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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Covid claims one more Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 OCT:**

Covid claimed one more life in Sikkim with a patient in home isolation in West district succumbing to the virus in the past 24 hours. With this, Sikkim's Covid toll has reached 392 from the 31,783 Covid-positive cases detected in the State since testing began on 28 Feb, 2020, giving Sikkim a case fatality rate of 1.23% thus far.

In the meantime, 27 new cases were reported in the past 24 hours from the testing of 537 samples on Monday giving Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 5.02%.

Of the 27 new cases, 19 were reported in East District, 07 in West District and 01 in North District.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department, while 13 of the cases were detected in RT-PCR test-

ing of 276 samples, 13 more returned positive in rapid antigen testing of 259 samples and one case was picked up in TruNat testing of two samples.

On the other hand, the number of recovered cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim now stands at 30,892. The current recovery rate of COVID-19 in Sikkim is 98.2%.

There 181 active cases of COVID-19 in the State at present.

Eight new COVID patients were hospitalized in the State in the past 24 hours and there are three Covid patients currently admitted in ICU facilities at STNM Hospital and Central Referral Hospital.

Vaccination numbers have dropped of late with 629 doses being administered in the State on Monday. Of these, 604 people completed their vaccination schedule with the second dose and 25 received their first dose of the vaccine.



That said, Sikkim is already rather well protected against the virus with the entire eligible population having

already received at least one dose of Covishield and more than 80% of the adults already fully vaccinated.

Inclement weather forces Vice Prez to postpone Sikkim visit



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 OCT:**

The furious rainfall by the monsoon in retreat and weather warning backed by persistent bad weather has led to the postponement of the Sikkim visit by the Vice President of India.

Vice President Venkaiah Naidu, it may be recalled, was scheduled to arrive in the State on 20 Oct and inaugurate Bhaichung Stadium in Namchi.

An update from Secretary, Sports & Youth Affairs Department, Raju Basnet, informs that the inauguration has been rescheduled for 22 October.

This new date, he informs, has been confirmed by the Vice President's Office.

Bhawika and Jharna are back from Tashkent

**SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 19 OCT:**

Bhawika Pradhan and Jharna Rai, back from an encouraging debut at the World Bodybuilding and Physique Sports Championship held in Tashkent, Republic of Uzbekistan, addressed a press conference here today, beaming with happiness and satisfaction over their performance and the support they have received from Body Builders Association of Sikkim [BBAS] and the State Government.

Bhawika and Jharna both came in fifth in the junior and senior categories respectively of the Women's Model Physique competition of the 12th World Bodybuilding and Physique Sports Championship 2021 held from 01 to 07 October at Tashkent.

This was the debut appearance for both athletes in any international competition.

Bhawika also bagged a bronze medal for the country in the Mixed Pair category of the championship.

Meanwhile, Sikkim's Tashi Ongmu Lepcha, who had accompanied the Indian team as women's team manager to the championship, passed the International Judge examination of World Bodybuilding & Physique Federation held during the competition.

Addressing a press conference here on Tuesday, BBAS general secretary, Pema WD Bhutia, congratulated Bhawika and Jharna for making the country and the state proud on their debut itself.

He further congratulated Tashi Ongmu Lepcha on becoming an international judge by passing the examination of WBPF.

On behalf of the association, he expressed gratitude towards the Chief Minister for extending financial support to send these two athletes from Sikkim to the event in Tashkent. He stressed that consistent support from all sides will help produce more national and international athletes from the State.

Tashi Ongmu Lepcha informed that contestants from 25 countries participated in the competition. "Both the women athletes

from Sikkim gave an outstanding performance by reaching the top-five in their respective categories. It is also a proud moment for us that Bhawika Pradhan won a bronze medal for the country as well," she said.

Likewise, Bhawika said, "This championship was very memorable since it was my first international event and I am happy with my performance. We really worked hard and made many sacrifices. The hard work finally paid off."

"It was a good learning experience to understand our weaknesses and make improvements for future competitions. Now we know how to prepare even better," Jharna added.

Both athletes have thanked the CM for providing financial support to ensure their participation in the international competition. They also thanked their coaches and gyms and all well-wishers for their support.



IIT Roorkee's iHUB DivyaSampark to set up Spoke Hub Centre at NIT-Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 OCT:**

iHUB DivyaSampark (a Section 8 company and a Technology Innovation Hub), under IIT Roorkee, and NIT Sikkim signed an MoU today to set up a Spoke Hub Centre at NIT here, a press release informs.

The Spoke Hub Centre of iHUB DivyaSampark will provide various opportunities for innovation, start-ups and train students in the development of Cyber Physical Systems, the release explains.

iHUB was set up under the National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems (NM-ICPS) initiated by the Department of Science and Technology for interdisciplinary, collaborative, and translational innovation in the broad area of devices and materials for cyber-physical systems to enable tech-

nological innovation.

The MoU was signed by Manish Anand, Chief Executive Officer iHUB DivyaSampark IIT Roorkee, and Prof MC Govil, Director, NIT Sikkim, representing their respective institutions.

Prof Govil said, "I am confident that our association with iHUB DivyaSampark at IIT Roorkee will immensely benefit our students and faculty in the area of research and innovation. I hope that it will usher in a new era of academic brilliance in the north-east and pave the path for product development and will enable us to solve the local problems".

Mr Anand of iHUB DivyaSampark, in turn, welcomed the MoU as a collaboration "which will help students and faculty members of NIT Sikkim develop products specifically required for hilly areas."

Rains pour havoc on South Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT
NAMCHI, 19 OCT:**

Heavy downpour across the State since the night of 18 October has also caused a series of damages affecting crops, landed property and private houses in South Sikkim, an IPR Deptt press release informs.

Major damages have occurred at Tirikhol, Rong under Namchi block.

Relief materials have been provided to the victims who have been asked to shift to safer locations for a few days considering the weather warning issued by the India Meteorological Department for the State.

Also today, 25 vehicles ferrying tourists were stranded along the Melli-Manpur stretch and the safely evacuated and helped across the Melli Check Post. Police personnel also helped in clearing the road, the release informs.

Another lot of between 30 to 40 vehicles are still stuck near Melli, the release adds.

Road clearance is underway despite active slides.

District Collector, South, M Bharani, has directed the concerned SDMs and Revenue Surveyors to submit reports on damages by 3PM Wednesday.

Road connectivity

across the district has been severely hampered. The Wok-Namchi axis remains completely blocked while the Namthang-Namchi road via Bhanjyang was blocked at Namchi View Point and eventually cleared. Narak Jhora was also blocked earlier in the day. The Jorethang-Namchi road is also blocked at several places as is the Namchi-Melli NH 710 highway.

The District Collector has directed all members of the South District Disaster Management Au-

thority to remain on high alert, especially officials of the Roads & Bridges Department, who have been directed to station men & machinery at disaster prone sites, the release informs.



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Sikkim Yuva Sangathan wants private sector jobs to go to local youth



SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 19 OCT:

Sikkim Yuva Sangathan [SYS] has demanded that the State Government should ensure that job opportunities in the private sector in Sikkim go to local youth. SYS president, Toya Rizal, addressing a press conference here today, contended that unemployment has

been increasing in the State because local job opportunities are being taken by people from outside the State.

He further stated that SYS will soon submit a memorandum to the government on this issue.

Mr Rizal stated that although Sikkim has many job opportunities now, local youth remain unemployed. Most of the

jobs go to people from outside and the locals who do get employed in the private sector here, receive only the lower rung positions and are poorly paid.

“Our people are now ready to work in any sector but are being denied the chance to capitalise on these opportunities, so now the government should

take this issue seriously and resolve the issue of unemployment in the State,” he said.

He also called on the State government to address the practice of subletting of the trade licenses more seriously.

He also remarked that the state currently has an unregulated rate for different

services and goods as businesses are being run by the people from the outside.

SYS has further suggested that the government collect data on unemployed youth and categorize them as per their qualifications and working experience and adjust them in matching job-openings in the private sector here.

SAFF C’ship title not “Special Success,” aim is to qualify for 2023 Asian Cup: India Football Coach

NEW DELHI, 19 OCT [PTI]: India winning the SAFF Championships for an eighth time is not a “special success” as the country is dominant in the South Asian region and the bigger aim is to do well in the 2023 Asian Cup qualification, national football team head coach Igor Stimac said on Wednesday.

India won the regional tournament after beating Nepal 3-0 in the final in Male on Saturday to hand Stimac his first trophy as in-charge of the team.

“I don’t consider it (the SAFF title) as a special success because it is normal that India wins when it goes to SAFF but it demonstrates that we are very dominant in this competition and we can progress in our game a lot more,” Stimac said at a virtual interaction. He, however, admitted that his team was under a lot of “result pressure” after drawing Bangladesh (1-1) and Sri Lanka (0-0) in the first two round-robin league matches.

The results had put India in danger of going out of reckoning for the final. India then beat Nepal 1-0 and hosts Maldives 3-1 in must-win matches before outplaying the Himalayan country 3-0 in the summit clash to stamp their authority.

“It was obviously a difficult situation we found after the first two matches but they looked bad only because of the results. There was no big difference in approach, the numbers and statistics, we had enough shoots, scoring chances, movement and energy by players.

“We scored sometimes and didn’t score sometimes and that

made the difference. So, we had a lot of results pressure on our shoulders but we dealt with it the way it should be and in the end we won the trophy which was really important.” Stimac was speaking from Bengaluru after his return from Maldives and he is leaving for Dubai Tuesday night with the U-23 national team, which he has taken charge of for the 2022 Asian U-23 Championships qualifiers in the UAE from October 25 to 31.

The Croatian gaffer said that the side’s aim is to make it to the 2023 Asian Cup for which the qualification third round is set to begin early February next year. That could be tricky as the Asian Cup qualification matches would be outside of FIFA window and the federation will need to convince the Indian Super League organisers and clubs to release players for national duty.

“We don’t know yet who we are going to play, we don’t know our group yet. But we need to prepare ourselves because we have been told our first game will be on February 1. If we are going to succeed in this qualifier which are games to play outside FIFA window, we need to sit down with other stakeholders in domestic competitions (read ISL), how much time the national team players will get for preparation.”

