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SummitTIMES

Vol 06 | Issue 179 | Gangtok | Friday 16 July 2021

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | Rs. 5

Covid third wave end of August, may be comparatively mild: Medical Body

NEW DELHI, 15 JUL [NDTV]: The third wave of Covid is likely to hit the country at the end of August and chances are that it will not be as intense as the second wave, Dr Samiran Panda, Head of Epidemiology and Infectious Diseases at the Indian Council of Medical Research, has told NDTV.

"There would be a nationwide third wave but that does not mean that it would be as high or as intense as the second wave," Dr Panda told NDTV in an exclusive interview.

Four things, he said, could lead to the third wave. The first of these is an instance where the immunity acquired in the first and second wave due drop. "If that goes down, it could lead to a third wave," he said.

Secondly, there could be a variant that can bypass the immunity acquired. Third – the new variant may not be able to bypass immunity but can circulate fast in the population.

Fourth -- if the restrictions are lifted prematurely by states, it could lead to a fresh surge, Dr Panda said.

Asked if the variant involved could be Delta Plus, he said both Delta and Delta Plus have swept the country and "I'm not expecting any more public health havoc from the Delta variant".

Earlier this week, the top doctors'body in the country, the Indian Medical Association, said the third wave is "inevitable and imminent", pointing out that "in many parts of the country both the government and public are complacent and engaged in mass gatherings without following Covid protocols".

CM CHAIRS REVIEW MEETING ON COVID-19

State Govt announces fresh restrictions to curb COVID-19 spread



GANGTOK, 15 JUL (IPR): Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang chaired a high-level meeting at Samman Bhawan, Gangtok, today, to review the Covid-19 situation in the State and to deliberate on the way ahead.

The meeting had the presence and participation of Ministers, DGP, Additional Chief Secretaries, Heads of Depart-

ments, senior Government officials, District Collectors, Chief Medical Officers, Health Department officials, ADCs (Development), and officers of the Covid-19 Management Group.

The Chief Minister issued strict directives to the District Collectors, SPs, ADC Development and BDOs to ensure that

strict measures are adopted to contain the spread of Covid-19 any further. He called for the need to review the containment measures. He further called for emphasis on home quarantine even for people who move out of their ward or village. He urged the District Administration to review the paid quarantine fa-

cilities for people entering the State through the inter-state borders. He further urged the Health Department officials to enhance mass testing.

The Chief Minister lauded the Health Department for successful implementation of the vaccination programme. He called for additional measures to ensure 100% coverage.

NEW RESTRICTIONS

- Complete ban for one month on all socio-religious and entertainment related activities like marriage, pujas and birthday parties and other get-togethers, both in urban and rural areas.
- Restrictions on serving food and beverages during funerals and last rites.
- Only in-house puja or rituals will be allowed in religious places. There will be complete ban on visitors to any religious place or institution.
- End practice of issuing special permits, other than for health and police personnel.
- Police will strictly enforce odd-even rule for vehicles without any exception.
- If any person in a ward or village tests positive, the entire ward will be declared a containment zone and strict measures will be enforced to prevent further spread. In case of urban or semi urban areas or towns, the entire building will be contained.
- Any relief work, social or medical service should compulsorily be routed through the District Collectors.
- IEC and mass awareness on Covid Appropriate Behaviour will be upscaled. Strict penalty on people and establishments violating Covid-19 guidelines.

The Chief Minister directed the Tourism Department to facilitate smooth movement of tourists into the State, duly ensuring that all safety measures are strictly followed.

Likewise, Labour Department and Police Department were directed to strictly monitor the movement of labour force into the State.

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Sikkim's Covid recoveries cross 20K-mark

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 15 JUL:**

Sikkim's count of recovered cases of COVID-19 crossed the 20,000 mark today and now stands at 20,029 with 92 more formerly Covid-positive people making full recoveries in 24 hours.

Over the same 24 hours, 137 new cases of COVID-19 were detected from the testing of 660 samples on Wednesday giving the State a daily positivity rate of 20.7% today. Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 has now reached 22,929.

Unfortunately, Sikkim also recorded one more COVID death

in the last 24 hours taking the State's death toll to 318. This new COVID death was reported from STNM Hospital.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department this morning, the 137 new cases, 46 were registered in East District, 19 in West District, 72 in South District and 04 in North District.

A total of 81 samples returned positive for COVID-19 in RT-PCR testing of 425 samples and 56 others were found positive in rapid antigen testing of 232 samples.

Even as 137 new cases were detected, only three COVID patients were hospitalized today taking the total number of Covid patients in hospital at present to 96. Some solace can be drawn from the fact that this number of under-100 patients in hospital even though there are 2,322 active cases in the State, suggests that the infections are milder [something achieved by vaccination perhaps].

Worryingly for Sikkim, there are 13 Covid patients currently being attended to in ICU facilities at STNM Hospital and Central Referral Hospital.

Binoy Tamang resigns, winds up his faction of GJM



**SMRITA KHAWAS
DARJEELING, 15 JUL:**

President of Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (Binoy faction) Binoy Tamang resigned from his post and party today. He said that this is the end of the Binoy faction of GJM and Bimal Gurung now leads GJM.

Addressing a press conference today, Mr Tamang said, "During the 2017 Gorkhaland agitation, I decided to divide Gorkha Janmukti Morcha into two factions but today I want to end the Binoy faction and return the party flag to Mr Bimal Gurung because he is the founder president of GJM. I request all the party leaders from GJM (Binoy faction) to change the faction's name as per the High Court verdict."

Mentioning that there are many reasons behind his resignation, Mr Tamang said that his party has lost two elections and since 2019 there has been a conspiracy at the national level to throw him out of politics.

"This is not the end of my political career. I will come back stronger and that will be my third phase of politics. I have been with two political parties - Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) and Gorkha Janmukti Morcha. My next journey will be in the interest of Darjeeling Hills and all Gorkha community," said Mr Tamang.

Reacting to the statement given by Binoy Tamang, general secretary of GJM (Binoy faction),

Anit Thapa said that he was shocked when he heard of the resignation.

"I will respect Binoy Tamang forever. When Darjeeling Hills was suffering, he did his best to solve the problem. I am totally shocked. It would have been better if he had called a meeting and talked about everything. But he is a senior politician, maybe he thought of what is best for the future. I will always follow his path," said Mr Thapa.

Bimal Gurung, president of GJM (Bimal faction) said he respects Mr Tamang's decision.

"I believe we don't need place, post or designation to work for the people. I respect the decision made by Binay Tamang," he stated.

What Oxfam India's study reveals about Assam's Tea Workers

GUWAHATI, 15 JUL [NDTV]: Only 39 percent of Assam's tea garden workers are permanent while 61 percent are contractual labourers, a study by Oxfam India said.

"There exists a growing incidence of contractualisation in the tea plantation sector in Assam. Only 39 percent of workers can be considered as permanent workers, while the remaining 61 percent are temporary workers when social security and other mandated provisions under the Plantation Labour Act (PLA) are taken into consideration," the report titled "In Defense of Living Wages for Tea Plantation Workers: Evidence from Assam" observed.

As per the study, a tea worker's average family income per month is ₹ 4,774 (without deductions) while the average expenditure on food

consumption is ₹ 1,854 and non-food expenditure is 3,895. The average deduction by the employer is 778 which varies across tea estates. Therefore, after deductions, the in-hand income of a tea worker is around 3,996 per month with variations across districts.

The workers are entitled to get 167 per day which is inclusive of both cash and non-cash benefits, but their wages range between 160 to 180 per day, the study noted.

The study estimates that for tea workers to have a dignified life, their compensation should include 285 per day as expenditure on food items (considering 4 members in family) and 599 per day as expenditure on non-food items, both essential and non-essential utilities. Therefore, their living wage should be 884 per day, the study concludes.

The report also observed that during the Covid-induced nationwide lockdown, only 10 percent of the respondents worked. Women were more severely impacted by the lockdown and were not able to work for 45 days on an average, while for men the duration was 33 days.

The study has been conducted jointly by Oxfam India and Dr. Rahul Suresh Sapkal, Assistant Professor, Centre for Policy Studies, IIT Bombay and the research is based on a primary survey which included 5,000 tea plantation workers spread across seven districts -- Biswanath, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Lakhimpur, Tezpur, Golaghat and Sivasagar -- in Upper Assam during the period of October to December last year.

"The study is the voice of 5,000 tea workers and we

believe that the findings will make all stakeholders in tea sector to work for their welfare. The study finds a stark gap between the current wages that tea workers receive vis a vis the living wages that has been calculated. We appeal to the government and tea industry to consider an upward revision of the wages to improve the lives of the tea workers," Amitabh Behar, CEO Oxfam India said.

Ahead of Assam's 2021 Assembly elections, the BJP-led government promised a wage hike to the tea labourers. The government then raised the wage by 50 but withdrew the hike following a lawsuit at the Gauhati High Court by the tea estate owners. Assam government, instead, announced the setting up of a new committee for fixing the minimum wage of the tea workers.

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India’s farmer protest and the issue of stubble burning

ROSHAN RAI
The government and farmers clashed last year on the farm bill and the issue further aggravated into prolonged conflict. The NDA government had brought huge changes in the agricultural sector from economy to environmental factor. The farmers had huge discontent with the government about the bill because it had brought comprehensive changes which ended the monopoly system of Mandi. It also brought the private players in the sphere to negotiate with the farmer. The bill had also produced about the proper disposal of crop residue after the harvest is completed. The burning of this crop residue has aggravated air pollution which affects the atmosphere and the quality of air. According to the Ministry of New and renewable energy (MNRE), India generates on an average 500 million tons of crop residue every year. The highest emission of stubble burning comes out from the states like Uttar Pradesh (23%), Punjab (22%) and Haryana (9%).

Environment problems have an intrinsically transnational character; they do

not respect any borders. States are therefore environmentally vulnerable to the economic activities that take place outside their territorial jurisdiction. All human beings have equal rights to use global atmospheric commons, despite the equal importance some advanced countries had benefited it indiscriminately creating further environmental problems. The Stockholm conference led to the establishment of UNEP, which is responsible for coordinating the environmental activities of states and international organizations to promote better regional and global environmental protection. In 1997 Kyoto protocol was enacted in order to mitigate the proportion of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The presence of greenhouse gases increases the earth temperature and lead to various trajectories, for example of melting of ice, increase in the earth temperature. The problem with this type of agreement is, states in the long run abandon their commitment and pursue their interest. The developed countries use economic and political leverages to escape from the climate

agreement. The role of environmental protection has to be holistic rather than individualistic.

India’s farmer protest has showed the resistance of farmers, despite of the government bringing huge changes in the agriculture sector. The issue revolves around on the political and economic sphere, very little concern was given to the practice of stubble burning and its impact on the health of the people and global warming. Farmers opt for burning stubble is because of its easy way to manage the large crop residue, inadequate resource and shortage of labors. At present approximately 23% wheat straw was taken as fraction burnt in the states of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh and for the rest it was 10%. For sugarcane trash it was considered that 25% of the trash is burnt in the fields. The main reason for the burning of stubble is because of the short duration available between the harvesting of paddy and sowing of wheat. This rule was laid down by the

2009 Punjab preservation of subsoil act, where the paddy transplantation date is fixed for June 20 which pushes ahead of the harvesting of rice crops. After that, the farmers only get 20-25 days to sow the new crops. Hence, they rely upon the quick and easiest solution i.e. burning of field. The air pollution act of 1981 focuses on the preservation of the quality of air and control of air pollution, the center is responsible for passing the law but

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the responsibility for the implication lies at the provincial and local levels.

India is the third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases behind China and the U.S, about a fifth of these emissions, are from the agricultural sector. since 2000, India’s agriculture production emission has increased by 14 per cent. Due to the high rate of burning of crops residue in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana many airborne diseases are flown

through the region and in the national capital affecting the lives of many. The poisonous gas like carbon monoxide which is released when the stubble is burned, if inhale reduces the blood efficiency to take oxygen and generate respiratory problems. The problem of Acute Respiration Infection (ARI) is particularly increasing in children due to the high respiration rate among children.

