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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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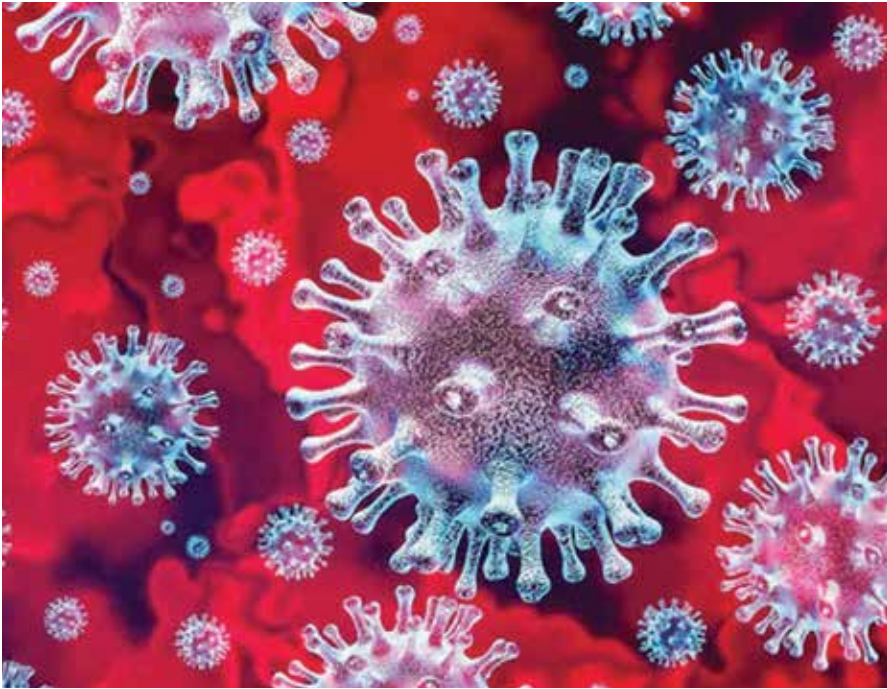
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Daily cases come in below 100 for fourth time this week

**SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 24 JUN:**

The number of daily new cases in Sikkim came in at two-digits today, a dip that has been seen only 11 times in the past 62 days the second wave of Covid has been among us. What should ease nerves some more is that this was the fourth time this week alone that new cases have been below hundred. This new, however, come tempered with news that the State also lost two more lives to the virus in the past 24 hours, taking the State's Covid death toll to 298. To get a sense of how brutal the second wave has been, one should bear in mind that 54% [162] of the Covid deaths in the State have occurred in the second wave.

As per the Daily Report of Covid-19 in Sikkim released by the



Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department released today, 92 new cases of Covid-19 were detected in the State in the last 24 hours from the testing of 652 sam-

ples. This gives Sikkim a Test Positivity Rate of 14.10%.

That said, Sikkim continued its reassuring record of post more recoveries than new cases with 198 former-

ly Covid-positive people completing their home isolation and getting discharged. Sikkim's count of recovered cases of COVID-19 has now reached 16,850. The total number of confirmed cas-

es of Covid recorded in the State thus far is 19,681.

Of the currently active cases - 2,282 - seventeen more were admitted to hospital today, taking the number of Covid patients in hospital to 96, of whom 14 are in ICU. Most of the Covid-positive people - 2,186 - are in home or facility isolation on their way to recovery with either no symptoms or symptoms mild enough not to require hospitalisation.

Of the 92 new cases, 35 were found in RT-PCR testing of 140 samples, while 54 more tested positive for COVID-19 in rapid antigen testing of 502 samples and three were detected in TruNat testing of 10 samples. While 52 new cases were registered in East District, 25 were in West District, 14 in South District and one in North District.

N'tl Gorhaland Comm meets Dhankar with Gorkhaland demand



SMRITA KHAWAS

DARJEELING , 24 JUN:

A delegation of National Gorkhaland Committee members met West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankar here today and submitted a petition demanding that Darjeeling be granted statehood as Gorkhaland or be upgraded to a

Union Territory from its district status.

Trilok Dewan, vice chairperson of the NGC, informed that they decided to intensify their demand after word about plans to separate North Bengal from the State, obviously being actively promoted by the Governor and BJP,

started circulating.

"We are in support of separating North Bengal from West Bengal State because we are aware of the sufferings of the people from Terai and the Doars, but we cannot be a part of North Bengal and hence our demand for statehood has been intensified," he said.

Google and Jio unveil budget phone "built for India"

NEW DELHI, 24 JUN [BLOOMBERG]: Billionaire Mukesh Ambani of Reliance Industries Ltd. unveiled the much-awaited JioPhone Next co-developed with Alphabet Inc.'s Google, a handset designed to target India's hundreds of millions of first-time smartphone users.

"An ultra-affordable 4G smartphone is essential," Mr Ambani told shareholders at Reliance's annual general meeting on Thursday, outlining the capabilities of the device that will run a re-engineered version of the Android operating system. Alphabet Chief Executive Officer Sundar Pichai joined remotely to say that the JioPhone was "built for India" and would deliver translation features, a voice assistant and a great camera.

Neither company leader disclosed a price for the handset, which will debut in the market on September 10, ahead of the country's peak shopping and gifting season. Both indicated plans to achieve a breakthrough price.

Jio is India's leading telecom operator with over 423 million users of voice and data services. The new 4G-capable device will try to entice users of basic phones, those "trapped in the 2G era," in Mr Ambani's words, to make the transition to more advanced hardware. For Google, it marks another effort toward making Android

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Vaccination drive of Special School for Children with Disabilities

**SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 24 JUN:**

A special COVID-19 vaccination drive for residents of the Special School for Children with Disabilities was carried out at its premises at Shyari on Thursday. A total of 36 special children in the age group 18 to 44 years of the centre were vaccinated for COVID-19 during this day-long special vaccination drive.

Minister for Social Justice & Welfare Department [SJWD], Dr MK Sharma along with Secretary, Tsewang Gyachho and other officials of SJWD were also present during the vaccination drive.

Speaking to media persons, the Minister mentioned that the government has been trying to cover every person in the state with COVID-19



vaccination. He added that it was difficult for differently abled persons to go to vaccination sites so the department has taken this special initiative by bringing the vaccination team to their doorsteps. He mentioned that the department would cover residents of old age homes and other centers who cannot go

to vaccination sites with such special vaccination drives in a phase-wise manner.

The Minister mentioned that the state government has been working sensibly to support differently abled persons in the State. He also thanked the Chief Minister for working for differently abled persons on

priority basis to support them to live a normal life in the society.

Differently abled persons with benchmark disability of 40% and above are eligible for the pension scheme, he informed.

He added that under Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme, the Centre was

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India presses OPEC for affordable oil price

NEW DELHI, JUN 24 (PTI):

With domestic retail fuel prices jumping to record high on rising international oil rates, India on Thursday pressed oil cartel OPEC for 'affordable' oil price within a 'reasonable band' and that the producers should phase out production cuts.

OPEC nations such as Saudi Arabia have traditionally been India's principal oil source. But, OPEC and its allies, called OPEC+, ignoring its call for ease supply curbs had led to the world's third-biggest oil importer tap newer sources to diversify its crude oil imports.

As a result, OPEC's share in India's oil imports has dropped to about 60 per cent in May from 74 per cent in the previous month.

India's Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan in virtual dialogue with OPEC secretary general Mohammad Sanusi Barkindo reiterated concerns over oil prices, which have shot up above USD 75 per barrel - the highest since

April 2019. The spike has led to retail petrol and diesel prices climbing to a record high. Petrol is above the Rs 100 per litre mark in 9 states and UTs, while diesel is being sold at over Rs 100 a litre in Rajasthan and Odisha.

"Minister Pradhan highlighted the importance of affordable and regular supplies of energy to drive economic and social progress, noting that his country is a major consumer and importer of oil," a statement issued by OPEC after the meeting said.

Later, a statement from the oil ministry said "Pradhan flagged concerns over the increasing crude oil prices and its impact on consumers as well as on smart economic recovery. He emphasised that high crude prices are adding significant inflationary pressure on India".

Both sides discussed recent oil market developments, trends in oil demand recoveries, economic growth forecasts and overcoming energy challenges, among other

issues of mutual interest.

"Pradhan reiterated his request of phasing out production cuts and also emphasised that crude prices should remain within a reasonable band, which will be in the collective interests of both consumers and producers and will encourage a consumption-led recovery," the ministry statement said.

He also stressed that all forms of energy will be needed to address India's growing energy needs.

"The Minister, citing the growing cooperation between India and OPEC over the years, said: 'We regard OPEC as a vital energy partner,' expecting the ongoing cooperation to continue going forward," as per the statement by the oil cartel.

He noted that the ongoing cooperation comprises high-level dialogue and collaboration on the technical level.

In March, Pradhan and his Saudi Arabian counterpart were locked in a verbal duel after

turn to pg02

Scientists write to President, say proposed law is "Against Lakshadweep's Culture"

KOCHI, 24 JUN [PTI]: The proposed Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation of 2021 (LDAR) is highly problematic and will work against existing legal provisions that safeguard the resilience of Lakshadweep's ecology,

livelihood and culture, say a group of scientists from different institutions who have worked on the islands for years.

In a statement issued on Thursday, the Lakshadweep Research Collective said it along with 60 other signatories from the scientific community have written to President Ram Nath Kovind seeking his intervention to withdraw the "incautious draft" Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation of 2021.

A collective of scientists and citizens, the Lakshadweep Research Collective, said they have done a thorough review of the implications of the LDAR. "In enabling take-over of local land, we find this draft regulation is not

in consonance with existing laws, such as the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, the Biological Diversity Act 2002, The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986," the statement said.

It is also against the suggestions of the Justice Raveendran Committee recommendations set up by the Supreme Court (as approved and notified by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, in its Notification No.19011/16/91-IA. III dated 23 October 2015, and the Lakshadweep Panchayats Regulation 1994), the collective said.

"The LDAR does not address India's commitments towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, marine protection goals under the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Ecotourism Guidelines 2019," it said.

Noting that Lakshadweep is a coral atoll, which means the islands are part of a living

coral system, the scientists said this island system is facing the impacts of climate change.

"Lakshadweep has experienced catastrophic climate change-related coral mass mortality events, straining the accretion and buffer capacity of the reefs. As just one example, the reefs of the capital, Kavaratti, are already eroding more than they are growing.

Lakshadweep is not just ecologically fragile but also socially progressive, and it needs a sustainable development framework," it said.

They said anyone who has lived or worked in Lakshadweep for any length of time will be aware of its special vulnerability.

"Surrounded by the ocean, barely a few metres above sea level, and with only the reef to protect it, it is clear that all development on these islands needs to be very carefully managed. Over the last two decades we have personally witnessed the reefs being battered by

repeated bleaching events and intense storms.

"How long it will take for these ecosystems to recover is anyone's guess. Given how linked land, lagoon and reef are in Lakshadweep, the development envisioned in the draft LDAR would be nothing short of disastrous," says Rohan Arthur, Senior Scientist, Nature Conservation Foundation.

In its current form, the LDAR keeps local islanders out of decision-making processes.

The LDAR embraces a questionable vision of development that is neither sustainable in design nor likely to improve local wellbeing or safeguard the future habitability of the archipelago.

Dr Naveen Namboothri, Director, Dakshin Foundation said the communities of the Lakshadweep Islands practise forms of social living and collective action that has served them well against external adversity.

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Legship residents protest after under construction water tank breaks, Minister intervenes

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 JUN:

An under construction water tank near Legship bazaar in West Sikkim broke leading to a protest by local residents against the project. Expressing their displeasure over the quality of work, the residents said that if the work is completed with this quality then it would put the villages below the tank in danger.

However, the villagers were assuaged after Area MLA and Minister, LN Sharma intervened and directed the contractor to ensure quality of work.

Two water tanks of 60 ltr and 70 ltr capacity are being built under the project at a cost of Rs 7 crore by the PHE Department to solve the problem of drinking water supply shortage in and around Legship.

Agri Minister interacts with Gelling farmers

GYALSHING, 24 JUN (IPR):

Minister for Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services Departments, Lok Nath Sharma interacted with the farmers of Gelling and peripheries under Salghari Zoom constituency, West Sikkim. He was accompanied by Area MLA, Sunita Gazmer.

Addressing the farmers, Minister Sharma announced to establish Milk Dairy Cooperative at Gelling and Lower Se-gang within a week.

Earlier, the farmers appraised the Minister on the increasing milk production in the locality and demanded for opening of a dairy cooperative.

The Minister discussed the proposal with the Managing Director, Sikkim Milk Union Dr.



