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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Bringing some reprieve from Covid, week ends on hopeful note for Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 21 AUG:**

Sikkim today recorded a third straight day with fewer than 100 new cases, a first for the state during the second wave which has been here since 22 April. Saturday was a day of more hopeful tidings for Sikkim in that there were no new Covid deaths in the past 24 hours either and the Covid toll held at 364.

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

of the Health Department this morning, 87 cases were recorded from the testing of 779 samples yesterday, giving Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 11%.

With this, a week in which Sikkim appears to have turned the corner on the second wave has come to a close on a positive note even though the test positivity rate remains high.

In the week from 15-21 August, Sikkim recorded three Covid deaths, substantially lower than what it has averaged of late. There

had been six Covid deaths in the previous week, from 08-14 August.

Over the past seven days, the State recorded a total of 690 new cases from 5,775 tests recorded a test positivity rate of nearly 12% for the week. There were also more than double the number of recoveries in the week with 1,312 formerly Covid-positive people completing their prescribed period of isolation without symptoms and getting discharged from home and facility isolation.

As for the 87 new cases, 34 of these were detected from the RT-PCR testing of 349 samples and 53 in rapid antigen testing of 427 samples. Of the new cases, 38 were registered in East District, 36 in West District, 11 in South District and 02 in North District.

Over the last 24 hours, 163 people were released from home and facility isolation after making full recoveries. Sikkim's figure of recovered cases has further improved to 26,970. Since 28 February, 2020, Sikkim

has recorded a total of 29,244 Covid cases from 2,23,876 tests at an overall test positivity rate of around 13%.

There are currently 1,630 active cases of Covid in the State, nine of whom were admitted to hospital in the past 24 hours, taking the number of Covid patients in hospital to 107, only four of whom are under 18 years of age. There are 13 Covid patients with symptoms severe enough to require admission into the ICU facilities at STNM Hospital and Central Referral Hospital.

Namchi bans poly-pipe water supply lines, makes stop-cocks mandatory

**BIKASH CHETTRI
NAMCHI, 21 AUG:**

The use of polypipes to connect water from PHE Department supply lines to homes has been banned in Namchi. A PHE Department notice has been issued to this effect. AE, PHE-Namchi, Sonam Karthak, informs that polypipes, being less durable than regulation GI pipes, spring leaks easily and this leads to wastage which has been identified as one of the reasons adding to Namchi's water supply woes. Namchi homes relying on polypipes have been given 15 days to replace these pipes, failing which, the PHE Department will disconnect water supply to those homes. These homes have been directed to use GI pipes not more than 15 mm in diameter.

Continuing with efforts to stop leakage,



the Department has also made the use of stop-cocks mandatory for water tanks. Failure to do this within three months will attract a penalty of Rs 500 per household, the AE informs.

The notice also calls on people to clear their dues within 15 days of receiving the bills and

informs that late fee will be charged after this last date is missed. It is informed that there are consumers who have not cleared their dues for as long as six months.

Following complaints of consumers getting water "fitters" of the Department to tweak

supply lines to favour them, the Department has also promised to take "strict action" against employees indulging in such activities.

As for augmenting the water supply to Namchi, Mr Karthak informs that new sources of water from higher altitudes are being

explored and developed to ensure proper supply to the town. Meanwhile, in coordination with the Smart City project, work is also underway to categorise commercial and domestic consumption and provide them separate supply schedules and billing rates.

Sikkimey Naagarik Samaj complains to DGP against police inaction on lady's complaint against Pol Secy to CM JACOD KHALING DISMISSES ALLEGATIONS AS AN OPPOSITION CONSPIRACY TO DEFAME HIM



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 21 AUG:**

Sikkimey Naagarik Samaj [SNS] has written to the Director General of Sikkim Police alleging police inaction on a complaint submitted by a lady against Jacob Khaling, the Political Secretary to the Chief Minister. In a letter submitted to the DGP on Saturday, SNS rues that despite the SP-East having received the lady in question's FIR by speed post on 09 July, he has not even registered an FIR "against the accused holding a high post in the Government of Sikkim." Mr Khaling took to Facebook shortly after the SNS press conference and dismissed the allegations against him as an Opposition conspiracy to silence him.

Earlier, addressing a press conference, SNS general secretary, Passang Sherpa, alleged that serious allegations have been leveled against Mr Khaling ranging from molestation to attempt to rape to outraging the modesty of a woman and violations under the SC&ST Prevention of Atrocities Act.

All of these are cognizable offences and should have led to immediate arrest of the accused, SNS has pointed out in its letter to the DGP and highlighted that inaction has not only brought disrepute to the entire police department but also weakened the faith of citizens in law enforcing agencies.

While SNS has called on the DGP to hold up the rule of law in the larger interest of Sikkimese people, the organization has also demanded that Sikkim Krantikari Morcha and its government strip Mr Khaling of all posts in the party and the government until the complaint has been investigated thoroughly.

Mr Khaling has, in turn, countered in his Facebook post that the allegations against him reflected the nadir of political engagement by his detractors. These allegations, he claims, are false and baseless and an attempt at character assassination.

He has also called on his well-wishers not to get unduly worried and he continues to remain true to his faith and duty.

Summit Times in Nepali

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Thank You!

SNS memo to committee on Companies Act seeks continuation of Old Law

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 21 AUG:**

Sikkimey Naagarik Samaj [SNS] today submitted a six-point memorandum to the committee constituted by the Commerce & Industries Department to examine the Companies Act in Sikkim.

Addressing a press conference here on Saturday, SNS general secretary, Passang Sherpa, informed that the committee had called SNS president, Bharat Basnet, to a meeting today but the president refused to attend the meeting.

However, he added that the organisation

has submitted a six-point memorandum to the committee in the interest of the entrepreneurs of Sikkim.

The memorandum demands the incorporation of companies here under the Registration of Companies (Sikkim) Act of 1961, an old law protected under Article 371F of the Constitution, which is yet to be legally repealed, Mr Sherpa underlined.

The memorandum also demands that the committee propose the continuation of Sikkim's Old Law on the matter and bring the required

amendment to achieve global best practices on business in Sikkim and to issue Company Incorporation Number [CIN] and Director Identification Number [DIN] to Sikkim-based companies registered under the Registration of Companies Act 1961.

The memorandum further demands to introduce the 'One Man Company' within Old Law, global recognition of Sikkimese companies at par with companies registered under the Companies Act 2013 and Income Tax exemption for companies registered under the Registration of Companies Act 1961.

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SGJS reiterates stand on proportionate representation in legislative assembly

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 AUG:

Sikkim Gorkha Jagaran Sangh [SGJS] has once again reiterated its stand seeking proportionate seat reservation in the State Legislative Assembly based on population.

SGJS president, Balbir Tamang, while addressing a press conference here today, contended that the amendment to the People's Representation Act in 1979, notorious in Sikkim as the "Black Bill," was still ruling Sikkim and stopping people from unity and securing true peace. This Bill, when it was tabled in 1979, had presented a new reservation system for the legislative assembly, reducing the seats reserved for BLs from 15 to 12 and doing away with the seats



reserved in the Assembly for the Nepalese.

Mr Tamang informed that SGJS has already presented its formula for seat reservation and stated that instead of blaming the government, Sikkimey Naagarik Samaj [SNS] and other

organizations, which have criticized SGJS, should give their formula and solution to the seat reservation conundrum.

He mentioned that on the basis of the report submitted by the High-Powered Committee of the State in the earlier

government, the Centre has released data attesting that Sikkim's population comprises 18.43% of Bhutia-Lepcha, 14.97% of Limboo-Tamang, 4.63% Scheduled Castes and 61.97% others.

Based on this, he has questioned how SNS

and other organisations to state on record how many seats 62% of the population deserves.

Mr Tamang expressed hope that the state government has sent a scientific formula for Limboo-Tamang seat reservation to the Centre.

Fit India Freedom Run in West Sikkim

GYALSHING, 21 AUG

[PIB]: Fit India Freedom Run 2.0 was organized in 75 villages of West Sikkim in collaboration with the District Administration and affiliated youth clubs of Nehru Yuva Kendra, Gyalshing and NSS.

The district level freedom run today started at Kyongsha Ground and concluded at Gyalshing Bazar.

All the participants were handed certificates from NYK West Sikkim with the theme of "Jhan Bhagidari Se Jan Andalon".

The Fit India Freedom Run was flagged off by

Hari Narayan Subedi, Chairperson, PHE Department, in the presence of Devendra Sharma, Nagar Nigam President, West Sikkim, Nickjey Lhamu Bhutia, Deputy Director, Youth Affairs & Sports, and Sibasis Banerjee, State Director, Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, Sikkim.

The Fit India Freedom Run was also conducted at 51 villages of West Sikkim in collaboration with local affiliated youth clubs in which 2,924 people took part while at the district level there were 108 participants.



Indian children at extremely high risk of climate crisis impacts: UNICEF

NEW DELHI, 21 AUG

[PTI]: India is among four South Asian countries where children are most at risk of the impacts of climate change threatening their health, education, and protection, according to a new UNICEF report.

"The Climate Crisis Is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index" (CCRI) is UNICEF's first focussed on children. It ranks countries based on children's exposure to climate and environmental shocks such as cyclones and heatwaves, as well as their vulnerability to those shocks based on their access to essential services.

Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and India are among four South Asian countries where children are at extremely high risk of the impacts of the climate crisis, with a ranking of 14th, 15th, 25th and 26th respectively.

CCRI has placed India as one of the 33 extremely high-risk countries with flooding and air pollution being the repeated environmental shocks leading to socio-economic adverse consequences for women and children.

Approximately 1 billion children live in one of the 33 countries classified as "extremely high-risk", including the four South Asian



countries.

It is estimated that more than 600 million Indians will face "acute water shortages" in the coming years, while at the same time flash flooding is to increase significantly in the majority of India's urban areas once the global temperature increase rises above 2 degree Celsius. Twenty-one of the world's 30 cities with the most polluted air in 2020 were in India.