The ISL organisers have issued the fixtures of the first leg of the league from November 19 to January 9. They have not yet announced the second leg fixtures. He said the national team would need good preparation time to produce good results in the Asian

Cup qualification matches.

“Otherwise, we are going to gamble, as simple as that,” he quipped. “Because the players will begin ISL season now and we need to make sure as soon as possible that this February opening of the third round of qualifications (for Asian Cup) is part of the ISL calendar so that the players are released for national team duty.”

Stimac was also all praise of the talismanic captain Sunil Chhetri, who at 37 is one of the fittest players in the team.

“His influence is keeping the team going. He is a role model and leader off and on the field. He is the most passionate player in the dressing room and his fitness level is unbelievable. He is in the best shape possible and that is why he played in all the matches (of SAFF Championships). When somebody who can score better and who has better fitness (comes along), only then he can be replaced, otherwise you cannot replace him and he keeps on playing till the time he is with the team.”

Chhetri netted five out of India’s eight goals to emerge as the best player and highest scorer in the regional tournament in Maldives. He was named the most valuable player for the third time in as many appearances in the tournament, the earlier instances being in 2011 and 2015. He was the highest scorer in the 2011 edition in New Delhi with seven goals while finishing joint second with three goals in the 2015 tournament in Thiruvananthapuram. India won all the three editions Chhetri played in.

Bad loans likely to rise up to 9% by fiscal-end: CRISIL

NEW DELHI, 19 OCT [NDTV]: Gross non-performing assets (NPAs) of banks are likely to rise to 8 per cent to 9 per cent by the end of the current financial year, compared to 7.5 per cent of last year, rating agency CRISIL said in a report.

The Coronavirus relief measures like restructuring and emergency credit line guarantee scheme will help in

limiting the rise, it added. The rise in NPAs, said Krishnan Sitaraman, CRISIL’s senior director and deputy chief ratings officer, will be led mainly by retail clients and micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) segments.

The agency further said that with 2 per cent bank credit expected under restructuring by the end of this fiscal, stressed assets – consisting of

gross NPAs and loan book under restructuring – should touch 10 per cent to 11 per cent.

“Stressed assets in these segments are seen rising to 4 per cent – 5 per cent and 17-18 per cent, respectively, by this fiscal year-end (March 2022). The numbers would have trended even higher but for write-offs, primarily in the unsecured segment,” Mr Si-

taraman said.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had allowed banks to offer a six-month moratorium to all small borrowers last year and afterwards allowed them to offer a one-time loan restructuring facility to help them prevent rising NPAs. It also gave borrowers more time to repay their debt.

Even after taking these steps, stressed

assets in the retail segments will rise, though home loans will be least impacted while unsecured loans will be the worst hit, said CRISIL.

The corporate segment is expected to be more resilient as a large part of the stress in the corporate portfolio was already recognised during an asset quality review initiated by the RBI in 2015, CRISIL said.

IndiGo cautions candidates against fake job offers



NEW DELHI, OCT 19 (PTI): IndiGo on Tuesday cautioned candidates to be cognizant of fake job offers, saying certain people are using the name of airline’s employees to demand money in exchange for interviews, jobs or trainings.

In a statement, the airline stated: “The airline does not charge any money for conducting interviews, providing jobs, or imparting trainings on joining.”

IndiGo “strictly” advises to report the matter to the police if someone asks for money and promises a job at the airline.

“IndiGo is also taking appropriate actions for cases that get reported, along with spreading awareness,” the statement mentioned.

The carrier said it is conducting anti-fake jobs

campaign across social media to raise awareness on how certain people claiming to represent IndiGo are misusing the brand name and the names of its employees to demand money in exchange for jobs, interviews or trainings.

“We believe that as the market leader, it is our responsibility to identify and control such malpractices that not just impact IndiGo but also other companies in the sector,” IndiGo CEO Ronojoy Dutta said.

“We have been working in close collaboration with law enforcement department to identify these offenders with success in the past. We hope to put an end to this menace with support from the police department and awareness amongst people,” he added.

New book to tell origin stories of Indian states

NEW DELHI, OCT 19 (PTI): A new book, slated to release on October 25, will present the incredible origin stories of each of India’s 28 states and eight union territories.

“The Origin Story of India’s States”, published by Penguin Random House India (PRHI), is written by author Venkataraghavan Subha Sri-nivasan.

“States give every Indian a home and an identity. Every time a new state is created or an old one altered, India and Indians are remade, recreated, reborn. Every

single Indian deserves to know the story of their state, their home, their identity. That’s how this book was born,” writes the author in the book.

Be it the state that wasn’t even a part of India until 1975; the union territory that had a prime minister for a single day; the state that has not one or two but three capitals; or the union territory that has beaches on both coasts, the book looks into unique aspects of Indian history and adds to the understanding of how India has been built.

According to the pub-

lishers, the story of the birth of India’s states is the story of the birth and continuing rebirth of India. The book lays out the fascinating political and historical circumstances of the birth of India’s states and union territories.

“We are all Indian, but we are also all from a state or union territory. These are our homes, and we are naturally curious about our homes because it gives us an insight into who we are and where we come from. This book quenches that curiosity,” they said in a statement.

Bench upholds single judge order against Muthoot

CHENNAI, OCT 19 (PTI): A division bench of the Madras High Court has refused to interfere with the orders of a single judge, which upheld the Tamil Nadu government blacklisting Muthoot Exim Private Limited in Mumbai from participating in government tenders and confiscating the earnest money deposit (EMD) of Rs 53 lakh pertaining to the Gold for Thali (Mangalsutra) scheme.

The bench of Justices Pushpa Sathyanarayana and Krishnan Ramasway upheld the single judge order, while dismissing an appeal from Muthoot, recently.

The appeal sought to set aside the order of the single judge passed in February, 2020, declining to interfere with the impugned order of the state’s Social Welfare department.

The dispute arose out of the tender issued in July 2018 for supply of 1.11 lakh eight gram gold coins of 22 carat, each. The tender was floated to distribute the gold coins to

the beneficiaries under the TN government’s prestigious ‘Gold for Thali’ scheme.

Muthoot had participated in the tender and offered to supply 20,000 gold coins, which was permissible as per the tender conditions. The selection letter was handed over to it on September 20, 2018, with a delay of 20 days from the date of opening of the tender, within which time, there was a steep rise in the price of gold due to extremely volatile market conditions.

As Muthoot was not in a position to absorb the steep rise in the price of the gold, it requested the government to consider the current rate per gram gold price as of September 24, 2018 or permit it to withdraw from the tender and return the EMD. However, the state government refused and by proceedings initiated under the TN Transparency in Tender Rules, blacklisted the firm and confiscated the EMD of Rs 53 lakh in December, 2018. Aggrieved, the firm moved the



High Court and a single judge in February, 2020 rejected the plea. Hence, the present appeal.

The bench pointed out that the dispute brought-forth by Muthoot was based on a contract. The scope of judicial review in such contractual matters was very limited. Power of judicial review would not be invoked to protect private interest at the cost of public interest or to decide contractual disputes.

When Muthoot was clear

on the facts and the dispute and the authorities concerned had acted only as per the tender conditions, by filing a writ petition under Article 226, it could not persuade the court to interfere in the matter, the judges said, adding that the appellant was blacklisted for its delinquent act, which was well within the power of the State to take any action.

In view of the settled position, Muthoot could not invoke Article 226 of the Constitution, when it got the common

law remedy, as the dispute had arisen out of breach of contract. When an alternative remedy was available, unless it was established that there was a breach of its fundamental rights or violation of principles of natural justice or an excess of jurisdiction, which were exceptional cases, the company could not invoke Article 226 of the Constitution, the bench said and held that the order of the single judge did not suffer from any infirmity for interference.

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DoT webinar discusses impact of USOF projects in rural Sikkim, busts myths about electromagnetic radiation

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 OCT:

Department of Telecommunications, Sikkim Unit, West Bengal License Service Area (LSA), organized a webinar on 1 October deliberating two topics - "Impact of USOF Project on Village Coverage in Sikkim" and "Busting Myths on Electromagnetic Radiation," an official press release in-

forms.

The webinar, it is informed, was held as part of the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations.

The webinar was attended by government officials, Telecom Service Providers, infrastructure providers, consumers and lay citizens of Sikkim, the release adds.

Speakers at the event included Dr Biswajit Paul, Sr. DDG, Head of

West Bengal LSA, N. Murali Krishna, DDG Sikkim, and Dr TK Joshi, Maulana Azad Medical College, New Delhi.

The Senior DDG, Head of West Bengal LSA, informed that USOF project was conceived as a mission to provide widespread and non-discriminatory access to quality ICT services at affordable prices to people in rural and

remote areas and bridge the Rural-Urban digital divide.

He expressed hope that on completion of the ongoing USO projects, the uncovered villages will receive mobile network and high-speed internet.

Regarding public concerns on possible adverse health effects of electromagnetic field radiation from telecom towers, he

explained the difference between ionised and non-ionised radiations and expressed hope that the webinar will address the apprehensions of the stakeholders about EMF radiation.

Mr Krishna, DDG Sikkim, DoT, explained the necessity of Universal Service Obligation Fund [USOF] projects in rural India in general and rural Sikkim in particular.

India sees lowest rise in daily Covid cases in 231 days

NEW DELHI, OCT 19

(PTI): India logged 13,058 new coronavirus infections, the lowest in 231 days, taking the total tally of COVID-19 cases to 3,40,94,373, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Tuesday.

The death toll climbed to 4,52,454 with 164 fresh fatalities, while the active cases declined to 1,83,118, the lowest in 227 days, according to the data updated at 8 am.

The daily rise in new coronavirus infections has been below 30,000 for 25 straight days and less than 50,000 daily new cases have been reported for 114 consecutive days now.

The active cases comprise 0.54 per cent of the total infections, the lowest since March 2020, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate was recorded at 98.14 per cent, the highest since March 2020, the ministry said.

A decrease of 6,576 cases has been recorded in the active COVID-19 caseload in a span of 24

hours.

As many as 11,81,314 tests were conducted on Monday taking the total cumulative tests conducted so far for detection of COVID-19 in the country to 59,31,06,188.

The daily positivity rate was recorded at 1.11 per cent. It has been less than three per cent for last 50 days. The weekly positivity rate was also recorded at 1.36 per cent. It has been below three per cent for the last 116 days, according to the ministry.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 3,34,58,801, while the case fatality rate was recorded at 1.33 per cent.

