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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Youth bludgeoned to death at MG Marg

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 14 JUN:**

The body of a youth was recovered from the Statue of Unity complex here in MG Marg this morning.

It is suspected that the deceased was hit by a brick several times on his head and face. However, the identity of the deceased has not been established yet.

In this case, Sadar Police has taken a 26-year-old Nepal resident into custody. It is learnt that police found him at the spot with blood stains all over his clothes.

The dead body has been forwarded for autopsy and the case is under investigation.

CM meets Union Home Minister, highlights protection of 371F

NEW DELHI, 14 JUN (IPR): Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang (Golay) called on Union Home Minister, Amit Shah at North Block today. He congratulated and extended warm greetings to Mr Shah on assuming office as Union Home Minister.

During the discussion, the Chief Minister highlighted Article 371F of the Constitution which is the greatest gift to the Sikkimese people and that it needs to be preserved, protected and implemented both in letter and spirit.

His belief on strengthening and stabilizing this future of our Constitu-



tion which in turn is to strengthen the Constitutional framework was

communicated.

The Chief Minister placed the demand for

the reservation of the seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly for

Limboo – Tamang Communities which is pending for the last so many years as a result of which the communities are deprived from their political rights.

The Chief Minister also placed before the Union Minister for the inclusion of the eleven left out communities of Sikkim in the List of Scheduled Tribes status so as to bring equality among the Sikkimese people.

Further the Chief Minister requested the Union Minister to support for the water supply, power and road construction in the border areas under Border Area Development Programme.

Governor meets Union Ministers in New Delhi

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 14 JUN:**

In a series of engagements with Ministers in the Union Government in New Delhi, Governor of Sikkim, Ganga Prasad met Union Home Minister, Amit Shah, Union Minister for Law and Justice, Electronics and Information Technology, Ravi Shankar Prasad and Union Minister of State (I/C) for Development of North Eastern Region

(DoNER) & Minister of State for PMO, Dr. Jitendra Singh in their respective offices today, a Raj Bhavan press release informs.

It was a courtesy call by the Governor to the Ministers after their assumption of office and Ministries following the historic mandate achieved by NDA and Bharatiya Janta Party under the leadership of Prime Minister, Narendra Modi in the recent Gener-

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Mother-son duo on all-India pilgrimage reach Sikkim



**SHRAVAN CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 14 JUN:**

Chuda Ratna [70] and son, D Krishna Kumar [40], reached Sikkim on 12 June after covering almost all the religious pilgrimages of India since January 2018.

The mother-son duo has been travelling for almost 1 year and 6 months now on a journey

exploring every pilgrimage centre across India on a 20-year-old Bajaj Chetak covering almost 39250 kms till date.

In what he calls 'Mathru Seva Sankalpa Yatra', they set out to visit all possible holy places in Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Bihar, and West Bengal,

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SMIMS students join Bengal doctors' protest

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 14 JUN:**

The students of Sikkim Manipal Institute of Medical Sciences staged a protest at the premises of Sikkim Manipal Institute at 5th mile today in solidarity with the protest by doctors in West Bengal.

Doctors and medical professionals in Kolkata have launched a massive protest after an intern doctor at NRS Hospital in Kolkata was beaten up and left with a fractured skull over the death of a patient on 10 Jun.



Sixteen doctors of the RG Kar Medical Col-

lege and Hospital in Kolkata have submitted

their resignation to the Health department of

the West Bengal Government. Many doctors are

on strike mode in various parts of West Bengal and in rest of the country due to this incident.

"We are still studying and only in the process of learning the art of healing the ailing. We look forward to alleviate the sufferings of mankind in the future. However, it pains us to see the society's mindset towards us. Rules and laws are definitely important and should act as a deterrent for any kind of violence, but what propels the patients' relatives and the bystanders for their ag-

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No threat to Great Parrotbill habitat at Hilley, says Forest Dept

**Fact finding team constituted
to look into matter**

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 14 JUN:**

The Forest Department has issued a clarification regarding a news report published by Sikkim Express on 11 Jun, 2019, which alleged that a parking lot construction at Hilley, West Sikkim was disrupting the natural habitat of the Great Parrotbill.

The Great Parrotbill (Conostoma aemodium) is a bird species the Sylviidae (Old World warbler) family. It falls under the Least Concern category of the IUCN list of threatened species.

The department has said that no felling has been undertaken for the parking lot, however, a fact finding team has been constituted headed by the Additional Project Director, SBFP, M Ravi Kumar, and comprising of officials of SBFP and West Wildlife Division. The team will visit the site to verify and have a thorough analysis of the concerns raised by the news report, and submit

a report to the Project Director, SBFP within a week's time.

The Engineering Cell of the Sikkim Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Management Project (SBFP), which is an ongoing project aided by the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) and implemented by the Forest Environment and Wildlife Management Department, has informed that a Nature Interpretation Centre is presently under construction at Hilley where one of the components is an open parking lot of approximately 500sqm which is planned below the turning of the existing road leading up to the forest check post.

As per the news report, "a concrete building has been proposed in the parking lot project replacing bamboo jungle in the area". However, the department has clarified that the proposed Nature Interpretation Centre itself is two storeyed and is constructed on the same plot where a Forest Bar-

turn to pg02

GOPAL YONZON SAANJH

WITH RAM KRISHNA DHAKAL

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21 ST JUNE 2019 | VENUE : MANAN KENDRA MAIN HALL, GANGTOK, SIKKIM | Doors Opens 5 PM Show Starts 6 PM

Each Friday, Field day at Shipgyer GPU

GANGTOK, 14 JUN (IPR): Each Friday, Field Day was conducted at Shipgyer GPU on 14 Jun, 2019 by District Collector, Raj Yadav with ADC, Dev Chungthang, SDM Chungthang, BDO Chungthang & Concerned RS, AE BAC & other field Officers and Staff.

During the visit following decisions were taken by the team-

1. Raychu Khola protection wall already have been sanctioned by GREF and work have already started from today onwards so within 2 to 3 months it will be completes as assured by GREF.

2. Walking trail at Upper Raychu is found damaged due to landslides therefore the maintenance is required so that transist can happen during monsoon season, therefore SDM Chungthang is directed to start work and work has been sanctioned on the spot.

3. Wong Khola water have to divert through diversion channel which



was damaged during monsoon and caused landslides, therefore Estimate will be prepared under SLRC and will be forwarded to Commissioner Cum Secretary, LRMDD for consideration.

4. One toilet is required at Toong Checkpost and approved on spot. ADC Dev Chungthang was directed to start work. There is need of protection wall before constructing toilet so protection wall was sanctioned on spot in convergence with MGN-ERGA and DLRC.

5. Approach road to

Saffo is closed due to heavy landslide. GREF, Panchayats, District Administration are working on it to open within a week. It is found that power and water supply is restored already.

6. Food Stock is being supplied by the Food department to Saffoo GPU. One temporary log bridge has already been constructed by SDM Chungthang under DLRC.

7. RAMAM VILLAGE
a. Approach road to Ramam village is damaged due to landslides and the repair work has been started by Testa Urja



Ltd. Restoration work of water supply for the village will be done by Teesta Urja (MH pipes have been distributed to the land owners on spot.

b. Footpath from main road to Ramam village will be constructed by SDM Chungthang under DLRC.

c. Later on team visited Ramam village where land

of 25 land owners found damaged due to landslide therefore the cheques of amount of Rs 7 lakh have been distributed to the land owners on spot.

d. Two RCC houses of Karma Singi Lepcha and Dhingpo Lepcha found fully damaged and one house of Nagan Tshering Lepcha found partially damaged therefore the Exgratia of Rs 2.09 lakh was sanctioned and

cheques handed over to owners on spot.

e. As reported by the Panchayats the food stock position for the month of June is not adequate, therefore DCSO, North will be directed to supply as soon as possible at Ramam village.

f. Poly pipes and tarpaulins have been provided to the Panchayat President of Ramam ward as per requirement.

DC West tours Soreng Sub-division

GYALSHING, 14 JUN (IPR): District Collector, West, Karma R. Bonpo toured the Soreng Sub-division. The DC was accompanied by Gayas Pega, ADC (Dev.) Soreng; Jeewan Thapa, SE Power Soreng; Himmat Rai, SDM and Deepak Kr. Rai, BDO Soreng along with other officials of Soreng Sub Division.

The District Collector visited Soreng Senior Secondary School and interacted with teachers and students. The DC encouraged the students to dream big and work hard and smart.

He then visited the sites of the Football Stadium at Soreng, Base camp under the Tourism Department at Timberbung, Model ICDS at



Timberbung and Science College Chakung where the problems of water scarcity and electricity shortage were discussed.

He also met with the contractor of the Science College Chakung and asked him to start the work as soon as possible. The repairing of water tank at Hingwa was also

discussed. He also visited the Primary Health Center, Soreng.

On the way, the District Collector also visited Kaluk Rinchenpong areas and met with the BDO Kaluk and Panchayat Members. He then assured that the problems of the area would be solved soon.

The District Collector stated that a plan for creation of infrastructure facilities in Soreng would be put forward to the state government. Interventions like improving the quality of education and health care would be taken under the Aspirational District Program.

Mother-son duo on all-India pilgrimage reach Sikkim

Contd from pg01

Nepal, finally reaching Sikkim on 12 June.

"My mother never visited even a nearby temple for 67 years and this made me very sad for which I have decided to take her to every pilgrimage spot that India has. I love my mother unconditionally and Mathru Seva Sankalpa is about making her the first priority," says Mr D Krishna.

While responding to the queries, Chuda Ratna said that she feels very blessed to have a son like D Krishna and it's really an amazing world where people are very generous and kind hearted.

She further added that the duo has visited each and every temple they have come across till now and she wishes to visit some more with her son.

The duo is currently in the state exploring holy sites and are supposed to set off to Guwahati on 17 June.

Governor meets Union Ministers in New Delhi

Contd from pg01

The Governor's first engagement of the day was with Union Minister, Ravi Shankar Prasad, where he congratulated Prasad on assuming greater responsibility once again in Prime Minister Modi's Council of Ministers. The Governor

sought continued support from the minister and the Union Government to Sikkim's specific needs to its developmental journey.

Later on the day, the Governor met with Union MoS, Dr Jitendra Singh and discussed various developmental needs and concerns of Sikkim. The much awaited Rail-

way Link to Sikkim and issues delaying its speedy execution also featured in the discussion where in MoS provided updates on progress of the project and assured to take the matter with priority. Holding NEC Plenary meeting in Sikkim also came up for discussion.

The Governor, in

his last engagement for the day, called on Union Home Minister, Amit Shah and congratulated him for the spectacular victory of Bharatiya Janata Party under his dynamic leadership as President of the party. He also conveyed his felicitations to Shah on assuming the office of Home Minister.

