), Rachael Haynes (vice-captain), Darcie Brown, Maitlan Brown, Stella Campbell, Nicola Carey, Hannah Darlington, Ashleigh Gardner, Alyssa Healy, Tahlia McGrath, Sophie Molineux, Beth Mooney, Ellyse Perry, Georgia Redmayne, Molly Strano, Annabel Sutherland, Tayla Vlaeminck, Georgia Wareham.

Match starts at 10:40am (IST).

Naomi Osaka withdraws from next month's Indian Wells tourney



INDIAN WELLS, SEP 23 (AP): Naomi Osaka pulled out of the BNP Paribas Open, a move that was expected after she indicated following her U.S. Open loss this month that she planned to take another extended break from tennis.

The withdrawal was announced by the official Twitter feed for the hard-court tournament at Indian Wells, which is scheduled for Oct. 4-17 after twice being delayed during the coronavirus pandemic.

Osaka is a four-time Grand Slam champion who has been ranked No. 1 and is currently No. 8.

She last played at the U.S. Open, where her title defense ended with a third-round loss to eventual runner-up Leylah Fernandez on Sept. 3.

After that defeat,

Osaka said: I honestly don't know when I'm going to play my next tennis match.

Osaka, a 23-year-old who was born in Japan and now is based in the U.S., took time off earlier this season, a mental health break that began when she withdrew from the French Open before her second-round match. She also sat out Wimbledon, then returned for the Tokyo Olympics, where she lit the cauldron during the opening ceremony.

I feel like for me, recently, when I win, I don't feel happy, I feel more like a relief. And then when I lose, I feel very sad, Osaka said at her news conference following the 5-7, 7-6 (2), 6-4 loss to Fernandez at Flushing Meadows.

I don't think that's normal.

Genoa, Italy's oldest soccer club, sold to American company

GENOA, ITALY (AP): The oldest soccer club in Italy is the latest in a growing number of Serie A teams with North American owners.

Genoa, which was founded in 1893, was sold to the private investment firm 777 Partners, the club announced Thursday, in a deal reportedly worth 150 million euros (\$175 million).

"The new ownership group will purchase 99.9% of the share capital in Genoa, inject fresh capital into the club and will

assume certain related liabilities," a statement announcing the ownership change said. "The club's previous owner, Enrico Preziosi, will remain on the club's board of directors, while CEO Alessandro Zarbano will continue to run the day-to-day operations of the club."

Preziosi had been looking to sell Genoa for some time after 18 years in charge.

"The time has come to pass the torch," Preziosi said. "I have always said that I would leave Genoa

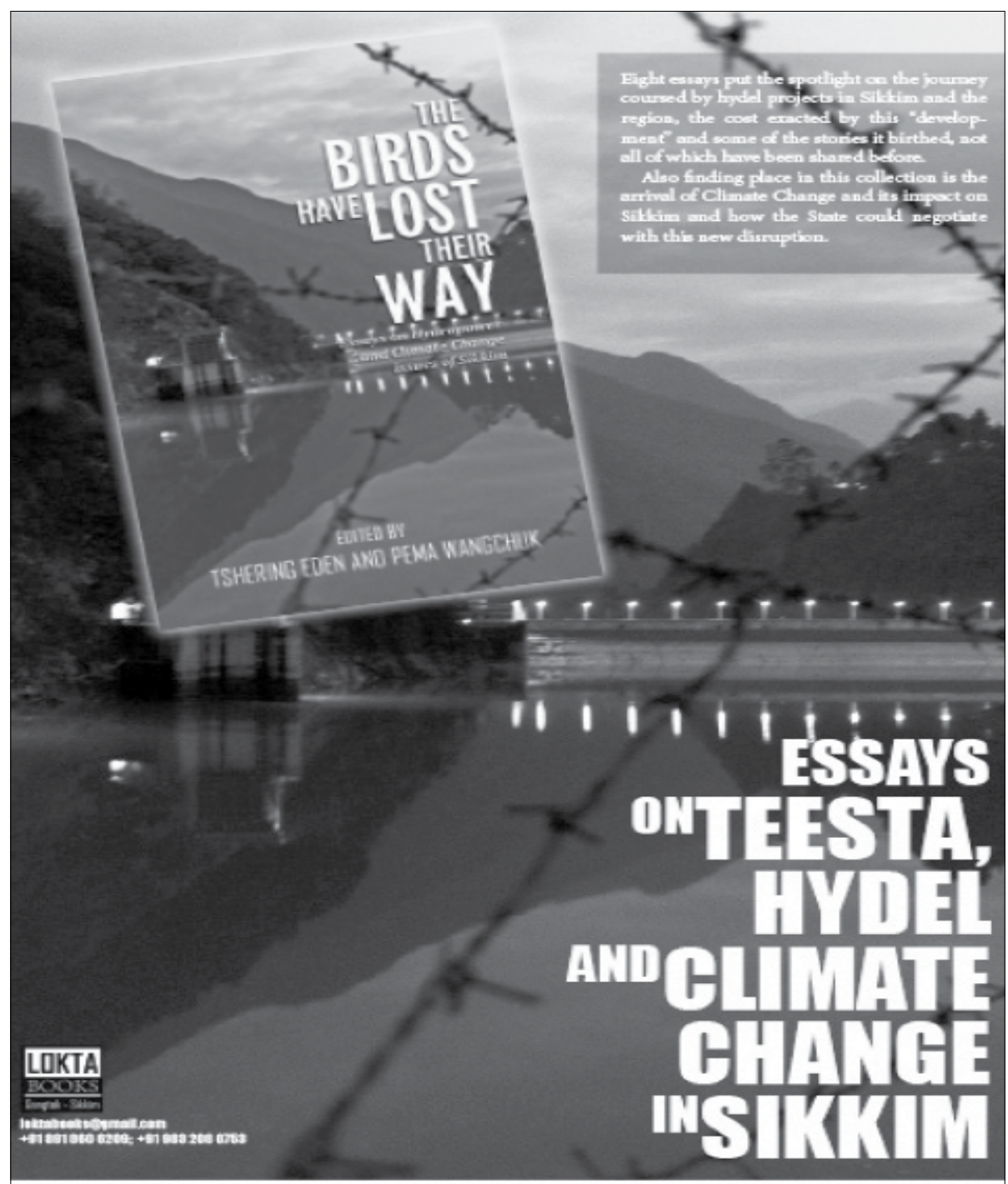
only to a strong and reliable new owner."

