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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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**India records
less than
60,000 cases
after 81 days**

NEW DELHI, JUNE 20 (PTI):

India recorded less than 60,000 new coronavirus infections after 81 days taking the total tally of COVID-19 cases to 2,98,81,965, while the active cases further reduced to 7,29,243, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Sunday.

A total of 58,419 fresh infections were reported in a day. The death toll climbed to 3,86,713 with 1,576 fresh fatalities, the lowest in 63 days. The active cases further declined to 7,29,243 comprising 2.44 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate improved to 96.27 per cent, the data updated at 8 am showed. A net decline of 30,776 cases has been recorded in the COVID-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours. As many as 18,11,446 tests were conducted on Saturday taking the total cumulative tests conducted so far for detection of COVID-19 in the country to 39,10,19,083.

The daily positivity rate was recorded at 3.22 per cent. It has been less than 5 per cent for 13 consecutive days, the ministry said, adding the weekly positivity rate has declined to 3.43 per cent. Recoveries continue to outnumber daily new cases for the 38th consecutive day. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 2,87,66,009, while the case fatality rate stands at 1.29 per cent, the data stated.

Cumulative, 27,66,93,572 COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered so far. India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19. India crossed the grim milestone of 2 crore on May 4.

CM hails SiCA Stands by You initiative, assures cricketers govt will support their careers

GANGTOK, 20 JUN [IPR]: Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang attended the "SiCA Stands by You" programme, an initiative of the Sikkim Cricket Association to provide financial aid to players considering the current COVID-19 situation, at Mining Ground, East Sikkim.

In his address, the Chief Minister hailed the unique initiative by SiCA and acknowledged the concern of the association towards the players, especially during the time of the pandemic.

He stated that cricket has recently gained much prominence in the state and has been a great source of employment for the youths and has more potential going forward.

Going back to the days when the Chief Minister was the concerned Minister of Sports department, he reminisced about the days and informed about the struggles



to develop sports in the state and his personal interventions to provide recognition and platform for the youths during those days.

He added that his intentions remain the same and the government will do everything in its power to develop the field of sports in the state and

provide a platform for the upcoming generation.

He emphasized on developing proper infrastructure and facilities at various levels in the state to motivate and generate interest among the people especially the youths.

The Chief Minister encouraged the youth to be dedicated towards

their endeavours and assured of assistance from the association and the government to help them advance in their careers.

He mentioned that contrary to the previous government's philosophy, none of his family member is indulged in money-oriented lucrative activities, rather they are rendering a helping hand

and support to the ailing and poor people of Sikkim.

The Chief Minister affirmed to continue with the same intentions and aspirations and work towards the benefit of the entire Sikkimese people rather than personal gains and accolades.

During the programme various cat-

egory of Cricket players including senior players, U-16 and women's team were handed incentives as an aid for sustenance during the pandemic.

The Chief Minister also felicitated the Sikkim Cricket team who were Champions of U-16 Vijay Merchant Trophy, Zonal Champion 2019-

20 including players and staff.

Similarly, Sikkim Cricket Association contributed a sum of Rs 15 lakh to Chief Minister's Relief Fund to combat COVID-19 while various local clubs jointly contributed a sum of Rs 51,000 to the CMRF.

In this regard, the Chief Minister expressed his gratitude for their kind gesture and also informed that the CMRF is utilized with austerity and in a transparent way which can be verified by everyone if desired.

The event was also attended by Minister Kunga Nima Lepcha, Advisor IPR, Birendra Tamling, Secretary (Sports) Raju Basnet, Confidential Secretary to CM Bikash Basnet, President and members of Rangpo Nagar Panchayat, officials of East District Administration, President and members of SiCA, local gentry in addition to press and media were present on the occasion.

Chamling explains effigy-burning episode as "manifestation" of SKM leadership's "mentality"

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 JUN:

The effigy-burning incident at Namchi has been tagged as an "unfortunate event" and explained as an "external manifestation of the mentality of the SKM leadership," by Sikkim Democratic Front president Pawan Chamling in weekly Sunday post on Facebook today.

Condemning the incident in which Bhaichung Bhutia's effigy was burnt by a group claiming offence over his criticism of the SKM Government's plans to construct a 300-bed hospital on a football ground in Namchi, Mr Chamling alleged that this was a "well-orchestrated act executed on the behalf of the SKM party with the full blessing of the government."

He writes: "When somebody asks a tough question - don't think, don't engage intellectually - just threaten."

The ladies were used by the party leadership to execute the evil plan and the party withdrew from the act once completed, Mr Chamling is convinced.