The Governor, during a brief discussion, apprised the Minister about the developmental issues

and bottlenecks that Sikkim is facing and sought his personal attention on resolving some pending issues on behalf of the Union Government.

He also sought continued patronage and support to the developmental strides that Sikkim has taken, given its potential of growth in various sectors including tourism, civil aviation, organic farming, hydro-power among others.

SMIMS students join Bengal doctors' protest

Contd from pg01

gressive behaviour and violent actions towards us makes us more worried and demotivated to serve the society. We hereby want to appeal to all those individuals who get carried away during tough times and to the society at large, that we are here to serve you," the press statement reads.

"We simply want an environment free from

fear where we can function and our minds can think so we can serve you to the best of our potential. We also want to make an appeal to the government that there should be sufficient provisions in law to protect us and to reprimand those who try to take law in their hands and disgrace the profession," the release adds.



CM meets President, urges IT exemption for Old Settlers

NEW DELHI, 13 JUN (IPR): Chief Minister of Sikkim, Prem Singh Tamang (Go-lay) called on the President of India, Ram Nath Kovind at Rashtrapati Bhawan at New Delhi on 13 Jun.

The visit of the Chief Minister was to pay respect and to obtain blessing from him for the people of Sikkim. Mr Tamang placed the request to exempt the old Settlers of Sikkim from the ambit of Income Tax.

It may be recalled that the previous Government did not place the matter to the Government of In-

dia where a Committee was constituted to recommend for the exemption. Nonetheless, the Committee in their report did not even consider their case.

The old Settlers made several representations to the Committee constituted by the previous government, however, no efforts were made to address it. The President listened to the demands patiently and assured to look into the issue carefully.

The Chief Minister invited the President to visit Sikkim in the near future.

KUTSE SHEGU

The 49th day Kutse Shegu of Late Doma Bhutia w/o Lakpa Thendup Bhutia who left for her heavenly abode on 01.05.2019 falls on 18.6.2019 (Tuesday). All relatives, friends & well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence at Below Law College, Helipad, Lower Burtuk, Gangtok, East Sikkim.

Lakpa Thendup Bhutia(Husband), Kesseng Norbu Bhutia(son) & all family members.
Mob: 9800655921/ 6294186876.



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URGENTLY REQUIRED:

Urgent Recruitment for a waiter with atleast 3 years experience and one kitchen helper. Contact: Hotel Paramount, Dentam, West Sikkim- 9735909625 / 8348285444

PLOT FOR SALE:

Vacant plot measuring 0.38 Acres for sale at Amdo Golai, Deorali. Contact: 09717191985/097474651223

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Complete yoga syllabus will be provided by SYVC Gangtok absolutely free of cost. After one year of basic training and service (karma yoga)/ volunteering in the Centre, the candidate would be sent for Yoga Teacher Training Course at Shivananda Yoga Ashram. After TTC, the candidate would be appointed on part time basis at the Yoga Centre in Gangtok. College students can also apply. If required, food and accommodation would be provided.

Interested candidates may contact
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Mob: +91 7432043719/ +91 8170953919.

LAND FOR SALE

A vacant plot measuring 0.38 Ha. (16552.80 sq - ft) is for sale at Amdo Golai (above the main road), Gangtok. For more information please contact - 9717191985/9474651223.

WANTED

HOUSEKEEPER/BABYSITTER.

Contact: 9933443442/9800500696.

GENERAL INFORMATION

This is for general information of all concerned that Hotel Parasol Residency, Panihouse, Deorali East Sikkim shall remain closed for a period of six months for carrying out necessary repairs. All concerned tour operators and clients are requested to refrain from booking or deal with any sort with regard to Hotel Parasol Residency, Panihouse, Deorali, East Sikkim.

Mr. Subash Lama
Proprietor
Hotel Parasol Residency,
Panihouse, Deorali, East Sikkim

BUILDING FOR SALE

A 5 storied building with 3 floor completed having a land area of 30x70 at DABUWA, Melli road (2km from Namchi) is for sale. Rate reasonable. Interested party please contact: **6296370905, 9733284142, 8597088755.**

Buildings & Housing Minister chairs coordination meet

GANGTOK, 14 JUN (IPR): A coordination meeting was held in the Conference Hall of the Buildings & Housing Department chaired by the Minister, Sanjit Kharel. The meeting was attended by the PCE-cum-Secretary, Principal Chief Architect, Principal Director Accounts, Special Secretary and Officers of the Department.

The Additional Chief Engineer (Planning & Monitoring) started the session by welcoming the new Minister. The PCE-cum-Secretary presented a bouquet to the Minister followed by khadas by the entire Department.

In his welcome address, the Additional Chief Architect extended warm greetings to the Minister on behalf of all the officers and also gave a brief introduction of the Buildings and Housing Department.

The PCE-cum-Secretary then congratulated the new Minister on his electoral success. He then talked about the Department being the nodal organization on good building construction practices and monitoring of such



projects. He mentioned that the annual revenue generated by the Department amounted to more than Rs 5 crore which was normally overlooked when allocation of revenue budget was done.

He said that Buildings and Housing Department assists other Departments that do not have engineering/architectural back up and also mentioned some projects completed by the Department like the Tashiling Secretariat, Chenrezig Singkham Rewa Potala Project at Pelling and the 1000 bed-

ded Hospital at Sichey. He then asked all the officers present to introduce themselves and assured the Minister that the Department was ready to be of service to him.

The Chief Engineer briefed the Minister on the various projects currently being undertaken by the Department and explained about the sub-divisions under the engineering wing throughout the State.

He also talked about the Department's jurisdiction outside the state where the government

buildings have been constructed viz Siliguri, Bodhgaya, Guwahati, etc. Additionally, he listed out a number of projects of other Departments which were being undertaken by the Buildings & Housing Department.

The Special Secretary spoke on the man power and strength that existed in the Department. The Senior Accounts Officer gave a brief talk about the Accounts Section where a decentralized method of payment for all four districts is in place. He talked about Revenue

Capital and revenue expenditure. The Principal Chief Architect spoke about the architectural wing and all its officers. He mentioned and listed the in-house projects designed by the Architects.

In his deliverance the Minister started off by saying that the entire Department was to work as a unit and as a family. He stressed that transparency in work was of utmost importance to him and that there should be no compromise in the quality of work done by the Department. There should be accessibility and legality and a need to tackle all pending projects with solutions to completing them. He said that all new ideas and proposals were welcome and ever ready to assist officers of the Department. The Minister concluded by extending warm wishes to the Department and stated that he was looking forward to taking the Department to greater heights.

The session concluded with a vote of thanks by the Superintending Engineer (N/E).

Indra Hang Subba felicitated by Sikkim University

GANGTOK, 14 JUN (PIB): Member of Parliament, Indra Hang Subba was felicitated by Sikkim University at the Cauveri Hall of the University on 13 Jun, 2019. Mr Subba is a research scholar in the department of Physics of the University.

The officiating Vice-Chancellor, Prof Jyoti Prakash Tamang handed over a letter of commendation to Indra Hang Subba and Registrar, TK Kaul presented a memento to the MP.

Prof Tamang congratulated the young Member of Parliament from Sikkim and stated that the University fraternity is very proud of his achievement and looked forward to the development of the University and the State of Sikkim as a whole and wished him good luck for a long and fruitful political career.



Indra Hang Subba in his address mentioned that he would work with utmost sincerity and

dedication for the progress of Sikkim and work towards the growth of the University.

Marwari Yuva Manch celebrates World Blood Donor Day



SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 14 Jun:

Prerna Branch of Marwari Yuva Manch, Gangtok, celebrated World Blood Donor Day 2019 with an awareness rally and blood donation camp here on Friday. The celebration started with an awareness rally on blood donation from Deorali to Titanic Park in MG Marg, which was flagged off by the Mayor Shakti Singh Chaudhary.

The rally was fol-

lowed by a day-long blood donation camp here at District Control Room, MG Marg in coordination with the Blood Bank of STNM Hospital. On the occasion, Prerna Branch felicitated regular blood donors, Savita Chaudhary and Sidharth Sirohia for their selfless service to the needy.

Health Department Principal Director, Sarita Lama, who was present as the chief guest, and other officials of the de-

partment presented the certificate of appreciation to them. A total of 76 units of blood were donated by people during the camp.

A member of Prerna Branch, Sunita Sirohia mentioned that Prerna Branch has been celebrating World Blood Donor day with awareness activities and blood donation camp every year since last four years. She stated that the organisation will continue with such activities.

Transasia Bio-Medicals announces Rs. 50 cr investment in Sikkim plant

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 14 JUN:

Transasia Bio-Medicals Ltd., India's leading in-vitro diagnostics company, announced a Rs 50 crore investment in the expansion of its manufacturing facility in Sikkim. The largest of its India manufacturing plants, Sikkim is the

fourth one after Mumbai, Daman and Baddi, a press release informs.

Also, the first ever diagnostics manufacturing facility in Northeast, the expanded facility will significantly enhance Transasia's capacity to cater to the growing Indian and overseas market demands. Spread over 2 acres, the facility can produce 6000+ in-

struments monthly including the complete range of semi-automated analyzers.

"Sikkim is fast becoming a major hub for healthcare manufacturing with 14 major players already there. Transasia's new facility will further reinforce this besides providing employment to local youth who otherwise would

need to move out of the state for such quality opportunities. With this addition of capacity, we are well placed to deliver to the demand arising from continued growth posted by the company both in Indian and overseas markets," Chairman & Managing Director, Transasia Bio-Medicals Ltd., Suresh Vazirani has said.

Founded in 1979, Transasia Bio-Medicals Ltd., India's Leading In-vitro Diagnostic Company offers products and solutions in Biochemistry, Hematology, Coagulation, ESR, Immunology, Urinalysis, Critical Care, Diabetes Management, Microbiology and Molecular Diagnostics, the release mentions.

World Blood Donor Day celebrated in West Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 14 JUN:

World Blood Donor Day was celebrated at Zilla Panchayat hall, Gyalshing in West Sikkim today. The event was organised by Red Ribbon Club, South/West in collaboration with Voluntary Blood Donors Association of Sikkim (VB-DAS) supported by State Blood Transfusion Council and Sikkim State Aids Control Society, Gangtok, a press release informs.

The celebration was chaired by ADC, Karma Loday Lepcha, West, Additional Director Health,

Dr Baroon Subba, District Planning Officer, Saran Pradhan, Principals from different schools and colleges along with the VBDAS team.

Fifty-time blood donor, Gaurav Raj and different organizations were also felicitated on the occasion.