The investment was led by Josh Wander and Steve Pasko, the founders of 777 Partners, as well as Juan Arciniegas, who oversees the firm's sports, media and entertainment investments, and Andres Blazquez, the operating partner who helps manage the company's soccer investments.

"We are profoundly humbled to be a small part of the rich history, heritage and tradition of Genoa," Wander said. "We

understand and respect the responsibility we are inheriting to preserve and protect the proud legacy of the Rossoblu, and we are committed as custodians of that legacy to help the club reclaim its place at the top of Serie A."

Six other teams in the top division have North American owners: AC Milan, Roma, Fiorentina, Bologna, Spezia and Venezia. So does Parma, which was relegated to Serie B for this season, while Inter is controlled by China's Suning Group.



Fears of global shockwaves from Chinese builder’s debts ease

BEIJING (AP): Fears that a Chinese real estate developer’s possible default on multibillion-dollar debts might send shockwaves through global financial markets appeared to ease Thursday as creditors waited to see how much they might recover.

Shares of Evergrande Group, one of China’s biggest private sector conglomerates, rose 18% in Hong Kong after the company said it would pay interest to bondholders in China.

The company gave no sign whether it would make a payment due Thursday on a separate bond abroad.

Evergrande’s struggle has raised fears it might destabilize China’s financial system and set off a global chain reaction. But economists said while Chinese banks and other creditors are likely to suffer losses, there appeared to be little way a default on its 2 trillion yuan (\$310 billion) in debt would hurt the Chinese system or feed through to financial markets abroad.

“It’s definitely a local problem in China,” said Robert Carnell, head of Asian research for ING.

“There will be some suppliers and others who will go bust,” Carnell said. “But it’s not systemic in a sense that I can put my finger on.”

Chinese regulators have yet to say what Bei-



jing might do. But despite that, plus uncertainty about how much banks and individual buyers of Evergrande’s bonds might lose, stock markets appeared to recover from anxiety that caused Chinese stocks to tumble on Monday.

China’s benchmark Shanghai Composite Index closed 0.4% higher on Thursday. Hong Kong’s Hang Seng rose 1.2%. Markets in Australia and Southeast Asia, where economies depend heavily on trade with China, also rose.

Markets are “in a worst is over frenzy” after Evergrande’s promise to pay bondholders, said Jeffrey Halley of Oanda, in a report.

Evergrande was caught by tighter restrictions on borrowing imposed by Chinese regulators last year in a campaign to reduce the economy’s reliance on surging debt. The company has sold billions of dollars of assets to meet government limits.

Evergrande’s billionaire founder, Xu Jiayin, has expressed confidence the company will survive, but it has yet to announce a plan for repaying debtors.