"In exchange, the SKM government delayed the arrest, gave bail within minutes and will probably dismiss the case once the public interest dies down. If anyone is expecting better governance from this government, I am sorry, your expectation is going to be crushed again and again. Just keep watching. There is too much anger in the SKM party and it will one day burst to their own destruction," he goes on to write.

"Their press conferences and speeches are nothing but outbursts of anger, hatred and frustration," he adds.

Mr Chamling goes on to comment that his government also faced opposition not only from former CM, the late Nar Bahadur

Bhandari who staged a dharna in Delhi, but also from Bhaichung Bhutia who did the same in Delhi and others in the State, one of whom even conducted Mr Chamling's final rites.

No effigies were burnt at that time, he underlines.

As for Bhaichung's comments which attracted the opposition, Mr Chamling alleges that SKM's major decisions are made by some anti-Sikkim, anti-people and anti-peace elements who are probably based outside Sikkim.

He stands by Bhaichung's opinion on the matter.

The 300-bed hospital at Namchi was planned, designed and approved by the SDF Government, he goes on to contend, as part of a statewide upgradation of district hospitals. It was to come up after the STNM Hospital at Socheythang was completed and Gyalshing and

Mangan hospitals were to follow next.

The SKM Government, however, cancelled the work order for the Rs 375 crore project and then re-evaluated the project for Rs 585 crore.

"It should have started two years ago. By now it would have probably been completed and ready for use if they had acted in a timely fashion. What was the government doing for the last two years?" he asks.

The SDF proposal was for the new facility to come up next to Namchi hospital.

The veterinary playground, where the hospital project has been shifted, Mr Chamling adds, that it was built on public demand and is the main open space for the people of Namchi and provides a much needed breathing space for people and a training space for sports and fitness lovers.

87 new Covid infections and 139 recoveries in past 24hrs in Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 JUN:

Sikkim recorded 87 fresh cases of novel coronavirus and 139 new recoveries of COVID patients in the last 24 hours to continue the pattern of recording more recoveries than new cases, a trend that has stayed unbroken for the past ten days.

In the meantime, two more persons succumbed to Covid in the last 24 hours taking Sikkim's COVID death toll to 293. Both the COVID deaths were reported from STNM Hospital.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme [IDSP] of the Health Department this

morning, the 87 cases were picked up the testing of 578 samples on Saturday.

Noticeably fewer tests are being conducted of late, and this could be because of a combination of factors. For RT-PCR tests, people are usually expected to visit hospitals or PHCs where samples are collected and since most of the Covid clusters have already been screened once, those numbers have also come down, sources inform.

It would however be well advised to continue pushing mass and convenient Covid testing across the State since this is the best way to detect spikes in cases before infections run out of control.

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Sikkim Govt has its priorities right in battle against Covid

POOJA SHARMA

"It is health that is the real wealth, and not pieces of gold and silver."
- **MAHATMA GANDHI**

The unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic that has engulfed the entire world has upturned lives in ways no one could ever imagine and has seen disruptions in almost all aspects of society. For the past one year, India's war against coronavirus has been unrelenting and has also thrown up many unforeseen challenges before that governments.

However, every challenge comes with a bundle of opportunities, so does this pandemic

situation. The new disease, despite leaving its devastating effect across the sectors—from lifestyle to education to economy, and most importantly, health, has opened a wide window of opportunities for the government to restructure and reform the health sector.

This pandemic has promptly impelled the governments to review the budgetary allocation and enhance the health infrastructure in every state of the country to ensure quality and timely healthcare and to prepare itself to meet similar challenges in the future.

As the pandemic and the en-

suing economic recession negatively affected millions of lives, the Sikkim Government, under the able leadership of Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang (Golay)

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has been at the forefront in prioritising measures to fight the coronavirus and to ensure the health and safety of all its citizens. In a speech he rightly puts a stand where he says 'if I build a house or a hotel then question me but if i am being considerate on building a hospital for the public then questioning me is inappropriate.



He/She may be knowledgeable but such question is unwise. This pandemic has no certainty and

it could go on for long...nobody knows up till when? '

The Sikkim Government fully

understands the importance of the health sector imbuing the whole economy. The health sector is central to the well-being and progress of the nation, an employment generator, a productivity enhancer and a driver of innovation and entrepreneurship.

As soon as the country was hit by the pandemic, the Sikkim Government quickly responded and rose to the occasion and within a year has made significant improvements in the health sector of the State. Let us not forget that the challenges faced by the State were enormous and the fight was, and is, against an unseen enemy.

turn to pg02

Yoga – a protective shield for health at all times

Kiren Rijju

The unabated enthusiasm that is building up around International Day of Yoga (IDY) 2021 is both heartening and rare, at the same time. This is rare because it will be the second year in a row when there will be no major outdoor activity or mass congregation for IDY around the globe due to the pandemic, and yet people in large numbers are embracing Yoga from the quietude of their homes.