Dr Yasmin Ali Haque, UNICEF India Representative, said, "Climate change is a child rights crisis. The Children's Climate Change Index data has pointed to the serious deprivations faced by children due to the intensifying effect that climate and environmental shocks have on existing inadequate access to essential services such as water and sanitation, healthcare and education."

"Understanding where and how children are uniquely vulnerable to this crisis is crucial to building our resilience and effectively

addressing climate change. UNICEF hopes the findings of the report will help prioritize action to protect those most at risk and to ensure that children inherit a livable planet."

India's neighbours Nepal is ranked 51st and Sri Lanka 61st. Bhutan is ranked 111th, with children at relatively lower risk.

"For the first time, we have clear evidence of the impact of climate change on millions of children in South Asia. Droughts, floods, air pollution and river erosion across the region have left millions of children homeless and hungry, and without any healthcare and water," said George Laryea-Adjiei, UNICEF Regional Director for South Asia.

"Together, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic have created an alarming crisis for South Asian children. The time to act is now - if we invest in water, healthcare and education, we can protect their futures from the impacts of a changing climate and degrading environment," Laryea-Adjiei said.

"Merely because arrest can be made doesn't mean it must be made": Supreme Court

NEW DELHI, 21 AUG

[PTI]: Merely because an arrest can be made as it is lawful does not mandate that it must be made, the Supreme Court has said, while observing that personal liberty is an important aspect of constitutional mandate.

The Supreme Court said if arrest is made routine, it could cause "incalculable harm" to the reputation and self-esteem of a person.

A bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Hrishikesh Roy said if the investigating officer of a case does not believe that the accused will abscond or disobey the summons, he or she is not required to be produced before the court in custody.

"We may note that personal liberty is an important aspect of our constitutional mandate. The occasion to arrest an accused during investigation arises when custodial investigation becomes necessary or it is a heinous crime or where there is a possibility of influencing the witnesses or accused may abscond," the bench said in its order passed earlier this week.

The top court passed the order while hearing a plea against the Allahabad High Court verdict which had dismissed an application seeking anticipatory bail in a case in which FIR

was registered seven years ago.

The bench noted that contrary to the observations made in the top court verdict of 1994 on how a police officer has to deal with a scenario of arrest, the trial courts are stated to be insisting on arrest as a pre-requisite formality to take charge sheet on record in view of provisions of section 170 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).

Section 170 of the CrPC deals with cases to be sent to magistrate when evidence is sufficient.

The top court said the word 'custody' appearing in section 170 of the CrPC does not contemplate either police or judicial custody but it merely connotes the presentation of accused by the investigating officer before the court while filing charge sheet. It noted that section 170 of the CrPC does not impose an obligation on the officer-in-charge to arrest the accused at the time of filing of charge sheet.

"Merely because an arrest can be made because it is lawful does not mandate that arrest must be made," the bench said, adding, "If arrest is made routine, it can cause incalculable harm to the reputation and self-esteem of a person."

BJP-Sikkim begins work on party's National Health Volunteers Campaign



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 AUG:

Bharatiya Janata Party's Sikkim unit has been working towards training two volunteers each from 1,251 villages of Sikkim under the National Health Volunteers Campaign to assist healthcare workers at the grassroots level combat Covid.

The state-unit has already enrolled more than 300 youth under this campaign.

National Health Volunteers Campaign [NHVC] was launched by

BJP national president JP Nadda in New Delhi on 28 July.

Addressing a press conference here today, BJP state spokesperson, Raju Giri, informed that the Sikkim unit started work on the campaign on 08 August. He added that the required basic training to these volunteers was also underway.

Mr Giri added that the plan to train two volunteers, a male and a female, from 1,251 villages here by 31 August. He mentioned that after basic training,

these volunteers will be stationed at their respective villages equipped with the required kits to assist healthcare workers contain Covid-19.

NHVC state coordinator, Bhupendra Giri, mentioned that youth have been coming forward to join the campaign. He added that these volunteers will work at the grassroots level alongside healthcare and ASHA workers for any medical emergency and also assist with the vaccination process.

SKM Tumin-Lingee in-charge chairs meeting to take stock of implementation of schemes

WANGCHUK BHUTIA

DIKCHU, 21 AUG:

A meeting chaired by the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha constituency in-charge for Tumin-Lingee, Samdup Bhutia, took stock of the implementation of different government schemes and other project-related works at Lower Rakdong and Dikchu-Jang wards.

The meeting was held at the Gram Prasashan Kendra,

Lower Rakdong, and also attended by ward panchayat, Dikchu Jang, CL Sharma, SKM's CLC president Paras Pandey, SKPPL co-ordinator Lall Man Subba, Youth Convenor Kamal Bhattarai, SKM Ward Level Committee's GS YP Adhikari, residents and members of SHG groups.

The area in-charge informed that the SHGs will be given more schemes and called on

all to work together for development.

He also directed the party workers and the WLC not to display any bias while distributing the schemes and added that no beneficiary will be offered more than their share and none deprived. He also spoke about the Garib Awas Yojana and house upgradation schemes to be provided to eligible beneficiaries from underprivileged backgrounds.

India records 34,457 fresh COVID-19 cases, 375 deaths

NEW DELHI, AUG 21

(PTI): A single-day rise of 34,457 COVID-19 cases pushed India's tally to 3,23,93,286 on Saturday, while the number of active cases declined to 3,61,340, the lowest in 151 days, according to Union health ministry data.

India has reported less than 50,000 daily cases for 55 consecutive days.

The death toll climbed to 4,33,964 with 375 fresh fatalities, according to the data updated at 8 am.

The 3,61,340 active cases comprise 1.12 per cent of the total infections, the lowest since March last year. The national COVID-19 recovery rate stands at 97.54 per cent, the highest since March last year, the ministry said.

A reduction of 2,265 cases has been recorded in the active caseload in a span of 24 hours.

The daily positivity rate stands at 2 per cent. It has been less than 3 per cent for the last 26

days, according to the ministry.

The weekly positivity rate stands at 1.98 per cent. It has been below 3 per cent for the last 57 days, the ministry said.

As many as 17,21,205 COVID-19 tests were conducted on Friday, taking the total number of tests done so far in the country to 50,45,76,158.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease has surged to 3,15,97,982, while the case fatality rate stands at 1.34 per cent, the data stated.

So far, 57.61 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered under the nationwide vaccination drive.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7 last year, 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, 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and

surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

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

The 375 new fatalities include 105 from Maharashtra and 99 from Kerala.

Of the 4,33,964 deaths reported so far in the country, 1,35,672 were from Maharashtra, 37,105 from Karnataka, 34,663 from Tamil Nadu, 25,079 from Delhi, 22,791 from Uttar Pradesh, 19,345 from Kerala and 18,346 from West Bengal.

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

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

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South District Police gets a Cyber Cell

GANGTOK, 21 AUG [IPR]: In a move to tackle the issue of internet-related criminal activity at the district level itself, the South District Police has established a Cyber Cell at the District Police Headquarters here. The Cyber Cell was set up and inaugurated at DHQ, Namchi, by SSP-South, Thakur Thapa, on 20 August.

DySP-Traffic, SDPOs, DySP-HQ, SHOs and other staff members were present for the opening ceremony.

The Additional Superintendent of Police, South, will be the in-charge of Cyber Cell and provide technical support to investigating officers of South District Police in solving cyber crimes. Subordinate staff here will also be trained to deal with cybercrimes and raise awareness and provide strategies to the public on cyber security.



Court gives Assam 45 days to complete facility to house "foreigners"

GUWAHATI, 21 AUG [NDTV]: The Gauhati High Court has given the Assam government 45 days to complete the construction of a facility to house "illegal foreigners" in Goalpara district.

The centre at Matia in Goalpara, about 150 km from Guwahati, is being built to exclusively house people declared and convicted as foreigners by the foreigners tribunals.

It is being constructed at a cost of ₹ 46 crore and will have the capacity to house about 3,500 people.

Justice Kalyan Rai Surana directed the Home and Political Department of Assam government to file a status report on the centre's construction after 45 days and posted

the matter for hearing on September 30.

The government has told the court that steps are being taken to complete construction. The state government's counsel sought six weeks' time to complete the construction and shift the detainees to the new facility.

Currently, all the centres to detain "illegal foreigners" in Assam are located within jail premises. These are in Tezpur, Silchar, Jorhat, Kokrajhar and Goalpara districts.

The court had earlier directed the state government to take steps to shift those people to facilities outside the premises of prisons.

The matter relates to petitions filed by Santhanu Borthakur,

Abantee Dutta and Dipika Sarkar with regard to the operation of detention centres for accommodating foreigners/illegal migrants and others who are awaiting deportation or repatriation to the countries of their origin or waiting for a ruling on their appeals.

According to the Assam government, as of April 2021, 2,98,471 cases have been disposed of by the Foreigners Tribunals so far and 1,36,173 cases are pending.

Meanwhile, the Assam government has renamed the detention centres for foreigners to the more humane expression, transit camps. A 12-year-old notification was modified to effect this.

Opposition parties to hold joint protests across India between Sept 20-30

NEW DELHI, 21 AUG [PTI]: The leaders of the 19 political parties who met virtually today said they will organise joint protests and demonstrations across the country from September 20 to September 30 as they urged the people to save the country today to change it for a better tomorrow.

After a virtual meeting of the Opposition parties, where they stressed on unitedly moving forward to defeat the ruling BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the leaders released an 11-point charter of demands for the government.

"We will jointly organise protest actions all over the country from 20th to 30th September, 2021," they said in a statement.

The forms of these public protest actions will be decided by the respective state units of their parties, depending on the concrete conditions of the Covid regulations and protocols in the states, the leaders said.

The protests may include dharnas, protest demonstrations, and hartals, the joint

statement read.

"We, the leaders of 19 Opposition parties, call upon the people of India to rise to the occasion to defend our secular, democratic, republican order with all our might. Save India today, so that we can change it for a better tomorrow," they said.

The leaders also strongly condemned the manner in which the Centre and the ruling BJP disrupted the Monsoon Session of Parliament, refusing to discuss the alleged illegal use of the Pegasus military spyware for unauthorised surveillance, a repeal of three "anti-farmer" laws, the gross mismanagement of the coronavirus pandemic, inflation and price rise and the spiralling unemployment.