AB Karki, over telephonic call and came to conclusion to establish Milk Dairy Cooperative, within a week. Minister Sharma also urged the farmers to collect milk of at least one hundred litres

in the dairy cooperative.

The Minister expressed happiness on the increasing interest of the farming community in Dairy and Livestock Farming Sector. He mentioned that the involvement of youth age

group in Dairy sector clearly indicates a step forward towards self-reliance in rural economy and Aatmanir-bhar Sikkim.

Earlier, he also interacted with the field functionaries of Agricul-

ture, Horticulture and Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services and encouraged them to provide exemplary service to benefit the farming community with utmost sincerity and dedication.

Soreng school alumni donate equipments to CHC Soreng

GYALSHING, 24 JUN (IPR):

The Alumni (1991 Batch) of Government Senior Secondary School Soreng came out with a noble deed and donated two Crash Cart Trolleys and a Cradle bed to Community Health Centre, Soreng.

The Minister Agriculture & Horticulture, Lok Nath Sharma along with the batch mates jointly handed over the two Crash Cart Trolleys and Cradle Cart to the Medical Professionals of Soreng Community Health Centre in special presence of the Press Advisor to the CM, CP Sharma and the Chairman, Agriculture and Horticulture Board, CK Rana, in a brief function held at Power Guest House today.

The programme also had the presence of SDM Soreng, Ranjan Rai, BDO Soreng, Sabita Subba, Panchayats, Alumni Batch Mates and others.

Minister Mr Sharma, in his brief address, expressed happiness that the Alumni could accomplish the social and noble deed and also requested the medical staff to take care of the received materials, so that, maximum number of patients can be benefited in future.

He also applauded cooperation of Alumni members and informed that the batch mates have also donated Oxygen Cylinders to Jorethang CHC,



Rinchenpong PHC, Mangbaria PHC, Bermiok PHSC in recent days. He also urged people to adopt COVID appropriate behaviour and the guidelines issued by the government.

Press Advisor to CM, CP Sharma acknowledged the noble gesture of the Alumni to support the health care system and anticipated further replication of such social services in the society. He also extended his best wishes for amicable coordination and unity amongst the alumni for future endeavours as well.

Medical Staff of Soreng CHC, Technical Officer, Suren Subba and Assistant Nursing Superintendent, Meena Devi Sharma expressed gratitude to the 1991 batch mates for providing the much needed and useful health care items. The Cradle bed will be highly useful for carrying unconscious/traumatic patients and

the Trolley would be truly significant to accommodate all required medicines, accessories and other requirements in emergency cases, they stated.

On the occasion, the Alumni Batch Mates also felicitated and honoured, Manita Pradhan from Soreng for scaling the summit of World's highest peak Mt. Everest, recently.

The Minister also presented cash amount of Rupees Twenty Five Thousand only as a token of honour, from his personal level.

Ms Pradhan expressed her gratitude to the Alumni members and also shared her experiences of climbing the Mt Everest.

The Minister, Advisor, Chairman, dignitaries and the alumni members congratulated the mountaineer for her remarkable achievement and wished for her good health and further endeavours.

China to start first electric train in Tibet close to Arunachal Pradesh: Report

BEIJING, 24 JUN [PTI]:

China is all set to operationalise the first electric train in the remote Himalayan region of Tibet, connecting the provincial capital Lhasa with Nyingchi - a strategically located Tibetan border town close to Arunachal Pradesh.

The 435.5-km Lhasa-Nyingchi section of the Sichuan-Tibet Railway is expected to be inaugurated ahead of the centenary celebrations of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) on July 1, according to official media reports.

The electricity trans-

mission process has been completed and tested, Liu Yuxiang, Chief Engineer of the Lhasa-Nyingchi Railway, was quoted as saying by the state-run CCTV earlier.

The Sichuan-Tibet Railway will be the second railway into Tibet after the Qinghai-Tibet Railway. It will go through the southeast of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, one of the world's most geologically active areas.

In November, Chinese President Xi Jinping had instructed officials to expedite construction of the new railway proj-

ect, connecting Sichuan Province and Nyingchi in Tibet, saying the new rail line would play a key role in safeguarding the border stability.

The Sichuan-Tibet Railway starts from Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province, and travels through Ya'an and enters Tibet via Qamdo, shortening the journey from Chengdu to Lhasa from 48 hours to 13 hours. Nyingchi is a city in Medog region, which is adjacent to the Arunachal Pradesh border.

China claims Arunachal Pradesh as part of South Tibet, which is firmly rejected by India.

Scientists write...

Development on the islands need to see people and these ecological spaces as one unit, rather than severing their fragile ties," Namboothiri said.

According to Dipani Sutaria, an ecologist studying marine mammals in Lakshadweep with Divya Panicker and a team of islanders, Lakshadweep is a model for people-biodiversity coexistence.

Research Fellow, Lancaster Environment Centre, said the LDAR envisages tourism in uninhabited islands with scant regard for biodiversity.

India presses OPEC...

OPEC+ ignored India's plea to ease production control.

Saudi energy minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman asked New Delhi to instead use oil it bought at rock bottom rates last year.

Days later, Pradhan termed the statement as an "undiplomatic response from a friendly nation".

Thereafter, his ministry asked refiners to look at sources outside of the Middle East for buying oil.

This led to imports from Saudi Arabia, India's second-largest supplier after Iraq, slipping by about a quarter from a year earlier, while the United Arab Emirates slipped to being the seventh-largest supplier from being No 3 in April. Nigeria, another OPEC nation, is now the No 3 supplier.

But, the outbreak of the second wave of COVID-19 infections, which led to severe scarcity of hospital beds and medical oxygen, led to New Delhi courting the Middle East nations for sourcing medical supplies.

"The Minister (Pradhan) also thanked OPEC member countries, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, for providing medical support during India's recent surge in COVID-19," the OPEC statement said.

OPEC said Barkindo and Pradhan discussed oil market developments.

"The videoconference was held as part of the (OPEC) Secretariat's regular consultation programme and outreach activities with oil-consuming countries,

The Collective appealed to the President to restore and reinvigorate the Justice Raveendran Committee recommendations set up by the Supreme Court and ensure that they are robustly implemented and monitored.

It also appealed to establish a committee of scientists, policy makers and local representatives to re-evaluate the broader development plans and directions of which the LDAR is a part, in the context of Lakshadweep's unique culture, ecological fragility and climate vulnerability.

as well as other producers and industry stakeholders.

The discussions were part of the constructive relationship between OPEC and India, one of the world's largest oil consumers," it added.

The consultations, it said, focused on "exchanging views and reviewing the conditions of the global oil market, emerging trends related to energy, the recovery prospects for the world economy and other topical issues".

Barkindo, in his remarks, highlighted the improving outlook for the world economy and the global oil market.

OPEC's Monthly Oil Market Report for June projected that the global economy will grow by 5.5 per cent and oil demand will rise by 6 million barrels per day in 2021.

"The Secretary General additionally underlined the strategic role of the Declaration of Cooperation (DoC) in overcoming two global oil cycle downturns in 2015 and 2016, and in 2020, the latter caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

He noted that Participating Countries have set up solid mechanisms to contribute to the return of oil market stability, including meeting on a monthly basis to review market conditions," it said.

The first high-level OPEC-India Energy Dialogue was held in New Delhi in December 2015. The last and the fourth dialogue in the series was held via videoconference on November 5, 2020.

The next dialogue meeting is expected to take place later this year.

SDF to observe Ten Minutes to Earth virtually

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 24 JUN:

Sikkim Democratic Front party has decided to observe its annual programme, "Ten Minutes to Earth" on Friday in a different manner due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The party has divided the programme into two parts; plantation and cleanliness drive in the morning and a virtual programme in the evening.

An SDF press release by its general secretary [administrative affairs], Amos R Lepcha mentions that 10 Minutes to Earth was an important environment-friendly programme of the SDF government since 2009. The programme was conceptualized by SDF president, Pawan Chamling and the party has been observing this day on 25 June every year, the release informs.

The release mentions that due to the present pandemic the party has decided to observe the day in a different manner, in which the party will carry out plantation and cleanliness drive by following all COVID pro-

ocols at 10:10 AM in the morning and another virtual programme at 4 PM in the evening. Party workers will carry out plantations and cleanliness drive at their respective places.

The party is also organizing a 30-minute webinar on 'Ten Minutes to Earth: Bhawishya Ko Nimti Ek Path' at 4 PM in the evening. It is added that the winner of the photography competition 'Every Tree Matters' by the party would also be announced through this webinar and winners would receive cash prize and certificates.

The release mentions that the party president will address in the webinar and there will be 20 minutes talk by Director General of Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, Dr Sunita Narayan. It is added that there will also be a panel discussion by renowned environmentalists, researchers and other experts on the theme of the webinar. The webinar will be telecast live on the official Facebook page of the party.

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Vaccination drive...

providing Rs.300 pension per month to differently abled persons of above 18 years with benchmark disability of 80% and above, while the State government has added Rs.1700 to provide the pension of Rs.2000 every month.

The Minister mentioned that the Subsistence Allowance has been renamed Chief Minister's State Disability Pension Scheme and the existing pension has also been enhanced from Rs.1000 to Rs.1500, which covers differently abled persons with benchmark disability of 40 to 79% from the day of birth. He added that the state government has also covered differently abled persons of below 18 years with benchmark disability of 80% and above under this scheme.

The Minister informed that the state government has decided to provide Rs.1000 as conveyance allowance to differently abled persons working in the government sector on temporary basis. This, he added, was totally ignored by the earlier government.

Google and Jio...

friendlier to more frugal devices and thus accessible to a wider audience of potential users of its services.

Google Cloud technologies will form the basis for Jio's upcoming 5G wireless solutions as well as serving the internal needs of online services such as Reliance Retail and JioMart, Mr Ambani said.

Engineers from the two companies worked for more than nine months to co-develop the JioNext hardware specifications in sync with a modified version of Android that would maintain a high-end experience without recourse to expensive components. The launch comes nearly a year after Google agreed to buy a \$4.5 billion stake in Jio Platforms Ltd., the digital arm of Reliance Industries.

Global tech leaders like Google and Facebook Inc. have jumped on the Reliance bandwagon as they look for ways to grab a slice of the Indian market where an estimated 300 million first-time smartphone users are expected to start accessing the internet by 2025, according to the Internet and Mobile Association of India.

Asia's richest man, pursuing his own large-scale project of turning an oil-and-petrochemicals giant into a homegrown tech leader, presented the new device even as the plans to sell hundreds of millions of the Google-powered smartphone faced supply chain headwinds.

Standing in the way of the Google-Jio alliance will be China's fast-rising coterie of leading smartphone makers. Xiaomi Corp., Oppo, Vivo and OnePlus have already established their brands, credentials and some manufacturing facilities in India, with their domestic approach of high specs at low prices resonating well with the Indian consumer.

LOST

I, Manita Karki Chettri, daughter of Ram Lall Karki Chettri, Resident of 8th Mile, Geyzing under Geyzing Bermiok constituency, west Sikkim has lost her original Certificate of Identification (COI) bearing sl.no 620 volume number XI while travelling from Geyzing Bazar to Tikjuk DAC, west sikkim.

Woman ex-Councillor of BJP stabbed to death in Bengaluru

Bengaluru, Jun 24 (PTI): A former woman BJP councillor in the Bruhat Bengaluru Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), the city corporation, was stabbed to death in front of her house in Cottonpet in the city on Thursday, police said.

Rekha Kadiresh, 46, was rushed to the Kempe Gowda Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) but could not be saved, police said, adding that previous enmity was suspected to be the reason behind the murder.

According to the Additional Commissioner of Police S Murugan, Rekha was distributing food kits when the two motorcycle-borne youths attacked her at around 10.30 AM.

"Our investigations are in full swing. Very soon we will arrest the culprits," Murugan told reporters.

Police sources said the two CCTV cameras installed in front of her house were found to be turned in the opposite direction in a manner that nothing happening on the street could be captured.

Her husband Kadiresh had been stabbed to death by two youths on February 7, 2018.

His assassins had later surrendered before a city court.

According to the party office-bearers, Rekha had represented Chalavadi-palya ward once -- from 2015 to 2020.

Reacting to the incident, Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa said he has spoken to the Bengaluru police Commissioner Kamal Pant.

"Earlier her husband too was murdered brutally. We will take stringent action and will arrest the murderers within 24 hours," Yediyurappa said.

State can't dictate what we eat, drink: High Court argues on Gujarat prohibition law

AHMEDABAD, 24 JUN [PTI]:

The Gujarat High Court on Wednesday reserved its order on maintainability of a batch of petitions challenging provisions of the state's Prohibition Act as contrary to the citizen's rights to privacy, life and personal liberty as enshrined in the Constitution.