The Prime Minister's appeal in 2014 to the world community to embrace Yoga was indeed a bold and visionary step. "Yoga is an invaluable gift of ancient Indian tradition", he had told the UNGeneral Assembly on September 27, 2014. "It embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfilment; harmony between man and nature and a holistic approach to health and well-being. Yoga is not about exercise but to discover the sense of oneness with ourselves, the world and Nature". He further urged the world community to work towards adopting an International Yoga Day. Heading to his call, on 11 December 2014 the United Nations General Assembly declared the 21st of June of every year as the International Day of Yoga (IDY). This has led to the observation of IDY across the globe through various Yoga and wellness-related activities and programmes. Over the last six years of observation of IDY, Yoga has emerged as a significant public health movement across the world. This has been particularly true in India where, where the role being assigned to Yoga in the policy and practice of public health

has significantly grown.

India plays a pivotal role in the global observation of IDY. The Ministry of AYUSH, the nodal Ministry for Yoga, as well as the Missions of India abroad support Yoga-related training programmes and other activities across the world. Ayush Ministry came up with a Common Yoga Protocol (CYP) in 2015, to facilitate harmonious observation of IDY. The CYP is a 45-minute sequence of appropriate Yoga drills carefully put together by experts, which can be practiced by the young and the old without any hassles. It was designed based on the traditions of Yoga and the available scientific inputs on different practices of Yoga. It is a testimony to the inherent merits of CYP that in a short period of six years, this protocol has emerged as one of the most widely accepted formats of daily practice of Yoga.

Building upon the huge wave of public enthusiasm generated by IDY observation, the Ministry of Ayush initiated many reforms to promote the Yoga sector. Setting up of a national level advisory body called National Board for Promotion and Development of Yoga and Naturopathy was one of the basic initiatives. The Board, with thought leaders from the sector, gives policy-level advice for promotion of Yoga. Other major initiatives of the Ministry included steps for skill development as a means to ensure quality in Yoga training, Promoting evidence - based research in Yoga in collaboration with reputed institutions like AIIMS, promoting Yogasana as a competitive sport and widening the access to Yoga- learning and treatments through the network of 1.25 lakh Health &

Wellness Centres.

The Ministry of AYUSH and Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports recently came together to grant formal recognition to Yogasana as a competitive sport. Yogasana represents the

yoga teachers has gone up significantly during these years. As per Tourism statistics from the Ministry of Tourism, the foreign inflow of tourists who came to India for yoga training has significantly gone up af-

ViewPoint

physical dimension of Yoga, and is amenable to the format of a competitive sport. Thanks to its basic strengths, Yogasana has the potential to emerge into a global sporting discipline. This will ensure new technologies and new strategies being inducted into the discipline. Our athletes and officials will be able to build fruitful and fulfilling careers in this field.

The decision of the Government to operationalise 1.25 lakh Health & Wellness Centres (HWCs) under the Ayushman Bharat Scheme is significant for the development of Yoga, as there will be a significant component of Yoga in the activity. This decision will lead to creation of country-wide Yoga assets, as Yoga will be integrated into all 1.25 lakh HWCs. Adequate number of Yoga professionals will be engaged for this.

The IDY observation has been a phenomenon of high visibility. As per self-reported figures, at least 12.06 crore people joined the harmonious Yoga practice on IDY-2020 from their homes, despite the shadow of the pandemic looming large. The impact of the IDY observations over the years, however, goes beyond the participation numbers, and has been felt in multiple areas. For example, the demand for

ter 2015 IDY with an increase of 37.4% by 2018, i.e., over four years. The healthcare industry has also gained from the increased interest in Yoga, and have been offering more holistic solutions to health-seekers. There is no doubt the pandemic has inhibited these sectors, but trends prior to 2020 certainly bode well for the future.

Yoga not only improves overall health and immunity but also contributes to a quicker recovery of patients from diseases. In the current scenario where large sections of the population are enduring stress and anxiety related challenges due to Covid-19, Yoga offers effective solutions. Thus, in these troubled times when wellness is a goal for all of us, "Yoga for Wellness" becomes an appropriate and natural theme for IDY-2021.

That the health benefits of Yoga are numerous and multifaceted is now widely accepted. But then, good health is just the beginning of the rewards offered by Yoga. Let this Yoga Day be the starting point of making Yoga an integral part of our lifestyle. Let us also strive to encourage our friends and family to adopt it, and become beneficiaries of this zero-cost health assurance activity.

[the writer is Minister of State for Youth Affairs & Sports]

87 new Covid...

Given the low number of tests, Sikkim daily test positivity rate also grew to 15% from having come down substantially below 10% over the past week.