All these and many other issues affecting the country and its people were deliberately ignored by the government, they alleged.

Attacking Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Opposition leaders said his Independence Day address did not focus on a single issue adding to the people's miseries.

Pang Lhabsol greetings from CM

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 AUG:

Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang has extended greetings and good wishes to the people of Sikkim on the occasion of Pang Lhabsol which falls on 22 Aug, Sunday, this year.

In his message, the Chief Minister states that Pang Lhabsol is an important festival symbolizing unity and brotherhood amongst the Sikkimese people with the mighty Khangchendzonga as the guardian deity.



"I pray to our guardian deity to continue to bestow peace and communal harmony in Sikkim and usher us towards the path of progress & prosperity and bless our people with happiness, abundance, and well-being", states Chief Minister Tamang.



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM SOCIAL JUSTICE AND WELFARE DEPARTMENT CHILD PROTECTION SCHEME GANGTOK

No. 255/SJ&WD/CPS/2021

Dated: 19/08/2021

INVITATION FOR QUOTATION

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The interested bidder must be empanelled / registered with the Information and Technology Department, Government of Sikkim (copy of valid empanelment/ registration proof to be enclosed).

The sealed quotation must be submitted to the following address by 15th September, 2021 before 4.30 pm:

* Special Secretary-cum-Director, CPS, Social Justice & Welfare Department Lumsey, Tadong – 737101.

The date of opening of quotation shall be 16th September, 2021 at 11.00 am in the chamber of Special Secretary-cum-Director, CPS. The interested bidder may have their presence on the scheduled date and time.

The department reserves the right to accept or reject the quotation.

**Sd/-
Joint Secretary-cum- Programme Manager, CPS.**

Ro. No. 154/IPR/Pub/Classi./21-22dt. 20.8.2021



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM SIKKIM STATE COMMISSION FOR WOMEN GANGTOK

No. 375/SSCW/2021-22

Dated: 17/08/2021

The Sikkim State Commission for Women seeks applications for one (1) post of Project Coordinator for the Project funded under the Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India from experienced Professional for a period of 22 months on purely contractual basis or co-terminus with the Project. The selected candidate will not have any right towards claim for regularization or extension of his or her service.

Eligibility:-

- The applicant should possess a Degree in Law/Social Work/Sociology/ Gender Studies with minimum of 3 years experience in Project Management under Government or Private Organizations.
- The applicant should have a Certificate of Identification.
- The applicant should have the relevant working experience in the field of Gender issues.
- The minimum age of the applicant should be 30 years and the upper age limit should not exceed 45 years.

Additional Required Skills and Experience:-

- Proficiency in computer applications (Microsoft Office and Web VC Expert)
- Excellent documentation skills.
- Fluency in English, Hindi and Nepali.
- Presentation and Communication Skills.
- Should be able to understand the relevant stakeholders within the State with the ability to engage with them, build trust and be a bridge between the stakeholders and the Commission.
- Ability to organize events and should have good networking skills.
- Attention to details, ability to deliver tasks on time with limited supervision.
- Ability to deliver trainings and coordinate workshops.

Interested candidates can Walk in Interview for the said post on 25th August 2021 between 11 am and 4 pm, Venue: Office of the Sikkim State Commission for Women, Old Secretariat, Opposite Super Market, Near National Highway, Gangtok, East Sikkim.

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Awaiting Collaborations

If people don't network, their issues will get hijacked

Gangtok is cleaner than most State capitals in India, much cleaner than any other hill station. And the Gangtokians appear happy with that much because one is yet to see any community-level initiative to improve civic conditions any further. For instance, it had to be the State Government which gave the nod to a proposal which came from a foreign funding agency to declare MG Marg a “litter & spit free zone”. The declaration was easy, it was the implementation that tested the patience of the enforcers. It has succeeded, but again as a top-down initiative, and with it, much before the rest of India was told to go swachh, Sikkim had added another USP to its appeal. Of course, no tourist is going to come to Gangtok only to see a the nation's first litter & spit free urban zone, but it will be initiatives like this that will add up to provide that larger argument which will convince visitors to choose Gangtok over, say a Shimla for their summer vacations. It would have been so much more palatable and welcome if the “zone” had come on public initiative. Why did it have to be the State which had to enforce the new stipulations? Why couldn't a local NGO have pursued the concept and convinced the locals to stop littering and spitting at MG Marg?

The problem lies with the fact that Gangtok, although it is the most urban of spaces in the State, is still also closed and uninvolved, populated by Gangtokians who are isolated not only in their lifestyles, but also their thinking. They complain that the GMC garbage collection trucks do not detour to their residences often enough, but will never come together to work out a solution for locality garbage disposal problems on their own. They will be scandalised when reports of a fire in a school in South India hits the headlines and will worry about the safety of their children, but will wait for the State Government to draw up a legislation making the schools safer. And then they will forget to keep track. They will not come together as parents and pressure the respective school managements to install the safety mechanisms. They will complain of drunken driving on weekends until one of their own gets challaned for driving under the influence of alcohol and then it will be about how overbearing the cops have become. And through all this, they will not convince their neighborhood bars to collect car keys and refuse to hand them over to inebriated drivers or unless the group has a sober hand for the wheels. After all, it does not take a rocket scientist to identify the problem areas and suggest remedial measures when it comes to working out how communities can work together to make living better. The oft-expressed need for a civil society in Gangtok is not misplaced, the problem is, it does not appear to be forming; not until Gangtokians stop reacting only to personal discomforts and ignoring community issues. The problem with such an attitude is that when real issues crop-up, because the people are not interested in understanding them in their entirety, they get hijacked by people we all know popularly as “vested interests.” When this happens, there is a lot of noise, but no resolution. It is for the people to decide whether they want to continue living in this cacophony or opt for saner collaborations.

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After India's brutal coronavirus wave, two-thirds of population has been exposed to SARS-CoV2

RAJIB DASGUPTA
THECONVERSATION.COM

India emerged in June and July of 2021 from a particularly savage second wave of COVID-19, with total confirmed cases at about 32 million and more than 400,000 deaths. But this could be a dramatic under-counting. Alternative estimates have put excess deaths in the range of 3.4 million to 4.9 million.

This wave was driven by multiple coronavirus variants, including alpha, which was first detected in the U.K., and delta, first identified in India and now the main source of infections in many countries. Because the emerging threat was not recognized early enough, health care services were overwhelmed starting in early April, with the lack of reliable oxygen supply becoming a major problem.

Both the alpha and delta variants are highly contagious, with delta being nearly twice as transmissible as the original strain of SARS-CoV-2. The rapid rise in cases in India is attributed to the high viral load – the amount of virus infecting a person – of delta, which is about 1,000 times higher than other strains. This resulted in widespread infections among household members with rates as high as 80% to 100%.

The decline of cases in India has been surprisingly rapid given that there were daily new cases in the range of 400,000 in the first week of May and the test positivity rate in some districts was as high as 20%. Similar sharp declines were observed more recently in the U.K., Netherlands and Israel – perhaps a result of a combination of high vaccination rates and high infection levels. Daily cases in India are now between 30,000 and 40,000 per day.

WHAT'S THE PROGRESS WITH VACCINATION?

With the vaccination campaign substantially picking up in India, about 15% of adults have now received both doses of the vaccine and nearly 40% a single dose. A record 8.8 million doses were administered on Aug. 17, 2021 in a bid to achieve the 250 million target for August, although some projections consider it likely will be missed.

Supply situations continue to be challenging. Production of the Covaxin vaccine, developed by Indian company Bharat Biotech, did not accelerate as envisaged, at least in part due to quality issues of some batches. Negotiations with Moderna haven't worked out and Johnson & Johnson received emergency authorization for use in August. Production of the Russia-developed Sputnik V by an Indian partner has been delayed and manufacturing is expected to be on track only by September. Covishield from AstraZeneca continues to be the workhorse, accounting for 87.5% of the vaccines administered to date.

An estimated 9 million doses will need to be administered daily through the next five months to meet the target of vaccinating all adults by Dec. 31, 2021. For comparison, average daily vaccinations

in the U.S. at its peak in April was 3.5 million per day. An added challenge for the Indian campaign will be the vaccination of children. Vaccination of an estimated 400 million in the 2-18 years age group is likely to begin in March 2022 though emergency authorization is expected to begin this month.

HOW MANY OF INDIA'S 1.3 BILLION PEOPLE HAVE BEEN INFECTED?

In the aftermath of the second wave from roughly April to June, the Indian Council of Medical Research conducted the fourth round of a national sero-survey in June and July 2021 to test for antibodies in blood samples from residents across 70 districts of 21 states. The overall seroprevalence was 67.6%, a huge increase from 24.1% recorded in the third round from December, 2020 to January, 2021. The presence of antibodies

indicates that a person has either been exposed to the coronavirus or has been vaccinated.

Seropositivity among children was 57.2% in those aged 6-9 years and 61.6% among those who are 10-17 years old. Experts believe that there is not much scientific evidence that children would be disproportionately vulnerable in a third wave. The government, however, anticipates the possibility of intermittent surges in the number of cases and prepared operational guidelines for children and adolescents in preparation for a third wave. Seroprevalence among those above 45 years was 77.6% and 66.7% among younger adults, indicating the effect of vaccination as well as infections.

The coronavirus had spread through the entire country; seroprevalence among the rural population (66.5%) was only slightly lower than in urban counterparts. A wide range of interstate differences have emerged, from a low of 44.4% in Kerala to 79% in Madhya Pradesh.

The extent of undercount – the difference between estimated cases (based on seroprevalence) and actual cases detected by RT-PCR and rapid antigen tests – is particularly worrying. Nationally, the system missed 33 cases for every one detected.

WHAT ARE THE PROSPECTS FOR THE WEEKS AND MONTHS AHEAD?