The division bench of Chief Justice Vikram Nath and Justice Biren Vaishnav reserved its order on maintainability of the petitions challenging the provisions of the Gujarat Prohibition Act, 1949, after Advocate General Kamal Trivedi argued that "it is not permissible for court to examine the validity of any law or any new or law or additional grounds when it has been upheld by the apex court in the past".

In his submission, Mr Trivedi said a law, which has been made valid by the Supreme Court today, can be held invalid tomorrow, "but for that purpose, the forum is the Supreme Court and not this court."

The Supreme Court had upheld the Act in its judgment in 1951.

"If you want to get the law corrected or improvised in light of the recent judgments of the Supreme Court (on right to privacy), then I think you may take the mat-



ter before the Supreme Court and not before this court," he said.

"This concept of right to privacy is not like a bull in a china shop. It is subject to reasonable restrictions based on social environment," Mr Trivedi argued, adding that the right to eat non-vegetarian food within the four walls of one's home cannot be compared to the right to drink alcohol, which is injurious and can be stopped.

"Otherwise tomorrow somebody will say you should not harass me if I am taking drug, psychotropic substances within my four walls," he said.

In his submission, Ad-

ditional Advocate General Prakash Jani said that "people of Gujarat are extremely happy with the prohibition law."

The petitioners, on the other hand, argued that the matter should be taken up on merits, as the provisions challenged in the pleas are materially different from what they were in 1951, as they have been amended over the years.

A batch of petitions have challenged the constitutional validity of various sections of the Gujarat Prohibition Act, 1949, including sections 12 and 13 (total prohibition on manufacture, purchase, im-

port, transportation, export, sale, possession, use and

consumption of liquor) and sought them to be declared as ultra vires the Article 246 of the Constitution.

A petition argued that the provisions are "arbitrary, irrational, unfair, unreasonable, and discriminatory...and despite prohibition being in place for more than six decades, a steady supply of liquor continues to be available through an underground network of bootleggers, organised criminal gangs and corrupt officials."

"With expanding interpretation of the right to life, personal liberty and privacy, as contained in Article 21 of the Constitution, a citizen has a

right to choose how he lives, so long as he is not a nuisance to the society. The state cannot dictate what he will eat and what he will drink," said a plea filed by one Rajiv Patel and two others.

"When it is found that privacy interests come in then the state has no compelling reason to continue an existing law, which penalises private transportation, possession and consumption of liquor that cause no harm to others..The provisions destroy the right to life, personal liberty and privacy which is a pivotal facet of Article 21 of the Constitution," it said.

Police allegedly beat up gangrape survivor, family; MP High Court orders CBI probe

Gwalior, 24 Jun [PTI]:

The Madhya Pradesh High Court on Wednesday ordered a CBI probe into the alleged beating of a minor survivor of gang rape and her family members in a police station apparently to save the accused. The girl and her family are from the Scheduled Caste community.

The bench also directed to register an FIR against the police personnel involved in beating the girl and transfer senior officers involved in saving their subordinates outside the Gwalior-Chambal region. A fine of ₹ 50,000 was also imposed on them which will be paid to the survivor as compensation immediately.

The CBI probe was ordered by Justice GS Ahluwalia hearing a petition filed by the girl.

The girl was allegedly raped on January 31 in the Morar area in the house where she was working as domestic help and living as a tenant, advocate Anil Mishra told reporters.

The high court also gave liberty to the survivor to file a petition demanding additional compensation, he said.

The house owner's grandson and his friends allegedly raped the girl after which her family members reached the Morar police station to lodge an FIR for the sexual assault and under the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act.

After registering the FIR, the police personnel allegedly put the survivor and her family members in the police station lock-up and beat them under pressure from the

accused, Mr Mishra said.

A woman cop shot videos of questioning and beating the girl in the lock-up and circulated them on social media, he alleged.

After the girl recorded her statement under section 164 of CrPC in court, she was allegedly forcibly sent to the One Stop Center for such survivors by police.

Mr Mishra then filed a habeas corpus petition in the court following which she was sent back to her parents.

Though Gwalior SP handed over the probe to woman additional SP rank officer Suman Gurjar and transferred the case to Sirol police station as it was not being investigated properly by the Morar police, the women police officers too did not probe the matter properly and allegedly tried to save the accused, Mr Mishra said.

The high court passed strictures against police officers including the then Morar police station in-charge Ajay Pawar, ASP Gurjar, city superintendent of police (CSP) Ram Naresh Pachori and inspector Preeti Bhargava and directed the state's police brass to initiate departmental inquiry against them and transfer them outside the Gwalior-Chambal range.

The accused in the case are still at large, the advocate said.

The High Court also directed the police personnel to hand over the entire material related to the case to the CBI and directed the central investigative agency's director to appoint a senior officer to probe the matter thoroughly.

Reliance to invest Rs 75,000 cr in new energy business

MUMBAI, JUN 24 (PTI):

Reliance Industries Ltd on Thursday announced a Rs 75,000 crore investment in new energy business over the next three years as the operator of the world's largest oil refinery pivots towards a greener and cleaner version.

Reliance will build solar manufacturing units, a battery factory for energy storage, a fuel cell-making plant and an electrolyzer unit to produce green hydrogen as a part of the business, Chairman Mukesh Ambani said at the company's annual general meeting with shareholders on Thursday.

It will also set up 100 gigawatts (GW) of solar power generation capacity by 2030 and invest in setting up a carbon fibre plant.

The company, which earns about 60 per cent of revenue from its hydrocarbon-fuelled energy operations, had last year set a target of becoming a net-zero carbon company by 2035 - a shorter time frame compared to the 2050 cutoff self-imposed by many of its global peers, including BP Plc and Royal Dutch Shell Plc.

This comes as energy giants around the world come under pressure to move towards a low-carbon future to help improve the environment.

Last year, "I had announced our 15-year commitment to become net carbon zero by 2035. Today I am happy to present to you our ambitious strategy and roadmap for implementing this vision," Ambani, 64, said. "The

age of fossil fuels, which powered economic growth globally for nearly three centuries, cannot continue much longer."

The three-year plan includes building 'four Giga factories'.

"Over the next three years, we will invest over Rs 60,000 crore in these initiatives," he said. "Reliance will thus create and offer a fully integrated, end-to-end renewable energy ecosystem."

The integrated solar photovoltaic Giga factory will create solar energy. It will use raw silica to make high-efficiency solar cells.

"Reliance will establish and enable at least 100 GW of solar energy by 2030. A significant part of this will come from rooftop solar and decentralised solar installations in villages," he said.

To store energy, thus generated, the firm will set up a factory to make advanced energy storage batteries.

Besides electricity, Reliance also intends to produce green hydrogen that can be used as fuel in automobiles.

It will set up a fuel cell factory that will use oxygen from the air and hydrogen to generate electricity. "The only emission of this process is non-polluting water vapour," he said.

Ambani said his oil-to-telecom conglomerate will invest another Rs 15,000 crore to provide infrastructure and utilities to manufacturing ancillary materials and equipment needed to support the four Giga factories.

"Thus, our overall initial investment from our own internal resources in the new energy business will be Rs 75,000 (over USD 10 billion) crore in three years," he said.

The company has started work on developing the Dhirubhai Ambani Green Energy Giga Complex on 5,000 acres in Jamnagar. "It will be amongst the largest such integrated renewable energy manufacturing facilities in the world," he added.

Ambani announced two additional divisions within the company - renewable energy project management and construction division and renewable energy project finance division.

All of these, he said, together constitute architecture for India's decentralised green economy.

"With these new initiatives, Reliance will put Gujarat and India on the world solar and hydrogen map," he said. "All our products will proudly proclaim: Made in India, by India, for India and for the world!"

Also, Reliance is evolving a vision for new materials and green chemicals. "We will kick-start this by strategically investing in India's first world-scale carbon fibre plant for supporting our hydrogen and solar ecosystems," he said.

The oil-to-chemicals (O2C) unit of the group will use solar energy on an economically attractive basis to decarbonise and use green hydrogen and CO as raw materials to develop green chemicals, fertilisers and e-fuels.

Russia says it may fire to hit intruding warships

MOSCOW (AP): Russia will be ready to fire to hit intruding warships, a senior diplomat warned Thursday in the wake of a Black Sea incident in which a British destroyer sailed near Crimea in an area that Russia claims as its territorial waters.

Russia said one of its warships fired warning shots and a warplane dropped bombs in the path of British destroyer Defender on Wednesday to drive it away from the area near Sevastopol, but Britain denied that account and insisted its ship wasn't fired upon.

The incident marked the first time since the Cold War that Moscow acknowledged using live ammunition to deter a NATO warship, underlining the rising threat of military collisions amid Russia-West tensions.

Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Thursday that "the inviolability of the Russian borders is an absolute imperative," adding that it will be protected "by all means, diplomatic, political and military if needed."

He giped that the British navy should rename its destroyer from Defender to Aggressor and warned that "those who try to test our strength are taking high risks."

Asked what Russia would do to prevent such intrusions in the future, Ryabkov told reporters it would stand ready to fire on targets if warnings don't work.

"We may appeal to reason and demand to respect international law," Ryabkov said in remarks carried by Russian news agencies. "If it doesn't help, we may drop bombs and not just in the path but right on target if colleagues don't get it otherwise."

Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman deplored what he described as a "deliberate and well-prepared provocation" by Britain and seconded the tough warning.

"If unacceptable provocative actions are repeated, if those actions go too far, no options to legitimately protect the borders of the Russian Federation could be excluded," the spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said in a call with reporters.

On Wednesday, the Russian Defense Ministry said a patrol ship fired warning shots after the HMS Defender had ignored a notice against intrusion and sailed 3 kilometers (1.6 nautical miles) into Russia's territorial waters near Sevastopol, the main Russian naval base in Crimea. It said a Russian Su-24 bomber also dropped four bombs ahead of the vessel to persuade the Defender to change course. Minutes later, the Defender left Russian waters, the ministry said.

Britain's Ministry of Defense denied the Defender had been fired on or was in Russian waters, but said it had been in

Ukrainian waters.

"No warning shots have been fired at HMS Defender," it said in a statement. "The Royal Navy ship is conducting innocent passage through Ukrainian territorial waters in accordance with international law."

Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014, a move not recognized by most countries, gaining access to its long Black Sea coast. Russia has chafed at NATO warships visiting near Crimea as destabilizing. In April, it declared a broader area off Crimea closed to foreign naval ships.

"It's incorrect to say either that it was fired on or this ship was in Russian waters," Max Blain, a spokesman for Prime Minister Boris Johnson, said Wednesday. "HMS Defender was taking the most direct and internationally recognized route between Ukraine and Georgia."

He emphasized that Britain, and much of the international community, does not recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea.

The Russian navy chief, Adm. Nikolai Yevmenov, said that the British destroyer's move was clearly provocative and aimed to test Russia's resolve.

"Our navy acted in a competent and safe manner to stop the provocation," he told reporters in St. Petersburg.

UEFA scraps away goals rule for club competitions from next season

LONDON, 24 JUN [AFP]:

UEFA said on Thursday it will scrap the away goals rule for all of its club competitions from next season in favour of extra time and a penalty shootout. Introduced in 1965, the rule was used to determine the winner of a two-legged knockout tie in cases where the two teams had scored the same number of goals on aggregate over the two matches. From the 2021-2022 season, if the two teams score the same number of goals over the two legs, the tie will be decided by playing two 15-minute periods of extra time at the end of the second leg.

In the event that the

teams score the same number of goals or fail to score at all during extra time, a penalty shootout will then be held to decide the winner.

Champions League, Europa League, Europa Conference League and Women's Champions League matches will no longer use the away goals rule.


"It is no longer appropriate for an away goal to carry more weight," said UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin.

He said the away goals rule actually discouraged home teams from attacking, especially in the first leg.

"Although there was no unanimity of views,

many coaches, fans and other football stakeholders have questioned its fairness and have expressed a preference for the rule to be abolished," Ceferin said in a statement.

"The impact of the rule now runs counter to its original purpose as, in fact, it now dissuades home teams - especially in first legs - from attacking, because they fear conceding a goal that would give their opponents a crucial advantage. "There is also criticism of the unfairness, especially in extra time, of obliging the home team to score twice when the away team has scored."



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Protect the Minors More Effectively

...and help them heal

Anyone with any understanding of things will know that the current situation in which people are forced to stay home, forced into close quarters with people they are not safe around. It is now universally accepted that child abuse happens most often from the hands of people they are familiar with - relatives, neighbours, teachers, senior at school, family friends etc. Much more should have been done to secure the children better, but beyond shallow lip-service, nothing has been done.

