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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## Third consecutive day with no Covid deaths in Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 04 JUL:**

While daily cases continue to come in three-digits, Sikkim is being allowed some respite from Covid-19 with the latest update informing that that the State has now gone three straight days without a Covid fatality. This is significant because in the 72 days that the second wave has brutalised Sikkim, the State has seen 172 deaths, averaging more than two lives lost of Novel Coronavirus every day.

Hopefully, this record will continue and not get jinxed.

Over these three days on no Covid deaths, Sikkim recorded a total of 465 new cases, and a marginally higher number of recoveries at 471.

As per the Daily Report of Covid-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health

Department at 8AM, Sunday, 133 more formerly Covid-positive people made full recoveries and were discharged from facility and home isolation in the past 24 hours.

The count of daily cases was higher than the recoveries today with 176 new cases being detected over the same period. The number of confirmed cases of Covid reported in the State now stands at 21,131.

The best piece of information in the daily report is confirmation that no one died due to Covid in Sikkim in the past 24 hours and the State's COVID death toll continues to hold at 308.

Meanwhile, the 176 new cases were picked up from the testing of 1,367 samples collected on Saturday giving Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 12.8%.

South Sikkim topped the



list of new cases again today with 87 cases registered there while 58 new cases were reported in East District and 31 in West District.

While 99 of the new cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 560 samples, 76 more

persons were found positive in rapid antigen testing of 802 samples and one more case was reported in TruNat testing of five samples.

What is also reassuring to learn is that there were only 3 new hospitalisations of Covid

patients. Of the 2,101 active cases of Covid in Sikkim, only 83 have symptoms severe enough to require hospitalisation. Of these, five patients are admitted in the ICU at STNM Hospital and three at the ICU at Central Referral Hospital.

**Tambuttar's Sanjana Chettri selected for Chevening Scholarship**



**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 04 JUL:**

Sanjana Chettri, a resident of Tambuttar Saramsa, East Sikkim, has bagged the prestigious Chevening Scholarship to study a postgraduate course in the UK.

She will be starting graduate school at SOAS, the University of London, where she will be studying Development Studies. Her research and professional interests lie at the intersection of development, politics and policy.

She is a recent graduate of Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi.

The Chevening Scholarship is an international scholarship scheme that enables students with leadership qualities from over 160 countries and territories to undertake postgraduate study or courses in universities in the United Kingdom.

She has also offered assistance for students keen on applying for the next cycle of applications and can be contacted at sanjanachettri123@gmail.com.

## SKM has destroyed Assembly's dignity, Chamling on why he has stayed away

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 04 JUL:**

Sikkim Democratic Front president, Pawan Chamling, has reiterated his allegation that the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha has "destroyed" the sanctity and dignity of the Legislative Assembly by "hiring goons" to heckle him from the galleries and lining up legislators in the House to shout down his comments. Mr Chamling said this in his weekly Facebook ruminations posted every Sunday in response to a query posed to him. Today, he was responding to the query on why he has not been attending the Assembly sessions, something that SKM has

also questioned.

Mr Chamling explains that the reason he has attended only two sessions was because of the heckling he was targeted with from the guest's gallery of the Assembly and of how those who lowered the dignity of the Assembly were never held accountable for their conduct.

In this regard, Mr Chamling also comments that this failure to hold the perpetrators to account is best understood by the fact that Sikkim Police and several other government servants are behaving like SKM party-workers instead of conducting themselves as public servants.

"Remember, government employees must be

loyal to the government, not the ruling party," he writes.

Mr Chamling also elaborates that his avoiding the Assembly sessions was not out of worry for his personal safety, but because he does not want the dignity of the Assembly to be sullied any further.

"...let me say this, the SKM party questioning my absence in the Assembly is like a man inviting people to his house with unchained rabid dogs loitering in the compound. I am more worried about the sanctity of the house than about my personal safety. I ask the government to recognise the sacrosanct status of the SLA and keep it away from the reach of goons.

They don't have to worry much about my absence now. I will be there when I see fit," he writes.

Mr Chamling also recounts the incident when he was heckled, the follow-up action [of the lack thereof], and his party boycotting the initial assembly sessions to register its protest of PS Tamang becoming chief minister. SDF is convinced that Mr Tamang was ineligible to become a public representative and contest the election when was sworn in as CM and Mr Chamling has alleged that he "came from the backdoor to become Sikkim's Chief Minister."

The SDF president also details all the suggestions and offers he

has made to the State Government when it comes to the Covid situation and rues that all of these were ignored, bringing Sikkim to the present situation.

"The Sikkim media kept quiet about it. Sikkim civil society didn't utter a word. What does it show? It shows that the people's freedom of speech and press freedom has been curtailed. There is no democracy inside the Assembly and outside the Assembly. People are afraid to speak. They are losing confidence. The happiness index is now worst in the country where Sikkim was the happiest state in India," he also writes.

## India records 43,071 new COVID-19 cases, 955 deaths

**NEW DELHI, JUL 4 (PTI):**

India saw a single-day rise of 43,071 COVID-19 infections, which took the tally of cases to 3,05,45,433, while active cases have declined to 4,85,350, according to Union health ministry data updated on Sunday. The death toll has climbed to 4,02,005 with 955 more fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The active cases have further declined to 4,85,350 and comprise 1.59 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate has improved to 97.09 per cent, the ministry said.

It said active cases have declined by 10,183

in a span of 24 hours.

The data stated that 18,38,490 tests were conducted on Saturday, taking the total cumulative tests conducted so far for detection of COVID-19 in the country to 41,82,54,953.

The daily positivity rate was recorded at 2.34 per cent. It has been less than five per cent for 27 consecutive days, the ministry said, adding that the weekly positivity rate has declined to 2.44 per cent.

Recoveries continue to outnumber daily new cases for 52 consecutive days.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease has increased to 2,96,58,078,



while the case fatality rate has risen to 1.32 per cent, the data stated.

Cumulative vaccine doses administered so far has reached 35.12 crore under nationwide Covid vaccination drive.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 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 two crore cases on May 4 and three crore on June 23.

## CISCE reduces Class 10, 12 syllabus for 2022 Exams

**NEW DELHI, 04 JUL [NDTV]:** The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) has reduced the syllabus of Class 10 and Class 12 for the 2022 exams. Considering the struggle to cope with the disruption in educational activities brought about due to extended lockdowns in the country, CISCE, the board which conducts the ICSE Class 10th and ISC Class 12th annual exams, has reduced the syllabi of English and Indian Languages for ICSE and ISC 2022 exams.

However, the council has also said that it is carrying out syllabus reduction in several other subjects at the ICSE and ISC levels, in consultation with its subject experts, without compromising on the quality of content.

"...CISCE has initiated the process of syllabus review for various subjects at the ICSE and ISC levels specifically for Classes 10 and 12, for the Examination Year 2022, to identify portions of the syllabus which may be reduced, without compromising on the quality of content," said Gerry Arathoon, Chief Executive and Secretary, CISCE in a statement issued to the heads of all affiliated schools.

Students can access the revised syllabus for the 2022 exams on the official website of CISCE -- cisce.org and check the Regulations and Syllabuses link under ICSE and ISC tabs.

"In the eventuality of the need for further reduction in the syllabus, it is imperative that the concerned subject teachers transact the syllabus strictly according to the sequence of topics given in the syllabus. This will ensure that all CISCE affiliated schools are broadly teaching the same topics at any given point of time as well as facilitate subsequent reduction in syllabus, if required," the CISCE statement added.

The Council, this year, had to cancel the Class 10 and Class 12 exams in view of the pandemic and considering the safety of the students. CISCE will use internal assessment marks, past performance to arrive at the ICSE 10th and ISC 12th results.

**Covid third wave may see half the cases reported during 2nd surge: Top expert**

**NEW DELHI, 04 JUL [PTI]:**

The third wave of coronavirus could hit the peak between October-November if Covid appropriate behaviour is not followed, but may see half the daily cases recorded during the second surge, according to a scientist of a government panel tasked with modelling of COVID-19 cases.

He, however, said the third wave could spread faster if any new virulent variant emerges.

Manindra Agarwal, involved in the "Sutra Model" or the mathematical projection of trajectory of COVID-19, also said the model has three scenarios--optimistic, intermediate and pessimistic--for the prediction of the third wave.

The Department of Science and Technology had last year formed the panel to forecast the surge of coronavirus cases using mathematical models.

The panel had also received flak for not predicting the exact nature of the second wave of Covid.

Mr Agarwal, who is part of the three-member panel, said loss of immunity, effects of vaccination and possibility of a more virulent variant, have been factored while predicting the third wave, something which was not done during modelling the second wave.

"We have created three scenarios. One is "optimistic" one. In this, we assume that life goes back to normal by August, and there is no new mutant. Second is "intermediate" one. In this, we assume that vaccination is 20 per cent less effective in addition to optimistic scenario assumptions.

"Third is "pessimist" one. This has one assumption different from intermediate one: a new, 25 per cent more infectious mutant spreads in August (it is not delta+, which is not more infectious than delta)," he said in a series of tweets.

According to the graph shared by Mr Agarwal, the second wave is likely to plateau by mid-August, and the third wave could reach its peak between October and November.

In case of the "pessimistic" scenario, the third wave could see cases rise up between 1,50,000 to 2,00,000 in the country, the scientist noted.

The figure is less than half of what was recorded when the deadly second wave had hit its peak in the first half of May, flooding hospitals with patients and claiming thousands of lives daily.

On May 7, India had recorded 4,14,188 COVID-19 cases.

...turn Pg2



# 8 BJP leaders seek recounting in Bengal, approach Calcutta High Court

**KOLKATA, 04 JUL:** The Calcutta High Court will hear on Monday the pleas of two Bharatiya Janata Party leaders seeking a review of the results of the recently-held Assembly elections in West Bengal in their respective constituencies.