With about 40,000 cases and 400 deaths each day as of mid August, a new uptick is likely in the cards. The Indian states experiencing most of these new cases are those with relatively lower

sero-prevalence, ranging between 50% and 70%. The 400 million sero-negative pool – that is people who have not been infected or had the vaccine – continues to be a large vulnerable group.

Forecasting by modelers indicates a third wave beginning in August and peaking at 100,000 to 150,000 infections a day by October. An alternative projection expects the peak in cases going until November. States currently reporting higher daily cases are also testing at two-three times the national average. The case fatality rate in these states is also lower than the national average and health service capacities are not yet stretched. For its part, the federal government announced the second phase of its emergency response policy with targets that go until March 2022.

HAS THE ECONOMY OPENED BACK UP?

COVID-19 vaccination in India has been marked



by both inequity and hesitancy; negotiating both will be crucial in the weeks ahead.

The range of vulnerabilities have included rural and remote locations and a lack of access to the internet; a gender divide has emerged too with more men being vaccinated than women. As vaccination progresses with underlying inequities, the phenomenon of “patchwork vaccination” emerges – pockets that are highly vaccinated and adjacent to places or communities with low coverage. The communities with low coverage are vulnerable to hyperlocal outbreaks.

Most economic activities have resumed, and the education and entertainment sectors are opening up too. A joint statement on June 6, 2021, issued by the public health associations in India urged that district-level sero-surveys be undertaken by the state or federal health services to enable a more granular understanding of the epidemiologic context to enable planning. While this was accepted in principle, such systematic surveys have yet to be rolled out.

The World Health Organization advises that public health and social measures in the context of COVID-19 be guided by local transmission dynamics. Planning at the district level in India shall be crucial in the journey ahead.

[the writer is Chairperson, Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health, Jawaharlal Nehru University]

Afghanistan: Progress on Women's Rights Has Been Hard Fought – now everything is at risk under the Taliban

SAHAR MARANLOU
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When the Taliban was in power between 1996 and 2001, women's rights to education and employment were brutally violated. They could only go out in public if accompanied by a male relative and, even then, had to be fully covered with a burqa. There was severe punishment for disobeying these strict rules.

In the 20 years since the Taliban was ousted, Afghan women have fought for their own rights and have taken a proactive role in the development of human rights in their nation – including the establishment of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

Under the government that has just been toppled, there was a Ministry of Women's Affairs and, in 2009, a landmark law was passed to address violence against women. Afghanistan has also become a signatory to several international human rights instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Now that the Taliban has once again taken over, women fear the worst.

STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE

Despite progress, the World Health Organization estimates that almost 90% of women in Afghanistan have experienced at least one form of domestic violence and that 17% have experienced sexual violence. This high rate of violence is rooted in cultural values but is also enabled by the way laws are structured and

justice is delivered.

Women are often unable to access justice on the same terms as men, be that through formal or informal dispute resolution mechanisms. For example, if an Afghan woman decides to take legal action under the landmark law Elimination of Violence Against Women, she will often face violence from a family member for trying to stand up for her rights.

In many cases, husbands, family members, police, lawyers and judges discourage women from taking legal action. Many women report sexual assault via abusive vaginal examinations, or “virginity tests”, during court procedures. The virginity examination is a routine part of criminal proceedings when women are accused of moral crimes, including sex outside of marriage. In many cases women's sexual histories are used in court as evidence to justify long prison terms.

Both men and women face delays and a lack of support when seeking legal representation in Afghanistan but women find it even harder because of discriminatory cultural norms and a lack of family support. Women are likely to have a lower level of literacy, lack of information about how the justice system works and have limited access to financial resources. Being dependent on male breadwinners is an important barrier in taking legal action.

In addition to formal obstacles, women face strong societal pressure to resolve marital disputes via informal justice

mechanisms such as jirgas (an assembly of local leaders) and shura (a consultation process) – even though these offer them little protection. Women must be represented by a male family member in informal community dispute resolution gatherings so don't have the freedom to speak for themselves. And some mechanisms of dispute resolution based on restorative principles, such as the exchange of women between tribes to resolve a disputes, are fundamentally discriminatory to women.

RETURN TO TALIBAN RULE

While the situation in Afghanistan has been difficult for women over the past two decades, there was at least a shift in the right direction and support for change among many important people.

The justice system operated by the Taliban, by contrast, is likely to wilfully violate the constitutional and international protections that are in place to support women. With the international community in retreat, there will be no one to stop the new regime from dismantling these protections. It took significant political pressure to push ahead with what reforms have taken place. That will now disappear altogether.

One major concern is the future of the many women's rights organisations and other civil society groups that have been operating in Afghanistan until now. International charities and foreign embassies have supported their work on the ground but are now leaving them vulnerable.

The Afghan legal system is highly complex. It is based on religious values, custom and tribal values, often resulting in discriminatory processes. Women, can, for example, be imprisoned for zina (moral crimes) that can include “running away from home” in domestic violence cases.

Even when a court rules in favour of a woman, she may still face violence at the hands of her own family. Patriarchal norms and socio-cultural values carry a great deal of weight and often prevent women from accessing the public sphere – such as courts and police stations – without the accompaniment of male guardians. Taking legal action against spouses is often perceived as a shameful taboo.

These practices continue despite two decades of progress. Now it seems more likely that such practices will become the norm under the Taliban. Their recent statement declares: “We are going to allow women to work and study within our frameworks”. This leaves open the question: what is the framework being offered?

The women who lived under the Taliban 20 years ago remember with fear their extreme interpretation of Sharia law. These women have little faith that the new regime will be any different. As a female academic working on access to justice, it's unbearable to imagine what it would feel like to live under the Taliban's misogynist rule, where men will be able to spin patriarchal narratives from religious laws.

[the writer is Lecturer, School of Law, University of Essex]

Sri Lankan president warns of consequences if longer Covid lockdown enforced

COLOMBO, AUG 21 (PTI): Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has warned of the consequences the public will need to face if a longer lockdown is enforced as he ordered a 10-day nationwide shutdown to combat the spike in coronavirus cases. In a televised address to the nation on Friday, Rajapaksa said he agreed to enforce a brief lockdown from 10 pm till 4 am on August 30, however, if a longer shutdown is enforced in future then the public will need to be prepared to make sacrifices.

"At this crucial juncture, everyone should take the country forward strategically by acknowledging the gravity of the situation," he said.

Rajapaksa also underlined that a lockdown will damage the country's economy, including the tourism sector which is trying to revive.

The president had earlier refused to heed to calls of a lockdown by medics as coronavirus infections overwhelmed hospitals, morgues and crematoriums, arguing that closing down the country will badly impact the island's fragile economy.

However, he was



compelled to relent as the powerful Buddhist clergy and his own political alliance members demanded the lockdown in view of the grave situation facing the island nation.

The pressure mounted as the death toll in the ongoing third wave surged to unmanageable levels with the health sector having to cope over its capacity. The morgues had bodies piled up waiting to be cremated. The death toll on Friday was a record with 195 fatalities, along with 3,839 new infections.

According to official figures, as on Saturday, a total of 6,985 people died of the virus, while 381,812 have been infected.

Rajapaksa noted that a majority of COVID-19 deaths are of unvaccinated people over the age of 60 with chronic ailments.

Health experts say the Western province with the capital district of Colombo was the worst hit. Over 75 per cent of the cases in Colombo were from the rapidly spreading Delta variant.

This is the first time since mid-June that the country has re-imposed a lockdown. The ongoing third wave of infections is blamed on the traditional Sinhala and Tamil New Year celebrations held in mid-April.

The stepped up vaccination drive was another reason why the government was not

keen on re-imposing a lockdown. Over 5 million out of the 21 million population have been given two doses of a vaccine.

Asserting that vaccination is the primary solution to contain the pandemic, the president recalled his personal appeals made to world leaders to secure consignments of vaccines to inoculate Lankan population.

All these efforts were made because I wanted to vaccinate all the people of our country. As a result of this effort, the country is now receiving a large number of vaccines," he said, underlining that Lanka was among the countries with the highest vaccination rate

in the world.

At present, about 98 per cent of people above the age of 30 have been vaccinated, while 43 per cent have been given both the doses. By August 31, more than 81 per cent of the population will receive the second dose. By September 10, 100 per cent of the population will receive both the doses, Rajapaksa asserted.

Lanka, which has witnessed a series of lockdowns and curfews to contain the spread of COVID-19 in the country, has been impacted in terms of its economy. The tourism sector, which generates a huge quantum of revenue for the island nation, has seen a drastic fall.

Andaman & Nicobar reports 3 new COVID-19 cases

PORT BLAIR, AUG 21 (PTI): The union territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands reported three new COVID-19 cases, pushing the tally to 7,556, a health official said on Saturday.

The three new cases were detected during testing at the airport. All passengers arriving by flight have to undergo a mandatory RT-PCR test before they are allowed entry into the islands.

The archipelago

now has eight active COVID-19 cases and all eight patients are in the South Andaman district. The other two districts - North and Middle Andaman and Nicobar - are COVID-19 free, the official said.

A total of 7,419 people have recovered from COVID-19 so far, he said.

The COVID-19 death toll in the union territory remained at 129 as no fresh fatality due to the

disease was reported in the last 24 hours.

So far 4,69,406 samples have been tested for COVID-19 and the cumulative test positivity rate is 1.61 per cent.

A total of 3,33,520 beneficiaries have been inoculated in the union territory so far, of which 2,32,979 people have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine and 1,00,541 have received both doses of the vaccine, he said.

Bengal: Subrata Mukherjee given charge of Sadhan Pande's departments

KOLKATA, AUG 21 (PTI): Senior West Bengal Minister Subrata Mukherjee was given the additional charge of the Consumer Affairs, and Self-Help Group and Self Employment departments, as per an official order.

The two portfolios

were held by Sadhan Pande, who is in hospital since mid-July with lung infection.

Pande would remain a minister in the Mamata Banerjee government but without a portfolio, the order said.

Besides the two new departments, Mukherjee

holds the portfolios of Public Enterprises and Industrial Reconstruction, and Panchayat and Rural Development.

The condition of Pande, the TMC MLA from Manicktala, is "quite critical", hospital sources said.

