



CHINESE POP STAR DUMPED BY BRANDS OVER SEX COMPLAINT
pg 08

CAN CONSCIOUSNESS BE EXPLAINED BY QUANTUM PHYSICS?
pg 04

AMITABH BACHCHAN TO RECITE POEM FOR 'CHEHRE'
pg 08



SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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One more Covid death takes Sikkim's toll to 325

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 20 JUL:

Sikkim's COVID death toll reached 325 today with one more COVID death reported in the last 24 hours. The 325th death was reported from STNM Hospital.

In the meantime, 147 more were found positive for Covid from the testing of 692 samples on Monday giving

Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 21.2%.

Of these 147 new cases, 76 were registered in East District, 45 in West District, 26 in South District and two in North District.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department, 63 sam-

ples returned positive in RT-PCR testing of 269 samples and 84 more were found positive in rapid antigen testing of 416 samples.

Today, 11 COVID patients were hospitalized in the State and rest sent to isolation at COVID Care Centres or home.

Sikkim currently has 2,462 active Covid cases, of whom only 91 have symptoms severe

enough to require hospitalization. Worryingly, 11 of them are in ICU.

On the other hand, 111 persons were discharged from home isolation on Monday after making full recoveries taking the number of recovered cases to 20,745.

Meanwhile, the state's tally of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 has now reached 23,796.

Govt vehicles exempted from odd-even rule on working days

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 20 JUL:

The state government has exempted government vehicles from the odd-even rule from 9am to 5pm on all working days.

In an order issued today, the government has also said that project

related workforce will have to undergo seven days mandatory quarantine at the project site which will have to be organized by the project authorities. The quarantine facility will be monitored by the concerned District Collectors.

No data on deaths due to Oxygen shortage, Centre blames States

NEW DELHI, 20 JUL [NDTV]: The Union health ministry has said the states have not provided any information on deaths of Covid patients in hospitals due to lack of oxygen. With a number of deaths due to oxygen shortage making headlines during the second wave, especially in Delhi, the matter drew sharp criticism from the opposition.

Health is a state subject and states and UTs regularly report the number of cases and deaths to the Centre, junior health minister Bharati Praveen Pawar had said in a written reply in Rajya Sabha. "However, no deaths due to lack of oxygen have been specifically reported by states and UTs," added Ms Pawar, responding to the question on whether Covid patients died on roads and hospitals due to oxygen shortage.

In Goa, more than 80 people died at a state-run medical facility over five days in May. In Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, 11 Covid patients who were at the ICU of a hospital died after the supply of medical oxygen was disrupted. At a hospital in Hyderabad, seven patients died at a government hospital during a two-hour cut in oxygen supply.

In most places the authorities have denied that the deaths took place due to oxygen shortage. Last month the Centre had vetoed an investigation ordered by the Delhi government into the deaths caused by a lack of oxygen supply. At one hospital in Delhi, 21 patients died due to oxygen shortage and the matter is pending in the High Court.

"This is a blind and unconcerned government. People have seen how many of their near and dear ones have died because of lack of oxygen," said KC Venugopal. Mr Venugopal, who also asked the question on oxygen deaths, said he would move a privilege motion against the minister "for giving false information".

Even in the Lok Sabha today, Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya defended the government on the issue of high death figures in the second wave and said it is states that are in charge of registering and providing death figures.

Concern over the deaths had been widespread with the virus ripping through the countryside this summer. Images of mass graves on the sandbanks of Ganga in north India, and thousands of bodies floating down the river, has created a perception that the real figure of deaths in the second wave will never be known.

It is wrong to blame the Union ministry over death figures, said Mr Mandaviya.

"Whom are you blaming? You are blaming the Indian government, you are blaming Modi Ji. Who does the registration? The states do. Who decides the count? The states do. They have to do the registration, they have to put in the numbers. Here, no one has asked them to stop. Modi Ji said that if there is a backlog put that as well. There is no reason to hide it," he said.

Sikkim athletes selected for Federation Cup U-20 c'ship



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 20 JUL:

A three-member squad from Sikkim Amateur Athletic Association [SAAA] will be representing Sikkim at the forthcoming 19th Federation Cup U-20 Athletic Championship 2021 scheduled to be held from 31 July to 02 August at Patiala, Punjab.

Ranjana Tamang and Sapna Khanal in girls' category and Manoj Bishwakarma in boys' category have been shortlisted

to represent the State.

A selection committee constituted by Sikkim AAA carried out a time-trial at Khelgaon here on Tuesday to select athletes for the state team.

It is informed that a total of nine boys and six girls attended the time trial and only three qualified in the entry time to book places in the State team.

Rajana Tamang with timing of 11:31:22 seconds and Sapna Khanal

11:38:44 seconds in girls' category qualified and Manoj Bishwakarma with a timing of 9:26:30 seconds qualified in the boys' category. The State team will be accompanied by RB Subba as team manager-cum-coach.

It is informed that athletes who make it through the national championship will get the chance to represent India in the World U-20 Athletics Championship to be held from 17 to 22 August in Kenya.

CBSE to work through Eid to meet Class 12 result deadline



NEW DELHI, 20 JUL [NDTV]: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) will work on Eid tomorrow, July 21 which is also a Gazetted Holiday so that the board can declare results on time. The last date for finalising the Class 12 results is July 22.

To assist the schools in finalising the result, the Regional Offices and the Examination Department of the head-quarter will function from 10 am to 5 pm, CBSE in a statement said today, adding that they will also release some answers to frequently asked questions by 12 noon tomorrow.

The board in the statement said: "For finalizing the Class 12 result, last date is July 22, 2021. It is informed that to meet the last date and to assist the schools, all the Regional Offices, CBSE and the Examination Department, CBSE HQ will be functioning

from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM."

"CBSE has also received some queries and requests from the schools through e-mail/ WhatsApp, etc. In this regard, FAQs are being developed and it is expected that the same will be provided to all the schools by 12.00 noon, so that schools can take appropriate action," it added.

Earlier today, the board said it is yet to make a decision on the date for the announcement of Class 10 and Class 12 results. A board official said the date will be announced when it is confirmed.

CBSE did not conduct board exams this year. The results are being prepared with alternative schemes of assessment. CBSE results, apart from the official websites, will be available through DigiLocker. CBSE pass certificates and marksheets will also be available on the DigiLocker platform.

CM meets South district residents, hands over relief



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 20 JUL:

Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang interacted with the people from different parts of South District at Mintokgang today, a press release from the CMO informs.

During the interac-

tion, he addressed their individual and collective grievances and handed over cheques from CMRF [ranging from Rs 50,000 to Rs 3 Lakh] to 20 beneficiaries in urgent need to repair their houses affected by the monsoon.

The Chief Minister urged the people to uti-

lize the fund in a meticulous way for repairs, up-gradation and maintenance of their houses, besides rendering quick assistance to the family for emergency expenses.

Block Development Officers of Namchi and Nandugaon were also present on the occasion.

Border situation with Mizoram fragile: Assam CM

GUWAHATI, JUL 20 (PTI): Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said that the situation along the interstate border with Mizoram is currently "fragile" and it will take some time to resolve the disputes with the neighbouring state.

The chief minister, however, expressed optimism that some progress will be made in resolving boundary disputes with Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh when he meets his counterparts from these states of the North-eastern region on July 23 in Shillong.

The chief ministers of the region will be present at a meeting of the North

East Space Applications Centre (NESAC), to be chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, on that day.

The NESAC is a joint initiative of the Department of Space and the North Eastern Council (NEC) to augment development of the region by providing advanced space technology support.

Sarma said that he is expecting some headway during the talks to resolve the border disputes with Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. As far as the boundary dispute with Nagaland is concerned, the matter is in the court, he said.

"The situation with Mizoram, however, is not

conducive. We are not seeing eyeball to eyeball in Hailakandi district (bordering Mizoram). The situation is fragile. It will take some time with Mizoram," he said.

Tension along the inter-state with Mizoram in Cachar and Hailakandi districts of Assam have been escalating in the last few days over Assam Police's drive to clear land allegedly encroached by miscreants from across the border.

An IED was hurled on an Assam government team visiting the border by suspected miscreants on July 10, while two back to back explosions were heard from across the border in the wee hours of July 11.

call for submissions

CONVERSE CHRONICLES

CONVERSE SIKKIM is pleased to announce its first publication showcasing writings from Sikkim entitled Converse Chronicles. It will be an anthology containing poems, short stories, essays and book excerpts. As such, entries are invited for possible inclusion from established and aspiring writers.

Mail in your entries at - converse.sikkim@gmail.com

General guidelines for both prose and poetry -

- The entries should be in Word (Document) format, mailed as an attachment with a small introduction of the writer, name and other relevant details.
- The subject of the mail should be - 'Entry For Converse Chronicles'
- Prose can be fiction/non-fiction/essays/narrative pieces.
- Word limit - 2000

Last date of submission - 10 August 2021



Site inspection of proposed New Singtam District Hospital

GANGTOK, 20 JUL (IPR): As per the directions of Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang, a team comprised of Additional Political Secretary to CM (East District), Tshering Wangchuk Lepcha, Consultant Health CM Dr Subash Tamang, Resource Officer Chief Minister's Office, Surjay Pradhan, CMO (East) Singtam District Hospital, Dr Tempo Gyaltsen Tshechutharpa, SE, DE and AE

Power Department, and Revenue Surveyor made a site inspection and visit to the proposed New Singtam District Hospital at East Circle I-Topakhani area today.

The joint inspection was carried out to observe the feasibility of the proposed land for the construction of New Singtam District Hospital.

The State Government has kept health

and education sector on top priority and present Singtam District Hospital built in the year 1975, demands for a new hospital complex which full fills Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS) Guidelines for District Hospitals.

Further, new Singtam District Hospital will cater and give best health services and benefits to the people of rural areas surrounding Singtam.

Nearly 12,900 companies struck off in 2020-21

NEW DELHI, JUL 20 (PTI): As many as 12,889 companies were struck off from official records in the financial year ended March 2021 and 87 companies dissolved during the same period, according to official data.

As per the data provided by the corporate affairs ministry to Rajya Sabha on Tuesday, a total of 2,38,223 companies were struck off and 651 dissolved during the period from 2018 to June 2021 under Section 248 of the Companies Act, 2013.

Under the Section 248, a company can be struck off the official records subject to certain conditions. These include instances where the Registrar of Companies has a reasonable cause to believe that companies that are not carrying on any business or operation for two immediately preceding financial years and has not made any application within such period for obtaining dormant company status would be struck off after following the due process of law.

Further, companies are dissolved through amalgamation or otherwise with the approval of courts.

In 2020-21, a total of 12,889 companies were struck off and 87 companies dissolved, as per the data provided along with a written reply by Minister of State for Corporate Affairs Rao Inderjit

Singh. "Thus, it cannot be said that 13,000 big companies and lakhs of small and tiny companies have shut down during 2020-21," Singh said.

He was responding to a question on whether it is a fact that over 13,000 registered big companies and over lakhs of small and tiny industries have shut down operations in 2020-21, including 1,200 companies based in North India.

The minister also noted that big companies, small and tiny industries are not defined under the Companies Act, 2013, and that the term 'closed company' is also not defined under the Act.

In North India, 5,034 companies were struck off and 44 dissolved during the last financial year.

North India refers to NCT of Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, UT of Chandigarh, UT of Ladakh and UT of Jammu and Kashmir.

In Delhi and Haryana, 2,396 companies were struck off and 42 dissolved in 2020-21 while 12,653 companies were struck off and 53 dissolved in 2019-20, the data showed.

This was in response to a query on whether it is a fact that in Haryana itself, about 3,000 and in Delhi, over 2,450 registered big companies have shut down their business in the last two years.

Two-thirds of Indians over six have Covid antibodies: Sero survey results



NEW DELHI, 20 JUL [NDTV]: Roughly two-thirds of all Indians above the age of six, or 67.6 per cent of the population, were previously infected with the SARS-CoV2 virus - which causes the COVID-19 disease - the government said this evening, as it announced the results of the fourth national serosurvey.

This means around 40 crore are still at risk of infection, the government added, as it warned against laxity in following Covid-appropriate behaviour and urged eligible people to get vaccinated.

"The fourth serosurvey shows there is a ray of hope, but there is no room for complacency. We must maintain Covid-appropriate behaviour," ICMR chief Dr Balram Bhargava said.

A survey of 36,227 people, including 7,252 healthcare workers, conducted across 70 districts in 21 states in June-July indicated 67.6 per cent of Indians over the age of six had COVID-19 antibodies.

