



**KARAN JOHAR TO MAKE A
FILM ON LAWYER-ACTIVIST C
SANKARAN NAIR
PG.08**

**LET'S HAVE SOME EXPERTS AS
FIRST-RESPONDERS TOO
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pg 08**



SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Positivity rate climbs to 24% as testing remains low in Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 30 JUN:**
Sikkim recorded more than 200 cases in a day after a 15-day breather today with 220 new cases being reported in the last 24 hours. This is the first time since 15 June, when 209 new cases were recorded, that daily cases have crossed the double century mark. There was a time when Sikkim used to average barely 800 tests per day, but when the second wave was at its peak, this was ramped up to close to 4,000 tests. The number of daily tests have ebbed since, and although a reasonably respectable 901 samples were screened yesterday, the numbers should ideally be higher since infections have not come down to a level which justify less intensive testing.

port of Covid-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department [covering the last 24 hours] at 8AM this morning, 220 new cases were detected in the State from the screening of 901 samples giving Sikkim a test positivity rate of 24.40%. The Centre, it may be mentioned here, has recommended strict containment guidelines for areas reporting more than 10% test positivity rate. This is an incomplete guideline since there should also a baseline on how many tests should be conducted given the population covered for 10% and above to be considered high. Meanwhile, Covid also claimed two more lives in Sikkim in the last 24 hours, taking Sikkim's COVID death toll to 307. A patient each died at

STNM Hospital and Central Referral Hospital in the past 24 hours. This is the sixth COVID death reported here in the past three days. The only consolation offered today is from the statistic that the number of recoveries continued to remain higher than new cases today as well with 260 more formerly Covid-positive people making full recoveries and getting discharged from home isolation. Of the 20,544 confirmed cases of Covid detected in the State thus far, 17,962 have already recovered, 252 migrated from the State, 307 have died [171 in the second wave], leaving Sikkim with 2,023 active cases at present. The number of patients in ICU and hospitals has also thankfully stayed low of late. While

there were only 17 more patients admitted to hospital, there are 1,928 Covid-positive people in home or facility isolation suggesting that they have either no symptoms or are only mildly symptomatic and hence on their way to recovery. There are seven Covid patients in ICU at STNM Hospital and CRH at present. New cases remain high in East and South Sikkim which are also the two most populated districts of the State. Of the new cases, 102 were reported in East District, 88 in South District and 30 in West Sikkim. There were no new cases reported from North district. A total of 144 new cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 562 samples and 76 in rapid antigen testing of 337 samples.

CM chairs meetings with UDHD and Power Dept



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 30 JUN:**
Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang chaired two individual meetings with the Urban Development Department and the Power Department in the presence of Ministers, Secretaries, Chief Engineers and other officials at Samman Bhawan today, a press release from the Chief Minister's Office informs. In the first meeting, the officials of UDD presented a detailed report and gave a comprehensive presentation of the current projects, finances, manpower management and upcoming projects and schemes. The Chief Minister also inquired about the progress of work in the Gangtok and Namchi Smart City project and was briefed about it by the concerned officials. They also expressed several grievances and issues regarding office space, licensing and other internal matters of the department which needs to be addressed. The Chief Minister also put forth his sug-

gestions and directed the officials to take necessary steps for smooth completion of works, besides his concerns towards cleanliness, hygiene and sanitation of the cities, towns across the state. Similarly, in the second meeting with the Power Department, the concerned officials presented a brief overview of financial expenses, revenue and progress of the work under their respective charge. They provided a detailed presentation about the projects and schemes, including the Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Scheme (DDUGJY) and SAUBHAGYA scheme and also updated the Chief Minister about the current work under the department like pre-paid meters, power share allocation etc. They also put forth their grievances and requirement. The Chief Minister shared his suggestions towards imparting more facilities to the general public and urged the department to expedite the renewal, repair and replacement of transformers, besides many other concerns.

Protesting ad-hoc teachers meet Edu Secy, Dept refuses to give in

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 30 JUN:**
Protesting ad-hoc teachers met the Secretary, Education Department, Anil Raj Rai, today to resolve the issue of re-interview but the meeting was not fruitful. The teachers had also met Additional Chief Secretary, Education Department, GP Upadhyaya on 29 June. A section of ad-hoc teachers who had passed interviews held last year are protesting the Education Department's decision to make them sit for interviews again for extension of their service. They have demanded that the Department

withdraw its circular issued on 28 June which states that after 30 June 2021 all appointments of ad-hoc teachers would be made via an interview. The Education De-

partment has said that it will not change its decision to hold interviews for ad-hoc teacher appointment and this group of teachers will have to sit for an interview again.

Following the meeting, the teachers said that they want to meet the Chief Minister and waited outside the Secretariat till evening before finally dispersing.

DAMS IN
SIKKIM:
A BOON OR
A BANE

Join eminent environmentalists
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the "river talk" of Sikkim and
North Bengal hills.

#TeestaMattersToUs

DATE: 04 JULY
TIME: 2PM ONWARDS
MEDIUM: GOOGLE MEET

Link to register
<https://surveyheart.com/form/60d94e1087d5d852cefb155d>



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The country cannot forget the services rendered by the unsung heroes who have done excellent work in the field of Disaster Management.

— Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

Saluting the selfless service to humanity

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Any Indian individual or organization may apply

Awards to be announced on 23rd January 2022

Last date to apply 31st August 2021

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**CONTACT
SUMMIT
TIMES
REPORTERS
SINGTAM
8170070813
MANGAN/
DIKCHU
9832612485/
9434011213
GANGTOK
8116388176
9832424750
8016270440
NAMCHI
9832048410**

Woman gets new lease of life at Apollo Proton Cancer Centre

GANGTOK, 30 JUN:

A team of doctors at Apollo Proton Cancer Centre, the first Proton Therapy Centre in South Asia & the Middle East successfully performed two complex and complicated surgeries on a patient at the same time.

India's first-of-its-kind Mega prosthesis Fixation for femur (thigh bone) and Laparoscopic Radical nephrectomy to remove a cancerous kidney as a single stage surgery through a Multimodal approach on a 54-year-old woman from Assam, giving her a new lease of life.

Jyoti (name changed), from Assam had sustained fracture of her left thigh bone and suffered with a trivial injury two months ago and was completely bedridden. She was taken to orthopedic doctor for treatment, wherein he saw unusual symptoms of bone tumor. To evaluate her condition, she visited Apollo

Proton Cancer Centre on June 13, 2021 completely immobile, where a biopsy was done. Her report confirmed that she had a 4th stage kidney cancer and cancer cells travelled to the thigh bone.

As a novel attempt we performed two procedures on the patient simultaneously. Both the procedures were completed in six hours. The knee joint containing the Tumor was removed with wide margins and replaced with a mega prosthesis. The patient also underwent a laparoscopic Kidney removal using Key hole surgery which was performed through 3 tiny 5mm holes in the abdomen in the same sitting with minimal blood loss. In view of the local nodal spread in the CT scan, comprehensive nodal clearance was also performed in order to give a better survival rate," said Dr Srivathsan Ramani, Consultant Surgical Oncology & Robotic Surgery at Apollo Proton

Cancer Centre. After the procedure the patient was mobilized the very next day and made to walk after almost three months

Speaking during the event Dr. Vijay Kishore Reddy, Senior Consultant Orthopaedic surgeon, Apollo hospitals said, "In this current pandemic era, patients with cancer often present late due to travel restrictions and fear of COVID. This has led to undue delay in diagnosis and treatment, resulting in late presentation of tumor at its final stages that has spread everywhere. Early detection through a multi-modal approach and treatment is the key for tackling this deadly disease.

Dr .Vishnu Ramanujan, Ortho Oncologist at Apollo Proton Cancer Centre, said "Looking at the age and condition of patient, we consulted and planned for surgical resection of the tumor in the thigh bone and the re-

moval of the affected kidney using a minimally invasive surgery technique through tiny incisions instead of large opening for less blood loss and quicker recovery."

Treatment for kidney cancer or renal cell carcinoma requires optimal surgical control of the primary tumor managing of the spread metastases to other parts of the body. This kind of spread is rarely seen in RCC (renal cell carcinoma) and accounts only for around 7% of all patients with metastasis. Anaesthetizing a kidney cancer patient with Bone metastasis is a real challenge due to the risk of blood clot in the blood vessels that can cause lung attack (Pulmonary embolism) during and immediately after surgery.

Dr. Prathap C Reddy, Chairman, Apollo Hospitals said "Here at Apollo Proton Cancer Centre, we are setting trends in the field of oncology with our breakthrough surgeries and the uniqueness of

it. This achievement by the Clinicians team is a matter of great pride not only to Apollo Group, but also to the whole healthcare industry. Patient's faith on our doctors has built us and the entire team is working towards strengthening it by innovating and providing world class healthcare at your reach.

Speaking during the press meet, Ms. Preetha Reddy, Executive Vice Chairperson, Apollo Hospitals Group, said, "The multimodal approach allows for earlier mobilization, lesser hospital stay and reduced post-operative morbidities. Both the procedures being done in the same sitting of surgery allows to reduce costs drastically. This is possible only with multimodal management where highly specialized doctors in their individual fields collaborate for optimum patient care to achieve excellent functional and oncological outcomes."

Škoda Kushaq launched in India



SUMMIT REPORT

NEW DELHI, 30 JUN:

Škoda Auto's renewed commitment to India takes a strong stride forward as the company opened bookings and announced the prices for its most-anticipated SUV under the India 2.0 Project –Škoda Kushaq. Since its world premiere in India earlier this year, Kushaq has created a strong presence and stands out as an entirely new ŠKODA that's made in India and for India. Škoda Kushaq will be offered at anex-showroom price starting at Rs

10.49-lakh nationwide.

With a robust and muscular appearance, the Kushaq is perfectly tailored to the taste of Indian SUV buyers. The Kushaq comes with numerous active and passive safety features along with ESC as standard across all variants.

With the Kushaq launch, the company will penetrate deeper in the country by expanding its network to Tier II and III cities. Škoda Auto India currently has 120 sales touchpoints in 85 cities and plans to expand to

150 touchpoints by end of 2021.

Every Kushaq comes with 4 years/ 1,00,000 km warranty, which can be extended up to 6 years / 1,50,000 km. The price of ŠKODA Kushaq fixed depending to its variants: Active (Rs 10,49,999), Ambition (Rs 12,79,999 and Rs 14,19,999), and Style (Rs 14,59,999, Rs 15,79,999, Rs 16,19,999 and Rs 17,59,999). The Škoda Kushaq will be available in 5 colour options: Honey Orange, Tornado Red, Candy White, Reflex Silver and Carbon Steel.

Vaccination centres down by 82% in Assam over short supply from Centre

GUWAHATI, 30 JUN [PTI]: Short and erratic vaccine supply by the Centre has forced the BJP-led government in Assam to cut down the number of operational vaccination centres by almost 82% from over 2,000 centres to a little over 300 on Wednesday. The supply shortage has derailed the mega vaccination drive which began across the country on June 21.

While Assam administered a record 3.74 lakh doses across over 2,000 centres to kickstart the mega vaccine drive on June 21, the number of vaccine centres have since been reduced - to just 353 on Wednesday and till 4 PM today, only about 10,000 people were inoculated.

"On June 21, when we launched the enhanced vaccination drive, the target was to inoculate about 30 lakh people in ten days if the centre sustained the vaccine supply. The plan - to vaccinated

three lakh people each day - was only successful for three days but it slowly got derailed due to a shortage of vaccine supply. We have shown that we can actually vaccinate over three lakh people in a day but we need a smooth supply of vaccines for that," said a senior health department official who did not want to be named.