That includes an \$83.5 million payment due Thursday to buyers abroad of a U.S. dollar-denominated bond. The company has a month to pay before it would be declared in default.

Economists say any government action is likely to focus on protecting Chinese families that paid for apartments that are yet to built, rather than on bailing out banks or other creditors.

Beijing has resources to prevent a Chinese credit crunch if Evergrande defaults. But it doesn’t want to appear to organize a bailout while it tries to force others to cut debt, economists say. The ruling Communist Party worries surging debt that piled up during China’s boom years might cause problems as economic growth slows.

On Thursday, one of Evergrande’s biggest

shareholders, Chinese Estates Holdings Ltd., announced it sold part of its stake at a loss and might sell its remaining 5.66% of the company. Chinese Estates said it took a 1.4 billion Hong Kong dollar (\$177 million) loss.

Evergrande’s debt problems come at a time when Chinese economic growth is forecast to weaken due to a slowdown in construction and home sales due to government pressure on the real estate industry to reduce reliance on borrowed money.

On Thursday, Fitch Ratings cut its growth forecast for China this year to 8.1% — still among the world’s

strongest — from 8.4%, citing the real estate slowdown.

Meanwhile, S&P Global Ratings downgraded the debt of a smaller Chinese developer, Xinyuan Real Estate Co., which has delayed releasing 2020 results. S&P said Xinyuan, which has shares traded on the New York Stock Exchange, faces “refinancing difficulty” that will make it harder to service \$229 million in debt due to lenders abroad in October.

Hundreds of smaller Chinese developers have gone bankrupt since Beijing started tightening financial controls on the industry in 2017.

Some commentators suggested Evergrande might become a “Lehman moment,” invoking the 2008 collapse of Wall Street bank Lehman Brothers ahead of the global crisis. But economists say Evergrande’s debts are relatively simple compared with those of a Wall Street bank and appear unlikely to set off a chain reaction.

Evergrande’s debt is the equivalent of as much as 2% of China’s annual economic output, but economists say the state-owned banking industry can absorb a possible default.

“There will be some banks exposed,” said ING’s Carnell. “The big ones can cope. The small ones don’t matter.”

Woman with Down syndrome loses UK abortion law challenge

LONDON (AP): A woman with Down syndrome lost a court challenge against the British government Thursday over a law allowing the abortion up until birth of a fetus with the condition.

Heidi Crowter, 26, and two others took the Department of Health and Social Care to court, arguing that part of the Abortion Act is discriminatory and violates the European Convention on Human Rights.

Abortions in England, Wales and Scotland are allowed up till 24 weeks of pregnancy. But the law states that terminations can be allowed up until birth if there’s “a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped,” which includes Down syndrome.

Crowter has said that she found the legislation “offensive” and disrespectful, and that she wanted to change the law to challenge people’s perception of Down syndrome.

Two judges dismissed the case Thursday after a two-day hear-

ing, concluding that the legislation isn’t unlawful and that it aims to strike a balance between the rights of the unborn child and that of women.

Crowter brought the case with Maire Lea-Wilson, 33, who has a son with Down syndrome, and an unidentified child with the condition.

She said she plans to appeal the ruling.

“The fight is not over,” Crowter said outside the Royal Courts of Justice in central London, surrounded by supporters.

“We face discrimination every day in schools, in the workplace and in society. Thanks to the verdict, the judges have upheld discrimination in the womb too,” she said.

Paul Conrathe, a lawyer from the firm representing the three claimants, called the judgment disappointing and “out of step with modern attitudes to disability.”

“By allowing babies with (Down) syndrome to be aborted up to birth, unlike neurotypical babies, the law sends a powerful message that the lives of people with (Down) syndrome are of lesser value,” he said.

Lava flow slows on Spanish island after volcanic eruption

TODOQUE, Canary Islands (AP): The advance of lava from a volcanic eruption in Spain’s Canary Islands has slowed significantly, raising doubts Thursday about whether it will fan out across the land and destroy more homes instead of flowing into the sea.

A giant river of lava slowed to four meters (13 feet) per hour after reaching a plain on Wednesday. On Monday, a day after the eruption on the island of La Palma, it was moving at 700 meters (2,300 feet) per hour.

As it slowed, the lava grew thicker. In places, it rose up to 15 meters (50 feet) high, authorities said. The lava now covers 166 hectares (410 acres) and has swallowed up around 350 homes.

The lava’s slowing pace bought time for more residents of towns in its path to grab belongings, with the Guardia Civil police force escorting them to their homes in Todoque, close to the coast, on Thursday morning.