Over 50 per cent of all children between the age of six and 17 also had the antibodies. Among healthcare workers 85 per cent had the antibodies, and only a tenth were as yet unvaccinated.

The 67.6 per cent figure is a steep increase from the results of the third serosurvey. Conducted in De-

cember-January, shortly before the second wave began, it suggested that only 21 per cent of those over 10 showed evidence of past exposure to COVID-19.

The second and first serosurveys, conducted last year in August-September (during the first wave of infections) and May-June, respectively, returned 7.1 and 0.7 per cent indications.

The results of the fourth serosurvey suggest the virus has covered around 67 per cent of India's population in a year - despite the centre imposing one of the world's strictest lockdowns and states following that with a slew of localised restrictions, some of which are still in place.

Medical experts and doctors have repeatedly warned of a third wave of infections and deaths, particularly since the second brought the country's healthcare system to its knees.

However, images of people eschewing even the most basic protocols - wearing face masks and maintaining social distance in public - have drawn criticism and renewed fears. The government has repeatedly urged people to follow the rules, with Prime Minister Modi among the voices.

Some states' decision to allow large-scale

religious gatherings has increased the potential for the virus to spread. Kerala and Uttar Pradesh have both been hauled up by the Supreme Court for allowing Bakrid (Eid-ul-Azha) and the Kanwar Yatra to be celebrated.

The circulation of more aggressive variants of the virus, including those that are potentially more resistant to the vaccines, have further heightened worries of a third wave.

Last month AIIMS (Delhi) chief Dr Randeep Guleria said it was "inevitable", and that the main challenge now is vaccinating enough people to minimise the impact.

Concerns, however, have been raised over the slow pace of daily vaccinations, which dipped from a record high of over 80 lakh doses on June 21 to a seven-day average of 38.62 lakh on Monday.

This morning India recorded 30,093 new cases in 24 hours - the lowest in four months.

And while that should be cause for celebration, experts have flagged worrying signs, including a steady increase in the 'R' factor, or reproduction rate, of the virus.

The danger level is a 'R' value of 1.0. This morning it was 0.95 - up from 0.87 two weeks ago and 0.76 a month ago. A similarly steady increase was witnessed ahead of the second wave.

Unlock sale offer -The biggest unlock sale is now in Gangtok

GANGTOK, 20 JUL: Brand Factory's Big Fashion Unlock Sale at store in Tadong, Gangtok is on - bringing you the best of fashion and deals so you can go on a shopping spree, worry-free in a safe and secure shopping environment! With a truly irresistible Special 5 days Unlock Offer, On Entire Store from 21 to 25 July. It's something you just can't afford to miss!

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citing deals and offers lined up for you at Brand Factory! Get ready to walk in style with some fabulous offers from Lee Cooper Men's Footwear - Buy Sandals worth MRP Rs.1250/- to 2399/- at Flat Rs.999/- and Shoes of MRP Rs.2499/- to Rs.3499/- at just Rs.1399/-. Also avail additional benefits up to Rs.1500/- with Bajaj Finserv, on purchase worth Rs.5000/- and above.

It just doesn't get better than this, so what are you waiting for?

Punjab earmarks 331 Cr for Sero survey focused on children

CHANDIGARH, 20 JUL [NDTV]: Amid apprehensions that a third wave of Covid infections may severely affect children, Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh today announced an allocation of ₹ 331 crore for a sero survey focused on the 6-17 years age group.

The allocation for the third sentinel sero-surveillance survey is in addition to the money allocated earlier for emergency Covid response, a government release said.

The Chief Minister said outcomes of the sero survey will be utilised to determine further localised restrictions as the state prepares for the third wave. He added that Geographic Information System-based surveillance and prevention tools will be used with an auto trigger mechanism for implementing local curbs, he disclosed.

Several experts have argued that there is no evidence so far that a third wave will exclusively or severely target children. However, since this is a population group in which vaccination is yet to begin in the country, there is some fear that children may be more vulnerable to a third wave.

At a review meeting, the Chief Minister also directed that a paediatric unit must be set up in each district and a Centre of Excellence in Paediatrics must be established in the state.

He announced that the government will also establish storage tanks for liquid medical oxygen in every district to ensure 24x7 availability of medical grade oxygen.

He further said that a medical gas pipeline will be set up at each district, subdivision and the community healthcare centre level and also announced that 17 more RTPCR labs shall be set up. ICU beds in government hospitals shall be increased to 142 and a hub and scope model for telemedicine and teleconsultation shall be established, said the Chief Minister.

In reply to a query from the Chief Minister, Dr K K Talwar, Health Advisor To Punjab government, said that in the first and second wave, 10 per cent of those infected were under the age of 18. According to a release, he said that while there was no concrete data to support such a projection, the state is preparing to handle more cases of infection of children in the

third wave.

During the meeting, Health Secretary Hussan Lal apprised the Chief Minister that the Corona Virus Alert app was being modified. Mr Singh asked the state Health Department to speed up recruitment for all posts for which Cabinet approval has been obtained, the government release said.

The Chief Minister expressed satisfaction over the strategy for preparation of the third wave, pointing out that testing has been maintained at around 40,000- 45,000 a day, said the release.

Health Minister Balbir Sidhu and Medical Education and Research Minister O P Soni briefed the Chief Minister on the situation in hospitals.

Dr Talwar said at the meeting that Punjab was currently in a comfortable situation though the fear of a third wave remains. The situation may not be as bad as in the second wave unless a new variant comes before that, he said, according to the release. He, however, stressed on the need for extreme caution with crowds building up even as cases were on the rise in some states, the release added.

Daily COVID-19 tally in India lowest in 125 days



NEW DELHI, JUL 20 (PTI): India recorded 30,093 new coronavirus infections, the lowest in 125 days, taking the total tally of COVID-19 cases to 3,11,74,322, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Tuesday.

The death toll climbed to 4,14,482 with 374 daily fatalities, the lowest in 111 days, while the active cases have declined to 4,06,130, the lowest in 117 days.

The active caseload comprises 1.30 per cent of the total infections and the national COVID-19 recovery rate stands at 97.37 per cent, the data updated at 8 am showed.

A decrease of 15,535 cases has been recorded in the active COVID-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours.

As many as 17,92,336 tests were conducted on Monday taking the total cumulative tests conducted so far for detection of COVID-19 in the country to 44,73,41,133.

The daily positivity rate was recorded at 1.68 per cent. It has been less than three per cent for 29 consecutive days, the ministry said, adding the weekly positivity rate has declined to 2.06 per cent.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 3,03,53,710, while the

case fatality rate stands at 1.33 per cent, the data stated. Cumulative vaccine doses administered so far has reached 41.18 crore under the nationwide 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 the grim milestone of two crore on May 4 and three crore on June 23.

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NEDFi donates Rs 15 Lakh towards CMRF to help Sikkim battle Covid

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 JUL:

The Branch Manager of North-East Development Finance Corporation, Sikandar Ali Khan, accompanied by his team called on Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang and donated Rs 15 lakh towards the Chief Minister Relief Fund as a sign of solidarity with Sikkim in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, a press communiqué from the Chief Minister's Office informs.

The donation was made as part of NEDFi's "Mission Oxygen" CSR initiative.

The Chief Minister expressed his gratitude on behalf of the Sikkimese people for NEDFi's "kind gesture in this hour," the release adds. NEDFi is a public



limited company that provides financial assistance to micro, small, medium and large en-

terprises for setting up industrial, infrastructure and agri-allied projects in the North Eastern Re-

gion of India and also Microfinance through MFI/NGOs. Besides financing, the Corporation offers

Consultancy & Advisory services to the state Governments, private sectors and other agencies.

Sirwani GPU donates chainsaw to Singtam crematorium

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 JUL:

Sirwani GPU has donated a chainsaw to Baikhunt-ShaSewaSamaj which looks after the Singtam Crematorium.

As per a press release, a team headed by Panchayat President Sirwani GPU, Bhim Maya Darnal presented the chainsaw to president, BaikhunthaSewaSamaj, Sundar Raiat Dochum, Panchayat office today.

6 new cases take COVID-19 tally of Andamans to 7,516

PORT BLAIR, JUL 20 (PTI):

The COVID-19 caseload in Andaman and Nicobar Islands rose to 7,516 as six more people tested positive for the disease in the Union Territory, a health department official said on Tuesday.

Of the new patients, three have travel history and others were detected during contact tracing, he said.

The death toll remained at 129 as no new fatality due to the infection was reported in the last 24 hours, the official said.

At least three more people were cured of the disease during the period, taking the total number of recoveries in the archipelago to 7,368.

The Union Territory now has 19 active cases.

South Andaman is the worst-affected district as it currently has 18 active cases.

The local administration has been strict to contain the spread of the disease and has adopted an approach of tracking, testing and treating, the official said, adding that people arriving here from the mainland are mandatorily required to undergo COVID test.

Altogether, 2,58,257 people have been inoculated with 82,981 of them having received both doses of the vaccine.

The Andaman and Nicobar administration has conducted 4,27,711 sample tests for COVID-19 so far, and the positivity rate stands at 1.76 per cent, the health department official said.

Ex-Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi's response amid row over Pegasus scandal

NEW DELHI, 20 JUL [PTI]:

Former Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi today refused to comment on allegations that a woman who had accused him of sexual harassment in 2019 was among those targeted by Israeli Pegasus spyware for potential snooping.

"I will not comment on it," said Ranjan Gogoi, who was nominated to the Rajya Sabha by the ruling BJP after he retired as Chief Justice.

Eleven phones connected to the woman were listed for potential surveillance by the spyware available only to governments. This has been revealed by The Wire, Washington Post and other media partners involved in a global investigation.

According to reports released by The Wire so far, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, poll strategist Prashant Kishor, two union ministers, Trin-

amool Congress leader Abhishek Banerjee and some 40 journalists were potential targets of snooping, selected by an unidentified Indian agency that is a customer of the Israel-based NSO Group. NSO says it sells Pegasus spyware only to "vetted governments", for the purpose of fighting terrorism, and not to private entities.

The Supreme Court employee who accused Justice Gogoi of sexual harassment and victimisation in 2019 was named in yesterday's reports. The Wire said three phone numbers belonging to the woman were selected as potential targets for surveillance.

She was reportedly marked as a "person of interest" days after she recorded her allegations in an affidavit on April 20, 2019. Eight other phone numbers belonging to her husband and two of his brothers were also marked as possible candidates for surveillance.

Hemant K Yadav defends his PhD thesis

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 JUL:

Dr Hemant K Yadav, son of Ram Naresh Yadav and Late Ramavati Yadav, who hails from Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, has successfully defended his PhD thesis on the topic "Gender based violence in Tibetan refugee camps in India: a study of Himachal Pradesh" under the supervision of Professor Nawal K Paswan, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Sikkim University, a press

release informs.

Prior to attaining the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Dr Hemant did his Bachelor of Arts (BA) from Banaras Hindu University, Uttar Pradesh. Further, he went on to attain his MA in Youth Empowerment from Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development, Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu and Master of Philosophy (MPhil) degrees in 'Ahimsa and Peace



Studies' from Mahatma Gandhi Antrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya, Wardha, Maharashtra.

Over 45,000 cases of Black Fungus reported in country this year

NEW DELHI, JULY 20 (PTI): A total of 45,432 cases of mucormycosis have been reported by states and UTs till July 15 of which 21,085 affected people are receiving treatment and 4,252 have died, the Rajya Sabha was informed on Tuesday.

A large majority of mucormycosis patients (84.4 per cent) had reported a history of COVID-19, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said in a written reply.

Most common presentations of mucormycosis include Rhinocerebral (77.6 per cent), Cutaneous (4.3 per cent) and Pulmonary (3.0 per cent).

In the wake of second wave of COVID-19, an increased number of mucormycosis cases were reported and the Ministry of Health after thorough gap analysis and consultations took a number of steps to address the problem.

Mucormycosis and other fungal infections are most commonly seen as an opportunistic infection. They are found in those with low underlying immunity either due to a diabetes, cancers particularly hematological malignancies, etc. or as a side effect of prolonged/irrational use of certain drugs like steroids, immunosuppressive drugs for management of other disorders including COVID-19, the minister explained.

Mandaviya said although it is not a new disease, its true incidence during the beginning of second wave was unknown as it was not a notifiable disease.

The Ministry of Health in May requested states to declare Mucormycosis a notifiable disease under the Epidemic Disease Act to get an objective assessment of the disease.