While 51 new cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 333 samples, 36 more tested positive for COVID-19 in rapid antigen testing of 231 samples.

Out of the 87 new cases, 57 were registered in East District, 22 in West District, 06 in South District and 02 in North District.

Only six people developed symptoms severe enough to require hospitalisation over the past 24 hours and collectively, only 100 of the 2,697 currently active cases are in hospital and the rest of the Covid-positive people are recuperating at home. The two Covid ICU facilities in the State - at STNM Hospital and CRH-Tadong - have a total of 14 under their watch at present.

Sikkim Govt has...

The pandemic has exposed the inadequacies in the health-care and shed light on the importance of spending and strengthening public healthcare.

The Government had to re-evaluate and drastically improve upon the funding and the existing infrastructure in public healthcare. The manpower crisis plaguing the healthcare sector had to be also managed. It was a herculean task, but we managed to tide over the situation fairly well.

Keeping in mind the present pandemic as well as envisioning a robust health care system in the Sikkim for the future, the Sikkim Government has embarked on a path to revamping the health sector with much zeal and vigour. This roadmap includes not only strengthening the existing hospitals and health care centres, but also building new infrastructure.

The objective is to have well dispersed hospitals with oxygenated beds, OPDs, emergency casualties, more doctors and specialised departments and all modern facilities, not just in East District but also in South & West Districts of the State. This also includes strengthening District hospitals and Primary Health Centres & Sub Centres and creating new ones to detect and cure new diseases. The Govern-

ment is focused on improving primary, secondary and tertiary care. I believe additional beds in existing hospitals are makeshift arrangements. Secondary care hospitals i.e District hospitals and Community Health Centre at block level are also needed.

Global leaders throughout the world have been putting in the effort to control and prevent Covid-19 in their respective countries and States. At present, throughout the World 2073 Hospitals (government + private) are at various stages of construction and some of them are on the verge of completion by this year itself.

Let us look at some major initiatives taken by governments across the world in the health-care sector on the heels of the global Covid-19 crisis:

1. A special 1000-bed hospital was set up in just 10 days in China's Wuhan — the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak. A second, a 1,600-bed hospital called Leishenshan, has an equally ambitious deadline, efforts were made to get the Huoshenshan Hospital off the ground began the same day. China raced against time to press 100 heavy construction machines and over 7,000 workers into service. The country kept its citizens updated on the progress — construction of the

hospital was live-streamed to an audience of over 40 million people.

2. In Philadelphia, USA, a 300 bedded hospital is all set to be constructed worth 3.4 billion \$

3. The Los Vegas Hospital, USA launches \$ 82 million expansion on 6/01/2021.

4. In India too, 60 Hospitals are set to start its construction at a fast pace to curb the medical emergency of the country.

5. In Uttar Pradesh, the Tata Group completed its 1000 bedded Medanta Hospital during lockdown period.

6. In Madhya Pradesh the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) will fully assist the government in the construction of a 1,000-bed temporary hospital at Bina amid surging COVID-19 cases, said Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on 17th April 2021.

It is heartening that the Sikkim Government has got its priorities right by focussing on the health care sector during these unprecedented times. By focusing on improving the health care infrastructure, it has shown its empathy and its foresight. The construction of an upcoming 300 bedded hospital in Namchi, South Sikkim will go a long way in providing modern and timely health care to the people of South and West Districts. It will

also ease the load on the STNM Hospital.

While some may argue that the timing of starting the construction of this hospital was wrong, but if one looks at the present health crisis, this was the need of the hour. Freedom of expression is the forth pillar of democracy. Democracy is the government for the people, of the people and by the people. This right of expression gives us a right to criticize and ask the state to function properly and work as it is obliged to. Freedom of expressions gives us something more than just existence, it gives us a reason to live with dignity. It makes us a social being.

For now, the priorities of the Sikkim Government is, on strengthening the health care sector and provide the much-needed holistic care to the people of Sikkim. It is the time we must come together and fight this pandemic collectively.

The first role of any government is to protect the lives of its citizens and we must support the government wholeheartedly in this. We must do whatever we can to stop the spread, protect lives and reduce the pressure on the health service.

"Kaal Kare So Aaj Kar, Aaj Karai So Ab". The time is now.

[the writer is Chairperson, Sikkim Film Promotion Board]

UCWSS launches Covid Ambulance service in Gangtok



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 JUN:

The United Christian Welfare Society of Sikkim [UCWSS] launched an ambulance service to help people in need during the pandemic. The ambulance was flagged-off by Upper Tadong MLA, GT Dhungel after a dedication prayer held here at Greendale School on Sunday.