40 kg heroin recovered from India-Pakistan border in Amritsar



Chandigarh, Aug 21 (PTI): Around 40 kg of heroin worth Rs 200 crore in the international market was recovered from the India-Pakistan border in Amritsar early Saturday morning, police said.

The recovery was made during a joint operation by the Punjab

Police and the Border Security Force, they said. Amritsar (Rural)

Senior Superintendent of Police Gulneet Singh Khurana told PTI that police had received information that one Nirmal Singh, a resident of Gharinda in Amritsar, would take delivery of heroin coming

from Pakistan at the International Border (IB).

Based on this, an operation was conducted and 40.810 kg of heroin was recovered from the border, he said.

Khurana said Singh is on the run and a case has been registered in the matter.

Ladakh records 3 fresh COVID-19 cases



LEH, AUG 21 (PTI): The total number of COVID-19 cases in Ladakh climbed to 20,483 as three more people tested positive for the disease in the union territory, officials said on Saturday.

With 12 more patients recovering from

the disease, the number of active cases dropped to 72, they said.

So far, Ladakh has recorded 207 Covid-related deaths -- 149 in Leh and 58 in Kargil.

The officials said over 3,300 people were tested for COVID-19 in Leh and

Kargil on Friday. Of these, two tested positive in Leh and one in Kargil.

Of the 72 active cases, 65 are in Leh and seven in Kargil, they said.

So far, 20,204 patients have recovered from COVID-19 in Ladakh, they said.

Two elephants electrocuted in Assam's Baksa

GUWAHATI, AUG 21 (PTI): Two elephants were killed after they came in contact with illegally installed electric fences in Assam's Baksa district near the Bhutan border, a forest official said on Saturday.

The incident happened in the Koroibari area near the Batabari Forest Range on Friday, he said.

The elephants, both adult females, came down from the Bhutan Hills in search of food, he added.

A person, identified as Reshan Daimary, who had allegedly installed the electric fences to protect his crops,

surrendered before the police.

An investigation into the incident is underway, the official said.

"Daimary will be taken into custody and booked under the Wildlife Protection Act," he said.

This is the third incident of electrocution of elephants this year amid a growing human-elephant conflict with illegal electric fences having claimed the lives of 13 jumbos so far, the official said.

Marsch wins Bundesliga's 1st duel between American coaches

BERLIN, AUG 21 (AP): Jesse Marsch won the first Bundesliga duel between teams with American coaches by leading Leipzig to a 4-0 win over Pellegrino Matarazzo's Stuttgart.

As well as giving Marsch temporary bragging rights over his compatriot, the win made amends for Leipzig's shock 1-0 loss at coronavirus-hit Mainz in the coach's German league debut in the opening round.

"It was a super reaction after our defeat last week in Mainz," Marsch said in German.

"From the beginning, we were clear, precise and good. We wanted to be very intensive, very

aggressive against the ball, with the ball. It was really a great performance from us."

Marsch's team had been threatening more than Matarazzo's and it was no surprise when Dominik Szoboszlai finally made the breakthrough in the 38th minute.

The Hungarian forward let fly from a difficult angle inside the far post for his first Bundesliga goal. Szoboszlai had arrived at Leipzig in January but missed half a season due to injury. The 20-year-old Szoboszlai scored on his debut in the German Cup this month.

Emil Forsberg made it 2-0 seconds after the interval when Andr Silva

laid the ball off with his heel for the Sweden midfielder to finish past Florian Müller in the Stuttgart goal.

Szoboszlai's low free kick intended as a cross flew inside the far post in the 52nd, and Silva sealed the result with a penalty in the 65th for his first Leipzig goal.

The penalty was awarded despite the ball coming off Marc Oliver Kempf's body before it hit his arm, but there was no correction from the video referee.

"It wasn't the deciding factor," said Matarazzo, whose team routed promoted Greuther Frankfurt 5-1 in the opening round.

"We were shown our limits today. Leipzig were simply the better team in every aspect.

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Kapur shoots second straight 70, makes cut in Czech Masters

PRAGUE, AUG 21 (PTI): India's Shiv Kapur shot a second straight round of two-under and moved to four-under to make he cut at the D+D REAL Czech Masters golf tournament here. Based out of Dubai during the pandemic, Kapur seemed to have finally found form and played steady to be placed tied 17th at the Albatross Golf Resort. Things, however, were not so good for SSP Chawrasia (70-75) and Ajeetesh Sandhu (74-73), who missed the cut.

Chawrasia, who had a good 70 on the first day, started the second with five bogeys in the first six holes and missed the cut by one. Kapur birdied the eighth, but bogeyed the ninth to turn in even par. On the back nine, he birdied Par-3 13th and par-4 15th and did not drop any shots for a round of 70. Play was halted for half an hour due to waterlogging after heavy rain in the Czech capital. Sebastian S derberg, who will defend his Omega European

Masters title next week at Crans-sur-Sierre, equalled the course record at Albatross Golf Resort as he fired an eight-under par 64 to take the halfway lead. The 30-year-old leads Sean Crocker of the United States and Poland's Adrian Meronk, who both carded five under par rounds of 67 to sign for nine under par totals. They sit one stroke ahead of 2016 Open Champion Henrik Stenson, who remains bogey-free after 36 holes on eight-under.



Lahiri shoots another 69, makes cut at Northern Trust golf

NEW JERSEY, AUG 21 (PTI): India's Anirban Lahiri shot another two-under 69 in the second round of the Northern Trust golf tournament to move into the weekend action in the first play-offs at the FedExCup here. His 69-69 moved him to four-under and was T-36, down 21 places from his overnight T-15. Lahiri, who found 11 of the 18 greens, needs to be around 10th to make the next play-off event, the BMW Championships, and for that he will need to hole a lot more putts. He is four strokes outside the top-10 presently, and eight behind leader Jon Rahm of Spain. Rahm (63-67) reached 12-under as Tony Finau (67-64) was a shot behind in his search for the season-ending Tour Championship berth and a place on the Ryder Cup team. Lahiri confessed, "To be honest, I'm running a little low on energy and I think it caught up with me towards the end a little bit." "Four or five of the last holes, I missed

putts from inside pretty much of 15 feet on all of them except for the last hole. I've been playing really well I think. Played well yesterday (Round 1) morning in the tough conditions and could have shot two or three better, and today's conditions were absolutely ideal and the golf course was right there." "I got off to a good start and in the middle part of the round, I didn't take the opportunities that were in front of me. I've been playing well and just haven't quite made as many putts as I need." Three pars at the start were followed by three birdies in a row as Lahiri seemed set for a low number in the second round. Soon after missing a 13-footer for birdie on third, the Indian hit his tee shot to 18 feet on par-3 fourth and holed it. On the 427-yard par-4 fifth hole, Lahiri hit a 178 yard-approach to 12 feet and holed it to go two-under. The momentum continued as he drove 339 yards on Par-5 sixth and then a yet



another superb second shot of 192 yards gave him an eagle putt from 12 feet but he managed only a birdie. Yet he looked great at three-under for the round. He missed a couple of fairways and then had very long putts till a 10-and-a-half footer on 13th, which he missed and parred. On 14th, he missed a six footer for par and on par-4 15th he was on the fringe in two and chipped to just under feet but missed the par. Two great shots on the par-4 16th hole saw him recover one shot and he missed a 11-footer for par on 17th. His putter did work early with conversions

of 18 feet and 13 feet for gains but later on his irons left him fighting for pars coming in. "I've put myself in a good position for the weekend. If I keep doing what I'm doing, I just need to sharpen up on the greens and maybe get some better greens tomorrow as I won't be playing absolutely last and try to take advantage. "I feel like I'm playing well. I just need to put 36 holes together and keep pushing my body," said Lahiri. Olympic gold medalist Xander Schauffele tied his personal best on the PGA Tour and the course record at Liberty National with a 62 and

was in the group at 10-under 132 along with Justin Thomas (69) and Keith Mitchell (64). Thomas had two contrasting nines. In his first nine holes, he made four bogeys in eight holes, only to play his last five holes in five-under including an eagle at the par-5 eighth. Korea's Sungjae Im, the leading Asian in regular season, will enter the third round as the highest ranked Asian in a share of 17th place and six off the lead after a bogey-free 66. Japan's reigning Masters winner, Hideki Matsuyama fired a 67 which included a disappointing triple bogey on his last hole for T-25 on 137.

No. 1 Barty beats Krejcikova to reach semis in Cincinnati

MASON, OHIO (AP):Top-ranked Ash Barty beat Barbora Krejcikova 6-2, 6-4 on Friday to reach the semifinals of the Western & Southern Open. Barty will face two-time Cincinnati finalist Angelique Kerber, who won her quarterfinal when two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova retired during the second set because of a stomach problem. Kerber won the first set 6-4 and was tied 3-3 in the second. Barty beat Kerber in the Wimbledon semifinals in July. They have split their six matches. "She's one the best competitors in the world," Barty said. "Angie's never far off her best. Even on days where she's not playing her best tennis, she finds a way to stay in matches. When you play against Angie, you ride a fine line of not pressing too much, but also not being too defensive where she can move you around the court." Barty, ranked No. 1 for 87 weeks, hasn't lost a set this week in Cincinnati, a tune-up event for the U.S. Open. "This is actually why I'm here, to have a lot of good matches against the best players before going to the US Open," Kerber said. "I'm excited to playing against Ash again." Barty's biggest challenge so far this week came from Heather Watson in the second round. Barty has since dispatched of Victoria Azarenka and Krejcikova in straight sets. The Australian was not deterred by the extreme heat

and humidity in the morning's first match at the Lindner Family Tennis Center. "It was like a Brisbane summer day," Barty said. "The heat's certainly not a problem for me. It's nice to play the first match. You know when your start time is, which is not very regular in the tennis world." Barty won 84% percent of first serves against Krejcikova and four of eight break points. She had only 15 unforced errors. Barty had seven aces Friday and has 15 in the tournament. "I feel like I did a good job looking after my own serves," she said. "I felt like a lot of the time I was in control of it. That just allowed me to be more free on Barbora's service games. Overall, I was able to use my forehand and slice effectively." Barty won Wimbledon in July, but two weeks later was beaten in the first round of the Tokyo Olympics. She appears to have regained her stroke in Cincinnati. "I feel like it's nice to get a couple of matches now here in Cincy," Barty said. "Each match you get to play in different conditions and you get more and more used to it. I'm just able to adjust and adapt and I look forward to my next one, no doubt." There was no celebration by Jil Teichmann when she dispatched of fellow Swiss and Tokyo gold medalist Belinda Bencic in straight sets, 6-3, 6-2. Teichmann ended her close friend's nine-match win streak.