The cumulative doses administered in the country so far under the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination drive has exceeded 98.67 crore.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 2020, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh

on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

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

The 164 new fatalities include 60 from Kerala and 27 from Maharashtra.

A total of 4,52,454 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 1,39,816 from Maharashtra, 37,953 from Karnataka, 35,912 from Tamil Nadu, 26,925 from Kerala, 25,089 from Delhi, 22,898 from Uttar Pradesh and 18,989 from West Bengal.

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

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

Govt sanctions ad hoc bonus to employees for FY21

NEW DELHI, OCT 19

(PTI): The government has sanctioned non-productivity linked or ad hoc bonus for central government employees for fiscal year 2020-21.

In an office memorandum, the Department of Expenditure under the Finance Ministry said the employees of central para military forces and armed forces too would be eligible for the bonus.

Employees who were in service as on March 31, 2021, and have rendered at least six months of continuous service during 2020-21 fiscal year would be eligible for this ad hoc bonus.

The non-productivity linked bonus (ad hoc bonus) would be paid to the central government employees in Group C and all non-gazetted employees in Group B, who are not covered by any productivity-linked bonus scheme.

The calculation ceiling for payment of this bonus would be monthly emoluments of Rs 7,000.

"The quantum of ad hoc bonus will be

worked out on the basis of average emoluments/calculation ceiling whichever is lower," the Department of Expenditure said.

To calculate ad hoc bonus for one day, the average emoluments in a year will be divided by 30.4 (average number of days in a month).

This will, thereafter, be multiplied by the number of days of bonus granted.

Giving an illustration, the memorandum said given the calculation ceiling of monthly emoluments of Rs 7,000 (where actual average emoluments exceed Rs 7,000), the non-productivity linked bonus or ad-hoc bonus for 30 days would work out to be Rs 6,908.

It also clarified that in case of employees who resigned, retired from service or expired before March 31, 2021, the ad hoc bonus would be paid only to those who superannuated or retired on medical grounds or died before March 31, 2021, but after completing at least six months regular service during the year.

Satta king' involved in betting in UP, U'khand arrested

SHAHJAHANPUR (UP),

OCT 19 (PTI): A man involved in betting in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, and known by the name satta king was arrested on Tuesday, police said.

The accused, Ved Vyas alias Bedi, was involved in betting in various districts of Uttar Pradesh and Ut-

tarakhand. He was also carrying a reward of Rs 25,000 on his arrest, Superintendent of Police S Anand said.

He said Vyas was arrested from near a temple in Factory Estate area.

According to police, the accused was also wanted in a case

under the Gangster Act. The police had also attached one of his houses. Apart from this, other properties of the accused are being identified, and will be attached.

The officer added that Rs 16 lakh was seized from the possession of around two dozen people who were arrested recently in this connection.

Pondy logs 55 more COVID cases

PUDUCHERRY, OCT 19

(PTI): Puducherry posted 55 fresh cases of coronavirus on Tuesday raising the total caseload to 1,27,479.

The new cases of infection identified at the end of examination of 4,217 samples were spread over Puducherry 24, Karaikal 18 and Mahe 13. The active cases were 490 of whom 94 patients were in hospitals under treatment while remaining 396 cases were in home isolation.

Two more persons hailing from Puducherry succumbed to the infection raising overall toll to 1852.

Director of the Health Department G. Sriramulu said while 86 patients recovered and were discharged during last twenty four hours the overall recoveries stood



at 1,25,137.

He said that the test positivity rate today was 1.30 percent while fatality and recovery rates were 1.45 percent and 98.16 percent respectively.

The health department has tested so far

18.76 lakh samples and found 15.91 lakh out of them to be negative.

It has administered so far 10,82,250 doses of which 7,13,849 were first doses and remaining 3,68,401 were second doses.

CRPF jawan found dead in J-K's Ramban

BANIHAL/JAMMU, OCT

19 (PTI): The body of a CRPF jawan bearing a gunshot wound was found in Jammu and Kashmir's Ramban district on Tuesday morning, official sources said.

Constable Rajeev Ranjan was found dead at the 84th Battalion camp in the Boom Chanderkoot area of the district around 8.40 am, they said.

As per the sources,

Ranjan, who was from Bihar's Chhapra district, allegedly shot himself with his service rifle.

Inquest proceedings have been initiated by police under section 174 of the CrPC, they said.

Ladakh reports 3 COVID-19 cases, 5 recoveries

LEH, OCT 19 (PTI):

Ladakh recorded three fresh COVID-19 cases on Tuesday, taking the infection tally in the union territory to 20,881, even as the count of active cases fell to 34, officials said.

Ladakh has registered 208 Covid-related deaths -- 150 in Leh and 58 in Kargil -- since the outbreak of the pandemic last year.

Five more patients have been cured and discharged from hospitals in Leh, taking the tally of recoveries to 20,639, they said.

All three new cases



were reported in Leh, the officials said.

No daily death due to the disease was reported in Ladakh on Monday.

The total number of COVID-19 active cases in Ladakh is now 34 33 in Leh and one in Kargil district.

Assam's primary school students attend school after nearly 2 years

GUWAHATI, 19 OCT

(PTI): Students of the primary section from Class 1 onwards attended school in Assam for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic struck nearly two years ago while adhering to strict health protocols and other guidelines. Physical classes also resumed for the upper primary section, six months after it had briefly reopened in April this year, only to be closed again as the second wave of the pandemic struck that month.

Online classes will, however, continue for

those opting to stay at home, as per the new Standard Operating Procedures issued by the state government. School authorities said attendance was low, particularly in the lower primary section. Premises of educational premises have been thoroughly sanitised and all COVID-appropriate behaviour is being followed, including wearing of face masks and maintaining social distancing, they added.

According to the new SOPs, physical classes for standards 1-8 will be held on

alternate days of the week, while from standard 9 onwards, classes will be on a daily basis. A maximum number of 30 students is allowed per section of a class. Parents/guardians are also required to give written consent for their wards to attend physical classes, as per the SOPs.

Meetings and cultural functions are disallowed inside school premises, it said. Physical classes for final-year students of higher secondary, degree, post-graduation as well as technical courses have al-

ready resumed from September 6, while those for Class 10 restarted from September 20.

The decision to reopen the educational institutions was taken in view of the improving COVID-19 situation in the state, with the deputy commissioner of a district reserving the right to declare these closed if the positivity rate breaches the 2-per cent mark on a particular day.

In case of detection of any COVID-19 positive case in a school, the local government authority has to be

informed, and classes resumed the next day, only after testing all students and staff, according to the new SOPs.

If multiple positive cases are detected, the educational institution will be closed for seven days, the notification said. At least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine is compulsory for all teaching and non-teaching staff, while both doses are mandatory for boarders and staff of hostels and residential schools, barring students of the final year under the age of 18 years, it added.

Disney delays 'Indiana Jones 5,' 'Black Panther 2' releases



LOS ANGELES (AP): The Walt Disney Co. is pushing back the release dates of many of its upcoming titles, including the untitled Indiana Jones movie and the Black Panther sequel "Wakanda Forever."

The company said Monday that the fifth Indiana Jones, a James Mangold-directed and Steven Spielberg-produced installment which sees the return of Harrison Ford as the adventurous archaeologist, will be delayed almost

a year and open in theaters in June 2023.

"Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" has also been pushed several months, from July 2022 to November 2022. Both films are currently in production.

Other Marvel titles like "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness," "Thor: Love and Thunder," "The Marvels" and "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania" were also all delayed several months.

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

NOTICE

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Sd/-
Director
Social Justice and Welfare Department
Government of Sikkim.

Wildlife Worries

The numbers might be healthy, but what about wildlife's health

Deers stumble into villages along the edge of forests, diseased and suffering from open sores. Sometimes, dogs set upon the sick animal and bring her down and at other times people try to care for the animal and make its final hours as comfortable as possible. Elsewhere, farmers are reporting raids by wild boars even in North Sikkim. Even the wilds along Tsomgo now have wild boar populations competing with the wildlife there for the scarce resources. Parts of West and South Sikkim have been grappling with increased incidence of wild boar raids for a while now and these packs are clearly now expanding to new terrains. Both incidents are playing out due to half-cock policy interventions. It is “proper” to ban hunting, but even the half-educated know that forest dwellers and traditional hunting are allowed even when a strict hunting ban is in place. Not so in Sikkim. What should actually have been a strictly enforced ban on recreational hunting has instead banned this traditional activity altogether from Sikkim. Traditional hunting, apart from providing the much-needed protein supplement for communities living along forest belts, also played the important role of culling the sick and the weak from animal herds before they infected the rest. Accept it, no matter how good a hunter someone is, they are only good enough to bring down the weakest of the pack. Rural pragmatism also ensured that such hunting was also regulated and almost honorable in the manner it was carried out and had worked a fine arrangement to maintain the balance. But then Gangtok banned it for all of Sikkim (except the privileged for whom the laws don't apply just equally). What this has resulted in is an unbalanced growth. And nature does not like that. Also, in the case of wild boars, it is not just farms that are being dug up, but even bigger, but solitary, animals like the bears being chased out of their traditional haunts. Okay, this last one is speculative, but it is not as far out as some might argue. The point being made is that while it is wonderful that Sikkim's wildlife population is supposedly growing, it is important now to find out whether it is also healthier and whether some informed decisions need to be made to ensure that better health returns to the wildlife.

About hunting... Has anyone ever heard of anyone reasonably well-heeled ever get picked up for poaching in Sikkim. And yes, since even traditional hunting practices are no longer allowed in Sikkim, all hunting is poaching irrespective of those with big caliber guns and searchlights on their vehicles might say. For far too long, Sikkim has heard of only lay villagers getting rounded up for wildlife offences and the only confiscations have been primitive guns and even more primitive traps. Hunting by the well-connected was an open secret and conveniently ignored much to Sikkim's disadvantage. And now, a legislation has been passed which allows people to kill wildlife if it strays into private land holdings. Yes, trespassing animals can now be shot or poisoned. It is another matter that no one has bothered to address the trespass into forest lands which has erased the buffer zones which separated wildlife from humans here.