At least eight leaders of the BJP moved the Calcutta High Court seeking recounting of the votes.

Kalyan Chaubey, who lost the recent assembly election from the 167 Maniktola assembly constituency told ANI, "I have filed a petition in the Calcutta High Court, requesting it to conduct re-counting of votes. 167 Maniktola is my assembly constituency. There was violence during elections. There were attacks on me twice on polling day. Everything is on record. On the counting day, there were many unauthorised polling agents of the TMC were present in large numbers at counting booths. I had submitted written complaints both to the state election commission and returning officer. On the basis of these complaints, I have filed

a petition in the Calcutta High Court urging it to consider re-counting."

The development has come days after West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee moved the High Court seeking a recount for the Nandigram Assembly constituency, where she lost to BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari.

"8BJP leaders moved to HC seeking a review of results (West Bengal Assembly Polls 2021) in their respective constituencies. Many of them have got listed on Monday," he added.

BJP candidate Soujit Singha who lost the recent Assembly election of Jalpaiguri constituency to the TMC candidate, has also sought a review of the results. Singha expressed confidence that if re-counting is conducted the results shall be totally different.

Speaking to ANI, Mr Singha said, "I just want the re-counting should take place. I am 100 per cent sure that if recounting will be done then results will be totally different."

"I won just 941



votes. After the results were declared, everyone kept on asking the same thing that how did this happen, many people had doubts about the results. On the day of polling, many people gheraoed a vehicle from where three EVMs were recovered. This raises suspicion. During counting, when there were 50 BJP workers allowed at the counting booth but more than 100 TMC workers were allowed," said Singha.

He further said, "The counting was conducted in four rooms and 16 rounds. I was leading in the first round of counting itself, but then suddenly I started trailing suddenly and the op-

ponent TMC candidate was given a lead by over 1000 votes which is evident that the pace of counting and the votes by which the TMC candidates were given a lead did not match."

"Then I wrote a letter to the returning officer (RO) and asked him that he conducts the re-counting of at least the last round of one room. If everything comes out to be fine, I will accept my defeat. And if there is even a small degree of doubt then the entire counting should be conducted again. But the RO dismissed my plea. Then I was not left with any other option but to knock on the

doors of Calcutta High Court where I filed an election petition. Now the court will decide whether there is a need for re-counting or not," he added.

BJP leader Biswanath Banerjee who lost the recent Assembly election also moved to the Calcutta High Court seeking a review of the results

"I've filed a petition in High Court seeking recounting of votes of Mahishadal Vidhan Sabha constituency," Mr Banerjee said.

The Calcutta High Court on June 24 reserved the judgement on a plea of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee chal-

lenging Nandigram election results. The Election Commission had declared BJP's Suwendu Adhikari the winner in the fiercely contested election for the Nandigram constituency.

After her defeat in Nandigram, Mamata Banerjee alleged that the Returning Officer of the Assembly seat had said that he was threatened against recounting of votes.

Despite Banerjee losing the seat to Adhikari, who was once her close aide, the TMC registered a landslide victory in polls winning 213 seats in the 294-member West Bengal assembly. While the BJP lost the polls but emerged as the second-largest party with 77 seats.

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) even wrote to the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), West Bengal seeking "immediate re-counting of votes and postal ballots" in the Nandigram constituency, but recounting was refused for reasons unknown.

"Such refusal is bad in law and coloured. We demand an immediate recounting of Nandi-

gram AC 210 to preserve the sanctity of the electoral process," the TMC had said in a letter to the CEO. (ANI)

On June 20, BJP West Bengal state president Dilip Ghosh had said that the saffron camp will also move the court demanding recounting in 50 seats where the BJP got defeated in lesser margins, shortly after TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee moved Calcutta High Court challenging the result of Nandigram Assembly Constituency.

Earlier, TMC candidates of Bongaon (South), Moyna, Balarampur and Goghat had also filed cases in Calcutta High Court, demanding recounting from those seats as they also believe that the BJP used unscrupulous methods in those seats as well.

Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress won 213 seats in the West Bengal Assembly elections that concluded last month. The Bharatiya Janata Party garnered 77 seats in the 294-seat state assembly. The results of the Assembly elections were declared on May 2.

## As Delhi unlocks, sports complexes reopen Monday, multiplexes stay shut

**NEW DELHI, 04 JUL [NDTV]:** Delhi enters the sixth phase of the easing of Covid lockdown tomorrow with stadiums and sports complexes reopening, although they still won't allow spectators. Cinema halls, multiplexes, and swimming pools, however, will remain shut.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's government today issued orders allowing the sports facilities to function normally. Earlier, stadiums and sports complexes were opened up for those training for national and international competitions or to hold such events.

Now the government has opened them up on a regular basis, but without spectators.

There will be strict adherence to standard operating procedure and other guidelines of the government, and compliance of Covid-appropriate behaviour, the Delhi Disaster Management Au-

thority (DDMA) said. Spas, schools and colleges, social, political, cultural, religious, and other such gatherings will remain prohibited, its order has stated, according to a PTI report. Delhi Metro trains and public transport buses will continue to operate with 50 per cent seating capacity, it said.

Last week, the DDMA allowed the opening of gyms and yoga institutes, allowing them to function at half their capacity, while weddings at banquet and halls and hotels were okayed at 50 per cent attendance.

From June 14, shops, malls, and restaurants had been allowed to function in the city with Covid numbers dropping to a three-month low. Weekly bazaars, too, were opened up then with up to 50 per cent vendors and only one market functioning in each municipal zone ev-

ery day.

However, two markets -- Punjabi Basti and Nangloi's Janata market -- were yesterday ordered shut till July 6 for not following the health protocol.

Delhi was under a complete lockdown from April 19 to May 30, following which it has been opening up in a phased manner.

The city was one of the worst affected during the deadly second wave of the pandemic earlier this year which saw a huge number of fatalities and hospitalisation. The unprecedented surge led to a virtual breakdown of the health infrastructure with hospitals big and small crumbling under pressure.

A lack of resources like drugs, beds, personnel, and, most importantly, oxygen, ensued, throwing up nightmarish conditions for the administration, health professionals, and patients and their relatives.

## Kolkata idol maker becomes first to send fiberglass Durga idol overseas amid Covid

**KOLKATA, 04 JUL:** An idol maker from Kolkata's Kumartuli sent a fiberglass idol of Goddess Durga to Germany and New Jersey becoming the first artisan in the region to send his artwork overseas amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

Mintu Pal, popular clay modeller, spoke to ANI and said that every year Durga idol of fiberglass is sent abroad from Kumartuli of Kolkata, ahead of the annual Durga Puja festival. "This year also I have got two orders: one went to New Jersey and one is ready to go to Berlin, Germany," he said.

The cost of the idol is over ₹ 1.5 lakh, said the clay modeller.

"This idol is made completely of fiberglass. It will be transported from India to Germany via ship and it will take about 2 months to reach,"

Mr Pal said.

He further informed that the orders for these idols were received in January and it took two months to make it.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the artist said that fewer orders were received. "This year, there were orders for small idols instead of bigger ones," said Mr Pal.

Every year, the artist claims to send 6-8 Durga idols abroad. "Last year also I have sent five Durga idols to foreign countries during the pandemic. My idols have gone to Switzerland, United Kingdom, USA, France, Beijing so far," he said.

Months ahead of the festival, there seems to lack of enthusiasm among people, he believes.

"The people of the Puja Committee are not excited in view

of the current situation of the pandemic across the country, but there is enthusiasm in foreign countries. We are hoping that the situation will improve at least after some time, as the Puja is

still months away," Pal said.

Nilam Pal, another clay modeller said that they have barely received any order as people are not stepping out due to the fear of the COVID-19 pandemic.

ic. "We have taken a risk and made 15-16 idols in advance in case someone shows up," he said.

This year, Durga Puja will commence on October 11 and extend till October 15.

### Covid third wave may see half...

"If a new mutant comes, the third wave could spread rapidly, but it will be half of what the second wave was. Delta variant is infecting people who were infected with a different variant. So this has been taken into consideration," Agarwal said.

He said as vaccination progresses, the possibility of a third or fourth wave will be less.

"In case of an "optimistic" scenario, the daily cases could be in the range of 50,000 to 1,00,000. In case of the intermediate scenario (if it is assumed that vaccination is 20 per cent less effective, in addition to optimistic scenario assumptions), the cases could be in the range of 50,000 to 1,00,000, but more than the optimistic scenario," the panel member noted.

M Vidyasagar, scientist at IIT-Hyderabad, who is also involved in modelling of Covid cases, said hospitalisation could be less during the third wave.

He cited the example of the UK where in January more than 60,000 cases were reported with daily deaths touching 1,200. However, during the fourth wave, the number dropped to 21,000 cases and just 14 deaths.

"Vaccination played a major role in bringing down the cases that needed hospitalisation in the UK. This has been factored while coming out with the three scenarios," Mr Vidyasagar told PTI.

The government has been emphasising on vaccination as the fear of the third wave looms.

Mr Agarwal also explained the reasons behind the delay in coming out with an analysis for the third wave.

"It took us a while to do the analysis for three reasons. First, loss of immunity in recovered population. Second, vaccination induced immunity. Each of these two (factors) need to be estimated for future.

"And third, how to incorporate these two factors in the Sutra model. Fortunately, it turned out that both can be incorporated by suitably changing contact rate and reach parameters. So that takes care of the third factor. The first two factors required detailed analysis," he tweeted.

"Contact rate" is how fast the infection spreads and "reach parameter" is the percentage of population the pandemic is active in.

Mr Agarwal added that his team went through studies done in the past on loss of immunity while making the Sutra Model.

"Similarly, we also looked at the projected vaccination rate over the next few months, including the effects of vaccine-hesitancy, and arrived at month-wise estimates for vaccination," he said.