On June 24, Assam's daily inoculation had fallen to 1.58 lakh doses. On June 27, Assam could administer slightly above 10,000 doses.

The vaccination slowdown corresponds to an inadequate and erratic vaccine supply from the Centre.

According to the Assam Health Department data available with NDTV, before the mega drive began, Assam received 2.90 lakh doses of Covishield and 20,000 doses of Covaxin on June 19.

Again, between June 22 and

June 24, the state received 6.27 lakh doses of Covishield and 29,000 doses of Covaxin.

But since then, vaccine doses have not reached the state and Assam is running the drive with whatever vaccine is in stock.

According to the government data, the state had received only over 14.2 lakh doses for the special drive between June 19 and June 24 from the Centre. The state had some doses left from a previous stock.

In the last 10 days, Assam could administer only about 16 lakh doses - one lakh above the halfway mark of its target.

The crisis is reflecting on the ground. For the past four days, Jyotirman Kalita has been looking for a vaccine for his father but with no luck.

"I am looking for a vaccine for my father who is a government employee. His office has given a circular that he should get vaccinated or his salary will

be withheld. But there is no vaccine at the centres and when I ask, they say that even they do not know when it will be available," Mr Kalita told NDTV.

Assam has asked all its departments to review the status of vaccination of its frontline government employees before the salaries from the "current month onward" are disbursed.

During the first three days of the mega vaccine drive, when Assam was able to meet the target of three lakh doses a day, both Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and Health Minister Keshab Mahanta had posted about the success of the vaccination drive on social media. But now, the government has no official word on the vaccine slowdown in the state.

Assam has administered about 72.21 lakh doses so far. Only 12.20 lakh beneficiaries have been fully vaccinated with two doses.

Bengal launches Student Credit Card for loans upto Rs. 10 lakh

KOLKATA, 30 JUN

[NDTV]: Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee announced the launch of a credit card for students with a limit of ₹ 10 lakh today, meeting one of her key pre-election promises. A student -- aged upto 40 -- who has lived in Bengal for 10 years will be eligible for the card, which can be used to get a loan for higher studies in India or abroad. "No guarantor is needed for this loan. The state will stand guarantee," Ms Banerjee said at an online press conference, calling it a "unique scheme".

Loan will be available for undergraduate, postgraduate, doctoral and post-doctoral study in India or abroad, Ms Banerjee told reporters. It could also be available for students studying in coaching classes for competitive exams.

The loan can be taken for course fee, tuitions, hostel fee, books, study materials, computers or laptops, the Chief Minister said.

The loan can be taken from any bank -- government-run or private -- or

even cooperative organisations.

Any student taking a ₹ 10 lakh loan on the card will have 15 years to repay it.

"Students can apply online for this loan, it can even be in the middle of a course. After this, parents will not have to worry about the education of their children. Students need not be under pressure and run from pillar to post for an education loan," the Chief Minister said. "I hope that in the coming days, this loan will help the students fulfil their dreams. I'd ask my student friends to forget worrying about money and focus on their studies," she added.

The Bengal government is among the first to offer a student credit card. Bihar is in the process of organising it.

Currently, credit cards for students are only offered by some private banks, including ICI-Bank, HDFC Bank and Axis Bank.

The State Bank of India also offers a secured card against a fixed deposit of ₹ 5000.

Mizoram accuses Assam of encroachment as state border dispute escalates

AIZAWL, 30 JUN [PTI]:

Mizoram today accused Assam of encroaching upon its land in the Kolasib district, in a new escalation of the border dispute between the two Northeastern states.

Kolasib district's superintendent of police Vanlalfaka Ralte said that over a hundred officials and policemen led by Assam's Hailakandi district deputy commissioner and SP entered Mizoram's territory and has been camping there since Tuesday.

The area, locally known as Aitlang hnar (the source of river Aitlang), belongs to Mizoram and is about 5 km from Vairengte village in Kolasib which borders Assam's Karimganj district, he said.

The residents of Vairengte practice plantations in the area, which they claim belongs to Mizoram since time immemorial, Mr Ralte said.

A host of district officials and police personnel from Assam arrived and forcefully seized the area on Tuesday, he alleged.



"It is pure aggression by the neighbouring state as the area belongs to Mizoram. The local farmers were forced to flee for fear of being attacked by armed personnel," Mr Ralte, who is currently camping at the site, told news agency Press Trust of India.

Officials on the Assam side were not immediately available for comments on the matter.

On learning about the incident, district officials and policemen from Mizoram led by a sub-divisional officer rushed to the spot on Tuesday to take stock of the situation, Mr Ralte said.

Officials of both states held a discussion at the site on Tuesday but Assam officials refused to withdraw from the area, he alleged.

Residents of Vairengte, who rushed to

the site, were sent back home to prevent violence, the police officer said.

Kolasib's deputy commissioner H Lalthlangliana is also in the area.

Three districts of Mizoram - Aizawl, Kolasib and Mamit - share about a 164.6 km border with Assam's Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts.

The border dispute between the two neighbouring states is a long pending issue. Several dialogues held since 1995 to resolve the dispute yielded little result.

After a massive tussle in 2018, the state border row resurfaced in August last year. The matter further escalated in February and was defused after a series of parleys with the intervention of the Centre.

NEW DELHI, JUN 30

(PTI): Talismanic India captain Sunil Chhetri has been recommended for this year's Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna, the country's highest sporting honour, by the All India Football Federation.

National women's football team striker Bala Devi, who is currently playing for Rangers in the Scottish Women's Premier League, has been recommended for the coveted Arjuna Award.

"We have recommended Sunil Chhetri for the Khel Ratna and Bala Devi for Arjuna Award," an official source told PTI on condition of anonymity.

"We have also recommended Gabriel Joseph for Dronacharya Award," the source added.

The 36-year-old Chhetri has been in tremendous form for the country and for his club Bengaluru FC in the last few years. He has played 118 international matches, scoring 74 goals, both Indian records.

He scored twice



against Bangladesh in the recent World Cup Qualifiers in Qatar to become the second highest international goal scorer among active footballers, ahead of Argentine maestro Lionel Messi.

He is, however, currently in the fourth spot with United Arab Emirates' Ali Mabkhout (76) and Messi (75) having overtaken him.

Chhetri is a recipient of Padma Shri (2019), the country's fourth highest civilian honour, and the Arjuna Award (2011).

Since making debut in 2005, Chhetri has been part of Indian team that won the AFC Challenge Cup (2008), SAFF Champi-

onships (2011, 2015), Nehru Cup (2007, 2009, 2012), Intercontinental Cup (2017, 2018). He also played in the 2011 and 2019 Asian Cup.

The 31-year-old Devi, on the other hand, became the first Indian woman footballer to play for a top-flight PROFESSIONAL league in Europe when she joined Rangers of Glasgow in January last year.

She has played more than 50 matches for the country since 2010 and will play an important role in the national team during the AFC Women's Asian Cup to be hosted by the country next year.

CONTACT

SUMMIT TIMES REPORTERS

SINGTAM

8170070813

MANGAN/ DIKCHU

9832612485/

9434011213

GANGTOK

8116388176

9832424750

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KUTSE SHEGU



terfly Fly Over.

We would also like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude towards all those who stood by us during our time of bereavement and to thank you all for your kind support and concern.

Passong Gensapa 8918153622

Kuentsel Gensapa 7679217911

Ranjana Chakraborty 9641927953

CM's message on Doctors' Day

GANGTOK, 30 JUN [IPR]: On the occasion of National Doctors' Day, the Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang has extended his warm greetings and heartfelt gratitude to all the doctors of Sikkim.

In his message, the Chief Minister stated that doctors are an integral part of society and play a vital role in our lives. They devote themselves to the service of others and stay true to their

oath, dedicating themselves to their duty regardless of the challenges. He added that there have been instances of doctors playing a major role in the past with the COVID-19 pandemic being no different.

Further, he stated that since last year doctors have been tirelessly serving the people amidst the pandemic.

"They are indispensable and are at the heart of our fight

against COVID-19", he added. Expressing his sympathies on the unfortunate demise of doctors throughout the country, he offered his sincere prayers and gratitude for their service. He asserted that "words are not enough to express how grateful we are for their contribution and assure to stand by them and extend every possible support". He also expressed his gratitude to all the nurses, health workers

and support staff for their service.

He added that the Government recognizes their role and contribution on this special day and reiterated that the sacrifice and effort put forth by the doctors are invaluable. "We strongly believe that we will flourish as a progressive state only when our healthcare ecosystem becomes accessible to everyone", the Chief Minister stressed.

Road carries landslides into Rimba

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 30 JUN:

Road-cutting work, which the villagers are convinced, was being carried out recklessly, is being blamed for having triggered a landslide at Rimba village in South Sikkim. Surface runoff from this road washed away land of the villagers and also swept away a cowshed at around 7am this morning.

A 2km road from



17Mile to Rimba at Rayong Tinkitam GPU under Barfung constituency, was awarded in 2018-19 and cutting work had been underway for the past few months, it is informed.

The villagers are now convinced that given the intensity of the rains, another, bigger landslide is inevitable if corrective measures are not undertaken immediately.

After losing mother to Covid, Chennai woman now running 'Oxygen Auto'

CHENNAI, 30 JUN [NDTV]: 36-year-old Seetha Devi is helping many breathe. Rechristened Chennai's 'Oxygen Woman', Ms Devi lost her mother to Covid. Since then, she took up the responsibility to help people who need oxygen. Her blue auto-rickshaw, fitted with an oxygen cylinder, has been a lifesaver for many. She waits outside the Rajiv Gandhi Hospital offering refuge to patients in need of oxygen till they got a bed.

Often, she also lends her cylinder to ambulances with patients that ran out of oxygen.

"We saved more than three hundred patients gasping for breath that time, no questions were asked, no money was received," says Seetha Devi

about the deadly second wave when hospitals in Chennai were short of oxygen and beds with serpentine queues of ambulances waiting with critical patients.

A daughter of a porter who grew up on the streets of Chennai is now a social worker helping street children with education. It is a personal loss that triggered Seetha to serve Covid patients through her 'oxygen auto'.

She had lost her 65-year-old mother R Vijaya on May 1 for want of oxygen. They struggled for around 12 hours through the night in ambulances at the Rajiv Gandhi Medical College Hospital. Though she got a bed with a ventilator at the Stanley Hospital later, it was too late. She died

after five hours.

This is when she decided to offer lifesaving oxygen through her auto at the same place where her mother struggled for breath. Ms Devi added, "After my mother died, I decided none should die for want of oxygen. Now there is an urgent need for oxygen. It's the decision I took that day".

Sharing how the oxygen auto helped her elderly mother get stabilised before medical help, one woman said, "We have been struggling for oxygen since the previous day but we could not get it. We could not get an ambulance though they said it would come in two or three hours. We suffered a lot. Thank you so much. We will not forget this".

Though the oxygen crisis is over at hospitals for the last few weeks, Ms Devi continues to help discharged patients requiring oxygen support to get back home. She also helps with the transport of patients from the hospital to Covid care centres. She has bought a few more cylinders and oxygen concentrators to help those being treated at home.

In Chennai's Anna Nagar area, Vignesh's father is back home after in hospital for a month. The family is in financial distress after spending around ₹ 2 lakh on treatment during the peak crisis time. Ms Devi has given them an oxygen concentrator and a cylinder for free to make sure nothing would go wrong for his father.