The Guardia Civil said seismic activity in the area, which surged before the eruption and has remained strong, has stabilized.

Molten lava, ash and smoke continued to pour from the volcano’s mouth, shooting up to 4,200 meters (nearly 14,000 feet) high, the Canary Islands Volcanology Institute said. That raised concerns about whether airspace above the island could remain open.

ENAIRe, which manages Spain’s airspace, said two areas above the affected area are being declared no-fly zones to allow emergency services to operate freely. Some flights into and out of La Palma were delayed early Thursday.

The Emergency Military Unit deployed on the island said the readings it has taken of the air

found no threat to health.

Authorities haven’t reported any casualties from the eruption, though damage to property, infrastructure and farmland is expected to be significant.

Scientists were monitoring the volcano activity and had warned of a possible eruption. That allowed almost 7,000 people to be evacuated in time.

Officials had initially expressed fears about what would happen when the lava reached the Atlantic Ocean. The lava, whose temperature exceeds 1,000 C (more than 1,800 F), could cause explosions, trigger landslides and produce clouds of toxic gas when it hits the ocean, experts say.

The eruption and its aftermath could last for up to almost three months, according to the Volcanology Institute.

Spain’s king and queen, and the Spanish prime minister, were due to visit the affected area Thursday.

Life on the rest of La Palma, which is roughly 35 kilometers (22 miles) long and 20 kilometers (12 miles) wide at its broadest point, has been largely unaffected, with undeterred tourists landing for previously scheduled vacations.

The Canary Islands are a popular destination for European tourists due to their mild year-round climate.

Naval officer wins praise for Portugal’s vaccine rollout

OEIRAS, PORTUGAL (AP): As Portugal closes in on its goal of fully vaccinating 85% of the population against COVID-19 in nine months, other countries in Europe and beyond want to know how it was accomplished.

A lot of the credit is going to Rear Adm. Henrique Gouveia e Melo. With his team from the three branches of the armed forces, the naval officer took charge of the vaccine rollout in February — perhaps the moment of greatest tension in Portugal over the pandemic.

Now, the county could be just days away from hitting its target. As of Wednesday, 84% of the total population was fully vaccinated, the highest globally, according to Our World in Data.

Along with the rising number of shots, the COVID-19 infection rate and hospitalizations from the virus have dropped to their lowest levels in nearly 18 months. Portugal could end many of its remaining pandemic restrictions in October — a coveted development for many countries still in the grip of the highly infectious delta variant and lagging in their own vaccination rollouts.

Previously unheralded outside the military, Gouveia e Melo is now a household name in Portugal, having made a point of going on television regularly to answer public concerns about the vaccination program.

Easily recognizable even behind a face mask due to his blue

eyes, close-cropped salt-and-pepper hair and 1.93-meter (6-foot-3-inch) height, he’s often greeted in the street by people wanting to thank him.

“People are very nice,” he says. But the 60-year-old officer also is quick to insist he is just “the tip of the iceberg” in the operation and that many others share the credit.

Military involvement in rolling out the COVID-19 vaccine is not uncommon elsewhere, but Portugal has given it the leading role.

It turned out to be an inspired choice: Although Gouveia e Melo’s team works hand-in-hand with health authorities, police and town councils, the military’s expertise has proven invaluable.

“People in the military are used to working under stress in uncertain environments,” he said at his office in a NATO building near Lisbon that commands a view of the Atlantic. “They’re organized, have a good logistics set-up ... and are usually very focused on the mission.”

Gouveia e Melo set the tone of the rollout with his no-nonsense approach and emphasis on discipline. His straight-talking style endeared him to many who worried they might not get vaccinated in time.

In an interview with The Associated Press, he admitted that replacing a political appointee who quit after only three months was “intimidat-



ing.”

At the time, Portugal was in the worst phase of the pandemic, when it was among the hardest-hit countries with public hospitals near collapse. Promised vaccine deliveries weren’t arriving. And jockeying for shots was threatening to undermine public trust in the rollout.

“I felt like I had the eyes of 10 million people on me,” Gouveia e Melo said, referring to Portugal’s population.

His 42-year military career helps explain how he handled the pressure.

He was a submarine commander, and at one point was in charge of two of the vessels at the same time -- returning to base with one, eating a meal on shore and then taking another out to sea.

Gouveia e Melo also captained a frigate, led Euromarfor, the European Union’s Maritime Force, and has logged the most hours at sea of any serving Portuguese naval officer.

He is unapologetic about couching the vaccine rollout as a battle and has worn combat fatigues ever since taking

over the effort. He said he wanted to send a message that it was a call to arms.