The issue of stubble burning in states like Punjab and Uttar Pradesh had not only created breathing problems and health hazards but contributed to global warming. To deal with Stubble burning government has to come up with a holistic approach focusing on crop diversity, sustainable development and using green technology (for example happy seeder). Indian farmer protest is a local issue, but if it is integrated with climate change it becomes global. The protest did gain huge support from all over the world, mainly supporting the economic cause of the farmers but very few looks in the environmental aspect as the bill also focused on the waste management.

Exploring the fate of Indo-Bangladesh border Haats amidst Covid-19

TAPASHYA RASAILY
According to Nazneen Ahmed (Ahmed, 2021), a border haat is a ‘rough and ready market’ allowing ‘local people to trade in locally-grown agricultural and manufactured’ items along the border. The word ‘haat’ is specific to the South Asian context and it is also interchangeably used for the word ‘bazaar’ in hindi. The first border haat was initiated on the 13 Jan, 2015, in the south district of Srinagar. Since then three more haats have been established along the Indo-Bangladesh border, which have all been successful in their goal of promoting wellbeing of the people living along the borders. Border haats, unlike the haats that operate within the country, require joint co-operation of both the countries concerned for their smooth functioning. Since these markets exist at the borders, they are also sensitive to global and geopolitical changes that occur on a macro level.

The coronavirus pandemic, first known as Sars-Cov2, and now as Covid 19, was first detected in China in 2019, and it arrived in India in 2020. It has become the greatest existential threat worldwide, shutting down entire sectors of world economies, and devastating small and medium enterprises in an unprecedented manner. Nations had to impose severe lockdowns in order to contain the spread of the virus, resulting in very strict restrictions and even an indefinite shut-down of border trade from the middle of March 2020. Although 2021 saw the re-opening of the haats, for example the re-

opening of Kalaichar haat in January 2021, restrictions have been stricter, affecting the number of visitors who can enter a shop at a given time.

The four operational haats along the Indo-Bangladesh border have had tremendous significance for the inhabitants in the region. Firstly, they are the most essential source of livelihood for the people, and sometimes the main reason behind the decrease in the once thriving illegal trade at the border. Infact, illegal trade has reduced significantly since the haats have begun to operate. The degree of womens’ participation in the haats as small and medium entrepreneurs has also increased impressively due to the ease of carrying out trade in the haats. The socio-cultural significance of the haats cannot be stressed enough, given their role in the reunion of numerous families separated for generations by the Radcliffe Line (Haque, 2020). Poverty and remoteness rendered the border inhabitants unable to get visas for visiting their families across the border for decades, and this situation improved only when the haats were established which allowed them to visit each other legally.

The coronavirus pandemic brought with it the consequence of a nation-wide lockdown. Given the nature of border haats as open markets dependent on people-to-people contact, the question naturally emerges about the scale of damage caused on border trade, as well as on the livelihoods of the haat’s traders after the outbreak. The next

key question that arises is about the impact of the pandemic on the positive changes entailed by the haats, most significant being the increased participation of women in public life at the border region. Border haats carry immense potential for encouraging bilateral trade, and increasing the incomes of both nations. Yet they have been underutilised due to a variety of factors. According to Shreeradha Dutta, there is a need to frame border haat development within the greater framework of border aea development as a

ViewPoint

whole. The volume of bilateral trade at the Indo-Bangladesh border amounts to around 1686.2 lakh rupees in 2015–16. Hence the haats are extremely significant for the country’s economy as well as the inhabitants at the border.

However, the effect of the pandemic and the resulting lockdown imposed on the haats in 2020 has devastated the livelihoods of the vendors and small businessmen, as well as women entrepreneurs, who have borne the brunt of the crisis. The present paper seeks to explore the scale of the effect on the economy, the livelihoods and the lives in the border haats along the Indo-Bangladesh border. The broader attempt is to analyse how vulnerable the border haat is to global crises and shocks such as Covid-19.

Why you aren't repealing British era sedition law used against Gandhi, SC asks Centre

NEW DELHI, JUL 15 (PTI)
Concerned over “enormous misuse” of the colonial era penal law on sedition, the Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Centre as to why it was not repealing the provision used by the British to “silence” people like Mahatma Gandhi to suppress freedom movement

Agreeing to examine the pleas filed by Editors Guild of India and a former major general, challenging the constitutionality of section 124A (sedition) in the IPC, a bench headed by Chief Justice N V Ramana said its main concern was the "misuse of law" and issued the notice to the Centre The non-bailable provision makes any speech or expression that “brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the Government established by law in India” a criminal offence punishable with a maximum sentence of life imprisonment

“Mr Attorney (General). We want to ask

some questions. This is the colonial era law and the same law was used by the British to suppress freedom movement. It was used by British to silence Mahatma Gandhi, Gokhale and others

"Is it still necessary to keep this in statute even after 75 years of independence""", asked the bench which also comprised justices A S Bopanna and Hrishikesh Roy

Observing that the provision on sedition has been put to “enormous misuse”, it also referred to alarming misuse of section 66 A of the Information Technology Act even after the top court set it aside long back and observed: “It can be compared to a carpenter, asked to cut a wood, cut the entire forest.”

“A factionist can invoke these types of (penal) provisions to implicate the other group of people,” the CJI said, adding that if a particular party or people do not want to hear a voice, they will use this law to implicate others

The bench wondered at the continuance of the

sedition law in statute book for last 75 years and said: “We do not know why the government is not taking a decision. Your government has been getting rid of stale laws.”

The bench said that it was not blaming any state or government, but unfortunately, the executing agency misuses these laws and “there is no accountability”

In a hearing, conducted through video-conferencing, the bench said that if a police officer in a remote village wanted to fix a person then he can easily do so by using such provisions Moreover, said the bench, there was very low percentage of convictions in sedition cases and these are the issues which are needed to be decided

The CJI, on being told that another bench headed Justice U U Lalit has been hearing a similar plea which has been fixed for further consideration on July 27, said he would take call on posting of the matters and notify the Attorney General K

K Venugopal, who was asked to assist the bench in dealing with the case, defended the provision and said it be allowed to remain in the statute book and the court may laid down guidelines to curb the misuse

Senior advocate Shyam Divan, appearing for the Editors Guild of India, said that a separate plea has been filed by the journalists’ body challenging the validity of section 124A (sedition) of the IPC and that plea can also be tagged along with the present one

He said that besides challenging the validity, the Guild has also sought framing of guidelines to curb misuse

The bench was hearing the fresh plea by former army officer, Major-General S G Vombatkere (Retd), challenging the Constitutional validity of section 124 A (sedition) of the IPC on grounds that it causes a “chilling effect” on speech and is an unreasonable restriction on free expression, a fundamental right

The bench, referring to the credentials of

Vombatkere, said that he gave his entire life to the country and his motive in filing of the case cannot be questioned

The former Army officer challenged the constitutional validity of the sedition law on the ground that it causes “chilling effect” on speech and is an unreasonable restriction on free expression, a fundamental right

His plea said section 124-A is wholly unconstitutional and should be “unequivocally and unambiguously struck down” “The petitioner contends that a statute criminalising expression based on constitutionally vague definitions of ‘disaffection towards Government’ etc. is an unreasonable restriction on the fundamental right to free expression guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a) and causes constitutionally impermissible ‘Chilling Effect’ on speech,” the plea said

The petition said there is need to take into account the “march of the times and the development of the law” before dealing with Section 124-A

part of the densely populated capital region that’s home to half of South Korea’s more than 51 million people.

Officials here have raised social distancing restrictions to the highest “Level 4,” closing nightclubs and churches, banning visitors at hospitals and nursing homes and clamping down on private social gatherings of three or more people after 6 p.m.

But rising infections outside the capital area are prompting calls for virus restrictions to be elevated nationwide. The 494 cases outside the capital region were the highest since February 2020, when the country dealt with its first major outbreak, which was mostly limited to the southern city of Daegu and nearby areas.

The virus is once again circulating quickly in southern regions, with Daegu, Busan and South Gyeongsang province reporting more than 200 cases combined. Health workers here are scrambling to trace infections linked to various places, including hostess bars, restaurants, schools and offices.

More than 110 cases were reported in the central city of Daejeon and nearby South Chungcheong Province, where hundreds of hostess bars in Cheonan are participating in voluntary closures at least until Sunday over virus concerns.

The regions outside

the greater capital area are currently maintaining Level 1-2 restrictions, which allow for social bubbles of up to eight people and for restaurants, bars and nightclubs to receive customers until midnight.

Busan, South Korea’s second largest city, has added extra precautions to its Level 2 rules since last Friday, forcing entertainment venues to close after 10 p.m. and prohibiting social gatherings of five or more people after 6 p.m.

Some experts have urged the government to elevate distancing measures simultaneously across the country to prevent a “ballooning effect” where the squeeze in the capital area spikes transmissions elsewhere. But KDCA officials during the briefing said such action isn’t currently being discussed.

South Korea was praised for its initial response to the pandemic that included aggressive testing and contact-tracing, but the early success was followed by months of complacency before the country was hit by a devastating winter surge.

Critics say the country has slipped into another huge wave of the virus in a similar way it sleepwalked into the crisis in December and January, with officials sending the wrong message to the public by pushing for a premature easing of social distancing.

State Govt announces...

During the interactive session that followed, the District Collectors presented the status of Covid-19 in their respective districts.

Director, Health Services, Dr. Sonam T. Ethenpa apprised about the status of vaccination and testing. He informed that mobile testing will commence from next week.

Likewise, Chief Medical Officers of the four districts presented the statistics and ground situation under their respective jurisdiction.

Director General of Police, S.D. Negi and Special DGP, Law & Order, Akshay Sachdeva also provided their inputs during the meeting.

DG-cum-Secretary Health, Dr. Pempa T. Bhutia summed up the present scenario from the medical point of view. He shared statistics from the past few months and presented a comparative report. He also apprised about the steps being taken to enhance the existing health infrastructure, especially testing laboratories. He also presented the status of vaccination in the State.

Director, Panchayat, RDD, Prabha-

kar Rai presented a brief report of the activities being carried out by rural development functionaries to contain Covid-19.

DIG Range, Prawin Gurung also placed his suggestions in the meeting. He appealed to the line departments and concerned agencies to coordinate and cooperate with the Police for enforcement of the laid down rules and guidelines.

Likewise, ADCs (Development) of all the four districts also placed their feedback and suggestions in the meeting.

MS, STNM Hospital Dr. K.B. Gurung gave a brief outline of the case load in the Hospital and the level of preparedness.

General Manager, SNT, and Member Covid Management Group, Karma Namgyal Bhutia presented the status report of the availability of medical oxygen in the State. He also gave a brief background of the accomplishment of the State Government in commissioning the required medical oxygen for the State.

Primary eye care vision center inaugurated at Mangan

WANGCHUK BHUTIA
MANGAN, 15 JUL:

When Giving Foundation Australia has partnered with Mission For Vision, an India-based international development organization to support Siliguri Greater Lions Eye Hospital towards the launch of a primary eye care Vision Center at Mangan, West Sikkim, on 14 Jul, 2021.

This is the first Primary eye care centre in Sikkim under the universal eye health commitment towards the people of Sikkim that was envisaged together with Chief Minister of Sikkim, PS Tamangin the year 2019 during his visit to Greater Lions Eye Hospital in Siliguri, to make Sikkim the first avoidable blindness free State in India.

The primary eye care



centre would be catering to a population of 43,000+ which includes people from administrative headquarters Chungthang, Mangan and its 55 villages ensuring early access to quality treatment through early interception and di-

agnosis to prevent avoidable blindness probability in the region.

The vision center was formally inaugurated today by the Additional Political Advisor Mangan, Tshering Wangyal Bhutia in the presence

of DC North, Tenzing T Koleon, Municipal Executive Officer, Tempo Tashi Bhutia, representative of Siliguri Greater Lions Eye Hospital, Dibyaraj Ghatani and Sanjeev Paul along with Vision Centre Chief Optometrist.