"They are life savours for us to be honest. We can't afford to buy at this time two lakhs or a lakh and sixty-five thousand for a concentrator. Before that, I was paying per day ₹1,000 every day for a concentrator, it has been like twelve or fifteen thousand," Mr Vignesh added.

While the second wave shook up the health care system and lefts hundreds gasping for breath, Seetha Devi has continued to provide timely oxygen intervention so many could have a second chance at life.

As part of the LottolandAaj Ka Sitara series, we feature ordinary citizens and their extraordinary actions. Lottoland will support Seetha Devi's cause with a cash incentive of ₹1 lakh.

India adds 45,951 cases, 817 fresh fatalities

NEW DELHI, JUNE 30 (PTI): India logged 45,951 new coronavirus infections taking the total tally of COVID-19 cases to 3,03,62,848, while daily fatalities remained below 1,000 for the third consecutive day, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Wednesday.

The death toll rose to 3,98,454 with 817 fresh fatalities, the lowest in 81 days.

According to the data published at 7 am, cumulatively 33.28 crore vaccine doses have been administered so far under the Nationwide Vaccination Drive.

The active cases further declined to 5,37,064 comprising 1.77 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate has improved to 96.92 per cent, the data updated at 8 am showed.

As many as 19,60,757 tests were conducted on Tuesday taking the total cumulative tests conducted so far for detection of COVID-19 in the country to 41,01,00,044 while the daily positivity rate was recorded at 2.34 per cent.

It has been less than five per cent for 23 consecutive days, the ministry said, adding the weekly positivity rate has declined to 2.69 per cent.

Recoveries continue to outnumber daily new cases for the 48th consecutive day. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 2,94,27,330 and the case fatality rate stands at 1.31 per cent, the data stated.

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.

The 817 new fatalities include 231 from Maharashtra, 118 from Tamil Nadu and 104 from Karnataka.

A total of 3,98,454 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 1,21,804 from Maharashtra, 34,929 from Karnataka, 32,506 from Tamil Nadu, 24,971 from Delhi, 22,577 from Uttar Pradesh, 17,679 from West Bengal and 16,033 from Punjab.

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

Sikkim-Darj merger a publicity stunt by GRC: SKM



SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 30 JUN:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha party lambasted the Gorkha Rashtriya Congress [GRC] today for raising the issue of Sikkim-Darjeeling merger. Without any mandate or support of the people and after being rejected by people of Darjeeling on this issue, GRC has only been raising this issue to grab some headlines, the party has said. The party has further warned GRC leadership not to mislead the people on such an issue.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, SKM spokesperson, CP Sharma condemned GRC for raising the issue and alleged that GRC is only after publicity.

He added that trust of the people of Sikkim is the greatest strength of SKM and it is working to fulfill their hopes and aspirations.

Sikkim has been protected by Article 371F of the constitution and the

Centre would also not take any wrong decision against Sikkim and its people, he said.

"We give full support to Darjeeling and its people and their constitutional demand but GRC should not do politics on such issues to disrupt peace in Sikkim," Mr Sharma said. He also condemned the recent statement of GRC president, Bharat Dong that no one wants to live in a place like Sikkim. On the same, he asserted that the statement is highly condemnable and demanded that the GRC president apologise and issue a clarification.

During its days in the opposition and now as the ruling party, SKM has never supported and would never support the issue of Sikkim-Darjeeling merger, said SKM spokesperson and Political Secretary to CM, Jacob Khaling.

He said that a handful of persons who do not have any mandate or

support are raising this issue for their political benefits. He added that SKM would debate or respond to them on this issue if they had any support but the party does not want to respond as it would only give them more publicity.

"I want to tell the people, intellectuals and opposition parties in Sikkim that it is not an issue of concern and so we should ignore this subject as it is something that can never happen," Mr Khaling said.

Mr Khaling further warned the GRC leadership not to spoil the relationship between Sikkim and Darjeeling. Sikkim has always stood with Darjeeling, its people and their legitimate demand but will never accept this issue of Darjeeling-Sikkim merger, he added.

He stated that those who say that the Chief Minister of Sikkim has given a positive response on the GRC demand, should provide proof for their claim.

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KOLKATA OFFICE:

Irshad Ali/ Imteeyaz. Synapse, 6, Madan Street, Mezzine – 2, 2nd floor. Kolkata – 700072. Ph. 033-22124348/ fax 033-22124337/ mob. 9830547774/ 983108397. E-mail: contact.synapse@gmail.com/ irshad_ali123@rediffmail.com

Sputnik V doses for transgenders in Bengaluru vaccine drive

BENGALURU, 30 JUN [PTI]: The clearance of the Moderna vaccine for limited emergency use will make it the fourth vaccine against coronavirus that will be available and used in India. The third vaccine to get approval - Russia's Sputnik V - has been soft-launched in different cities across the country as part of a pilot phase.

In Bengaluru, the Manipal Hospital held a vaccination camp for members of the transgender community where doses of Sputnik V were administered.

Divya Darshini, a physiotherapist who works for a community-based organisation, told NDTV, "For my vaccination, I was eagerly waiting for this vaccine - the Sputnik vaccine. The efficacy of this vaccine is more from what I have heard on social media and YouTube. Out of my own interest, I have taken this vaccine."

"There is a segment of the population that prefers to take Sputnik. The efficacy is around 92% and you complete the entire vaccination within 3 weeks' time, which is the least among vaccines avail-

able in the market," the hospital's Chief Operating Officer Karthik Rajagopal said.

"Less than four percent of the transgender community has been vaccinated. So when we looked at the stats, we believed that this is one community that probably needs to ramp up vaccinations," he said.

"Irrespective of what vaccine is used, the drive aims to get as many people vaccinated as possible," he added.

"We need as many vaccines as possible to cover a population of 1.3 billion people. No country will ever undertake such an exercise, probably other than China," Dr Satyanarayana Mysore, Head of Pulmonology, Manipal Hospital, told NDTV.

"Over the last six months, our hospital has been engaging with the LGBT community. We have cleared the misconceptions they have had. We have allayed the fears they had. This has been our motive - to be all-inclusive. We urge NGOs, corporate hospitals to join this kind of a campaign to vaccinate

them," Dr Satyanarayana Mysore, Head of Pulmonology, Manipal Hospital, told NDTV.

The private sector in Bengaluru has been actively involved in the vaccination campaign.

The eligible population for Covid-19 vaccination in the city is around 99 lakhs - 50 lakh doses have been administered so far.

The city's civic body BBMP said it is targeting almost one lakh vaccines a day in the capital city so that it is better protected by the time the third wave hits.

"The limited pilot soft-launch of the Sputnik V vaccine in India that was initiated by Dr. Reddy's in Hyderabad on May 14 has been successfully scaled up to Vizag, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, Chennai, Miryalaguda, Vijayawada, Baddi, Kolhapur, Kochi, Raipur, Chandigarh, Pune, Nagpur, Nashik, Coimbatore, Ranchi, Jaipur, Lucknow, and Patna. By the end of this final leg of the pilot phase, we aim to reach 28 cities in total," a statement from Dr Reddy's Laboratory - which is manufacturing the vaccine in India - said.

"DAMS IN SIKKIM BOON OR BANE?"

Affected citizens of Teesta (ACT) is organising a webinar on 04.07.2021

Eminent resource person joining us as guest

Mr. Jiten Yumnam
Secretary of Centre for Research and Advocacy (Indigenous peoples' human rights organization) Manipur

Mrs. Usha Lachungpa
Naturalist
Former Principal Chief Research Officer (WL) and Additional Director, Sikkim Biodiversity Board

Mr. Neeraj Vagholikar
Member of Kalpavriksh, a leading environmental non-profit organisation in the country, since 1998.

Moderator
Mr. Dawa Lhendup Lepcha

#Teesta matters to us

Date: 04.07.2021
Time: 2PM onwards
Medium: Google meet

Still Suicidal

Let's have some experts as first-responders too

28 June was a day of morbid events. On this day, Sikkim recorded eight avoidable [if we include Covid fatalities as avoidable] deaths. What should concern people, especially those who claim to be doing something for the mental health of people here, is the fact that suicides claimed more lives than Novel Coronavirus on this day.

Against the three lives claimed by Covid the day and one life lost to an accident, four lives were lost to suicides in Sikkim on the day. For those who thought that the number of suicides had gone down just because they are not being reported on a regular basis, this update should deliver a re-think. While two of the suicide victims were 22 years old, one was 55 and the fourth was a 60 year old. They were all males. Police records on the suicides include what the cops believe to be the reasons behind the suicides, but even the keenest police investigation will uncover only the final trigger or the last incident of consequence in the lives that ended in suicide. The reasons are obviously always an underlying mental condition which has either not received medical attention or has been misdiagnosed.

A State which boasts a “multi-speciality” hospital, a referral hospital, claims to have psychiatric divisions at district hospitals and a mental health programme which claims to have arranged help at the sub-division and PHC level, should have a policy in place which sees mental health workers join cops as first responders to every case of suicide. While the suicide rate in Sikkim is high, in absolute numbers, the count is low enough to allow for every case to also include, apart from the poorly informed police record, a detailed case file on each case of suicide by professionals with the training to analyse, record in medical terms and write up a detailed case history. While these reports will not save the lives already lost, they will help inform the State's future interventions to save lives at risk. This will also set up a proactive approach to combatting suicides which will be a welcome change the passive approach in which intervention is available only for those who show up for help. Mental health requires outreach and effective awareness.

Four deaths to suicide in a day is hopefully an aberration, but in these times of heightened stress and frequent trauma, it is not so any more. This aberration occurs too often, but beyond police records, there is no real understanding of the reasons. A suicide can never be really understood, explained or settled, but some informed record of each case could help notice a trend, find common threads and then plan an intervention. It is important that such “unnatural death” casualties are not allowed to join the poorly maintained statistics on suicides in Sikkim. But that is probably what will happen, and it will be in this detached insensitivity that someone in the future will find the reasons why Sikkim lost so many to suicides.

Admittedly, there was much chest beating here when Sikkim topped the nation in suicide rates and even politics sought to score some points off it. Shallow commentary followed for some time and some lip service was paid to the problem. And then, like always, nothing. Suicides continue being reported and the civil society, which can play an instrumental role in curbing suicides, continues to remain oblivious to its role. It is unlikely that the civil society will still respond. In a way, the situation is now so dire that it is already too late to work on theories to explain the trend; the situation is now critical and it is urgent to start caring more for those at risk of taking their own lives. In a way also, Sikkim has already wasted too much time waiting for experts to study the situation and offer explanations and solutions to its suicide challenge. It will be wasting even more time and sacrificing more lives if it waits for the civil society to measure up to the challenge. So, the only option left, like with most other challenges, is for the State Government to initiate a proactive policy intervention one of which is suggested above. Meanwhile, the Health Department could perhaps, in association with the Social Welfare Department and even RDD and UDD, prepare an effective awareness module to sensitise teachers, panchayats, municipal representatives etc on recognising and handling psychiatric symptoms triggered by stress, depression and trauma. Something similar should also be prepared for lay people so that there is social support available to deter suicidal thoughts among the young in time.

It is also important that the stigmastill associated with psychiatric help is ended because that, at the end of the day, is the only defence against the rash of suicides in Sikkim. Instead of blindsiding the obvious, the society at large needs to recognise that people are living in conditions much different from earlier times. They need special care and understanding.