Taking cognizance of association between elevated blood sugar levels (whether in patients with pre-existing diabetes mellitus, or hyperglycemia due to steroid therapy), an updated Clinical Guidance on Diagnosis and Management of Diabetes at COVID-19 Patient Management facility was issued by the ministry on June 1.

After expert deliberations in the National Task Force on COVID-19, a detailed advisory on treatment and management of COVID-19 associated Mucormycosis (CAM) was formalized and disseminated on June 7.

Amphotericin-B has been prescribed and it is available in two formulations, Liposomal Amphotericin B and Amphotericin B Deoxycholate, which are similar in efficacy.

However, the latter needs to be used with greater caution with respect to its effects on kidney function test and electrolyte imbalance, the minister explained.

The second drug of choice is Posaconazole which may be used in cases with compromised renal function, drug reaction to Amphotericin B, electrolyte imbalance or in non-availability of Amphotericin B.

A checklist for managing mucormycosis and other fungal infections was also circulated to all states and UTs on June 11.

The clinical management guidelines for managing COVID-19 cases by the ministry advocates rational use of steroids for managing moderate to severe cases of COVID-19 under medical supervision.

For the reporting of cases and deaths due to mucormycosis, the ministry has requested the states and UTs to submit the details on the COVID-19 India portal.

States were asked to update the data on the portal which has helped the ministry to analyse and keep a track of evolving nature of problem.

In response to a question on whether the government has taken cognisance of shortage in supply of Amphotericin-B injections used for the treatment of mucormycosis, Mandaviya said since early May the details of production, stock, supplies made and purchase orders were obtained from manufacturers and their cooperation was sought to overcome the gap between supply and demand.

Both first and second line drugs used for managing mucormycosis cases are currently amply available in Indian markets, he said.

The Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP), Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) & National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) have been jointly monitoring the production and availability of critical Covid drugs including Amphotericin-B injections, he said in the reply.

The Centre has taken various measures to improve the availability of Amphotericin B (liposomal) through a multipronged approach of augmenting production, and import and ensure equitable distribution to states and UTs. It is also engaging with manufacturers to resolve issues related to raw materials.

Pegasus maker to NDTV: "The target list in India is not ours, never was"

NEW DELHI, 20 JUL [NDTV]:

The NSO Group - the Israeli technology firm that developed and sells the Pegasus spyware programme - told NDTV on Tuesday that the list of Indian phone numbers reportedly targeted for surveillance by the government with its software is "not ours, never was".

A NSO spokesperson told NDTV the company is "not related to the list published by Forbidden Stories (the Paris-based non-profit group that obtained a database of 50,000 phone numbers)".

"It is not a NSO list, and it never was - it is fabricated information. It is not a list of targets or potential targets of NSO's customers," the spokesperson said, adding "repeated reliance on this list and association of people on this list as potential surveillance targets is false and misleading."

"The company does not have access to the data of its customers," the spokesperson also

said, adding that clients "are obligated to provide us with such information under investigation".

"If and when NSO receives credible proof of misuse of its technologies, it will conduct a thorough investigation, as it always had and always will," the spokesperson said.

On Monday the company put out a public statement denying all allegations after an explosive report from The Wire said over 300 Indian phone numbers - including those belonging to opposition leaders like Rahul Gandhi and senior journalists - were potential targets for hacking.


It said it only offered its programme to "vetted governments for the sole purpose of saving lives through preventing crime and terror acts", and that it is "considering a defamation lawsuit".

Over the past two days an international media consortium - which includes The Wire and The Washington Post - have published reports that claim clients of the NSO

Group used Pegasus to hack phones of opposition leaders, journalists, human rights activists and others. In India, The Wire reported, several of these phone numbers were added to the list between 2017 and 2019, and in the run-up to the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

The list, media reports claim, include Congress MP Rahul Gandhi and poll strategist Prashant Kishor (who masterminded the Trinamool's victory over the BJP in Bengal). Forensic analysis indicated Mr Kishor's phone was compromised as recently as July 14, The Wire reported. Another name is Ashok Lavasa - the former Election Commissioner who recorded a dissenting opinion when the election body ruled in favour of the Prime Minister during the 2019 election.

The Wire has said there is not enough evidence to suggest all phones on the list had been hacked, but forensic tests on some phones associated with target numbers reveal signs of Pegasus activity.



SIKKIM STATE TEACHERS' RECRUITMENT BOARD
(Constituted Vide Notification No. 933/HRDD, 2015)
Upper Syari, Gangtok, East Sikkim

Memo No.:60/SSTRB/ADM

Date:20/07/2021

NOTICE


ADDENDUM to Memo No.57/SSTRB/ADM Dated 05/07/2021

Reference notice vide Memo No.57/SSTRB/ADM dated 05/07/2021 inviting applications from in- service eligible Graduate Teachers, Primary Teachers with Graduate Degree, Headmasters/Headmistresses (HM) of Primary Schools serving in the Government Schools of Sikkim for filling up the posts of Assistant Education Officer (AEO), following addendum are issued:

- 01) At Para 2, Sl No. 2, Column 3 (Professional qualification) may be read as: B. Ed/D. El. Ed from an institute recognized by the NCTE
- 02) At Para 3, the last date for filling up of the forms both offline and online is extended till July 26, 2021 by 4.30pm.
- 03) At Para 5, documents mentioned at point j and k i.e., Departmental Clearance and Vigilance Clearance, if not submitted by July 26, 2021 may be submitted in original on the date of Screening-cum-Interview.

R.O No. 109/IPR/Classi/Pub/2021-22
Dated: 20.07.21

(Secretary)
Sikkim State Teachers Recruitment Board



What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV

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

Precautions to Prevent nCoV

- Wash your hands often with soap.
- Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer
- Observe good personal hygiene.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms.
- Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats.
- Avoid travel to nCoV affected places.
- Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome. and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.

Treatment

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

If you seek help, you may call :

-Toll free no. 104

District surveillance Officer

EAST : 7029372100



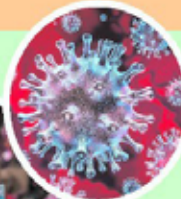
WEST : 9593297809

NORTH : 9641957468

SOUTH : 7407691463

New STNM

AMS : 9434711402

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

Change Approach to Addressing Climate Change

Sikkim needs to accept Climate Change as the challenge that it is

A study by a team of geographers and glaciologists has projected that over 70% of the glacial volume in the Everest region could be lost by 2100! And that is the lower end of their estimate!! If greenhouse-gas emissions continue to rise and global warming comes true to predictions, even up to 99% of the glacier volume of the Everest region could be lost by 2100!!

A team of researchers in Nepal, France and the Netherlands have found that Everest glaciers could be very sensitive to future warming, and that sustained ice loss through the 21st century is likely. The research has been published in "The Cryosphere", an open access journal of the European Geosciences Union (EGU) some years ago, but the message still resonates. "The signal of future glacier change in the region is clear: continued and possibly accelerated mass loss from glaciers is likely given the projected increase in temperatures," says Joseph Shea, a glacier hydrologist at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Kathmandu, Nepal, and leader of the study. The glacier model used by Shea and his team shows that glacier volume could reduce between 70% and 99% by 2100. The results depend on how much greenhouse-gas emissions continue to rise, and on how this will affect temperature, snowfall and rainfall in the area. Just to drive home a point – it is not as if the loss will manifest suddenly in the year 2100, it will play out through the years, obviously accelerating the already noticeable trend in the merely eighty-five years left till it is 2100.

The lead scientist has underlined that the results indicate that these glaciers may be highly sensitive to changes in temperature, and that increases in precipitation are not enough to offset the increased melt. Increased temperatures will not only increase the rates of snow and ice melt, but can also result in a change of precipitation from snow to rain at critical elevations, where glaciers are concentrated. Together, these act to reduce glacier growth and increase the area exposed to melt.

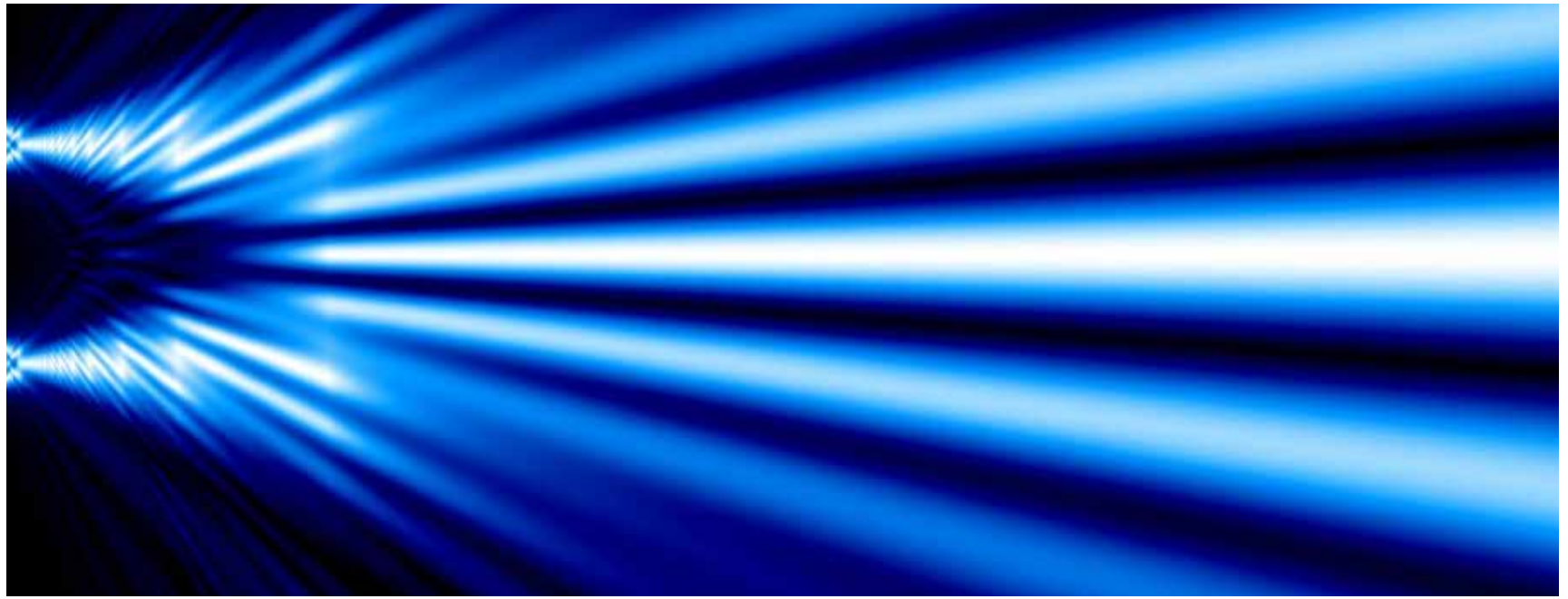
Reflect these findings and projections against Sikkim and talk to stakeholders here and even they will vouch that parts of North Sikkim which used to receive only snow [and no rain] have been inundated by sleet and rain in the recent years. Global warming is a reality for Sikkim as well and reports of rain in formerly only snowed regions and the advance of lower hill plants into the higher reaches provide the more obvious evidence. The report mentioned here speaks exclusively of glaciers in the Everest region, but that zone is not very far or separated from the Sikkim Himalaya and if anything, Sikkim's glacial areas are even closer to the tropics, hence more affected by warming, than the ice of Everest. It becomes necessary then that Sikkim work on its preparedness for climate change with more seriousness than just adding "climate change" to the name of one of its departments, or putting out an action plan without any real plan of action.

A study of Sikkim's glaciers had been commissioned some years ago which had reported that the glaciers here were in good health. Welcome as this update was, given the rather short duration of the study and the general lack of adequately reliable base-data, future projections could not have been very detailed. It is learnt that the study of Sikkim's glaciers, including observations of glacial lakes is being undertaken in earnest and there is already a very real GLOF fear here as well. This study should be expanded to academics beyond the jurisdiction of government departments not only so that their analysis is based only on hard data and not influenced by other considerations, but also so that more minds are applied to aspects which could have a very telling effect on how the Sikkimese live in the very near future. And the study needs to be expanded to features beyond glaciers and made to include the mountain springs, catchment areas and lakes of the State as well. Changes in the hydrology of the State, whether induced by climate change or direct human interference, will impact the availability of water for drinking [think Ratey Chu for Gangtok], will bear consequences on agriculture and also hydropower.

GLOFs have struck Sikkim even in the recent past but have gone largely under-reported because they were born in remote valleys and did not cause too much damage. That will however not always be the case. Glacial retreat will further aggravate the situation as it will result in the formation and growth of more lakes dammed by glacial debris and landslides. This level of reasoning even casual online browsing can inform, which is why when experts are marshalled to prep Sikkim for climate change, more specifics and more clearly spelled out plans of action should result.