TNA Alumni Assoc extends best wishes to Tarundeep



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 15 JUL:

Tashi Namgyal Academy Alumni Association [TNA] extended its best wishes to the sole Olympian from Sikkim, Tarundeep Rai, who is representing India in archery in the Tokyo Olympics 2020.

In a short function held here on Thursday, TNA president, Jigme Namgyal presented a khada and a memento to Anjana Bhattarai, wife of Tarundeep Rai, informs

a TNA press release. Team India leaves on 17 July and the ranking event is on 23 July.

The release mentions that Ms Rai expressed that Tarundeep has been practicing hard and hopes to win a medal for the country this time.

Vice-president, Tashi Chopel and sports secretary, Dr Remon Chettri and other executive members of TNA Alumni Association also extended their best wishes to Tarundeep.

"Not getting enough vaccines, will write to PM for them": Mamata Banerjee

KOLKATA, 15 JUL [NDTV]: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday flagged the "irregular supply" of COVID-19 vaccine doses to the state and said she will write to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking his intervention. "Bengal needs 14 crore doses but 2.12 crore is all we have got," she said.

The Chief Minister demanded "at least 2 crore doses" per month and said that even with this supply, it will take "six months to vaccinate seven crore people" with both the doses.

The Trinamool boss also alleged that the BJP-ruled states, such as Uttar Pradesh, are getting more vaccines as compared to the other states. "I don't have any problem but also give vaccines to us," she said.

This month, Bengal has received 25 lakh doses contrary to the "Health Minister's claim of 75 lakh doses", Ms Banerjee said.

Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Wednesday slammed the

states complaining about low vaccine stocks, accusing them of "mismanagement" and that their "useless statements" are "creating 'panic among the people'".

His statement came after several states such as Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Odisha reported shortages in COVID-19 vaccines.

The Healthy Ministry today said over 40.31 crore doses have so far been provided to the states and more than 1.92 crore balance and unutilised jabs are still available with them and private hospitals.

Vaccine supply has been a point of contention between the states and the centre amid the push to vaccinate more people before a possible third wave.

India's vaccination coverage crossed the landmark of 39 crore on Thursday, as per a provisional report, said the centre, which re-took control of vaccination procurement from the states last month.

LingiPaiyong alumni donate safety equipments

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 15 JUL:

Two alumni doctors of Government Secondary School LingiPaiyong, South Sikkim, donated safety equipments to their alma mater on Wednesday, a press release informs.

Dr. Som Nath Adhikari and Dr. Durga Koirala, both working as Dentists under Health Department provided cash amount of Rs. 10000

each to the school to procure two automatic sanitiser dispensers, two thermal scanners and 10 litres of sanitiser.

"The items were procured from Siliguri today and will be installed and used in the school once it reopens," informed school headmaster, Suraj Kumar Sharma.

Mr. Sharma thanked the two doctors for their contribution in ensuring safety of the school family.

"Appalling Apathy": Rights body for CBI probe in Bengal post-poll violence

KOLKATA, 15 JUL [NDTV]: Accusing the West Bengal government of "appalling apathy" towards victims of political violence after the March-April elections, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has recommended a CBI probe into "grievous offences like murder and rape" and said that these cases should be tried outside the state.

In a sweeping indictment of the state government, an NHRC committee formed on the directions of the Calcutta High Court said the situation in West Bengal was a "manifestation of law of ruler instead of rule of law" and "the local police has been grossly derelict, if not complicit, in this violence."

Backing claims of "retributive violence by supporters of the ruling party against supporters of the main opposition party" the BJP, the report placed before the high court said that it "resulted in disruption of life and livelihood of thousands of people and their economic strangulation."

"To compound the problem, violence and intimidation has con-

tinued. There is palpable fear among victims against police and goons of ruling party. Many displaced persons have not yet been able to return to their homes and resume their normal life and livelihood. There have been several sexual offences but victims are scared to speak out. Loss of faith in State administration among victims is very evident," the NHRC said.

"The committee has recommended that grievous offences like murder, rape, etc should be handed over to the CBI for investigation and these cases should be tried outside the state," the report, submitted before the court on Tuesday, said.

The statements, however, have not gone uncontested. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday lashed out at the NHRC for "disrespecting the court" and pursuing the "political vendetta" of the BJP by leaking its report.

Ms Banerjee also expressed surprise over the conclusion that the NHRC arrived at in its report without taking into account the views of the state government.



Tadong MLA checks on labour registration process

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 15 JUL:

Upper Tadong MLA, GT Dhungel accompanied by Advisor to Labour Department, Manoj Kumar Pradhan and Daragaon-Lumsey Ward Councilor, Milan Gautam inspected the ongoing labour registration process here at Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College, Tadong on Thursday.

On the occasion, the MLA thanked the people for their cooperation and support by registering themselves under the La-



bour Registration Act. He further expressed that the ongoing labour registration is for the benefit of labourers.

The MLA was also joined by Labour Department officials, SKM CLC president Sonam Pinto Bhutia, SKM ward presi-

dent Nima Dorjee Bhutia, SKM Nari convenor Bina Chettri, SKM general secretary Prashant Lamichaney and others.

GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM SOCIAL JUSTICE AND WELFARE DEPARTMENT 5th Mile , Tadong, Gangtok

NOTICE INVITING RE-TENDER

Memo No:62/GOS/SJ&WD/ EC/2021-22

Dated: 15/07/2021

The Assistant Engineer, (East) Social Justice & Welfare Department, Government of Sikkim, Samaj Kalyan Bhawan, Lumsey, Tadong East District , Sikkim on behalf of Governor of Sikkim, invites sealed tender in percentage Rate basis from the eligible contractors of appropriate class Vide notification no 584/R&B/PWD/Secy. Dated 08.10.2018 Vide notification No. 515/R&B/Pwd/Secy. Dated 12.06.2018 notification No. 104/R&B Dated 08.10.2020 for the work (s) listed under:-

Sl. no.	Name of work	Value put to Tender (in Rs).	Completion Time (in months)	Amount of Earnest Money @ 2.5% for issue of tender form (Rs.)	Amount of Bank receipt for cost of tender document Rs.)	Constituency / GPU/ Ward.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.	Extension of Playground and Construction of Pavilion & Gallery at Central Pendam S.S.S in East Sikkim.	95,70,238.00	18 months	2,39,256.00	5,000.00	Central Pendam GPU. 18 th West Pendam Constituency.

Time Schedule is as follow:-

1. Date for submission of application: 16.07.2021 to 11.08.2021 (within office working hours).
2. Last date for issue of tender form: 13.08.2021 (within office working hours).
3. Date and Time for submission of Tender: 17.08.2021 (10.00 am to 1.00 pm).
4. Date and Time of opening of Tender: 17.08.2021 at 2.00 pm.
5. Place of Tender : Central Pendam GPU, 18th West Pendam Constituency, East Sikkim.

Note: The details of tender documents including tender form can be obtain from the office of the Assistant Engineer- East SJ&WD on production of receipt of deposit made to the respective GPU.

CONDITIONS OF CONTRACT:

1. Tender is open only to the eligible Contractors / Firms of appropriate Class/Area.
2. The intending tenders/contractors should apply in writing for issue of tender documents. The application would invariably be signed by the contractor himself/herself. The tender documents will not issued to any person other than the INTENDING TENDER.
3. The applicants should enclose attested copies of the (a) Valid GSTIN Registration Certificate, (b) Latest Income Tax Clearance Certificate as per the Indian Income Tax Act and (c) Validated Contractor Enlistment Certificate, and Professional Tax Clearance Certificate along with the application. It is mandatory to produce the original validated/updated Enlistment Certificate during sale/issue of the Tender Document for verification (d) PAN Card.
4. The prescribed Non-Transferable Tender Documents (Excluding the Tender Form) can be obtained during the period specified in (As above from the office of the Divisional Engineer of Social Justice & Welfare Department, Samaj Kalyan Bhawan , Lumsey, Tadong, East District , Sikkim, on production of receipt deposit to the revenue of the respective GPU for cost of tender documents.
5. Earnest Money Deposit @ 2.5% in the State bank of Sikkim in the form of deposit receipt of schedules bank which includes in the form of temporary deposit receipts fixed deposits receipts in favour of the Sr. Accounts Officer of the Department Tender Form shall be issued only on the production of the deposit receipt to the contractors who has obtained the tender documents, on production of deposit receipts of 2.5% earnest money.
6. The Tender documents, including the Tender Form with quoted offer should be placed in a sealed cover with the name of the Tenderers and the name of the work superscripted on it. Supporting documents listed at SL3 (a), (b) and (c) above should be enclosed with the offer.
7. Sealed Tenders may be deposited in the Tender Box in the concerned GPK on the date and time indicated above.
8. Tenders will be opened by a Tender Opening Committee as prescribed by the Government in the presence of the tenderer on the date and time indicated above.
9. The Tender should sign on every page of the tender documents as Acceptance of the General Direction and Conditions of Contract and other laid down norms. The rate quoted should be both in figures and words and should be inclusive of GST and all other Taxes and Levies. Over writing and correction should be avoided and if made should be authenticated. Incomplete/Conditional tenders shall be rejected forthwith.
10. In case of any discrepancy in rate(s) printed In the Schedule of Rates and Quantities issued with the tender document, rates as per approved Schedule of Rates will be taken as correct. For items outside the SOR, the rates shall as per the technically checked/estimate/analysis. Decision of the Addl. Chief Engineer cum Secretary/Head of the Department will be final in this regard.
11. The Work Value, scope and quantum of work are subject to change, the contractor shall execute the work as per the directives of the Department . No claim on this account shall be entertained whatsoever. If any extra claim is made , it shall be as per the agreement rates.
12. Avoidable damages due to negligence of the contractor shall be at his own risk and cost. The department shall not be liable for payment of such damages (if any), including accidents to laborer at site .
13. The offer shall remain valid for a period of 90 days. The work should commence within 15 days from the date of issue of work order.
14. The department reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason thereof.
15. Subletting of contract work is against the norms and if it comes to the notice, the original contract shall be cancelled and appropriate action shall be initiated as per the rules.
16. The Department also reserves the right to increase, decrease, alter or modify the item of works as indicated in the NIT without assigning any reason thereof.
17. The contractor will have to pay all taxes and duties as applicable and notified by the State/Central Government and no claim shall be entertained in this regard whatsoever.
18. The rate quoted shall be inclusive of prevailing taxes.
19. The department reserves the right to reject the incomplete tender without any reasons there-off.
20. The Contractor has to submit the work program / bar Chart in the initial stage.

Sd/-
Assistant Engineer (East)
Social Justice & Welfare Department
Samaj Kalyan bhawan, Lumsey,
5th Mile, East District, Sikkim

R.O. No. 105/IPR/Pub/classi./21-22
Dated: 15.7.2021

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

email us: news@summittimes.com

Missed Opportunities

Disaster preparedness should undertaken on mission-mode, 24x7

The 18 September 2011 Earthquake was a watershed event for Sikkim in as far as natural disasters are concerned. The scale of the earthquake was unprecedented for the mountain state and the Sikkimese should consider themselves extremely lucky that the nature of damage and number of casualties were not even close to what the temblor had potential to deliver. Yes, the damage to property and the loss of lives were higher than anything recorded in Sikkim in the past, but if one were to step back and take count, the devastation was clearly not of the scale or kind that one has seen in earthquake ravaged regions elsewhere. It was perhaps because of this relatively light penalty exacted by such a major tectonic event that Sikkim, in the decades since, has not undertaken the disciplining so essential for a mountain state to continue living in relative security. Given that Sikkim has a history of living with natural calamities, preparedness should have been a way of life here instead of something people need to be reminded about at workshops. In fact, preparedness was an instinctive practice here until centralized planning started complicating everything and ruining lifestyles. And that brings one to the present situation where even those who have been working on disaster mitigation will admit that Sikkim is still woefully unprepared for calamities. And it is not just lack of preparedness which hamstrings Sikkim; bad planning, irresponsible development/ construction and poor involvement amplify the potential threats.