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Parent-teacher relations were both strained and strengthened by the COVID-19 pandemic

BONNIE STELMACH
THECONVERSATION.COM

As school winds down for the summer, it is worth considering the past 16 months of pandemic schooling. As difficult as this time has been for schools and families, it provided an opportunity to ask: What insights into parent-teacher relations has the pandemic provided so far?

The adage “it takes a village to raise a child” was put to the test when the pandemic forced school closures beginning in spring 2020. Parents took on a role for which most were unprepared.

With the help of a doctoral student, I conducted a web-based survey in Alberta, then interviewed volunteer parents and teachers between June and August 2020.

We learned that the pandemic both strained and strengthened parent-teacher relations.

ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS?

As an educational researcher who focuses on parents' roles in schooling, I have observed a tendency to romanticize the dynamic. I've frequently heard: “It's all about relationships!” Yes, that's true, but that assumption doesn't consider that relationships are not always positive.

There is evidence, for example, that educators in Alberta feel they are increasingly working against parents rather than with them. We also know that events like natural disasters can bring people together.

When the pandemic forced school closures in March 2020 in Alberta, emergency remote teaching meant many parents were involved beyond monitoring children's progress.

OUR SURVEY FINDINGS

Findings from the Alberta study are based on collected data from 1,067 parent survey respondents, 566 teacher survey respondents and 10 parents and 10 teachers who were individually interviewed.

Forty-five per cent of parents reported their understanding of

the demands of teachers and their respect for them increased.

Among teachers, 74 per cent reported they knew their families better. The pandemic increased empathy and patience. Equally compelling however, was that 43 per cent of parents reported decreased interaction with teachers, and only 18 per cent reported improvements in their relationships with teachers.

INTERPRETING APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS

First, when we speak about the importance of relationships, we must remember that both parents and teachers make assumptions about the other that may be based on differing values and expectations, and incomplete or downright false information.

For instance, a common concern among teachers during the early stages of the pandemic was for the parents who were non-communicative. On survey comments and during interviews teachers said some parents were “ghosting” them. Parents admitted that they minimized time spent on school, or dropped out completely.

In response to questions about challenges experienced during school closures, we learned that there was confusion about who was performing expected roles — something psychologists have described as boundary ambiguity.

Central to the problem was that teachers were not sure how much to press families. And, parents felt that they had become the teacher but simultaneously realized they were unable to motivate and support their children the way teachers could.

“Parents aren't meant to be teachers,” were parents' common laments. Parents and their children fought. The intrusion of school in families' private spaces created tensions. Some parents dealt with the boundary intrusion by giving

up school to save the family dynamic. Teachers might not have realized that some families had to negotiate such trade-offs, assuming apathy drove parents away.

EROSION OF BOUNDARIES

Moreover, the erosion of the physical boundary between home and school meant that students were distracted by TV and video games and other leisure temptations. Parents realized that teachers not only have expertise, but a special power to focus students and motivate them to do schoolwork. Some children simply refused to complete work until a teacher was present on a screen. Role ambiguity resulted because there was a natural elevation of parents' roles in their children's learning without the status of the professional role.

In addition, teachers may assume they are communicating through reporting and interviews with parents who know their children better than they do. Parents and teachers discovered Zoom as a convenient way to have timely and meaningful discussions about children's learning during emergency remote teaching.

Having to sit beside their children and watch them complete school work, however, opened many parents' eyes to their children as learners. Many admitted that report card comments and parent-teacher interview discussions all of a sudden made sense. Without directly witnessing their children engaged with school, parents may not really know their children as students as teachers do.

INTO THE “NEXT NORMAL”

A common assumption is that effective parent-teacher relations depend primarily on parent-teacher interactions. Much of what happens between parents and children at home, however, can influence how parents and teachers ultimately engage or not. Parents may choose to protect their relationship

with their child by backing away from homework and other curricular activities.

They may value education, but value their family more. Perhaps it is worth teachers and parents discussing the parent-child or family dynamic in this particular context to determine whether and/or how parents can play a supportive role in their children's learning. Teachers cannot assume prescribing parent involvement in homework is a positive strategy, or that their refusal to participate means they are apathetic.

The pandemic has also offered an opportunity to reconsider traditional approaches to sharing children's progress such as report cards and once or twice-a-year parent-teacher interviews. The screen may provide parents with safety during virtual conferencing to ask more questions, to admit to not really understanding and to seek clarification.

INFORMING vs. COMMUNICATING

The pandemic clarified a distinction between informing parents and communicating with parents. While traditional practices like in-person parent-teacher conferences may continue to work for some, virtual conferencing may be more convenient, inviting and ultimately effective.

Finally, parents do teach, but their teaching unfolds organically within the context of family life. “Doing math” while baking cookies with a parent is positive for children; working on math problems with a parent may not be.

The nature of teachers' authority differs from that of parents. Thus, while parents and teachers are part of the village necessary to raise the child, they do not perform the same roles. It took a virus to help us see the value in honouring a division of labour.

[the writer is Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta]

Queer people's experiences during the pandemic include new possibilities and connections

Jessica Fields, James K Gibb & Sarah A. Williams
theconversation.com

Like much of Canada, many queer people have spent the last year at home, trying to keep safe in a world marked by risk and uncertainty.

For some queer people, time at home has meant time away from communities and friends who recognize and support their gender and sexual identities. For others, time at home has brought opportunities to build new queer communities online — communities that offer a sense of belonging and recognition.

Our team of student and faculty researchers at the University of Toronto Scarborough surveyed 366 queer people about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Survey responses indicate that living with family during the pandemic was significantly associated with elevated depression, anxiety and loneliness. This was particularly true for cisgender women and for non-binary or two-spirit participants.

To learn more about these experiences of depression, anxiety and loneliness, we also interviewed 46 of our survey respondents at length about the last year and a half. In those interviews, we heard about not only loneliness but also new connections that will shape their return to community and public life.

STRUGGLING TO RECEIVE SUPPORT

Our study is one of several that looks at the ways public health responses to the COVID-19 pandemic — especially social distancing and stay at home orders — may have especially adverse consequences for queer people's well-being and health.

This research consistently points to the ways intersecting structural and cultural inequalities shape COVID-19's impacts on queer people.

For example, COVID-19 threatens queer people's long-standing vulnerability to anxiety, depression and other mental health concerns. Older queer people may be especially vulnerable to loneliness and isolation because of already being twice as likely to live alone.

Like these studies, we have found that many young queer people have struggled to secure the support they need, particularly from their families.

Young queer people have less access to secure and stable housing under the best of circumstances (about 1 in 10 of our survey respon-

dents had experienced homelessness at some point in their life). During COVID-19 this has meant many young queer people have moved back in with families of origin.

Though these living arrangements may have afforded young people some stability in an uncertain time, that stability has come at a cost. As a Black, agender and bisexual interviewee in their 20s explained: “I live with relatives who constantly threaten to kick me out of the house and render me homeless.” This interviewee feels compelled to be “in the closet” when with their family, for fear of being among the many queer young people living on the streets in urban North American centres.

Even those queer people who don't live with a constant threat of homelessness may contend day-to-day with low-level hostility in their families and homes.

A 19-year old interviewee who described themselves as a “non-binary trans femme” explained, “[Family members] say they support me, but they really don't. (T)hey don't respect my chosen name, or preferred name, pronouns ... I guess the best way I could describe their attitude towards me is, like, tolerant.”

Research indicates tolerance is not a strong enough stance to meet the needs of queer young people or to imagine broadly the lives and worlds queer people want to build.

Such imagination requires a valuing of queer life and a recognition of the particular costs of COVID-19 for queer young people. Family settings that offer only lukewarm support may exacerbate feelings of loneliness. For queer young people, the best possibilities and connections may sit outside the family in community and public life.

CONNECTING AMIDST ISOLATION

Some of the people we spoke to worried that queer young people have lost out on important experiences of exploring their queerness and building queer community. An interviewee in his late twenties remarked, many queer young adults will either delay for “quite some time” or miss altogether the opportunity to explore their sexualities and genders in a vibrant queer community because of the pandemic.

As we return to public life, for some young and newly out queer people, the interviewee continued, “That window of time where they may be open to participating in that kind of com-

munity will have come and gone.”

However, others described finding new communities online during the pandemic. They expect those relationships and connections will help them build more caring and sustaining communities as the world reopens.

Young queer people's best chance may lie in the care and support that more experienced members of their queer communities can offer.

In our interviews, those young queer people who've managed to connect with others online during the pandemic look forward to the return to public life with greater hope.

A bisexual cis woman in their 30s belongs to an invitation-only online group that began as a few people watching movies and playing video games together. A year later, the group has grown to nearly 50 people who share ideas about not only films and video games but also their genders and sexualities. This interviewee described feeling “more comfortable for the future now ... I know these people and this great community, and they will all tell me, ‘Oh, no, we got you. When things reopen, you're going to be invited to our parties. We're going to go to these things together.’ And it's like, yeah, they got me under their wing.”

This community is integral to this person's sense of possibility: “Meeting those people, even if everything's on hold right now, is actually making me comfortable ... It's almost better this way because we get to know each other virtually. And now it's like, cool. I have a group of friends that, you know, we're going to go do stuff together.”

As cultural critic Roxane Gay recently reminded readers,

“We still need people who will show us different ways we can be and what might be possible and what we should fight for.”

For queer people, those people are often outside our home, in our communities, holding up the light of possibility. As our communities emerge from a year marked by loneliness and new possibilities, our task will be to sustain those new connections, support one another, and remind ourselves of the different ways we might be.

[Jessica Fields is Professor, Health and Society, University of Toronto; James K Gibb is Visiting Scholar, Department of Health and Society, University of Toronto; Sarah A. Williams is Assistant Professor, Anthropology and Gender Studies, University of Toronto]

Forecasts for smaller areas could minimise damage and save lives, experts say

CHANDAN KUMAR MANDAL
KATHMANDU, 30 JUN [KATHMANDUPOST]: This year the monsoon arrived with a bang.

As in the first week of its onset, heavy rainfall unleashed floods and landslides in different parts of the country, mainly the hill and mountain districts.

As in the past few years, Sindhupalchok was the worst hit. Flooding of the Melamchi river displaced hundreds of families, killed five and 20 went missing. Manang, usually a dry district, saw unprecedented floods and landslides sweeping away houses and hundreds had to be airlifted to safety. Lamjung also witnessed damage to private and public property and displacement of families.

With three months of the monsoon still remaining and the further devastation it could cause, experts and authorities have called for improving early warning systems to minimise the loss of lives and property.

“Preparations for the rest of the monsoon season should start with the weather office providing more localised weather updates rather than simply sharing forecasts on larger territories like provinces and regions as it is doing now,” Madhukar Upadhyaya, a watershed practitioner and climate change expert, said.

At present weather updates come from Gandaki or Lumbini province and do not say anything much about small valleys like Melamchi.

“The Department of Meteorology and Hydrology should provide more details and pinpoint information on rainfall so that local units and district authorities can warn communities,” he told the Post.

The Meteorological Forecasting Division under the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology normally provides weather updates twice a day—at 6am and 6pm. The Daily Weather Forecast Bulletin provides meteorological analysis, present weather status and prediction for the next

three days. If there is a sudden change in weather condition, the met office also issues a special bulletin.

However, all these weather updates broadly share information on weather conditions in extensive geography like regions—eastern, central or western—or province-wise as in recent years.