This superficiality is a reflection of how Sikkim has traditionally handled child abuse. There have been instances when a paedophile grandfather was mildly ostracised but no criminal charges filed against him and teachers accused under POCSO Act have been allowed to return to their hunting grounds - schools - to further traumatise their victims. What such disinterest towards the need to keep children safe reflects is a lack of empathy which is inexcusable. And the same attitude manifests when some officials take interest driven more by pity than a sense of duty. For children to be secure, all concerned agencies should approach their responsibilities with a clear checklist of what they are required to do [ensuring the abuser does not get easy access to his victims being but one of them] and then a reiteration of priorities - children.

One must realise that it takes several sessions of sensitive counselling for victims to open up and then the therapy can begin to heal. POCSO cases are processed and tried and even as the law takes its course, in most instances to bungle investigation with their incompetence and corruptibility, it is important for the rest of Sikkim to return more resolutely to its responsibility towards its children safe. Episodes of child abuse, even though shocking and disturbing, cannot be considered an aberrations since reports of the young and the very young falling victim surface too often to be considered rare anymore. And because the young need to be protected more effectively, it is important that Sikkim addresses this issue more often and in more earnest.

When one is told that child abuse is not normal behaviour, it is not the social contempt alone that people are talking about. Child abuse is obviously deviant behavior. One can understand the violent reaction of parents and sympathise with them when such incidents come to light, but as a society, Sikkim needs to learn more from each episode and make more demands than just punishment for the accused. What is worrying for every parent is that for every case of molestation that gets reported, there are countless others that get swept under the carpet. This could be for two reasons. One, the child never confides in anyone out of fear and even guilt, and two, the elders refuse to recognise the signs of abuse even when it stares them in the face. In most cases, a child suffers in the hands of someone close, someone they and their families trust. Disturbingly, pandemics, the kind in the middle of which we find ourselves, are the most traumatic times for victims since lockdowns increase access for their tormenters.

There is little that the society can do to identify all paedophiles in advance. What our children deserve, however, is our full interest in their lives. Parents have to speak to their children, look out for warning signs that they might give out and tell them what kind of behaviour [by elders] is acceptable and what sort of touching is wrong. This, every parent needs to do. And more importantly, they need to take up for the child when s/he musters the courage to report abuse. What is also required is professional counselling for all victims of child-abuse, molestation and rape. Just booking the culprit is not enough, we need to also heal the scars that the children bear.

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IQ tests can't measure it, but 'cognitive flexibility' is key to learning and creativity

BARBARA JACQUELYN & CHRISTELLE LANGLEY
theconversation.com

IQ is often hailed as a crucial driver of success, particularly in fields such as science, innovation and technology. In fact, many people have an endless fascination with the IQ scores of famous people. But the truth is that some of the greatest achievements by our species have primarily relied on qualities such as creativity, imagination, curiosity and empathy.

Many of these traits are embedded in what scientists call "cognitive flexibility" – a skill that enables us to switch between different concepts, or to adapt behaviour to achieve goals in a novel or changing environment. It is essentially about learning to learn and being able to be flexible about the way you learn. This includes changing strategies for optimal decision-making. In our ongoing research, we are trying to work out how people can best boost their cognitive flexibility.

Cognitive flexibility provides us with the ability to see that what we are doing is not leading to success and to make the appropriate changes to achieve it. If you normally take the same route to work, but there are now roadworks on your usual route, what do you do? Some people remain rigid and stick to the original plan, despite the delay. More flexible people adapt to the unexpected event and problem-solve to find a solution.

Cognitive flexibility may have affected how people coped with the pandemic lockdowns, which produced new challenges around work and schooling. Some of us found it easier than others to adapt our routines to do many activities from home. Such flexible people may also have changed these routines from time to time, trying to find better and more varied ways of going about their day. Others, however, struggled and ultimately became more rigid in their thinking. They stuck to the same routine activities, with little flexibility or change.

HUGE ADVANTAGES

Flexible thinking is key to creativity – in other words, the ability to think of new ideas, make novel connections between ideas, and make new inventions. It also supports academic and work skills such as problem solving. That said, unlike

working memory – how much you can remember at a certain time – it is largely independent of IQ, or "crystallised intelligence". For example, many visual artists may be of average intelligence, but highly creative and have produced masterpieces.

Contrary to many people's beliefs, creativity is also important in science and innovation. For example, we have discovered that entrepreneurs who have created multiple companies are more cognitively flexible than managers of a similar age and IQ.

So does cognitive flexibility make people smarter in a way that isn't always captured on IQ tests? We know that it leads to better "cold cognition", which is non-emotional or "rational" thinking, throughout the lifespan. For example, for children it leads to better reading abilities and better school performance.

It can also help protect against a number of biases, such as confirmation bias. That's because people who are cognitively flexible are better at recognising potential faults in themselves and using strategies to overcome these faults.

Cognitive flexibility is also associated with higher resilience to negative life events, as well as better quality of life in older individuals. It can even be beneficial in emotional and social cognition: studies have shown that cognitive flexibility has a strong link to the ability to understand the emotions, thoughts and intentions of others.

The opposite of cognitive flexibility is cognitive rigidity, which is found in a number of mental health disorders including obsessive-compulsive disorder, major depressive disorder and autism spectrum disorder.

Neuroimaging studies have shown that cognitive flexibility is dependent on a network of frontal and "striatal" brain regions. The frontal regions are associated with higher cognitive processes such as decision-making and problem solving. The striatal regions are instead linked with reward and motivation.

There are a number of ways to objectively assess people's cognitive flexibility, including the Wisconsin Card Sorting Test and the CANTAB Intra-Extra Dimensional Set Shift Task.

BOOSTING FLEXIBILITY

What we can learn about risk from the COVID experience

GEOFF MULGAN
theconversation.com

Life is risky and tends to end in death, which makes it easy to become paranoid – about the food you eat, the air you breathe or the strangers you walk past in the street. But what should we really fear, whether as individuals or collectively?

After a year of lockdowns and millions of deaths this question is very much in the air as countries weigh up the risks of new strains of the coronavirus and the potential harms from further lockdowns. Evolution made us highly attuned to risks such as spiders or snakes. But we're not so good at handling the risks of modern life and our governments are sometimes just as incompetent.

The surprising claim of social science is that what we fear – and how much we fear it – is in part a matter of choice. Your ancestors were terrified of going to hell or being cursed. Many of us are probably much more worried about being given cancer by a fizzy drink or the whole world going up in smoke because of climate change.

Research shows that we exaggerate fears of things that are dramatic, immediate and easy to visualise, and where we don't have any control – like terrorism or air crashes. But we generally underestimate risks that are slow and invisible (like climate change) or where we think we are in control, like driving which may actually be much more dangerous (in the US about one in a hundred people is likely to die in a car crash and even more now die of opioid overdoses).

Media coverage feeds these imbalances. The BSE "mad cow disease" scare peaked in the 1990s and led to the culling of millions of cows at a cost of nearly £40 billion. Yet the numbers of people who died in Europe from it during that decade (about 150) were roughly equal to the number who died from drinking scented lamp oils in the same period.

The great anthropologist Mary Douglas showed half a century ago – and counter-intuitively – that much of

our perception of risk is socially determined. How we see things like nuclear power or GM crops reflects our broader world views – a web of beliefs about hierarchy, individual control, or the authority of experts – as much as objective facts in the world. This has been very visible in risk perceptions of vaccines, and particularly with the rapid rollout of coronavirus vaccines, and also explains why just giving people the facts can have little impact.

These cultural dispositions also affect our views of positive risk, like our willingness to invest pension money on the stock market or to try out new cuisines. Here there are important geographical differences: contrast the US approach to venture capital and start-ups, happy with risks and failures, and the European stance which tends to be more cautious, favouring the "precautionary principle" and suspicion of new technologies like artificial intelligence.

But the patterns are also political and cut across national cultures. One of the striking findings of recent work on authoritarian politics, and the motivations of followers of figures like Donald Trump or Matteo Salvini, is that they hate complexity and distrust novelty of all kinds.

Becoming aware of the social and personal construction of risk may help us make wiser choices, as does some grasp of probability theory, which can help us distinguish the risks of death from slipping in the bath (quite high) versus being in a train crash (very low). But addressing the deeper causes of distrust may have more impact on people's willingness to act on health risks than just providing more information.

For example, although overall the UK has pushed ahead with mass vaccination and with less hesitancy than many European countries – judging the benefits to greatly outweigh the potential and only partly known side-effects – significant minorities remain unconvinced.

But what of our collective approach to risk? Are governments any better at handling the risks

we all share?

I became involved in this question 20 years ago. In 2000, a strike by fuel drivers almost brought the UK to a standstill. In the new age of just-in-time production, in which companies streamline systems to increase efficiency and lessen waste with just enough inventory as needed, it became clear that stocks of fuel for hospitals and supermarkets would barely last a couple of days. Luckily the strike was quickly settled, but not long after there was a severe outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Britain's livestock. The country's systems for handling risk were not up to scratch.

I was then running the UK government Strategy Unit which was asked to look at what needed to be done. We examined how big companies and other governments handled risk; tried to make sense of what had and hadn't worked in the past; and made recommendations which were quickly put into effect.

The main conclusion was that since all organisations struggle to understand or prepare for risks, particularly high impact low probability ones, they need to find systematic ways to counter complacency. One strand was about helping government scan for potentially big risks: from pandemics to financial crises, attacks on critical infrastructure to extreme weather events. Another prepared decision makers using simulations, scenarios and models. A third involved creating a central Civil Contingencies Unit, networked into local government, to cope with the worst crises. And a fourth led to investment in longer term risks like the increased risk of flooding on the country's east coast because of climate change.

For a decade these generally worked well. But it's no secret that most of this apparatus crumbled during the 2010s thanks to the effects of austerity, Brexit and political distraction. Leading to disaster in 2020.

But now that we have experienced the risk – a pandemic – that always came top of the lists, there's a

The good news is that it seems you can train cognitive flexibility. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), for example, is an evidence-based psychological therapy which helps people change their patterns of thoughts and behaviour. For example, a person with depression who has not been contacted by a friend in a week may attribute this to the friend no longer liking them. In CBT, the goal is to reconstruct their thinking to consider more flexible options, such as the friend being busy or unable to contact them.

Structure learning – the ability to extract information about the structure of a complex environment and decipher initially incomprehensible streams of sensory information – is another potential way forward. We know that this type of learning involves similar frontal and striatal brain regions as cognitive flexibility.

In a collaboration between the University of Cambridge and Nanyang Technological University, we are currently working on a "real world" experiment to determine whether structural learning can actually lead to improved cognitive flexibility.

Studies have shown the benefits of training cognitive flexibility, for example in children with autism. After training cognitive flexibility, the children showed not only improved performance on cognitive tasks, but also improved social interaction and communication. In addition, cognitive flexibility training has been shown to be beneficial for children without autism and in older adults.

As we come out of the pandemic, we will need to ensure that in teaching and training new skills, people also learn to be cognitively flexible in their thinking. This will provide them with greater resilience and wellbeing in the future.

Cognitive flexibility is essential for society to flourish. It can help maximise the potential of individuals to create innovative ideas and creative inventions. Ultimately, it is such qualities we need to solve the big challenges of today, including global warming, preservation of the natural world, clean and sustainable energy and food security.

[Barbara Jacquelyn is Professor of Clinical Neuropsychology, University of Cambridge; Christelle Langley is Postdoctoral Research Associate, Cognitive Neuroscience, University of Cambridge]

serious danger of the wrong lessons being learned

WRONG LESSONS AS WELL AS RIGHT

One is about predictability. A top civil servant was asked in the 1970s to compile a list of several hundred of the top risks facing the UK, a huge exercise. But none of the risks on their list happened, though quite similar ones did. It follows that rather than trying to anticipate every risk you should try to cultivate resilience and adaptability so that when the crises hit you can respond fast and flexibly. Unfortunately, we're now likely to see streams of books, gifted with hindsight, showing that COVID should have been predicted and putting pressure on governments to invest heavily in trying to predict the exact form of the next crisis.

A second, related, wrong lesson could be a swing to excessive paranoia. It's right to criticise decision makers for not taking risks seriously (like the UK's prime minister Boris Johnson apparently seeing COVID as "a scare story"). But just as often they're punished for the opposite, like the French minister who spent heavily in response to H1N1 in 2009 – stockpiling 2 billion masks – and was then denounced for wasteful overreaction. The same commentators who have enjoyed lambasting politicians and scientists for underestimating COVID will have equal fun lambasting their successors for hysterical overreaction. Hindsight is a wonderful thing.

None of us see risk clearly. We all choose what to fear and how much to fear it, individually and collectively. But we now have vastly more data than ever before to challenge or own perceptions, which must count as progress. And since many risks have to be handled collectively, we should all be interested in whether our governments are doing a good job of being prepared and striking the right balance between paranoid paralysis and incompetent neglect.