WRITE US:

Readers are invited to comment on, criticise, run down, even appreciate if they like something in this paper. Letters carrying abusive/indecorous language and personal attacks, except when against people responsible in this newspaper (who are fair game), will have to be ignored. Letters which carry forward a conversation or initiate a dialogue will command immediate attention and receive prominence. Mail us at: news@summittimes.com



Can Consciousness be Explained by Quantum Physics?

CRISTIANE DE MORAIS SMITH
theconversation.com

One of the most important open questions in science is how our consciousness is established. In the 1990s, long before winning the 2020 Nobel Prize in Physics for his prediction of black holes, physicist Roger Penrose teamed up with anaesthesiologist Stuart Hameroff to propose an ambitious answer.

They claimed that the brain's neuronal system forms an intricate network and that the consciousness this produces should obey the rules of quantum mechanics – the theory that determines how tiny particles like electrons move around. This, they argue, could explain the mysterious complexity of human consciousness.

Penrose and Hameroff were met with incredulity. Quantum mechanical laws are usually only found to apply at very low temperatures. Quantum computers, for example, currently operate at around -272°C. At higher temperatures, classical mechanics takes over. Since our body works at room temperature, you would expect it to be governed by the classical laws of physics. For this reason, the quantum consciousness theory has been dismissed outright by many scientists – though others are persuaded supporters.

Instead of entering into this debate, I decided to join forces with colleagues from China, led by Professor Xian-Min Jin at Shanghai Jiaotong University, to test some of the principles underpinning the quantum theory of consciousness.

In our new paper, we've investigated how quantum particles could move in a complex structure like the brain – but in a lab setting. If our findings can one day be compared with activity measured in the brain, we may come one step closer to validating or dismissing Penrose and Hameroff's controversial theory.

BRAINS AND FRACTALS

Our brains are composed of cells called neurons, and their combined activity is believed to generate consciousness. Each neuron contains microtubules, which transport substances to different parts of the cell. The Penrose-Hameroff theory of quantum consciousness argues that microtubules are structured in a fractal pattern which would enable quantum processes to occur.

able quantum processes to occur.

Fractals are structures that are neither two-dimensional nor three-dimensional, but are instead some fractional value in between. In mathematics, fractals emerge as beautiful patterns that repeat themselves infinitely, generating what is seemingly impossible: a structure that has a finite area, but an infinite perimeter.

This might sound impossible to visualise, but fractals actually occur frequently in nature. If you look closely at the florets of a cauliflower or the branches of a fern, you'll see that they're both made up of the same basic shape repeating itself over and over again, but at smaller and smaller scales. That's a key characteristic of fractals.

The same happens if you look inside your own body: the structure of your lungs, for instance, is fractal, as are the blood vessels in your circulatory system. Fractals also feature in the enchanting repeating artworks of MC Escher and Jackson Pollock, and they've been used for decades in technology, such as in the design of antennas. These are all examples of classical fractals – fractals that abide by the laws of classical physics rather than quantum physics.

It's easy to see why fractals have been used to explain the complexity of human consciousness. Because they're infinitely intricate, allowing complexity to emerge from simple repeated patterns, they could be the structures that support the mysterious depths of our minds.

But if this is the case, it could only be happening on the quantum level, with tiny particles moving in fractal patterns within the brain's neurons. That's why Penrose and Hameroff's proposal is called a theory of "quantum consciousness".

QUANTUM CONSCIOUSNESS

We're not yet able to measure the behaviour of quantum fractals in the brain – if they exist at all. But advanced technology means we can now measure quantum fractals in the lab. In recent research involving a scanning tunnelling microscope (STM), my colleagues at Utrecht and I carefully arranged electrons in a fractal pattern, creating a quantum fractal.

When we then measured the wave function of the electrons, which describes their quantum state, we found that they too lived at the fractal dimension dictated by the physical pattern we'd made.

In this case, the pattern we used on the quantum scale was the Sierpiński triangle, which is a shape that's somewhere between one-dimensional and two-dimensional.

This was an exciting finding, but STM techniques cannot probe how quantum particles move – which would tell us more about how quantum processes might occur in the brain. So in our latest research, my colleagues at Shanghai Jiaotong University and I went one step further. Using state-of-the-art photonics experiments, we were able to reveal the quantum motion that takes place within fractals in unprecedented detail.

We achieved this by injecting photons (particles of light) into an artificial chip that was painstakingly engineered into a tiny Sierpiński triangle. We injected photons at the tip of the triangle and watched how they spread throughout its fractal structure in a process called quantum transport. We then repeated this experiment on two different fractal structures, both shaped as squares rather than triangles. And in each of these structures we conducted hundreds of experiments.

Our observations from these experiments reveal that quantum fractals actually behave in a different way to classical ones. Specifically, we found that the spread of light across a fractal is governed by different laws in the quantum case compared to the classical case.

This new knowledge of quantum fractals could provide the foundations for scientists to experimentally test the theory of quantum consciousness. If quantum measurements are one day taken from the human brain, they could be compared against our results to definitely decide whether consciousness is a classical or a quantum phenomenon.

Our work could also have profound implications across scientific fields. By investigating quantum transport in our artificially designed fractal structures, we may have taken the first tiny steps towards the unification of physics, mathematics and biology, which could greatly enrich our understanding of the world around us as well as the world that exists in our heads.

[the writer is Professor, Theoretical Physics, Utrecht University]

Why studying arts like acting or dance can better equip business students for the post-COVID world

LUCY GILL-SIMMEN
theconversation.com

COVID has seen the idea of caring for your employees take on a whole new meaning. As workplaces reopen and companies deal with the socio-economic fallout of the pandemic, leadership specialists increasingly stress the importance of maintaining this focus on human needs.

Beyond the immediate imperative to keep employees safe in the midst of the health crisis, business administration specialist Hubert Joly underlines how managers need to consider the longer term mental health needs as well as sense of purpose and social wellbeing of their workforce.

Historically, the so-called soft or people skills required to do this were not the primary focus of a business and management education. Rather, management theory centred around what managers do: planning, organising, coordinating and controlling.

This focus has long had its critics, of course. One answer, which is backed up by years of research, is that when business students engage with the arts and humanities at university level, it can equip them with the additional skills that they need.

SOFT SKILLS

Returning to the office post-lockdown has put kindness, compassion and empathy at the top of employee wishlists. Workers now expect their managers to be more supportive.

Although long recognised as im-

portant leadership skills, the pandemic has made these more salient. And with changes to the workplace like remote working and increased use of virtual technology likely to be here to stay to some extent, the greater demand for such skills may be permanent too.

When teams were sent home amid lockdown procedures, our ability to collaborate was also dramatically reduced. Collaboration has long been a focus of workplace culture and managerial methods. It is key to quality of work, innovation and employee engagement.

Companies emerging from the pandemic are therefore understandably keen to get their employees working effectively together once again. This also makes cultural intelligence – defined as the skill by which you understand other cultures, learning from ongoing interactions and adapting your thinking accordingly – even more important than before.

HOW CAN ARTS STUDIES HELP?

Students themselves are conscious of the importance of human-centric skills, as well as critical thinking and creative problem-solving. A survey of 1,000 Australian students in 2020 found that 88% believed soft skills to be necessary for their future career, with 78% agreeing such skills would give them an advantage in an increasingly automated workplace.

These findings are confirmed by a 2021 study among undergraduate

aviation students in Australia. The respondents thought non-technical skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and emotional intelligence would be highly necessary in the post-pandemic economy.

Human-centric skills are best learned by doing. This kind of experiential approach is something the arts have traditionally offered. Unlike a standard management lecture, where students will sit and listen to lecturers passing on their knowledge, arts majors – student dancers interacting in a dance routine, for example – focus on ideas and expression.

Since the 1980s, management education specialists have noted the impact of including poetry, music and literature in business courses. In a 2002 study, American management theorist Robert Mockler looked at how drama, too, could be used. He highlighted the leadership lessons to be found in Shakespeare – from Henry V and Coriolanus to King Lear – and the presentation, self-awareness and leadership skills to be gleaned from taking acting classes.

Business students are more likely to be found in a financial accounting lecture or an organisational change dynamics tutorial than learning about storytelling. Yet storytelling serves as a powerful tool for communication both inside and outside organisations. Narratives enable companies to develop their own personas and for brands to forge customer relationships.

Beyond techniques, a simple visit to an art museum can readily enhance the critical thinking skills for any student – not just art history majors. The arts engage us, as the audience, mentally, physically, and emotionally. And they prompt us to understand and improve the world and ourselves. This may be one of their most powerful uses in education.

To this end, prospective students interested in pursuing a business and management degree should be encouraged to immerse themselves in additional arts and humanities courses. Even better, they could seek an interdisciplinary degree where arts and humanities are embedded in the curriculum.

US business schools often dabble in the liberal arts. But in the UK, business students will need to dig a little deeper to find a way to integrate the arts into their studies. There are professional development courses, which include acting classes to promote self-awareness and creative writing classes.

Students can also acquire these skills by themselves. In A Whole New Mind management specialist and author Daniel Pink recommends taking drawing classes and heading to storytelling festivals. It's about developing the right side of the brain, the side most often associated with soft skills.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer in Marketing, Royal Holloway University of London]

Turkey aims for dialogue with Taliban on Kabul Airport plan

ISTANBUL (AP): Turkey's president said Tuesday his country will talk with the Taliban regarding Turkey's bid to operate and secure the airport in the Afghan capital, Kabul.

Speaking after Eid al-Adha prayers in northern Cyprus, President Recep-TayyipErdogan acknowledged that the hardline Islamist group had some "discomforts" over Turkey's proposed plans for Hamid Karzai International Airport.

"This process will also be discussed with the Taliban," he said, adding that the group had previously negotiated with the United States and "should hold these talks much more comfortably with Turkey."

"I give the possibility that we will discuss these issues with them well and have an agreement because Turkey does not have an opposing side to their beliefs," Erdogan said. He stressed that Turkey has always stood with Afghanistan, saying "imperial powers" have been there for decades, including in the past 20 years — an apparent reference to the U.S. deployment that is drawing to a close.

Erdogan's comments follow Taliban warnings last week that Turkey should withdraw its troops from Afghanistan,



along with other foreign forces. The group called Turkey's airport proposal "reprehensible."

On Monday, Erdogan called on the Taliban to end its "occupation of its siblings' lands" and said Taliban's stance in Afghanistan did not fit how Muslims should treat other Muslims.

The Taliban have been taking strategic border posts and pushing to gain territory in recent weeks, driving tens of thousands of Afghans to flee their homes. Many have been trying to cross to Turkey, with more than 1,450 migrants

found by authorities in eastern Van province.

Government forces have regained some posts and are refocusing their resources on strategic points and provincial centers.

Turkey has been negotiating with the U.S. over a proposal to operate and secure the airport. Erdogan reiterated that Turkey would do so only if certain conditions are met and said Washington had asked Turkey to stay on. "First, America will stand with us at the point of diplomacy and diplomatic relations," he said. The

other conditions are logistical and financial support.

An agreement on the protection of the airport has become increasingly urgent as the final withdrawal of the remaining 2,500-3,500 U.S. troops and 76,000 allied NATO soldiers nears a conclusion.

NATO-member Turkey has over 500 troops in Afghanistan and already plays a significant role at the airport but the troops have not served on combat missions.

Turkish-American relations have been rocky for the past few years

over a host of problems, including Turkey's human rights issues, Ankara's purchase of a Russian-made missile system, Washington's support of a Syrian Kurdish group Turkey considers terrorists, and the continued U.S. residency of a Muslim cleric whom Turkey accuses of masterminding a bloody failed coup.

Erdogan was speaking during a two-day visit to Cyprus' breakaway north for celebrations to mark the 47th anniversary of a Turkish invasion that split the island along ethnic lines.

No caste census other than SCs, STs: Govt

NEW DELHI, 20 JUL [PTI]: Caste-wise data on population, other than those for Dalits and Scheduled Tribes, won't be included in the upcoming national Census, the Ministry of Home Affairs said today. The decision has been taken as a matter of policy, the government informed the Lok Sabha.

The ministry also said that some state governments had earlier requested the collection of caste data.

"The state governments of Maharashtra and Odisha have requested to collect caste details in the forthcoming census. The government of India has decided as

a matter of policy not to enumerate caste-wise population other than SCs and STs in Census," Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai stated in a written reply.