“When rainfall prediction is given for one province, chances are one district of the same province could be battered by heavy rain whereas another district on the other end of the province could not be receiving the same intensity of rainfall,” said Upadhyaya.

Making more specific projections may not be too difficult, according to him.

“We can also rely on historical data to identify areas that have received more rainfall than others and provide localised weather updates,” Upadhyaya said. “Besides, if the monsoon trough is positioned in one area, we can predict where it could possibly rain and alert the authorities and communities.”

The Department of Meteorology and Hydrology admits that it has not been able to give weather updates for smaller areas and said this is because it does not have the technical capability to do so.

“We are trying to provide district-specific weather forecasts but have not been able to do so, so far. Earlier, the weather updates would be only for regions, which have come down to provinces now,” said Saraju Kumar Baidya, director general of the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology, referring to the five development regions that the country was divided into before the federal structure was adopted in 2015. “But in case of flood warnings we even provide district-wise updates.”

Despite the fact that there is room to improve on forecasts, in recent years, the department has done a remarkable job in terms of flood early warning systems and alerting the general public living in nearby rivers across the country, according to

experts.

The Flood Forecasting Division of the department monitors the water levels in several river basins through 89 stations to provide 24-hour updates on water flow in those rivers. Based on these and rainfall prediction authorities warn communities of imminent floods.

There are also 215 rainfall monitoring stations across the country and data from them helps in flood warnings for downstream communities.

“For rivers where there is no flood monitoring system, we give general warning based on rainfall forecast for the area,” said Baidya.

During the monsoon season, the Flood Forecasting Division also publishes a daily Flood Forecasting Bulletin at 7am, mentioning possibilities of floods in major rivers of the country.

But looking at the changing rainfall patterns in recent years, there is a need for more enhanced weather predictions and the possibility now of a three-day weather forecast with upgraded equipment means that it can be done, according to Upadhyaya.

“Nearly 10 years ago even flood forecasting was not imagined. But starting at the small-scale level initiatives, flood-forecasting warning has been really significant in informing communities. A similar early warning system is required for rainfall as well,” he said.

Lately concentrated rain has been occurring in small patches or river basins more frequently, probably because of climate change, causing destruction to downstream communities.

“According to Upadhyaya meteorology authorities need to provide basin-wise rainfall prediction and narrow it down to other small rivers.

Government authorities agree that more needs to be done beyond regular weather forecast dissemination.

“We need impact-based forecasting

for various disasters,” said Anil Pokharel, chief executive officer with the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority under the Ministry of Home Affairs. “If there are possibilities of extreme weather events then the weather office should communicate impacts of landslides and lightning so that communities can remain alert and move to safer places rather than just weather observations as is the case now. This level of forecast or communicating risk has not happened so far.”

However, the Met office says it is easier said than done.

Providing more area-specific daily weather updates abounds with challenges for several reasons, according to Baidya.

“Any weather phenomenon covers a large area, so it makes it difficult to say that it will rain at this particular place at this particular time. Also since Nepal is a mountainous country rainfall pattern is varied even within small geographical areas. For instance, it may be raining in one area of Kathmandu Valley but not in another one,” said Baidya. “Finally we do not have the required technology for area-specific forecasts because of insufficient resources.”

According to him, the weather forecast models at the disposal of his department cannot make such small-scale weather forecasts.

Meteorologists rely on forecasting models which are computer programmes that provide meteorological information to predict the weather based on wind speed, direction, air temperature, moisture, and pressure collected from different locations.

“Besides, all the models have some levels of uncertainty. On top of that, our topography and rainfall variation makes area specific forecasts even more challenging,” said Baidya. “Using existing computer-based global forecast models, we need to customise them for Nepal with Nepal’s topography, weather systems, in-

put of Nepali weather data and make the required changes.”

Fine-tuning forecast models requires extensive research and research has never been a forte of Nepal’s government, he said.

Besides, this means more resources.

For experts like Upadhyaya, resources should not be a concern as this is a matter of people’s lives and property.

Instead of building bridges and roads, investing in the technology required that could save and improve lives should be prioritised, he said.

The government’s monsoon action plan has estimated that nearly 1.8 million people are likely to be affected by monsoon-related disasters this season.

“The estimation that 1.8 million to be affected should also include how each of those individuals will be impacted by the monsoon rains. Otherwise, that’s just a vague number,” Upadhyaya said. “Such data looks good for discussions among government agencies like the National Planning Commission, but does not make sense in the everyday lives of the people.”

The importance of preparedness cannot be overemphasised.

“Rather than spending billions in the aftermath of disasters that damages infrastructures and livelihoods and kills people, some millions invested in developing early-warning systems could make lots of difference and save lives,” said Baidya.

But Baidya and his department alone cannot make such priorities.

“We have been reaching out to the government for the required human resources and budget for improving our capacity,” said Baidya. “The department is a science-based entity, and as long as we do not devote enough resources for research, the weather forecast, flood forecast and climate forecast cannot be accurate. With the availability of more resources we can provide more localised and more accurate weather forecasts.”

Odisha extends partial lockdown till July 16

BHUBANESWAR, JUN 30 (PTI): The Odisha government on Wednesday extended the partial lockdown in the state for 15 more days till 5 AM on July 16, a senior official said.

The existing restrictions will end at 5 AM on Thursday.

The state government has divided the 30 districts into A and B categories. Twenty districts where the test positivity rate (TPR) remains less than five per cent are in the A category, while the remaining 10 coastal districts, where the number of cases is high, are in the B category, Chief Secretary S C Mohapatra said.

There will be no weekly shutdown in category A districts and

shops will remain open from 6 AM to 6 PM. Buses will be allowed to ply with passengers up to the seating capacity and taxis and autorickshaws can carry a maximum of two passengers.

Daily markets and weekly haats can open, small salons can function, street food vendors can operate takeaway businesses, while outdoor and indoor film shooting has been permitted in these districts, he said.

Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Bargarh, Sambalpur, Deogarh, Kalahandi, Balangir, Nuapada, Sonapur, Ganjam, Gajapati, Kandhamal, Boudh, Koraput, Nabarangpur, Malkangiri, Rayagada, Angul, Dhenkanal and Keonjhar are category A

districts.

In category B districts, shops can open from 6 AM to 2 PM but shopping malls, spas and beauty parlours shall continue to remain closed.

Bus services won’t restart now and weekend shutdowns will continue in these districts.

The coastal districts of Nayagarh, Cuttack, Puri, Khurda, Jagatsinghpur, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Bhadrak, Balasore and Mayurbhanj are in category B.

Night curfew from 6 PM to 6 AM shall remain in force across the state but people and services in the essential category shall be permitted to move during the restricted hours, he said.

Religious and educa-

tional institutions and cinema halls shall continue to remain closed, while the ban on public gatherings, trade fairs, exhibitions and jatra (theatre) shall continue across Odisha, Mohapatra said.

The restrictions on weddings and funerals shall also continue, he said.

Mohapatra said the state government decided to extend the partial lockdown keeping in view the prevailing situation, while an effort was made to strike a balance between life and livelihood.

The lockdown was first imposed on May 5 following the resurgence of COVID-19 cases and was repeatedly extended since then.

Another imposter govt official arrested in Kolkata

KOLKATA, JUN 30 (PTI): A man was arrested from central Kolkata’s Beniapukur area for impersonating as a senior government official, police said on Wednesday.

The arrest comes amid the investigation into the dubious COVID vaccination camps in the city, which were being organised by fake

IAS officer Debanjan Deb.

The arrest was made on Tuesday night when police at a checkpoint in Beniapukur stopped an SUV having a ‘VIP’ sticker, a board mentioning ‘Central Vigilance Commission’, and a blue beacon.

“The man inside the vehicle first said that he

is an officer of the Central Vigilance Commission. Then he suddenly changed his version and claimed to be an officer of the Narcotics Cell. He could not produce any identity card and kept on challenging and threatening us,” an officer of the Kolkata Police said.

Preliminary inves-

tigation revealed that the man, in his mid-20s, is a resident of the Park Street area, he said.

He studied engineering but dropped out of college, the officer said.

“We are trying to find out whether he has duped any people. We are also talking to his family members,” he said.

Grievance redressal service resumes in Ganjam

BERHAMPUR (ODISHA), JUN 30 (PTI): After a gap of over one year, the Ganjam district administration in Odisha has resumed its monthly public grievance redressal service ‘Mo Nibedan’ through the virtual mode, officials said.

As many as 71 people of four panchayats of Rangeilunda block

aired their grievances on the first day on Monday, when the panchayats connected with the sub-collector’s office online.

“The camp was held for about two hours and people talked about the issues they were facing,” District Collector Vijay Kulange said.

Public grievance

camps that were held in sub-collector offices in the district every Monday were stopped since the COVID-19 pandemic struck in March 2020.

Kulange said more panchayats will be connected to the camps next week - every Monday at the district level and on Saturdays at the

block level.

Prior to selecting the panchayats, necessary awareness regarding the session will be ensured by the officials concerned, he said.

The district administration had enforced restrictions on public visit to government offices from April 12 in the wake of surging Covid cases.

Change vaccine share to 95:5%: Jharkhand to Centre

RANCHI, JUN 30 (PTI): Asserting that “artificial” tie up of 25 per cent vaccination in private hospitals may result in many citizens missing the jabs, the Jharkhand government has asked the Centre to alter the ratio and allot at least 95 per cent of the COVID-19 shots through government route, a top official said on Wednesday.

The state government said the mandate for 75:25 allocation format of COVID vaccines to the government and the private institutions needs to be reconsidered keeping in view the doctrine of colourable legislation (What cannot be done directly, should also not be done indirectly).

Additional Chief Secretary (Health department) Arun Kumar Singh told PTI that the state has made a demand to the centre for allocation of 95 per cent shots through the government route considering more than 75 per cent population living in the rural areas which has negligible reach to private hospitals.

Earlier, the Odisha government had also sought tweaking the share of vaccines to 95:5.

Singh said, even in cities where private hospitals are available, on account of lack of purchasing parity, demand for COVID-19 vaccine on payment

basis is very limited as Below Poverty Line (BPL) population across the state is more than 37 per cent.

“It is requested to reduce the share of vaccination in private hospitals from 25% to 5% for the state of Jharkhand.

“At least 95% vaccines for the state of Jharkhand should be allocated from the government route to enable equitable distribution of vaccines,” the Jharkhand government said in a letter to the centre.

This would ensure adherence to the constitutional mandate of equity, equality and reasonable opportunity for all citizens, it said.

In a letter to Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan, Singh has mentioned that since the advent of COVID-19 vaccination in private hospitals on January 30, 2021, the share of vaccination in private hospitals in the state has been less than 2 per cent till April 30, 2021.

“The overall objec-

tive of the government is to achieve 100% vaccination, leaving no one behind, at the least possible time frame.

“However, this artificial tie-up of 25% vaccination in private hospitals, despite knowing the fact that the demand for vaccines in such hospitals is negligible, may lead to deprivation,” the letter mentions.

The said mandate needs to be reconsidered keeping in view the doctrine of colourable legislation, it stated.

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SummitTIMES

Germany coach Joachim Löw’s 15-year tenure ends in regret

BERLIN (AP): Joachim Löw’s 15-year tenure as coach of Germany’s national soccer team is over, and many think it should have ended a long time ago. The Germans at least advanced from the group stage this time, unlike three years at the World Cup when they were defending champions, but then lost to England 2-0 at Wembley Stadium on Tuesday in the round of 16 of the European Championship.