And now, let's return to the wildlife and even turn the initial observation on its head. Even though few people like to admit it, with hardly any predators around, and given the fact that nearly 50% of the land in Sikkim is officially recorded as being under forest cover, the wildlife density, or at least its visibility, is not half teeming as the laws and maps would lead one to believe. The biodiversity hotspot that Sikkim is introduced as, should manifest itself in more obvious displays, one would expect. While the loss of contiguous forest belts to human encroachment could have resulted in some depletion in wildlife numbers, it is unfortunate that even areas where wildlife was abundant even till recent times, have fewer animals left. These numbers, as mentioned earlier, should have multiplied given the anti-hunting laws and absence of predators. It is also possible that the animals have been driven deeper into the forests, but even that needs to be authenticated because Sikkim is a very small state and the forests here run only so deep before they start touching a habitation on the other side. By a lay thumb rule, sightings should have been much more frequent.

And, to end with the argument this piece began with - let us have a proper wildlife census commissioned for Sikkim and along with it, also a proper, scientific study on how well the wildlife is keeping.

How to nurture creativity in your kids

JAMES C. KAUFMAN
THECONVERSATION.COM

Parents who want their kids to be more creative may be tempted to enroll them in arts classes or splurge on STEM-themed toys. Those things certainly can help, but as a professor of educational psychology who has written extensively about creativity, I can draw on more than 70 years of creativity research to make additional suggestions that are more likely to be effective – and won't break your budget.

1. BE CAUTIOUS WITH REWARDS

Some parents may be tempted to reward their children for being creative, which is traditionally defined as producing something that is both new and useful. However, rewards and praise may actually dissuade your child's intrinsic interest in being creative. That's because the activity may become associated with the reward and not the fun the child naturally has doing it.

Of course, I am not saying you should not place your child's artwork on your fridge. But avoid being too general – “I love every bit of it!” – or too focused on their innate traits – “You are so creative!” Instead, praise specific aspects that you like in your child's artwork – “I love the way you made such a cute tail on that dog!” or “The way you combined colors here is pretty!”

Some rewards can be helpful. For example, for a child who loves to draw, giving them materials that they might use in their artwork is an example of a reward that will help them stay creative.

It is also important to note that there are many activities – creative or otherwise – for which a child may not have a particular interest. There is no harm – and much potential benefit – in using rewards in these cases. If a child has an assignment for a creative school activity and hates doing it, there may not be any inherent passion to be dampened in the first place.

2. ENCOURAGE CURIOSITY AND NEW EXPERIENCES

Research shows that people who are open to new experiences and ideas are more creative than those who are more closed off. Many parents have children who naturally seek new things, such as food, activities, games or playmates. In these cases, simply con-



tinue to offer opportunities and encouragement.

For those whose children may be more reticent, there are options. Although personality is theoretically stable, it is possible to change it in subtle ways. For example, a study – although it was on older adults – found that crossword or sudoku puzzles can help increase openness. Childhood and adolescence is a natural period for openness to grow. Encouraging curiosity and intellectual engagement is one way. Other ways might include encouraging sensible risk-taking – such as trying a new sport for a less athletic child or a new instrument for one less musically inclined – or interest in other cultures. Even very simple variations on an evening routine, whether trying a new craft or board game or helping cook dinner, can help normalize novelty.

3. HELP THEM EVALUATE THEIR BEST IDEAS

What about when children are actually being creative? Most people have heard of brainstorming or other activities where many different ideas are generated. Yet it is equally important to be able to evaluate and select one's best idea.

Your child might think of 30

possible solutions to a problem, but their creativity will not be expressed if they select the one that's least interesting – or least actionable. If giving praise can be tricky, feedback can be even tougher. If you are too harsh, you risk squashing your child's passion for being creative. Yet if you are too soft, your child may not develop their creativity to the fullest extent possible.

If your child seeks out your input – which in adults can be a good indicator of creativity – make sure to give feedback after they have already brainstormed many possible ideas. Ideally, you can ensure your child still feels competent and focus on feedback that connects to their past efforts: “I like the imagery you used in your poem; you are getting better! What other metaphors might you use in this last line?”

4. TEACH THEM WHEN NOT TO BE CREATIVE

Finally, creativity isn't always the best option. Sometimes, straightforward solutions simply work best. If the toilet is clogged and you have a plunger, you don't need to make your own from a coat hanger and bisected rubber duck.

More notably, some people, including teachers, say they like cre-

ative people but actually have negative views of creative kids without even realizing it.

If your child is in a class where their creativity is causing some blowback, such as discipline issues or lowered grades, you may want to work with your child to help them understand the best course of action. For example, if your child is prone to blurt out their ideas regardless of whether they are related to the discussion at hand, emphasize that they should share thoughts that are directly relevant to the class topic.

If, however, you get the feeling that the teacher simply does not appreciate or like your child's creativity, you may want to suggest that your child keep an “idea parking lot” where they write down their creative thoughts and share them with you – or a different teacher – later in the day.

Creativity has a host of academic, professional and personal benefits. With some gentle nudges, you can help your child grow and use their imagination to their heart's content.

[the writer is Professor of Educational Psychology, University of Connecticut]

Thailand inmates are taking green chiretta to fight mild COVID – here's what we know about this herbal drug

JOSE PRIETO GARCIA
THECONVERSATION.COM

The news that inmates in Thailand are being handed capsules of a herbal medicine called green chiretta (*Andrographis paniculata*) to treat asymptomatic and mild COVID is unlikely to come as a surprise to the average Thai citizen.

In Thailand, healthcare professionals and the public alike are familiar with green chiretta – nicknamed the “king of bitters” – which is as popular as paracetamol for treating cold and flu.

In 1991, researchers at Mahidol University in Bangkok, Thailand, concluded after a clinical trial that chiretta (6g a day) was as effective as paracetamol (4g a day) at relieving fever and sore throat in patients with inflammation of the pharynx and tonsils (pharyngotonsillitis). Since then, several reviews have found that chiretta may be more effective than placebo at treating uncomplicated upper respiratory tract infections. Reported side-effects tend to be mild and short-lived.

In line with a global trend to use cold and flu medicines to ease the symptoms of mild COVID, and in face of an emergency situation, the Thai Corrections Department gave the herbal remedy to 11,800 inmates with mild symptoms of upper respiratory infections and now claims that 99% of them recovered, prompting the Thai Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation to recommend that asymptomatic patients take 180mg of chiretta a day, divided into three doses at mealtimes.

As far as we know, full data for this intervention has not been released to the international scientific community and details of the study are sparse. For example, we don't know if there was a control group (a group that received a placebo or different treatment for comparison), and, if so, whether inmates were randomly assigned to one group or the other.

This type of “randomised, controlled trial” is the gold standard for clinical research. Especially if it is “double blind”, that is, neither the participants nor the researchers know who received



the new drug and who received the placebo. This removes conscious and unconscious biases from the study.

In addition, the recovery rates from COVID are extremely difficult to calculate and only meaningful if the subjects are first diagnosed with a validated SARS-CoV-2 test. By way of comparison, the recovery rates announced by Thai officials are somewhat higher than overall COVID recovery rates in India (32%-83%) or Australia (96% recovered after 120 days).

In a review of herbal medicines that might be beneficial for treating COVID, chiretta was considered “promising” when weighing up risks and benefits. It contains an active compound called andrographolide. Purified andrographolide was hailed as moderately effective at inhibiting SARS-CoV-2 replication according to a laboratory test. And a recent computer simulation showed that it may bind (attach) well to the spike protein on the coronavirus (the spike protein is the part of the coronavirus that latches on to human cells to gain entry to them). But whether these experiments translate into real-world benefit can only be proven with a well-designed clinical trial.

MORE EVIDENCE SOON

Fortunately, such studies are in the pipeline. In Thailand, a randomised controlled trial with just over 3,000 participants is comparing chiretta extract (containing 20mg of andrographolide per capsule, for a total of 180mg per day, dosing into three capsules taken before each meal for five days) with “standard care” in people with asymptomatic COVID. The main outcome the researchers are investigating is how many people in each group end up in hospital within 28 days of a positive coronavirus test. The trial is expected to be complete in May 2022.

A small trial at Tbilisi State Medical University in Georgia is testing a combination of chiretta and Siberian ginseng extract for treating mild COVID symptoms. The results are also expected in early 2022.

The king of bitters is being given serious consideration as a candidate to fight COVID, but we'll need to wait a few months to know if it fulfils its potential.

[the writer is Associate Professor in Natural Products and Phytochemistry, Liverpool John Moores University]

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Question of survival stares at migrant workers' families

SRINAGAR/SAHARANPUR, OCT 19 (PTI):

How to make both ends meet is a question that is haunting 28-year-old Jehangir, a small-time carpenter in Uttar Pradesh's Saharanpur, after his father was shot dead by terrorists last Saturday in south Kashmir, triggering an exodus of migrant labourers from the area.

"Together with Abba (father), we used to run the household. Now I am wondering what to do as there is not much work over here and I can't think of taking up his job over there (Kashmir)," Jehangir told PTI over the phone from Saharanpur.

His father Sageer Ansari was shot dead by terrorists in Litter village of south Kashmir on Saturday where he was working as a carpenter with a local unit for the last couple of years.

"We received a call that Sageer bhai is no more, and we were asked to collect his body from Jammu. We left that very moment and did the needful, and brought his body

home," said Naseem, the younger brother of the deceased.

He made it clear that the body was brought from Jammu to Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh by the family as the Jammu and Kashmir administration had not made any arrangements to send it.

"Together with my father, we used to manage an income of around Rs 15,000 per month, but now after his death, I have no idea how to pull the family together," said Jehangir, who himself is married and has a small daughter.

Recalling his conversation with his father, he said Sageer was very happy working in Kashmir and often praised his employer who used his services for manufacturing bats and other wooden items.

However, the death of Sageer in Pulwama on October 16 and then two more non-locals -- Raja Reshi Dev and Joginder Rishi Dev -- in adjacent Kulgam on October 17 triggered a panic reaction among labourers from other states working in the



volatile south Kashmir region.

The non-locals, engaged in apple orchards, and cardboard and bat factories, used to spend around six months in the Valley before returning home, an official said.

Another official from the security establishment claimed that

around 600 people from south Kashmir have already moved towards safer places.