A painting competition for school students was also organized on the day. Neha Cintury of Gyalshing Girls Sr Sec School stood first, followed by Babita Gurung from the same school in second position. Prasis Rai from Gyalshing Girls Sr Sec School came third.



Gita Path underway at Singtam

YOGEN THATAL
GANGTOK, 13 JUN:

Five-day Bhagwad Gita Path organized by the Marwari Sewa Samity of Singtam Bazaar has entered its second day today. Devotees from every corner of the state are attending the event at Singtam Bazar.

Doctors' stir: WB CM politicising issue, BJP communalising it, says Yechury

New Delhi, Jun 14 (PTI): CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury Friday accused West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of politicising the issue of doctors' agitation and the BJP of communalising it.

Protesting doctors demanded Banerjee's unconditional apology

and set six conditions for the state government to withdraw their four-day-long stir that disrupted healthcare services across West Bengal.

"West Bengal govt must invite health workers & resolve this humanitarian crisis on a war footing. CM is trying to politicise instead of dis-


charging basic responsibility. BJP wants to communalise by highlighting the religious identity of victims of a tragedy," he tweeted.

While visiting the SSKM Hospital on Thursday, Banerjee had contended that "outsiders" had entered medical colleges to create distur-

bances and the agitation was a conspiracy by the CPI(M) and the BJP.

Listing the six conditions, the agitators said the chief minister will have to visit the injured doctors at the hospital and her office should release a statement condemning the attack on them.

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GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
OFFICE OF THE SR.SUPERINTENDENT OF PRISONS
STATE CENTRAL PRISON
RONGYEK

TENDER NOTICE

Sealed quotations are invited from registered firms of Sikkim for Supply of ration, grocery, hardware and electrical items to the State Central Prison, Rongyek and District Prison, Namchi for the period with effect from 01.07.2019 to 31.03.2020. The rates quoted shall be inclusive of all transportation/Carriage charges upto point of delivery i.e. the Central Prison, Rongyek and District Prison, Namchi as and when the items are requisitioned. The items which fall under the provision of Essential Commodities Act, the rates fixed by the government shall prevail.

The quotations addressed to the Sr. Superintendent of Police/Prison, Rongyek should reach the office of the undersigned on or before 10 A.M. on 12/07/2019. The Tender Selection Committee shall open the tenders in the office of the Sr. Superintendent of Police/Prison, Rongyek at 11 A.M. on the same day in the presence of the Tenderers or their authorised agents.

The quotations shall be accompanied by a State Bank of Sikkim, T.D.R. made in favour of the Sr. Superintendent of Police/Prison, Rongyek for Rs.20,000/- (Rupees Twenty Thousand) only along with certified copies of the concerned firms registration, valid Trade License, Income Tax/Sales Tax/VAT Clearance Certificates, GST etc. The failure to submit anyone of the above mentioned documents shall render the quotation void.

The Tender Selection Committee reserves the right to accept or reject any or all of the quotations without assigning any reason thereof.

The Tender documents can be obtained from the Office of the Sr. Superintendent of Police/Prisons, Rongyek between 10.00 A.M to 2.00 P.M. on all working days with effect from the publication of Tender Notices.

Sd/-
R.O No. 51/IPR/Pub/Classi./19-20
Sr. Superintendent of Police/Prison,
State Central Prison, Rongyek

Save the Minors

POCSO started a process, but saving children will require more

Cases booked under the POCSO Act come with unnerving frequency in Sikkim. And before anyone jumps to the conclusion that this is a recent phenomenon, take a pause and take stock - minors have always been at risk in the hands of sexual predators. Such violations had been occurring so often that the country now has a specific law to deal with such crimes, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act.

Data on child sexual abuse also reveals that in most of the cases, 94.8% as per the Crime in India Report of 2015, the perpetrator is someone known to the child. People in this circle have not developed sexual deviance in recent years, there have always been predators in our mix. What has happened instead is that the “circle” around children has changed. Where they used to earlier fall victim to relatives, it is now neighbours and teachers. This change in the profile of who we surround our children with has probably made the decision to file police complaints easier, because the vileness is not from within the family. This higher degree of separation also perhaps makes it slightly easier for children to report the violations since it is not an elder in the family they are pointing fingers at. Hopefully these speculations are inaccurate and the reason why more complaints are being filed nowadays is instead because parents and families have become more responsible and aware. That is probably not the case though, but let us hope for the sake of our children that we are evolving towards it, because unless there is genuine empathy and awareness about how such cases need to be handled and pursued, the children will not be secured a safe childhood.

What is also noticeable is that while one reads often about cases being booked under POCSO Act and pedophiles being taken into custody, one does not hear often about them being convicted. Agreed, the POCSO Act itself is barely six years old, but it should have delivered much more given the fact that it was drafted to address a situation which was not getting enough attention and leaving too many minors scarred for life. National data on POCSO cases reveals that in as many as 85% of the cases, the victims turn hostile, retracting their allegations. This is obviously not because they were mistaken about the crime committed against them but because their families could not withstand the pressure to “compromise” and “settle” the matter. Once the family collapses, the child cannot stand up either. One needs to go back to all POCSO cases in Sikkim and verify how many cases have led to acquittals. Only in the rare case will the investigators or prosecutors weaken such cases on their own, but would do so in a small State like Sikkim if the victim’s side settles the matter with the other side. This cannot be allowed to happen because then all institutions that a child would have trusted – the family, the police, the law and courts – would have failed them.

Let no one be surprised if these children then grow up to become antisocial. This is not a matter that can be taken lightly. Not only is the harm enormous, but even the scale is frighteningly large. A top Delhi police official, while speaking at the launch of a new campaign – “It Takes Every Indian to End Child Sexual Abuse and exploitation”-- by World Vision India that 50 per cent of children in our country have suffered some form of sexual abuse. That is too much suffering without any healing.

WRITE US:

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

Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

The three big studies pushing at the frontiers of HIV prevention

GLEND A GRAY
theconversation.com

There are an estimated 5000 new HIV transmissions every day. Around 70% of the 37 million people living with HIV globally are in sub-Saharan Africa. Of the 1.8 million new HIV transmissions worldwide in 2017, 800 000 occurred in eastern and southern Africa. New, effective prevention strategies are essential to reducing HIV transmission.

So what will it take to reduce HIV transmission? Prevention.

This is why researchers around the world are working hard to find a vaccine that is safe and effective. This requires extensive testing, starting in laboratories and then moving to animal trials. Then comes the crucial human clinical trials. A number of these are underway at the moment, running at different sites in 12 countries across four continents.

These trials are being conducted under the auspices of the HIV Vaccine Trials Network. The network currently runs 49 clinical trial sites in nine countries with 18 ongoing trials, four of which are efficacy trials. Three trials are of particular interest as they have already been running since 2016 and are expected to close in late 2021.

The first is known as the Antibody Mediated Prevention studies. It’s testing whether a broadly neutralising antibody can prevent HIV acquisition in people. The second, called Uhambo, is testing an experimental vaccine regimen against HIV. And the third, Imbokodo, is testing an experimental vaccine regimen that’s designed to offer protection against a variety of global HIV strains.

These studies involve thousands of people all over the world, including countries hardest hit by HIV. If any of them are successful – that is, if the drugs being tested prove to be safe and effective for human use – the 30-year fight to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic will take a huge step towards victory.

It has been incredibly hard to make a vaccine against HIV. Some of the hurdles to overcome in-

clude the genetic diversity of HIV, which is greater than any other pathogen, the lack of a good animal model, no natural human cure and the complexity of the virus’s outer structure or envelope.

THE ANTIBODY SEARCH

The Antibody Mediated Prevention studies have 4625 participants from the US, Brazil, Peru, Switzerland, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Botswana, South Africa, Kenya, Malawi and Mozambique.

These trials started in May 2016 and are expected to close in late 2021. The clinical trials are designed to test if a broadly neutralising antibody (VRC01), given intravenously, can prevent HIV acquisition.

A broadly neutralising antibody is an antibody



that has been found to neutralise or inactivate HIV in non-clinical experiments. Study participants are receiving intravenous infusions of the VRC01 broadly neutralising antibody every eight weeks.

This is the furthest that a clinical trial testing the effectiveness of a broadly neutralising antibody in preventing HIV acquisition in people has progressed. These studies can potentially clarify what level of neutralisation a vaccine or antibody-based method of HIV prevention needs to achieve and maintain to provide sustained protection.

VACCINE

The Uhambo trial is currently underway in South Africa and aims to enrol 5400 healthy, HIV-negative men and women aged between 18 and 35 years. This clinical trial involves a new version of the only HIV vaccine candidate ever shown to pro-

vide some protection against the virus. That vaccine candidate was investigated in the RV144 clinical trial from 2003 to 2006 in Thailand led by the U.S Military HIV Research Program and the Thai Ministry of Health.

The Thai trial delivered landmark results in 2009 when it found, for the first time, that a vaccine could confer – albeit modest – protection against HIV.

The Uhambo regimen aims to provide greater and more sustained protection than the RV144 regimen and has been adapted to the HIV subtype that predominates in southern Africa.

IMMUNE RESPONSES

The Imbokodo study (Imbokodo means “rock” in isiZulu) is formally known as the HVTN 705/HPX2008 trial. It’s being conducted in more than 2600 healthy, HIV-negative women in South Africa, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe aged between 18 and 35.

The vaccine regimen being tested in this trial is based on “mosaic” immunogens. These are vaccine components derived from strains of HIV from different regions of the world. This approach has been designed to induce immune responses against a wide variety of global HIV strains.

WAY FORWARD

Our scientific journey is remarkable.

But there is some way to go before we know the full impact of these trials. All three trials are building on important breakthroughs over the past two decades. We hope that out of these three areas of exploration clarity will emerge that brings the world closer to solving what is required to protect against HIV.

If any of the vaccines or antibodies are effective, it will unleash an enormous explosion in scientific enquiry to improve, adapt and, most importantly, bring a new form of HIV prevention to people.

[the writer is Research Professor, Perinatal HIV Research Unit and President, South African Medical Research Council]

Spending two hours a week in nature is linked to better health and well-being

MATHEW WHITE
theconversation.com

The idea that spending recreational time in natural settings is good for our health and wellbeing is hardly new. Parents have been telling their kids to “go play outside, it’s good for you” for generations. Now, colleagues and I have published a study in the journal Scientific Reports which suggests that a dose of nature of just two hours a week is associated with better health and psychological wellbeing, a figure that applies to every demographic we could think of (at least in England).

So why do we need research into this? Although our parents’ common sense observation is true in the general sense, the devil – as always – is in the detail. For instance, it’s less intuitively obvious exactly how much time in nature we need before we experience the benefits, whether we can have “too much of a good thing”, whether it’s better to have lots of smaller encounters or one big one, whether parks, beaches and mountains offer similar benefits, or whether nature exposure is more important for some people than others.