Löw led Germany to the World Cup title in 2014, and a semifinal appearance at Euro 2016, but his team never recovered from its early exit at the last World Cup.

An attempted reboot after the tournament in Russia failed to yield the desired results. First there was the embarrassing 6-0 loss to Spain last November, and then a 2-1 loss to North Macedonia in World Cup qualifying in March.

Shortly before the second of those two surprising results, Löw announced that Euro 2020 would be his last tournament. And with no need to personally to persevere with the team’s rebuilding process, he recalled veterans Thomas Müller and Mats Hummels for the pandemic-delayed tournament.

Hawks romp to 110-88 win without Young, Giannis goes down

ATLANTA (AP): The Atlanta Hawks proved they are more than a one-man team. Now, it’s the Milwaukee Bucks who may have to show they can get by without the Greek Freak. With Trae Young sidelined by an unusual injury, Lou Williams and a host of Hawks stepped up to fill the void, leading Atlanta to a 110-88 rout of the Bucks in Game 4 to even the Eastern Conference finals Tuesday night.

“A total team effort,” Hawks coach Nate McMillan said.

In another stunning twist to a series no one saw coming, two-time MVP GiannisAntetokounmpo hobbled off the court with an injured left knee, depriving the Bucks of their best player.

“We’ll see how he is tomorrow,” coach Mike Budenholzer said. “We’ll take everything as it comes. We’ll evaluate it. We’ve got a heck of a team, a heck of a roster.”

Williams started for Young and did a stellar job with 21 points, BogdanBogdanovic added 20 to break a series-long slump, and the Hawks pulled away in the third quarter to tie the series at two wins apiece.

Game 5 is Thursday night in Milwaukee.

It’s not known if Young or Antetokounmpo will be able to play.

Williams, long one of the NBA’s best players off the bench, will be ready to start again for the Hawks, if needed.

“Iknew about an hour before this game that I was going to start, when



they said Trae was out, so I just had to refocus my energy, put on a different hat and get ready for the game,” Williams said.

Young was declared out about 45 minutes before tipoff, having sustained a bone bruise when he twisted his right ankle stepping on an official’s foot along the sideline in Game 3. He watched from the bench in a black warmup suit, barely noticeable with a hood over his head and a mask across his face.

Turns out, he wasn’t needed.

“Everybody played with confidence. Everybody played at a high level,” Williams said “Going back to Milwaukee, we’re going to have to bottle it up and take it with us.”

Antetokounmpo endured a dismal first half, scoring just six points and chunking up a pair of airballs from the free-throw line. He bounced back with eight points in the first 4 1/2 minutes of the third quarter, including a step-back jumper that sliced Atlanta’s lead to 62-54.

The next time down the court, Williams worked a pick-and-roll with Clint Capela, who went up for a dunk that Antetokounmpo tried to contest. The Bucks star landed awkwardly and went down in a heap, grasping at his left knee while a hush fell over the arena.

The entire Milwaukee bench came out to check on Antetokounmpo, who had to be helped to the locker room with what was diagnosed as a hyperextended knee. He returned briefly to the bench, but never made it back to the court, heading to the locker room for good when the Hawks blew the game open.

Atlanta outscored the Bucks 25-8 the rest of the quarter to seize a commanding 87-62 lead.

Budenholzer is confident his team will play much better the next time out — with or without Antetokounmpo.

“We’ve got to be better on both ends,” the coach said. “Our group will gather. The character will come through.”

The Hawks led 51-38 at halftime, holding the Bucks’ to their lowest-scoring half of the postseason.

Milwaukee made only 14 of 41 shots from the field — including 5 of 23 beyond the arc — to go along with nine turnovers.

MIDDLETON STRUGGLES

Two nights after tying his career playoff high with 38 points in a Game 3 victory, Milwaukee’s Khris Middleton was held to 16 points on 6-of-17 shooting.

He missed all seven of his 3-point attempts.

REDDISH SHINES

With Young out, the Hawks needed some little-used players to step up.

No one was bigger than Cam Reddish.

In just his second appearance since February, Reddish scored 12 points, pulled down five rebounds and came up with two steals.

Reddish missed the final 42 games of the regular season with an Achilles injury and the

first two rounds of the playoffs. His first appearance since Feb. 21 came during garbage time of Milwaukee’s blowout win in Game 2.

Reddish had to play a much bigger role in Game 4, coming on less than seven minutes into the game in the first wave of substitutions. He was joined by Kris Dunn, playing his third game in the playoffs and just his seventh game all season.

FREE THROW WOES

With the crowd mocking him mercilessly, counting off the number of seconds he took to shoot, Antetokounmpo missed all three of his free throws in the first half.

In fact, he only hit the rim on one of them, which had the Atlanta fans jeering him even louder.

TIP-INS

Bucks: Milwaukee’s lowest-scoring first half of the regular season was a 31-point effort at Philadelphia on March 17. They wound up winning that game 109-105 in overtime. ... The Bucks had not scored fewer than 41 points in a half during the playoffs. ... Jrue Holiday was the top scorer with 19 points.

Hawks: Milwaukee’s 38-point half was the lowest allowed by Atlanta in a playoff game since holding Boston to 33 in 2016. ... The Hawks came out spreading the ball around. Four players were in on first 10 points. ... Capela was helped to the locker room with a towel over his face after taking an elbow in the closing minutes. The extent of his injury wasn’t known.

Centre Court’s been slippery when wet, even with roof closed



WIMBLEDON, England (AP): Novak Djokovic landed on his backside twice early in the first match played on Centre Court at Wimbledon this week. He was no worse for the wear.

Roger Federer’s opponent on Day 2, Adrian Mannarino, lost his footing in the main stadium, too, but he was not so lucky: The Frenchman’s 33rd birthday ended with a twisted knee and a loss, because he was too hurt to keep playing.

That also happened to Serena Williams in the very next match Tuesday, and her latest bid for a record-tying 24th Grand Slam title ended with her “heartbroken” and in tears after just 30 minutes and less than a set. She injured her right leg when her left shoe lost traction behind the baseline in almost the exact same spot Mannarino went down.

All of those contests were played with the arena’s retractable roof shut because of rain. And that — rather any sort of change to the grass itself as the oldest Grand Slam tournament returns after being canceled a year ago, early in the pandemic — is what the All England Club blames for how slippery the surface has been during what it says were the wettest two opening days of Wimbledon “in almost a decade.”

Keeping the roof closed for a long period leads to “additional moisture” on the grass, the club said in a statement released after Williams and Mannarino got hurt and exited the singles brackets.

“It feels a tad more slippery, maybe, under the roof. I don’t know if it’s just a gut feeling. You do have to move very, very carefully out there. If you push too hard in the wrong moments, you do go down,” said Federer, an eight-time Wimbledon champion. “I do feel it’s drier during the day. With the wind

and all that stuff, it takes the (moisture) out of the grass. But this is obviously terrible.”

In what sounded like an attempt to dispel the notion that anything might be different about the grass this time, particularly given that it’s been two years since the tournament was held, the club’s statement said: “The preparation of the grass courts has been to exactly the same meticulous standard as in previous years.”

Here is a key element in the equation: Wimbledon’s courts are removed annually and new grass is installed.

So the fact that there wasn’t a tournament in 2020 shouldn’t be affecting things.

“Even though we didn’t have The Championships, our renovation program was the same,” Neil Stubley, the club’s head of courts and horticulture, said before competition began Monday. “So we literally just ripped the courts up and sort of re-lev-eled, re-seeded and then just grew them back in for this year. Which we would have done exactly the same, whether we’d had The Championships or not.”

The outset of the two-week tournament is “a time when the grass plant is at its most lush and green, which does result in additional moisture on what is a natural surface,” the club said in its statement, adding: “With each match that is played, the courts will continue to firm up.”

Federer offered a similar assessment.

He’s rather familiar with the place, having first entered Wimbledon in 1999 and first won it in 2003.

“I feel, for a lot of players, it’s super key to get through those first two rounds, because the grass is more slippery. It is more soft,” he said. “As the tournament progresses, usually it gets harder and easier to move on.”

‘Sad story’: An injured Serena Williams is out of Wimbledon

WIMBLEDON, ENGLAND (AP): Serena Williams bit her upper lip. She held her left hand over her mouth and tried to hold back tears while getting ready to serve.

It was the first set of her first-round match Tuesday at Wimbledon, and Williams knew this stay at a tournament where she has won seven of her 23 Grand Slam singles titles was about to end because she hurt her right leg when she lost her footing behind a baseline.

Moments later, her legs buckled as she tried to change directions to chase a shot by her opponent, 100th-ranked AliaksandraSasnovich of Belarus. Williams dropped to her knees, her head down on the grass. She used her racket to help her stand, but only so she could limp to the net to concede — just the second mid-match retirement at any Grand Slam tournament of her career and first since 1998.

“I was heartbroken to have to withdraw today,” Williams said in a statement released by the tournament.

“Feeling the extraordinary warmth and support of the crowd today when I walked on — and off — the court,” she said, “meant the world to me.”

Said Sasnovich: “She’s a great champion, and it’s (a) sad story.”

Roger Federer surely articulated a common sentiment when told by a reporter what happened to Williams.

“Oh, my God,” he said. “I can’t believe it.”

Williams was serving while leading 3-1 at Centre Court — where the retractable roof was shut because of rain that forced

the postponement of two dozen matches until Wednesday — when her left shoe seemed to lose its traction while she was hitting a forehand.

Williams winced and stepped gingerly between points, clearly troubled. After dropping that game, she asked to visit with a trainer and took a medical timeout.

She tried to continue playing. The crowd tried to offer support and encouragement. Eventually, the 39-year-old American couldn’t continue. The chair umpire climbed down to check on her, and they walked together up to the net; the score was 3-all, 15-30 when Williams stopped.

Williams, who began the match with her right thigh heavily taped, raised her racket with right arm and put her left palm on her chest. Then she waved to the spectators.

Officially, this goes in the books as only the second first-round Grand Slam exit of Williams’ career. The other came at the 2012 French Open, where she was beaten by VirginieRazzano. Shortly after that, Williams teamed up with coach Patrick Mouratoglou and began accumulating majors to eclipse Steffi Graf’s professional era record of 22 and move within one of Margaret Court’s all-era mark of 24.

“All the best for her,” said Sasnovich, who reached the fourth round at Wimbledon in 2018 for her best Grand Slam result.

Williams’ departure makes a wide-open women’s draw even more so. As it was, defending champion SimonaHalep and four-time major champ



Naomi Osaka withdrew before the tournament started.

And so, even as her 40th birthday approaches in September, Williams was among the top contenders. With her best-in-the-game serve and stinging groundstrokes, she had made it to the past four finals when she entered Wimbledon — winning in 2015 and 2016, missing the tournament while pregnant in 2017, then finishing as the runner-up in 2018 and 2019 (it was canceled last year because of the pandemic).

Williams was hardly the first player to find it difficult to deal with the slick grass over the first two days of main-draw play.

In the match that preceded hers in the main stadium, eight-time Wimbledon champion Federer advanced when his opponent, Adrian Mannarino, injured his right knee late in the fourth set when he tumbled near the same spot Williams did.

Federer was trailing two sets to one, but ahead 4-2 in the fourth, when Mannarino fell. He tried to continue but dropped eight of nine points

when they resumed and called it quits.

“Obviously,” Federer acknowledged, “he was the better player.”

Novak Djokovic fell twice in the first set of his first-round victory Monday at Centre Court, too.