"Once we step on court it's business, it's just another player I have to deal with," Teichmann said. "She had the same mindset." Teichmann, a wild card who shocked No. 2-ranked Naomi Osaka on Thursday night, continues her unexpected run against No. 5 seed Karolina Pliskova in Saturday's semifinals. When asked if she expected to be in this position, Teichmann said she's not one to look ahead. "No, I'm going match by match, because I know every match is a big challenge and I need to get the win to get the next chance," she said. Pliskova won when Paula Badosa retired in the second set due to injury. Five of the top eight men's seeds reached the quarterfinals for the 11th time in tournament history. Top-seed and No. 2-ranked Daniil Medvedev reached his third consecutive quarterfinal in Cincinnati and rolled to a 6-1, 6-1 victory over No. 7 seed Pablo Carreno Busta. Medvedev who has yet to lose more than three games in a match this week, will face fellow Russian Andrey Rublev in Saturday's semifinals. He has never lost to Rublev in four meetings. "It's always a new match," Medvedev said. "He plays with a lot of intensity. Serves well. Always a difficult match. Right now, my level of confidence is very high." The other men's semifinal on Saturday will pit No. 2 seed Stefanos Tsitsipas against No. 3 seed Alexander Zverev.

MP govt to groom budding sportspersons for 2024, 2028 Olympics: Chouhan

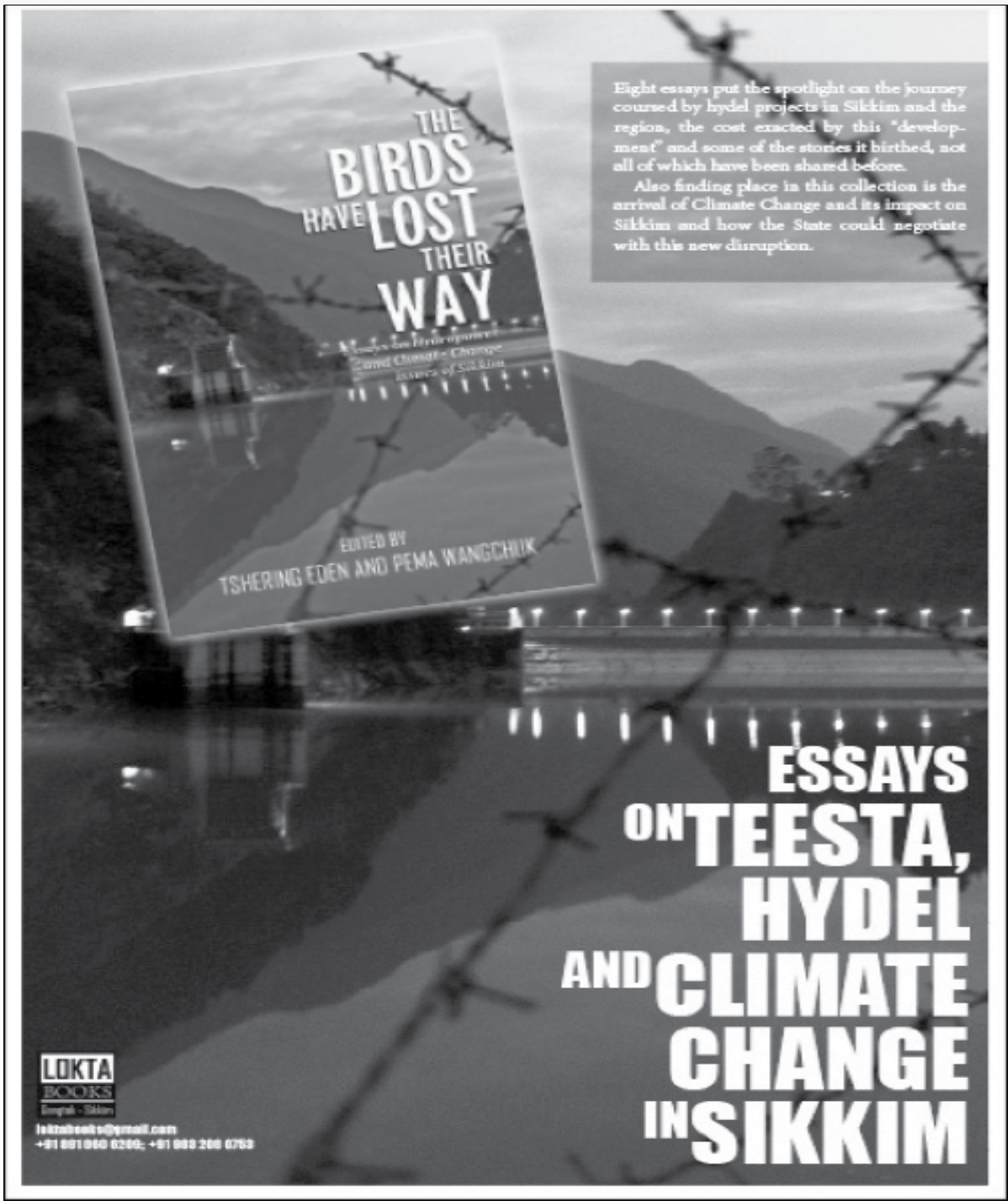
BHOPAL, AUG 21 (PTI): The Madhya Pradesh government will train budding sportspersons for the 2024 and 2028 Olympics, state Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said. Under a talent search programme, the government has started looking for sportspersons so that they can be groomed in 18 sports academies in the state for the world's largest sporting event. In a statement, Chouhan said that Indian players, who made a record in the Tokyo Olympics, have opened the doors for future possibilities and their brilliant performance has been inspiring. "Therefore, we have decided to look for new talented players under a campaign and train them in 18 sports



academies of Madhya Pradesh. We will churn out not one but many such players, who will bring laurels to the country and the state in the Olympics besides in national and international competitions," he said. So far, around 50,000 youths have registered their names under the talent search programme, he added. Chouhan said the

state government has set its eyes on the 2024 Paris Olympics and the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics and Madhya Pradesh's sportspersons will win medals for the country there. He urged the youths interested in sports to register themselves for the talent search campaign of the Madhya Pradesh government. "This will help

in nurturing and training budding players in bringing glory to the country. The youths should register themselves and participate in talent search programmes," he said. Recently, Chouhan had offered Vivek Sagar, midfielder in the Olympic bronze medal-winning Indian hockey team, service in MP Police as a DSP. Sagar hails from Itarsi in the state.



China allows couples third child amid demographic crisis



BEIJING (AP): China will now allow couples to legally have a third child as it seeks to hold off a demographic crisis that could threaten its hopes of increased prosperity and global influence.

The ceremonial legislature on Friday amended the Population and Family Planning Law as part of a decades-long effort by the ruling Communist Party to dictate the size of families in keeping with political directives. It comes just six years after the last change.

From the 1980s, China strictly limited most couples to one child, a policy enforced with threats of fines or loss of jobs, leading to abuses including forced abortions. A preference for sons led parents to kill baby girls, leading to a massive imbalance in the sex ratio.

The rules were eased for the first time in 2015 to allow two children as officials acknowledged the looming consequences of the plummeting birthrate. The overwhelming fear

is that China will grow old before it becomes wealthy.

China long touted its one-child policy as a success in preventing 400 million additional births in the world’s most populous country, thus saving resources and helping drive economic growth.

However, China’s birth rate, paralleling trends in South Korea, Thailand and other Asian economies, already was falling before the one-child rule. The average number of children per mother tumbled from above six in the 1960s to below three by 1980, according to the World Bank.

Meanwhile, the number of working-age people in China has fallen over the past decade and the population has barely grown, adding to strains in an aging society. A once-a-decade government census found the population rose to 1.411 billion people last year, up 72 million from 2010.

Statistics show 12 million babies were born last year, which would be

down 18% from 2019’s 14.6 million.

Chinese over 60, who number 264 million, accounted for 18.7% of the country’s total population in 2020, 5.44 percentage points higher than in 2010. At the same time, the working-age population fell to 63.3% of the total from 70.1% a decade ago.

The shift to the two-child rule led to a temporary bump in the numbers of births but its effects soon wore off and total births continued to fall because many women continued to decide against starting families.

Japan, Germany and some other wealthy countries face the same challenge of having fewer workers to support aging populations. However, they can draw on investments in factories, technology and foreign assets, while China is a middle-income country with labor-intensive farming and manufacturing.

At its session Friday, the Standing Committee of the National People’s

Congress canceled the leveling of fines for breaking the earlier restrictions and called for additional parental leave and childcare resources. New measures in finance, taxation, schooling, housing and employment should be introduced to “to ease the burden on families,” the amendment said.

It also seeks to address longstanding discrimination against pregnant women and new mothers in the workplace that is considered one of the chief disincentives to having additional children, along with high costs and cramped housing.

While female representation in the labor force is high, women, especially those with children, are severely underrepresented at the higher levels, holding just 8.4% of leadership positions at the central and provincial levels. Among the young party leaders who will take the reins in the coming decades, only 11% are women.

Europe fears Afghan refugee crisis after Taliban takeover

HANGEDIGI, TURKEY (AP): From above, the new border wall separating Turkey from Iran looks like a white snake winding through the barren hills. So far it only covers a third of the 540-kilometer (335-mile) border, leaving plenty of gaps for migrants to slip across in the dead of night.

Traffic on this key migration route from central Asia to Europe has remained relatively stable compared to previous years. But European countries, as well as Turkey, fear the sudden return of Taliban rule in Afghanistan could change that.