[the writer is Professor of Collective Intelligence, Public Policy and Social Innovation, UCL]

'Fake' vaccine probe after MP Mimi Chakraborty gets jab at suspect event

KOLKATA, 24 JUN [NDTV]: A man who allegedly pretended to be an IAS officer and supervised thousands of vaccinations in Kolkata was arrested on Wednesday after he was exposed reportedly when Trinamool Congress MP Mimi Chakraborty took a Covid shot at his camp.

The frightening possibility of fake vaccines given to hundreds of people has led to a bigger investigation by the Kolkata Police.

Mimi Chakraborty complained to the police when she received no official confirmation after taking the vaccine. The actor-politician had gone as a chief guest to the vaccination camp organised by the arrested man, Debanjan Dev, in south Kolkata.

Ms Chakraborty said she took the Covid shot to encourage people to vaccinate themselves and help check the spread of the virus. Around 250 people were vaccinated at the



camp, reports said.

Debanjan Dev allegedly claimed to be an IAS officer when he invited her to the camp. He reportedly told her the inoculation effort was organised by the Kolkata Municipal Corporation.

"He said that he was running a special drive for transgenders and specially-abled persons and requested my pres-

ence," the Lok Sabha MP was quoted as saying by news agency ANI.

"I took Covishield vaccine at the camp to motivate people for taking jabs. But I never received a confirmation message from CoWIN," she said.

She said she noticed that no Aadhar card details were taken for people to register with CoWIN at the site, so no one

received any message after the shot.

Suspicious, Ms Chakraborty filed a complaint with the Kolkata Police and the accused man was arrested.

"He was using a car with a blue beacon and fake sticker," the TMC MP said, according to ANI.

The police are now investigating the shots given to people and whether they were vaccines past

their expiry date.

"We haven't come across any vial having an expiry date. Seized vials will be sent for testing to find out if they are genuine or not. Accused will be interrogated in this regard," the Kolkata Police said today in a statement quoted by ANI.

The case has been transferred to the Kolkata Police Detective Department, said the police.

226 new cases push Mizoram's COVID-19 tally to 18,624

AIZAWL, JUN 24 (PTI): The COVID-19 caseload in Mizoram mounted to 18,624 on Thursday as 226 more people, including 19 prisoners, tested positive for the disease, an official said.

The death toll rose to 86 as one more fatality due to the infection was reported in the last 24 hours, he said.

Of the fresh cases, 140 were recorded in Aizawl, 37 in Kolasib and 31 in Lunglei.

The remaining cases were registered in several other districts.

Nineteen prisoners of Aizawl Central Jail, 54 children, two frontline workers and a Border Security Force employee are among the new pa-

tients, the official said. There are currently 160 coronavirus patients in the central jail, he said.

Six new patients have travel history. The north-eastern state now has 4,442 active cases, and 14,096 people have recovered from the disease.

The recovery rate among coronavirus patients in the state stands at 75.68 per cent.

Mizoram has so far conducted over 4.65 lakh sample tests for COVID-19, including 3,136 on Wednesday.

State Immunisation Officer Dr Lalzawmi said over 4.37 lakh people have been inoculated till Wednesday, with 53,892 of them having received both doses of the vaccine.

Sanitisation, head shave for BJP recruits rushing back to Trinamool

KOLKATA, 24 JUN [NDTV]: From having to shave their heads to being doused in sanitiser, it's a literal walk of shame for BJP workers in West Bengal who are trying to switch back to their old party Trinamool Congress following the state election results in May.

While the ride back was smoother for the likes of Mukul Roy, a top Trinamool lieutenant who switched to the BJP before the 2019 general elections, it's an entirely different experience for many of the party's foot soldiers.

Those being accepted back in have been seen undergoing egregious tests of loyalty and prostrating to please the powers that be. Recently, six BJP workers shaved off their hair when they swapped party flags in Hooghly. The move drew condemnation from BJP Rajya Sabha MP Swapna Dasgupta, who managed to secure a seat back in the upper house of parliament after an unsuccessful run in the state elections.

The public humiliation was reminiscent of 1960's China, he said.

Today, in the Birhum district, 150 BJP workers were thoroughly sprayed with sanitiser before being handed the Trinamool flag. The local party leader who organised the switchover event said he "wanted to sanitise the BJP bug out of these people".

After boldly declaring that it would win more than 200 of West Bengal's 294 constituencies, the BJP was constricted to less than 80 seats in the March-April elections by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress.

Since then, several Trinamool defectors have expressed their interest in returning to Mamata Banerjee's team, besides Mukul Roy.

Though the Trinamool has been slow and selective in letting the turncoats back in, at Mr Roy's homecoming ceremony, Mamata Banerjee, somewhat cryptically said, "More will come."

The Trinamool, sources have said, is eager to "strike while the iron is hot" and break a chunk off the BJP, preferably a bigger one than the section that left the Trinamool before the election.

Mamata Banerjee joins Court hearing virtually in case vs Suvendu Adhikari

Kolkata, 24 Jun [PTI]: Mamata Banerjee today joined a Calcutta High Court hearing on her petition challenging the election of the BJP's Suvendu Adhikari in Nandigram virtually. The Bengal Chief Minister had filed a petition asking that Justice Kaushik Chanda exit the case over "conflict of interest". The judge did not announce any decision.

Justice Chanda referred to Mamata Banerjee request for him to drop out and asked: "You filed a reassignment plea before the acting Chief Justice on 16 June. Why didn't you tell me that when I heard the case on June 18? You can't seek administrative and legal intervention at same time?"

Lawyer Abhishek Manu Singhvi, representing Mamata Banerjee, said the judge should recuse as there was a conflict of interest.

Mamata Banerjee wants the case to be re-assigned to a different court as she alleges Justice Chanda has links with the BJP and would be biased.

In a letter to the Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court on June 16, Ms Banerjee had given two reasons for her re-

quest.

Justice Kaushik Chanda was associated with the BJP in the past, Ms Banerjee's letter said, and therefore there was "reasonable apprehension of bias... in favour of the respondent...", who is also from the BJP.

Ms Banerjee also said she "reasonably apprehends likelihood of bias" because in April she had objected to Justice Chanda's confirmation as a permanent judge at Calcutta High Court.

"... it will lead to a situation and perception whereby the Honourable Judge, in adjudicating the matter, may be said to be 'judge in his own cause'," the Chief Minister wrote in her letter.

"Justice must not only be done; it must also be seen to be done," she added, as she underlined the need to "sustain the confidence of the public in the judiciary".

Ms Banerjee's petition was briefly heard by Justice Chanda on June 18 and the case was adjourned to June 24. She was not present in court in the previous hearing.

Sources said in cases related to the Representation of the People Act, the petitioner - in this case Ms Banerjee - needed to be present in court.

Otherwise, the court may dismiss the plea.

Ms Banerjee had last month challenged the election result in Nandigram, where she contested against her protégé-turned-rival Suvendu Adhikari and lost by less than 2,000 votes.

She asked for Mr Adhikari's election to be declared void on grounds of "corrupt practices" including bribery, promotion of hatred and enmity, and seeking of votes on the basis of religion.

In addition to Ms Banerjee, four other Trinamool leaders who lost their elections also filed petitions.

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Commuters block tracks in Bengal, seek permission to board special trains

KOLKATA, 24 JUN [PTI]: A section of commuters blocked railway tracks at several stations in West Bengal for about three hours on Thursday, demanding they be allowed to board staff special trains, amid the current COVID-19 restrictions, police said.

Demonstrations were held at Mallickpur, Baruiapur, Sonarpur, Ghutiari Sharif and Diamond Harbour stations in the Sealdah South Division of the Eastern Railway.

Commuters assembled at these stations, alleging that they have been facing hardships to reach their places of work with no availability of public transport, a senior police officer said.

They started agitating at the stations when they were not allowed to board staff special trains without valid document by the Railway Protection Force personnel, he said.

The agitators also threw stones at a vehicle of GRP at Mallickpur station in the Sealdah-Baruiapur section, while hundreds of protesters refused to vacate the railway tracks at Ghutiari Sharif in the Sealdah-Canning segment, disrupting the movement of staff special trains there, the officer said.

Following the requests of the Government Railway Police personnel, the blockade was lifted after about three hours in the morning, he said.

The movement of local trains has been stopped since the imposition of COVID restrictions in May to contain the spread of the disease. Only staff special trains are running for people involved in essential services. "We have urged the state government to allow us to run more trains with COVID-19 protocols and are ready for it," a spokesman of the Eastern Railway said.

Survivors of Melamchi floods wait to see missing family members

ANISH TIWARI

KATHMANDU, 24 JUN [KATHMANDUPOST]: Chitra Kumari and her daughter were rescued by Kumari's husband from the flooded Melamchi river on July 15 but he could not save himself.

"We were at the farm at Kiul bazaar when the flood hit. My husband was trying to steer us towards safety. He asked me and our daughter to start running. He was running towards us when he disappeared in the floods," said Kumari, a resident of Churatar in Helambu Rural Municipality Ward No. 2.

Her husband is still missing.

Nila Bahadur Khadka, another resident of the same ward, is waiting for news of his mother who has also gone missing in the floods from Kiul area.

"I go to the river every day in search of my

mother. I hope to find her soon," said Khadka.

According to Sorbang Tamang, a local resident of Helambu Ward No. 1, at least six individuals from the Halde area who work in various fish farms are missing in the flooded river.

"Workers at the fish farms save many lives by warning villagers of floods. But many have gone missing in last week's floods. I was one of the lucky few who survived when the floods hit the farm in Kiul," said Utam Mani Bhandari, a fish farm operator in Helambu Ward No. 2.

Last week, continuous rainfall had raised the water level in the Melamchi river, which inundated the Melamchi Bazaar area and caused massive damage to the surrounding settlements. Until Wednesday, 20 peo-

ple have gone missing and five individuals have died in Melamchi floods," Superintendent of Police in Sindhupalchok Rajan Adhikari told the Post. "More than 500 security personnel from the Nepal Army, Armed Police Force and Nepal Police have been mobilised to search for the missing people."

Around 600 people in Melamchi and 300 in Helambu, which lies upstream, have been affected by the flooding, according to the District Administration Office in Sindhupalchok.

According to the District Police Office, the raging river swept away eight resorts, two motorable bridges and six suspension bridges from Helambu to Melamchi Bazaar. More than 150 houses were inundated, displacing hundreds of people.

Trinamool Vs BJP over recognition to illustrious "Sons of Bengal"

KOLKATA, 24 JUN [PTI]: The ruling Trinamool Congress and the BJP hit out at each other on Wednesday over giving due recognition to the illustrious sons of Bengal, as leaders of the two parties paid tributes to Syama Prasad Mookerjee on his death anniversary.

BJP state president Dilip Ghosh and West Bengal Transport Minister Firhad Hakim were among several leaders who garlanded the statue of the Jana Sangh founder in Kolkata.

"We demand that the mystery involving the death of Syama Prasad Mookerjee be uncovered," Mr Ghosh said. Claiming that regional parties in Bengal have never given the great sons of the state the recognition they deserve, he said the BJP has started working towards it.

Meanwhile, Mr Hakim, while garlanding a bust of Mookerjee in south Kolkata, said the policy of the BJP has always been "to use and throw".

"After a few days, they will have no interest in the distinguished sons of

Bengal, including Mookerjee," the TMC leader said.

He also asserted that the BJP did not gain anything in West Bengal by "using" the name of Mookerjee on several occasions in the run-up to the assembly polls.

Mr Ghosh later led a demonstration at Hazra crossing in the metropolis to protest against the alleged refusal by police to organise a blood donation camp to mark the BJP ideologue's 68th death anniversary.

The state BJP said the camp, which has been held for the last 42 years on this day, was disallowed due to "narrow political interests" of the TMC.

The camp was to be set up at Jatin Das Park, which is a kilometre away from Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's residence. Syama Prasad Mookerjee had died under detention in 1953. While the government then said his death was due to health reasons, Jana Sangh and later the BJP have often questioned the claim.

Women with young children to get vaccine on priority in Bengal: Mamata Banerjee

KOLKATA, 24 JUN [PTI]: Amid a warning that children might be infected during the possible third wave of coronavirus, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said that priority would be given to inoculate women having children aged up to 12 years.

She also said that the state would start inoculating at least four lakh people on an average daily from Thursday.

"We are giving importance to the third wave.

The second wave has increased the number of infections. We have decided to prioritise inoculating the mothers of children aged zero to 12 years old, so that the child does not get the infection from the mother," she said.

At least two crore people have been vaccinated against Covid-19 in the state till now, Ms Banerjee said.

"We have decided to start vaccinating at least four lakh people from tomorrow," the Chief Minis-

ter said.