The Constitution provides for reservation of seats for members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the Lok Sabha and in the various assemblies in proportion, as nearly as may be, to their population, the Minister said. In the Census, those specifically notified as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are enumerated, he said.

The Ministry had earlier informed that a Socio-Economic and

Caste Census (SECC) was carried out in 2011 by the Ministry of Rural Development in rural areas and the then Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (HUPA) in urban. The government later reportedly decided not to update the SECC as the Centre remained uninterested in maintaining caste data in the registry.

Replying to another question, Minister Rai said the government's intent to conduct Census 2021 has been notified in the Gazette of India on March 28, 2019, but due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the activities were postponed.

Pandemic recovery to push emissions to all-time high: Energy Watchdog

LONDON, 20 JUL [PTI]: The global rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic is set to drive emissions of greenhouse gases that stoke climate change to all-time highs, the Paris-based International Energy Agency said in a report on Tuesday.

"We estimate that full and timely implementation of the economic recovery measures announced to date would result in CO2 emissions climbing to record levels in 2023, continuing to rise thereafter," it said.

Spending plans for clean energy allocated by governments around the world in the second quarter of this year

add up to \$380 billion, making up just 2% of their total stimulus funds in response to the pandemic, the IEA said.

The energy watchdog said the figure represented around a third of what it envisioned was needed in order to put the world on course to reach net zero emissions by mid-century.

"(Countries) must then go even further by leading clean energy investment and deployment to much greater heights beyond the recovery period in order to shift the world on to a pathway to net-zero emissions by 2050, which is narrow but still achievable -- if we act now," IEA chief Fatih Birol wrote.

Sandeep Lamichhane's availability for Oval Invincibles in UK tourney in doubt over visa issues

KATHMANDU, 20 JUL [KATHMANDUPOST]: Nepal's leg spinner Sandeep Lamichhane, who is in the United Kingdom, is a doubt for the opening games of the Hundred due to visa issues.

According to ESPNcricinfo, a sports news website exclusively for the game of cricket, Lamichhane is due to play for Oval Invincibles in the competition on a £60,000 deal.

But his availability is now uncertain.

The Hundred is a professional franchise 100-ball cricket tournament involving eight men's and women's teams located in major cities across England and Wales. The tournament has been delayed by a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The competition's opening matches are between Oval Invincibles and Manchester Ori-

nals at The Oval, with the women's fixture on July 21 before the men's on July 22. ESPNcricinfo said that Lamichhane's agent confirmed that Monday was the ninth day of a mandatory 10-day quarantine period he spent in a government-approved hotel.

But despite being allowed into the country on a Tier 5 visa, he is not permitted to play in the Hundred as things stand, the website reported

"At the moment, we're unsure," Sam Billings, the Invincibles' men's captain, told ESPNcricinfo. "I obviously heard that today and fingers crossed he can get here. It's been a difficult time for a lot of players with the various restrictions and things around the world. Hopefully that can get resolved [because] he's a special talent. If not, back to the drawing board."

Ugandan who fled pre-Olympics camp found in central Japan

TOKYO (AP): A Ugandan athlete who fled during pre-Olympics training in western Japan last week has been found and is being interviewed by police, officials said Tuesday.

Mie prefectural police in central Japan said 20-year-old weightlifter Julius Ssekitoleko was in the Yokkaichi city, 170 kilometers (105 miles) east of his host town in western Japan. Police are asking him what happened since he fled his hotel in Izumisano in the Osaka prefecture Friday, leaving behind a note

saying he didn't want to return to his country.

Ssekitoleko left behind his luggage and a note saying he wanted to stay in Japan and work, Izumisano officials said. He did not meet Olympic standards in the latest international rankings released after he arrived Japan and was to return home this week.

The pandemic-delayed Olympics open Friday despite mounting concern about an upsurge of infections in Tokyo, which on Tuesday reported 1,387 cases, up 557 from a week ago.

Suwendu Adhikari asks local police chief to refrain from filing 'false cases', says may prompt transfer to Kashmir

TAMLUK, JUL 20 (PTI): Leader of Opposition in West Bengal and BJP MLA Suwendu Adhikari, during a party meeting in Purba Midnapore, publicly advised the district police chief to refrain from doing something that would prompt his transfer to Kashmir's Anantnag or Baramulla.

Adhikari who is facing multiple police probes, including one related to alleged tarpaulin theft, asserted at a meeting held here on Monday that it would be wrong to assume that the BJP was weak as it has the central government by its side.

Citing the example of former Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar, who was grilled by the CBI for his alleged involvement in chit fund cases, Adhikari said it would be best if police officers perform their functions with integrity and to carry out their duties without prejudice.

The senior BJP leader, in his message to the district Superintendent of Police Amarnath K, said, "Do not file

fake cases. I have evidence to prove that they are fake. I will file public interest litigation seeking a CBI probe into such allegations.

"Please do not do anything that would prompt your transfer to Kashmir's Anantnag or Baramulla."

The Nandigram MLA who narrowly defeated Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in elections held recently, also said he has "details of all calls made to you by nephew (TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee), and added that if you have the state government to support you, we have the Central government by our side."

He hailed the NHRC report on Bengal's post-poll violence which had stated that the situation in Bengal is a manifestation of "law of the ruler" and not "rule of law".

The leader of opposition added that he would hold a mass agitation in the district on August 9 with one lakh people to protest against all malpractices in the state.

Rs 1528 crore spent on updating NRC: Assam CM

GUWAHATI, JUL 19 (PTI): Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday said that Rs 1527.90 crore has been spent so far on updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC), an official record of bonafide Indian citizens living in the state. Replying to a question of Congress MLA Kamalakhya Dey Purakayastha in the assembly, the chief minister said that the Registrar General of India (RGI) is yet to notify the final NRC published on August 31, 2019.

The NRC, updated under the supervision of the Supreme Court, left out more than 19 lakh of the 3.29 crore applicants.

Regarding the issuance of rejection slips to those who had been left



out of the final register, Sarma said that this falls under the purview of the RGI and the NRC State Coordinator.

Sarma said that the state government had filed a petition for 20 per cent re-verification in the border districts and 10 per cent in the others but the Supreme Court did not consider it as the former NRC State Coordinator had submitted that 27 per cent re-verification has been already done.

In reply to another question by AIUFD MLA

Aminul Islam on the biometric data taken during the claims and objection process of the NRC updating, Sarma said that it was taken for linking with Aadhar cards.

"The matter is pending with the Supreme Court and the Aadhar Card is issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI). The department concerned can only issue it following the Supreme Court's directives and the notification of the final NRC," he added.



NEW DELHI, JUL 20 (PTI): A total of 525 posts of doctors are lying vacant in the Central Armed Police Forces like the CRPF and the BSF and the process of recruitment of medical officers is on, Lok Sabha was informed on Tuesday.

Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai said recruitment of specialist and general duty medical officers in the CAPFs is being made regularly

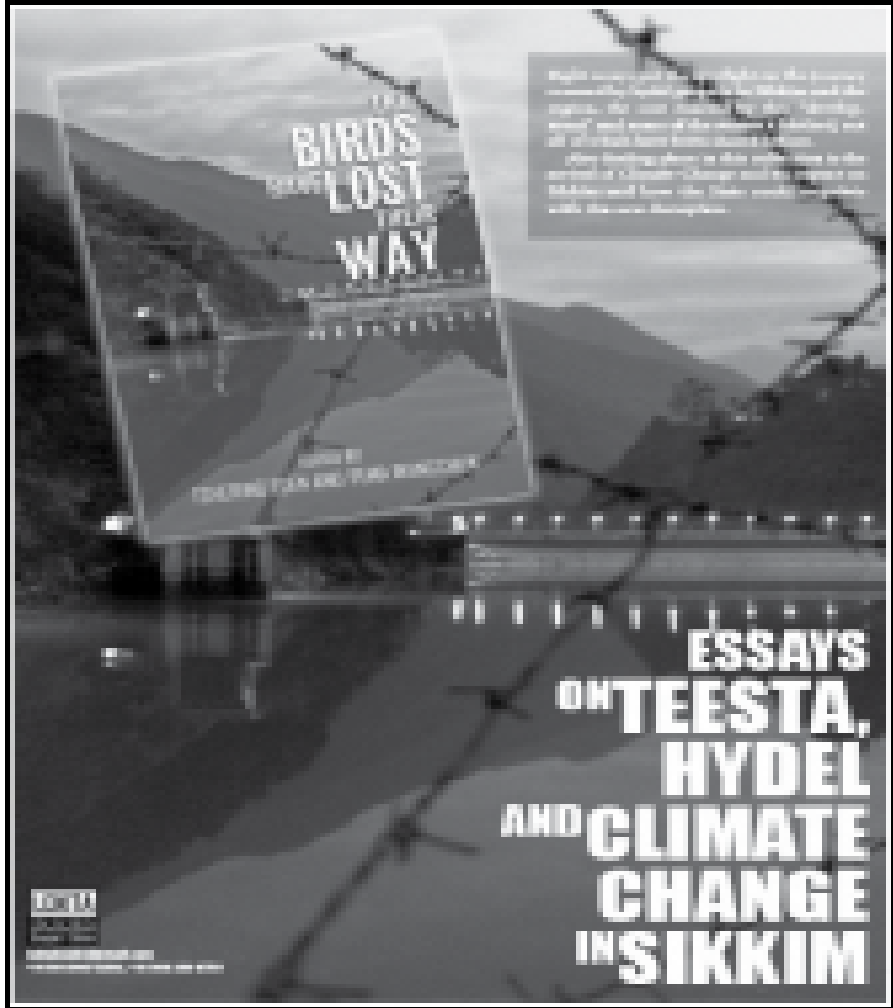
through Medical Officers Selection Board (MOSB).

As on February 15, 193 specialist medical officers' posts were lying vacant in the CRPF, Border Security Force (BSF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and the Assam Rifles while 332 posts of general duty medical officers were lying vacant in these five forces, he said replying to a written question.

Rai said in the wake of

the COVID-19 pandemic, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) has been allowed to recruit general duty medical officers on a contract basis against vacant posts of specialists medical officers for a period of one year.

Offers have already been given to the candidates in the reserve list of the last Medical Officers Selection Board and many candidates have joined against the vacant posts, he said.



Big boost for Lahiri ahead of Olympics, finishes T-3 at Barbasol Championship

NICHOLASVILLE (US), JUL. 20 (PTI): Olympic-bound Indian golfer AnirbanLahiri fired a stellar seven-under 65 to finish tied third at the Barbasol Championship here for his best result of the season, a timely boost ahead of the Tokyo Games.

Lahiri, 34, made eight birdies, including four over his closing five holes, at Keene Trace Golf Club here on Sunday to end his week on 20-under 268, one stroke behind the playoff duo of Seamus Power and J T Poston.

Ireland's Power went on to earn his first PGA TOUR title following a six-hole playoff.

It was a welcome return to form for Lahiri, who had struggled with COVID-19 in April.

His third career top-three finish on the PGA TOUR moved him up from 129th to 108th on the FedExCup standings. The top-125 will qualify for the lucrative FedExCup Playoffs in August and retain their TOUR cards for next season.

"I think all week, I've played a little better than the scores I've shot. I've been a little disappointed with my scrambling and just my score hasn't been as good as I would have liked it to be.

"I'm not playing next week, off to Tokyo, so I wanted to make sure that I get the most out of this week. I've done whatever



I could given the circumstances," said Lahiri, who has featured on the PGA TOUR since 2016.

His week's cards of 68, 67, 68 and 65 marked the first time he has shot in the 60s in all four rounds of a tournament since finishing tied 10th in the 2018 Mayakoba Classic in Mexico.

Lahiri was especially delighted with his ball-striking.

After an opening birdie on the third hole from eight feet, Lahiri rattled home a 32-foot conversion at the next before finishing strongly with six more birdies on

his homeward stretch against a lone bogey on 13.

"Yeah, I really needed those," said Lahiri of his strong finish.

"I really enjoyed it. The golf course obviously is set up for a ton of birdies and eagles, so you better be flag hunting and rolling it good. All in all, a great week," said the Indian, a former two-time International Team member of the Presidents Cup.

The Indian will now head to Tokyo at the end of this week for the men's golf competition from July 29 to August 1 where

he is determined to challenge for a podium finish against a stellar line-up featuring newly crowned Open champion Collin Morikawa, World no.1 Jon Rahm, Justin Thomas, Xander Schauffele, Rory McIlroy and local hero Hideki Matsuyama.