"Killing an unknown person creates more fear psychosis than killing a known individual, and I am afraid that the terrorists may have achieved that," the official, who chose to remain anonymous, said.

Sooraj, a resident of Bihar working at a garment shop here, has already packed his bags and is leaving the Valley soon. "I have no idea as I used to earn my livelihood from the shop and my owner was also nice. However, now I am stepping into a bleak future ahead of me," he said.

Javed, who is from

Hapur in Ghaziabad and works at a saloon here, is also planning to leave. "Fear is in the air. My owner takes care of me but he can't be with me 24 hours. My other friends working elsewhere have already moved out of the Valley. Unfortunately, I have to start something afresh," he added.

Alert in Assam over threats from Pakistan's ISI, Al-Qaeda

A circular issued by the Assistant Inspector General of Police (Law and Order) on Saturday said the alert has been issued following reports received from the Special Branch of the state police.

Guwahati: The Assam Police have sounded an alert over possible terror strikes by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and terror outfit al-Qaeda over alleged persecution of Muslims in the state.

A circular issued by the Assistant Inspector General of Police (Law and Order) on Saturday said the alert has been issued following reports received from the Special Branch of the state police.

The circular said the ISI is planning to target "individuals including Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) cadres and army areas in Assam and other places in India".

There is also a "threat from global terror outfits to indulge in spectacular action by resorting to explosion of bombs/ IEDs in places of mass gathering/ mass transport/ religious places, etc".

Another input quoted in the circular said the al-Qaeda has called for "jihad in Assam and Kashmir".

The circular further said the general secretariat of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has released a statement regarding the Dhalpur eviction drive in Assam's Darrang district, which had claimed the lives of two persons.

Over 20 people were injured, including policemen, in the anti-encroachment drive against "illegal settlers" at Dhalpur in September.

In the statement released through Twitter, the OIC has condemned the 'systematic persecution and violence ramped up against the Muslim community in Assam'.

Given the inputs, the state's entire police machinery has been asked to take preventive and precautionary measures to thwart any evil design by 'global terror outfits and fundamental/ radical elements'.

All ground sources and intelligence gathering machinery have been asked to be geared up in the districts.

Uttarakhand battered by rain, flooding, PM speaks to Chief Minister

India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued a red alert for Uttarakhand with a forecast of heavy to very heavy rainfall in the state on Monday.

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday spoke to Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami to take stock of the situation in the hill state after heavy rains and floods.

"PM Modi spoke to Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami and Minister from Uttarakhand Ajay Bhatt. PM took stock of the situation arising due to heavy rains in the state," sources said.

Yesterday, Uttarakhand Governor Lt General Gurmit Singh met Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This comes amid heavy rainfall and floods in the state.

Earlier, Uttarakhand Chief Minister took detailed information from officials concerned about the situation of excessive rainfall in the state. He has been taking stock of the situation from the disaster control room of the state's secretariat.

India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued a red alert for Uttarakhand with a forecast of heavy to very heavy rainfall in the state

on Monday.

"Heavy to very heavy rainfall with extremely heavy falls very likely at isolated places over Uttarakhand and West Uttar Pradesh," the weather department said in its daily weather bulletin issued on Monday morning.

As a precautionary measure, the Badrinath Yatra has been halted and passengers en route to Badrinath were stopped in safe places.

Army Flags off cycling expedition to visit J&K, Himachal's border villages

The expedition by the Jammu-based Tiger Division, also aimed at motivating young people to join the armed forces, is part of the 50th anniversary of India's victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war which is being celebrated as the Swarnim Vijay Varsh, the defence spokesperson said.

Jammu: The Army on Tuesday flagged off a cycle expedition that will cover a distance of 525 kilometres in 13 days and visit 100 border villages of Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh to reconnect with veterans and "Veer Naris", an official said.

The expedition by the Jammu-based Tiger

Division, also aimed at motivating young people to join the armed forces, is part of the 50th anniversary of India's victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war which is being celebrated as the Swarnim Vijay Varsh, the defence spokesperson said.

He said General Officer Commanding, Tiger Division, Major General

Neeraj Gosain flagged off the cycle expedition from the Satwari cantonment on Tuesday morning.

The expedition by 12 cyclists from the Garhwal Rifles unit, which took part in the Kargil war, would culminate at Yol cantonment in Himachal Pradesh after covering a distance of 525 km in 13 days, the spokesman said.

Army chief visits forward areas along LoC in Jammu

JAMMU, OCT 19 (PTI): Army chief General M M Naravane visited forward areas along the LoC in Jammu region on Tuesday and was briefed on the ground situation in the region and ongoing counter-infiltration operations, officials said here.

Naravane arrived in Jammu on a two-day visit on Monday amid a spurt in targeted attacks on civilians by terrorists in the Valley and an ongoing counter-insurgency operation in the forest belt of the twin border districts of Poonch and Rajouri, where nine soldiers have laid down their lives over the past week.

"General MM Naravane #COAS (Chief of Army Staff) visited forward areas of #WhiteKnight Corps & undertook a first-hand assessment of the situation along the Line of Control. #COAS was briefed by commanders on the ground about the present situation & ongoing counter-infiltration operations," the Additional Directorate Gener-



al of Public Information (ADGPI) of the Indian Army tweeted.

Eleven people have lost their lives in targeted attacks by terrorists in different parts of the Kashmir valley this month. The count includes five non-local labourers, two teachers belonging to minority communities and a renowned pharmacist.

Amid the spate of civilian killings, Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on

Sunday vowed to avenge every drop of blood shed by hunting down the terrorists and their sympathisers.

The officials said the Army chief visited the border districts of Rajouri and Poonch, where a massive operation to track down terrorists hiding in the forest areas of Mendhar, Surankote and Thanamandi has been going on since October 11.

While five Army per-

sonnel were killed in an attack by terrorists in the forest area of Surankote on October 11, another four soldiers laid down their lives in a gunfight with the ultras in Mendhar last Thursday.

The operation to neutralise the terrorists entered its ninth day on Tuesday. So far, eight people, including a mother-son duo, have been detained for questioning in connection with providing logistic support to the terrorists.



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Staying a Sixer: Simmons’ fate looms large in Philadelphia

CAMDEN, N.J. (AP): Philadelphia 76ers coach Doc Rivers and the team he led to the best record in the Eastern Conference last season put their hands together in the middle of a huddle at the end of practice and counted off, “1-2-3! Together!” Linger

ing outside the huddle, holding a basketball and looking uninterested was the \$147 million puzzle piece in Ben Simmons. With Simmons focused and engaged, the Sixers are again a team to beat in the East this season.

But the Sixers open the season Wednesday in New Orleans with no guarantee that Simmons will play. He has practiced twice with the Sixers since ending his holdout. Meanwhile, the Sixers hold out hope the three-time All-Star guard wants to suit up again.

Simmons has dominated the headlines in Philadelphia since his baffling offseason trade request and then mystifying decision to report, showing up without warning last week.

He declined to talk to the media for the second straight practice on Monday -- the Sixers say he’s scheduled for Tuesday -- and maybe then he can start to explain why he wanted out of Philadelphia. And now that he’s back, how long does he plan to stay.

Tyrese Maxey ran



the offense with the first team in the portion of practice open to the media, and Simmons mostly stood in a corner stretching or dribbling the basketball. He played defense on one drill, then walked off the court without saying a word to a teammate.

Rivers said he had no idea if Simmons will play Wednesday.

“We’re just going to take our time,” Rivers said Monday. “When it comes, I’ll make that decision. I’m just going to wait and see and watch. The spirit has been so good. We’re just going to keep going.”

Simmons, the No. 1 pick of the 2016 draft,

was paired with Joel Embiid as the franchise cornerstones as the Sixers chase their first NBA championship since 1983.

Simmons, though, took the brunt of the blame for the top-seeded Sixers’ second-round exit in last season’s playoffs. He shot 34% from the free-throw line in the postseason and was reluctant to attempt a shot from anywhere on the floor late in games. That led to him spending critical minutes on the bench.

He’d be the only missing starter from last season’s run to the Eastern Conference’s top seed. Embiid, Danny Green, Seth Curry

and Tobias Harris form a solid first four. Sixers President Daryl Morey has fielded offers for Simmons, but has yet to find a package to his satisfaction for the enigmatic guard.

WHERE’S THE BEEF

Embiid, the NBA MVP runner-up, will have to limit the trash talking with Andre Drummond to practices this season. Drummond played for the Detroit Pistons and engaged in some physical and social media battles with Embiid through the years. That’s on hold for now after Drummond, a two-time All-Star, signed as Embiid’s backup. Embiid once accused Drummond of being unable to play

defense. Drummond chirped Embiid wasn’t worthy of his time until he could stay healthy for an entire season.

“We’re in the NBA. At the end of the day, what kind of beef can you really have?” Drummond said.

But he has to adjust to life as a reserve for the first time since he was a rookie with Detroit in 2012-13.

Drummond, a four-time NBA rebounding champion, is a significant upgrade from last season over the aging Dwight Howard. Drummond said there’s no issue with Embiid.

“We’re two competitors that love the game of basketball,” Drummond

said. “We’re like titans. We just clash. We play hard against each other. I have no animosity toward him, nor does he.”

MISSING HIGHLIGHTS

The Sixers edited Ben Simmons out of the in-game highlight films shown during preseason games. Depending on the what happens the next couple of days they may need to call the editor back for some last-minute splicing before Friday’s home opener against Brooklyn.

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

Tyrese Maxey enjoyed the cameo role he shot over the offseason for the Adam Sandler movie “Hustle.” He “had a blast” playing, well, a basketball player in the movie that filmed all over the city.

Maxey didn’t get to share any scenes with Sandler, though, or play with him during off-hours pickup games.

“I heard he can pass the ball pretty well,” Maxey said.

The Sixers need the same out of Maxey, who averaged eight points in averaging 15.3 minutes last season. He is close with Simmons and may start in his spot on opening night. Shake Milton, the other point guard, is out with an injury, and Isaiah Joe may see more playing time. Seth Curry could even run the point in Simmons’ place.

Madrid forward Benzema on trial in France for blackmail

LYON, FRANCE (AP): Real Madrid forward Karim Benzema will stand trial outside Paris starting Wednesday after being accused of trying to blackmail former France teammate Mathieu Valbuena over a sex tape.