We wanted to answer these questions so we could start developing recommended guidelines about how much time people should spend in nature. Similar guidelines have been developed to advise 150 minutes of physical activity per week, or that five portions of fruit and veg a day benefits health. Our findings do not yet offer a final recommendation, but we think they are an important starting point.

Our research used responses from a large, representative sample of 20,000 adults in England, collected as part of an annual government advisory survey on Engagement with the Natural Environment. The survey takes place in people’s homes

and interviewers ask respondents to go through each of the previous seven days and describe any time they spent “out of doors” in natural settings such as urban parks, woods, or beaches on each day.

Once this nature “diary” has been reconstructed, interviewers randomly select a previous visit in the past week, and ask more extensive details such as how long the visit was, who they went with, how they got



there, and what they got up to. This “random” selection aspect is really important scientifically because it means we get to learn about people’s visits in general, not merely the “highlight” events that most stick in the memory. Using these responses, we were able to build a profile of how much time each of our 20,000 respondents spent in nature per week.

To figure out how this was linked to health and well-being, we looked at the responses given by the same people to two further questions on general health and overall “life satisfaction”.

We found that people who spent

at least two hours a week in nature were more likely to report “good” health or “high” levels of well-being than people who spent no time in nature. People who spent some time in nature, but less than two hours, were no more likely to report good health and well-being than those who had zero weekly exposure, suggesting that one can have too little. Further, after about five hours a week, there was some evidence of no additional

benefits.

TWO-HOUR THRESHOLD

Perhaps most importantly, this pattern of a “two-hour threshold” was present for nearly all groups we looked at: older and younger adults, men and women, people in cities and in rural areas, people in deprived and wealthy communities, and even among people with and without a long-term illness or disability.

This suggests our results are not merely due to “reverse causality” – the possibility that people who visit nature are already a self-selected sample of healthier people. Even those with long-term illnesses were

more likely to report better health and well-being if they spent 120 minutes a week in nature.

Although encouraging, we must be careful about overplaying these results. The fact remains that the data was self-reported and “cross-sectional”. Despite our best efforts, we can’t rule out the possibility that people didn’t accurately remember the time they spent in nature last week, or are nervous about talking about their health and well-being to interviewers. We don’t think this was too much of an issue here because the questions were simple, taken from internationally recognised surveys, including the census, and have been shown to be highly reliable.

Furthermore, there is a large body of experimental work, including work using stress biomarkers, which essentially shows that time spent in nature is good for physiological and psychological health – our main advance here is taking a step towards understanding a weekly dose.

There is increasing pressure on our parks and other green spaces to be used for urgently needed housing and other infrastructure. Colleagues and I fully appreciate that these alternative land uses are important, but we feel these spaces themselves are often undervalued. By improving our understanding of how spending time in nature is related to health and well-being we hope to better inform these decisions on what to do with green space.

Access to most parks and green spaces is free, so even the poorest, and often the least healthy, members of communities have equal access for their health and well-being. We hope that evidence such as ours will help keep them that way.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer in Environmental Psychology, University of Exeter]

Doctors protest against assault of colleagues in Kolkata spreads to other parts of the country

NEW DELHI, JUNE 14 (PTI): The stir by junior doctors protesting assault on two of their colleagues at a hospital in Kolkata assumed nationwide proportions Friday with government doctors in various states expressing solidarity and resorting to agitations.

The protests began after a patient’s relatives assaulted the doctors at NRS Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata on Sunday night.

The doctors have demanded Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s unconditional apology and set six conditions for the state government to withdraw their four-day-long stir that disrupted healthcare services across West Bengal.

Among other things, they are pressing for more stringent laws to protect them from such assaults.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) launched a three-day nationwide protest from Friday to express solidarity with the doctors and called for a strike on June 17 with withdrawal of non-essential health services.



In Delhi, scores of doctors at several government and private hospitals held demonstrations by boycotting work, marching and raising slogans.

They also met Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan and apprised him of the medical fraternity’s demand of ensuring safety and security of doctors in face of any violence in hospital premises.

In a letter to Banerjee, the Union minister has urged her to ensure an “amicable end” to the protests and provide a secure working environment for doctors.

Around 4,500 resident doctors in Maharashtra, including some 2,800 in Mumbai, went on a one-day strike.

The Maharashtra Association of Resident Doctors (MARD) had declared that junior doctors at government hospitals in the state will not perform surgeries or attend to out-patient departments (OPDs) between 8 am and 5 pm Friday.

In Hyderabad and other places in Telangana, Junior doctors staged protests against the

In Raipur, around 400 junior doctors of Dr B R Ambedkar Memorial Hospital, Raipur - the biggest government hospital in the state - staged a protest from 8 am to 2 pm in premises of the medical facility.

The services at the state-run Goa Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) at Panaji and its facilities across the state were partially affected Friday as several doctors went on a one-day strike.

In Chandigarh, over 1,200 resident doctors at the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) held a demonstration to express solidarity with their protesting counterparts in Kolkata.

In Coimbatore, over 100 doctors staged a dharna in front of the government hospital to protest against the assault of a junior doctor in Kolkata.

The doctors, including women, belonging to the local chapter of Indian Medical Association (IMA) and Tamil Nadu Government Doctors Association raised slogans.

Doctors from other districts of Rajasthan also took part in the token protest, according to a report.

HC refuses to pass interim order on doctors strike, asks WB govt about steps taken after NRS incident

KOLKATA, JUN 14 (PTI): The Calcutta High Court on Friday refused to pass any interim order on the strike by junior doctors in protest against an attack on their colleagues at a hospital here and asked the state government to resolve the issue so that patients can get health services.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice TBN Radhakrishnan and Justice Suvra Ghosh also directed the Mamata Banerjee-led West Bengal government to apprise it of the steps taken following the attack on junior doctors, two of whom suffered serious injuries, at NRS Medical College and Hospital on Monday night after death of a patient.

The Chief Justice,

during the hearing of a Public Interest Litigation (PIL), reminded the striking doctors of the ‘Hippocratic Oath’ they take to ensure the welfare of all patients.

The bench fixed June 21 for further hearing of the petition.

Claiming that the strike by the doctors is unlawful, petitioner Kunal Saha prayed that the state take meaningful steps to end the impasse.

Appearing for the state, Advocate General Kishore Dutta submitted before the court that the government does not support the strike.

When the Chief Justice asked him whether the police have initiated action in the case of attack on junior doctors by

the relatives and neighbours of a patient, who died Monday night at NRS hospital, Dutta answered in the affirmative.

The bench asked the state government to persuade the striking doctors to resume work and provide usual services to patients.

Doctors across all state-run hospitals in West Bengal are on a strike, demanding adequate security in medical colleges and hospitals.

Emergency wards, outpatient facilities, pathological units of many state-run medical colleges and hospitals and a number of private medical facilities in the state have remained closed for the last three days in the wake of the protest.

Plea in SC for safety, security of doctors at government hospitals

NEW DELHI, JUN 14 (PTI): In the wake of protests by doctors in West Bengal against assault on their colleagues, a plea was filed in the Supreme Court Friday seeking to ensure safety and security of doctors in government hospitals across the country.

The petition sought directions to Union ministries of home affairs and health as also West Bengal to depute government appointed security personnel at all government hospitals across the country to ensuring safety and security of the doctors.

Due to protests, the healthcare services in the country have been badly disrupted and many people are dying because of the absence of the doctors, it said.

“The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has supported the agitation of the doctors and has directed its members of all its state branches to stage protests ad wear

black badges on Friday. Many senior doctors have resigned from their government posts in order to express solidarity with the agitating doctors,” it said.

The plea, filed by advocate Alakh Alok Srivastava, also sought directions to the West Bengal government to take strictest legal and penal action against the attackers who assaulted junior doctors at NRS Medical College Hospital, Kolkata, on June 10.

“As per the study conducted by IMA, more than 75 percent of doctors across the country have faced some form of violence. This study concluded that 50 percent violent incidents took place in the Intensive Care Unit of hospitals and in 70 percent of cases, the relatives of the patients were actively involved,” it said.

The plea sought directions to formulate appropriate guidelines/act/rule

or regulation to ensure safety and security of the doctors working at government hospitals and to ensure its compliance.

“The doctors are our saviours and particularly the doctor working in government hospitals are doing great national service, particularly to the poor and downtrodden of this country, in extremely adverse circumstances,” it said.

Junior doctors in West Bengal are on a strike since June 11, demanding better security at workplace after two of their colleagues were attacked and seriously injured at the NRS Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata allegedly by relatives of a patient who died at the hospital.

The IMA declared Friday as the “All India Protest Day” and launched a three-day nationwide protest. It also called for a strike on June 17 with withdrawal of non-essential health services.

FAW outbreak ‘more or less’ contained in Mizoram: Agri Min

AIZAWL, JUN 14 (PTI): The Fall Army Worm (FAW) outbreak in Mizoram, affecting maize cultivation in the state, has been “more or less” contained, state Agriculture Minister C Lalrinsanga said Friday.

The state government had provided assistance

to the maize cultivators by distributing bio-pesticide, bio-agents and pesticides free of cost to deal with the FAW outbreak, he said in the Assembly.

The FAW outbreak was reported in the state since early April.

The minister said this in a written reply to a ques-

tion from Vanlalhlana of the Zoram People’s Movement (ZPM) and Vanlaltanpuia of the ruling Mizo National Front (MNF).

The state government had constituted a sub-committee on the incidence of FAW, and a Rapid Response Team to take measures to mit-

igate the loss of crops caused by the pest, he said.

The Centre was asked to provide assistance to the farmers under Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) and National Food Security Mission (NFSM), he said.

Coordinated efforts

were made with local NGOs in combating the crop loss, caused by the lepidopteran pest that feeds on multiple plants.

The FAW outbreak had affected maize cultivation in 1,747.9 hectares in 122 villages of the state, the minister had earlier said.

Man arrested for Facebook post on Tripura CM

AGARTALA, JUN 14 (PTI): The Tripura Police has arrested a man from Delhi for allegedly posting “fake news” on Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb’s personal life, a senior police officer said.

Based on specific inputs, Anupam Paul,

who had been on the run since April 26, was arrested by the crime branch of Tripura Police on Wednesday.

After the arrest, he was produced before a Delhi court on Thursday seeking a transit remand for interrogation and in-

vestigation into the case. And, the plea was granted by the court.

“He will be taken back to Tripura for interrogation as the court has already granted his transit remand,” the police officer said on Friday.

The police registered

an FIR against Paul for forgery, cheating and conspiracy after the April 25 Facebook post went viral on social media.