# Journos celebrate “Adi-Patrakar” Pastor Ganga Prasad Pradhan’s birth anniv

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 04 JUL:**

Journalist Union of Sikkim [JUS] celebrated the 170th birth anniversary of Padri [Pastor] Ganga Prasad Pradhan here on Sunday. Padri Ganga Prasad Pradhan was born in 1851 in Kathmandu and was the first ordained Nepali Christian pastor, main translator of the Nepali Bible, co-author of an English-Nepali dictionary and author of children’s textbooks in Nepali. He was also editor

of Gorkhey Khabar Kagat, a monthly magazine, from 1901 to his death in 1932.

The program, which was chaired by senior journalist Nita Nirash and JUS president Bhim Rawat, was attended by union members. Pastor Ganga Prasad Pradhan, apart from his proselytizing work, is remembered as the first Gorkha journalist.

A JUS press release issued by its general secretary, Sujal Pradhan, informs that the JUS president spoke



briefly on the life of Padri Ganga Prasad Pradhan.

“We should not forget that Padri Ganga Prasad Pradhan gave birth to

Gorkha journalism in the region,” Mr Rawat highlighted.

Likewise, Ms Nirash urged the younger generation to come forward for

the further preservation and development of language and literature. The programme was conducted by Prabin Khaling.

# Air India passenger seeks damages over data breach

**NEW DELHI, JUL 4 (PTI):**

An Air India passenger has sought damages from the airline after the recent leak of personal data of 4.5 million passengers including hers and her husband’s.

A legal notice was sent to Air India management on Sunday by Ritika Handoo in which she said that the airline informed her about the breach on June 1, her lawyer said.

Terming the breach as a violation of her “right to be forgotten and informational autonomy”, she sought a compensation of Rs 30 lakh.

Air India’s passenger service system provider SITA faced a sophisticated cyberattack in February this year leading to the leak of personal data of 4.5 million passengers -- which included passengers of the national carrier -- from across the world, the email sent by the carrier said.

The breach involved personal data registered between August 26, 2011 and



February 20, 2021, with details that included name, date of birth, contact information, passport information, ticket information, Star Alliance and Air India frequent passenger data (but no passwords data were affected) as well as credit cards data.

“However, in respect of this last type of data, CVV/CVC numbers are not held by our data processor, the email said.

Handoo, a Delhi-based journalist, in her notice to Air India accused it of “knowingly, intentionally and deliberately leaking the personal data and for

breach of sensitive information.

Noticees (Air India) are the guilty of leaking the sensitive information and personal data of my client.

My client was shocked and alarmed to learn the recent security lapse of you the Noticees that has led to a massive personal data breach that includes sensitive personal information and personal data thereby, making my client’s personal data open to exploitation, the notice sent through advocate Ashwani Kumar Dubey said.

Referring to Chapter VII of the Company’s Customer Care

Data Privacy Policy, the notice said that it clearly provides that all customers retain control over their data/information to the extent possible so as to change the personal information in your records except in exceptional circumstances where it’s a law and order issue.

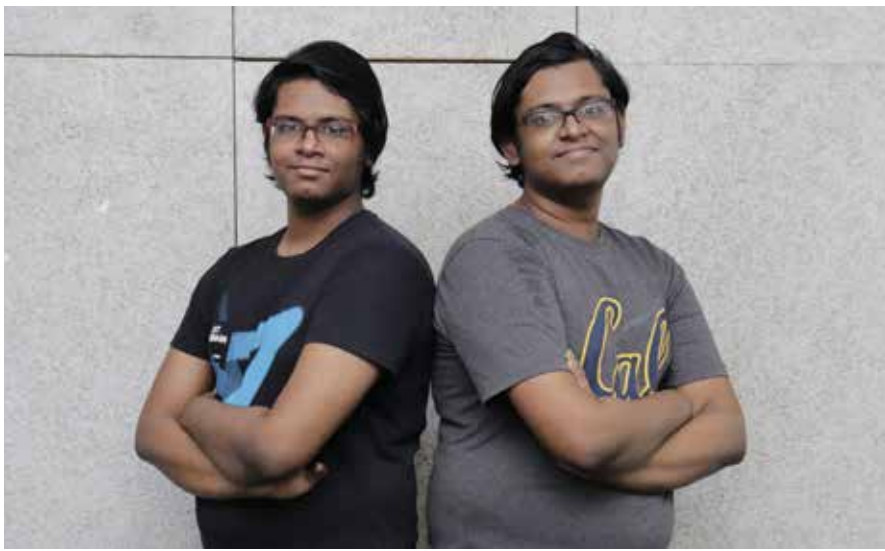
Now that my client does not have any control over personal information as the same is stolen, it violates my client’s right to privacy and right to be forgotten as this loss of control over his personal data has led to a loss of my client’s informational autonomy, which is guaranteed

as a fundamental right by the Supreme Court in Justice K.S. Puttuswamy (Retd.) & Anr. Vs. Union of India & Ors, the notice said.

Data of 4.5 million passengers -- which includes Air India’s passengers -- across the world has been “affected” due to the cyberattack on SITA, the statement said. SITA is based out of Geneva in Switzerland.

“Air India would like to inform its valued customers that its passenger service system provider has informed about a sophisticated cyber-attack it was subjected to in the last week of February 2021,” the airline had said.

# Twins bag Rs. 50 lakh pay package each in SRM University AP campus selections



**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 04 JUL:**

Twins Saptarshi and Rajarshi Majumdar, students of SRM University, Andhra Pradesh, received a pay pack of ₹ 50 lakh per annum each with PVP Inc, a

strategic partner of Google Japan, a press release informs. They were selected during a campus placement programme and have bagged the highest pay package for students graduat-

ing from Andhra Pradesh so far. Saptarshi and Rajarshi are from the first batch of engineering students of SRM University – AP campus. The university on Saturday felicitated the twins.

# Swimmer Sajan Prakash says self belief and shutting down non-sense helped him

**NEW DELHI, 04 JUL [PTI]:**

One of India’s top swimmers, Sajan Prakash says shutting down all the “nonsense” around him and self belief and having a great support system were key to his dream comeback and he is aiming to compete in the finals of the upcoming Tokyo Games.

The Keralaite was laid low by a career-threatening neck injury in 2019 and the COVID-19 induced lockdown only made it more challenging for him to qualify for the Olympics as the pools remained close for long. However, the 27-year-old clocked 1:56:38 seconds in the men’s 200m butterfly event in Rome to become the first ever Indian swimmer to earn a direct Olympic qualification.

“There were many comments, even before the lockdown that I was old and am not getting any improvements,” Sajan said in a virtual interaction organised by SAI.

“Keeping all that aside, I think the important thing was the support system believed in me. My friends backed me and I didn’t lose hope in myself. I’m 27-year-old and a swimming event like this needs a lot of confidence in you.”

“It’s all the work we did and we tried to stay focussed on our goal and sticking towards our business and not letting any nonsense come inside. With that we

could achieve it,” he said.

Asked about a realistic target at the Games, he said, “I would say cut down another 0.5 seconds and it’s possible in this case and that will take me 1:55:8, something that will surely get me into the semi-finals, and maybe towards the final as well.”

Sajan said he’s working on the turns and trying to cover more distance in one-stroke so as to cut down the timing.

“Exactly we have 20 days for the meet. We have done all the work before the qualifications, it’s about working on small things. I’m working on the turns, increasing more distance on that one stroke so that I reach the wall quicker and turn.

“I’m increasing on some speed because I lack the front hand speed. I’m confident to cut down some more time so that will give me a chance to be in the semi-finals and maybe in the final as well,” he said.

Sajan first had signs of the neck injury during the sidelines of the World Championships in Gwangju in July 2019 but it was only at the Nepal South Asian Games in December, scans revealed a slip disc on his neck’s C4, C5 and C6 bones.

Rehab followed and his recovery was hit hard by the lockdown as he could not get into the pool after shifting to Thailand. Forget breaching the Olympic A qualification mark

of 1:56:48 seconds, it was tough to manage even a stroke in the trickiest butterfly that requires immense muscle power and skill, but he kept at it without paying heed to the criticism around him.

“I had to basically start everything from scratch. I had to work on basics so looking to qualify for another Olympics with an A cut, that wasn’t the right thing to do and we had to run very short of time,” he recalled.

“We worked on small small things going step by step, and with my own dedication, and of my coach, today I’ve made it.”

After Sajan, Srihari Nataraj also achieved a direct qualification, when the 20-year-old clocked 53.77 seconds in the men’s 100m backstroke in Rome to make the cut.

India will also have a third swimmer, Maana Patel who has made the cut through the universality quota’ as for the first time India will send three members to take part in the Summer Games.

Sajan says lack of opportunity is the biggest hurdle for Indians’ progress.

“As for as the Indian swimmers are concerned, they don’t lack in talent but they don’t have the opportunity to be consistent. We just have two competitions in our senior swimmers and that’s not enough to go and test yourself all the time.”

# Assam CM to meet Muslim intellectuals for talks on 2-child policy

**GUWAHATI, 04 JUL**

**[NDTV]:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma will interact with intellectuals from the Muslim community in Assam tomorrow on the need for a two-child policy.

Mr Sarma, who took charge as chief minister in May, has been advocating a two-child norm for the Muslim commu-

nity in the state, arguing that it will help ensure proper allocation of resources and tackle poverty in the community.

In an official release the state government stated, “An interactive session, ‘Alaap Aru Alochana’ (meaning talks and discussion) by the Chief Minister with intellectuals

and leading persons of minority community will be held on Sunday at Assam Administrative Staff College, Khanapara.”

Chandra Mohan Patowary, state Minister for Welfare of Minorities, will also be present at the interactive session.

Mr Sarma had said in an earlier meeting that Mus-

lims account for 34 per cent of the 3.12 crore population of Assam, and that 4 per cent of the Muslims in the state are Assamese Muslims while the remaining are mostly Bengali-speaking Muslims. The BJP-led government in Assam had earlier proposed formation of a development board for indigenous Muslims com-

munities Gorias, Morias, Deshis and Jolais.