Haunted by a 2015 migration crisis fueled by the Syrian war, European leaders desperately want to avoid another large-scale influx of refugees and migrants from Afghanistan. Except for those who helped Western forces in the country’s two-decade war, the message to Afghans considering fleeing to Europe is: If you must leave, go to neighboring countries, but don’t come here.

“It must be our goal to keep the majority of the people in the region,” Austrian Interior Minister Karl Nehammer said this week, echoing what many European leaders say.

European Union officials told a meeting of interior ministers this week that the most important lesson from 2015 was not to leave Afghans to their own devices, and that without urgent humanitarian help they will start moving, according to a confidential German diplomatic memo obtained by The Associated Press.

Austria, among the EU’s migration hard-liners, suggested setting up “deportation centers” in countries neighboring Afghanistan so that EU countries can deport Afghans who have been denied asylum even if they cannot be sent back to their homeland.

The desperate scenes of people clinging to aircraft taking off from Kabul’s airport have only deepened Europe’s anxiety over a potential refugee crisis. The U.S. and its NATO allies are scrambling to evacuate thousands of Afghans who fear they’ll be punished by the Taliban for having worked with Western forces. But other Afghans are unlikely to get the same welcome.

Even Germany, which since 2015 has admitted more Syrians than any other Western nation, is sending a different signal today.

Several German



politicians, including Armin Laschet, the center-right Union bloc’s candidate to succeed Angela Merkel as chancellor, warned last week that there must be “no repeat” of the migration crisis of 2015.

On Monday, French President Emmanuel Macron stressed that, “Europe alone cannot shoulder the consequences” of the situation in Afghanistan and “must anticipate and protect ourselves against significant irregular migratory flows.”

Britain, which left the EU in 2020, said it would welcome 5,000 Afghan refugees this year and resettle a total of 20,000 in coming years.

Besides that, there have been few concrete offers from European countries, which besides evacuating their own citizens and Afghan collaborators, say they’re focusing on helping Afghans inside their country and in neighboring countries such as Iran and Pakistan.

Europe “should not wait until people stand at our external border,” EU Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johanson said.

Greece, whose scenic islands facing the Turkish coast were the European point of entry for hundreds of thousands of Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans and others six years ago, has made clear it doesn’t want to relive that crisis.

Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi said Wednesday that Greece won’t accept being the “gateway for irregular flows into the EU,” and that it considers Turkey to be a safe place for Afghans.

Such talk makes Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan see red. His country already hosts 3.6 million Syrians and hundreds of thousands of Afghans, and he has used the threat of sending them to Europe for political leverage.

“Turkey has no duty, responsibility or obligation to be Europe’s refugee warehouse,”

Erdogan warned in a speech Thursday.

The Turkish president talked about migration from Afghanistan in a rare phone call with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on Friday, and also is discussing the issue with Iran, a statement from Erdogan’s office said.

Attitudes toward migrants have hardened in Europe following the 2015 crisis, fueling the rise of far-right parties like the Alternative for Germany, the biggest opposition party in parliament ahead of the federal election next month.

Even in Turkey, migrants from Syria and Afghanistan, once treated like Muslim brethren, are increasingly viewed with suspicion as the country grapples with economic problems including rising inflation and unemployment.

Acknowledging the public’s “unease” about migration, Erdogan noted how his government has reinforced the eastern border with Iran with military, gendarmerie, police and the new wall, which has been under construction since 2017.

AP journalists near the Turkish border with Iran encountered dozens of Afghans this week, mostly young men, but also some women and children. Smuggled across the border at night in small groups, they said they left their country to escape the Taliban, violence and poverty.

“The situation in Afghanistan was intense,” said one young man, Hassan Khan. “The Taliban captured the whole of Afghanistan. But there is no work in Afghanistan, we were compelled to come here.”

Observers say there are no indications yet of any mass movement across the border. Turkish authorities say they have intercepted 35,000 Afghans entering the country illegally so far this year, compared with over 50,000 in all of 2020

and more than 200,000 in 2019.

Metin Corbatir, head of the Ankara-based Research Center on Asylum and Migration, said there has been a small increase in arrivals across the border from Iran recently, “but there is no mass migration.”

Farha Bhooroo, who works for the U.N. refugee agency in Iran, gave a similar assessment of the Afghan-Iranian border.

“So far numbers are quite stable,” she said. “We have seen a slight increase in Afghan refugees coming to Iran, but we don’t qualify it as an influx.”

UNCHR estimates that 90% of the 2.6 million Afghan refugees outside of the country live in neighboring Iran and Pakistan. Both countries also host large numbers of Afghans who left in search of better economic opportunities.

By comparison, about 630,000 Afghans have applied for asylum in EU countries in the past 10 years, with the highest numbers in Germany, Hungary, Greece and Sweden, according to the EU statistics agency. Last year, 44,000 Afghans applied for asylum in the 27-country bloc.

Jan Egeland, secretary-general of the Norwegian Refugee Council, said it’s not a forgone conclusion that the Taliban takeover will result in a new refugee crisis.

“I would warn against a self-fulfilling prophecy,” he told AP. Afghans are “scared, bewildered but also hopeful that a long, long war will be over and maybe now they can avoid the crossfire.”

He said much depends on the Taliban allowing development and humanitarian work in the country and on donor nations continuing to fund those efforts.

“If you would have a collapse of public services and if there would be a major food crisis, there will be for sure a mass movement of people,” Egeland said.

Haitian quake victims rush aid sites, take food and supplies

LES CAYES (HAITI), AUG 21 (AP): Haitians left hungry and homeless by a devastating earthquake swarmed relief trucks and in some cases stole desperately needed goods Friday as leaders of the poor Caribbean nation struggled to coordinate aid and avoid a repeat of their chaotic response to a similar tragedy 11 years ago.

The attacks on relief shipments illustrate the rising frustration of those left homeless after the Aug. 14 magnitude 7.2 earthquake, which killed nearly 2,200 people, injured more than 12,000 and destroyed or damaged more than 100,000 homes.

I have been here since yesterday, not able to do anything, said 23-year-old Sophonie Numa, who waited outside an international aid distribution site in the small city of Camp-Perrin, located in the hard-hit southwestern Les Cayes region. I have other people waiting for me to come back with something.

Numa said her home was destroyed in the quake and that her sister broke her leg during the tremor.

The food would help me a lot with the kids and my sister, she said.

George Prosper was also in the large, anxious

crowd awaiting aid.

I am a victim. I was removed from under the debris, the 80-year-old Prosper said. I don’t feel well standing up right now. I can barely hold myself up.

In the small port city of Les Cayes, an AP photographer saw people stealing foam sleeping pads from a truck parked at a Red Cross compound, while others stole food that was slated for distribution, said Jean-Michel Saba, an official with the country’s civil protection agency.

Police managed to safely escort the food truck away, Saba said. He did not say how much was taken. People also stole tarps from a truck in a community outside Les Cayes.

Similar thefts appeared to take place in the small town of Vye Terre near Les Cayes, where a second AP photographer witnessed a group of men pulling large sacks from a half-opened container truck. People then grabbed the sacks and rushed off. One man who made away with a parcel of food was immediately surrounded by others who tried to grab it from him as people nearby screamed.

The frustration over the pace of aid has been rising for days and has been illustrated by the

growing number of people crowding together at aid distribution sites. But Friday was the first time there was such widespread stealing.

Some of the trucks that were looted were part of the convoy of the United States-based nonprofit group Food For The Poor. The trucks were transporting cases of water, bags of rice and beans and cases of Vienna sausage.

Although this unfortunate situation took place, our drivers were able to remain safe and the trucks were not damaged spokeswoman Soraya Louis said in a statement.

... Our staff members in Haiti are working on assessing the damage and figuring out how to continue the task at hand in reaching even the furthest of the localities in need.

Complicating aid matters, officials began restricting access to the bridge connecting Les Cayes to the small, quake-impacted port city of Jeremie, meaning aid distribution had to be delivered there by boat or plane.

The quake wiped out many of the sources of food and income that the poor depend on for survival in Haiti, which is already struggling with the coronavirus,

gang violence and the July 7 assassination of President Jovenel Mo se. Most of the devastation happened in Haiti’s already impoverished southwestern region.

As of Wednesday, more than 300 people were estimated to still be missing, said Serge Chery, head of civil defense for the Southern Province, which includes the small port city of Les Cayes. In that community, a group of Mexican rescuers focused Friday night on a quake-damaged two-story home where equipment that allows them to detect sounds beneath the rubble caught noise.

Pressure for coordinated aid efforts mounted this week as more bodies were pulled from the rubble and the injured continued to arrive from remote areas in search of medical care. International aid workers on the ground said hospitals in the areas worst hit by the quake are mostly incapacitated and that there is a desperate need for medical equipment. Prime Minister Ariel Henry on Friday asked international governments and aid groups to funnel all of their donations through the country’s civil protection agency, which will specify the needs of each town, each village and each remote area not yet attended.

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Kangana Ranaut begins filming for 'Tejas'

MUMBAI, AUG 21 (PTI): Kangana Ranaut on Saturday started shooting for her next film "Tejas".

The film, being directed by Sarvesh Mewara, will see the actor playing the role of an Air Force Pilot.

In a post on Instagram, the 34-year-old actor shared the news along with a picture of herself with the director.

"On to my next mission #Tejas Starting today... Josh is soaring high thanks to my fabulous team @sarveshmewara @rsvpmovies," she wrote.

"Tejas" is produced by Ronnie Screwala's RSVP Movies.

The 34-year-old actor recently wrapped filming for



her action movie "Dhaakad", which also stars Arjun Rampal and Divya Dutta.

She is currently awaiting

the release of "Thalaivi", the biographical drama movie on the life of the late actor-politician J Jayalalithaa.

Ranaut will also star in "Manikarnika Returns: The Legend Of Didda" and a political drama, titled "Emergency".