Earlier, the Tripura Police had arrested a journalist, Saikat Talapatra, in connection with a similar post on Facebook.

He is now out on bail, the police officer said.

Recently, six people, including journalists, were arrested in Uttar Pradesh for posting or sharing alleged objectionable remarks on Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

DRI seizes 834 tortoises meant for smuggling to Bangladesh

KOLKATA, JUN 14 (PTI): The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) has seized 834 Indian star tortoises meant for smuggling to Bangladesh, an official statement issued on Friday said.

On the basis of inputs that a consignment of Indian star tortoises is being brought from Chennai onboard the Coromandel express train and would be handed over to a group of people at the Santragachi railway station here, officials of the DRI mounted surveillance at the station on Monday.

At around noon, a few minutes after the Coro-

mondal express arrived at the station, the officials spotted some suspicious movement of three people trying to hurriedly load four trolley bags in a car at the parking area, the DRI said in the statement.

The officials intercepted the vehicle along with the three persons.

During interrogation, the persons admitted that the trolley bags contained Indian star tortoises and were handed over to them by a passenger of that train. The trio was supposed to carry the bags to Banipur from where they would be smuggled out to Bangladesh, the state-

ment added.

On a thorough search, the officials found 834 number of Indian star tortoises, a vulnerable wildlife species and prohibited for export under the Indian Foreign Trade Policy.

The tortoises, which were seized, handed over to Alipore Zoological Garden, Kolkata for safe custody.

The three people were arrested under provisions of the Customs Act.

In another case, the DRI has seized six kilograms of gold, smuggled into India from Myanmar, worth Rs 2.01 crore from four people staying in a hotel here.

Information was received that four people, jointly travelling in a group, were lodged in Hotel Samrat here and they would receive gold of foreign origin, which was smuggled into India from Myanmar through the Indo-Myanmar border for ultimate delivery to Uttar Pradesh, the DRI said.

A team raided the hotel and identified the rooms where the suspected persons had checked in, it said.

The four people admitted that they had in their possession substantial quantity of gold of foreign origin in bar form, secreted in their shoes.

They said such gold bars were smuggled into India from Myanmar and they had come here to procure those smuggled gold bars and take them to Pratapgarh for further delivery.

A total of six rectangular shaped gold bars of foreign origin totally weighing six kgs were seized from the possession of these four people, the DRI said.

All the four people were arrested and produced before a court here on Thursday, which sent them to judicial custody till June 27.

Mamata’s nephew, Kolkata mayor’s daughter join doctors’ protest

KOLKATA, JUN 14 (PTI): Nephew of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and children of two top Trinamool Congress leaders are among the doctors agitating in West Bengal over the assault on their colleagues.

Abesh Banerjee, son of the TMC supremo’s brother Kartick Banerjee, is a doctor at KPC Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata.

With a poster in hand,

he was seen at the protest in his college on Thursday and Friday.

Kolkata Mayor and state urban development minister Firhad Hakim’s daughter Shabba, also a doctor, had on Thursday criticised the state government on social media for its alleged inaction in the matter.

“As a TMC supporter I am deeply ashamed at the inaction and the silence of

our leader,” Shabba Hakim posted on Facebook.

Referring to those who have been raising concern over the fate of patients in the wake of the strike, she said, “For those saying ‘Ono Rugider ki dosh? (how are other patients at fault?)’ Please question the government as in why the police officers posted in government hospitals do little to nothing to protect doctors? Please ques-

tion them that when 2 truckload of goon showed up why wasn’t back up sent immediately?”

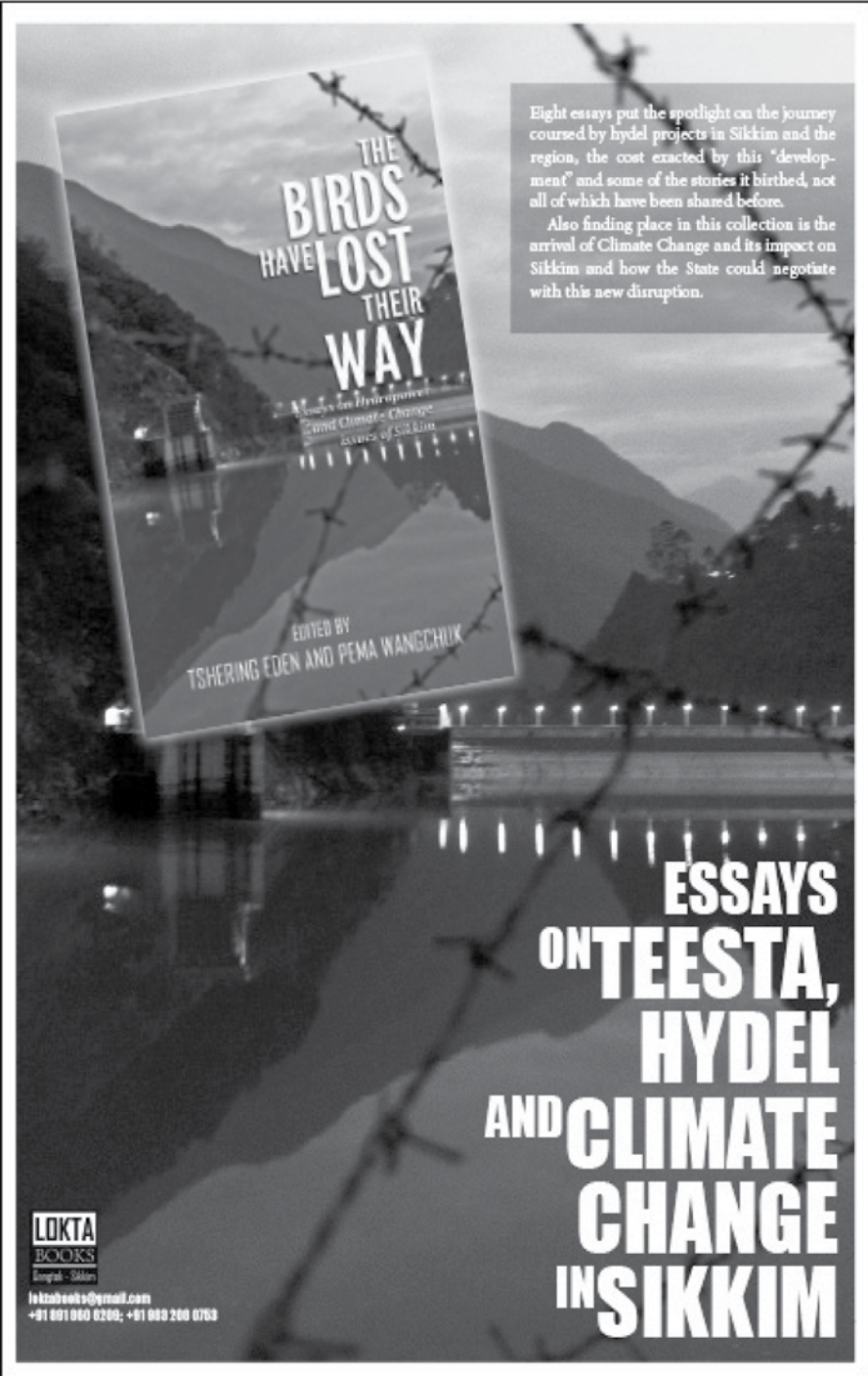
“Please question why goons are still surrounding hospitals and beating up doctors? We have a right to peaceful protest. We have a right to safety at work,” she added.

Baidyanath, the son of senior TMC leader and MP Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, also showed solidary with

the agitators at NRS Medical College and Hospital.

“I stand with NRS. To hell with politics....I personally apologise to all the doctors if any unfair comments have been made against them,” he said on Facebook.

Doctors across the state have been observing a strike in protest against the attack on their colleagues at NRS Medical College.



The Pak-born fan who gets match tickets from Dhoni, since 2011

BHARAT SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JUN 14 (PTI): The bond between M S Dhoni and Karachi-born Mohammad Bashir aka ‘Chacha Chicago’ blossomed during the 2011 World Cup semifinal between India and Pakistan and it has only grown stronger since then.

Such is the bond that Bashir has flown in to Manchester from Chicago (approximately 6000 kms) for Sunday’s high-octane Indo-Pak contest without a match ticket. He knows that Dhoni will ensure that he is it at the Old Trafford when the first ball is bowled.

“I arrived here yesterday and saw that people are ready to pay as much as 800-900 pounds for a ticket. A return ticket from Chicago costs the same. Thanks to Dhoni, I don’t have to struggle for a match ticket,” the 63-year-old, who owns a restaurant in Chicago and is an American passport holder, told PTI.

The connection goes back to 2011. Bashir was bowled over by Dhoni’s benevolence when India’s World Cup-winning captain went out of his way to arrange a ticket for him for the marquee clash in



Mohali, a showdown for which most fans would pay an arm and a leg to watch in person.

Eight years later, the heartwarming story of Bashir and Dhoni continues. It is not a surprise anymore that Bashir supports Dhoni’s team over the country of his birth whenever the two sides clash.

Dhoni might not be easily accessible for even his teammates at times but has never disappointed Bashir.

“I don’t call him as he is so busy. I keep in touch only through text messages. Long before I came here, Dhoni assured me of the ticket. He is a great human being. I can’t think of anyone else doing what he has done for me since that 2011 game in Mohali.

“Imagine I get the ticket for free when most would pay a fortune for it. I have got a surprise gift for him this time and I hope to give it to him

later today,” said Bashir.

After arriving in Manchester, he checked into the Pakistan’s team hotel where he met most of the squad members including captain Sarfaraz Ahmed, Mohammad Amir, Mohammad Amir and Hassan Ali.

One of his selfies was with Shoaib Malik and Indian tennis star wife Sania Mirza, an Indo-Pak union just like him and his wife. He checks into the Indian team hotel lat-

er on Friday.

His love for his homeland is understandable but the reason for his affinity towards India is his Hyderabad wife, besides Dhoni of course. His match-day uniform has both India and Pakistan colours and Bashir calls himself an ambassador of peace.

While watching Indo-Pak games all-around the World, Bashir has made lifelong Indian friends and one them is the well-known superfan



Real Madrid confirm signing of ‘Japanese Messi’ Kubo

MADRID, JUNE 14 (AFP): Real Madrid confirmed the signing of Japanese teenager Takefusa Kubo on Friday.

The 18-year-old joins from FC Tokyo and will play for Madrid’s B team, Castilla, next season.

“Takefusa Kubo will join Castilla next season,” a Real Madrid statement read.

“He is one of the most promising young players in world football, an attacking midfielder with excellent technique and great vision for the game.”

Kubo, who has been dubbed the “Japanese Messi”, made his full international debut against El Salvador earlier this month and was also linked with Barcelona, Paris Saint-Germain and Premier League champions Manchester City.