The West Bengal government has decided to have at least 26,000 Covid-19 beds for women in state-run as well as private medical facilities.

Besides, around 10,000 general beds have been earmarked for mild and moderate paediatric cases in the age group of 90 days to 12 years and 20 per cent of special newborn care unit (SNCU) beds for Covid positive patients aged between 1 day and 90 days.

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Transgender Olympic athlete could polarize opinion

WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND (AP): A U.S. expert on transgender rights and politics says the participation of New Zealand weightlifter Laurel Hubbard at the Tokyo Olympics might inspire other trans athletes but could also become a focus for conservative activists who oppose greater LGBTQ rights and freedoms.

Dr. Jami Taylor, professor of political science at the University of Toledo, said Hubbard might find herself in a no-win position even if she succeeds when she competes in the women's 87-kilogram plus division.

Hubbard's selection, which will make the 43-year-old New Zealander the first trans athlete to compete at an Olympics, has already drawn criticism from some conservative commentators.

"I suspect that we are going to see opponents of transgender rights frame the Hubbard situation in ways that further their own ends," Taylor said in an email to The Associated Press. "I think they are going to have some success and I would not be shocked if the IOC and other sporting bodies end up tightening their policies if those policies were relatively permissive.

"In the U.S., that has and will continue to happen at the state level until we have some national level policy,"

Hubbard's participation at Tokyo is a major milestone for transgender athletes and possibly an inspiration to others, Taylor said, but may also attract condemnation.

"I think it is likely that a backlash is building on this," she said. "We see it in various states in the U.S. "The International Olympic Committee has also noted that its policies on trans people participating are open to further review as more medical and scientific evidence emerges."

Taylor said Hubbard is "now part of this body of evidence."

"In some respects, Hubbard is in a no-win situation," Taylor said. "If she medals, her performance will certainly be used by opponents to argue that trans women should be subject to greater restriction if not an outright ban."

Hubbard rarely gives media interviews and tends to shun the spotlight. Inevitably, though, it follows her to each

competition. "In some respects, this is the best Olympic games for her to be at," Taylor said. "The reduced crowd capacity and restrictions on yelling due to COVID-19 will limit the ability of fans to affect her performance by booing and yelling."

"It will not just be fans though," Taylor added. "I suspect that she is going to get a lot of hostile questions from reporters . . . especially from segments of the U.S. and U.K. media who have been on the warpath over trans women in sport."

Some critics of inclusion argue that transgender women have intrinsic advantages of physiology and strength in some sports. Some female athletes have cited that in calling for Hubbard's exclusion, and conservatives have amplified it.

Taylor, who teaches in areas including public policy and American politics and is a co-author of the book "The Remarkable Rise of Transgender Rights," conceded that the inclusion of transgender women in sport involves complicated issues.

"Gender transition changes some but not all biological factors that may contribute to performance differences that exist on average between males and females," Taylor said. "There is also the gender bias that may negatively affect sporting opportunity for many women and most trans women have not faced that. "Regardless of that, societal averages don't compete, individuals do. And their circumstances vary. Individuals also have rights."

Hubbard, who won a silver medal at the 2017 world championships and gold in the 2019 Pacific Games in Samoa, will be ranked fourth in the Olympic competition on Aug. 2.

She competed at the 2018 Commonwealth Games on Australia's Gold Coast but sustained a serious injury that set back her career.

"I am grateful and humbled by the kindness and support that has been given to me by so many New Zealanders," Hubbard said in a statement when her selection was announced earlier this week. "When I broke my arm at the Commonwealth Games three years ago, I was advised that my sporting career had likely reached its end. But your support, your encouragement, and your aroha (love) carried me through the darkness."

Busquets proves key as Spain gets back on track at Euro 2020

SEVILLE, SPAIN (AP): After helping Spain avoid elimination at the European Championship, Sergio Busquets had to pause for a moment while talking about his time away from the squad because of the coronavirus.

The Spain captain teared up recalling the doubts that went through his mind after being told he had to go into isolation only days before the tournament was to begin.

"I'm emotional because I had to go through some difficult times," Busquets said. "I had to stay at home for 10 days, not knowing if I was going to be back or not."

Spain was glad Busquets did make it back, just in time to lead the team to victory over Slovakia on Wednesday. The Barcelona midfielder was voted the man of the match in the 5-0 win that sent Spain to the round of 16 after opening with disappointing draws against Sweden and Poland.

The result allowed Spain to finish second in Group E, setting up a meeting against Croatia in Copenhagen on Monday.

"All this helped us grow," Busquets said. "Now whatever challenges we have in front of



us, we will face them with this mentality."

Busquets' return was a big boost for a Spanish squad that lacked leadership and struggled with poor finishes and a shaky defense in the first two matches. The 32-year-old midfielder, the only member left from Spain's World Cup-winning squad in 2010, gave the team that much-needed balance it had been missing so far at Euro 2020.

Busquets was the first Spaniard to touch the ball when the match started at La Cartuja Stadium, and he was in control of the midfield from then on. Collected and composed as usual, Busquets showed no signs of being affected by his less-than-ideal preparations because of the virus. He constantly guided his teammates and helped created chances in attack and keep the defense protected.

Busquets, who was asymptomatic with the virus and could practice at home while in isolation, had been replaced in the first two matches by Rodri Hernández, who couldn't bring in the same attitude and leadership of the veteran Barcelona player.

Busquets took over as captain after Sergio Ramos was left off the squad after playing sparingly this season because of injuries. Jordi Alba had been

the captain at Euro 2020 in Busquets' absence.

Busquets was loudly cheered by the home crowd when he was substituted by Thiago Alcantara in the 71st minute after feeling a little tightness in his calf, which he said shouldn't be a problem ahead of the round of 16.

"He played perfectly," said Spain coach Luis Enrique, who decided to wait for Busquets instead of dropping him from the squad despite not knowing if he would fully recover from the virus. "He is unique, a guarantee."

With Busquets back and the team having found its scoring touch again, Luis Enrique feels Spain is back to being a contender at Euro 2020. He said there are always things to improve, but "La Roja" remains among the favorites for the title.

"We are gaining momentum. I'm sure that if you ask any of our rivals no one will be happy to have to play against us," the coach said. "Now we get to play against a Croatia team that has great players and plays at a high level. You can't expect weak teams in the round of 16."

Eligibility rule keeps transgender runner out of trials

EUGENE, ORE. (AP): Transgender runner CeCe Telfer will not be allowed to compete in the women's 400-meter hurdles at U.S. Olympic trials because Telfer has not met the conditions World Athletics established in its eligibility regulations for certain women's events.

Telfer competed for the men's team at Division II Franklin Pierce, but took time off, then came back to compete for the women's team. In 2019, Telfer won the NCAA title.

Telfer was entered in this week's trials but was ultimately not allowed to compete because of guidelines World Athletics released in 2019 that closed off international women's events of between 400 meters and a mile to athletes who did not meet the eligibility requirements. Among those requirements was that their testosterone levels had to be below 5 nonomoles per liter (nmol/L) for a span of 12 months. Telfer's manager, David McFarland, said Telfer would respect the decision.

"CeCe has turned her focus towards the future

and is continuing to train. She will compete on the national — and world — stage again soon," McFarland said. USATF said in a statement that in order for athletes to be eligible for the trials, they must meet the requirements to be a member of the U.S. Olympic team, and that eligibility for the Olympics is governed by World Athletics.

It further explained: "Following notification from World Athletics on June 17 that the conditions had not yet been met, USATF provided CeCe with the eligibility requirements and, along with World Athletics, the opportunity to demonstrate her eligibility so that she could compete at the U.S. Olympic Team Trials. According to subsequent notification to CeCe from World Athletics on June 22, she has not been able to demonstrate her eligibility."

In a blog last week in Women's Health, Telfer said: "I love what I'm doing and I'm getting to live my truth and live my authentic life. I believe that this is my way of being the change that I want to see in the world. And I live by that every single day."

Strikers search for goals, wing backs shine at Euro 2020

LONDON (AP): Kylian Mbappé scored the most goals in France last season, and Harry Kane did likewise in the Premier League.

It's not just the fact that neither Paris Saint-Germain nor Tottenham won their leagues that links them. Nor the fact that both strikers are being talked about for transfers to new clubs after the European Championship.

Although prolific for their clubs — Mbappé with 27 league goals and Kane with 23 — neither has managed to replicate their domestic scoring output at the European Championship.

Kane managed only one shot on target in the three games for England. Mbappé had three for France. But neither striker found the back of the net.

"I think it's the world of a big player," England coach Gareth Southgate said, discussing Kane. "Inevitably he's come through those periods and scored important goals for us and played exceptionally well. So it's a bit of a repetitive cycle."

Perhaps it's a reflection of the toll of more gruelling pandemic-congested seasons on players' bodies.

France is at least reaping the benefit of recalling Karim Benzema after six years in international exile. It was the Real Madrid forward scoring for France for the first time in 2,085 days — twice in fact — that secured a 2-2 draw against Portugal on Wednesday and passage into the round of 16.

"I knew as soon as I would be in the national team, the critics would come out — that is part of the football game but I never give up," Benzema said. "Everyone was waiting for this goal and that was some kind of extra motivation for me. Of course there is another pressure than when you play for your club because it is your whole country but for me it is a great pleasure."

At least it was Mbappé who earned a penalty for Benzema, which is a greater contribution than Kane has made as England also advanced as group winners.

Euro 2020, however, will be missing Europe's leading striker in the knockout phase. Three goals from Robert Lewandowski weren't enough to carry Poland through to the next round.

The top individual scorer is,



unsurprisingly, Cristiano Ronaldo, with five for Portugal.

But it's own-goals that made a big splash. After only nine own-goals from 1960 to 2016 at European Championships, there have been eight in less than two weeks this year.

WING BACKS

While some leading strikers are struggling to make an impact, this tournament has been a stage for wing backs to shine.

Denzel Dumfries has been the unexpected star for the Netherlands, capitalizing on a 3-5-2 formation that gives him space to surge down the right when in attacking mode. Goals against the Ukraine and Austria — the PSV Eindhoven's player first for the national team — helped them into the last 16.

While Dumfries was familiar to the Dutch, playing for the second-place team in the domestic league, Robin Gosens has never played in the Bundesliga nor Germany's youth teams.

But after flourishing in Italy with Atalanta — which has become a regular in the Champions League — Gosens has more than justified Joachim Löw's decision to call him up for international duty. His signature performance in the group stage came when he forced an own-goal, set up a goal and then scored himself in a 4-2 win over Portugal.

VERSATILITY

What benefits any modern side is the versatility of players.

There's Joshua Kimmich, who can excel as a right back or in midfield with Germany and Bayern Munich. And for so long a fullback at Bayern alongside him, David Alaba has flourished more recently as a center back. With Austria, he's

Young scores 48 points, Hawks beat Bucks 116-113 in Game 1

MILWAUKEE (AP): Trae Young remains as poised as ever in hostile environments in his first postseason.

Young scored 48 points, Clint Capela converted a go-ahead put-back with 29.8 seconds left and the Atlanta Hawks beat the Milwaukee Bucks 116-113 on Wednesday night to open the Eastern Conference finals.

The Hawks improved to 6-2 in road playoff games this year and handed the Bucks their first home loss of the postseason.

"Ever since I was in middle school, when I was going on the road in middle school, I always loved playing on the road," said Young, who was two points off his career high. "I loved playing against an opposing crowd, an

opposing team. It feels like you're really with your team, and it's just them in the building. I think that really brings our group together."

Game 2 is Friday night in Milwaukee.

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 34 points, 12 rebounds and nine assists for the Bucks. Jrue Holiday added 33 points and 10 assists.

Milwaukee's Khris Middleton missed a potential tying 3-pointer in the closing seconds. Although Middleton scored 15 points, he shot 6 of 23 and missed all nine of his 3-point attempts.

"I've just got to be better," Middleton said. "It's as simple as that."

Never before had the Hawks won an Eastern Conference finals game since moving to Atlanta in 1968. The Hawks reached the East

finals in 2015, but were swept by Cleveland.

The Hawks did win a title in 1958 and reached the league finals in 1957, 1960 and 1961 when they were in St. Louis.

"It's special," Young said. "I wanted to achieve things like this when I was a rookie. Coming in as a rookie, you don't know how hard it is until you've got to actually do it." John Collins added 23 points and 15 rebounds for the Hawks. Capela had 12 points and 19 rebounds.

Antetokounmpo scored the first six points in a 9-0 run that turned a 98-96 deficit into a 105-98 advantage with 4:18 left. But the Hawks scored the next five points, and the game went back and forth from there.

German vaccine center flooded, 5 injured by heavy hail

BERLIN (AP): Officials say a vaccination center was flooded and five people were injured by hail during heavy storms in southwestern Germany overnight.