Responding to a query on eviction drives in the state, the Chief Minister said last month that unless Assam adopts a two-child policy, especially for the minority community, it will always have a dearth of land, job and other opportunities.



## An Emotionless Stirring

...because this merger proposal does not meet re-unification criteria

A Darjeeling-based political outfit press-conferenced its way back to the headlines with a reiteration of its demand for Darjeeling's merger into Sikkim. The group has made headlines with this demands for the past decade and more, and every time to the same chorus - no exuberant support in Darjeeling and across-the-board condemnations in Sikkim.

People in the Darjeeling Hills are still grappling with identity issues, their statehood demand and their ever-confounding political alignments and it is unlikely that too many there take such a merger proposal too seriously because it complicates their more passionate extant demands. In Sikkim, reactions to a merger proposal have veered to extremes – either not taken seriously at all, or dismissed with vehemence. It can be safely vouched that even those who will discuss the issue here without throwing a fit will consider the option only at an academic interest level. There are too many things that militate against the proposal. That said, there is also the instinctive fear of being swamped [something not unique to Sikkim] that has ensured that the demand has never found any backers of consequence in Sikkim. The demand, however, continues to be raised off and on and some comments need to be shared on it as well, from time to time.

Darjeeling, although just a district/ territorial administration, packs in many more people than the entire state of Sikkim. Its people are also seen as politically smarter [even though the continued sway of dictatorial regimes and confused albeit authoritarian decision making would have one believe otherwise]. Since democracy is all about numbers, Sikkim knows that it will be swamped if a merger is ever formalised. The Darjeeling Hills also subscribe to a more aggressive brand of politics, something that tone-deaf state and central governments have forced out of them, and Sikkim's penchant for vehicle-burning and stone-throwing political clashes pale in comparison to the violence which Darj politics can visit its players. When it comes to politics then, Darjeeling with its numbers, muscle and reputation can prove too overpowering for a Sikkim still trying to find its voice in the Indian mainstream.

The Darjeeling Hills were a part of Sikkim at one time, long ago, but history has carved separate identities for the two in the nearly two centuries that have lapsed since it was severed from Sikkim. Darjeeling, for instance, is much older as a hill station than Gangtok is as the capital of Sikkim. People on either side of Rangpo have evolved their own ethos which, let's accept it, beyond the cultural aspects, are not in sync with each other. In fact, there is also a strong cynicism in how the two people regard each other and while they might come together for reality show voting and even emotional support for political demands, a strong sense of mutual distrust also exists. This scepticism that the two people harbour about each other also underlines why a Sikkim-Darjeeling merger is ill-advised any time soon.

The two regions might have been a composite unit at one time, the people, however, were never so because the neighbouring Hills were populated after Darjeeling was cleaved away from Sikkim. This is not a land where people were partitioned along with territories [as India and Pakistan or West and East Bengal]; in this case, the boundaries were carved and the people came in later. The emotional strands required for 'reunification' do not exist and only historical context for a geography is not enough to push through a merger.

All this, of course, applies for the now; what the later future holds, no one can say.

What is shared above is obvious to everyone... even those who could not be bothered with history or politics. And while this obviousness establishes that this demand is not moving forward with any bite any time soon, one wonders then, why the political parties feel the need to shoot it down in the strongest words. Part of it could be to divert attention, part of it could also be to reiterate their commitment to "local" protection and may be they are also ideologically opposed to the idea, but there has to be more to it since they always fall for the instigation and draw a line of defence.

# Record-Breaking Temperatures Mean We Must Change the Way We Talk About the Climate Emergency

KAMYAR RAZAVI  
THECONVERSATION.COM

New normal. Record-breaking. Unprecedented.

In recent days, as Western Canada and the United States have been broiling under a climate-fuelled heat crisis, all sorts of superlatives have been used to describe never-before-seen temperatures: the British Columbia community of Lytton hit a mind-boggling 49.5 C on June 29, breaking all-time temperature records three days in a row.

People are understandably shocked and scared by those numbers. But should this have come as a surprise? No. Scientists have been warning about the link between longer, more intense heat events and climate change for over 40 years. The language of "normals" and "new records" is rapidly becoming meaningless.

But the notion that humanity should have known, or should have done something about the crisis earlier — that we should be ashamed for our lack of inaction — is unhelpful for dealing with the climate crisis.

### TALKING CLIMATE

So, what's a better, more helpful approach to communicating climate change?

The first thing to do is to spend more time talking about climate change. There is far too little discussion around this issue in the public sphere. Global heating is the biggest emergency the planet has ever faced, but one would not know it reading or listening to the news.

Last year, stories about climate change represented just 0.4 per cent of all major U.S. broadcast news coverage. In 2019, it was 0.7 per cent. Even in the midst of an unprecedented heat wave stretching from California to Yukon, references to climate change are few and far between.

### INFORMATION DEFICIT MODEL

Ironically, one of the biggest blind spots has to do with how information about this issue is shared with the public.

The conventional approach re-

lies upon what's known as the "information deficit model." The deficit model builds on the assumption that people will take action on climate change if they have more information about it.

This information-based approach has shaped all sorts of communication, from public safety ads on drinking and driving to news reporting about climate and other important issues.

Unfortunately, the relationship between how much people know and how they act is not always linear. Feeding more facts to someone who is highly politically motivated to dismiss climate change will not convince them to pay more attention to the problem.

Climate change is a tricky story to wrap one's head around. It can feel too big, too scary and too difficult for any one person to fix. Information, while important, is not always enough.

For there to be engagement with this subject and, by extension, political action, the climate crisis must feel personal, relatable, understandable and, most importantly, solvable.

Charts and graphs — even polar bears — rarely achieve that goal. Eighty-three per cent of Canadians agree that the Earth is getting warmer. But just 47 per cent think climate change will harm them personally.

To have people connect on climate, we need to have more conversations about how people are working to solve it and how those solutions are improving their quality of life where they live. These conversations foist an otherwise abstract, intangible and scary subject into the realm of the everyday — and make it feel solvable.

### SOLUTIONS MATTER

Environmental communicators have long pointed to an excessive use of fear messaging around climate change as one of the main problems with engaging the public on this subject.

The challenge is to pair fear messaging with information about efficacy, namely what people can actually do to mitigate the fear. The com-

bination of fear and efficacy leads to what is known as "danger control," actions to mitigate the danger, as opposed to "fear control," actions to shut down the fear.

In the case of COVID-19, the sense of efficacy was clear: hand washing, social distancing, masking. With climate change, efficacy information is far less obvious, and more difficult to act upon.

It's often argued that the large emitters, notably fossil fuel producers, are the ones that harbour the most blame, and are responsible for cleaning up the mess. The Guardian points out that 100 companies are responsible for 71 per cent of emissions.

Yes, it's clear the world needs to stop burning fossil fuels — oil, gas and coal. But to get there, individuals can also set examples of what pro-environmental behaviour looks like.

It can be as simple as posting photos to social media from community cleanup drives, nature walks or posts about any kind of pro-environmental behaviour, such as taking transit. This form of communication — as opposed to images that promote a high-carbon lifestyle — normalizes the urgency, importance and possibility of protecting the Earth.

Some of the most effective communicators are TV news meteorologists, who often have loyal followers. More of them are discussing ways the climate crisis is being addressed where people live.

### SEEING IS BELIEVING

Most communication around risk, builds on the standard of moral injunctions — that one should or must act to do something, or else. For example, a park sign might tell visitors not to feed the ducks because human food is bad for them. And yet, visitors keep feeding the ducks.

Instead, communicators should rely on "descriptive social norms," descriptions of behaviour that others, like them, are already doing and benefiting them.

In the United Kingdom, a 2015 campaign urged people to "Take

your litter home, other people do." It was more likely to reduce illegal littering than signs that said "Please keep your park clean by not littering."

Solutions, notably in the form of stories about people and communities taking action to solve the climate crisis, are among the most effective ways of communicating the emergency.

The National Observer's "First Nations Forward" series is a great example of this type of reporting. Story after story details how First Nations communities in British Columbia are leading the way in the transition to a renewable-energy future.

Mainstream news media outlets, like the one I work for, Global News, are also spending more time on climate and rethinking how they cover it. One recent national story reported on the massive energy transition already under way in Alberta.

Such stories about change that is working send a message that action to mitigate the climate crisis by ordinary people is doable, normal, empowering and desirable. They energize and mobilize members of the public ready to take action, by providing visual examples of who is leading the way.

They also move the conversation beyond the conventional emphasis on skeptics and deniers, and normalize pro-environmental values and behaviours for the growing number of people who are already alarmed or concerned about the climate emergency.

Far from driving the fear narrative, stories of climate solutions unlock people's sense of efficacy and agency in the face of impending danger. In other words, they engage the public on climate change by doing what all good communication does: meeting people where they are at, through a mobilizing story.

This is storytelling 101: engaging audiences, not turning them away, as most climate reports do.

*[the writer is PhD candidate in the School of Communication, Simon Fraser University]*



# Delta Variant Exposes the Flaws of Stop-Start Vaccination Programmes

ROB REDDICK  
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For many countries, vaccine programmes have been one of the great triumphs of the pandemic. But in South Africa, it's a very different story. To date, fewer than 5% of South Africans have been vaccinated, and the country is now in the grips of another COVID-19 surge as the delta variant takes hold.

This puts a focus on the country's vaccination failures – of which there have been many, says Shabir A Madhi, professor of vaccinology at the University of Witwatersrand.

South Africa didn't start trying to buy vaccine doses until too late and has been towards the back of the vaccine queue, which has led to a shortage of supplies. It has also struggled to roll out the vaccines that it has. In mid-June, a third of its supplies still sat unused, a sign of poor logistical planning and that its electronic vaccination system had failed to reach all groups across the population.