Kubo earned his nickname after joining

Barca’s youth academy aged 10 but returned to Japan in 2015 as a result of FIFA sanctions handed to the club for breaching rules on signing under-age players.

Barcelona have kept tabs on Kubo ever since but Madrid stole a march on their La Liga rivals with an offer of two million euros (2.25 million) a year, according to Japanese media.

Kubo came on as a second-half substitute in Japan’s 2-0 win over El Salvador last weekend and has been included in the Blue Samurai squad for the Copa America, which begins on Friday in Brazil.

He has scored four goals in 13 J-League games this year for Tokyo.

Japan open their second Copa America campaign against Chile in Sao Paulo on Monday.

India supported our Asia Cup bid but venue to be decided later: Mani

KARACHI, JUNE 14 (PTI): PCB chief Ehsan Mani on Friday said that India supported the awarding of 2020 Asia Cup’s hosting rights to Pakistan at the recent Asian Cricket Council meeting in Singapore.

“India supported our bid but the venues will be decided later. Our preference is to have the matches in Pakistan if the Indian government gives permission to the Indian board to send its team to Pakistan for the tournament. If not, UAE is the second option,” Mani told the media in Lahore.

Next year’s Asia Cup is scheduled for September before the World T20 in Australia.

India had hosted the last Asia Cup in UAE last

year after Pakistan refused to travel across the border.

Mani said Pakistan was trying to bring back international cricket to the country and its first priority would be to have matches in Pakistan. “But it will depend on whether the Indian team is cleared to tour the country.”

The Asian Emerging Nations Cup was held in Karachi and Dubai earlier this year with India playing all their matches in UAE while Pakistan played their group games in Karachi and later travelled to UAE for the final round.

Mani also made it clear that despite the continued suspension of bilateral cricket between Pakistan and India, the relations between the

two boards remained cordial.

“Both boards have no issues with each other and we have cordial relations. But our policy on the resumption of bilateral ties with India is now clear..that is..we will not request them again to play with us,” Mani, a former President of the International Cricket Council, said.

“The Indian board will now take the first step if they want to resume bilateral cricket series. Hopefully, since the elections are now over in India and the government has been formed the political climate will change and allow the resumption of ties,” he added.

We have to play within our limitations, can’t copy teams like India: Karunaratne

London, Jun 14 (PTI): Sri Lanka will have to work within their limitations and can’t copy a team like India in their pursuit for a knockout berth at the World Cup, said skipper Dimuth Karunaratne.

“We are a team with limited talent. If you compare us with a lot of other sides, we have major limitations. For example, the India side has someone who hits a hundred virtually in every match. In our team, we’ve only had one or two centurions all year,” Karunaratne was quoted as saying in ESPNcricinfo.

“Their openers can hit the big shots any time they want. They can defend any time they want ... They’ve faced every bowler there is to face, either in internationals or the IPL, and they’ve got all that knowledge and experience,” he said.

Karunaratne also said that his fast bowlers cannot be compared



with the Indians.

“They’ve got fast bowlers that go at over 140kph. We don’t have that luxury - we’re 130, 135kph. So we have to work within those limitations. We have to compete, but we can’t copy India. We have our own rhythm. If we play smart, we can beat anyone.”

Despite just one win from four games, Sri Lanka are currently placed at the fifth spot in the points table, courtesy two wash out matches from which they shared points with Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Sri Lanka face defending champions Australia here Saturday.

Tendulkar sues Australian bat manufacturer for not honouring agreement: reports

Melbourne, Jun 14 (PTI): Sachin Tendulkar has sued an Australian cricket bat manufacturer for allegedly failing to pay him USD 3 million under an exclusive licensing agreement to use his name and image on the company’s products, according to media reports here.

The 45-year-old Tendulkar, who holds a plethora of records in international cricket, was signed up by the Sydney-based company Spartan Sports in 2016. It was co-founded by Indian entrepreneur Kunal Sharma.

In September last year, Tendulkar, an investor and an advisory board member, terminated his association after the company defaulted on payments running into crores, asking the company to stop using his name and likeness.

Now, the batting legend has filed a civil lawsuit in an Australian court.

“Tendulkar is suing Spartan after it allegedly failed to pay him USD 3 million under an exclusive licensing agreement to use his name and image on sporting goods,” said a report in the ‘Sydney Morning Herald’.

It is not known what damages were sought by Tendulkar.

Interestingly, David Warner used a bat manufactured by Spartan while hitting 107 against Pakistan in the World Cup match in Taunton on Wednesday.

The report said Warner recently signed a new deal with Spartan but it was unclear whether or not he had been paid a portion of his contract.

While there was no suggestion Spartan would not pay the money owed to the Australian opener, Warner’s manager James Erskine said he expected the contract to be fulfilled.

“Warner has got a contract with them and if they don’t pay, we’d probably do the same thing (as Tendulkar). If people don’t pay you under a contract, you are free to sue them for the money you think you have been owed,” Erskine was quoted as saying in the report.

A court ruling in Australia last year ordered the sports gear and equipment company to be liquidated, which in turn could affect the players associated with Spartan Sports.

Michael Clarke, Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Kevin Pietersen are among other cricketers Spartan has had on its books over the years.

Australian Test cricketers Mitchell Johnson and Joe Burns have previously sued Spartan over an alleged shortfall in contract payments.

Jaipur Literature Festival to make Belfast debut in UK

ADITI KHANNA
LONDON, JUN 14 (PTI): The sixth international edition of the Jaipur Literature Festival commenced at the British Library here on Friday, with a debut at Belfast in Northern Ireland planned next week.

This year’s London chapter, which runs until Sunday, brings together over 60 speakers from a range of disciplines, genres and cultures, including Nobel Laureate Venki Ramakrishnan, acclaimed travel writer Pico Iyer, and award-winning author and journalist Christopher de Bellaigue.

The festival will then travel to Belfast as its second stop in the UK to explore themes that bind India and Northern Ireland, both nations deeply affected by issues around border and partition and the concepts of identity and migration.

“This time there will be an edition also in Bel-

fast, which is at the initiative of the city. It would certainly help bring a new facet and a new element into this interesting exchange that we have between our two countries,” said Ruchi Ghanashyam, the Indian High Commissioner to the UK, at a launch ceremony for JLF in London.

“And, in London, what better place to have a literary festival than the repository of all literature and books and manuscripts like the British Library..We are enriched by the tradition of reading and the tradition of exchange in the field of literature that has existed between India and Britain,” she said.

This year’s festival line-up includes an evening at the British Museum in London and will cover a series of debates and discussions, opening with a keynote address by Victoria and Albert Museum Di-

rector Tristram Hunt, the author of ‘Ten Cities That Made An Empire’.

“We’re back for our sixth edition in London with a colourful bandwagon of books, ideas and dialogue that capture our imaginations and explore the dynamic and challenging times we live in,” said Sanjoy K Roy, Managing Director of Festival producer Teamwork Arts.

“ZEE JLF at the British Library will look at history as well as current affairs, explore scientific works and the creative worlds of cinema, literature and poetry,” he said.

The international edition of the literature festival, which began its life in Rajasthan, is set to travel to the US, Canada and Australia later in the year, with the organisers defining the core concept as sharing South Asia’s unique literary heritage and fusing it with local narratives.

LONDON, JUN 14 (PTI): A UK judge on Friday set a February 2020 timeline for the extradition trial of Wikileaks co-founder Julian Assange, who faces charges of computer hacking and espionage in the US.

At a Westminster Magistrates’ Court hearing in London, Chief Magistrate Emma Arbuthnot ruled that a full extradition hearing lasting five days should begin on February 25 next year, after UK home secretary Sajid Javid had certified the US extradition request.

Assange, who appeared via videolink from the high-security Belmarsh prison for the hearing, told the judge that “175 years of my life is effectively at stake” as

he defended his website against hacking claims.

“WikiLeaks is nothing but a publisher,” he said.

The barrister representing the 47-year-old Australian national described the charges against his client as raising a “multiplicity of profound issues” and told the court that his client will also be challenging his 50-week imprisonment for breach of his bail conditions in the UK.

“We say it [the case] represents an outrageous and full-frontal assault on journalistic rights,” said Mark Summers.

A large group of Assange supporters had gathered outside the courtroom to chant slogans and

wave placards calling for “Justice for Assange”.

Opening the proceedings, barrister Ben Brandon, representing the US authorities, said: “This [case] is related to one of the largest compromises of confidential information in the history of the United States.”

He claimed that the US evidence will show that Assange “first encouraged” former US army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to illegally obtain documents and then agreed with her to “crack” a password on a Pentagon computer.

“By taking steps to crack the password hash, it’s said that Mr Assange was also attempting to il-

legally obtain and receive classified information,” Brandon said.

The documents in question were said to be related to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and information on secret intelligence sources.

“By publishing that unredacted material on the internet, Mr Assange created a grave and imminent risk that human intelligence sources, including journalists, human rights defenders and political activists, would suffer serious physical harm or arbitrary detention,” Brandon said.

On Thursday, UK home secretary Javid confirmed that he had signed an order following a request

from the US government to extradite the Wikileaks co-founder.

“It is a decision ultimately for the courts, but there is a very important part of it for the home secretary and I want to see justice done at all times and we’ve got a legitimate extradition request, so I’ve signed it, but the final decision is now with the courts, the senior Pakistani-origin minister said.

Assange, who faces an 18-count indictment by the US Justice Department, had been too ill to appear before the court at a scheduled hearing last month and appeared wearing a grey T-shirt and still sporting his white beard.

Iran denies tankers attack as tensions soar

DUBAI, JUN 14 (AFP): Iran dismissed as “baseless” Friday US accusations that it carried out twin attacks that left two tankers ablaze in the Gulf of Oman, escalating tensions across the region and sending world oil prices soaring.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned Washington would defend its forces and allies in the region, and the United States pressed its case as the UN Security Council met to address the incident -- the second in a month in the strategic shipping lane.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted Friday that the US administration had “immediately jumped to make allegations against Iran without a shred of factual or circumstantial evidence.”

He accused it of seeking to “sabotage diplomacy” amid a visit to Iran by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and “cover up its economic terrorism against Iran” in enforcing crippling unilateral sanctions.

With tensions spiralling between Iran and the United States, the European Union called for “maximum restraint” and UN chief Antonio Guterres warned the world cannot



afford a major confrontation in the Gulf.

Iran labelled the apparent attacks “suspicious,” as its supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei rebuffed overtures by Abe to open talks with US President.

Pompeo said there was strong evidence of Iran’s culpability, after the US Navy said it had spotted an unexploded limpet mine stuck to the hull of one of the vessels.