“This uniform ... was symbolic for people to comprehend the need to roll up our sleeves and fight this virus,” he says.

Gouveia e Melo did away with Portugal’s initial efforts to piggyback on established vaccination strategies, such as those used annually for flu shots in usually small, public health centers. The demands of scale and speed to address COVID-19 required a very different approach.

Portugal began using large sports facilities around the country to set up what Gouveia e Melo called a “production line”: a reception and processing area; a waiting room; cubicles where injections are given; and a recovery area. He used soldiers as guinea pigs at the Lisbon military hospital to figure out the fastest flow of people through a building.

A major push came with what he described as a “tsunami” of vaccine deliveries in mid-June, which allowed a shift into a higher gear.

Tiago Correia, an associate professor in international public health at Lisbon’s New University Institute of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, reckons that the public view of Gouveia e Melo as the principal factor in the successful rollout is an “exaggeration” of his role.

A key factor, Correia says, is the traditional consenting attitude in Portugal toward national vaccination programs. Its vaccination rate for measles, mumps and rubella, for example, is 95% -- one of the EU’s highest -- and there is no significant anti-vaccination movement.

Even so, Gouveia e Melo’s military background meant he was able to “cut through all the politics” and ensure public trust in the rollout, Correia told AP.

These days, Gouveia e Melo is often greeted with spontaneous applause from the public when he visits vaccine centers and poses for selfies. He has been the subject of TikTok videos and poems.

Framed on the wall behind his desk is a

drawing given to him by a child who wrote “Obrigado” — “Thank you” — in capital letters.

On a visit Tuesday to a vaccine center at the Lisbon University campus, Gouveia e Melo strode around in his combat fatigues and handed out a cloth crest he designed for the rollout to those waiting for their shots. The emblem, worn by many in the effort, depicts a three-headed hydra lunging at two virus cells, with a green border representing the more than 4,700 people who have worked at Portugal’s vaccine centers.

Claudia Boigues, a 53-year-old waiting in the recovery area with her 15-year-old son who had just been vaccinated, said she marveled at the swift rollout.

“I never thought we’d reach 85%,” she said. “But now we deserve congratulations.”

Other countries, which Gouveia e Melo declined to identify because their requests have not been made public, have asked Portugal about its effort.

Gouveia e Melo will soon be able to say “mission accomplished” for his immediate goal. But with significant vaccination hesitancy in some wealthier countries and many poorer countries without sufficient doses, he’s under no illusion that virus variants could come back to torment Portugal.

“We’ve won a battle,” he says. “I don’t know if we’ve won the war against the virus. This is a world war.”

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Ashanti to star in romantic comedy movie 'The Plus One'



LOS ANGELES, SEP 23 (PTI): Singer-actor Ashanti has signed on to play the lead in rom-com feature "The Plus One".

Ashanti, whose film credits include "John Tucker Must Die" and "Resident Evil: Extinction", will also produce the upcoming movie.

According to Deadline, Ashanti will play Lizzie, whose only request of her 'Male of Honor' Marshall is that he doesn't bring his hated ex Marie to her destination wedding. But lovesick Marshall brings her as his plus

one, and Marie does everything in her power to wreck Lizzie's big day.

Austin H Garces and Brendan Bradley serve as writers on the film. Director and additional casting are being kept under wraps.

Danny Chan, Danny Roth, David Yates and Demetrius Spencer are also attached to produce the film. Executive producers are Almost Never Films, Tina Douglas and Stephan Dweck.

Filming is scheduled to take place in Florida in December.

LOS ANGELES, SEP 23 (PTI): Embattled Hollywood star Johnny Depp said he is a victim of cancel culture and that "no one is safe" any more.

Depp addressed a press conference at the San Sebastian Film Festival on Wednesday where he was scheduled to receive the honorary Donostia Award, reported Deadline.

"It can be seen as an event in history that lasted for however long it lasted, this cancel culture, this instant rush to judgement based on what essentially amounts to polluted air," he said ahead of receiving the honour.

Cancel culture or call-out culture is a modern form of ostracism in which someone is thrust out of social or professional circles.

"It's so far out of hand now that I can promise you that no one is safe. Not one of you. No one out that door. No one is safe. It takes one sentence and there's no more ground, the carpet has been pulled. It's not just me that this has happened to, it's happened to a lot of people. This type of thing has happened to women, men. Sadly at a certain point they begin to think that it's normal. Or that it's them. When it's not," he added.