All appointments for Thursday at the vaccination center in Tuebingen were canceled after the site was swamped by torrential rain late Wednesday.

Police said five people were injured in the nearby town of Reutlingen after they were struck and injured by hail the size of tennis balls.

Firefighters were out in force across the region pumping water out of flooded basements and removing toppled trees from roads, police said.

The downpour also drenched players and spectators at the Germany-Hungary Euro 2020 match held in Munich on Wednesday evening, forcing some public viewings to be abandoned. The game ended in a tie.

The neighboring Czech Republic and Switzerland were also affected by the heavy rain, with some roads and train tracks made impassable by floodwater.

German business sentiment rises as pandemic ebbs

BERLIN (AP): Germany's businesses are more optimistic than they've been in almost three years, according to a closely watched survey by Munich's Ifo institute released Thursday.

Sentiment among German managers rose to 101.8 points in June, from 99.2 in May, its highest since November 2018. The upbeat mood was partly spurred by declining coronavirus infections and the reopening of large parts of the economy.

Analysts had expected a more moderate increase in optimism from the questionnaire of about 9,000 businesses conducted every month.

One concern raised by manufacturing companies was ongoing supply shortages. German automakers have been among those hit by a lack of semiconductors, resulting in delivery delays for new cars.

As pandemic restrictions wane, hopes rise for Europe travel

SWANSEA, WALES (AP): When Sierra Schade booked a trip to from Atlanta to Greece, she hoped more European countries would follow Greece's lead and open to U.S. travelers.

She's now been able to add Italy and France to the itinerary for her trip next month after the 27-nation European Union recommended last week that restrictions be lifted for American tourists.

As pandemic restrictions start to ease, travelers and the businesses in Europe that rely on them are eager for a return to something resembling normal.

In 2019, before the pandemic, tourism and related activities accounted for 10% of the EU's GDP, meaning the return of international travel is key to economic recovery, particularly for countries like Greece and Italy that rely more heavily on it. That figure was cut nearly in half in 2020, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council.

There is guarded optimism about tourists returning this year, though the EU doesn't expect growth in the industry to return to 2019 levels until at least 2023.

Schade has flexibility because she works for an airline, but a confusing patchwork of restrictions has made booking trips trickier for average travelers. And European travelers still aren't welcome in the U.S.

Within Europe, governments use a traffic light system where countries in green are deemed safe and countries in red unsafe, but they don't all use the same criteria, befuddling those who want to take a trip.

And while the EU agreed that



member countries should gradually remove restrictions on travelers from the U.S. and a handful of other countries, it's ultimately up to each individual country to decide how and when it wants to open its borders. Different countries may also have different requirements about vaccinations and COVID testing.

Things could get a bit easier, at least for Europeans, when the EU Digital COVID Certificate comes into effect next week. The certificates will certify EU citizens' tests and vaccinations, allowing them to travel between countries without having to quarantine or undergo coronavirus tests.

Jennifer Janzen, from Europe's largest airline association, Airlines for Europe, is hopeful that the certifi-

cate, if adopted widely, will help at least combat Europeans' confusion about travel, merging "27 different systems in order to travel, to one single system." She said that most Europeans didn't bother to travel outside their own countries with rules changing constantly, but an uptick is soon expected.

"We're going from a ... long period of chaos, where nobody traveled, to now, a state where the industry is really hopeful that we will have some sort of recovery for European travel," Janzen said. Many businesses that rely on tourists are still in wait-and-see mode.

"Right now there is not much tourism in Barcelona because of the pandemic," said Roger Martin. He and his parents own Bar del Pi, a

tapas bar and restaurant in the heart of the Spanish city. He said the lack of young tourists and local nightlife has meant much less business.

Still, he is hopeful the EU health passport will bring more tourism and investment in local businesses, including his own. Not everyone has waited for a health passport to make a trip or let pandemic restrictions impede their travel plans.

Irina Gatilova, who lives in the Czech Republic and isn't yet fully vaccinated, underwent coronavirus tests for a recent trip to Italy, also crossing through Austria and Germany. Shortly after, she went on a family trip to Russia, where she currently is, knowing a mandatory quarantine awaits her upon her return home. Gatilova supports the idea of the

EU's health passport and plans to get one after her second dose of the vaccine. "Being outside the EU at the moment I don't feel very comfortable in hotels or public places where they don't ask for tests and people don't wear masks," she said. "If there were compulsory COVID passports for travelers, it would give me confidence and peace of mind."

Recent data from the European Travel Commission found that two-thirds of Europeans plan to travel by the end of November.

Executive director and CEO Eduardo Santander said the travel industry in Europe is feeling additional relief and optimism with American travelers allowed in once again.

"U.S. travelers (are) very important for a lot of European destinations that really depend on them and their market power," he said, adding that these travelers often visit multiple countries at a time. But Europeans are still not allowed to visit the U.S., and Santander said that lack of reciprocity is posing a challenge for airlines that would prefer not to fly empty planes back to the U.S.

Still, U.S. airlines have scrambled to add new trans-Atlantic flight destinations in wake of the recent news, with American Airlines spokesperson Nate Gatten welcoming it as a "positive development"

For Schade, the relaxation of restrictions means a chance to get out into the world again.

"We were both very COVID-safe," she said, referring to the friend she plans to travel with. "So (this trip) is our first time...being out and able to do stuff that's not at home."

Last Apple Daily newspaper edition sold out across Hong Kong

HONG KONG (AP): Across Hong Kong, people lined up early Thursday to buy the last print edition of the last remaining pro-democracy newspaper.

By 8:30 a.m., Apple Daily's final edition of 1 million copies was sold out across most of the city's newsstands. The newspaper said it would cease operations after police froze \$2.3 million in assets, searched its office and arrested five top editors and executives last week, accusing them of foreign collusion to endanger national security — another sign Beijing is tightening its grip on the semi-autonomous city.

In recent years, the newspaper has become increasingly outspoken, criticizing Chinese and Hong Kong authorities for limiting the city's freedoms not found in mainland China and accusing them of reneging on a promise to protect them for 50 years after the 1997 handover from Britain.

The pressure on the paper — and Hong Kong's civil liberties — increased after authorities responded to massive protests in 2019 with a sweeping national security law — used in the arrests of the newspaper employees — and revamped Hong Kong's election laws to keep opposition voices out of the legislature.

"This is our last day, and last edition, does this reflect the reality that Hong Kong has started to lose its press freedom and freedom of speech?" said an Apple Daily graphic designer, Dickson Ng. "Why does it have to end up like this?"



Why is there not going to be the Apple (Daily) newspaper any more in Hong Kong?"

To a big applause, associate publisher Chan Pui-man told staff who gathered around the newsroom Wednesday night: "You've done a great job, everyone!" Chan was one of the five arrested last week.

Apple Daily printed 1 million copies for the final edition, up from the usual 80,000. While pro-democracy media outlets still exist online, it was the only print newspaper of its kind left in the city.

On Wednesday night, over 100 people stood outside Apple Daily's office building in the rain to show their support, as employees worked on the final edition, taking photographs and shouting words of encouragement.

In the early hours of Thursday, residents in the city's Mong Kok neighborhood in the working-class Kowloon district began lining up hours before the paper hit the stands.

Thursday's edition splashed an image of an Apple Daily employee in

the office waving at supporters surrounding the building, with the headline "Hong Kongers bid a painful farewell in the rain, 'We support Apple Daily.'" By Thursday, Apple Daily's website was inaccessible, with a notice that read: "We are sad to inform you that Apple Daily and Next Magazine's web and app content will no longer be accessible at 23:59, 23 June 2021, HKT."

"We would like to thank all of our readers, subscribers, advertisers, and Hongkonger for your loyal support," the notice said.

A similar notice was posted on its news app.

Apple Daily's closure marks a "dark day for press freedom in Hong Kong," said Thomas Kellogg, executive director of the Georgetown Center for Asian Law.

"Without Apple Daily, Hong Kong is less free than it was a week ago. Apple Daily was an important voice, and it seems unlikely that any other media outlet will be able to fill its shoes, given growing restrictions on free speech and freedom of the press," he said. British Foreign Sec-

retary Dominic Raab said on Twitter that the national security law is being used to curtail freedom and punish dissent.

The forced closure by Hong Kong authorities "is a chilling demonstration of their campaign to silence all opposition voices," Raab said.

German Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Adebahr called the closure a "hard blow against press freedom in Hong Kong."

"In our view this is another sign that pluralism, freedom of opinion and freedom of the press in Hong Kong are subject to erosion, which can particularly be seen since the National Security Law came into force," Adebahr said.

It was the first time the national security law had been used against journalists for something they published.

More than 100 people, including the city's most outspoken pro-democracy advocates, have been arrested under the security legislation. They include media tycoon Jimmy Lai, who founded Apple Daily in 1995. Many others have fled abroad.

Aging Japanese nuclear reactor restarted after a decade

TOKYO (AP): A more than 40-year-old nuclear reactor in central Japan which suffered a deadly accident has resumed operation after being taken offline for a decade after the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, as Japan pushes to meet its carbon emissions reduction goal.

Kansai Electric Power Co. said the Mihama No. 3 reactor in Fukui prefecture went back online Wednesday after workers removed control rods inside the reactor.

The reactor, which started operation in 1976, is one of Japan's oldest. It's one of three operated by Kansai Electric that were granted extensions to operate beyond their initial 40-year

life, and is the first of the three to resume operation since meltdowns at the Fukushima nuclear power plant prompted extended safety checks and tougher standards at all Japanese reactors.

Some residents of Fukui and nearby areas filed a request for an injunction with Osaka District Court on Monday because of concerns about the aging Mihama No. 3 reactor.

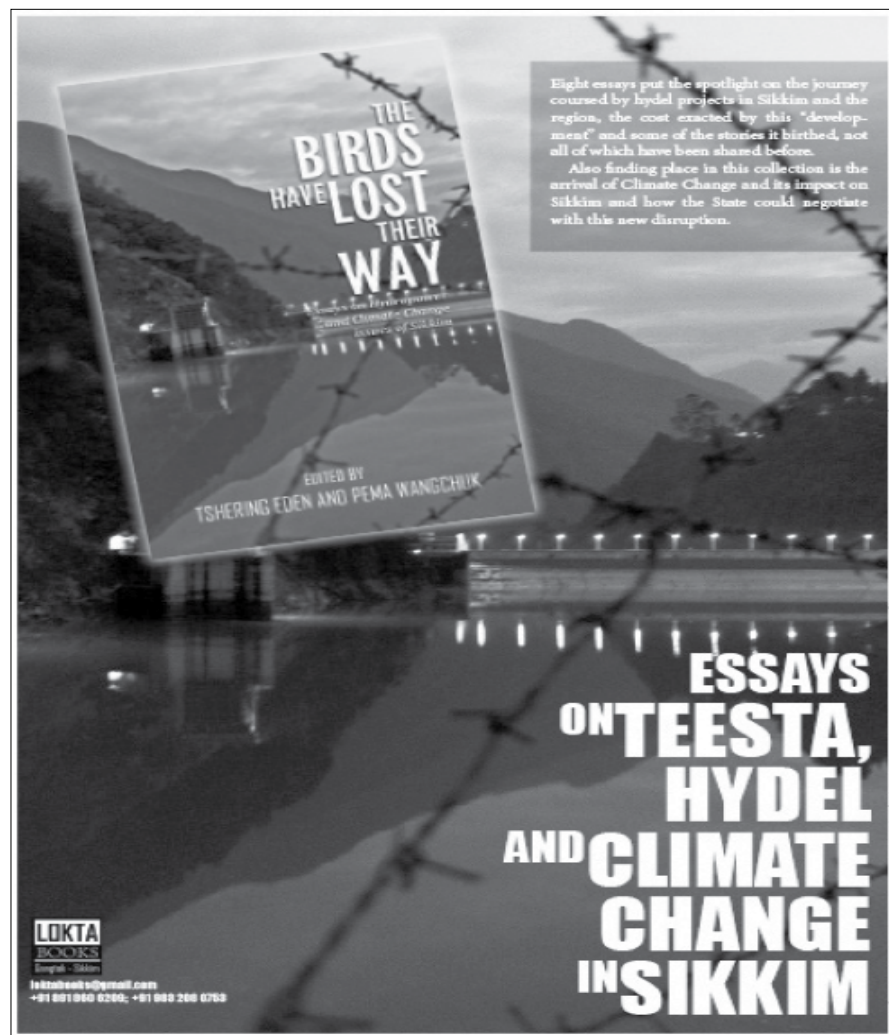
The reactor had an accident in 2004 in which hot water and steam leaked from a ruptured pipe in its turbine building, killing five workers and injuring six others.

Kansai Electric also plans to restart the two other aging reactors — Takahama No. 1 and No.