“I do feel it feels a tad more slippery, maybe, under the roof. I don’t know if it’s just a gut feeling. You do have to move very, very carefully out there. If you push too hard in the wrong moments, you do go down,” Federer said. “I do feel it’s drier during the day. With the wind and all that stuff, it takes the moist out of the grass. But this is obviously terrible.”

It was, by far, the most significant development Tuesday, when the winners included Williams’ older sister, 41-year-old Venus, 17-year-old Coco Gauff, reigning French Open champion BarboraKrejickova and No. 1 seed Ash Barty in the women’s bracket, and No. 2 Daniil Medvedev, No. 4 Alexander Zverev and No. 10 Denis Shapovalov in the men’s.

Sebastian Korda — a 20-year-old American whose father, Petr, won the 1998 Aus-

tralian Open and whose sisters, No. 1-ranked Nelly and No. 13 Jessica, are on the LPGA Tour — made a successful Wimbledon debut, eliminating No. 15 seed Alex de Minaur 6-3, 6-4, 6-7 (5), 7-6 (5).

Venus Williams accumulated 10 aces by smacking serves at up to 114 mph — not quite like the old days, but not too shabby, either. She drove forehands to corners. She made her way to the net for crisp volleys.

And when it was all over, she celebrated her first Wimbledon match win since 2018 by raising her arms and yelling “Come on!” before reprising her familiar smile-and-twirl wave at No. 3 Court.

A five-time singles champion at the All England Club who is making her 23rd appearance here, the elder Williams sister began her record-extending 90th Grand Slam tournament with her 90th career victory at Wimbledon, beating Mihaela-Buzarnescu of Romania 7-5, 4-6, 6-3.

Venus Williams is a former No. 1-ranked player who came into this week ranked 111th and having lost in the first or second round at the past eight majors. That included a first-round exit in 2019 at the All England Club against a then-15-year-old Gauff.

“You can’t win them all. Life is about how you handle challenges. Each point is a challenge on the court. No one gives you anything,” said Venus Williams, who was diagnosed a decade ago with Sjogren’s syndrome, an autoimmune disease that can cause fatigue and joint pain. “I like to think I handle my challenges well.”

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Kim berates North Korean officials for ‘crucial’ virus lapse

SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA (AP): North Korean leader Kim Jong Un berated top officials for failures in coronavirus prevention that caused a “great crisis,” using strong language that raised the specter of a mass outbreak in a country that would be scarcely able to handle it.

The state media report Wednesday did not specify what “crucial” lapse had prompted Kim to call the Politburo meeting of the ruling Workers’ Party, but experts said North Korea could be wrestling with a significant setback in its pandemic fight.

So far, North Korea has claimed to have had no coronavirus infections, despite testing thousands of people and sharing a porous border with China. Experts widely doubt the claim and are concerned about any potential outbreak, given the country’s poor health infrastructure.

At the Politburo meeting, Kim criticized the senior officials for supposed incompetence, irresponsibility and passiveness in planning and executing anti-virus measures amid the lengthening pandemic, the North’s official Korean Central News Agency said.

Kim said “senior officials in charge of important state affairs neglected the implementation of

the important decisions of the party on taking organizational, institutional, material, scientific and technological measures as required by the prolonged state emergency epidemic prevention campaign,” according to KCNA. This “caused a crucial case of creating a great crisis in ensuring the security of the state and safety of the people and entailed grave consequences.”

The report also said the party recalled an unspecified member of the Politburo’s powerful Presidium, which consists of Kim and four other top officials.

The reference indicated Kim may replace his Cabinet Premier Kim Tok Hun, who would be held responsible for failures in the government’s anti-epidemic work, said Hong Min, a senior analyst at Seoul’s Korea Institute for National Unification.

“There is no possibility that North Korea will ever admit to an infection — even if there were mass transmissions, the North will definitely not reveal such developments and will continue to push forward an anti-virus campaign it has claimed to be the greatest,” Hong said.

“But it’s also clear that something significant happened and it was big enough to warrant a reprimanding of senior



officials. This could mean mass infections or some sort of situation where a lot of people were put at direct risk of infections.”

Cheong Seong-Chang, an analyst at South Korea’s private Sejong Institute, expressed a similar view, saying North Korea is potentially dealing with huge virus-related problems in border towns near China, such as Sinuiju or Hyesan. He said the Presidium member Kim Jong Un sacked could possibly be Jo Yong Won, a secretary of the Workers’ Party’s Central Committee who had been seen as a fast-rising figure in the leadership circle.

But other experts said Kim could be responding to illicit border trade that defied his lockdown measures or set-

ting the stage for a political shakeup or purge to solidify his grip on power as he navigates perhaps the toughest time of his nine-year rule.

South Korea’s Unification Ministry, which deals with inter-Korean affairs, said it had no immediate information to share about the North Korean report and that it wouldn’t make pre-judgments about the country’s virus situation.

Wang Wenbin, spokesperson of China’s Foreign Ministry, raised the possibility of helping North Korea in the event of a major outbreak of COVID-19.

“China and the DPRK have a long tradition of helping each other when they encounter difficulties,” Wang said, refer-

ring to North Korea by its official name, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

“If necessary, China will actively consider providing assistance to the DPRK.”

From the start of the pandemic, North Korea described its anti-virus efforts as a “matter of national existence,” banned tourists, jettied out diplomats and severely curtailed cross-border traffic and trade. The lockdown has further strained an economy already battered by decades of mismanagement and crippling U.S.-led sanctions over the country’s nuclear weapons program.

Kim during a political conference earlier this month called for officials to brace for prolonged

COVID-19 restrictions, indicating that the country isn’t ready to open its borders despite its economic woes.

North Korea has told the World Health Organization it has not found a single coronavirus infection after testing more than 30,000 people, including many described as having fevers or respiratory symptoms.

North Korea’s extended border controls come amid uncertainties over the country’s vaccination prospects. COVAX, the U.N.-backed program to ship COVID-19 vaccines worldwide, said in February that North Korea could receive 1.9 million doses in the first half of the year, but the plans have been delayed due to global shortages.

Understaffed Tunisian hospital battles coronavirus spike

KAIROUAN, TUNISIA (AP): A man wearing a protective suit quickly yet carefully places a black sheet over a COVID-19 victim laid out in a coffin in a courtyard at IbnJazzar Hospital in the Tunisian town of Kairouan. He then folds a white sheet on top and sprinkles the body with disinfectant from a small bottle, while loved ones and other hospital visitors cry out “Allahu Akbar,” or “God is great,” in Arabic.

Patients in the hospital’s overfilled COVID-19 ward are dying daily amid a spike in coronavirus infections in the North African country, with Kairouan and three other regions especially hard hit. At the regional hospital, tensions mount as personnel try to cope with scarce means.

“I’m shocked,” said Sana Kraiem, whose mother was put in a wheelchair in a roomful of COVID-19 patients, “like a dog,” she described.

“They told me they can’t free up a bed occupied by a dead person,” a distressed Kraiem said in an interview with The Associated Press during a visit this week to the hospital.

The half-dozen rooms devoted to COVID-19 patients each packs in five or six beds. A patient who recently died was seen still occupying one of the beds in each room visited. A special service eventually removes the body.

Over the past month, confirmed virus infections in Tunisia have reached the highest daily levels since the pandemic began, but the vaccination rate remains low, according to data from John’s Hopkins University. Tunisia has reported Africa’s highest per-cap-

ita death toll from the pandemic, and is currently recording one of the highest per-capita infection rates in Africa, the data indicates.

The Kairouan region is living through “a real horror movie,” Mohamed Rouis, the regional health director in Kairouan, was quoted saying in Tunisian media earlier this month.

A temporary hospital has been set up on the outskirts of the city. The army has also bolstered that with a military care facility under a green tent which houses a line of beds with monitoring equipment and respirators. Despite the dire situation, there is no widespread testing for COVID-19 in the poor, rural region.

The IbnJazzar hospital’s supervisor, Zohra Hedwej, explained that goodwill gestures by officials end up as frustrating half-measures, such as opening a section for coronavirus patients, without making provisions for medical staff.

“We resort to recruiting workers from other departments in the hospital,” Hedwej told the AP. “It’s very difficult to find volunteers because some don’t know the level of their (own) physical immunity, others fear for their relatives who have weak immunity. We want a stable workforce that is able to work.”

Hedwej said there is such a dearth of trained personnel that sophisticated equipment can’t be used at times.

“We need labor more than we need new equipment,” she said, adding that while equipment comes from donors — who are still needed — there is still a greater need for trained professionals “who can use it and take care of it.”

Thailand bets on ‘Phuket sandbox’ program to save tourism

PHUKET, THAILAND (AP): Somsak Betlao covered the outboard motor on his traditional wooden longtail boat with a tarp, wrapping up another day on Phuket’s Patong beach where not a single tourist needed his services shuttling them to nearby islands.

Since Thailand’s pandemic restrictions on travel were imposed in early 2020, tourism has fallen off a cliff, and nowhere has it been felt more than the resort island off the country’s southern coast, where nearly 95% of the economy is related to the industry.

So, despite spiking coronavirus numbers elsewhere in the country, the government is forging ahead with a program known as the “Phuket sandbox” to reopen the island to fully vaccinated visitors. It hopes it will revive tourism — a sector that accounted for 20% of the country’s economy before the pandemic.

Instead of the hotel quarantines required elsewhere in Thailand, tourists on Phuket will be able to roam the entire island, but not travel to other parts of the country for 14 days. Skeptics question whether people will be willing to accept multiple restrictions including repeated virus tests and mandatory tracking apps, but officials hope the allure of the island’s famous beaches — and the idea of a beach holiday follow-

ing lengthy lockdowns — will be enough.

For islanders like Somsak, there is a lot riding on the tourists’ return.

Once he could count on earning more than \$100 a day taking them out on his boat, but this month he has taken home only \$40 from a single customer and has been forced to do odd jobs, pawn family belongings and fish for food to put dinner on the table for his wife and two young children.

“If it does not work we will just have to try and stay alive,” Somsak said.

The first two months of 2020, before travel restrictions were put in place, were among Phuket’s best ever, and the island saw more than 3 million visitors in the first five months of the year, including more than 2 million foreigners. For the first five months of 2021, there have been fewer than a half million visitors, and all but about 5,000 were domestic travelers.

Under the sandbox plan, visitors to Phuket will be subject to most of the same controls faced by those to the rest of the country, but instead of being quarantined in a carefully monitored hotel room for 14 days they’ll be restricted to Thailand’s largest island, where they can lounge on the white beaches, jet ski off the coast, and enjoy evenings eating out in restaurants.

“For people who have been closeted up in their apartments for 16 months, the idea to fly to Thailand where there’s a beach and you’re a normal guest, yes you’re being quarantined here but this is more than 500 square kilometers of quarantine and you’ve got national parks, golf courses, you can go diving — it’s really not a quarantine,” said Anthony Lark, president of the Phuket Hotels Association.

There is already some international interest, with the first flight arriving from Qatar, followed by one from Israel and then Singapore.

Still, some hotels and other businesses have decided to wait to see whether the tourists appear before they reopen, and there is skepticism in Thailand that they will.

The Bangkok Post newspaper wondered in an editorial this week headlined “Welcome to your prison vacation?” whether tourists would bother going through all the hoops for a holiday, especially after the government’s announcement that it would impose additional restrictions if more than 90 new virus cases are reported per week in Phuket.

Lark said he anticipates a lot of travelers will take a wait-and-see approach and that his expectations are “tepid.”

“The floodgates are not opening,” he said.