Not just K-pop: Korean TV shows gaining US popularity

NEW YORK (AP): Most nights around 10 p.m. when her family heads off to bed, Carol Holaday signs onto her computer. She's not falling down Internet rabbit holes of random information or combing through social media at her San Diego home. Holoday is signing on to volunteer with the subtitle translation of Korean TV shows —often referred to as K-dramas— on the streaming platform Rakuten Viki.

"It's my secret treat," said Holaday, who has helped to subtitle 200 titles for Rakuten Viki, commonly just called Viki.

Viki has both original and licensed content from Japan, Korea, China and Taiwan and subscribers around the globe. Its largest audience is from the U.S., 75% of which is non-Asian. It offers a tiered subscription, or limited content is available for free with ads.

The translator program enlists volunteers from beginners to contributors designated as gold status based on the quality and quantity of their contributions.

Holaday, who doesn't speak Korean, is an editor of subtitles. She looks at portions of video that have already been translated to English, and checks the grammar, word placement and spelling. Besides translators and editors, there are also "segmenters" who separate portions of video to be subtitled, so one person is not translating an entire episode.

Another proud, qualified contributor is retired attorney Connie Meredith. She even enrolled at the University of Hawaii to study Korean to become a better translator.

"The grammatical structure is so different

from English that it's really, really difficult," said Meredith, who has worked on more than 500 titles for Viki. She said translating a 10-minute segment can take about two hours.

"It's like a hobby to me. People say, 'You've done that much for free?' And I say, 'Why not?' I have nothing better to do with my time. And it's like doing a New York Times crossword puzzle for me, to solve the puzzle of language."

Makoto Yasuda, Rakuten Viki's chief operating officer believes using a crowd-source method for its subtitles only helps with accuracy.

"If you have hundreds of people contributing to the quality of subtitles, then it becomes much better than a single professional translator working on the topics that they are not really familiar with."

He says the company's name Viki is derived from the words video and Wikipedia, the crowdsourced online encyclopedia site.

"Sites like Viki use fan translations, which is great, but it can be done in a hurry because people are anxious to see the dramas. So it's probably not as polished as you might get elsewhere," said Joan MacDonald, a Forbes contributor who covers Korean media.

Viki translations aren't just to English. "A drama can translate into 20 different languages within 24 hours," said Yasuda. He said there's also often waiting lists to help translate on more popular shows. There are a small number of translators who do get paid, if it's on a show that doesn't have volunteers or a licensed series that already has subtitles.

The awareness of K-dramas outside Korea seems to be growing, said MacDonald. "The number

of people that contacted me in the last year and a half to say, 'Oh, I just discovered K-dramas, what do you recommend?' It's significant."

Other streaming sites are also adding more Korean content to their offerings.

Apple TV+ has two Korean language projects in the works: one based on the animation series "Dr. Brain," and an adaptation of Min Jin Lee's novel "Pachinko" about four generations of a Korean immigrant family. That series will be available in Korean, Japanese and English.

This year, Netflix is investing nearly \$500 million to produce Korean content and has partnered with big studios there including Studio Dragon and JTBC.

Some of Netflix's popular 2020 series included "Start-Up," "It's Okay to Not Be Okay," and "What's Wrong With Secretary Kim?"

Another that caused a sensation is "Crash Landing on You" starring actors Hyun bin and Son Ye-jin. The romance about a North Korean and South Korean aired on the paid channel tvN in South Korea and also on Netflix. Fans found their chemistry so believable, many believed there had to be a real relationship off-screen. The actors' representatives confirmed they were dating on New Year's Day.

MacDonald laughingly recalls hearing the news of the coupledom and thinking, "Wow, I am irrationally excited about this."

Streaming services have made television more globalized where it's easy to watch a show from another country, but MacDonald believes one reason for the popularity of K-dramas is because they blend genres like K-pop does.

"It's kind of an overall thing like pop is not really one sound. A lot of things fit into it. You will have something like a horror, rom-com that starts out as a gangster story but it's really a black comedy that keeps changing genres all the way through."

MacDonald says K-pop fans also gravitate to K-dramas because "a lot of K-pop stars are in dramas and a lot of actors that are in dramas sometimes go on to have singing careers."

"There's a band that's very popular, Astro, and one of the singers, Cha Eun-woo, was in a drama earlier this year called 'True Beauty,' said MacDonald. "I saw 'True Beauty' and thought, 'Wow, he is great and he's in a band. I have to check that band out.'" Another example: Bae Suzy, formerly of the girl group Miss A, starred in "Start-Up."

Sara Wagner of South Lyon, Michigan, grew up surrounded by Korean culture because her best friend of more than 40 years is Korean.

"I would hang out at their house a lot and eat Korean food. ... With the internet, it became a lot more accessible to watch dramas."

Wagner also believes "Parasite" winning best picture at the 2020 Academy Awards increased interest in Korean cinema. "People ask, 'What else would you recommend' and I say 'Train to Busan.'"

She even keeps an Excel spreadsheet tracking K-drama storylines, themes, featured food, weather and endings of the shows she watches so she can recommend them to others.

A note by Wagner for "What's Wrong with Secretary Kim?" says: "There's a kiss in episode 12 that'll knock your socks off."



SO FIT! FBOY Island's CJ Franco broke a sweat at Sunset Pilates in Los Angeles.

Popular yesteryear actress Chitra no more



CHENNAI, AUG 21 (PTI): Popular yesteryear actor Chitra died here on Saturday following a cardiac arrest, sources close to her family said.

The 56 year-old multi-lingual actor, more popularly known as 'Nallennai' (gingelly oil) Chitra following her association with a top oil brand, is survived by husband and daughter. She passed away at her Saligramam residence here.

Born in Kochi, Kerala, Chitra who earned the sobriquet 'Nallennai' after the gingelly oil advertisement in which she acted became popular, rose to fame in the Tamil film industry in the 1990s.

She has acted in a number of films alongside top stars including Rajinikanth, Sarathkumar and Prabu.

Introduced as a child artist by director K Balachander in 1975 in the national award

winning Tamil film 'Apoorva Raagangal,' Chitra starred along with other popular actors like Kamal Haasan and Srividya as well.

She has worked in a number of Malayalam, Telugu and Kannada films also. Chitra was cast as Mary Kutty along with top stars Prem Nazir, Mohanlal and Lakshmi in her first film Aattakalasham in Malayalam in 1983. She has also starred in some tele-serials.

ARIES:

The cards are urging you to understand the natural cycles that govern our human existence. Birth is followed by life, life is followed by death, and death is followed by life once again. In other words, it is destruction that makes way for creation, and it is the theme of destruction that you are likely to witness closely under the influence of the full moon in Aquarius. So, loosen the grip where you need to. Allow things that must come undone to come undone without blaming or judging anybody involved. This is how it is meant to be, Aries. This is how it was meant to be all along.

TAURUS:

This is a time of joy and prosperity in your world. There is enough for both your needs and wants. Look at you rewriting the old story, Taurus. Look at you transmuting the old beliefs about money. Such a long way you have come! What's making this phase of your life different from all others is the fact that you're more than willing to share the harvest with those around you. If the rule of

three is anything to go by, then everything you put into the Universe comes back to you threefold.

GEMINI:

The full moon in Aquarius finds you reassessing your career goals and introspecting on how you can make a greater impact. Success that serves you alone is not success at all, Gemini. You want the collective to rise with you and that's what you're working on in this phase. Remember to keep your feet firmly planted on the ground as you go along. Making practical decisions at this point will serve you well in the future.

CANCER:

It's all about joy and celebration in the Cancer HQ. You're connecting with your soul squad in a way you never have before *and* honouring the differences that make your relationship oh-so-beautiful. Some of you may be celebrating or prepping for a special occasion too, such as an engagement or baby shower of a loved one.

LEO:

You're feeling what you're feeling, Leo, and there is no need to justify or logically explain

the emotional turbulence that's weighing you down at this point. What you want to remember, though, is the mantra, "the only way out is through". So, feel the turbulence in its entirety. Offer it a cup of tea. Before you know it, the poison will have turned into a sweet elixir of peace and wisdom.

VIRGO:

The cards are urging you to pay attention to the seemingly mundane ideas that are coming through from the unseen realms. You never know what they may blossom into. You never know, Virgo. You never know.

LIBRA:

There are times we have to do-do-do and dedicate ourselves to the hustle, but now is *not* such a time in your life. The full moon in Aquarius is urging you to hit the pause button, refuel your reserves and prepare for the next chapter. So, make time for mindful practices, Libra. Spend time in nature (or near a water body) and engage in activities that uplift your soul. If you are a believer of the divine arts, sign up for a session with your healer.

SCORPIO:

Offer a prayer of gratitude when you find you reach a dead-end. Offer a prayer of gratitude when the road ahead seems like an obstacle course. Offer a prayer of gratitude when delays and difficulties are a constant in your world. It's all happening for a reason, Scorpio.

SAGITTARIUS:

Sometimes, the only way to deal with a problem is by stepping away from it. Time does heal all wounds, Sagittarius, as you will discover in the days to come. For now, focus on activities that uplift your soul and help you refuel your reserves. Given that we're under the spell of the full moon this weekend, you're also being called to honour the cycles of nature in your own special way. PS: take your crystals to the roof and soak in some of those healing la luna rays.

CAPRICORN:

Today, you're in the mood to spend quality time with your spiritual bestie, obsess over your favourite crystals, channel messages from the beyond, work with your Oracle cards, and honour the energy of the full

moon in your own special way. If you've been a student of mysteries since time immemorial, now is a good time to delve deeper and uncover newer truths.

AQUARIUS:

You've never known a love like this before, Aquarius. A love that's equal parts soulful and passionate. A love that meets you where you are and accepts you as you are. It's time to rise in this love, beautiful. Single water bearers are being reminded that their divine counterpart has been manifesting them too, and that it is just a matter of time before Fate brings you together. So, make a wish, beloved. Make a wish.

PISCES:

It's all about love and other intoxicants in the Pisces HQ. You and your beloved are vibing at a whole new frequency—and this frequency is called 'unconditional love'. Yes, this means honouring the differences as much as the similarities, for this is what makes your relationship flavoursome. For some of you, this may be a time of taking your commitment to the next level or giving cohabitation a shot.