Even students preparing debate arguments from Wikipedia tips will passionately highlight that while disasters like earthquakes, landslides and floods might be “natural”, casualties are largely manmade. To understand what one is getting at here, sample this: In 2010, two earthquakes struck the Americas. The one in Haiti killed more than 3 lakh people, but a much greater earthquake in Chile a few months later killed less than 600. The Chileans were better prepared, had stricter building codes and had trained rescue teams. After 18 Sept 2011, one knows that Sikkim has potential for Chile-like earthquakes. A follow-up question would then ask why then does it continue to live with Haiti-like ill-preparedness?

There is also an attitudinal handicap at work here. The post-18 Sept months and years have been invested with rebuilding projects, rehabilitation efforts and have been marred with allegations of favouritism and victimization. The government even released a white paper on the matter. Transparency and accountability are always welcome, but what has been inexcusably missing from official and public engagements has been any earnestness to learn from the earthquake lesson. There does not appear to have been any genuine effort towards documenting state and private response to the earthquake or recording what went right and where mistakes were made. This exercise not having been undertaken, no preparedness plan will be complete because lessons learnt on ground remain undocumented and unrecorded. And these lessons would still have only informed rescue operations. Safety will require a different level of engagement because that would demand stronger political will, a more responsible executive and a more involved citizenry.

Even if one were side-step responsibility from dealing with natural calamities and crediting such events to acts of god, the state continues to lack excuses to explain why the rapidly urbanizing towns are developing as death-traps. This is wet season, but dry winters will arrive soon enough and that is also fire season. No fire is easy to fight and Sikkim is lucky that it has brave fire-fighters. It is also lucky that no fire has flared into anything bigger than the force’s limited resources and woefully understaffed fire-fighting units. But that does not mean that such an inferno will not test Sikkim ever in the future. Preparedness thus becomes important in this aspect as well. It is not enough to rely on the commitment and professionalism of its firemen alone. Preparedness for worst case scenarios should be a policy-directed initiative and mitigation plans clearly spelled out and widely circulated. We are in the thick of monsoons at present, so there is nothing beyond repairs and clearing we can do at present.

WRITE US:

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

Generation COVID: pregnancy, birth and postnatal life in the pandemic

JAMES CLIFFORD KENT & SARAH LLOYD-FOX
theconversation.com

The pandemic made bringing a baby into the world an even bigger challenge for all new and expectant parents. As a photographer and researcher of visual cultures, I realised this would also be a unique opportunity to capture how COVID restrictions and unprecedented lockdowns impacted this life changing experience for me and my partner.

I began photographing our journey shortly after we got a positive pregnancy test in November 2019. The plan was to document Charley’s pregnancy, but the project quickly grew as I explored the effect of COVID-19 on our experience.

Yet it could have been so different. We had planned to have a homebirth because of COVID restrictions on birth partners. But Charley ended up being induced at the hospital and was left to labour alone through the night on the antenatal ward. Our homebirth midwife and I got there just in time to see my baby daughter being born. Charley received support on the phone from her doula (a person who supports a mother through labour and birth) and used the birthing techniques she had learned in online tutorials during her pregnancy. She said:

“I felt confused and distressed throughout my labour and counted down the minutes until I would see James and my midwife again. I knew as soon as I saw them that everything would be OK and I would finally receive the support I so desperately needed.”

Moments after our baby was born, the midwife asked me to push the emergency alarm button. A siren sounded immediately and seconds later hospital staff filled the room. Charley was rushed to theatre after experiencing a major obstetric haemorrhage and suddenly we were separated. Fortunately, she had expressed plenty of colostrum (the first form of breastmilk) and I was able to feed our new baby girl using a syringe.

This time in the recovery area is a blur. I received updates from midwives and surgeons dashing to and from theatre as other partners were being reunited with women and their babies. One midwife recognised me behind my mask and reassured me as I cared for our daughter.

Immediately after the birth I took a photograph of Charley with our newborn baby and our midwife. It was later shared widely on Instagram and I began to receive hundreds of messages from other people who wanted to tell their own stories about what it was like having a baby under pandemic restrictions. One woman, Stacey (35, London) told me it felt like she had “given birth to a secret baby, behind closed doors”.

And so the Pregnant in a Pandemic project was born: to give a voice to people like Stacey. A visual record of what new and expectant parents living in London were going through and the impact COVID-19 has had on their experiences. They have shared portraits and testimonies about love, loss and survival in the face of adversity, as well as personal experiences of key developmental and family milestones.

As a mother, and a developmental psychologist, the beginning of the pandemic also triggered in me a cascade of concerns. For many, the birth of a baby is the beginning of a web of positive relationships and connections that reach far beyond those within one household. But as the pandemic enclosed us in a new socially restricted world, I wanted to find out what unanticipated worries were being experienced by those going through pregnancies, birth and early parenthood.

And what of the baby? When their entire world became just their household, did this provide op-

portunity for closer relationships and improved early development, or were there also risks inherent in this changed landscape?

Our research group at the University of Cambridge and Cambridge University Hospitals set up the COVID in the Context of Pregnancy, Infancy and Parenting (CoCoPIP) online study to further understand and support families. Over 2,500 expectant and new parents have participated so far. Many of their stories bear striking parallels with the experiences of the families who reached out to James.

Our work has aligned through our common desire to provide a platform for “generation COVID” families. Here are just some of those voices.

BISMA – ‘A 1% CHANCE OF SURVIVAL’

Bisma is 34. Her waters broke prematurely at 22 weeks on the day the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic. No one else could be with her at the hospital, and having already experienced loss in previ-



ous pregnancies, decisions about how to manage this pregnancy were left to her alone.

She was told that she could give birth within 48 hours to a baby that had just a 1% chance of survival. Azlan was born at 32 weeks and is now a healthy one-year-old. Bisma said:

“I was assigned a bereavement midwife at 22 weeks and my husband was not allowed to stay with me. I spent three days on my own in a bereavement labour room. I could still feel the baby kicking and my faith was strong. I refused to take the tablet to induce labour and I carried my baby for another ten weeks. Azlan was in NICU [Neonatal Intensive Care Unit] for seven weeks while I made lifelong friends – they held my hand, wiped away my tears and gave me hope.”

Bisma’s sense of isolation aligns strongly with findings from the first 500 pregnant women in the CoCoPIP study. During 2020, a common theme was the way in which the changes to healthcare provision increased parents’ anxiety levels and feelings of not being supported.

Repeatedly, women commented on the acute anxiety from having to attend antenatal appointments alone or by phone or video call, and the chronic anxiety associated with the uncertainty of whether they would have to give birth in the hospital without family or friends present. Antenatal and maternity services for expectant parents have been consistently reported as being disproportionately affected by social distancing requirements put in place worldwide (Human Rights in Childbirth, 2020).

For example, there was a four-fold increase in stillbirths observed in a sample of 1,681 births in London between February and June 2020. This was attributed to a lack of preventative antenatal care.

SALLY – CATCHING COVID

At Christmas in 2020, Sally (38, London) – who was then 20 weeks pregnant – contracted COVID-19 along with the rest of her family, including her mother and 18-month-old son

“I was taken aback, since I didn’t have a high temperature or a cough ... I felt numb with fear of the unknown and the harm the virus could cause the baby. There were no answers ... Like dominoes, everyone in my household went down with COVID.”

Sally said she was afraid to take pain relief in case it would affect her unborn child. For the next three weeks her entire body was overtaken by surges of excruciating pain, but caring for her toddler was the hardest part. She added:

“He would scream for hours, sleeping only when he was propped up on my already protruding tummy. When he stopped eating and then drinking altogether all the GP could advise was to “try harder” – presumably to keep us out of an already overwhelmed NHS hospital ... We just had to wait it out.”

While for many of us the year represents a series of tumultuous restrictions on our lives, Sally’s story highlights the additional strain (both physical and mental) that the pandemic has brought into some households whether due to themselves or their wider family contracting the virus.

LEARNING FROM THE PANDEMIC

Birth could be thought of as the most dramatic change in environment that a baby undergoes in its lifetime. A pivotal moment on a journey begun months before, where myriad experiences have already affected a baby’s growth and development during pregnancy.

These cascading events are punctuated by birth itself, before a whole new host of experiences and factors continue to shape a baby’s early behaviour. And in the wake of each new life come ripples of changes to the lives of the family that supports them.

Many of the difficulties faced by expectant families having a baby during the pandemic have accentuated existing inequalities in antenatal and postnatal experiences across the UK.

And the UK government’s own report concerning NHS and social care staff burnout has highlighted that staff shortages have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Our projects are documenting the real life consequences that stem from these issues, as well as the hardship, courage and resilience that families are showing in the face of adversity. We intend to give “generation COVID” families a voice for months and years to come and we hope these stories, and the research data generated by them, will be a force for change in these most vital areas.

[James Clifford Kent is Senior Lecturer, Royal Holloway University of London; Sarah Lloyd-Fox is Research Fellow, Department of Psychology, University of Cambridge]

Why fans cover their faces when football players take penalties – a psychologist explains

GILLIAN COOK
theconversation.com

Penalty shootouts in football are one of the most unpredictable and dramatic events in sport, producing moments of utter ecstasy and deep despair in players and managers. As we saw in the recent UEFA Euro 2020 championship, fans often cover their faces when players take penalties.

Research shows us why. There are psychological reasons behind the powerful emotions that fans’ experience, and behind the nervous facial and body expressions in the image above.

Although the penalty taker may draw on feelings of competence and control to lessen their anxiety and stress, fans have no control over events. Indeed, as fans have very little ability to influence events beyond cheering to encourage their team and jeering to put off the opposition, sometimes fans will cover their faces as a way of coping and to partially block out what is happening.

Another factor at work is the influence of those around us. When we

watch people in a crowd, we capture their emotions through their facial expressions, bodily movements, yells and postures. This is due to the presence of “mirror neurons” in our brains which fire when we observe other peoples’ behaviour, and we then mimic and synchronise our emotions with theirs.

From the moment referees blow their whistle to indicate that the outcome of the match will be decided in a penalty shootout, to watching the penalty taker taking the long walk from the halfway line to the penalty spot, fans are feeling the emotions of the players. The image below shows this response to the stressor visibly etched on a fan’s face as they seek to manage the unfolding drama.

ENVIRONMENT SCANNING

Penalty shootouts are particularly fear- and stress-inducing events due to the importance of each kick for the outcome of the entire match, and their unpredictability. According to one prominent theory of stress and coping, we continually scan our environment for stressors, and when we encounter them, we evaluate their

personal significance to us in terms of threat, harm, challenge or benefit, and then assess the extent to which we have the resources to cope.

Emotions are a pattern of physiological and psychological responses to meaningful situations, such as the outcome of a football match. These responses include changes in bodily sensations such as a raised heart rate, and in mental processes such as thoughts, feelings, expressions, and related behaviours.

As humans we have a fundamental need to belong and feel a sense of connection with others, as was shown in research carried out by Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary. Membership of a group, such as being a fan of a particular sports team, can provide a strong social identity.

In the context of sport, this refers to the extent to which an individual feels psychologically connected with a team and views the team as an extension of themselves. Indeed, the stress the player feels on the pitch is also being felt by the fans.

As social identity is linked with how we view ourselves, highly iden-

tified fans are heavily invested in whether their team wins or loses, and will therefore experience the most intense emotional responses to match outcomes. The success or failure of groups that we identify with is linked to our emotional state and although there are many benefits of being a sports fan, including enhanced social connections and improved well-being, there are also downsides when your team loses.

HEALTH EFFECTS

Fans of unsuccessful teams typically report higher levels of negative emotions and lower levels of positive emotions in comparison to fans of winning teams. There have even been effects on health, with a reduction in heart attack deaths after France won the World Cup in 1998.

So, next time you watch a penalty shootout, don’t just think about the players and whether the kicks are scored or saved, spare a thought for all the other fans and the emotions and reactions they are experiencing.