Last year, when Depp lost the high-profile libel case with a UK tabloid over its branding of him as a "wife-beater", the actor was dropped from the "Fantastic Beasts 3", the multimillion film franchise from Warner Bros. Mads Mikkelsen replaced him as dark wizard Gellert Grindelwald in the film titled "Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore", slated to be released in April.

Depp also has a whopping USD 50 million defamation lawsuit against former wife, actor Amber Heard scheduled to go to trial in the US next year. "Aquaman" star Heard is pursuing a USD 100 million counterclaim.

"It doesn't matter if a judgement, per se, has taken some artistic license. When there's an injustice, whether it's against you or someone you love, or someone you believe in stand up, don't sit down. 'Cause they need you," Depp said in what appeared to be a reference to his legal troubles.

One of the members of the press attending the conference addressed the criticism of the festival for handing Depp a Donostia, particularly from Spain's Association of Female Filmmakers and Audiovisual



Media, which released a statement saying the award "transmits a terrible message to the public".

Before the actor could respond, the host of the event rejected the question out of hand and told the media to stick to questions about his career.

Depp later admitted he was concerned that his presence at the festival this year "would offend people" and that he "didn't want to offend anyone". He praised the event, its director Jose Luis Rebordinos, and the mayor of San Sebastian for their "undying support". "I haven't done anything, I just make movies," Depp added.

Asked about his views on Hollywood in recent years, the actor said the showbiz has "grotesquely underestimated the audience".

"Hollywood is certainly not

what it was. The studio system, the grudge matches, the pandemonium and chaos of cinematic releases to streaming it is a case of, 'no matter what, I'm going to get mine'. That's where these people are coming from.

"They realise they're just as disposable as I am. Some more so. Large, large corporations take control of these things. As someone who takes part in the creation of cinema, how much more formula do we need from the likes of studios? How much more condescension do we need as audiences?" he asked.

French star Marion Cotillard also received a Donostia Award on the festival's opening day last week.

The San Sebastian International Film Festival, held in northern Spain, will run through Saturday.

Nigeria-born designer Joy Meribe opens Milan Fashion Week

MILAN, SEP 23 (AP): Nigeria-born designer Joy Meribe opened Milan Fashion Week on Wednesday with her debut runway collection, a concrete success for a movement to promote diversity in Italian fashion just a year after launching.

The Italian National Fashion Chamber tapped Meribe to open six days of womenswear previews for Spring-Summer 2022 after her inaugural collection for the We are Made in Italy initiative last year found commercial success.

Beyond whatever video, proclamation or manifesto that we make, the real test is whether clients buy your products. Joy passed that exam,' said Italian-Haitian designer Stella Jean, who helped launch the initiative in the summer of 2020, asking the question, Do Black Lives Matter in Italian Fashion? inspired by the U.S. movement and following racists gaffes by major Italian fashion houses.

It wouldn't have been so quick, if there wasn't an acceleration from the United States,' said Jean, who basked in the early achievement in the front row alongside Italy-based U.S.-born designer Edward Buchanan and Afro Fashion Week Milano founder Michelle Ngonmo.

Meribe broke down in tears after the show as she thanked the fashion chamber and the movement's founders for getting her to the runway.

The collection featured tiered and ruffled skirts and jackets with built-in capes that were both regal, as seen in an off-shoulder dress sweeping the ground, and hip, including a mini day-dresses

and shoulder-baring tunic. Textiles were an explosion of bright yellow against an aqua blue, with tropic prints featuring thatched cottages against flourishing banana trees, which Meribe said was meant to celebrate a return to more normality.

We have passed from a dark moment, and I wanted to create something full of hope and light, the joy of restarting,' she said backstage.

The initiative that launched Meribe opened its second edition this fashion week, an all-female group of designers working in Italy with roots in Togo, Morocco, Haiti, Cuba and India, following last year's Fab Five inaugural class of all African-born designers.

There is movement happening,' said Buchanan, the American designer behind the Sansovino 6 label. Of course everything takes time, but it takes somehow an industry to get used to the idea that these are talents like any other.

To point, they have created a database of more than 3,000 fashion professionals with diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds living in Italy, including designers, merchandisers, photographers and stylists, with the aim of putting to rest the notion that diverse talents weren't available in Italy.

In this year's Fab Five class, Judith Borsetto created a line of shoes and hosiery with embroidered details for her Judith Saint Jermain label, recalling her birth name in Haiti before she was adopted by an Italian family at age 4. Zineb Hazim designed a line of busi-

ness wear for abaya-wearing Muslim women, using European plaids on the long garments, which were double-sided to extend a business traveler's wardrobe.