The US Central Command (CENTCOM) released a grainy black-and-white video it said showed an Iranian patrol boat “removing the unexploded limpet mine” from the ship.

“It is the assessment of the United States that the Islamic Republic of Iran is

responsible for the attacks,” Pompeo announced.

“This is based on intelligence, the weapons used, the level of expertise needed to execute the operation, recent similar Iranian attacks on shipping, and the fact that no proxy group operating in the area has the resources and proficiency to act with such a high degree of sophistication,” he said.

The two vessels were struck by explosions in the early daylight hours Thursday after passing through the Strait of Hormuz and travelling around 25 nautical miles off Iran’s southern coast headed towards Asia.

The Norwegian-owned Front Altair ethanol tanker was hit by three ex-

plosions, according to the Norwegian Maritime Authority, and remained ablaze late Thursday.

Explosions also struck the Japanese-owned Kokuka Courageous, which was loaded with methanol, but the fire on board was soon extinguished. One crew member suffered minor injuries. The ship was on Friday heading towards the Omani port of Khor Fakkan.

There was no claim of responsibility for the blasts, which struck both tankers at the waterline.

Iran said its navy rescued several dozen crew members of the two vessels, while the US Navy said it had picked up 21 from the Kokuka Courageous.

Washington has dis-

patched the destroyer USS Mason to the scene “to provide assistance,” CENTCOM said in a statement.

Pompeo called Thursday’s tanker explosions “the latest in a series of attacks” he alleged were undertaken by Iran or its “proxies,” including a Yemeni missile rebel missile which wounded 26 civilians at a Saudi airport on Wednesday.

A Saudi-led coalition which has been fighting the rebels it accuses of being Iranian proxies said Saudi air defences had intercepted a new rebel attack on a Saudi airport on Friday.

The abortive attack using five rebel drones targeted the southwestern city of Khamis Mushait, home to a huge airbase which has been the main launchpad of the coalition’s more than four-year bombing campaign in Yemen.

“Taken as a whole, these unprovoked attacks present a clear threat to international peace and security,” Pompeo said.

The United States has also accused Iran over May 12 attacks on four tankers anchored in the Gulf of Oman off the United Arab Emirates port of Fujairah.

A five-nation investigation into those attacks said

its preliminary findings indicated a state actor was responsible but stopped short of naming Iran.

The US called Thursday for the UN Security Council to confront the “clear threat” posed by Iran, as the council met behind closed doors to hear a briefing on Washington’s assessment that Tehran was responsible.

Iran’s mission to the UN pushed back, saying: “The US and its regional allies must stop warmongering.” Oil prices jumped at the threat of open conflict around the Strait of Hormuz, the chokepoint between the Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, through which transit some 15 million barrels per day of crude passes.

In London, benchmark Brent crude jumped 2.2 per cent to USD 61.31 a barrel, while in New York, the US standard, West Texas Intermediate, rose 2.2 per cent, to USD 52.28.

“We are in a dangerous moment in the region with this emerging pattern of attacks,” said Elizabeth Dickinson, senior analyst with International Crisis Group. “Any miscalculation or misunderstanding risks a spiral toward more direct confrontation.

Hong Kongers alarmed by Google translation gaffe

HONG KONG, JUN 14 (AFP): Hong Kong social media lit up on Friday when protesters noticed Google’s translation software was briefly churning out a rather odd suggestion during a week that has seen the worst political violence to hit the city in decades.

Eagle-eyed Google users discovered that when people entered the phrase “I am sad to see Hong Kong become part of China” the suggested translation in both Simplified and Traditional Chinese converted the word “sad” to “happy”.

It was not immediately clear what sparked the gaffe but Danny Sullivan, an official at Google, said in a tweet “we’re looking into why we had this translation and expect to have a fix to resolve it soon”.

The company’s hugely popular software tool uses complex algorithms and deep learning computers, as well as allowing users to make suggested translations to improve accuracy.

“Oh my god, I can’t be-

lieve my eyes,” one Facebook user commented under one of the many screen grabs of the false translation that went viral on Friday.

“The app intentionally mistranslates the English to ‘so happy/content’ instead of ‘so sad,’” added student Rachel Wong on Twitter. “I hope Google fixes this.” When AFP entered the sentence “I am sad to see Hong Kong become part of China” on Friday morning it did show the wrong translation, replacing sad with happy.

An hour later a correct translation was showing.

The international finance hub has been rocked this week by political violence as protesters opposed to a proposed China extradition law clashed with police.

On Thursday, the popular encrypted messaging app telegram, which is being used by protesters to coordinate, announced it had suffered a major cyber-attack that originated from China.

Hong Kong quiet now, but prospect of new protest looms large

HONG KONG, JUN 14 (AP): Hong Kong’s downtown was calm Friday after days of protests by students and human rights activists opposed to a bill that would allow suspects to be tried in mainland Chinese courts, although the prospect of further protests over the weekend loomed large.

Demonstrators have said they remain committed to preventing the administration of Beijing-appointed Chief Executive Carrie Lam from pushing through the legal amendments they see as eroding Hong Kong’s cherished legal autonomy which it retained after its handover from British to Chinese rule in 1997.

Traffic flowed on major thoroughfares that had been closed after a protest by hundreds of thousands of people on Sunday, posing the biggest political challenge yet to Lam’s two-year-old government.

Protesters had kept up a presence through Thursday night, singing hymns and holding up signs criticizing the police for their handling of the demonstrations.

Police said they have arrested 11 people on charges such as assaulting police officers and unlawful assembly. Police Commissioner Stephen

Lo Wai-chung said 22 officers had been injured in the fracas and hospital administrators said they treated 81 people for protest-related injuries.

Several hundred young protesters gathered Thursday on a pedestrian bridge across from the government complex, standing for hours and singing “Sing Hallelujah to the Lord,” while holding signs with messages such as “Don’t Shoot” and “End the Violence.” Signs were posted on the walls of the bridge Friday, including photocopies of the famed Associated Press “Tank Man” picture that became a symbol of resistance to China’s bloody suppression of student-led pro-democracy protests centered on Beijing’s Tiananmen Square in 1989.

Other signs criticized the police for their use of force in fighting back against protesters, including firing tear gas and rubber bullets and striking out with steel batons.

The debris-strewn area around government headquarters was blocked off by police while sanitation workers gathered rubbish and police officers checked the identity cards of pedestrians before letting them into the area.

The standoff between police and protesters is

Hong Kong’s most severe political crisis since the Communist Party-ruled mainland took control in 1997 with a promise not to interfere with the city’s civil liberties and courts. It poses a profound challenge both to the local leadership and to Chinese President Xi Jinping, the country’s strongest leader in decades who has demanded that Hong Kong follow Beijing’s dictates.

Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam declared that Wednesday’s violence was “rioting” that was “intolerable in any civilized society that respects the rule of law.” That designation could raise potential legal penalties for those arrested for taking part.

“Intense confrontation is surely not the solution to ease disputes and resolve controversies,” Lam said, according to an official news release.

It’s unclear how Lam, as chief executive, might defuse the crisis, given Beijing’s strong support for the extradition bill and its distaste for dissent. Beijing has condemned the protests but so far has not indicated whether it is planning harsher measures. In past cases of unrest, the authorities have waited months or years before rounding up protest leaders.

Nearly two years ago, Xi issued a stern address in the city stating that Beijing would not tolerate Hong Kong becoming a base for what the Communist Party considers a foreign-inspired campaign to undermine its rule over the vast nation of 1.4 billion people.

Not all in Hong Kong support the protesters. About a dozen older people staged a demonstration in a downtown garden in support of the extradition bill. But others expressed sympathy.

Though never a bastion of democracy, Hong Kong enjoys freedoms of speech and protest denied to Chinese living in the mainland.

Opposition to the proposed extradition legislation brought what organizers said was 1 million people into the streets on Sunday. The clashes Wednesday drew tens of thousands of mostly young residents and forced the legislature to postpone debate on the bill.

That came days after Hong Kong held one of the biggest June 4 candlelight vigils in recent years to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the 1989 protests in mainland China, a reminder of the uneasy relationship citizens

of the region maintain with the authoritarian regime in Beijing.

Those in Hong Kong who anger China’s central government have come under greater pressure since Xi came to power in 2012.

The detention of several Hong Kong booksellers in late 2015 intensified worries about the erosion of the territory’s rule of law. The booksellers vanished before resurfacing in police custody in mainland China. Among them, Swedish citizen Gui Minhai is under investigation for allegedly leaking state secrets after he sold gossip books about Chinese leaders.

In April, nine leaders of a 2014 pro-democracy protest movement known as the “Umbrella Revolution” were convicted on public nuisance and other charges.

Hong Kong’s protests have drawn international concern and support from human rights groups and foreign capitals.

On Thursday, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen said Hong Kong’s situation shows the “one country, two systems” framework devised for Hong Kong when Britain handed the colony back to China cannot work.

Field narrows to six in race to become British PM

LONDON, JUN 14 (AFP): The field of contenders vying to become Britain’s next prime minister narrowed to six on Friday when Health Secretary Matt Hancock withdrew from the contest.

The 40-year-old, who is against leaving the European Union without a deal, pulled out saying he was not in a position to win following Thursday’s first round of voting.

Former foreign secretary Boris Johnson, a Brexit figurehead who insists Britain must leave the EU in October “deal or no deal”, topped the secret ballot of Conservative MPs by a landslide, winning 114 of the 313 available votes.

Hancock came sixth out of the seven to make it through to a second round on Tuesday next week, when at least one more candidate will drop out.

“I have decided to

withdraw from the race and work out what is the best way to advance the values that I care deeply about,” he told the London Evening Standard newspaper.

“It is clear that I can’t win from here,” he said, having received 20 votes -- three more than the minimum threshold required to stay in the contest.

Hancock is one of the centre-right party’s rising stars, a moderate widely seen as competent at his job and skilful with the media.

“I’m going to talk to all the other candidates and consider how best I can advance the values that I care deeply about,” he said.

In Thursday’s vote, Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt came second behind Johnson with 43 votes, while Environment Secretary Michael Gove was third on 37.

Following a televised debate on Sunday, candidates will need a minimum 33 votes to get through Tuesday’s second round.

Further rounds of voting are scheduled and the Conservatives should be down to their last two candidates by the end of Thursday.

If Johnson does not lose votes next week, he is guaranteed a place in the final two.

But he is taking flak from other candidates as the only one yet to confirm he will take part in Sunday’s Channel 4 debate.

After hustings around the country, the party’s 160,000 grassroots members will pick their new leader in a postal ballot.

The winner will be announced in the week beginning July 22 and then take over from Theresa May as prime minister.