"It's exciting to be wearing the Tricolours. It's always a really, really special thing to represent India. Every opportunity that I get, I'm going to grab it with both hands, and hopefully I can go with this form to Tokyo and keep making these birdies because I'm going to

need them," said Lahiri, who finished 57th in a field of 60 in 2016 Rio Olympics.

"It would mean everything (to win a medal). I think it would change the way golf is perceived in India. I think it would change the kind of support we get from corporates and the government.

Japan's Satoshi Kodaira closed with a 68 to finish tied 20th while China's Bobby Bai, who Monday qualified for his first PGA TOUR start on US soil, settled for a share of 42nd place after a final round 73.

US Olympic gymnastics alternate tests positive for virus

TOKYO (AP): Kara Eaker, an alternate on the United States women's gymnastics team, has tested positive for COVID-19 in an Olympic training camp in Japan.

Al Fong, the personal coach for both Eaker and fellow Olympic alternate Leanne Wong, confirmed the positive test in an email to The Associated Press on Monday. The coach said Eaker, 18, was vaccinated against the novel coronavirus two months ago.

Eaker and Wong have been placed in isolation.

USA Gymnastics did not identify Eaker or Wong but said in a statement the athlete who tested positive and another alternate would be subject to additional quarantine restrictions.

"The Olympic athletes moved to separate lodging accommodations and a separate training facility, as originally planned, and will continue their preparation for the Games," the organization said in a statement. "The entire delegation continues to be vigilant and will maintain strict protocols while they are in Tokyo."

The positive test was the latest in a growing line of daily reports of athletes and others testing positive at the pandemic-delayed Olympics. Eaker is the first American to test positive.

"In alignment with local rules and protocols, the athlete has been transferred to a hotel to quarantine," the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee said in a statement, citing privacy in not identifying the in-

dividual.

The four alternates — Eaker, Wong, Kayla DiCello and Emma Malabuyo — traveled to Japan with the six-woman U.S. delegation of world and Olympic champion Simone Biles, Jordan Chiles, Grace McCallum, Sunisa Lee, MyKayla Skinner and Jade Carey.

The positive test came after Eaker received what was described as a "false positive" over the weekend. Eaker took a subsequent test that was negative before testing positive again multiple times.

"Kara is doing very well with no symptoms," Karla Grimes, who works at GAGE Center, the gym in the Kansas City, Missouri, suburbs where Eaker trains, said in an email to the AP. "She is incredibly strong and very brave. Although this is a very disappointing outcome for her, she wants everyone to know she is OK."

Biles, who is also the world champion, and the rest of the regular team have been vaccinated. Skinner, who made the team in the "plus-one spot" — meaning she can compete as an individual in Tokyo — following Olympic Trials did battle both COVID-19 and pneumonia last winter.

Alternates have been rooming with other alternates since arriving in Japan, with the competitive team rooming with fellow competitors. All Olympic athletes and coaches have been moved to their own rooms since the positive test, with the Olympic athletes also moving to a new hotel, as was originally planned.

US women shut out the noise in quest for 5th gold medal

TOKYO (AP): The U.S. women's national soccer team is in a bubble of its own making for the Tokyo Olympics, and it's not just because of coronavirus restrictions.

The World Cup champions have become adept at shutting out all the outside noise — the seemingly endless social media debates, the TV punditry and even the trash talk that comes with being the best in the world.

"I think, especially the players that have been through these major tournaments, you figure out how to stay in the best mental headspace and sometimes that's compartmentalizing, that's focusing on one thing at a time and trying not to let the noise get into what we like to call the bubble," defender Becky Sauerbrunn said. "So like, secure the bubble, protect the bubble."

The women's Olympic soccer tournament starts on Wednesday. The United States, the top-ranked team in the world and the favorite to win, opens against Sweden at Tokyo Stadium.

The Americans are vying for their fifth gold medal, more than any other national team. They can also become the first women to win an Olympic gold following a World Cup title.

There's reason to believe they'll do just that. The group is undefeated in 44 straight games, the second-long-

gest unbeaten streak in team history. It's a deep squad with a formidable attack: Seventeen of the players were on the World Cup squad.

Christen Press has been directly involved in 37 goals in her last 37 matches, with 16 goals and 18 assists. Megan Rapinoe, the unabashedly outspoken winger with purple hair, leads the team with seven goals this year.

Quietly holding down the defense is goalkeeper Alyssa Naehler, who has six shut-outs in nine starts this year.

Naehler is perhaps the leader on the team when it comes to shutting out the noise. She eschewed all social media during the team's run in France two years ago, and often worked on crossword puzzles before matches to chill out before games.

"Everything's all about compartmentalizing," the softspoken Naehler said.

Of course, it will likely be a bit easier to stay focused at this tournament. Japan is in a state of emergency because of rising coronavirus cases. As a result, the athletes participating will be in their own team or individual bubbles with strict COVID-19 protocols. And no fans will be allowed.

"It's not the best setup in terms of being able to go for a walk or just get outside, go grab a coffee that sort of thing. That's not available to us," defender

Kelley O'Hara said. "But at the end of the day we've all been doing it for a month now with national team, so it's the reality of the tournament, of the situation, of the Olympics this year. You just kind of take it in stride and make do with what you can."

The United States had a pre-tournament camp in Miyazaki before arriving in Tokyo on Friday in preparation for Sweden, the team that knocked the Americans out of the 2016 Olympics in the quarterfinals.

Australia plays New Zealand in the second match of the night at Tokyo Stadium. Twelve women's teams are divided into three groups for the tournament, which is being played at six stadiums across the country.

There are a pair of Wednesday matches at the Sapporo Dome: Britain plays Chile and host Japan play Canada. Additionally, China plays Brazil and Zambia plays the Netherlands at Miyagi Stadium.

As captain of the United States, Sauerbrunn is tasked with keeping her side focused.

"It's a skill that I think everyone needs to learn, especially in these major tournaments, because they're not easy," Sauerbrunn said about compartmentalizing. "There's a lot of stress, there's a lot of noise and so learning to knock that out, block that out, is really important."

India will aim to stamp authority over Sri Lanka in second ODI

Colombo, Jul 20 (PTI): India's young guns will get another opportunity to flaunt their exceptional talent and secure a series win against a hapless Sri Lankan outfit in the second ODI here on Tuesday.

Skipper ShikharDhawan was left in complete awe at the other end as the likes of Prithvi Shaw, IshanKishan and SuryakumarYadav made batting look ridiculously easy in the first ODI on Sunday night.

In the long run, India want to play more aggressively in the shorter formats and the performance of the trio served as a perfect template in that context.

Their sensational batting also reinforced the might of India's bench strength with ODI debutants Kishan and Yadav bossing the opposition from ball one.

Sri Lanka bowlers also made it easier for the marauding Indian batters who romped home to the win in the 37th over.

India are unlikely to make changes as they would like to pocket the series before giving chances to other youngsters in the squad.

The only one feeling the heat would be Manish Pandey, who laboured to a 40-ball 26 in the series opener when others were at their fluent best.

Shaw, in his comeback game, played breathtaking strokes on the off-side but missed out on a big score. It is something

he would like to correct on Tuesday.

It was good to see KuldeepChahal and YuzvendraChahal bowl in tandem after a long time and they proved once again that they perform better as a pair.

With spinners bowling the bulk of the overs, star all-rounder HardikPandya showed promise in the five overs he bowled.

Seniormost pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar did not have the best of days but trust him to be back in his elements in the next game.

It will take a special effort from the struggling Sri Lankan side to pull one back against the rampaging visitors.

The inexperienced team showed it has the talent to compete with the opposition if not win. Most of the batsmen got starts but could not convert. It is something they will have to fix to test India.

Thanks to Chamika Karunaratne's 35-ball 43, Sri Lanka were able to cross 250. He feels his team can regularly score 300-plus if the batsmen don't squander starts.

"We were trying to play longer innings - even when I was batting with DasunShanaka in the 42nd or 43rd over I asked him if I should go for some big shots, but he told me to wait until the 45th over.

"If more of our batsmen had been able to bat longer, we could have at-

tacked earlier and gone for a bigger score. We do have the ability to get to 300 or 350, and hopefully that will happen in the next games," said Karunaratne.

The bowlers too need to raise their game significantly to put pressure on the high-quality Indian batsmen.

Both teams might be interested in chasing with the slow pitch playing better in the evening.

Squads:
India: ShikharDhawan (captain), Prithvi Shaw, DevduttPadikkal, RuturajGaikwad, SuryakumarYadav, Manish Pandey, NitishRana, IshanKishan, Sanju Samson, HardikPandya, KrunalPandya, KrishnapaGowtham, YuzvendraChahal, KuldeepYadav, VarunChakaravathy, Rahul Chahar, Deepak Chahar, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, ChetanSakariya, NavdeepSaini.

Sri Lanka: DasunShanaka (captain), Dhananjaya De Silva, Avishka Fernando, BhanukaRajapaksa, Pathum-Nissanka, CharithAsalanka, WaninduHasaranga, Ashen Bandara, Mino dBhanuka, Lahiru-Udara, Ramesh Mendis, ChamikaKarunaratne, DushmanthaChameera, Lakshan Sandakan, AkilaDhananjaya, Shiran Fernando, DhananjayaLakshan, IshanJayaratne, Praveen Jayawickrema, Asitha Fernando, Kasun-Rajitha, Lahiru Kumara, IsuruUdana.

Match starts 3 PM IST.

Olympics finally to start, 1 year later and far from Tokyo

FUKUSHIMA, JAPAN (AP): Skippy the yellow kangaroo with green paws was affixed to the first base dugout railing, watching the Australia Spirit become the first team to work out at Fukushima Azuma Baseball Stadium, seven weeks after they became first foreign athletes to arrive at the Olympics.

Coach Laing Harrow hit grounders and flies to his women starting at 9 a.m. Tuesday, exactly 24 hours before the eighth-ranked Aussies step to the plate when host Japan, the No. 2-ranked softball team, throws the very first pitch of the very first event of the pandemic-delayed Olympics.

The Games of the 32nd Olympiad were to have started last July 22 but were pushed back by the coronavirus pandemic. Despite many in Japan questioning whether it is wise with the virus still raging in the country, the International Olympic Committee is pushing ahead.

This ballpark, located about 150 miles north of Tokyo and similar to a big league spring training camp, has only several handfuls of the 11,000 athletes who are converging on the Tokyo Games. The stadium, 42 miles northwest of the location of the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, will host the first two days of the softball tournament and the opening day of the baseball event on July 28, with the remainder at the home of the Central League's Yokohama DeNABayStars, a big ballpark 17 miles from the capital.

In their bright yellow jerseys, the Aussies were excited to be about to get underway. "It was disappointing for the girls, obviously, being postponed for a year," Harrow said. "Some of them would have had plans from after August 2020. And, sure, it wasn't in their plans to continue to be in the gym every day and training every day. But overall, the girls have really handled that well. And I think one thing we're very good at is being adaptable."

The top-ranked United States, seeking to regain the gold medal it lost when it was upset by Japan 3-1 in the 2008

final in Beijing, opens against No. 9 Italy in the second game of a tripleheader that ends with No. 5 Mexico against third-ranked Canada.

Host Japan took batting practice next on a broiling day with 95-degree heat and high humidity, followed by Italy, the United States, Mexico and Canada.

A 15-woman U.S. roster includes a pair of veterans: 38-year-old left-hander Cat Osterman, the last holdover from the 2004 gold medal-winning team, and 35-year-old left-hander Monica Abbott, who joined Osteman on the 2008 team.

Outfielder Janie Reed is the wife of Los Angeles Dodgers right-hander Jake Reed, who made his big league debut July 6, had six appearances and was optioned Monday to Triple-A Oklahoma City.

"The aspect of having 16 months, 17 months now since the decision to delay the Olympics has probably caused some environmental things to happen," U.S. coach Ken Eriksen said. "Number one, the natural order of aging another year for some of the players as far as either enhanced, or maybe it has brought in some consternation, especially emotionally."

The American team trained in the U.S. through June 20 and started in Japan on July 5 in Iwakuni, 525 miles southwest of Tokyo.

Canada's team dispersed last March, didn't gather again until January and landed in Japan on July 6.

"We relied on what many people did, just Zoom calls and just virtual communication and trying to stay connected, but fortunately this time gave way to a lot more individual preparation and a lot of learning and a lot of people pursuing knowledge and just continuing to perfect their craft," said Canada outfielder Victoria Hayward, who trains at Proswings in Longwood, Florida, to take advantage of better weather. "So we feel very fortunate that we had a little bit of extra time to sharpen our axes and to work together and then in 2021 we've been able to be together for a majority of the year unbroken."