On the occasion, the MLA said that the SKM government has been reaching support and assistance to people at all corners of the State and shared that the Chief Minister has been actively working day and night to keep Sikkim and its people safe from Covid.

On the same, he urged the people to support the government and further strengthen the efforts of the government.

Mr Dhungel congratulated UCWSS on its initiative and urged it to keep the ambulance on call 24x7.

UCWSS president, Elder Patrus Gurung, explained that the ambulance service has been initiated on behalf of all the churches of Sikkim and any person in need can avail it for COVID-19 situations.

He added that UCWSS had extended support to Christians in need during the first wave last year and provided Rs 50,000 to the Chief Minister Relief Fund.

He informed that UCWSS has also distributed relief to more than 260 families in need thus far in the second wave.

He added that ambulance service launched today was made possible by support from many people, including the Chief Minister.

Further, all the churches of Sikkim had pooled in resources and the UCWSS has provided Rs 6 lakh to the CM Relief Fund during the second wave.

Pastor Shyam Subba led the dedication prayer of the ambulance and the session ended with the vote of thanks proposed by UCWSS general secretary, Rev Peter Samsher.

Andhra sets record with over 10 lakh people vaccinated in a day

HYDERABAD, 20 JUN

[NDTV]: Andhra Pradesh has set a new record by administering over 12 lakh doses of COVID-19 vaccine till 6 pm today. A total of 12.56 lakh vaccines were administered to people across the state by 6 pm when the special drive ended.

In the process, the state also crossed the one-crore mark in the administration of the first dose of the vaccine.

The number reached 11.85 lakh at 5 pm, tweeted Arogya Andhra, the official Covid response handle of the state government.

The special vaccination drive was undertaken by the state health department on the orders of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Previously, the state created a record by administering over 6 lakh vaccines in a day.

Officials said the credit goes to the network of volunteers and healthcare providers who made this possible, with the understanding that vaccination is the only way to stop COVID-19.


The state reported 5,646 fresh Covid cases, while 7,772 recovered

and another 50 died virus in the 24 hours ending 9 am today.

The vaccination drive, with focus on people over 45 years and mothers with children under five years, began at 6 am in more than 2,000 locations in all 13 districts of the state.

The department officials were hopeful that the number could touch 12 lakh by the end of the drive today.

The two Godavari districts, East and West, topped the list with 1.11 lakh and 1.08 lakh vaccinations today.



What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

The Novel Coronavirus (nCoV) is new strain of Coronavirus that originated in Wuhan, China. Notorious for mutating quickly and acquiring new qualities, it is a rising epidemic that was previously not identified in humans.

<p>Symptoms of nCoV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fever ● Difficulty in breathing ● Dry Cough ● Severe acute respiratory syndrome ● Pneumonia - like symptoms 	<p>Precautions to Prevent nCoV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wash your hands often with soap. ● Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer ● Observe good personal hygiene. ● Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands. ● Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms. ● Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats. ● Avoid travel to nCoV affected places. ● Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome. and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.
<p>Treatment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition. ● No vaccinations available as of now. ● Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected. 	<p>If you seek help, you may call :</p> <p>-Toll free no. 104</p> <p>District surveillance Officer</p> <p>EAST : 7029372100</p> <p>WEST : 9593297809</p> <p>NORTH : 9841957468</p> <p>SOUTH : 7407691463</p> <p>New STNM</p> <p>AMS : 9434711402</p>

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE

GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

SIBLAC welcomes Labour Act, suggests even stricter regulations to stop illegal migrants

...WANTS BORDER CHECK-POSTS TO BE MANNED BY "HIGHLY SKILLED" AND "FAITHFUL" LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 20 JUN:
Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee has written to the Chief Minister welcoming the direction taken by the State Government to regulate the workforce in the unorganised sector better and has conveyed suggestions to make the execution stricter so that illegal migrants are stopped.

SIBLAC is convinced that a wider definition of "workers" and stricter registration protocols "to keep a track of migrant workers and stop illegal migrants" will "prevent crime, spread of diseases etc in the state."

Implemented in the right earnest and with clearer guidelines, the regulation will also serve the interests of national security and suggests that if the Government took "additional steps to regulate the wages of these workers so that they are not exploited and stop the unusual wage rate charged by workers in the construction sectors which has inflated the cost of construction in the state."

In his letter to the CM today, SIBLAC Convenor, Tseten Tashi Bhutia, states that the daily wage workers should also include: "Agriculture workers like Kutias who cultivate someone's land; Contingent workers (Peti sardars and baidars); Quarry workers; Lumber workers (Aarawalas); and Individual workers engaged in business sectors, shops like: (ration, bakeries, liquor, medicine, hardware, etc.), tea shops, canteens, and tours and travel.