But perhaps South Africa's greatest error was with the AstraZeneca vaccine, which it stopped rolling out on the basis that it didn't protect well against mild to moderate disease caused by the beta variant previously dominant in the country. Despite the World Health Organization saying South Africa should continue distributing the jab, as it would probably still protect against severe

disease, the government instead sold 1.5 million doses to other African countries.

That decision, which followed a study led by Professor Madhi on the effectiveness of the AstraZeneca vaccine against the beta variant, now looks like a massive error. Not using those doses has set back South Africa's rollout, and it is now facing delta – which the AstraZeneca vaccine performs well against – becoming the dominant variant.

Over the past few months, our weekly round-ups have looked a lot at vaccine hesitancy, production bottlenecks and procurement problems. But now, South Africa has shown that there's another factor that can severely undermine the success of vaccine rollout: a government not having faith in the products at its disposal. Hopefully others won't make the same mistake.

It has become clearer than ever that people need to take their second vaccine dose in order to minimise their chance of developing COVID-19. After two doses of either the Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccine, the chances of getting ill or being hospitalised aren't much different today than they were when the alpha variant was dominant, explains Rebecca Aicheler, senior lecturer in immunology at Cardiff Metropolitan University. But with only one dose, you're now much more likely to develop COVID-19 than before.

And delaying the second vaccine dose, as the

UK chose to do, was the right move, argues Paul Hunter, professor of medicine at the University of East Anglia. It allowed the good protection offered by a single shot to be given to more people at a time when cases were high and the vulnerable had little protection.

Yes, it may have since left single-dosed people more exposed to delta, but even without full protection, their chances of developing serious COVID-19 are low after having one jab. The real failure of the British government regarding the delta variant was in not doing enough to stop it coming into the country.

Finally, up until now it's been UK policy that your second vaccine dose should be the same as your first – but in time, that may change. Early results from an ongoing study suggest that mixing doses – giving people a first made by one manufacturer and a second from another – can result in better overall immunity, writes Tracy Hussell, professor of inflammatory disease at the University of Manchester.

Following AstraZeneca with Pfizer looks to be particularly good, leading to high levels of antibodies but also a very strong T-cell response. As the UK and other countries start to consider booster programmes, it may be that they decide to mix up what people get for their third doses.

*[the writer is Commissioning Editor, COVID-19]*

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# Assam, Mizoram chief secretaries to meet over border issues

**NEW DELHI, 04 JUL:** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said the state is striving for an amicable solution to "border disputes" with neighbouring states and noted that chief secretaries of Assam and Mizoram will hold a meeting in the national capital on July 9.

Mr Sarma said at a press conference as long as the dispute remains, there was of a possibility of "issues erupting" and it needs "mature handling".

"Unfortunately, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram have border disputes with Assam. As

long as this dispute remains, there will be some issue that will keep on erupting on both sides. Thus, it needs mature handling. We have started the process of handling the issue. We are defending our borders very firmly at the same time talking to the countervailing states for some amicable solution," he said.

Assam and Mizoram have a long-pending dispute concerning their borders.

The Chief Minister had said earlier that resolving border disputes among sister states was an important objective of his government.



## Revised railway service deal with India to facilitate Nepal's trade, officials say

**KATHMANDU, 04 JUL [KATHMANDUPOST]:** The revision of the 17-year-old Railway Service Agreement on Wednesday has removed bottlenecks that Nepal has been facing for long, particularly in the import and export of goods through the Indian railway freight services. According to the revised text of the Letter of Exchange, all authorised private container train operators (Indian as well as Nepali) will be able to utilise the Indian railway network to carry freight containers for Nepal's imports or exports, ending the monopoly of the Indian government-owned Container Corporation of India (CONCOR).

"This liberalisation will allow market forces to come up in the rail container freight segment in Nepal, and is likely to reduce transportation costs in the medium term, benefiting the Nepali consumer," a Nepali official who was involved in the negotiation process with India told the Post on condition of anonymity.

The new agreement will come into effect after the Cabinets of the two countries endorse it.

The agreement also allows India's railways freight services to bring goods to and take goods from other border points besides Raxaul/Birgunj.

"The scope of the present limited cargo movement and facilities from various Indian ports to bordering Nepali industrial areas has been extended by this agreement," said the officials.

As Nepal and India are planning to extend more cross-border railway networks, experts and officials said this agreement has opened new vistas of cooperation in Nepal-India trade and transit sectors.

After the revised agreement comes into effect, Nepal Railway Company-owned rail/wagons are also authorised to operate Nepal-bound freight (inbound and outbound) over the Indian Railways network as per Indian Railway standards and procedures. Earlier, this was only allowed for wagons owned by Indian Railways and CONCOR.

"The monopoly CONCOR has been enjoying since 2014 has ended with this revised agreement," Chandra Ghimire, outgoing secretary at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Supplies, told the Post. "Since CONCOR was also operating for Indian companies, it paid less attention to our side."

Nepali traders have long been complaining of difficulties in trading with third countries in the absence of timely evaluation and revision of the Rail Services Agreement with India.

Rajan Sharma, former president of Nepal Freight Forwarders Association, said breaking the monopoly of CONCOR in railway service is good for competitive service from railways.

"We had been raising the issue of breaking the monopoly of CONCOR for more than a decade and Indian private railway companies were also asking us to lobby for

inviting competition in railway service for goods delivery to and from Nepal," Sharma told the Post.

According to officials, in the absence of an updated agreement, other agreements that have been signed between the two countries could not be implemented effectively.

After the agreement comes into force, Indian private operators can transport Nepal-bound cargo from Visakhapatnam and Kolkata ports as well as more ports allowing Nepal to use Indian sea ports closer to major customs points of western and far-western Nepal for third-country trade as per the Transit Treaty between Nepal and India. At present rail cargo can be transported only on the Kolkata-Raxaul/Birgunj route.

"The present railway freight or cargo facility is only confined to Raxaul-Birgunj. We have to expand its scope to other dry ports and industrial corridors of Nepal like Nepalgunj, Bhairahawa, Biratnagar, Kakarvitta and other already established industrial areas and to set up industrial hubs," said Ghimire. "If we can bring raw materials through the rail instead of trucks, we will have abundant raw materials that will help us achieve fast industrialisation."

The new amendment has ensured competitiveness among the private players too.

"Several Indian private railways freight companies doing busi-

ness within India had been offering far cheaper service than CONCOR," the official said. "The end of monopoly and ensuring competitiveness is a major achievement."

With the increase in trade with other countries, Nepal had been demanding there be an extension of railway services to all the trading points across the country.

"There is now diversification in our existing facilities," a Nepali diplomat based in New Delhi told the Post over the phone. "The majority of our concerns have been addressed, now we have to scale up our capacity for full use of this revised agreement."

The new agreement will be more important after the planned four more railway links between the two countries come into operation. These four cross links include Jogbani-Biratnagar, Rupaidiya-Kohalpur, New Jalpaiguri-Karbhitta and Nautanwa-Bhairahawa.

A feasibility study for bringing rail up to Kathmandu from Raxaul, India is also under consideration.

"We have to add rail service to our industrial hubs so that we can ferry raw materials from Indian ports to these industrial hubs which will cost cheaper than by trucks," said Ghimire. "We need to address these issues in days to come for scaling up our industrial inputs."

Another major take-away of the revised Railway Service Agreement is all kinds of wagons

that can carry freight on Indian Railways network within India can also carry freight to and from Nepal. Earlier this facility was limited to only certain kinds of wagons.

The liberalisation will particularly reduce transportation costs for automobiles which are carried over special wagons that were not listed in the Railways Service Agreement of 2004, as they did not exist back then, according to the official.

"Now we can easily operate our cross-border railway and add more business. We can do business via India too if we can compete with Indian firms," said Balaram Mishra, former Director General at the Department of Railway. "The only thing we need is to develop more dry ports, industrial areas. Otherwise there is no use of these facilities," said Mishra.

The private sector, however, has a word of caution.

"Nepali importers are unlikely to benefit directly from competitive prices as most Nepali importers rely on foreign exporters to book railway services and they charge freight cost in the cost of goods. Therefore, they will benefit from it more as they can get competitive prices," Sharma, the freight forwarder, said. "Nepali importers can benefit only if they negotiate with railway companies for competitive prices or negotiate with exporters for reduction in freight charges."

## Youths protest Kathmandu Metropolitan City's decision to erase mural honouring frontliners



**KATHMANDU, 04 JULY [KATHMANDUPOST]:** Youths on Sunday staged a protest at Bhrikuti-mandap in the Capital against the Kathmandu Metropolitan City's move to erase a mural painted to honour the Covid-19 frontline workers.

In appreciation of their efforts at checking the spread of the pandemic, four artists had painted a mural on the wall of an overhead pedestrian crossing at Ratnapark.

The artwork was painted by Sangey Thinley Lama, Kipa Sherpa, Sumina Shrestha and Bishal Maharjan. The artists had painted the mural after getting permission from Ward 28 of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City on June 7. They had completed their work in seven days.

But the metropolitan office on June 30 whitewashed the mural painted in appreciation of health workers, security personnel and other pan-

democratic frontline workers, saying that the artists had not taken permission from Kathmandu Metropolitan City's office.

Kathmandu Metropolitan City's decision to erase the mural had garnered widespread criticism.

The protesting youths on Sunday chanted slogans against the Kathmandu Metropolitan City while demanding Mayor Bidya Sundar Shakya that the mural be repainted.

## Arunachal Pradesh reports 365 new COVID-19 cases

**ITANAGAR, JUL 4 (PTI):** Arunachal Pradesh's COVID-19 tally rose to 36,937 as 365 more people tested positive for the infection, a senior health official said here on Sunday.

The COVID-19 death toll in the frontier state remained at 176 as no fresh fatality was reported in the last 24 hours, the official said.