[the writer is Lecturer in Sport and Performance Psychology, Liverpool John Moores University]

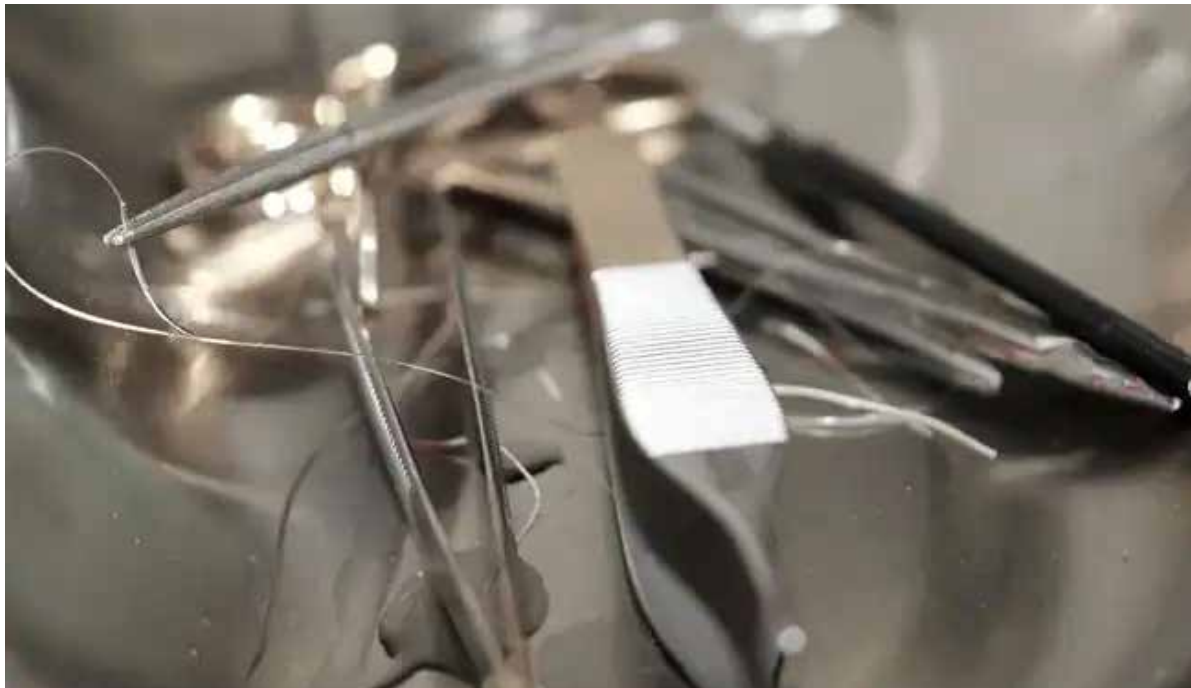
Another Assam kidney racket busted, high-profile names involved: Sources

GUWAHATI, 15 JUL [NDTV]: Another racket of touts luring economically weak people into selling their kidneys in Assam has been busted, the police said. The first such case in recent times was reported from Assam's Dharamtul. In the latest incident, a case has been filed into the organ trade racket in Dibrugarh. This one targeted tea garden workers.

The Dibrugarh Police said they started investigation into the kidney racket after a case was filed on Thursday.

"We have filed a case at Lahowal police station and started investigation. Right now we cannot say much about the case because it is at a preliminary stage," a senior police officer who asked not to be named told NDTV.

Kidney racketeers have been active in tea



garden areas of Upper Assam. The touts target workers by taking advantage of their poor economic condition.

In April, a tea garden worker, Ramu Karmakar, 45, of Singlijan tea estate in Di-

brugarh, sold one of his kidneys to an agent for 3.5 lakh.

"The poor tea garden workers are targeted by the kidney racketeers or agents who are closely monitoring them and collect details. Then they offer

them money and convince them to sell kidneys. It's an organised crime and many high-profile names are associated with the racket," the police officer said.

The Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha, the larg-

est body of tea garden workers, has formed a committee to investigate the matter. The team will visit the tea gardens and try to unearth the illegal racket, sources in the tea workers' body said.

Assam tea workers to be included in rural job guarantee scheme



GUWAHATI, 15 JUL [NDTV]: In a major decision that will benefit its largest vote bank, Assam's ruling BJP will include tea garden workers within MGNREGA, or the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. This is to help them in the winter, when jobs are scarce and they are forced to become migrant workers.

On Wednesday, during the the Assam cabinet's weekly meeting, it was decided that tea plantation workers would be offered jobs building roads, digging community ponds or planting trees.

The state has over 10 lakh tea garden workers in the organised sector alone.

They work on the around 850 big estates spread across the tea manufacturing belt along the Brahmaputra Valley in the Upper Assam dis-

trict, and certain parts of the Barak Valley.

Tea estates in these regions produce roughly 55 per cent of the country's total output.

The workers are a key vote base in at least 30 constituencies in Upper Assam.

Ahead of the April-May Assembly election, both the BJP and the Congress tried to win over this section by promising a hike in wages; the Congress offered to do so by ₹ 350 in daily pay and the BJP by ₹ 1,000 per month.

The BJP offer won out, with the party claiming several seats in Upper Assam and the retaining power in the state, despite losing some ground in other parts of the state.

The BJP and its allies won 75 of the 126 seats on offer (three down from 2016) and the Congress and its allies improved by eight to finish

with 50 seats.

In May, after the election results were announced and Himanta Biswa Sarma was sworn in as Chief Minister, the state was forced to withdraw a ₹ 50 hike in daily wages after tea plantation owners approached the Gauhati High Court.

The state, instead, set up a committee to fix the minimum wage.

Prior to the ₹ 50 per day hike, the minimum wage was ₹ 167 per day.

Other decisions taken by the cabinet on Wednesday included use of funds received under the 15th Finance Commission for renovation of schools and parks in villages.

The cabinet also declared the Golaghat and Sarupathar Revenue Circles as drought hit.

Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Jogen Mohan, Irrigation Minister Ashok Singhal

and Finance Minister Ajanta Neog will travel to assess the situation and release compensation.

It was also decided to merge the Guwahati Development Department and Urban Development Department, and rename it as the Housing and Urban Affairs Department.

The General Administration Department and the Secretariat Administration Department will also be merged, and renamed as the General Administration Department.

The Information and Public Relations Department will be allowed to directly approve necessary payments against advertising dues to print and electronic media houses.

The present residence of the Chief Justice of Assam is to be declared a 'heritage building', and preservation measures are to be taken.

HC directs Nagaland govt to reopen anganwadis

KOHIMA, JUL 15 (PTI): The Kohima Bench of the Gauhati High Court directed the Nagaland government to reopen the anganwadi centres in the state.

Hearing a public interest litigation, the bench of Justice Songkhupchung Serto and Justice S Hukato Swu gave the directions on Wednesday.

On behalf of the petitioner, Advocate Neiteo Koza submitted that lactating mothers and children were deprived of their required nutrition

due to the closure of the anganwadis. In view of the pandemic, the economically-disadvantaged section of the society has even more need for nutrition supplement to build their immune system against COVID-19 and thus the state government should reopen the anganwadi centres, she said.

The court observed, "It is common knowledge that the poor has been hit the hardest during this pandemic and they are in need of every help that can be provided. Therefore, it should be

the endeavor of everyone responsible to make such services or benefits available at their door steps."

The court directed the state government and the departments of Social Welfare, and Food & Civil Supplies to reopen the anganwadi centres and provide benefits to the people as per their entitlements.

Fixing the next date of hearing on July 28, the court asked the government respondents to file an affidavit of compliance, and response to the petition.

Bangkok's snakes keep catchers busy despite virus surge

BANGKOK (AP): Bangkok parkgoers looking for relief from renewed coronavirus restrictions got a slithering surprise Thursday when a python as long as two of the Thai capital's ubiquitous motorbikes was spotted in one of the city's most popular green spaces.

The reticulated python was only the latest big serpent to turn up in the dense center of Bangkok, where urban sprawl eating into natural habitats has been blamed for a rise in snake sightings in recent years.

This one was found in Benjasiri Park, which is flanked by towering hotels, apartment buildings and several high-end shopping malls now largely off limits due to restrictions put in place this week to stem a surge in virus cases.

The curbs have shuttered non-essential businesses and limited restaurants to takeout only, leaving parks among the few public places still open.

As parents pushed strollers and joggers rounded a nearby running path, firefighters called in to corral the snake started by trying to capture it with a ladder from the ground up.

The python plotted its escape by heading out on a limb, bound for a building on the edge of the park that houses the World Fellowship of Buddhists.

Other firefighters were waiting for it on the roof of the building. While one used a stick to grab the python by the neck, another man tried to cut the branch it was on. They soon coaxed it into a sack, tied up the bag, and carried it away.

Firefighter Somchai Yoosabai said the snake measured 3.5 meters (11.5 feet) long and weighed about 35 kilograms (77 pounds).

Bangkok firefighters typically get thousands of snake-removal calls each year. Yoosabai said his department alone has caught a snake or two a day during the current rainy season, mostly in neighborhoods or houses with pets.

As coronavirus cases rise, so do the risks.

"If any houses ... have COVID-19 cases, we have to go to catch the snakes anyway," he said. "Plus, wherever we go to catch a snake, the crowd is always there. We cannot avoid that."

Thailand reported 9,186 new virus cases, including a record high 98 deaths, on Thursday.

3 arrested with huge quantity of explosives near Kolkata

KOLKATA, JUL 15 (PTI): Three persons were arrested with a huge quantity of explosives and ammunition in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, police said on Thursday.

Acting on a tip-off, the Special Task Force (STF) of the West Bengal Police made the arrests on Wednesday from Shasan, around 30 km from Kolkata, they said.

Ten kg explosives, 20 rounds of ammunition and Rs 40,000 in cash were seized, a senior po-



lice officer said.

"We are grilling them to find out their plan and for whom they were working. We are also trying to ascertain whether they have links to any interstate or international

terror groups," the officer said.

The investigators are also trying to find whether they are connected to the JMB terrorists arrested in Kolkata on Sunday, he added.

3 new COVID-19 cases in Andamans, tally rises to 7,499

PORT BLAIR, JUL 15 (PTI): Andaman and Nicobar Islands COVID-19 tally rose to 7,499 as three more persons tested positive for the infection, a health department official said on Thursday.

All the three cases were airport arrival, the official said.

Passengers arriving by flight have to undergo mandatory RT-PCR test

before they are allowed entry into the islands, he said. The COVID-19 death toll in the archipelago remained at 129 as no fresh fatality due to the contagion was reported in the last 24 hours, the official said.