2, also in Fukui — that received operating extensions.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who pledged last October that Japan will achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, recently the raised 2030 target for reducing carbon emissions from 2013 levels to 46% from the previous 26%. Japan is one of the world's top carbon emitters.

A revision of Japan's current energy plan, set in 2018, is expected around July. The 2050 carbon emissions neutrality target will require drastic changes and likely prompt calls for the restart of more nuclear plants and possible construction of new reactors.



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Britney Spears tells judge: 'I want my life back'

LOS ANGELES (AP): After 13 years of near silence in the conservatorship that controls her life and money, Britney Spears passionately told a judge Wednesday that she wants to end the "abusive" case that has made her feel demoralized and enslaved. Speaking in open court for the first time in the case, Spears condemned her father and others who control the conservatorship, which she said has compelled her to use birth control and take other medications against her will, and prevented her from getting married or having another child.

"This conservatorship is doing me way more harm than good," the 39-year-old Spears said. "I deserve to have a life." She spoke fast and sprinkled profanity into the written speech that lasted more than 20 minutes as her parents, fans and journalists listed to an audio livestream. Many of the details Spears revealed have been carefully guarded by the court for years.

Spears told Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Brenda Penny that "I want to end this conservatorship without being evaluated." Penny thanked the pop star for her "courageous" words but made no rulings. A long legal process is likely before any decision is made on terminating the conservatorship. Spears said she wants to marry her boyfriend Sam Asghari and have a baby with him, but she is not allowed to even drive with him.

"All I want is to own my money and for this to end and for my boyfriend to be able to drive me in his (expletive) car," Spears said. "I truly believe this conservatorship is abusive," Spears said, adding at another point, "I want my life back."

When an attorney representing her co-conservator said the hearing and transcript should be kept sealed if private medical information was to be revealed, Spears shouted her down, saying her words should be public. "They've done a good job at exploiting my life," Spears said, "so I feel like it should be an open court hearing and they should listen and hear what I have to say." She went on to say she was forced to take lithium — which made her feel "drunk" — after rehearsals broke down for a Vegas residency in 2019, which was subsequently canceled. She said all she had done was disagree with one part of the show's choreography.

"I'm not here to be anyone's slave," Spears said. "I can say no to a dance move." "Not only did my family not do a god-damn thing, my dad was all for it," Spears said. She accused her father of relishing his power over her, as he showed when she failed a series of psychological tests in 2019 and forced her to go into a mental hospital. "I cried on the phone for an hour, and he loved every minute of it," Spears said. "The control he had over someone as powerful as me, as he loved the

control to hurt his own daughter 100,000%," Spears said she felt forced to do the Las Vegas residency on the heels of a tour, and felt like a great weight was lifted when it was canceled. She has not performed or recorded since. Spears also said several nurses often watch her every move, not even letting her change her clothes in private. Vivian Thoreen, attorney for Spears' father,

James Spears, gave a brief statement on his behalf after conferring with him during a recess. "He is sorry to see his daughter suffering and in so much pain," Thoreen said. "Mr. Spears loves his daughter, and misses her very much."

James Spears serves as co-conservator of his daughter's finances, and also had control of her life decisions for most of the conservatorship. He currently serves as co-conservator of her finances.

Britney Spears said her years-long public silence has falsely created the impression that she approved of her circumstances. "I've lied and told the whole world, 'I'm OK, I'm happy,'" she said. "I've been in denial, I've been in shock. I am traumatized." More than 100 fans from the so-called #FreeBritney movement gathered outside

the courthouse before the hearing, holding signs that read "Free Britney now!" and "Get out of Britney's life!"

Fan Marissa Cooper was inside the courtroom, and cried and occasionally clapped during the remarks. "It was insane," Cooper said outside court. "Everyone that's been following this has been called crazy since the beginning, and conspiracy theorists, so it just feels really really good to actually hear it from her." Spears said she has not felt heard in any of her previous appearances before the court, all of which were sealed from the public.

Her court-appointed attorney, Samuel Ingham III, said he made no attempt to "control, or filter, or edit" his client's words. He said Spears has not officially asked him to file a petition to end the conservatorship.

Spears said she had done research that showed her conservatorship could be ended without further evaluation of her. But under California law, the burden would be on her to prove she is competent to manage her own affairs, and an intensive investigation and evaluation is probably inevitable before it can come to an end. The conservatorship was put in place as she underwent a mental health crisis in 2008. She has credited its initial establishment with saving her from financial ruin and keeping her a top flight pop star.

Her father and his attorneys have emphasized that she and her fortune, which court records put at more than \$50 million, remain vulnerable to fraud and manipulation. Under the law, the burden would be on Spears to prove she is competent before the case could end.



STYLE STAR! The fashion guru, Olivia Palermo is seen looking chic on the streets of New York City.

Jewish Museum in Berlin opens kids' museum about Noah's Ark

BERLIN (AP): Torrential rain pours down, waves break and big puddles splash as visitors enter the new children's museum at the Jewish Museum in Berlin. No surprise there, because the exhibit is dedicated to the ancient story of Noah's Ark and begins in the middle of the biblical deluge.

Young children are invited to actively participate in Noah's journey as soon as they set foot in the new ANOHA Children's World, which opens Sunday. They can build little arks that they can float on a "deluge simulator" or help rescue 150 animals, created by over a dozen artists out of recycled material such as old spoons, espresso coffee makers, pieces of carpet or bike fenders. They can even use the animals' pretend excrement — represented by brown felt balls — to fertilize plants.

They can also cuddle a gigantic sloth, crawl through the serpentine body of an anaconda or take a rest on a yellow-eyed octopus.

The circular, wooden Ark is the centerpiece of the museum and spans 7 meters (23 feet) tall and 28 meters (91 feet) wide. At its heart is an empty space where visitors are in-

vited to sit down, linger and think about life's big universal questions: about God and the world, the past and the future.

At the end of the tour, there are glimpses of the earth again, rocks lurking out of the retreating floods and a big rainbow on which kids can write their thoughts, wishes or worries. The ANOHA museum was built inside a former flower market, across the street from the Jewish Museum's main building on a 2,700 square-meter (29,000 square-foot) space. It was meant to open in May 2020 but was delayed by the coronavirus pandemic.

While the main Jewish Museum's permanent and temporary exhibitions primarily cater to adults and teenagers, the children's museum targets the youngest visitors, children between 3 and 10.

"We tried to always listen to the children when we created this world," Ane Kleine-Engel, the head of the children's museum, told The Associated Press. "From the beginning of the museum's development, children were involved in the process and we plan to keep them on board as co-curators in the future as well."



Aries:
Your daily affirmation: "I trust myself to create the abundance I deserve." Repeat these words out loud to yourself with unyielding faith as you begin your day. Even better, write it down in your journal a few times or pin it up on your work desk as a reminder. What the Universe wants you to know is that the wealth you need for this venture will come your way soon.
Tip: "I trust myself to create the abundance I deserve."
Taurus:
That vision board looks sharp, Taurus, but it isn't going to manifest itself. This phase of your life is about putting the given plan into action. Remember, everything seems intimidating at first—until you get the hang of it. So, motivate yourself to take that first step and trust that you will find a way to learn the ways of the world as you go along.
Tip: It's time to put the given plan into action.
Gemini:
There are some days when everything seems top-sy-turvy, but today is "not" one of those days, Gemini. You've got a smile on your face and a song in your soul. You know that the divine forces are with you, and they will turn the most challenging circumstances around. So keep the faith, beautiful. Keep affirming the good within and without. As you do, trust that the

portal of healing and abundance is being activated for you.

Tip: The divine forces are with you and they're helping you turn the most sticky situations around.

Cancer:
Setting off on an adventure may or may not be an option right now. But that doesn't mean life has to be colourless. What the Universe is offering you today: the opportunity to board that flight of fantasy. So, take some time off from your routine to dream a new dream, to vision board about what you want to call into your reality, and set an intention about the ways in which you would like to be supported by the Universe.
Tip: Get ready to board the flights of fantasy.

Leo:
It's been a roller coaster ride, Leo, with little or no respite. Quite frankly, you're exhausted! So, instead of pushing against the flow, hit the pause button. Take that much-needed breather. A yin yoga session or a therapeutic massage are some of the ways in which you can decompress. If spending time outdoors is an option, reconnect with Mother Nature. Dig your feet into the soil and wrap the trees around you in a warm embrace. Meditating under the open skies may also be a good way to bring your body and being into bal-

ance.

Tip: Take a breather.

Virgo:

When we're stuck in the ego space, all we're able to focus on is the differences. When we tap into that space of love, however, we open the pathway to oneness. It all comes down to where you will choose to vibrate at, Virgo, and we do hope that you will make the right choices today. It's time to make peace where there has been war. It's time to become the flagbearer of change. Your angels and guides are with you, helping you bring about a shift.
Tip: It's time to become the flagbearer of change.

Libra:

Given that we're in retrograde season, unhealed trauma from the past is coming up in a big way. Here's the thing, Libra: you have a choice. You always have a choice. To choose the path of denial or to act responsibly. Something tells us you're in the mood to work through the heavy emotions and bring about a significant change. Remember, the other person is merely a mirror. A catalyst who is getting you to look within.
Tip: The other person is merely a catalyst, so treat them with respect.

Scorpio:

What if we said that you are an open channel for love,

healing, and abundance, and that everything you ever need will always be provided to you? You are beginning to see proof of your co-creating abilities, and it's oh-so-magical. Scorpio! Today, the cards are also bringing your attention to the quote 'the more you give...' So, offer your help freely, support small businesses, donate to charitable organisations that have been on your radar. Know that the seeds of goodness you are planting today will come back to you manifold.
Tip: "The more you give..."

Sagittarius:
You're many things, Sagittarius, but mediocre is certainly not one of them. What the cards are reminding you is that you are here to inspire change. You are here to start a revolution and help the masses question the rules that have been handed down to them. But, you can only create this change if you practice what you preach.

Tip: You are here to inspire change by living your truth boldly.
Capricorn:
Do you ever just look around and notice all the things that are transpiring for you, all the ways in which the Universe is conspiring so you can live the life of your dreams? The miracles are endless, Capricorn, and the support of both your earth angels and spirit team

she shared. "I left because he pushed me further and further out. The conversations that I used to have were now reduced down to a sentence or two. I just kept walking around that house, and knowing that this marriage was headed down a really s--tty path, I had to make a choice to do what was right for me. I couldn't live that way anymore."

She went on to inform her friends that she purposely hadn't told them details about the split until now so as not to put them in a "bad position" legally as the divorce process plays out.

"I struggled for a long time knowing that I had to leave," she explained in her confessional. "But once I made my decision, I spent a good 30 days closing out certain parts of my life. I cried every day. This was the end of a massive part of my life and stepping into, basically, a void."

Erika added that she was "met with such resistance" from Tom when she tried to get them to talk things out. She also claimed that the differences in status, given that he is 33 years older and

was wealthy when they first met, meant she "was always dismissed" if she were to bring up her hurt feelings.

The reality star shared that she intentionally filed for divorce on Nov. 3 because it was Election Day 2020 and she "wanted it to get buried" in the news cycle, but that media outlets nonetheless wrote about the news of her split.

Indeed, E! News was first to report the divorce, and the headline for our exclusive reporting was flashed onscreen during the episode. At the time, Erika released a statement saying in part that this was "not a step taken lightly or easily."

After her statement was released, a source close to Erika told E! News that Tom's alleged infidelity was the reason for the breakup. Tom's team did not respond to E! News' request for comment.

In addition, the attorney is currently facing legal issues after past clients accused him of fraud and embezzlement. Neither Tom nor Erika, who is also listed as a defendant in the suit, has yet to file responses to these complaints.

is strong. So, take a moment to count your blessings instead of nitpicking.

Tip: Oh, look! There's a rainbow beyond the clouds.

Aquarius:

We all need a little bit of hope and optimism once in a while. We all need a little bit of motivation to get back in the game. What makes "you" feel good, Aquarius? What are the activities that release your happy hormones? More importantly, who are the people in your life that remind you of the rainbow that exists beyond the clouds. It's time to get in touch with them in your own special way.
Tip: It's time to open the door to hope and optimism.

Pisces:

There's got to be more to life than amassing wealth and making your way up the corporate ladder. Thank goddess for art, music, and drama! Thank goddess for the creative and the intuitive and for everything that lies in between. If you've been unsure of your sacred purpose, this is your affirmation that you are meant to help humanity ascend to the next level of consciousness as a conduit of the Divine Feminine energy. Pisces, do you know how many people you inspire by just being "you"? PS: We're blinded by your awesomeness.

Tip: You are here to help humanity ascend to the next level of consciousness as a conduit of the Divine Feminine energy.