He suggests that compulsory registration be extended to "individuals living in unauthorised

lands, in relation to their employment, and also, individuals who run shop (ration shop, tyre repair, grill shop etc.), hotel and restaurant on a leased license."

"The notification also excludes workers in organised sector like Pharmacy Companies and other factories which will leave out a major chunk of workers, the Act must include these workers for their protection and for tracking of migrant workers in the state," he adds, while stating that the Act is also silent in on GREF and Central departments like CPWD workers, power project labourers, including the Army etc, which would lead to exclusion of these workers.

Rules must be framed to stop anyone from engaging unregistered workers and appropriate punishment must be prescribed, the letter adds.

SIBLAC also wants the registration form to require full address of migrant workers and rules framed to have the registration renewed every year.

"Furthermore, the purported "data collection form" must include an option for mentioning the thrust documents, so as whether the individuals possess COI/RC or just a Voter card/Aadhar card/Ration card of Sikkim or elsewhere, or some such documents for the foreign nationals," the letter adds.

"The step taken by the government to register workers is a very important step to check migration which has led to the population explosion in the state. Such unregulated migration has been the root cause of demographic change and the decline of original local population of the state," SIBLAC is convinced and wants border check posts be manned with "highly skilled" and "faithful" law enforcement officials for proper identification of the individuals crossing the border either in vehicles or on foot.

"Infiltration in the guise of individual workers cannot be ignored," SIBLAC writes.

CRH Janani Scheme has benefitted 959 families in 2 years

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 20 JUN:
In the two years that the CRH Janani Scheme has been around, it has provided coverage of more than Rs 46 lakh to 959 mothers and their families, a press communique from the Central Referral Hospital, Tadong, informs.

CRH had launched the scheme in June 2019 on the initiative of the erstwhile Vice-Chancellor, now Pro-Chancellor,

Sikkim Manipal University, Lt Gen (Dr.) MD Venkatesh, to support the Government to achieve the global goal of improving maternal health and to save women's lives.

This 100% CRH-sponsored scheme is available for all expecting mothers who are admitted in the CRH General Ward for normal delivery.

This is an effort to support and improve institutional delivery for improved outcomes. It

also reduces the financial burden on the new family to a great extent as it covers all treatment including bed, investigations, procedure & medicines, the release details.

This is over and above the CRH Free Bed Scheme that has been upgraded from the previous CRH Concessional Bed Scheme. There are 70 beds available under this scheme and patients can avail general beds at zero cost, it is informed.

BJP observes West Bengal Day, plays Hindu card

KOLKATA, JUN 20 (PTI): In an apparent bid to hard-sell its religious ideology, the BJP on Sunday observed 'Poschimbongo Divas' (West Bengal Day) here by paying tribute to party ideologue Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, as saffron camp leaders claimed that the state, without his intervention, would have become part of an Islamist country.

The TMC, however, alleged that the saffron party was trying to "distort" history. Opposition leader in West Bengal Assembly and BJP MLA Suvendu Adhikari led a programme organised on the occasion at the party headquarters here, while saffron camp MP Swapan Dasgupta took to Twitter to mark the day with his post.

Regretting the fact that "neither the TMC not the erstwhile ruling parties -- the CPI(M) and the Congress -- observed the day", Adhikari told reporters, "Had 54 Hindu representatives not carved out Poschimbongo, Islamabad or Dhaka would have been our state

capital, not Kolkata." Giving alleged incidents of post-poll violence in the state a communal colour, he further said that "people have been attacked for following the Sanatan Hindu dharma".

"As many as 17,500 people are still homeless and 42 have been killed (due to post-poll violence)," Adhikari stated during the function at the party headquarters. Asked about the demand for a separate territory by a certain section of people in north Bengal, the leader of opposition said his party does not support any call for division of the state.

He, however, insisted that grievances of people in the northern part of Bengal should be addressed.

At another programme near the south gate of the Assembly, he said, "The BJP will not back any demand for bifurcation of Bengal, but why is that just a few leaders from south Kolkata are given all key ministerial responsibilities? Districts have faced neglect for years."

NCC cadets of Namcheybong School celebrate Yoga

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 20 JUN:
NCC cadets of Namcheybong Senior Secondary School, under the guidance of their NCC officer Priyanka Rai, observed International Yoga Day on the theme, "Yoga at Home & Yoga with Family" today.

The cadets emphasized the importance of maintaining good health within constraints of social distancing.

Through photos, videos and slogans, the ca-

dets conveyed the message of keeping the mind & body fit through Yoga asanas.

Principal Sabita Sharma shared the importance and need of practising yoga to stay fit and healthy.

She added that the celebration of International Yoga Day was a reminder to incorporate yoga in every day routine to enjoy a happy life and reduce the effects of stress and other physical ailments.