The Capital Complex Region reported the highest number of new cases at 90, followed by Tawang (49), Lohit (32), Changlang (29), Papumpare (28), West Kameng (22), East Siang (20) and Lower Subansiri (15), State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Dr Lobsang Jampa said.

Fresh cases were also reported from Lower Dibang Valley, Anjaw, Kurung Kumey, Upper Subansiri, Longdiang, West Siang, Kra Daadi, East Kameng, Leparada, Kamle, Lower Siang, Namsai, Pakke Kessang, Upper Siang and Tirap district, the official said.

Of the 365 new cas-



es, 340 were detected through rapid antigen tests, 12 through RT-PCR and 13 by TrueNat method, the SSO said, adding that 155 people have symptoms of COVID-19.

The state now has 3,057 active COVID-19 cases, he said.

As many as 272 patients were cured of the disease on Saturday taking the total number of recoveries in the northeastern state to 33,704, Jampa said.

The COVID-19 recovery rate now is 91.25 per cent while the active percentage stands at 8.28 and the positivity rate at 7.27 per cent, the official said.

The Capital Complex Region - comprising Itanagar, Naharlagun, Nirjuli and Banderdewa areas - has the highest number of active cases at 638, followed by West Kameng (275), Upper Subansiri (208), Lohit (196), East Siang (178) and Changlang at 177 cases.

Altogether, 7,80,582 samples have been tested for COVID-19 in the state so far, including 5,016 on Saturday, Jampa said.

Meanwhile, State Immunisation Officer Dr Dimong Padung said that a total of 6,29,759 people have been administered COVID-19 vaccine doses so far in the state since the inoculation drive began in January this year.

## Two TMC activists attacked in Bengal, six arrested

**KOLKATA, JUL 4 (PTI):** Miscreants attacked two TMC activists and opened fire in the air outside one of the ruling party's offices in the city's northern outskirts, triggering panic in the area, a police officer said on Sunday.

Six persons have been arrested so far in connection with the incident, he said.

"At least 10-12 motorcycle-borne men arrived at the TMC's Deshpriyanganagar zonal party office in North 24 Parganas around 9.30 pm on Saturday, ransacked the furniture there and dragged two TMC activists out before hitting them with the butt of a revolver," the officer explained.

They then fired a few shots in the air and fled the place,

leaving the two injured activists lying on the road, he said, adding that locals are wary of stepping out of homes.

The incident, meanwhile, has sparked a furor, with the TMC holding BJP workers responsible for the attack, a charge denied by the saffron camp.

"The BJP, after its poll debacle, is desperately trying to terrorise TMC workers. We will take out a rally in protest," local MLA Madan Mitra, who visited the site of the incident during the day, told reporters.

State BJP president Dilip Ghosh, however, claimed that the attack was a fallout of infighting in the TMC, with two factions seeking to have total control over the real estate sec-



tor in the area.

Meanwhile, in yet another incident, TMC MLA Lovely Moitra alleged that a pandal built for a public outreach programme in her Sonarpur Dakshin constituency was "set on fire" late on

Saturday.

"Some rogue elements are trying to sabotage our programmes in the area. They will not succeed," Moitra said, further adding that the police are probing the matter.

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**SummitTIMES**



# Argentina beats Ecuador at Copa, plays Colombia in semifinal

**RIO DE JANEIRO, JUL 4 (AP):** Lionel Messi scored his 76th international goal and is now only one shy of Pele for the South American record as Argentina beat Ecuador 3-0 to progress to the semifinals of the Copa America. Messi scored from a late freekick on Saturday and earlier laid on two assists as Argentina eventually subdued Ecuador and kept the superstar's dream of winning his first major international title alive.

Argentina's rival at the Man Garrincha Stadium on Tuesday will be Colombia, which earlier overcame Uruguay on penalties. The other semifinal will feature defending champions Brazil and Peru.

Rodrigo de Paul opened the scoring at the Olimpico Stadium in Goi-



ania in the 39th minute, tapping into an empty goal before Lautaro Martinez added the second in the 84th with a blast

from close range. Messi, in his first match since his contract with Barcelona expired, assisted both of them.

In the dying moments of the match Messi scored Argentina's third from a free kick from the edge of the box. It was his

fourth goal in the tournament.

Heavily favoured Argentina wasted several opportunities at 1-0 to

cruise to a comfortable victory. Ecuador then hit the post in the second half before Martinez doubled Argentina's lead. But Messi became more influential after 71 minutes when ngel di Maria stepped in replacing Giovanni lo Celso.

Ecuador also lost defender Piero Hincapi to a red card near the end of the match after a foul on Di Maria that gave Argentina the free kick scored by Messi.

Messi said being in the semifinals was one of Argentina's objectives for the tournament.

"Now we have to rest and think of Colombia. They defend well, they have quick counters," the striker said.

Asked about his performance, he was brief: "Individual awards are secondary.

## Serbia athlete tests positive for COVID-19 at Tokyo airport

**TOKYO, 04 JUL [AFP]:** An athlete with the Serbian Olympic team has tested positive for coronavirus after arriving in Japan, less than three weeks before the Games, a host city official said Sunday. The member of the five-strong rowing team was found to have contracted the virus after a test at Tokyo's Haneda airport upon arrival Saturday, according to an official of Nanto, a central Japanese city, where the team planned to train ahead of the Olympics. The athlete has been isolated, while the remaining four have been transferred to a separate facility near the airport, the official said.

"The members were scheduled to arrive in our city today and start training, but the entire programme is likely to be cancelled," the official told AFP.

The case came as organisers prepare to tighten screening procedures at airports after two members of Uganda's team tested positive following their arrival in Japan last month.

Hidemasa Nakamura, a senior Tokyo 2020 Games official, said last week that Olympic teams should be immediately isolated if they arrive in Japan with a person infected with coronavirus.

Public opinion has been firmly opposed to holding the Games this year over pandemic fears, though recent polls suggest opposition may be softening.

No overseas fans will be allowed and domestic spectators will be capped at 10,000 per event.

## Colombia edges Uruguay on penalties to reach Copa semis

**RIO DE JANEIRO, JUL 4 (AP):** Two penalty shootout saves by goalkeeper David Ospina put Colombia in the semifinals of Copa America after a 0-0 draw with Uruguay in regular time and kept alive its hopes of a first Copa title since 2001.

The 4-2 shootout win on Saturday at the Man Garrincha Stadium in Brasilia also broke Colombia's bad luck in recent penalty shootouts and placed 32-year-old Ospina as the team's player with most international caps, with 112, overtaking retired captain Carlos Valderrama.

Ospina made saves from Uruguay's Jose Maria Gimenez and Matias Vi a which set up a semi-final matchup against Argentina, which beat Ecuador 3-0 in Saturday's late match.

Duv n Zapata, Davinson Sanchez, Yerry Mina and Miguel Borja all



scored in the shootout, with veteran strikers Edinson Cavani and Luis Su rez converting their spot kicks.

Saturday's victory ended a long trauma for in penalty shootouts for Colombia after painful exits in the 2015 and 2019 Copa America editions against Argentina and Chile, respectively. Colombia was also knocked out on penalties

in the round-of-sixteen clash against England in the 2018 World Cup.

"We want to give joy to our country, may it have peace," Ospina said after the match.

Uruguay's Cavani said his team had improved despite the elimination.

"We have a good feeling here, but it was for us to go out," he said.

"That's how penal-

Uruguay's Muslera made the save of the match in the 71st minute in a header by Zapata. Veteran strikers Su rez and Cavani did not get any clear opportunities as Uruguay's slow build up play through midfield appeared to suit Colombia's defense.

Colombia has reached the semifinal with only one win in five matches; a 1-0 victory against Ecuador in the first round of the group stage. The draw with Uruguay was the team's second in the tournament. It has also lost two games.

Colombia was one of the original hosts of Copa America with Argentina, but left the organization amid street protests against President Ivan Duque.

Defending champions Brazil and Peru will play for the other place at the July 10 final at the Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro.

## England thrash Ukraine 4-0 to set up semi-final clash against Denmark

**ROME, 04 JUL [AFP]:** Harry Kane scored twice as a buoyant England cruised through to the semi-finals of Euro 2020 with a one-sided 4-0 win over Ukraine in Rome on Saturday. Kane ended a worrying international scoring drought by netting in the 2-0 last-16 defeat of Germany in midweek and he put England ahead inside four minutes on a sweaty evening in the Italian capital.

Gareth Southgate's side then put this quarter-final tie out of sight with two more goals early in the second half, one from Harry Maguire before Kane netted again. Substitute Jordan Henderson got the fourth, and as Denmark lie in wait in the Wembley semi-final on Tuesday England will be confident of going on to reach a first ever European Championship final and even now claiming a



first major international title since 1966.

The draw here was kind for them, with Ukraine surely as weak an opponent as they could hope to face in a quarter-final, a stage at which they have lost to the likes of Italy and Portugal in recent European Championships.

However the statis-

tics are impressive, with England having come through five games at this tournament all without conceding a goal.

Some of their play in wide areas was outstanding, with Raheem Sterling and Jadon Sancho -- making his first start at the Euro -- too hot for Ukraine to handle.

Kane, their captain,

had gone close to eight hours without finding the net for his country but his opener here was his second in just eight minutes following the late strike that secured victory over Germany.

Regardless of the opposition, their display at the Stadio Olimpico was a step-up in class in the final third to previ-

ous games at the Euro and they will be favourites at home against a Danish side who played their own quarter-final against the Czech Republic on Saturday in distant Baku.

This will be the only match England play away from home in the competition and it marked quite a difference to their defeat of the Germans, which was watched by more than 40,000 supporters at Wembley, where coronavirus restrictions were eased.

With Italy currently imposing a five-day quarantine on all arrivals from the United Kingdom, the number of England fans in Rome was limited to those already based in the European Union although they still made themselves heard in the crowd of under 12,000.