Body of a minor girl, believed to be Indian, found near US-Mexico border

HOUSTON, JUN 14 (PTI): Body of a seven-year-old girl, believed to be Indian, has been found near the remote and deserted US-Mexico border area, according to the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

The girl was found dead 27 kms west of Lukeville in Arizona state by the US border patrol agents on Wednesday.

Our sympathies are with this little girl and her family. This is a senseless death driven by cartels who are profiting from putting lives at risk,” Roy

Villareal, Tucson Chief Patrol Agent, said.

The girl was travelling with four other persons and dropped near the border by human smugglers who ordered the group to cross in the dangerous and austere location.

The patrol agents got the information after encountering two women from India, who explained how they came to the United States and that three others, a woman and two children, got separated from them hours earlier, the US agency said

in a statement.

The agents took the two women into custody and began searching the area north of the international border in the remote terrain for the missing persons.

Within hours, they discovered the little girl’s remains, it said.

Aircraft and helicopters from National Guard and CBP’s Air and Marine Operations were called out to expand the search for the others missing.

Additional agents from Border Patrol Search

Trauma and Rescue Unit, the Ajo Border Patrol Station and personnel from the Bureau of Land Management combed the area on foot.

However, US Border Patrol agents located footprints, indicating the remaining two members of the group crossed back into Mexico.

The CBP and Mexican authorities searched the area for any associated persons but no additional members of the group were located on either side of the border.





HUNKY HEMSWORTH! The Aussie actor, Chris Hemsworth sends peace and love during an outing in Manhattan.

Daniel Radcliffe joins 'Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt' interactive special

LOS ANGELES, JUN 14 (PTI): Actor Daniel Radcliffe is set to star in Netflix's "Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt" interactive special. The film is scheduled to debut in 2020.

The special will see Kimmy Schmidt (Ellie Kemper) set off on her biggest adventure, reported Variety.

Viewers will get to decide the outcome of the story similar to "Black Mirror: Bandersnatch".

Along with Radcliffe and Kemper, Jon Hamm, Tituss Burgess, Jane Krakowski and Carol Kane will appear in movie.

"Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt" series ended its run in 2019 with the second half of the fourth season.

By the end of the show Kemper's Kimmy Schmidt had found fame and success with a book, Krakowski's Jacqueline became a successful Hollywood agent, Burgess' Titus became a true star after his Broadway debut and Kane's Lillian found a new purpose as the "voice of New York".

Series creators Tina Fey and Robert Carlock are writing the new special and are also the executive producers and showrunners.

The special is currently under production.



SHUBHA DUBEY

BALI (INDONESIA), JUN 14 (PTI): Chris Hemsworth's movie choices post his success as Thor have one thing in common -- strong and independent female characters.

The actor played a handsome but daft-headed secretary in an all-female reboot of "Ghostbusters" and in his latest "MIB: International", he features as Agent H opposite the franchise's first on-field woman agent, Agent M (Tessa Thompson).

The Hollywood star says even though he has not picked these movies keeping in mind the debate around gender, he is happy that the change is finally happening.

"I am glad that people are now sort of well aware. And for younger generation, it is normal as opposed to my or the older generations. We sort of have to rethink about it. Making it a norm should be the aim. That's important and I think it's occurring," Hemsworth told PTI in a group interview here.

The 35-year-old Australia-

lian actor said the fact that audiences are open to female superhero films and have made movies like "Wonder Woman" and "Captain Marvel" a huge success, shows the shift.



"It is fantastic that there is a change happening. There has been a conversation for a while now. You talked to people 10 years ago about of a female superhero film and most of them would have said it won't work and so on.

"I think 'Captain Marvel' or 'Wonder Woman'... these films have made more money than any of the other stand-

alones. These films have as much or sort of more following and appreciation than other films. For my kids in particular, Wonder Woman is their favourite superhero," he added.

Hemsworth said he has always enjoyed collaborating with women who are opinionated and working with veteran star Emma Thompson in "MIB: International" was one-of-a-kind experience.

"I first met her at an event many years ago. She has the most wacky sense of humour and she is just incredibly kind

and collaborative," he said.

The actor, however, admitted that he was initially "intimidated" by the Academy Award winning actor.

"She's the kind of person who you walk up to and you're intimidated to work with. But she instantly puts you at ease. She is all about sort of having fun. And it's interesting to see it in people like her, who are sort of Gods in the acting world."

Hemsworth said, for him, the biggest takeaway in working with seasoned performers like Thompson is their "humility".

"The humility these people have and also they still carry that sense of doubt like 'Will this be my last job? 'Am I any good at this?' It's quite comforting.

"But it's also part of the talent of people like Emma that keeps you grounded. It just forces you to work harder. It's a pretty good motivator," he said.

The Sony Pictures India released "MIB: International" in the country on Friday.

Vanessa Hudgens to star in 'The Notebook' musical reading

LOS ANGELES, JUN 14 (PTI): Actor Vanessa Hudgens is set to lead the reading of "The Notebook" musical along with Tony-nominee Hailey Kilgore.

The "High School Musical" will lead the first reading of the season on June 23 at Vassar and New York Stage & Film's annual summer play development incubator known as the Powerhouse season.

According to Variety, Tony-nominee Michael Greif is set to direct the reading.

The reading is a musical



adaptation of the popular 2004 film "The Notebook".

Based on Nicholas Sparks' novel of the same name, the romantic drama focuses on

the Noah and Allie's love story, spanning the earliest days of their teen courtship through their struggles to remember each other in their

twilight years. Hudgens will portray "middle" Allie, the character played by Rachel McAdams on screen, opposite Ryan Gosling.

Apart from Hudgens, Candy Buckley and Kilgore will be playing Allie. Antonio Cipriano, Clifton Duncan and Tony-winner James Naughton are cast as Noah.

Ingrid Michaelson is working on the production's music and lyrics.

Kevin McCollum and Kurt Deutsch are producing.

Taylor Swift new album 'Lover' to release in August



LOS ANGELES, JUN 14 (PTI): Pop star Taylor Swift has revealed that her new album "Lover" will release on August 23.

The 29-year-old singer shared the news through an Instagram Live Stream.

According to Entertainment Weekly, there will be four deluxe special editions of the album, all of which will be available at Target retail stores and on her official website.

The versions will also feature two audio tracks that will provide a glimpse into her songwriting process.

The singer-songwriter's new single "You Need To Calm Down" was released on Friday.

"I never take it for granted that you care about stuff that I've made," Swift said appreciating her fandom in her Live Stream.

Fantastic there is conversation: Chris Hemsworth on changing gender norms in cinema

ARIES: Feelings are flowing! Today's heart-opening trine between go-getter Mars and dreamy Neptune turns up your emotional dial. Your trademark Aries passion can be powerfully healing. It's a little-known fact that Rams can be some of the world's best listeners. Give people your full, undivided attention and don't tamp down your enthusiasm!

TAURUS: Feel no guilt today for making a few power moves and befriending influential people. A helpful trine between ambitious Mars and magnetic Neptune lights up your social sectors and makes you especially charismatic today. Use it to your advantage! Make a bold pitch or message someone you admire on social media. No need to hard-sell yourself, Bull.

GEMINI: Time to make a big ask? Gutsy Mars in your work and money house forms an opportune trine to magnetic Neptune, heating up career prospects. Be bold but not forceful, Gemini. The stars are working on your behalf and you don't need to over-explain yourself today. Just lay out the facts or make your request.

With karmic Neptune here, you might donate a few dollars to a cause you care about or mentor a person coming up through the ranks.

CANCER: Today, people's expectations (and soon, their demands!) might balloon out of proportion. Here's the rub: This whole situation might be your "fault." With the Sun and supersizer Jupiter working at cross-purposes, your ego could be out to prove something, leading you to take on responsibilities that are above your pay grade. Don't get swept up in the competitive vibes: As it's been said, pride goeth before a fall.

LEO: The world's your oyster as quicksilver Mercury makes a global entry into your ninth house of travel and adventure until May 6, sparking your wanderlust. Grab your car keys—or passport—and enjoy a spur-of-the-moment getaway. If you can't get out of Dodge on such short notice, consider this your long-lead nudge to start planning your late-spring or summer vacay NOW.

LIBRA: Body language isn't just a dialect spoken by a few—it's the universal language of love! And today, your cosmic ruler, sil-

ver-tongued Mercury, flits into your sultry, seductive erotic eighth house until May 6, inviting you to flirt with abandon. It's a time to let your desires be known, directly or with more secretive subtlety.

VIRGO: Even someone with superhuman powers couldn't keep up with everything you've got piled on your plate, Virgo. Compromise is mandatory if you hope to maintain some semblance of sanity, so find ways to scale back and streamline. In order to accomplish your most important work mission today, you'll need to backburner each and every nonessential to-do on your list. Tune out those around you, and you'll cross the finish line before the end of the day, Pheew.

SCORPIO: Today's emo moon brings out your empathetic side. Don't fight those feelings, Scorpio! If you feel a surge of sadness or anger in response to a friend's plight, express it! Let the tears flow and open your heart to those who mean the most to you. Go out of your way to let them know how important they are in your world. When you need a steady shoulder

and a compassionate ear, they'll be there for you with bells on.

SAGITTARIUS: Pull off that oversized cashmere sweater and slip into something more glamorous—or better yet, sexier. Today, messenger Mercury wings into your amorous, glamorous fifth house until May 6, turning you into an unabashed flirtaholic. Harboring a secret crush? It's time to act on it, Archer. Plan more playful dates over the next few weeks, whether you're single or spoken for. Think: private whisky tasting or an adventurous road trip to see Hamilton on tour. You'll be a magnet for magnates, so don't be shy about approaching the power players in any room!

CAPRICORN: Trying to make everyone happy, Capricorn? Today's stars turn that into an exercise in futility. If you've piled one too many obligations on your plate, your stress levels are liable to peak. Your best bet is to graciously bow out of a few responsibilities in the name of preserving your peace of mind. Don't worry—the people who really count will understand.

And if anyone tries to send you on a guilt trip, remember that their emotions are not your responsibility!

AQUARIUS: Unleash your trademark generosity today, Aquarius. Energizer Mars in your benevolent sixth house forms an auspicious angle to charitable Neptune in your finance sector. Put your money where your morals are, and "tithe" with your time. Sign up to volunteer or make a donation to a cause close to your heart. Little things count: You might offer career advice to a less experienced friend or pitch in on a project even though you won't get credit or glory!

PISCES: Today, your ruling planet Neptune synes up with sizzling Mars in your passionate fifth house. The line between love and hate is practically transparent, so if the energy shifts from hotheaded to hot-blooded, don't be surprised. You could find creative ways to channel these lusty vibes, and at least one willing participant! Enjoy the dance of seduction but DO make your desires known. The right balance between coy and courageous will make you irresistible.