Benzema is on trial for complicity in attempted blackmail. Four other people, including one of the player’s childhood friends, have been charged with attempted blackmail.

The charges are punishable by up to five years in prison and a 75,000 euro (\$87,400) fine. Benzema has denied wrongdoing.

During questioning, the 33-year-old Benzema acknowledged he had served as an intermediary between one of the alleged blackmailers, his friend Karim Zenati, and Valbuena, who now plays for Greek club Olympiakos.

But Benzema also told investigators that he took no part in blackmail and that his involvement was limited to simply telling Valbuena, out of friendship, about the existence of the sex tape.

It is unclear whether Benzema will be physically present at the trial from Wednesday through Friday in Versailles. Real Madrid was playing at Shakhtar Donetsk in the Champions League on Tuesday and Benzema traveled and trained with his team in Kiev ahead of the match.

Valbuena first filed a police complaint in June 2015. He said that while on international duty for France, at its training base in Clairefontaine, he had been telephoned by an anonymous caller who spoke about a sex tape and told him that they could come to arrangement. The caller told Valbuena to designate a trusted intermediary to work

out the details.

With a police detective posing as a negotiator, the investigation initially identified three people: Axel Angot, Mustapha Zouaoui and Younes Houass, all now standing trial for attempted blackmail. Their communications were wire-tapped.

Benzema was subsequently brought in by Zenati, a friend who has previous drug and robbery convictions and had been released from prison in 2013.

When both were on international duty in October 2015, Benzema asked Valbuena into his room at Clairefontaine for a conversation that led Valbuena to conclude that his France teammate was involved with the alleged blackmailers and acting as their intermediary.

Police say they heard Benzema tell Zenati in a wire-tapped call that evening that Valbuena “isn’t taking us seriously.”

Benzema later told the investigating magistrate that he had simply wanted to help the mid-fielder.

Benzema and Zenati were both handed preliminary charges in November 2015, joining Angot, Zouaoui and Houass under formal investigation.

Benzema was then dropped from France’s national team by coach Didier Deschamps, missing the 2016 European Championship and the 2018 World Cup, which was won by France.

Deschamps recalled Benzema in May ahead of the delayed Euro 2020 tournament and has fielded him 11 times so far in 2021.

Valbuena, now 37, hasn’t played for France since Oct. 11, 2015, when he came on as a substitute in a friendly match against Denmark.

Hawks agree to 4-year, \$65M extension with Kevin Huerter

ATLANTA (AP): The Atlanta Hawks agreed Monday to a four-year, \$65 million contract extension with guard Kevin Huerter, locking up another important player from the team that made a surprising run to the Eastern Conference final.

Huerter was the last piece in the Hawks’ offseason list of priorities, working out the rookie-scale extension shortly before Monday’s 6 p.m. deadline. The season begins Tuesday. ESPN first reported the deal, which begins with the 2022-23 season, and Hawks confirmed it in an evening news release.

“It was important to our group to secure Kevin as a part of our team moving forward,” general manager Travis Schlenk said. “He’s developed into a versatile, two-way player who can fit any lineup and can play minutes all over the perimeter. We are excited his future is in Atlanta.”

The 23-year-old Huerter was the No. 19 overall pick in the 2018 draft that also brought

Trae Young to Atlanta.

Huerter’s role has steadily grown over his three years in the league. Last season, the 6-foot-7 player averaged 11.9 points, 3.5 assists, 3.3 rebounds and a team-leading 1.2 steals while starting 49 of 69 games.

He saved his best performance for the playoffs, scoring 27 points in a Game 7 victory over the top-seeded 76ers in Philadelphia to cap a stunning upset in the conference semifinals.

Huerter’s signing follows the Hawks agreeing to a maximum five-year, \$207 million rookie contract extension with Young. They also locked up another key player when restricted free agent forward John Collins returned to the team with a new five-year, \$125 million contract.

In addition, the Hawks exercised fourth-year contract options on former first-round picks DeAndre Hunter and Cam Reddish, as well as the third-year option on Onyeka Okongwu, the No. 6 pick in 2020.

Rights activists urge boycott of Beijing Winter Olympics

ATHENS, GREECE (AP): Human rights activists urged international governments, sponsors and athletes on Tuesday to boycott what they called China’s “genocide games” as Greek officials handed over the Olympic flame to 2022 Beijing Winter Games organizers.

Activist groups, which also disrupted the flame lighting ceremony in southern Greece on Monday, accused the International Olympic Committee of granting legitimacy to rights abuses in China by allowing the Winter Games to go ahead in Beijing.

“We have yet again borne witness to the hypocrisy (of the IOC),” Mandie McKeown, the executive director for the International Tibet Network, said at a news conference in Athens. “They’re handing over the Olympic torch to a host government that is so far removed from holding any of (the Olympic) ideals that it seems we’re living in a kind of

warped reality.”

There has been international criticism of China’s treatment of Uyghur Muslims in the northwest region of Xinjiang, its crackdown on protesters in Hong Kong and its policies toward Tibet and Taiwan.

But the IOC, which previously held the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, has shied away from the issue, saying it’s out of its remit.

In his speech in the ancient stadium of Olympia on Monday, IOC President Thomas Bach stressed that the Games must be “respected as politically neutral ground.”

Activists on Tuesday argued that human rights in the country have deteriorated since 2008, claiming that the Summer Games “emboldened” China.

Beijing launched a brutal crackdown about four years ago that swept up to a million or more Uyghurs and other mostly Muslim minorities into



detention camps and prisons. Chinese authorities say their goal is not to eliminate the Uyghurs — a historically Muslim group of 13 million people — but to integrate them.

“If this press conference was to take place in China, I, as an Uyghur, would end up in a camp and maybe be subjected to sexual abuse and torture, as millions of my fellow Uyghurs are,” said Zumretay Arkin, program and advocacy manager for the World Uyghur Congress. “The

Olympic Games are being handed over to a country actively committing a genocide.”

President Joe Biden’s administration has affirmed the U.S. position that China’s repression of Uyghurs and other minorities was “genocide.” At June’s Group of Seven summit, Biden successfully pressed fellow leaders to include specific language criticizing China’s use of forced labor and other human rights abuses in their joint statement.

Arkin urged G-7 gov-

ernments to follow up on that by boycotting the Beijing Games.

“We believe that we have a better chance to-day ahead of the Games that governments commit to a boycott ... than we had previously in 2008,” she said.

Pema Doma, the campaign director for Students for a Free Tibet, said the IOC was making “a very big mistake.”

“How can anyone think that there is not a red line anywhere in the world for genocide?” said Doma, who was brief-

ly detained by police in Ancient Olympia before Monday’s protest.

The handover ceremony was held without spectators at the renovated marble stadium in Athens where the first modern Olympics were held in 1896.

Three activists were detained Monday after sneaking into the strongly-guarded archaeological site of Ancient Olympia during the flame lighting, waving a Tibetan flag and a banner that read “No genocide games.” Another four were detained outside the site, while two more protesters were detained in Athens on Sunday after a protest on the Acropolis.

The latter seven have been released, but the first three remain in police custody in southern Greece.

The Beijing Winter Olympics will run from Feb. 4-20. Only spectators from mainland China will be allowed to attend.

Israeli scuba diver discovers ancient Crusader sword

JERUSALEM (AP): An Israeli scuba diver has salvaged an ancient sword off the country’s Mediterranean coast that experts say dates back to the Crusaders.

Israel’s Antiquities Authority said Monday the man was on a weekend dive in northern Israel when he spotted a trove of ancient artifacts that included anchors, pottery and a meter-long (yard-long) sword.

The diver was about 150 meters (170 yards) off the coast in

five-meter-deep (5.5-yard-deep) water when he made the discovery. Experts say the area provided shelter for ancient ships and is home to many archaeological treasures, some dating back 4,000 years. But such discoveries can be elusive because of the constantly shifting sands.

Fearing his discovery might be buried, the diver took the sword ashore and delivered it to government experts, the authority said. The weapon is estimated to be 900 years old.

“It was found encrusted with marine organisms, but is apparently made of iron,” said Nir Distelfeld, an inspector in the authority’s robbery prevention unit. “It is exciting to encounter such a personal object, taking you 900 years back in time to a different era, with knights, armor and swords.”

The sword is to be cleaned and further analyzed, while the diver, identified as Shlomi Katzin, was given a certificate of appreciation for good citizenship.

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‘A dangerous time’: Portland, Oregon, sees record homicides

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP): It was nearly last call on a Friday when Jacob Eli Knight Vasquez went to get a drink across the street from the tavern where he worked in northwest Portland — an area with a thriving dining scene, where citygoers enjoy laid-back eateries, international cuisines and cozy cafés.

The 34-year-old had been at the pizza bar only a short time when shots rang out. Vasquez was struck by a stray bullet and died at the scene.

His killing in late September was one of the 67 homicides this year in Portland — a city that has already surpassed and is on pace to shatter its previous record of 66 slayings, set in 1987.

In a metropolis wracked by gang violence, fear and frustration have settled over Portland as stories like Vasquez’s have made some wary to go out at night. Unlike previous years, more bystanders, neighbors and friends are being caught in the crossfire — from people mourning at vigils and sitting in cars to children playing in a park.

“People should be leery because this is a dangerous time,” said Lionel Irving Jr., a lifelong Portland resident and a gang outreach worker.

Portland’s police department is struggling to keep up amid an acute staffing shortage and budget cuts. Now, the liberal Pacific Northwest city is implementing novel solutions aimed at improving safety, including adding traffic barrels to prevent drive-by shootings and suspending minor traffic stops so officers can focus on immediate threats.

But critics say Oregon’s largest city, home to more than 650,000 people, is flailing.

“Let’s please untie the hands of our law enforcement officers,” Vasquez’s brother-in-law, Don Osborn, said outside the business where Vasquez was slain. “I believe if the proper tools were in place for our law enforcement officers, this wouldn’t even have happened.”

So far this year, Portland has had about 1,000 shootings, 314 people have been injured by bullets, and firearms have accounted for three-quarters of homicides.

Police say many shootings are linked to gangs, fights and retaliation killings, but they are also affecting bystanders.