The union territory now has 11 active COVID-19 cases and all the patients are in the South Andaman district while

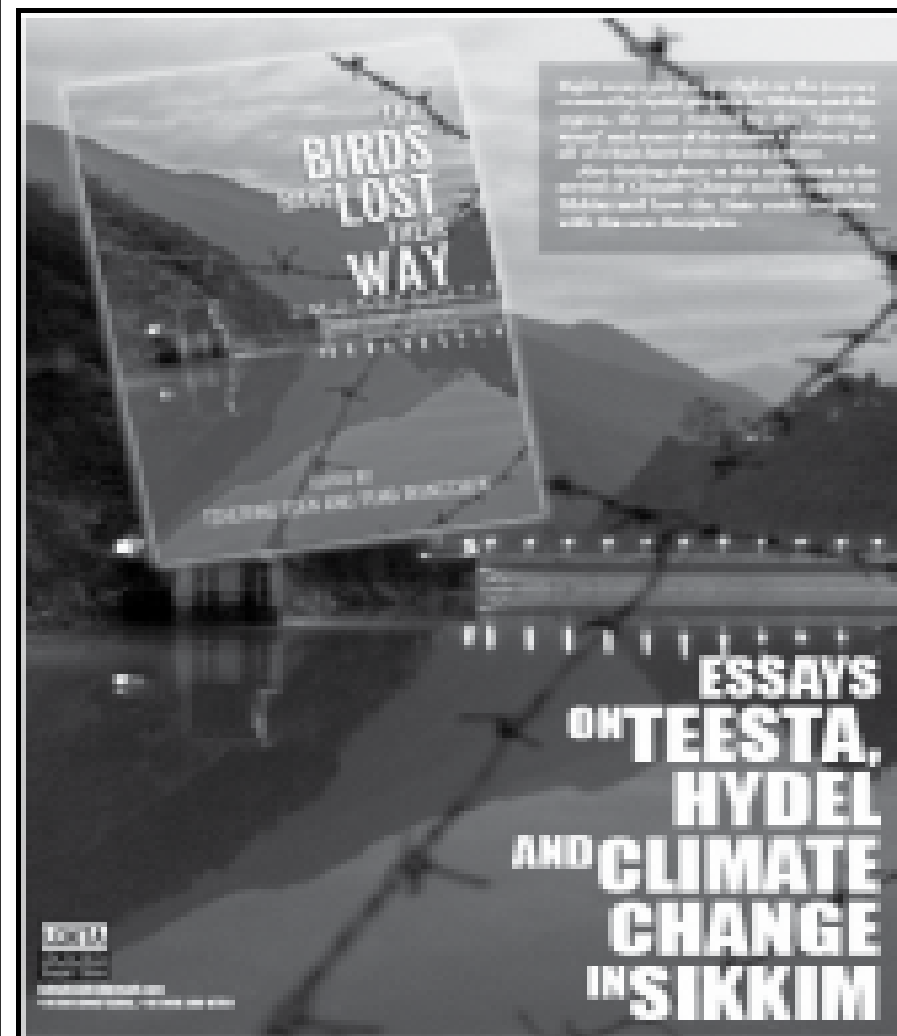
the other two districts - North and Middle Andaman and Nicobar - are now COVID-19 free.

One more patient recovered from COVID-19 in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of recoveries to 7,359, he said.

The Andaman and Nicobar administration has so far tested 4,21,940 samples for COVID-19 and the cumulative test

positivity rate is 1.78 per cent, the official added.

A total of 2,44,129 people have been inoculated so far, of which 1,70,537 people have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine and 73,592 people have received both doses of the vaccine, he said, adding that the union territory has a total population of 4 lakh people.



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Com

Middleton sends Bucks past Suns to tie NBA Finals at 2-2

MILWAUKEE (AP): Khris Middleton is an All-Star with unwavering confidence in his shot, always believing that no matter how poorly he starts that he can turn things around.

“Khris has no fear and he never has,” Milwaukee guard Jrue Holiday said.

Middleton’s big shots — and throw in Giannis Antetokounmpo’s big block — may have turned around the course of these NBA Finals.

Middleton scored 40 points, including 10 straight for the Bucks down the stretch to send them past the Phoenix Suns, 109-103 on Wednesday night to tie the series 2-2.

“We wanted this bad and the team showed it tonight,” Antetokounmpo said.

Middleton’s hot hand and a big block from Antetokounmpo gave the Bucks their second straight victory in the first close game of the series.

Antetokounmpo had 26 points, 14 rebounds and eight assists. His streak of 40-point games ended at two but the only number that matters for the Bucks is on the series scoreboard.

Devin Booker scored 42 points for the Suns, but his foul trouble cost them a chance to build a big lead in the second half. Chris Paul struggled through a 5-for-13 night, finishing with 10 points and five turnovers.

Game 5 is Saturday night in Phoenix.

“This is a tough one but we’ve got to bounce back,” Paul said. “That’s why we fought all season to get home court.”

Phoenix led by two with 2 1/2 minutes left before Middleton made the next two baskets to



give Milwaukee a 101-99 edge with 1:28 to play. It appeared the Suns would tie it with a lob pass to center Deandre Ayton but Antetokounmpo swooped in to block it, flexing his muscles to the crowd behind the basket as the Bucks broke the other way on the fast break.

“That’s an NBA Finals special moment right there, and we’re going to need more of them,” Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said.

Middleton missed a couple of jumpers but Paul lost the ball after the second one when he slipped and fell down while dribbling. That sent Middleton off for a layup and he followed with four free throws to make it 107-101.

“Nobody caved,” Middleton said. “We stayed with it.”

Brook Lopez had 14 points for the Bucks and Holiday added 13 points, seven rebounds and seven assists. He shot only 4 for 20, but his defense helped knock Paul off his

game.

Before Middleton’s run, it appeared it was going to be Booker’s night. He bounced back in a big way from a 3-for-14 night in Game 3 with his third 40-point game of this postseason.

But he had to spend portions of the third and fourth quarters on the bench after picking up fouls and his teammates couldn’t handle things without him.

With the leaders of their only title team in the arena, the Bucks improved to 9-1 at home in the playoffs. They are trying to overcome a 2-0 deficit for the second time in this postseason.

The Suns never got more than two wins in their two previous trips to the NBA Finals but it seemed they were finally headed there Wednesday. Booker had a big finish to the third quarter to send them to the fourth leading 82-76, but he picked up his fifth foul barely a minute into the period and sat for about five minutes.

The Bucks trimmed only three points off the lead before he returned midway through the fourth, but Middleton made sure they surged ahead when it mattered.

“When you have that kind of lead in the fourth, if we can just hold on to the ball and get good possessions, you feel like you can at least hold it there,” Suns coach Monty Williams said.

Antetokounmpo had dominated the previous game with his offense, but the 2020 Defensive Player of the Year made his biggest mark on this game on the other end of the floor.

Perhaps sensing the pressure, both teams fumbled the ball around in the early going, diving on the floor in desperate attempts to save it. The Bucks turned what looked like lost possessions into baskets that way in the first quarter, giving them a boost while their outside shooting was off.

The Bucks, who had a big second quarter in

Game 3, had another nice stretch midway through this one with an 8-0 run. That gave them a four-point lead and the margin stayed right around there, with the teams trading the lead, until Middleton’s 3-pointer made it 52-all at the break.

TIP-INS
Suns: Booker has 542 points, most ever for a player in his first postseason. Rick Barry scored 521 in 1967. ... Jae Crowder scored 15 points.

Bucks: Milwaukee shot just 7 for 29 (24%) from 3-point range. ... Pat Connaughton had 11 points and nine rebounds.

BEST OF THE BUCKS
Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Oscar Robertson sat next to each other and were given a loud ovation when shown during the first half. Bob Dandridge and Jon McGlocklin were the other members of the Bucks’ only NBA championship team who were at the game.

2 runners dropped from Kenya Olympic team over doping tests

NAIROBI, KENYA (AP): Kenya was forced to drop two runners from its Olympic team just over a week before the Tokyo Games because they haven’t taken the required number of out-of-competition doping tests, an official said on Thursday.

That has given 1,500-meter world champion Timothy Cheruiyot a last-minute place on the squad.

Kenya also hasn’t decided if steeplechase world and Olympic champion Conseslus Kipruto will be on the team and able defend his title in Tokyo.

Kipruto dropped out of the race at the national trials last month after two laps and is out of shape, while he is also facing a criminal case in Kenya having been charged last year with statutory rape. He is released on bail.

Kenyan team officials will meet to make a late decision on Kipruto’s inclusion.

Cheruiyot is now a strong contender for gold in the 1,500 in Tokyo after setting the

world-leading time this year and winning back-to-back Diamond League titles in Stockholm and Monaco this month. He wasn’t initially on the Kenya team after finishing fourth at the trials.

Cheruiyot will replace 18-year-old KamarEtiang, who surprised to finish second at the trials in a personal-best time.

But Etiang hasn’t met doping regulations that require Kenyan athletes to take at least three out-of-competition tests within 10 months of a major championship. The tests have to be at least three weeks apart. Those rules are enforced on Kenya because the country is considered high risk by the World Anti-Doping Agency after a large number of doping cases in recent years.

“It’s really unfortunate that Etiang had to be dropped,” Kenya Olympic team general manager Barnaba Korir said. “We have explained this to the athlete and he has understood the situation we are in.”

Another runner, United States-based 400-meter hurdler MoitalelM-

pokeNaadokila, was also taken off the team because he hasn’t met the doping test requirements.

This year, Kenya has largely avoided the many doping scandals that marred its buildup to the last Olympics in Rio de Janeiro and placed severe scrutiny on the country’s celebrated distance runners.

Race walkers Samuel Gathimba and Emily Ngii also won’t be going to Tokyo after their qualifying times at the Kenyan trials weren’t certified because there wasn’t a World Athletics official from outside the country present, Korir said.

He said the Kenyan team tried to arrange for Gathimba and Ngii to compete at an event in Spain to qualify but weren’t able to arrange that in time because of COVID-19 travel restrictions.

Kenyan newspaper the Daily Nation reported that Gathimba and Ngii have refused to leave the Kenyan team base in Nairobi until the reasons for their exclusion are explained to them.

Britain women’s soccer team will take a knee at Olympics



LONDON (AP): The British women’s soccer team plan to take a knee before kickoff at the Tokyo Olympics.

The players have been performing the anti-racism stance over the last year and the IOC relaxed its rules this month to allow Olympic athletes to make gestures of protest in their field of play at the Tokyo Games.

“The players and staff have been taking the knee at club and international level for over a year now,” Britain coach Hege Riise said, “and we

were all united in our decision to continue doing whatever we can to raise awareness of racism and discrimination in all its forms, standing in unity and solidarity with all those whose lives are affected.”

The Olympics start next week with Britain playing host Japan, Canada and Chile in the group stage.

“We are clear that taking the knee is an important symbol of peaceful protest against discrimination, injustice and inequality in society

and we are glad that the IOC have acknowledged the importance of this form of freedom of expression,” Riise said.

We will do so with the utmost respect for our fellow competitors, officials and the IOC, with due regard for the ideals that lie at the heart of the Olympic movement.”

The four nations that form Britain usually play soccer separately but are allowed to compete at the Olympics, qualifying through England’s run to the 2019 Women’s World Cup final.

Lahiri has lot to play for at Barbasol Championship

NICHOLASVILLE (US), JUL 15 (PTI): Indian golfer Anirban Lahiri will look to put up a good show at this week’s Barbasol Championship to boost his confidence ahead of the Tokyo Games and also keep his hopes alive for FedExCup Playoffs and Korn Ferry Tour Finals.

Lahiri, who is set to play his second Olympics after Rio Games, will tee off in the afternoon alongside Seamus Power and Bo Hoag in the USD 3,500,000 tournament, an event that is scheduled opposite the Major, The Open, in UK.

Lahiri is not the only Indian in the field, which also includes Arjun Atwal, and the Indo-Swede Daniel Chopra.

Atwal plays with Beau Hossler and Cameron Percy, while Chopra tees up with John Senden and Bronson Brugnoon at the Keene Trace Golf Club.

Lahiri, who is 127th on the FedEx Cup standings, needs to get back to Top-125 to get into the Play-offs (August 19-September 5), a series of three events that will determine the season champion on the



PGA Tour. The additional events on the PGA Tour, scheduled in the same week as a Major or a WGC, offer 300 FedExCup points to its winner besides a two-year membership exemption and spots in the next editions of THE PLAYERS Championship, the PGA Championship among others.

The Barbasol comes in the closing stages of the regular season.

After this week’s doubleheader that includes The Open Championship, only four events will remain to determine the field for the Playoffs and the Korn Ferry Tour Finals, which comprise of three events to be held in next two months.

Lahiri, who will not be playing the 3M Open (July

22-25), will have only two more events the Barracuda Championship (August 5-8) opposite the WGC-St Jude and the Wyndham Championship (August 11-15). He needs to ensure a good finish this week and then rush back from Japan to play Barracuda, which he has said he may, and then plays the final event of the regular season at Wyndham.

The highest ranked in the OWGR, who did not get into the Open, is CharlSchwartzel, and he will play the Barbasol Championship.

Other leading contenders could be Luke List, who was T-4 at John Deere and Chesson Hadley, who was T-2 at Palmetto at Congaree a month ago.

IOC guidelines for medal ceremony: Participants to wear mask all times, no group photo on podium

TOKYO, JUL 15 (PTI): Athletes, presenters and volunteers will not pose for group photographs and wear masks on the podium during Tokyo Olympics medal ceremonies, the International Olympic committee said on Thursday, announcing a series of health-safety measures keeping in mind the COVID-19 pandemic.