To visit, adult foreign visitors must provide

proof of two vaccinations, a negative COVID-19 test no more than 72 hours before departure, and proof of an insurance policy that covers treatment for the virus of at least \$100,000, among other things. Once on the island, visitors have to follow mask and distancing regulations and take three COVID-19 tests at their own expense — about \$300 total — and show negative results.

They also have to come from countries considered no higher than “low” or “medium” risk — a list currently including most of Europe, the U.S. and Canada — and fly directly to Phuket, though plans are in the works to allow carefully controlled transfers through Bangkok’s airport.

After 14 days, visitors are free to travel further in Thailand without other restrictions.

In preparation, some 70% of the island’s approximately 450,000 residents have had at least one vaccine dose, and the hospitality industry reports that all front-line workers in restaurants, hotels and elsewhere have been fully vaccinated.

Bars and clubs remain closed, but visitors will be able to go to restaurants and take in shows — once they’re up and running again.

At the Phuket Simon Cabaret, a 600-seat venue that has been closed for more than a year, some crew returned this

week to start checking lighting and other systems, while workers spruced up the dresses worn by its transgender dancers, sewing on new glitter and colorful feathers.

“We are entering into this fight wanting

to win,” owner Pornthep Rouyrin said defiantly, adding that the cabaret would not open immediately and that its dancers might start with smaller shows in hotels and restaurants until larger numbers of tourists start to arrive.

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Address:
Santa Bhawan Complex, Church Road
Near Diesel Power House (DPH)
Gangtok, East Sikkim, 737101

Actor Allison Mack faces sentencing in NXIVM sex-slave case

NEW YORK (AP): TV actor Allison Mack, who played a key role in a scandal-ridden, cult-like upstate New York group, is facing sentencing Wednesday after pleading guilty to charges she manipulated women into becoming sex slaves for the group's spiritual leader.

Mack — best known for her role as a young Superman's close friend on the series "Smallville" — is set to appear Wednesday in Brooklyn federal court. She's expected to seek credit for cooperating against NXIVM leader Keith Raniere and taking responsibility for helping him create a secret society of brainwashed women who were branded with his initials.

Devoting herself to the self-improvement guru "was the biggest mistake and greatest regret of my life," she wrote in a letter filed with the court last week.

"I am sorry to those of you that I brought into NXIVM," she wrote. "I am sorry I ever exposed you to the nefarious and emotionally abusive schemes of a twisted man."

Under advisory sentencing guidelines, Mack would face between 14 and 17 1/2 years behind bars. Her defense team has argued in court papers that probation or a sentence to home confinement is more appropriate, and prosecutors have agreed



that any prison term should be below the guidelines range because of her cooperation.

"The NXIVM saga and the story of Ms. Mack's descent have been a tragedy for all involved. But that need not, and should not, be the end of the story for Allison Mack," her lawyers wrote in court papers.

Mack, 38, was once part of the inner circle of Raniere, whose group attracted millionaires and actors among its adherents. Prosecutors said she became a "master" for "slaves" she ordered "to perform labor, take nude photographs, and in some cases, to engage in sex acts with Raniere."

As authorities closed in on Raniere, he fled to Mexico with Mack and others to try to reconstitute the group there. He was arrested and sent to the United States in March 2018; Mack was arrest-

ed a few days later.

"Ms. Mack now understands that this was the best thing that could have happened to her at that time," the defense papers say.

Mack provided information to prosecutors about how Raniere encouraged "the use of demeaning and derogatory language, including racial slurs, to humiliate 'slaves,'" the government papers said. More importantly, she provided a recording of a conversation she had with Raniere about the branding, they added.

The branding should involve "a vulnerable position type of a thing" with "hands probably above the head being held, almost like being tied down, like sacrificial, whatever," Raniere told her. The women, he added, "should say, 'Please brand me. It would be an honor.' Or something like that."

Dwayne Johnson collaborating with Amazon for holiday action comedy

Los Angeles, Jun 30 (PTI): Hollywood star Dwayne Johnson is teaming up with Amazon Studios for upcoming movie.

Titled "Red One", the movie is a holiday action adventure comedy, to be produced by

Johnson and Dany Garcia's Seven Bucks Productions in collaboration with Amazon.

Chris Morgan, a frequent collaborator of Johnson, will write the screenplay and produce the feature film, according

to Variety.

Morgan is known for scripting films such as "Fast and Furious Presents: Hobbs and Shaw", "The Fate of the Furious", "Furious 7", "Fast & Furious 6", and "Fast Five".

"Red One" was conceived by Hiram Garcia, president of production at Seven Bucks Productions.

The film is currently scheduled to shoot in 2022 with a planned 2023 holiday release.

Karan Johar to make a film on lawyer-activist C Sankaran Nair



MUMBAI, JUN 29 (PTI): Filmmaker Karan Johar on Tuesday announced that his next production venture is based on the life of C Sankaran Nair, the former President of the Indian National Congress and member of the Viceroy's Executive Council.

Titled "The Untold Story of C Sankaran Nair", the film is inspired from real life events and adapted from the book

The Case That Shook the Empire, written by Raghu Palat, (great-grandson of Sankaran Nair) and his wife Pushpa-Palat.

The movie, to be directed by Karan Singh Tyagi, will unravel the legendary courtroom battle that Sankaran Nair fought against the British Raj to uncover the truth about the JallianwalaBagh massacre.

Johar, 49, who shared the details about the film on Twitter, said he was hon-

oured to share Nair's story with the world.

Extremely excited and honoured to be bringing the untold story of C. Sankaran Nair, a historic man to the big screens. Directed by @karanstyagi, he wrote.

Johar's Dharma Productions will be presenting the movie along with Still & Still Media Collective.

The makers are yet to announce the cast of the movie.

Besides this film, Johar

is also producing movies "Sooryavanshi", "Brahmastra", "Dostana 2", "Meenakshi Sundareswar" as well as Madhuri Dixit-starrer web series "Finding Anamika" and season two of "Fabulous Lives of Bollywood Wives".

His next directorial venture is period drama "Takht", starring Ranveer Singh, Alia Bhatt, Vicky Kaushal, Kareena Kapoor Khan, Anil Kapoor, Janhvi Kapoor and Bhumi Pednekar.

Malayalam anthology 'AanumPennum' to stream on Amazon Prime Video

MUMBAI, JUN 30 (PTI): Malayalam anthology movie "AanumPennum" will premiere on streamer Amazon Prime Video on Wednesday.

The movie features three short films by celebrated filmmakers Venu, Aashiq Abu and Jay K.

Starring a star-studded ensemble cast of Parvathy Thiruvothu, Asif Ali, Joju George, Roshan Mathew and Samyuktha Menon among others, the film released theatrically in March this year.

Abu, who directed the short segment "Rani", took to Facebook to share the news with his fans.

"#AanumPennumOnPrime streaming from tomorrow," the filmmaker, known for critically-acclaimed movies "Virus" and "Gangster", wrote.

"AanumPennum" explores relationships in the backdrop of three different timelines,



with each segment telling a story on romance, betrayal and lust.

Abu's short film "Rani" is headlined by Mathew and Darshana Rajendran, whereas Venu has directed "Rachiyamma", featuring Thiruvothu and Ali.

The third film in the anthology, titled "Savithri", has been directed by Jay K and features George and Menon.

"AanumPennum" is produced by CK Padma Kumar and M Dileep Kumar.

ARIES:

We're officially on the other side of Mercury retrograde, Aries, which in turn is bringing forth a greater sense of clarity and helping you deepen your understanding of what you are meant to create in this lifetime. Getting in alignment with your purpose is not always an easy task, though. It is on this path that you're likely to face maximum opposition, judgements and failures. So, accept the metaphorical darkness as a test of resilience. The reins are in your hands, beautiful, and that is where they've been all along.

TAURUS:

Given that we're on the other side of Mercury retrograde, the clouds of confusion are clearing themselves, bringing forth the gift of light. You know exactly what you are here to do and you're ready to commit full-time. While you may not have the entire road map in your hand, you're giving yourself the permission to take it one day at a time. Trust the unknown, Taurus, and trust that the information you need at every stage will be revealed to you.

GEMINI:

There are important choices to be made, Gemini, choices that require you to take a peek in the rearview mirror. There are things that have worked for you and there are things that haven't. Keeping these learnings in mind will help you make the kind of decisions that will serve your highest good. Remember, your higher self is guiding you now and in every moment. So, pay attention to the

messages that are helping you walk your path armed with courage and confidence. PS: You've got this!

CANCER:

Not everybody is going to be on the same page as you. The journey they have taken is different from yours. As a result, so are the lessons they are integrating at this moment. Accepting the differences will help you make space for all kinds of colours in your life, Cancer. Remember, your soul family does not need your judgements. They need your presence and unconditional love.

LEO:

Those who look at you from the outside say you have unbelievable chemistry, but only you know the internal battles you have fought in order to arrive at this point in your relationship. 'Harmony' is your magic word, Leo, and it comes from accepting both yourself and the other, flaws and all. So, say a prayer of gratitude for this immense transformation as you commit to being there for each other in sickness and in health. Something tells us the best is yet to come!

VIRGO:

The world will do everything in its capacity to take you away from yourself, Virgo. But, you have to make a commitment to showing up, every single day, no matter what the consequences. You have to make a commitment to loving yourself as a form of worship. Remembering that the journey is from the self, through the self, to the self will help you invest your energy where it matters the most. So,

what are you doing to bring a little more light into your existence? How do you feel called to nourish yourself today?

LIBRA:

Following the herd is safe. But, how's a risk-free life going to facilitate growth in any way? Libra, it's time to embrace that spirit of adventure. It's time to venture into the unknown and make choices that may seem unconventional to those around you. The good thing is, you *know* you will land on your feet no matter how things turn out.

SCORPIO:

The decision at hand is not an easy one. It requires you to hit the pause button and glance into the rearview mirror. Your past experiences have shaped you, Scorpio, and they will help you understand the path that will facilitate growth and evolution. Remember, your higher self is holding space for you, now and in every moment. So, tune into the wisdom that is available to you, and know that there is no such thing as the wrong step.

SAGITTARIUS:

You are stepping into a period of endings, Sagittarius. But the final stage is seldom an easy one. Challenge yourself to keep moving forward and onwards nonetheless. Remembering what awaits you on the other side will provide you with the motivation you need to power through, beautiful. Word of warning: don't make everything in your life about your career, though.

Maintaining a work-life balance is the secret to bringing more lightness into your narrative.

CAPRICORN:

If we were given grades for breaking the rules, you'd take home a gold star, Capricorn. Yes, you're feeling all kinds of rebellious. Adventurous in a way that's making you want to redefine the course of your life. Remember, you're here to play and you're here to have fun. The ability to be less attached to the outcome of what you are creating is a sign of your evolution.

AQUARIUS:

Keep going when it's all falling apart. Keep going when it feels like you'll never make it to the top. Keep going even when you feel like your dreams are too bizarre. There is a reason you started walking this path, beautiful, and the time to exercise a greater degree of commitment is now. The truth is, you are closer to the desired destination than you've ever been and you're being supported by the Universal forces in more ways than one.

PISCES:

Maybe you didn't miss out on this opportunity. Maybe the timing wasn't quite right. Maybe you had to experience certain hardships to blossom into the being that you are today. No matter what the narrative has been, the wheel of fortune is turning in your favour, bringing forth the gifts of love, romance and fertility. Allow yourself to receive, Pisces. Know that the journey will be as blissful as the final destination.