Nine-year-old Hadar Kedem recently



told city leaders about a dangerously close call when she was caught in gunfire earlier this year.

Hadar had been playing with her father, brother and dog at a northeast Portland park when a group of people in ski masks began shooting. Hadar and her family dove for cover behind a metal equipment bin. One bullet landed within feet of the fourth-grader.

“I know that not only do I want change, but everyone wants change,” Hadar said during a City Council meeting last month. “I want to feel safe.”

Nationally, homicides increased by nearly 30% from 2019 to 2020, based on FBI data. However, in Portland, deadly violence is increasing at a faster rate than nearly all major cities, with an 83% increase in homicides in 2020.

Portland has seen more homicides in 2021 than some larger cities, including San Francisco, and it’s had twice as many slayings as its larger Pacific Northwest neighbor, Seattle. Other hard-hit Western cities include the Albuquerque, New Mex-

ico, metro area, which has about 679,000 residents and has seen a record 97 homicides this year.

Portland police have struggled to quell the violence, with the bureau 128 officers below authorized strength. Since August 2020, about 200 officers have left the department. Many, in their exit interviews, cited low morale, lack of support from city officials and burnout from months of racial justice protests, which often ended in plumes of tear gas and confrontation but have largely died down since last summer.

“We are running on fumes. There’s no way we can investigate thoroughly, and correctly, all these shootings,” said Daryl Turner, executive director of Portland’s police union.

Turner says the city will need to hire 840 officers over the next five years to implement proper community policing and keep Portland safe.

Besides staffing, Turner said the increase in violence is directly related to budget cuts.

Amid booming calls to defund the police, city leaders slashed \$27 million from the police budget last year — \$11 million due to the pandemic-caused budget crisis — a decision that Turner says has cost lives.

Officials also disbanded a specialized unit focused on curbing gun violence, which had long faced criticism for disproportionately targeting people of color.

Insufficient manpower and funds have forced officials to implement nontraditional ideas in an attempt to hinder gun violence.

Earlier this month, additional traffic barrels were installed in a southeast Portland neighborhood that has been plagued by shootings — some of which were linked to high-speed drivers. City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty said the hope is that the traffic changes will slow activity at gun violence hot spots and make it harder to “both commit a crime and get away with it.”

“This is an all-hands-on deck situa-

tion where government needs to dig deep, think creatively,” Hardesty said. “From police to community-based organizations to infrastructure design — we all have a role to play in this emergency.”

In addition, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler announced in June that officers are no longer being directed to stop drivers for low-level traffic violations.

Wheeler and Police Chief Chuck Lovell said this was in response to data showing a disproportionate impact on Black drivers, but also because the city doesn’t have enough officers.

But experts, police and residents say a shift of resources and added traffic barrels are not nearly enough to counter the most violent year in the city’s modern history.

“This past year has shattered anything that I’ve ever witnessed,” said Irving, the outreach worker and a former gang member. He said he does not see gun violence slowing without more officers on the street and a specialized gun violence unit, along with investments in community-based organizations.

In addition, four cultural institutions in Portland’s Old Town Chinatown neighborhood recently sent a letter to officials, demanding immediate action to keep visitors, staff and volunteers safe.

The increasing violence and pleas for cities to do more have compelled some areas to switch from defunding police departments to restoring funding to them.

In major cities across the country, portions of police budgets are being restored. From Los Angeles to New York, some law enforcement departments that underwent massive budget cuts, amid nationwide protests over the murder of George Floyd last year, have had local leaders restore funds or implement new programs or units.

In Portland, there’s money available for public safety in the form of a \$60 million general fund excess balance.

The City Council can use half the money, which came from business taxes last year and was far more than anticipated, however it wants. Whether a significant portion will go to the police bureau has yet to be determined.

“We have to realize that everybody has a role, from community members to the police department,” Irving said. “No one entity is going to solve gun violence.”

North Korea tests possible submarine missile amid tensions

SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA (AP): North Korea on Tuesday fired at least one ballistic missile, which South Korea’s military said was likely designed to be launched from a submarine, in what is possibly the most significant demonstration of the North’s military might since U.S. President Joe Biden took office.

The launch of the missile into the sea came hours after the U.S. reaffirmed an offer to resume talks on North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. It underscored how North Korea has continued to expand its military capabilities during the pause in diplomacy.

South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement it detected that North Korea fired one short-range missile it believed was a submarine-launched ballistic missile from waters near the eastern port of Sinpo, and that the South Korean and U.S. militaries were closely analyzing the launch.

The South Korean military said the launch was made at sea, but it didn’t say whether it was fired from a vessel underwater or another launch platform above the sea’s surface.

Japan’s military said its initial analysis suggested that North Korea fired two ballistic missiles. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said officials were examining whether they were submarine-launched.

Kishida interrupted a campaign trip ahead of Japanese legislative elections later

this month and returned to Tokyo because of the launch. He ordered his government to start revising the country’s national security strategy to adapt to growing North Korean threats, including the possible development of the ability to pre-emptively strike North Korean military targets.

“We cannot overlook North Korea’s recent development in missile technology and its impact on the security of Japan and in the region,” he said.

Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi said one of the North Korean missiles reached a maximum altitude of 50 kilometers (30 miles) and flew on “an irregular trajectory” while traveling as far as 600 kilometers (360 miles). He said the missile didn’t breach Japan’s exclusive economic zone set outside its territorial waters.

South Korean officials held a national security council meeting and expressed “deep regret” over the launch occurring despite efforts to revive diplomacy. A strong South Korean response could anger North Korea, which has accused Seoul of hypocrisy for criticizing the North’s weapons tests while expanding its own conventional military capabilities.

The apparent site of the missile firing — a shipyard in Sinpo — is a major defense industry hub where North Korea focuses its submarine production. In recent years, North Korea has also used Sinpo to develop

ballistic weapons systems designed to be fired from submarines.

North Korea last tested a submarine-launched ballistic missile, or SLBM, in October 2019.

Analysts had expected North Korea to resume tests of such weapons after it rolled out at least two new submarine-launched missiles during military parades in 2020 and 2021. There have also been signs that North Korea is trying to build a larger submarine that would be capable of carrying and firing multiple missiles.

Japanese Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihiko Isozaki said Tokyo lodged a “strong protest” to North Korea through the “usual channels,” meaning their embassies in Beijing. Japan and North Korea have no diplomatic ties.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said tensions on the Korean Peninsula were at a “critical stage” and called for a renewed commitment to a diplomatic resolution of the issue.

Ending a monthslong lull in September, North Korea has been ramping up its weapons tests while making conditional peace offers to Seoul, reviving a pattern of pressuring South Korea to try to get what it wants from the United States.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is “developing submarine-launched ballistic missiles because he wants a more survivable nuclear deterrent able to blackmail

his neighbors and the United States,” said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University in Seoul.

Easley said North Korea “cannot politically afford appearing to fall behind in a regional arms race” with its southern neighbor.

“North Korea’s SLBM is probably far from being operationally deployed with a nuclear warhead,” he added.

North Korea has been pushing hard for years to acquire an ability to fire nuclear-armed missiles from submarines, the next key piece in Kim Jong Un’s arsenal that includes a broad range of mobile missiles and ICBMs with the potential range to reach the American homeland.

Still, experts say it would take years, large amounts of resources and major technological improvements for the heavily sanctioned nation to build at least several submarines that could travel quietly in seas and reliably execute strikes.

Within days, Biden’s special envoy for North Korea, Sung Kim, is scheduled to meet with U.S. allies in Seoul over the prospects of reviving talks with North Korea.

Nuclear negotiations between the U.S. and North Korea have stalled for more than two years because of disagreements over an easing of crippling U.S.-led sanctions against North Korea in exchange for

denuclearization steps by the North.

While North Korea is apparently trying to use South Korea’s desire for inter-Korean engagement to extract concessions from Washington, analysts say Seoul has little wiggle room because the Biden administration is intent on keeping sanctions in place until North Korea takes concrete steps toward denuclearization.

“The U.S. continues to reach out to Pyongyang to restart dialogue. Our intent remains the same. We harbor no hostile intent toward (North Korea) and we are open to meeting without preconditions,” Sung Kim told reporters on Monday.

Last week, Kim Jong Un reviewed powerful missiles designed to launch nuclear strikes on the U.S. mainland during a military exhibition and vowed to build an “invincible” military to cope with what he called persistent U.S. hostility. Earlier, Kim dismissed U.S. offers to resume talks without preconditions as a “cunning” attempt to conceal its hostile policy toward the North.

The country has tested various weapons over the past month, including a new cruise missile that could potentially carry nuclear warheads, and a developmental hypersonic missile.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said North Korea’s latest launch did not pose an immediate threat to U.S. personnel, territory, or that of its allies.

the city,” Baker said. “They have lifted the wet blanket of the strong lockdown, and people are getting lockdown fatigue.”

Baker said he thought it was possible for the government to continue eliminating the outbreak outside of Auckland, provided it kept in place strict border controls around the city.

He said the most important goal in any reopening would be to ensure the health system was not overrun.

Health officials on Tuesday also said they had authorized people with weakened immune systems to get a third shot of the Pfizer vaccine and were recommending they do so.

New Zealand hits virus high, pushes vaccination as way out

WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND (AP): New Zealand counted its most new coronavirus cases of the pandemic Tuesday as an outbreak in its largest city grew and officials urged vaccinations as a way out of Auckland’s two-month lockdown.

Health officials found 94 new local infections, eclipsing the 89 that were reported twice during the early days of the pandemic 18 months ago. Most of the new cases were in Auckland, but seven were found in the nearby Waikato district.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said lockdown rule-breakers were contributing to the spread of infections and noted

that many of the new cases had been detected among younger people.

“I know the highs and lows of cases is incredibly hard on people, particularly those in Tamaki Makaurau,” Ardern said, using the Indigenous Maori name for Auckland. “I just wanted to reinforce again that we’re not powerless. We do have the ability to keep cases as low as we can.”

New Zealand had successfully eliminated earlier outbreaks by imposing tough border controls and strict lockdowns, as well as aggressive contact-tracing and isolating those who were infectious. But the approach failed against the more transmissible delta

variant. The government has since eased some of Auckland’s lockdown rules, allowing more people to return to work.