That athletes and medal presenters would be required to wear masks was made clear in the guidelines released in June.

According to the new guidelines, additional podium modules will be placed between gold and silver medallists and gold and bronze medallists to allow for social distancing.

“All the presenters will be vaccinated, and there will be only one IOC member and one In-

ternational Federation representative at each event.”

“A series of changes have been approved in order to respect the Tokyo 2020 health measures, with the aim of making the experience safe for everyone involved while also preserving the essence of this unique moment, when Olympians savour and celebrate the pinnacle of their sports career,” IOC said in a statement.

The IOC said that the athletes, medal presenters and volunteers “will be clearly and thoroughly briefed before the ceremonies on the guidelines they will need to follow.”

IOC president Thomas Bach had on Wednesday said that athletes at the Tokyo Olympics will have to put their medals around their necks themselves to protect against spreading the virus.

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China’s economic growth slows to still-robust 7.9%

BEIJING (AP): China’s economic growth slowed to a still-strong 7.9% over a year earlier in the three months ending in June as a rebound from the coronavirus leveled off.

As expected, the growth reported Thursday fell from the previous quarter’s explosive 18.3%, which was magnified by comparison with early 2020, when the world’s second-largest economy closed factories, stores and offices to fight the coronavirus. China led a global recovery after the ruling Communist Party declared the disease under control last March and reopened most industries.

The United States and other major economies are bouncing back, but some are hampered by the spread of new virus variants. The rapid U.S. recovery has led the Federal Reserve to suggest it might start unwinding its stimulus earlier than planned, late next year instead of in 2023.

China’s growth in the April-June quarter over the previous three months, the way other major economies report results, was 1.3%, reflecting a return to normal for factory activity and consumer spending as government stimulus and easy credit wind down. That was up from the January-March period’s 0.6% expansion over the final three months of 2020 but still was among the past decade’s weakest quarters.

“Overall, China’s economy looks to be on track for recovery,” said Chaoping Zhu of JP Morgan Asset Management in a report. The latest data, Zhu said, suggest the economy “has already peaked and is easing back to its long-term average



growth rate.”

China’s outlook is clouded by a lingering trade war with Washington over Beijing’s industrial development tactics. President Joe Biden has said he wants better ties with Beijing but has yet to say whether he will roll back tariff hikes imposed by his predecessor, Donald Trump.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen called this week for a “unified front” with Europe against China’s “unfair economic practices.” Biden has expanded the list of Chinese companies Americans are barred from investing in due to possible military connections.

Still, Chinese manufacturing, auto sales and consumer spending have recovered to above pre-pandemic levels.

Exporters benefited from their relatively early return to work while foreign com-

petitors were hampered by anti-disease controls. Exports surged 32.2% in June over a year earlier, though a government spokesman warned growth might weaken due to uncertain global conditions.

The International Monetary Fund and private sector forecasters expect economic growth this year of about 8% but say that should decline in 2022. The government is in the midst of a marathon effort to steer China to slower, more sustainable growth based on domestic consumption instead of exports and investment.

“With output already above its pre-virus trend, the economy is struggling to gain ground at its usual pace,” Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics said in a report. “Headwinds to growth are likely to intensify during the second half of the year.” China’s economy

shrank by 6.8% in last year’s first quarter, the worst performance since at least the mid-1960s. Activity started to recover in the second quarter, when the economy expanded by 3.2% over a year earlier. That accelerated to 4.9% in the third quarter and 6.5% in the final three months of the year. For the full year, growth was 2.3%, while the U.S., European and Japanese economies contracted.

In an apparent effort to reassure the public and financial markets, the government took the unusual step Thursday of reporting average growth in the second quarter and the same period of 2020 was 5.5%, up from 5.0% for the first quarters of the two years.

World markets took the update in stride. Benchmarks rose in Hong Kong and Shanghai, while U.S. futures were

marginally lower.

Beijing is in the midst of dual campaigns to step up oversight of a fledgling industry of online finance competitors such as tycoon Jack Ma’s Ant Group and to reduce risks to the financial system by forcing the real estate industry to cut its debt levels.

“Both will put downward pressure on growth in the short term,” Iris Pang of ING said in a report.

Retail spending has revived more slowly than manufacturing, prompting concern that might weigh on the recovery. That led Beijing to inject extra money last week into the pool available for lending to shore up business and consumer activity. But the central bank and economic planners say they are sticking to plans that call for a return to normal policy.

Retail sales in June rose 12.1%. That was down from 13.9% for the full quarter and well below the 33.9% surge in the January-March period.

“Domestic demand remained muted,” Louis Kuijs of Oxford Economics said in a report.

Factory output rose 8.3% in June over a year ago and was up 0.6% from the previous month.

Manufacturers face hurdles including shortages of processing chips.

Auto production fell 13.7% in June from a year earlier and sales fell 11.1% to 1.6 million, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers. It blamed “insufficient supply of chips.”

Investment in factories, real estate and other fixed assets rose 12.6% in the first half but was up only 0.4% in June over the previous month.

19 dead, dozens missing in Germany floods; 2 die in Belgium

BERLIN (AP) — At least 19 people have died and dozens of people are missing in Germany after heavy flooding turned streams and streets into raging torrents, sweeping away cars and causing some buildings to collapse.

Authorities in the western county of Euskirchen said Thursday that eight deaths had been reported there in connection with the floods. Rescue operations were hampered by the fact that phone and internet connections were down in part of the region, which is southwest of Cologne.

Police in the western city of Koblenz said four people had died in Ahrweiler county, and about 50 were trapped on the roofs of their houses awaiting rescue.

Six houses had collapsed overnight in the village of Schuld. “Many people have been reported missing to us,” police said.

Schuld is located in the Eifel, a volcanic region of rolling hills and small valleys southwest of Cologne.

The full extent of the damage in the region was still unclear after many villages were cut off by floodwater and landslides that made roads impassable. Videos posted on social media showed cars floating down streets and houses partly collapsed in some places.

Authorities have declared an emergency in the region after days of heavy rainfall that also affected large parts of western and central Germany, as well as neighboring countries, causing widespread damage.

Police said four people died in separate incidents after their basements were flooded in Cologne, Kamen and Wuppertal, where authorities warned that a dam threatened to burst.

Authorities in the Rhine-Sieg county south of Cologne ordered the evacuation of several villages below the Steinbachthal reservoir amid fears the dam there could also break.

A fireman drowned Wednesday during rescue work in the western German town of Altena and another collapsed during rescue operations at a power plant in Werdohl-Elverlingsen. One man was missing in the eastern town of Jöhstadt after disappearing while trying to secure his property from rising waters, authorities said.

Rail connections were suspended in large parts of North-Rhine Westphalia, Germany’s most populous state. Governor Armin Laschet, who is running to succeed Angela Merkel as chancellor in this fall’s German election, was expected to visit the flood-hit city of Hagen later Thursday.

German weather service DWD predicted the rainfall would ease Thursday. Relentless rains through the night worsened the flooding conditions in eastern Belgium, where one person was reported drowned and at least another was missing. Some towns saw water levels rise to unprecedented levels and had their centers turned into gushing rivers.

Major highways were inundated and in the south and east of the nation, the railway service said all traffic was stopped, adding that “alternative transport is highly unlikely.”

IOC’s Bach brings attention to Hiroshima -- some unwanted

TOKYO (AP): Many residents of Hiroshima welcome attention from abroad, which IOC President Thomas Bach will bring when he visits on Friday. The western Japanese city has been in the forefront of the world peace movement and a campaigner for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

But Bach will also bring political baggage — as will his vice president John Coates when he visits Nagasaki the same day — that is largely unwelcome in two cities viewed as sacred by many Japanese.

Bach and Coates are using the backdrop of the cities, hit with atomic bombs by the United States in 1945, to promote the first day of the so-called Olympic Truce, a tradition from ancient Greece that was revived by a United Nations resolution in 1993. They will also be signaling the start of the Tokyo Olympics in one week. The Games are going ahead during the pandemic despite persistent opposition in Japan from the general public and the medical community.

“Many Japanese believe that that IOC strictly forced Japan to have the Olympics this year,” Yasushi Asako, a political scientist at Waseda University, wrote in an email to The Associated Press. “Many Japanese believe that it is their (IOC’s) fault for having such an international event during the pandemic, and there is a high possibility that the pandemic becomes more severe after the Olympics.”

Some of those fears were reinforced on Thursday when Tokyo reported 1,308 new COVID-19 cases, up from



896 a week ago. It was the 26th straight day of cases being higher than a week previous.

Thursday’s cases were the highest reported since Jan. 21. Japan has attributed 15,000 deaths to COVID-19, good by world standards but worse than many Asian neighbors.

Bach will be welcomed on Friday by Hiroshima Governor Hidehiko Yuzaki and is expected to place a wreath at the Peace Memorial Park, visit the Peace Memorial Museum and view the Atomic Bomb Dome. He will not be welcome by everyone. Shuichi Adachi, a former Hiroshima bar association head, submitted a strong statement this week to Yuzaki and Hiroshima Mayor Kazumi Matsui opposing Bach’s visit. It was written on behalf of 11 anti-Olympic and pacifist groups.

“President Bach using the image of ‘a peaceful world without nuclear weapons’ only to justify holding of the Olympics by force under the pandemic is a blasphemy to atomic bombing survivors,” the group said in a statement. “An act like this does nothing but do harm to the global nuclear weapons ban movement.”

They also noted the poor timing. The date — Friday, July 16 — marks exactly 76 years since the Trinity nuclear test took place in New Mexico that led to the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki just weeks later.

A separate group has also launched an online petition opposing Bach’s visit. The petition, which has garnered almost 70,000 signatures, is addressed to the government of Japan, the Japanese Olympic Committee, and the mayor and governor of Hiroshima.

In ordinary times, the visits — largely photo ops — would draw little attention were it not for the pandemic and the Olympics. Depending on the poll and how the question is phrased, a majority of Japanese oppose holding the Olympics.

Bach defended the visit in a briefing on Wednesday, saying it was focused

only on marking the first day of the Olympic Truce. He termed it an IOC offer of peace “and nothing else.”

“This is the message we are going to send in the city of peace — of Hiroshima,” Bach said. “This will have nothing to do with politics. We will not politicize this visit in any way.”

Reports out of Hiroshima say the security will be similar to what was in place for President Barack Obama’s visit in 2016.

The official cost of the Tokyo Olympics is \$15.4 billion, though a government audit suggests it is much more. The IOC has a large financial stake in the Olympics going ahead since almost 75% of its income is from selling broadcast rights.

Dr. Ran Zwigenberg, a specialist in the history of Hiroshima at Penn State University, noted that tying the games to the bombed city was not a problem at the 1964 Olympics. A 19-year man named Yoshinori Sakai — born on Aug. 6, 1945, in Hiroshima, the day the atomic bomb was dropped on the city — ignited the cauldron in the national stadium to open the 1964 Olympics. The image of him doing it is famous.

“The problem is the controversy surrounding the Olympics, and it’s being very politicized,” Zwigenberg told AP in an interview in Japan where he is doing research. “And that’s something that a lot of people in Hiroshima don’t like. They don’t like to have the image of their city wedded to this kind of controversial visit.”

Zwigenberg has written several books on Japanese history, including one focused on Hiroshima — “Hiroshima: The Origins of Global Memory Culture.”

“I’m generalizing here, but the people in Nagasaki and Hiroshima don’t like to have their name or image used by outside bodies, especially when it’s controversial,” he added.

CORONAVIRUS PRECAUTIONS & SAFETY TIPS

DON'T LOWER THE GUARD

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

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

WEAR A MASK
Always wear a mask to prevent droplets from going outside

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

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

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

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

COVER YOUR MOUTH & NOSE WHILE SNEEZING, OR COUGHING
Before stepping outside, make sure to carry a handkerchief or a packet of tissues.

FOLLOW PRECAUTIONS BEFORE STEPPING OUT
Carry your sanitizer, water bottle and, most importantly, avoid crowded areas.