Flipkart opens one of its largest warehouses in West Bengal

GANGTOK, 20 JUN: Flipkart, the e-commerce marketplace, has announced the addition of a new fulfilment center in West Bengal, the second-largest in the state, as it ramps up its supply chain infrastructure in the East to cater to the growing demand for e-commerce services across the region and the country, a press release informs.

Spread across an area of over 2.2 lakh square feet and creating nearly 3,500 direct jobs, the new facility in Dankuni will cater to the needs of both Flipkart and Myntra customers in the region. It will also help thousands of sellers offer a wider selection and enable faster deliveries of customer orders within the region and neighbouring states while

also helping create national market access.

The new fulfilment centre will augment Flipkart's capabilities to cater to more consumers, including millions of first-time e-commerce users in the East. Over 52% of Flipkart consumers are from tier-II and beyond cities.

With the addition of this new facility, Flipkart now has more than 10 lakh square feet of warehousing space in West Bengal alone and employs over 50,000 people across all these facilities. This is in addition to lakhs of square feet of warehousing assets from partner brands creating lakhs of direct and indirect job opportunities while also working with over 9,300 Kirana deliv-

ery partners and 10,000 sellers from the region.

Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, Kalyan Banerjee, while applauding the launch of Flipkart's new Fulfillment Center, said, "We have all benefited tremendously in the past few months with the relentless efforts of e-commerce companies. Flipkart has shown deep commitment in bringing a world-class technology-enabled supply chain to the state and complementing the government's efforts in meeting the needs of customers and safely delivering essentials. We are glad that the new fulfilment center will create more than 3,000 jobs in the state and also help MSMEs grow and expand their businesses."

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94 new cases take Nagaland's COVID-19 tally to 24,191

Kohima, Jun 19 (PTI): Nagaland on Saturday reported 94 new COVID-19 cases, which pushed the tally in the state to 24,191, a health department official said.

At least 171 people were cured of the disease during the day, taking the total number of recoveries to 21,058, State Nodal Officer for Integrated Disease Surveillance Project Dr Nyanthung Kikon said in a bulletin.

The recovery rate among coronavirus patients in the state stands at 87.05 per cent, he said. One more fatality due to the infection was reported in Kiphire district, raising the death toll to 468, the official said.

Nagaland currently has 1,979 active cases, and 686 COVID-19 patients have migrated to other states so far.

Dimapur reported the highest number of fresh cases at 32, followed by Mokochung at 18, Kohima at 12, Peren and Tuensang at 11 each.

A high-powered committee on COVID-19, headed by Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, had announced extension of a state-wide lockdown till June 30 with an object to bring down the daily positivity rate to below five per cent.


"Today, it is at 8.37 per cent, while the overall positivity rate stands at 11.29 per cent," the official said.

The fourth phase of the lockdown came into force on Saturday.

In this phase, the government has allowed district task forces to impose their regulations as per the local conditions but clamped a total ban on the movement of people and vehicle from 4 pm to 5 am every day.

The state has conducted 2,14,131 sample tests for COVID-19.

State Immunisation Officer Dr Ritu Thurr said 3,99,141 doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered to 3,43,830 people till Friday.



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

HEALTH & Family welfare Department

STNM Hospital
Sochakgang, Gangtok

Ref No: 1167/ADM/STNM Dated : 18.06.2021

Re- NOTICE INVITING QUOTATION

The sealed quotations are invited from the interested and Registered Medical shop located within a radius of 0.5 KM (500 mtrs) from STNM Hospital, Sochakgang, Sikkim for the supply of Emergency Medicines and Allied items for the Year 2021-22.


Date of issue of Quotation : 24th June 2021 to 28th June 2021.
Date of Submission of Quotation : 6th July 2021 within 12.00 PM.
Date & Time of tender opening : 6th July 2021 at 2.00 PM
Terms and conditions

- The quotation form can be obtained from the office of Senior Accounts Officer, STNM Hospital on any working days from 24th June to 28th June 2021 from 11 AM to 3 PM on production of State Bank of Sikkim Challan of Rs.2000/-duly signed by Senior AO, STNM Hospital credited under head 0210-01-8000other receipts from 11 AM to 3 PM.
- The interested Firm should produce COI/Sikkim Subject/ Residential Certificate, Valid Drug License, Valid Drug License, Valid Registration Firm, Valid Trade License, GST Registration and clearance certificate , Experience certificate and full address of the shop at the time of submission of quotation form.
- The quotation should accompany TDR of Rs. 1,000,00/- (One Lakh) against the supply of Emergency medicines and consumables from the State Bank of Sikkim in favour of Senior Accounts Officer, STNM Hospital , Sochakgang. The department will not be liable to pay the interest on the said amount.
- The Tender Committee reserves the right to accept or reject any of all quotation without assigning any reason of reasons thereof and reserve to award the work to any bidder found competent.