## Mithali's records are here to stay: Shantha Rangaswamy



**NEW DELHI, JUL 4 (PTI):** Former India captain Shantha Rangaswamy on Sunday called Mithali Raj the "Sachin Tendulkar" of women's cricket and said her record of being the highest run-getter in the game is here to stay.

Mithali, who is already the leading run getter in ODIs, on Saturday surpassed former England captain Charlotte Edwards to become the highest run getter across formats. They are the only two women cricketers who have more than 10000 runs.

India's Test and ODI captain averages a staggering 51.80 in the 50-over format.

"Her records speak for themselves. What she has achieved is comparable to the achievements of the great Sunil Gavaskar and Sachin Tendulkar. It is safe to say that she will be lonely at the top for a long time. I don't see her record being broken anytime soon," Shantha, who is also a BCCI Apex Council member, told PTI.

Mithali scored her fourth successive half century on Saturday to lead India to a consolation victory over England in the third ODI.

Along with the rest of the batting line-up, her strike rate too was questioned but Shantha feels the criticism was uncalled for.

"Strike rate only comes into the picture when you are doing well as a batting group. Barring yesterday, she hardly had any support in the series. If she wasn't around, the team would

have struggled to reach even 200," said the former India skipper.

On India's batting woes, Shantha feels all-rounder Deepti Sharma can be a good number three, a position occupied by Punam Raut in the opening game before Jemimah Rodrigues replaced her for the remaining two games.

However, the 20-year-old too failed to make an impact and averages less than 20 in 21 ODIs.

"She is still very young. I would have said time to look beyond her if she was 10 years older. I hope she finds the runs soon," said Shantha referring to Jemimah.

"I also feel (Poonam) Raut, who did very well against South Africa, should be persisted with but if they strongly feel to change the number 3 slot, Deepti is a good choice."

On India T20 skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, who has not had much to show since her exploits in the 2017 World Cup, Shantha added: "She is yet to realise her potential. She needs to address her shot selection.

"If she can find a way to bat for 25-30 overs, she can score a hundred. She is that good a player but her lean patch has gone on for far too long."

Harmanpreet fell to a reverse sweep on Saturday while Jemimah perished attempting a guide towards third man.

"The nonsense shots needs to be avoided. There are other ways to rotate strike than guiding it to third man," Shantha added.

## Tokyo elects assembly amid pandemic fears over Olympics

**YURI KAGEYAMA TOKYO, JUL 4 (AP):** Voters in Japan's capital are electing the Tokyo city assembly amid worries about health risks during the Olympics, opening in three weeks, as coronavirus cases continue to rise.

In Sunday's balloting, 271 candidates are vying for 127 seats. Eligible voters total 9.8 million people in the megacity with a population of nearly 14 million. Public opinion surveys show most people want the Games cancelled or postponed again. Behind the fears is the lagging vaccination rollout, with only about 10 per cent of the population fully vaccinated.

Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike called in sick two weeks ago, citing exhaustion, and was not seen in public until Friday. Her routine role would have been to stump for her party, Tomin First, the biggest with 46 seats in the assembly heading into the election.

Neither Koike nor her party pushed for a cancellation, but instead called for the Games without fans in the stands. The organising committee has said a decision on attendance restrictions was still being studied.

The only major party

clearly advocating for the Olympic to be cancelled was the Communist Party, which held 18 seats.

The Democrats, a leading opposition party, raised questions about the Olympics but pushed other issues in their campaign, such as economic aid for those hurt by the coronavirus.

The Olympics, opening July 23, bring together 15,000 athletes and more than 50,000 officials, including corporate sponsors and dignitaries, as well as 70,000 volunteers.

Some medical experts have warned it could become a COVID-19 super-spreader event, warning that new cases in Tokyo, now totaling several hundred, could shoot up to thousands. Olympic team members and officials are more likely than the Japanese public to have been fully vaccinated.

The ruling Liberal Democrats, the party of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, which previously had 25 seats in the Tokyo assembly, are likely to increase their representation as the momentum of Koike's party has fizzled, according to Japanese media reports. But most people were still undecided.

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## Philippine scientists warn of another eruption at Taal Volcano

**JAKARTA, 04 JUL [ALJAZEERA]:** Another eruption at the Philippines' second-most active volcano can occur anytime soon amid "anomalously high" volcanic gas emissions, according to government scientists.

More than 3,000 residents from high-risk villages around Taal Volcano in Batangas province, 66km (41 miles) south of the capital Manila, have fled their homes since Thursday, when the volcano erupted, spewing a dark plume of volcanic gas and steam in the air.

Since then, several bursts of volcanic gas and steam have been generated by Taal.

On Sunday, "the highest levels of volcanic sulfur dioxide gas emission was recorded ... at an average of 22,628 tonnes per day, the highest-ever recorded in Taal", the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) said in a bulletin.

The emissions were accompanied by 26 strong and very shallow low-frequency volcanic earthquakes "associated with magmatic degassing", it added.

"These observations may indicate that an eruption similar to the July 1, 2021 event may occur anytime soon," the institute said.

Phivolcs raised the alert at the volcano to level 3, which means that there was "ongoing magmatic extrusion at the main crater that may further drive succeeding explosions".

Taal last erupted on January 12, 2020, displacing more than 376,000 people from surrounding towns.

At the time, 39 people, in evacuation centres, died due to illness and accidents caused by thick ashfall, according to the provincial government.

Taal has erupted 33 times since 1572.

The last eruption there in January 2020 shot ash 15km (9 miles) high and spewed red-hot lava, crushing scores of homes, killing livestock and sending more than 135,000 people into shelters.

Taal also has the distinction of being the only known volcano in the world within a lake on an island.

It is a popular tourist destination for its picturesque crater lake.

# Taliban seizes key districts in Afghanistan as gov't forces flee

**KABUL, 04 JUL [ALJAZEERA]:** The Taliban's march through northern Afghanistan gained momentum overnight with the capture of several districts from fleeing Afghan forces, several hundred of whom fled across the border into Tajikistan, officials said. More than 300 Afghan military personnel crossed from Afghanistan's Badakhshan province as Taliban fighters advanced towards the border, Tajikistan's State Committee for National Security said in a statement on Sunday. The Afghan troops crossed over at about 6:30pm local time on Saturday.

"Guided by the principles of humanism and good neighbourliness," the Tajik authorities allowed the retreating Afghan government forces to cross into Tajikistan, said the statement.

Since mid-April, when US President Joe Biden announced the end to Afghanistan's "forever war", the Taliban has made strides throughout the country. But its most significant gains have been in the northern half of the country, a traditional stronghold of the US-allied strongmen who helped defeat them in 2001.

The Taliban now con-



trols roughly a third of all 421 districts and district centres in Afghanistan.

Gains in northeastern Badakhshan province in recent days have mostly come to the armed group without a battle, said Mohib-ul Rahman, a provincial council member. He blamed Taliban successes on the poor morale of troops who are mostly outnumbered and lacking supplies.

"Unfortunately, the majority of the districts were left to Taliban without any fight," said Rahman. In the last three days, 10 districts fell to Taliban, eight without a fight, he said.

Hundreds of Afghan soldiers, police and intelligence troops surrendered their military

outposts and fled to the Badakhshan provincial capital of Faizabad, said Rahman.

Even as a security meeting was being held early on Sunday to plot the strengthening of the perimeter around Faizabad, some senior provincial officials were leaving the city for the Afghan capital Kabul, he said.

In late June, the Afghan government resurrected volunteer militias with a reputation of brutal violence to support the beleaguered Afghan forces but Rahman said many of the fighters in the Badakhshan districts put up only a half-hearted fight.

The Taliban also captured a key district in its former bastion of Kan-

dahar after fierce nighttime fighting with Afghan government forces, officials said on Sunday.

The fall of the Panjwai district in the southern province of Kandahar comes just two days after US and NATO forces vacated their main Bagram airbase near Kabul, from where they led operations for 20 years against the Taliban and its al-Qaeda allies.

Over the years, the Taliban and Afghan forces have regularly clashed in and around Panjwai, with the armed group aiming to seize it given its proximity to Kandahar city, the provincial capital.

The province of Kandahar is the birthplace of the Taliban, which went on to rule Afghanistan until being overthrown by a US-led invasion in 2001.

Panjwai district Governor Hasti Mohammad said Afghan forces and the Taliban clashed during the night, resulting in government forces retreating from the area. "The Taliban have captured the district police headquarters and governor's office building," he told the AFP news agency.

Kandahar provincial council head Sayed Jan Khakriwal confirmed the fall of Panjwai, but accused government forces of "intentionally withdrawing".

The areas under Taliban control in the north are increasingly strategic, running along Afghanistan's border with Central Asian states. Last month, the group took control of Imam Sahib, a town in Kunduz province opposite Uzbekistan and gained control of a key trade route.

The inroads in Badakhshan are particularly significant as it is the home province of former President Burhanuddin Rabbani, who was killed by a suicide bomber in 2011. His son, Salahuddin Rabbani, is part of the current High Council for National Reconciliation.

## Evacuations ordered as wildfires rip through Canada's west coast



**TORONTO, 04 JUL [ALJAZEERA]:** Residents in parts of British Columbia have been ordered to evacuate as wildfires are raging across the Canadian province following a record heat wave that officials say contributed to hundreds of deaths.

Around midday on Saturday, 176 fires were considered active across BC, including 76 that were reported over the past two days, according to a BC Wildfire Service dashboard.

The Thompson-Nicola Regional District, which covers 11 municipalities in the centre of the province, said nine evacuation orders urging residents to immediately leave their homes were active as of Saturday afternoon. Four evacuation alerts, which advise residents to prepare to leave on short notice, were also active.

"Generally speaking, we're three weeks ahead of our drying cycle," Cliff Chapman, director of regional operations for the BC Wildfire Service, told reporters on Friday afternoon, as reported by CBC News.