CHECK YOUR TEMPERATURE
Monitor your temperature on regular basis.

Britney Spears' new attorney says father must step aside

LOS ANGELES (AP): A judge allowed Britney Spears to hire an attorney of her choosing at a hearing Wednesday in which she broke down in tears after describing the "cruelty" of her conservatorship.

Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Brenda Penny approved Spears hiring former federal prosecutor Mathew Rosengart, who called on Spears' father to immediately resign as her conservator.

"The question remains, why is he involved," Rosengart said outside the courthouse. Britney Spears, taking part in the hearing by phone, told the judge she approved of Rosengart after several conversations with him. She then asked to address the court, but asked that the courtroom be cleared. As Rosengart began to argue for a private hearing, Spears interrupted him to say "I can talk with it open."

"My dad needs to be removed today," she said, adding that she would like to see him charged with abusing his position.

She spoke so rapidly she was at times difficult for the court reporter and the dozens of media members in the courtroom to understand. She said she wanted the conservatorship to end immediately but not if it required going through any more "stupid" evaluations. She said she did not want another opportunity for "people to question my intelligence for the millionth time."

She described being denied things as basic as coffee, her driver's license and her "hair vitamins" by the conservatorship.

"If this is not abuse, I don't know what is," Spears said. She recalled that "I thought they were trying to kill me" in the early years of the conservatorship as she was being overworked and constantly examined.

She began to sob as she talked about taking comfort in a therapy dog when she felt abandoned by her family.

James Spears would not be stepping down as Rosengart challenged, his attorney Vivian Thoreen said in court, adding that he has only ever had his daughter's best interests in mind.

Thoreen said Britney Spears had many inaccurate beliefs, among them that "her father is responsible for all the bad things that have happened to her."

"Whether it's misinformation, lack of correction, or being wrongly advised, I don't know," Thoreen said.

Thoreen emphasized that for nearly two years James Spears has had control only over his daughter's money, ceding power over her life choices to a court-appointed professional, Jodi Montgomery.

Thoreen argued that an evidentiary hearing was necessary to look into the allegations that Britney Spears made at the June 23 hearing, including that she was being forced to take medications and use an intra-uterine device for birth control.

Thoreen said she found it odd Britney Spears would describe those circumstances, which the pop star called "abusive," then approve of Montgomery continuing



in her role as overseer. Montgomery's lawyer, Lauriann Wright, responded that the last thing Britney Spears needed was to be put on the stand and cross-examined over the truth of what she said during her emotional testimony.

"I don't think it's a secret that we're dealing with someone with mental illness," Wright said.

Wright added that it's been "strongly recommended by her medical team that her father Mr. Spears needs to be off the

conservatorship." Britney Spears has been under court supervision since February 2008. She was in the midst of a public meltdown at the time and her family sought the conservatorship for her protection. She has had throughout the proceedings a court-appointed attorney to represent her interests, Samuel Ingham III, but he resigned after the dramatic hearing three weeks ago in which the pop star told Penny: "I just want my life back."

Fans from the #FreeBritney movement

outside the courthouse cheered the decision to appoint Rosengart, then cheered Rosengart himself when he walked out.

In court, he called into question whether the conservatorship should ever have been put into place, and said he and a team of attorneys from his firm would be taking a close look at the details of the arrangement.

"This is not working," Rosengart said. "We know that." Florida congressman Matt Gaetz made a brief appearance addressing the Spears supporters outside the downtown Los Angeles courthouse, at one point shouting "Free Britney!"

In Washington, D.C., a group of Spears supporters demonstrated on the National Mall in support of the singer.

The case had for several years operated with little drama, though questions about how its length and the singer's feelings about the proceedings, arose in recent years. That has culminated into intense public scrutiny of the court proceedings, which have been conducted largely in secret due to medical and private information about the singer and her condition.

There has also been focus on the complex network of lawyers and others involved in the conservatorship. Penny again gave little indication of what moves she'll make next, scheduling another hearing for late September and expressing hope that the warring factions will find common ground for Britney Spears' sake.

Olivia Rodrigo boosts White House youth vaccine push

WASHINGTON (AP): Olivia Rodrigo wants people to know that the COVID-19 vaccines are "good 4 u." The 18-year-old pop star and internet sensation was at the White House on Wednesday to meet with President Joe Biden and Dr. Anthony Fauci as part of the administration's efforts to encourage younger Americans to roll up their sleeves and get a coronavirus shot.

Rodrigo, who rose to fame as a Disney Channel star, was set to tape a joint social media message with the president and the nation's top infectious disease expert on Wednesday afternoon. She also made an appearance at the start of the daily White House press briefing "to help spread the message of the importance of youth vaccination."

"It's important to have conversations with friends and family members encouraging all communities to get vaccinated," she said. She encouraged people to use <https://vaccines.gov> to find their nearest vaccination clinic and access information about the vaccines.

Rodrigo's visit comes as the Biden administration is focusing its efforts on turning out people ages 12 to 27 to get a shot. While these younger Americans are at lower risk of serious outcomes or death from the coronavirus, the White House says the only way to be completely safe — and to protect their families — is to get a shot.

The character comes with a lot of responsibility: Kriti on playing Sita in 'Adipurush'



MUMBAI, JUL 15 (PTI): Actor Kriti Sanon, who is set to star in the multi-lingual period saga "Adipurush", says playing the iconic character of goddess Sita comes with a lot of responsibility, something the team of the film is aware of. Directed by Om Raut, the film is an on-screen adaptation of the Hindu epic Ramayana and features Prabhas as Lord Ram and Saif Ali Khan in the role of Lankesh.

Lately, several artistes have faced online trolling and calls for boycott for their projects on social media with users alleging the makers of hurting their religious sentiments be it the title change of Akshay Kumar's film from "Laxmi Bomb" to "Laxmii" or the controversy around a scene in web series "Tandav".

"Adipurush" star Saif had also apologised for his comments on the film in an interview.

Sanon, however, says the team of "Adipurush" understands the importance of depicting the story with sensitivity.

"We have to obviously stay within a certain boundary and realise the weightage and the responsibility that come with the character that you are playing. "Thankfully, I am in the hands of a brilliant director, someone who has done all the research on the subject

and on all characters," Sanon told PTI. The 30-year-old actor said Raut, who also directed the 2020 period blockbuster "Tanhaji", is an "extremely aware" filmmaker.

"I know he has written the film and the character so beautifully. He guides everyone so well, that I don't see anything going wrong. When you do something with all purity and honesty, it shows on screen. I hope people feel it has been done well," she said.

The film, produced by Bhushan Kumar's T-Series, went on floors earlier this year. Sanon, who has shot considerable portions for the film, said it was a delight to work with Raut, Prabhas and Khan- all her first time collaborators. "Everyone is amazing, warm and so correct for the part. I shot with Prabhas at the beginning of my schedule. My next schedule was with Saif. Both are quite different personalities but extremely entertaining in their own way."

"Adipurush" is also Sanon's most VFX-heavy film till date and the actor said filming it with blue screen, chroma has been a "different experience."

The actor will be next seen in "Mimi", scheduled to be released on Jio Cinema and Netflix on July 30.



PRETTY IN PINK! The Selling Sunset star, Chrishell Stause looks fab in a pink dress with matching phone case in LA.

Aries:

Maybe you're not the victim in this story. Maybe things are happening for, and not to you. Recognise each experience you have attracted into your reality as a soul lesson. This will help you grow, transform, and move to the next level. The cards are also urging you to find a balance between 'doing' and 'being'. Allow things to flow into your life rather than chasing them. Surrendering is a beautiful feeling, my dear Aries.

Tip: You are not the victim in this story.

Taurus:

Taurus, it's time to get out of that funk in a systematic manner. But, we're not propagating the path of indulgence this time around. What we are proposing is the warrior's way of life, one that requires you to adopt discipline. Starting this week, consider waking up with the sun, practicing yoga (or any other form of bodywork that you resonate with deeply), and eating a wholesome breakfast before you get to work. Activating the flow of good prana through your energy channels will help restore balance on a mind, body, and soul level.

Tip: Work with your body in a systematic manner.

Gemini:

You are at a turning point, Gemini. Taking a step in the right direction will change the course of your life permanently. So, trust what your instincts are guiding you

towards (even if the course of action makes no sense on paper). Choosing the path less trodden will liberate you in more ways than one. Yes, you will be considered an outcast in some circles. Yes, some of your own people may label you in ways that make you uncomfortable. Make peace with the discomfort as you vow to honour your soul purpose.

Tip: It's time to strip away the illusions. It's time to let go of all that is false within and without.

Cancer:

Weekly reminder, Cancer: you "cannot" heal or fix anybody. You cannot do the work for them either. Accept where you are in your journey as you accept that they are in a different place. The experiences they have attracted are a part of their learnings, which in turn are enabling them to rise on a soul level. The best thing you can do at this point is practice detachment. That way you will be able to offer unconditional love and support without getting entangled.

Tip: Practice the art of detachment.

Leo:

It's one of those days, Leo. One of those days where everything and everybody seems to be working against you. One of those days when the further you move, the further the destination begins to feel. Accept where you are in your journey. Accept that the soul lessons you have

attracted are helping you transcend. Trust that no matter what your physical reality is showing you at this moment, you are closer to that big breakthrough moment than you have ever been.

Tip: It will all be worth it in the end.

Virgo:

You are where you need to be, Virgo, and you are meant to have the experiences you have called in at this moment. Experiences that are helping you break out of the cocoon and undergo the process of metamorphosis. So, get comfortable with the uncomfortable. Show up for what you believe in even when it's hard to. One day, you will look back at this as a defining moment in your life that set the stage for bigger and better things to make their way to you.

Tip: You are in the midst of a massive metamorphosis.

Libra:

The truth is, you cannot heal or fix anybody. This is a time of stripping away the false illusions and letting go of the outmoded beliefs. This is a time of redirecting your energy towards yourself and your own healing, minus the guilt that previously weighed you down. Remember, inner alignment is the key to returning to that state of balance. Tip: It's time to honour your own energy.

Scorpio:

Growth is seldom a linear process. It comes with its own

twists and turns. Twists and turns that take you to the dark places within your psyche and your soul. Dedicate yourself to the shadow work, Scorpio. Honour this as a time of plucking the weeds out of your garden. Know that you have the power to push through despite the discomfort, and that your guides are holding space for you to become the most magnificent version of yourself.

Tip: Get comfortable with the uncomfortable.

Sagittarius:

2 + 2 doesn't always equal 4. Sometimes it's 17. At other times, it's 22. Pay attention to how your logical mind is interfering with your intuitive processes. The truth is, you are having massive downloads at this moment, both in the form of words and images. It's a good idea to honour what Spirit is showing you and take a step in the right direction. Can you imagine what your life will look like six months from now if you decided to follow divine inspiration?

Tip: Trust the downloads and visuals you are receiving at the moment.

Capricorn:

When we first fall in love with somebody, it is the light aspects of their personality that encapture us. It is only when we get to know them intimately that the shadows reveal themselves. What do you do when you are confronted by the so-called darkness, Capricorn? What do

you do when your head starts interfering in matters of the heart? It's time to get some distance, beautiful. To accept where you are in your journey and to accept that they are in a different place. The gift of unconditional love and acceptance will help you make your way back to that beautiful place.

Tip: It's time to shift your perspective.

Aquarius:

If you feel like your mind is on overdrive and that you're being pulled in ten different directions, it's time to take a breather. It's time to come back to the present moment. Having a spiritual practice that grounds you will prove to be beneficial at a time like this, Aquarius. So will spending time in Mother Nature's company.

Tip: Practice grounding techniques that help you return to the present moment.

Pisces:

Healing is seldom a linear process. There are good days and bad days. And the bad days are usually followed by the good days. So, trust the light at the end of the tunnel, and let this light guide you forward. This is a time of healing, Pisces. A time of letting go of the past baggage and finding your freedom. Working with a mentor or guide that you trust could provide you with the perspective that is needed to start over.

Tip: Trust the healing process.