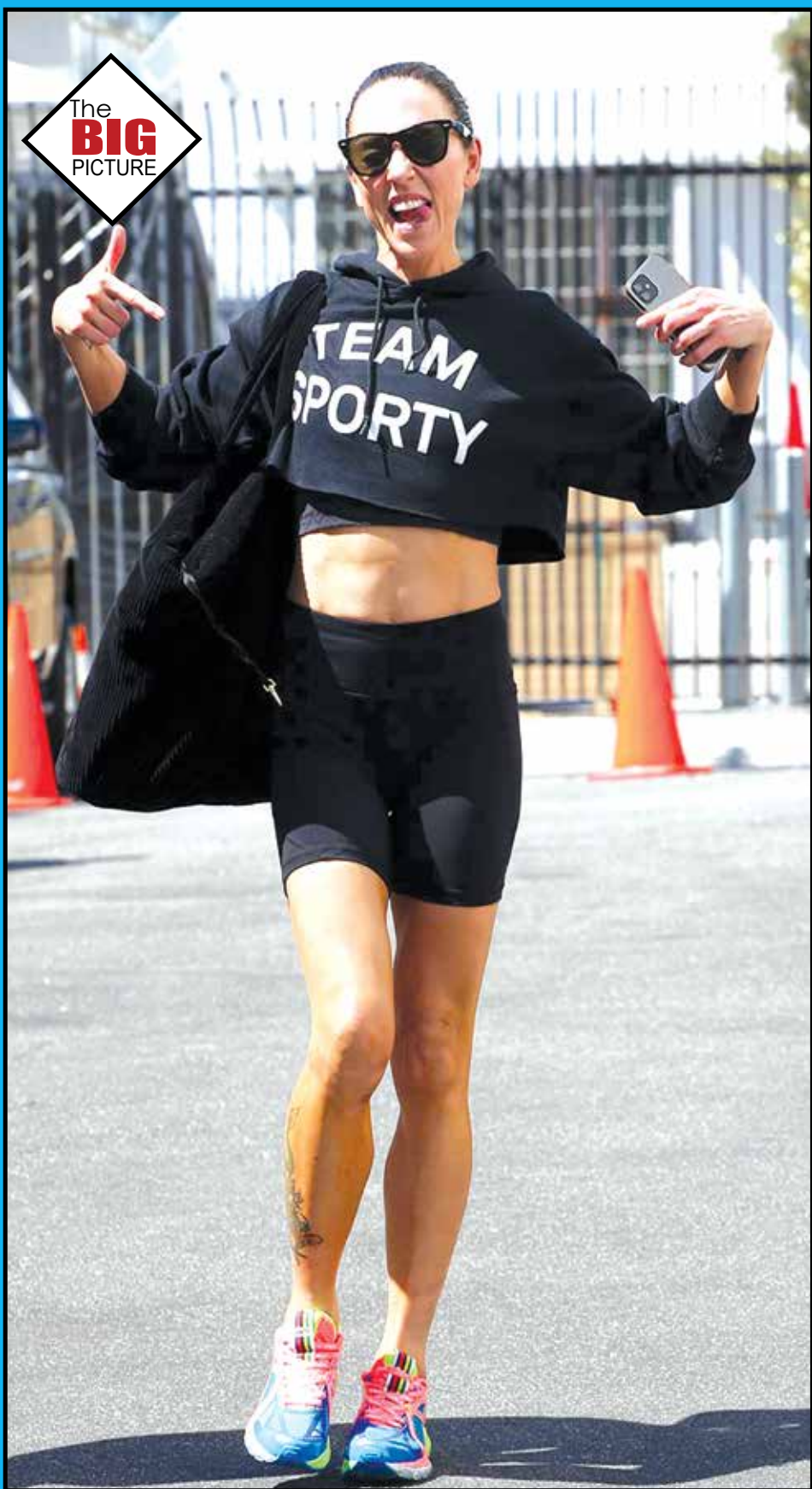
Fallylah Nyny Ryke Goungou sourced woven fabrics from her native Togo in western Africa for looks inspired by her love of Japan and know-how in her adopted Italy. Romy Calzado, a former textile designer born in Cuba, created a collection with honeycomb graphic elements on fabrics with anti-viral properties, while Sheetal Shah, originally from India, designed an all-denim collection from textiles treated to resist water and wear longer.

But even while marking progress on diversity being made in the industry, organizers said that a racist incident at a four-star hotel in Milan aimed at this year's Fab Five underlined the work still ahead.

Ngonmo said that she was checking into the hotel with the five women when the desk clerks rudely dismissed routine requests by paying guests, indicating that they didn't belong there. She posted the incident on social media and later spoke with management, who apologized and fired the workers responsible.