"It is not really comparable to seasons of the past just because of the heat wave that set in in June."

Chapman said about 12,000 lightning strikes were reported across the province on Thursday

alone, CTV News also reported.

The fires come after Canada's westernmost province experienced record-breaking temperatures over the past week, with the village of Lytton, about 275km (170 miles) northeast of Vancouver in the BC interior, shattering the countrywide record several days in a row.

Lytton ordered a community-wide evacuation after enormous fires broke out this week, forcing residents to flee. At least two people have died, local media reported.

"There was sheer panic," Lytton First Nation acting Chief John Haugen said, as reported by CBC. "It blew in and just took everything in its path."

The BC government has also announced disaster financial assistance for local governments and First Nations that have been affected by the blazes.

Experts have pointed to climate change as driving the early wildfire season and recent heat, which meteorologists said was linked to a so-called "heat dome" – a weather system that traps in hot air – that descended on the west coast, as well as on the Pacific Northwest of the United States.

# Israel carries out another air raid on besieged Gaza Strip

**GAZA, 04 JUL [ALJAZEERA]:** Israeli military has carried out another overnight raid on Hamas positions in the besieged Gaza Strip after saying incendiary balloons were launched from the Palestinian enclave.

The Israeli army said it struck a "weapons manufacturing site and a rocket launcher belonging to Hamas" late on Saturday.

According to security sources and witnesses in Gaza, fighter jets struck the facilities west of Gaza City and in the northern strip, with no immediate reports of casualties.

There was no immediate indication as to which Gaza-based group was responsible for the balloon launch, but Israel holds Hamas – the group that governs Gaza – responsible for any action.

"The strikes were made in response to the arson balloons fired to-



wards Israeli territory," said a statement from the Israeli army.

On Thursday, four small fires caused by incendiary balloons from Gaza were extinguished in the Eshkol region, according to fire services.

Israel retaliated early on Friday with airstrikes, which the army said struck "a weapons manufacturing site" belonging to Hamas.

The latest attack comes just weeks after the Israeli military

launched an 11-day bombardment campaign on the already ravaged enclave, killing at least 260 Palestinians, including 66 children.

In Israel, 13 people, including two children, were killed by rockets fired from Gaza, the police and army said.

Saturday's overnight raid was the fourth time Israel carried out air attacks in Gaza since the May offensive, which ended in an Egyptian-brokered "ceasefire"

on May 21.

Though Israel eased restrictions last month to allow some much-needed aid into the Palestinian enclave, it has maintained a 14-year crippling land, air and sea

blockade.

The UN has dubbed Gaza an "open-air prison" with residents enduring extreme poverty amid conditions that have worsened since the coronavirus pandemic.



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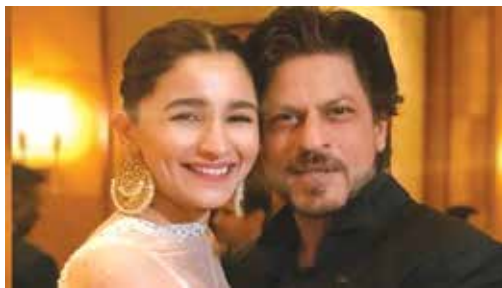
## Shah Rukh Khan asks Alia Bhatt to sign him for her next home production; promises to be ‘very professional’

Alia Bhatt started shooting for her next project titled Darlings. The film will mark her debut as a producer with her production house Eternal Sunshine. She will be co-producing the film with Shah Rukh Khan's Red Chillies Entertainment. Directed by Jasmeet K Reen, the film stars Alia Bhatt, Shefali Shah, Vijay Varma, and Roshan Mathew.

On Saturday, Alia took to her social media handle and shared her excitement for starting the shoot of Darlings. She shared pictures from her vanity van where she was seen prepping for the shoot and penned down her thoughts along with it.

Shah Rukh Khan took to Twitter to repost Alia's post and wrote, "After this production please sign me up for your next home production little one. I will come in time for the shoot and be very professional..promise!".

Responding to Shah Rukh Khan's tweet, Alia wrote, "hahaha I could ask for nothing more.. done deal signed! Love you



my favourite".

Darlings is a unique story of a quirky mother-daughter duo navigating through crazy circumstances as they try to find their place in the world. The dark comedy is set in Mumbai against the backdrop of a conservative lower-middle-class neighbourhood and traces the lives of these two women as they find courage and love in exceptional circumstances. The film comes with its own statutory warning – a reminder that offending women can be very dangerous for your health!

The Big Pic



**LOVEBIRDS!** The A-list couple, Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck, share some PDA while walking by the beach in the Hamptons, New York.

## Aamir Khan on divorce from Kiran Rao: “Our relationship has changed but we are still a family”

After announcing their separation, Aamir Khan and Kiran Rao shared a message together for their fans in a video.

Aamir Khan and Kiran Rao were together for 15 years and on Saturday, the duo announced their divorce in a joint statement. During a virtual event of their NGO Paani Foundation, Aamir can be seen addressing his fans with Kiran sitting next to him.

He can be heard saying while holding Kiran's hand: "Aap logon ko dukh bhi hua hoga, acha nahi laga hoga, shock laga hoga. Hum bas itna kehna chahte hai ki hum dono bahut khush hai and ab ek hi parivaar hai. Humare rishte mai change ayah hai, par hum ek dusre ke sath hi hain (You must have heard about us. You would've felt sad, must've been shocked. But we just want to tell you that we are very happy and we are one family. Our relationship has changed but we are still together).

Aamir also talked about their Paani Foundation and said that he and Kiran will take care of the foundation together



just like they will take care of their son Azad.

In 2016, Aamir Khan and Kiran Rao set up Paani Foundation to fight drought in Maharashtra. In the video, Aamir Khan said: "Toh aap log aesa kabhi mat sochiyega. Aur Paani Foundation humare liye Azad ki tarah hai, jaise humara bacha hai Azad, vaise hi Paani Foundation. Hum log hamesha family rhenge, humare liye aap dua

kariye, prarthana kariye ki hum khush ho. Bas yahi kehna tha hume (So please don't think otherwise. And to us, Paani Foundation is just like our son Azad. We will always be family. Please pray for us that we stay happy. That's all we have to say)."

Aamir and Kiran, in their joint statement yesterday, said that they will always "remain devoted parents to their son Azad."

## Britney Spears reportedly called 911 the night before her bombshell testimony

News details continue to emerge about Britney Spears' ongoing fight to end her 13-year conservatorship.

On Saturday, July 3, The New Yorker reported that the pop star allegedly called 911 the night before her court hearing, in which she gave a bombshell testimony on Wednesday, June 23.

According to the article, which was written by Ronan Farrow and Jia Tolentino, a person close to Britney, as well as law enforcement in Ventura County, Calif., told the outlet that the musician "called 911 to report herself as a victim of conservatorship abuse."

Moreover, People con-

firmed the Ventura County Sheriff's Department was called before Britney's hearing, stating that police records show authorities "arrived at her home per her request."

The New Yorker noted that while California typically allows the public to access emergency calls, the county sealed the records of Britney's message because it's an ongoing investigation.

Following the singer's alleged call, the outlet reported that her team began "texting one another frantically," stating, "They were worried about what Spears might say the next day, and they discussed how to prepare in the event that she went rogue."

## Shefali Shah starts shooting for ‘Darlings’

Actor Shefali Shah on Sunday began shooting for her upcoming feature film "Darlings", also starring Alia Bhatt.

Backed by superstar Shah Rukh Khan's Red Chillies Entertainment and Bhatt's Eternal Sunshine Productions, the dark comedy traces the lives of two women as they find courage and love in exceptional circumstances.

Shah took to Instagram and shared a picture of the film's script, writing, "It's time."

"Stepping into new shoes," the National Award-winning actor captioned the picture.

Directed by writer Jasmeet K Reen, the film is set in Mumbai against the backdrop of a conservative lower middle-class neighbourhood.

Bhatt, who is making her debut as a producer with "Darlings", began filming for

the project on Saturday and described how she always feels nervous before starting work on a film.

"Day one of 'Darlings' my first film as a producer but I will always be an actor first and forever (in this case a very nervous actor). I don't know what it is... A night before I start a new film I get this nervous tingling energy all over my body.

"I dream all night about messing up my lines... become jumpy... Reach sets 15 mins before time fearing I'll be late. I guess this feeling will never go away... And it shouldn't - because being nervous and feeling unsure means you really really care," she wrote.

The film also stars "Choked" actor Roshan Mathew and Vijay Varma, who also began filming on Saturday.

## Kangana Ranaut attacks Priyanka Chopra again, calls her ‘Secular Puppy’

Actress Kangana Ranaut has attacked her Fashion co-star Priyanka Chopra for her political stance on Instagram. Taking to Insta stories, Kangana commented on a news website's tweet which alleged that New York Times is looking for "anti-establishment" correspondents.

Kangana wrote, "But this is not just in journalism. It is in every field, the way Priyanka Chopra has gone from being a nationalist to secular puppy. From being Modi ji's biggest fan to his passionate critic and hater is evident. Basically roti ke liye duniya nachati hai. Apne desh mein freedom toh hai. Jo karna hai karo (The world can do anything just for their daily bread. There is indeed freedom in our country to do anything. Do whatever you want)."

Kangana had previously attacked Priyanka for voicing her support for the Farmer's Movement. Priyanka had retweeted a post by actor Diljit Dosanjh and written, "Our farmers are India's Food Soldiers. Their fears need to be allayed. Their hopes need to be met. As a thriving democracy, we must ensure that this crises is resolved sooner than later."



### ARIES:

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

### TAURUS:

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

### GEMINI:

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

### CANCER:

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

### LEO:

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

### VIRGO:

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

### LIBRA:

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

### SCORPIO:

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

### SAGITTARIUS:

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

### CAPRICORN:

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

### AQUARIUS:

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

### PISCES:

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