In flood-hit German town, a priest struggles to give comfort

AHRWEILER, GERMANY (AP): The Rev. Joerg Meyrer steels himself before making his way through the stinking piles of mud-caked debris that permeate this once-beautiful town in Germany’s wine-growing Ahr valley.

For the past five days, the 58-year-old Catholic priest has pulled on his galoshes and walked the streets to try to give comfort to his parishioners as they get on with the grim task of cleaning up what was destroyed by Wednesday’s flash flood — and recovering the bodies of those who perished in it.

“It came over us like a tsunami,” Meyrer recalls. “Bridges, houses, apartments, utility pipes — everything that actually constitutes this town, what it lives on, has been gone since that night.”

Residents of Ahrweiler had been told to expect the Ahr River, a tributary of the Rhine, to crest at 7 meters (nearly 23 feet), but Meyrer said few comprehended what that would mean. The last serious flood in the area south of Bonn was more than a century ago.

Nearly 200 people were killed when heavy rainfall turned streams into raging torrents across parts of western Germany and Belgium, and officials put the death toll in Ahrweiler county alone at 110, making it the hardest hit



region. Meyrer, who expects that figure to rise significantly, said the victims came from all walks of life.

“Old people who died in bed because they couldn’t get up or because they didn’t hear it; young people who died minutes after helping others; people who died in their car because they wanted to drive it out when the flood wave surprised them.”

Townsppeople recounted grim cases of delayed grief, as the realization began to sink in that those reported missing would not return.

Meyrer said he was called in when firefighters found the body of a

woman he had known well. “The husband knew his wife had been in the basement and he had to wait two days for her to be recovered,” he said.

For now, many residents are focusing on the cleanup before dealing with the longer task of rebuilding.

“We need to start over,” said Paddy Amantidis, the owner of La Perla pizzeria, as she took a break from cleaning the rubble out of the restaurant.

“We fought our way through (the coronavirus pandemic) and the flood won’t get us down either,” she said, adding that the solidarity shown by neighbors and

friends had helped to boost spirits. Meyrer believes that even for those lucky enough not to have lost loved ones, the enormous impact of the disaster has not fully hit them.

“When the first lot (of debris) has been cleared and people have nothing to do, then I think many will understand for the first time what they’ve lost and what that means,” he said.

German officials have rejected allegations that they failed to properly warn people of the severity of the floods, but conceded that more lessons can be learned from the disaster. Experts say global warming may make such floods even

more frequent.

Upriver in the village of Schuld, which was largely destroyed, Mayor Helmut Lussi said the scars would last a long time. “Our lives changed from one day to the next,” he told German Chancellor Merkel, who visited on Sunday.

As for mourning the victims, Meyrer says that daunting task will require the help of clergy from across the town and beyond.

Aside from the sheer number of dead, authorities also must figure out where to bury them, because the local cemetery, too, was flooded, with hardly any tombstone left standing.

While the freshly renovated Gothic walls of the 13th century St. Lawrence Church remained miraculously untouched by the flooding, Meyrer plans to keep walking the streets for now, offering a helping hand, a sympathetic ear and a shoulder to cry on.

But even he is struggling, saying that prayer hasn’t come easily in the days since the disaster struck.

“I don’t have the words, the time, the peace,” he said. “I can’t do that right now.”

“In the evening I try to say, ‘Lord, somehow you have to take over now.’ That’s got to be good enough,” he added.

Israeli PM vows to ‘act aggressively’ over Ben & Jerry’s ban

JERUSALEM (AP): Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett told the head of Unilever on Tuesday that Israel will “act aggressively” against Ben & Jerry’s over the subsidiary’s decision to stop selling its ice cream in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and contested east Jerusalem.

British consumer goods conglomerate Unilever acquired the Vermont-based ice cream company in 2000. Ben & Jerry’s said in a statement on Monday that it had informed its longstanding licensee — responsible for manufacturing and distributing the ice cream in Israel — that it will not renew the license agreement when it expires at the end of 2022.

Bennett’s office said in a statement that he spoke with Unilever CEO Alan Jope about what he called Ben & Jerry’s “clearly anti-Israel step,” adding that the move would have “serious consequences, legal and otherwise, and that it will act aggressively against all boycott actions directed against its citizens.”

The announcement was one of the highest-profile company rebukes of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, territories Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war. Most of the international community considers these settlements illegal under international law and an impediment to peace with the Palestinians.

Muslims mark Eid al-Adha holiday in pandemic’s shadow

CAIRO (AP): Muslims around the world were observing Tuesday yet another major Islamic holiday in the shadow of the pandemic and amid growing concerns about the highly infectious delta variant of the coronavirus.

Eid al-Adha, or the “Feast of Sacrifice,” is typically marked by communal prayers, large social gatherings and, for many, slaughtering of livestock and giving meat to the needy. This year, the holiday comes as many countries battle the delta variant first identified in India, prompting some to impose new restrictions or issue appeals for people to avoid congregating and follow safety protocols.

The pandemic has already taken a toll for the second year on a sacred mainstay of Islam, the hajj, whose last days coincide with Eid al-Adha. Once drawing some 2.5 million Muslims from across the globe to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, the Islamic pilgrimage has been dramatically scaled back due to the virus.

This year, 60,000 vaccinated Saudi citizens or residents of Saudi Arabia have been allowed to perform the hajj, preventing Muslims from other countries from fulfilling the Islamic obligation.

Indonesia marked a grim Eid al-Adha amid a devastating new wave of coronavirus cases in the world’s most populous Muslim-majority nation. Large gatherings were banned and tougher travel restrictions imposed. Vice President Ma’ruf Amin, also an influential Islamic cleric, appealed to people to perform holiday prayers at home with their

families.

“Don’t do crowds,” Amin said in televised remarks ahead of the start of the holiday. “Protecting oneself from the COVID-19 pandemic is obligatory.”

The surge is believed to have been fueled by travel during another holiday — the Eid al-Fitr festival in May — and by the rapid spread of the delta variant.

In Malaysia, measures have been tightened after a sharp spike in infections despite a national lockdown since June 1 — people are banned from travelling back to their hometowns or crossing districts to celebrate. House visits and customary trips to graveyards are also banned.

Healthy worshippers are allowed to gather for prayers in mosques, with strict social distancing and no physical contact. Ritual animal sacrifice is limited to mosques and other approved areas.

Health Director-General Noor Hisham Abdullah has urged Malaysians not to “repeat irresponsible behavior,” adding that travel and celebrations during Eid al-Fitr and another festival on the island of Borneo led to new clusters of cases.

“Let us not in the excitement of celebrating the Feast of Sacrifice cause us all to perish because of COVID-19,” he said in a statement.

Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin urged Muslims to stay home. “I appeal to you all to be patient and abide by the rules because your sacrifice is a great jihad in Allah’s sight and in our effort to save lives,” he said in a televised speech on the eve of the festival.

The World Health Organization has reported that COVID-19 deaths had climbed after a period of decline. The reversal has been attributed to low vaccination rates, relaxed mask rules and other precautions, and the delta variant.

Lockdowns will severely curtail Eid al-Adha festivities in Sydney and Melbourne, Australia’s two largest cities.

Sydney resident Jihad Dib, a New South Wales state government lawmaker, said the city’s Muslims were sad but understood why they would be confined to their homes with no visitors allowed.

“It’s going to be the first Eid in my life I don’t hug and kiss my mum and dad,” Dib told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

Melbourne Muslims face their second Eid al-Adha in lockdown in as many years. The sudden announcement of the Melbourne lockdown last week will also deal a huge financial blow to retailers who had stocked up on food ahead of what they thought would be usual Eid festivities.

Iran on Monday imposed a week-long lockdown on the capital, Tehran, and the surrounding region as the country struggles with another surge in the coronavirus pandemic, state media reported. The lockdown begins on Tuesday.

Not everyone is imposing new restrictions. In Bangladesh, authorities have allowed an eight-day pause in the country’s strict lockdown for the holiday that health experts say could be dangerous.

In Egypt, EssamShaban travelled to his southern hometown

of Sohag to spend Eid al-Adha with his family. He said ahead of the start of the holiday that he planned to pray at a mosque there on Tuesday while taking precautions such as bringing his own prayer rug and wearing a mask.

“We want this Eid to pass by peacefully without any infections,” he said. “We must follow instructions.”

Shaban had been looking forward to pitching in with his brothers to buy a buffalo to slaughter, going door-to-door to give some of the meat to the poor and to the traditional festive meal later in the day with his extended family.

“It’s usually boisterous with laughter and bickering with the kids,” he said. “It’s great.”

But others will be without loved ones.

In India, where Eid al-Adha starts Wednesday, TahirQureshi would always go with his father for prayers and then to visit family and friends. His father died in June after contracting the virus during a surge that devastated the country, and the thought of having to spend the holiday without him is heartbreaking.

“It will be difficult without him,” he said.

India’s Muslim scholars have been urging people to exercise restraint and adhere to health protocols. Some states have restricted large gatherings and are asking people to observe the holiday at home.

Meanwhile the pandemic’s economic fallout, which threw millions of Indians into financial hardship, has many saying they cannot afford to buy sacrificial livestock.

South Korean missing after fall while scaling Pakistani peak

ISLAMABAD (AP): A famous South Korean climber fell into a crevasse and went missing over the weekend in bad weather after scaling another mountain peak in northern Pakistan, a mountaineering official said Tuesday.

Kim Hong Bin was descending after having reached the 8,047-meter (26,400-foot) high Broad Peak in Pakistan’s north Karakoram Range on Sunday, said Karrar-Haidri, the secretary of the Pakistan Alpine Club.

With the summit, the 57-year-old Kim had scaled all of the world’s 14 highest summits, becoming the first person with disability to do so. In 1991, while climbing in Alaska, he suffered severe frostbite and had all his fingers amputated.

While descending from the peak with several other mountaineers on Sunday, Kim slipped and fell down the Chinese side of the mountain, according to Haidri.

“Since then no information is available about him,” the official said, adding that a search mission is being planned.

In Seoul, the Foreign Ministry said Pakistan has promised to send a helicopter to find Kim as soon as weather conditions allow the flight. Spokesman Choi Youngsam said China has also agreed to make efforts to locate the climber.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in — who had earlier issued a message congratulating Kim on scaling of the world’s 14 highest summits — said that he’ll pray for Kim’s safe return.

“There are some reports speculating his death, but the information is not clear and I’m

not abandoning hopes” that he’s still alive, Moon tweeted. “I’ll earnestly wait for the news of his safe return with my people to the end.”

Kim’s successes include world’s highest, Mount Everest on the China-Nepal border, and Pakistan’s K2, the second-highest, which like Broad Peak is also in the Karakoram Range. Disability never became a hurdle for Kim, Haidri said, and did not stand in the way of his passion.

The other mountaineers, who had in vain tried to find Kim, were safe and were descending amid bad weather. The South Korean Embassy in Islamabad was also organizing a search mission, he added.

“We do not want to speculate” on Kim’s fate, Haidri told The Associated Press, refusing to comment reports on Twitter that the climber had died.

Ghulam Muhammad, the owner of Blue Sky Expedition tour operating company who arranged the expedition for Kim, also confirmed an “unfortunate incident” when the South Korean was returning to base camp.

The organizers of the expedition were in contact with the family of the missing South Korean and any further information will be shared by his family or by the South Korean officials, he added.

Scores of mountaineers visit Pakistan every year to scale different mountains and peaks, located in the country’s scenic north. But the sport is dangerous, particularly when a sudden change in weather occurs.

CORONAVIRUS PRECAUTIONS & SAFETY TIPS

DON'T LOWER THE GUARD

LOCKDOWN HAS BEEN LIFTED, BUT UNFORTUNATELY, THE THREAT OF COVID-19 HAS NOT YET SUBSIDED.

As we adopt to the new normal, here is a reminder of the precautions you must take-

WEAR A MASK

Always wear a mask to prevent droplets from going outside

GET A FLU VACCINATION

Get your flu shot to develop an immune response before flu season begins, particularly if you have comorbidities

WASH YOUR HANDS

Wash your hands often, for about 20 seconds each with soap & carry a sanitizer

MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING

Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms' length) from other people

GET TESTED

Get tested if you have symptoms of COVID-19. Stay at home until you get the result.

COVER YOUR MOUTH & NOSE WHILE SNEEZING, OR COUGHING

Before stepping outside, make sure to carry a handkerchief or a packet of tissues.