They dehumanized us, taking away our humanity and treating us like animals. It is really, really bad,' Ngonmo said.

Jean said the incident is the proof that everything we are doing today, more than ever, needs to be done. It is a necessity.



SPICE UP YOUR LIFE! Singer Mel C rocked a Sporty Spice-themed hoodie on her way to Dancing With the Stars.

ARIES:

The closer you get to the destination, the more challenging the situation becomes. The higher up you go in the evolution ladder, the more you are tested by the mysterious forces above. But, these obstacles are not without a purpose. They are helping you build your muscles. Before you know, you will have crossed the threshold and entered the land of infinite possibilities.

Tip: It's time to build your reserve of strength and resilience.

TAURUS:

If the Rule of Three is to be believed, then everything we put into the Universe comes back to us threefold. So, begin to vibrate at the frequency of joy, love and abundance. Render your support in the best way you can and share your harvest with those who've played the role of the catalyst. You are a conduit of hope for those around you, Taurus.

GEMINI:

Silence the mind and the answers you seek will come to you. We repeat: silence the mind and the answers you seek will come to you. Your spirit team is working overtime to set big things into motion. So, follow the guidance that's coming through as you choose the path of surrender. "The how" and "the why" is not something you were ever meant to worry about, beautiful.

Tip: Make time to meditate.

CANCER:

There's a fine line between intuition and paranoia. It's easy to

get mixed up between the two when you're too close to the situation. So, get some distance, beautiful. Avoid making big decisions or reaching out to the other person until you are in a space of clarity yourself. As you do, be grateful for the things that are slipping out of your hands too as there are bigger and better things on the cards for you.

Tip: You've just got to trust the divine plan.

LEO:

This is an emotionally intense time for you, Leo. Old wounds from the past are resurfacing, so they can be healed and released once and for all. Yes, there will be moments of vulnerability over the next few days. Some of you may even feel your entire body burning up with rage. Accept everything. Reject nothing. But, don't go down the path of self-destruction. Remembering that everything and everybody is essentially a catalyst for your evolution will help you strengthen the forgiveness game.

VIRGO:

Like everything else in life, meditation is a cultivated practice. But, it's not something we 'do'. It's something that happens to us. So, allow the mysterious forces to hold space for you, and for the downloads to come through in unexpected moments. The cards are bringing with them the reminder that the answers you seek are within you. They've been within you all along.

LIBRA:

Hello, and welcome to Libra season! Things are about to get wild around here, and you're not complaining in the least. You understand that for changes to be set into motion, the cache must be cleared fully. So, allow what must come undone, to come undone, as you choose the path of surrender. The more detached you are to what's taking place, the easier it will be for you to sail through.

Tip: There is order in chaos, beautiful.

SCORPIO:

While there are many things in our lives that are predetermined, we are not sent here without the power of free will. So, pay attention to the choices that are being presented to you as you walk your path in a conscious manner. Choosing faith over fear will help you triumph over your perceived challenges and arrive at the destination in style.

Tip: Choose faith over fear, always.

SAGITTARIUS:

You've been preparing for this big change for some time now, beautiful. So, don't be afraid to set things into motion. Don't be afraid to do what's right for you and the collective. Remembering the quote 'with great power comes great responsibility' will empower you to walk your path fearlessly. Today, you're also being guided to find a balance between the material and the spiritual. Spending time in silence or at your sacred place will replenish your reserves greatly.

CAPRICORN:

There was a time you obsessively worried about the future and what it might bring. There was a time when you fixated on the past in the hope that you might be able to fix a few things. But, where you are now is a beautiful place. A place where you are learning to acknowledge what the present moment is offering you. Word for the wise: make the most of the opportunity at hand. Something tells us you are about to strike gold unexpectedly.

AQUARIUS:

Sometimes, it's easier to communicate our truth to strangers than it is to those we love. The fear that exposing our vulnerability might lead to rejection is what keeps us stuck in an endless loop. Could this be true for you, Aquarius? Pay attention to how the theme of self-betrayal is playing out. You are being called to heal your throat chakra issues. PS: Harnessing the power of crystals such as lapis lazuli, kyanite, turquoise and aquamarine will help you make a breakthrough.

Tip: Communication-related issues are coming to the fore.

PISCES:

You bend a little and they'll bend a little too. You bend some more, and they'll find a way to bury the hatchet and make peace with you. Let's admit it, Pisces. Love is always better than war. But, it's not just the conflicting situations in your present that are calling for your attention. The past too is resurfacing in a big way. Bring the gift of forgiveness to the table. Find a way to heal those old wounds.