Ardern has also embarked on an all-out effort to get people vaccinated. That’s included a televised “Vaxathon” festival on Saturday which saw a record 130,000 people getting shots, more than 2% of the New Zealand’s population of 5 million.

Ardern has promised to outline a path out of lockdown for Auckland based on vaccination numbers.

The government has previously talked about the importance of getting 90% of people aged 12 and over fully vacci-

nated, including a high proportion of Maori, who have been particularly hard hit by the outbreak.

But that goal remains some distance away, with 85% of eligible people having had at least one dose and 67% fully vaccinated. The numbers are lower among Maori.

Professor Michael Baker, an epidemiologist at the University of Otago, said he was concerned that contact tracers in Auckland would soon become overwhelmed. He said lawmakers needed to consider temporarily reimposing stricter lockdown rules as a circuit breaker.

“There are burning embers all over

The Big Pic



FUTURE NOSTALGIA! The singer, Dua Lipa struts a colorful Versace outfit in London.

Actor Yuvika Chaudhary, accused of Casteist remarks, granted interim bail

Bollywood actor Yuvika Chaudhary as charged under the SC/ST Act, was later granted interim bail by the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

Hansi (Haryana): Bollywood actor Yuvika Chaudhary on Monday joined the investigation for allegedly using offensive remarks against Scheduled Castes in a social media post.

The actress, who was charged under the SC/ST Act, was later granted interim bail by the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

"My client has joined the investigation as per the guidelines given by the High Court and she is on interim bail now in a case of alleged offensive remarks against Scheduled Castes on a social media platform," said Ashok Bishnoi, lawyer of actress Yuvika Chaudhary.

A case was filed against her by the complainant Rajat Kalsan in the police station town of Hansi, Haryana under the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Atrocities Act.

In his complaint, Mr Kalsan alleged that the actor made some derogatory and objectionable remarks about the Scheduled Caste



community in the video.

After her video went viral on social media and sparked an uproar, Ms Chaudhary took to Twitter to issue an apology and said that she did not know the meaning of the said word.

"Hi guys I didn't know the meaning of that word that I used in my last vlog I didn't mean to hurt anyone and I can never do that to hurt someone I apologise to each n everyone I hope you understand the love you all," she had tweeted.

tening to your favourite podcast, watching the rain from your window sill and sipping on some calming tea. As you do, let go of the need to worry about the future or obsess over the past. The present is perfect as it is and needs you undivided attention right now.

Tip: Everything is perfect in this moment. Breathe.

CANCER: Take the lead, baby! Take the lead. There's a new and prosperous opening on the cards for you, and it requires you to embody courage and say yes to the unknown. Yes, this is a trade off. You will have to leave the past behind in order to move forward. Know that this is a worthy sacrifice, one that will align you with your path and purpose, Cancer.

Tip: It's time to leave the past behind, Cancer.

LEO: Uh-oh! We've got a deadlock situation at hand, Leo, one that's hindering your growth. Word for the wise: release the need to win every argument and actively listen to what the other parties have to say. This is the only way to find an amicable solution *and* set the wheels in motion. As far as your interpersonal relationships are concerned, you're being guided to bring compassion to the table. They're not the only ones who have erred. You have too. The gift of forgiveness will help resolve matters

and let love triumph.

Tip: Now is not the time to let your pride get in the way.

VIRGO: You deserve to be loved, baby! You deserve to be loved in a way you've never been loved before. So, let down the walls, Virgo. Allow Cupid to come find you this time around. Something tells us you are stepping into a new cycle and the story you are about to write is unlike the ones you have written before.

Tip: The Universe is challenging you to let down your walls.

LIBRA: Today, you're being asked to ruminate over the Hermetic principle 'as above, so below' as a reminder of your own power. You are the co-creator of your reality, Libra, and every thought, word, and action is helping you create the world you desire for yourself. So, what will you choose to put out there today? Will you act from a space of limitation or believe in your own potential? Something tells us you're ready to cast a spell!

Tip: Remember your power as a co-creator, baby!

SCORPIO: Scorpio, you're likely to find yourself at a crossroads this full moon. The first pathway is synonymous with familiarity and will keep

MTV: Europe Music Awards to counter Hungary's anti-gay laws

LOS ANGELES (AP): The MTV Europe Music Awards will be held Nov. 14 in Hungary, the network said Tuesday, reaffirming and defending the location despite the country's recent passage of legislation widely condemned as anti-LGBTQ.

The ceremony is an opportunity to make a stand for gay and trans civil rights worldwide in the central European nation that has moved to curtail them, said Chris McCarthy, president and CEO of MTV Entertainment Group Worldwide.

"We're looking forward to using the event to amplify our voices and stand in solidarity with our LGBTQ siblings," McCarthy said in an interview with The Associated Press.

No government censorship of the telecast will be tolerated, McCarthy said.

"We've made it very clear and we have from the beginning.... we do not allow editorial input as it relates to the artists" and the content we create, he said. "That's always a condition regardless of whatever country we go into."

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's conservative ruling party introduced the measure that on its face was aimed at fighting pedophilia. Amendments ban the representation of any orientation besides heterosexual, along with gender change information in school sex education programs, or in films and advertisements aimed at anyone under 18.

Human rights groups strongly denounced the measure passed in June, saying it wrongly links gays with pedophilia and is intended as a tool that could be used to stigmatize and harass residents because of their sexual orientation and gender iden-



tity. A majority of European Union leaders said it goes against the EU's values and that discrimination must not be tolerated in the 27-nation bloc.

In 2020, Hungarian lawmakers approved legislation banning the legal recognition of transgender citizens.

MTV, which made a deal two years ago to hold the show in the nation's capital, Budapest, planned to issue a lengthy memo to staffers in apparent anticipation of possible criticism of its decision.

"This may surprise anyone who knows that in June of this year, Hungary passed anti-LGBTQ+ legislation banning television content featuring gay people during the day and in primetime," allowing it only to run overnight, McCarthy said in the memo.

McCarthy said his immediate and personal reaction to the law, as a gay man, was to move the event to another country. But after consulting within MTV and with LGBTQ advocates globally, including in Hungary, the decision "was very clear to us."

"Instead, we should move forward, using the show as an opportunity to stand in solidarity with the LGBTQ+

community in Hungary and around the world as we continue to fight for equality for all," he said in the memo.

MTV's pre-emptive outreach comes amid backlash by some Netflix staffers to the streaming service's handling of a Dave Chappelle stand-up special, "The Closer," which includes derogatory comments about trans people. Netflix has declined to remove the program.

As a gay youngster in a Pennsylvania steel mill town in the 1990s, McCarthy said he felt isolated and alone until he saw LGBTQ characters on TV, including Pedro Zamora on MTV's "The Real World."

"I started to think, 'this might be OK,'" he told the AP, and said it's alarming to imagine a young person deprived of the same opportunity because of Hungary's TV restrictions.

The Europe Music Awards, known as the EMAs for short, will honor young LGBTQ activists with MTV's Generation Change Award, to be given in partnership with the activist group All Out to amplify its worldwide campaigns for equality, McCarthy said.

Proceeding with the EMAs in Hungary is "absolutely the right decision," given the nation's "concerted onslaught" on LGBTQ rights and scapegoating of minorities, said Matt Beard, executive director of All Out.

Such visibility "gives fuel to LGBT-plus communities living in Hungary an incredibly precious sense of international solidarity that comes from a big global media event like the EMAs," Beard said.

In a September interview with the AP, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto said the new law is intended to protect children from pedophiles and "homosexual propaganda." An EU decision to delay billions in economic recovery funds earmarked for his country amounted to "blackmail," he said.

The MTV EMAs were launched in 1994 with a ceremony in Berlin hosted by Tom Jones. The awards have since hoppedscotched among nations, including France, England, Sweden, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands.

The host, nominees, and performers for this year's ceremony have yet to be announced. The 2020 event was held virtually because of the pandemic.

Kangana Ranaut's 'Dhaakad' to release in April 2022

MUMBAI, OCT 19 (PTI): Actor Kangana Ranaut's spy thriller "Dhaakad" is set to be released theatrically on April 8, 2022.

The film deals with the subject of child trafficking and the exploitation of women, the makers said in a statement.

Shot in Bhopal, Budapest and Mumbai, "Dhaakad" also stars Arjun Rampal and Divya Dutta.

Ranaut, who plays Agent Agni in the movie, said the film was always meant for the big screen experience.

"It's a deeply stirring subject and we have made it on a scale that only theatres could do justice to. The layered story at the heart of it needs to reach out to the



masses and I am certain, the film will speak to women across the board. I can't wait for the audience to meet Agent Agni on April 8," the 34-year-old actor said in a statement.

The film is directed by

Razneesh Razy Ghai, who said his intent was to ensure that "Dhaakad" stood "at par with international action films".

"Dhaakad" is produced by Deepak Mukut and Sohel Maklai.

"Our producers were a strong pillar of strength for us throughout. It was an incredibly challenging film to make. I am so thrilled for the audience to experience the rage and fury of Agni," Ghai said.

Mukut said a woman shouldering a film of this scale and budget sets a "new standard in Bollywood".

The team has made a "cool, slick action film" that will change the face of women-led action movies in the Hindi film industry, added Maklai.

"Dhaakad" is presented by Soham Rockstar Entertainment Pvt Ltd in association with Kamal Mukut, Sohel Maklai Productions and Asylum films.

point will help you overcome the obstacles in your path. Here's what you want to remember when you find yourself holding on too tightly: the Universe will never take away something that's meant to be yours.

AQUARIUS: You've been seeing the signs all around you, and you've been seeing them for a while now. So, get ready to take action, beautiful! Get ready to set the given plan into motion. Yes, you will have to embody courage. Yes, you will have to motivate those around you to overcome the fears being projected by their small, three-dimensional selves. But, it's all going to be worth it, Aquarius. Trust that you will eventually take the prize home.

Tip: Tap into your leadership skills.

PISCES: People tend to perceive you as the woo-woo child of the zodiac. The mystical one who simultaneously exists in multiple realms. But, this is only true upto a certain extent. You know when to zoom back into this reality. You know when to make practical decisions that will help manifest your vision, and this is precisely what you're being guided to do today. So, meditate on where you want to be six months from now as you take a bold step in the right direction. PS: The forces are with you and they're guiding you at every step along the way!