FOLLOW PRECAUTIONS BEFORE STEPPING OUT

Carry your sanitizer, water bottle and, most importantly, avoid crowded areas.

CHECK YOUR TEMPERATURE

Monitor your temperature on regular basis

Chinese pop star dumped by brands over sex complaint

BEIJING (AP): A popular Chinese-Canadian singer, Kris Wu, has lost endorsement and other deals with at least 10 brands including Porsche and Bulgari after a teen-ager accused him of having sex with her while she was drunk.

The former member of Korean boy band EXO denied the accusation, which prompted an outpouring of supportive comments for the woman online and criticism of Wu.

"There was no 'groupie sex'! There was no 'underage'!" Wu said on his social media account, which has 52 million followers. "If there were this kind of thing, please everyone relax, I would put myself in jail!"

The backlash after the accusation appeared on the internet portal NetEase reflects the growing willingness of Chinese women to speak up about abuses in a male-dominated society.

Brands cut ties with Wu the next day. They are acutely sensitive to public opinion after the ruling Communist Party stirred up anger at shoe and clothing brands in retaliation for Western reports of human rights abuses in the mostly Muslim region of Xinjiang in the northwest.

In addition to Porsche and Bulgari, brands including Tuborg Beer and China's Tencent Video and Master Kong Ice Tea scrapped endorsement, appearance and other deals with Wu. Lancome said its contract with Wu ended last month.

Louis Vuitton said it suspended a contract with Wu. Some comments left on websites criticized the company for not dropping him outright.

The woman told NetEase that when she was 17, Wu encouraged her to drink too much at a party and she woke up in his bed.

"I hate it so much that my teeth itch," she was quoted as saying. "I hate myself even more, hate it so much that I want to commit suicide."

The woman said other women told her Wu seduced them, sometimes when they were under 18, with promises of jobs and other opportunities. There was no indication any were under China's

tion. Wu wrote he met the woman at a friend's gathering on Dec. 5, 2020, but "I didn't force her to drink," and "there was not this sort of 'details' she describes."

"I didn't expect my silence to encourage these rumors, and I couldn't stand it!" Wu wrote. "There were a lot of people there that day who can bear witness."

In March, the ruling party targeted



age of consent of 14 or that Wu faces accusations of criminal misconduct.

"Get out of China," said a comment left under Wu's social media post.

Wu, known in Chinese as Wu Yifan, grew up in Guangzhou in southern China and in Vancouver, British Columbia. He performed with EXO in 2012-14 and then launched a solo career.

As an actor, he appeared in 2017's "XXX: Return of Xander Cage" and two Chinese box office successes, "Mr. Six" and "Journey to the West: The Demons Strike Back."

Both Wu, 30, and the woman said they asked police to investigate.

Wu said he waited to respond publicly to avoid interfering with legal ac-

H&M, Nike and other global brands over past expressions of concern about reports of forced labor in Xinjiang, where foreign governments say more than 1 million people have been confined in detention camps.

State TV called for a boycott of H&M, causing sales in China to plunge. Other official media criticized Adidas, Nike, Zara, Burberry and New Balance. More than 30 Chinese singers and actors pulled out of endorsement contracts with H&M, Nike and Adidas.

The ruling party claims credit for improving women's status in China but has tried to suppress the "#MeToo" movement as a potential source of political unrest.



HAPPY GAL! The actress, Mila Kunis is all smiles when spotted behind the scenes of her new movie, Luckiest Girl Alive, in Toronto.

Amitabh Bachchan to recite poem for 'Chehre'



MUMBAI, JUL 20 (PTI): Megastar Amitabh Bachchan is set to recite a poem for his upcoming mystery thriller "Chehre".

The 78-year-old actor will shoot the special video on Monday. The poem has been penned by "Chehre" director RumiJafry.

In April this year, composers Vishal-Shekhar had recorded the orchestral rendition of the title track with 107 musicians in Prague.

"Chehre" producer AnandPandit said Bachchan will now lend his voice and "add another dimension altogether to the track."

"He is a perfectionist and everything he does, be it a small movement before the camera, an action sequence, a close-up, a song he

has to hum, or just be silent, he gives the moment his all. "I am looking forward to seeing how he delivers the poem because it is going to be a once in a lifetime experience," Pandit said in a statement.

Bachchan has previously recited poems of SahirLudhianvi and JavedAkhtar for his films "KabhiKabhie" (1976) and "Silsila" (1981), respectively.

"Chehre" also stars EmraanHashmi, Annu-Kapoor, Krystle D'Souza, DhritimanChatterjee, RaghubirYadav, SiddhanthKapoor and Rhea Chakraborty. The film was set to release theatrically in April, but the makers pushed the date due to the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

Javier Bardem's mother, Spanish actor PilarBardem dies at 82

LOS ANGELES, JUL 20 (PTI): Veteran Spanish actor-activist PilarBardem, mother of Oscar winner Javier Bardem, has died due to the complications from lung disease not related to COVID-19. She was 82.

According to Deadline, the Goya Award-winning actor, known for her work across Spanish theatre, television and films, passed away on Saturday at the Ruber Hospital in Madrid.

In a statement written in Spanish, PilarBardem's children -- Monica, Carlos and Javier -- thanked the veteran's fans and well-wishers for showering her with love throughout her life.

"We want to share the news that PilarBardem, our mother, our example, has died. She departed in peace and without suffering, surrounded by the love of her family.

"We know the love and admiration many felt for her, both in Spain and beyond, for her work as an actress and as a fighter who always stood in solidarity. We truly appreciate that love for our mother with all our hearts. Thank you from her children, Carlos, Monica, and Javier," the statement, shared by Carlos on his Twitter page, read.

To the world audience, PilarBardem is best known for her work on 1995's "Nadie hablara de nosotros cuando hayamos muerto" ("Nobody Will Speak of Us When We're Dead"), which won eight Goya awards, including her best supporting actress nod.

She was also known for her political and social activism, including campaigning to improve conditions for actors and against the 2003 war in Iraq.

Javier Bardem's wife, actor Penelope Cruz, who worked in four films with her mother-in-law -- "Entre Rojas", "Live Flesh", "Don't Tempt Me", and documentary "Hecuba, un sueño de pasión" -- also paid tributes to the cinema veteran with a photo from Pedro Almodóvar's "Live Flesh".

My dearest Pilar, I look at this photo and wonder what our reaction would've been if someone would've told at this moment all the marvellous plans destiny had in store for us beyond the big screen, she wrote.

You were always so good to me. I couldn't have dreamed of having a better mother-in-law. Thank you for all the love that you've given us, your children, grandchildren, family, and friends. You have given me so much. Thank you for always standing by those who needed it the most and for raising your voice against injustice," Cruz added.

Actor Antonio Banderas said Spain's theatres and films have lost a "revered" performer.

PilarBardem has left us. The stages and movie theaters in Spain have lost a revered actress. My heart is with her family during this difficult time. A strong hug for Carlos, Monica, and Javier," he wrote on Instagram.

Honoured to play doctor on screen for first time: Ayushmann Khurrana on 'Doctor G'

MUMBAI, JUL 20 (PTI): Actor AyushmannKhurrana says he is excited to start the filming for his upcoming movie "Doctor G" as the campus comedy-drama will make him relive memories of his hostel life. Directed by AnubhutiKashyap, the film also stars RakulPreet Singh and Shefali Shah, both playing doctors.

Khurrana, who plays DrUday Gupta in the film, said the story of "Doctor G" is extremely close to his heart. He is currently in Bhopal to shoot for the Jungle Pictures-backed project.

"The subject of 'Doctor G' is very close to me. Considering the lockdown restrictions, we all have been waiting to start shooting the film and we are glad that the day has finally arrived. It's an honour to portray a doctor on screen for the first time," Khurrana said in a statement. The 36-year-old Chandigarh-born actor said the film will allow him to relive "memories of being a student and living the hostel life."

Aries: Where you are is a good place, Aries. But, who's to say the road isn't uphill from here? The cards are urging you to be mindful of the new opportunities that are being presented to you. Despite how they appear on the outside, they come with the promise of growth and expansion. So, make the most of what you have manifested into your physical reality as you keep in mind the mantra 'slow and steady wins the race'.

Tip: Be mindful of the new work opportunities that are being presented to you.

Taurus:

Often, we start off with a certain idea. However, as we go along, the given idea no longer resonates with us. It's okay to feel disenchanted, beautiful. It's okay to feel like your entire life is falling apart in front of your eyes. Honour what's taking place right now as an opportunity to look within and realign. Chances are, you haven't strayed too far from the path. A few adjustments here and there will help you get to that place you aspire to.

Tip: Honour the disenchantment as an opportunity to pause and look within.

Gemini:

This chapter of your life is bringing a sense of newfound freedom with it. You know what you are here to do and you won't shy away from achieving it. Tuesday sees you

taking a step in the right direction with the inner knowing that slow and steady wins the race. Those who have recently planted the seeds of the new are being reminded of the importance of consistency. Show up for what you love every single day even if it feels overwhelming sometimes.

Tip: It's time to take a step in the right direction, Gemini.

Cancer:

It's all about hope and infinite possibilities in the Cancer HQ. It doesn't matter how many times you have had your heart broken. You're willing to show up for who and what you love despite the risk this entails—and that's what makes this chapter of your life oh-so-beautiful! Yes, there are certain things that are on hold at the moment. There are relationships that feel like they aren't going anywhere. Instead of trying to control the external, turn your gaze inwards and focus on finding that inner alignment.

Tip: It's time to show up for who and what you love despite the risk this entails.

Leo:

Living somebody else's dream is safe. It's comfortable. There's not much to lose if everything goes downhill. Showing up for what you love, on the other hand, can be tricky. Can you imagine what you could potentially put at stake for this? Have the courage to show up for the big dream nonetheless, as you resolve the inner conflict.

What the cards want you to remember is that you are loved and supported every day, in every way.

Tip: Resolve that inner conflict and show up for what you love today.

Virgo:

It's been a roller coaster ride, Virgo, and quite frankly, you are exhausted. Let go of the need to have everything under control. Let go of the need to do-do-do. Remembering that you have nothing to prove to anybody will help you go easy on yourself. What you want to make time for today: Zen rituals that help you decompress. Consider staying indoors with your favourite self-help book and your furry friend(s) in tow.

Tip: Make time for Zen rituals today.

Libra:

It's not just about what you say, but about how you say it too. Tap into the gift of the gab, Libra (which is one of your strongest suits). Make a strong case for what you stand for and how you would like to be supported. The right dose of assertiveness and compassion will help you make a lasting impact on the other person/organisation. Remember, cycles in our lives keep repeating themselves until we learn important soul lessons.

Tip: Speak your truth. That's all!

Scorpio:

Here's the thing, Scorpio: we keep repeating patterns in our lives until we learn the soul lessons we're meant to. What are your circumstances teaching you today? How and where do you need to be mindful of your actions? The truth is, you won't receive the support you need until you make yourself vulnerable. So, express your desires to the other(s) in the manner that you feel called to as you let go of unrealistic expectations.

Tip: Make yourself vulnerable.

Sagittarius:

A love like this is rare to come by, Sagittarius. Honour what you have been given and nurture it with tenderness. As you do, let go of any and all expectations. The more you allow the other person to be who they are, the easier it will be for you to co-exist. Archers who have felt like their relationship has been on hold due to external circumstances will notice steady movement in the right direction as well.

Tip: Trust the flow, beautiful.

Capricorn:

Motivational author and speaker Brene Brown famously said, "People who wade into discomfort and vulnerability and tell the truth about their stories are the real badasses." Your thoughts exactly, Capricorn. July 2021 sees

you breaking past the illusion and letting go of the fears. There's never been a better time to embrace your truth. There has never been a better time to live in alignment with sacred purpose. What the Universe wants you to know: you are ready to manifest opportunities that will help you progress on your path.

Tip: It's time to live your truth, beautiful.

Aquarius:

You could stick to the rulebook and follow everything to a tee, but where's the fun in that? Reinvention is the name of the game, Aquarius, and it requires you to let go of your idea of who you are and who you need to be. Change can feel uncomfortable in the beginning as change often does. Don't let that stop you from stripping away the false and breaking past the illusion.

Tip: It's time to reinvent yourself, beautiful.

Pisces:

What if we said that there is more than one way out of the maze? What if we said that you are the only person standing in your way? Explore the many options available to you, Pisces. As you do, let go of the outmoded beliefs. Remembering that the Universe is supporting you every day and in every way will help take that metaphorical leap of faith.

Tip: What would you do if you knew that you are supported in every way?