For further information, visit or contact to the office of the undersigned.

Sd/-
R.O. No. 70/IPR/Pub/Classi./21-22
dt. 18.06.2021

Sd/-
PCC Cum Medical Superintendent
STNM Hospital, Sochakgang.



HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE DEPARTMENT

STNM HOSPITAL, SOCHAKGANG

GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
GANGTOK, SIKKIM

Ref No: 1163-4/STNM/Adm-2021 Dated: 17/06/2021

WALK IN INTERVIEW

A walk in interview will be held for local eligible candidates for one (01) post of Laboratory Technician on contractual basis for a period of three (03) years under the project “Development of indigenous reagent red cell panel for identification and characterization of blood group alloantibodies in North East India” in the Department of Transfusion Medicine (Central Blood Bank), STNM Hospital, Sochakgang, Gangtok.

Name of Post	No of Post	Essential Qualification	Monthly Emoluments	Remarks
Laboratory Technician	One (01)	Class 12 pass (science stream) with Diploma/Degree in Medical Laboratory Technology from a recognized university	Rs. 18000/- per month (PB-1 5200/- GP 2800/-) *10% increment @ Rs.800/- for 2 nd year @18,800/-pm *10% Increment of 800/-for 3 rd year @ 19600/-pm	Age: 25-40 Years Preference will be given to candidates with at least 1 year experience in Blood Banking/ Immunohaematology.

Project Duration : 3 Years.
The following documents (Attested) should be submitted on the date of interview.

- Proof of age: Birth Certificate/ Class X Mark Sheet.
- Degree Certificate of DMLT /BMLT.
- Sikkim Subject / Certificate of Identification.
- Employment Card(renewed) in case of unemployed candidates.
- No Objection Certificate (NOC) in case of in – service candidates.
- Two recent Passport size photographs.

No TA/DA will be admissible for attending the interview.
Date: 5th July, 2021.
Time : 10:00 AM
Venue : Seminar Hall, Deptt. Of Medicine, Level 4, STNM Hospital, Sochakgang, Gangtok.

Note: This appointment is purely contractual for a period of 3 years only. It does not confer the selected candidate any right to apply for regular government service.

Sd/-
Principal Investigator
ICMR Project
Department of Transfusion Medicine
STNM Hospital
Gangtok.

R.O. No. 69/IPR/Pub/Classi./21-22
Date:17.6.2021

Converts & Support

Engage for durability because echo chambers tend to misrepresent

Politicians in our country, and in Sikkim, have lived in a make believe world of sycophants and pretence for far too long to be able to see realities unless strained through the reassuring filters that suit them. In their defence, it is not just politicians who take on such imagined sense of power, significance and influence, and one sees such attitudes among government officials, social and religious organisations, and yes, even in the media. It is however only the politicians who are actively lobby for direct endorsement of the people and stand a chance of deciding policy, hence it becomes important priorities are aligned properly for them and political-speak nuanced with a better sense of proportions.

One could argue that selective perceptions would affect only individual fates and political careers, but it becomes important to marshal the debate on the right course when these impressions begin hogging public engagement. Take for instance the trend of claiming turn-coats, a gimmick which gains currency every time elections come calling or have ended and the victors and runners-up decided. These are fine as victory-march asides, but rankle when they become the centrepiece of public engagements. One speaks here of the frequent claims and counterclaims of number of supporters gained and weaned away that compete for headlines. While these displays may be necessary to send out a signal of increasing popularity or resurgence, they are not ladders on which political futures can be reached.

To begin with, commitments so fickle that a once in five years toss-up triggers an ideological shift can hardly be considered endorsements of any significance. Any one who has followed politics in Sikkim long enough will know how these inductions are managed and of how routinely such claims are announced, and how it appears to be the predilection of a certain set. At best, these are interesting sideshows to the circus of politicking, not politics itself. Agreed, there are some crossovers which are politically significant in that they help open some un-reached pockets, but to believe these to have the potency of changing political fortunes is misplaced and in fact demeaning to the intelligence of the people. To believe that people cannot see through the political opportunism at the root of such fluctuations in allegiance reflects an inexcusable disconnect with how and what the people think.

Induction ceremonies and claims of winning new members are at best stepping stones to catch the attention of the people, an attention span that should then be captivated with policy and performance to make voters seriously consider their choices.

At the end of the day, it is for the political parties in the fray and their leaders to decide where their priorities rest – whether it is to believe their own PR or work along with and among the people to expand their support base. The Opposition has often made the mistake of buying into the anti-incumbency fiction to do their job and not only not engage but also fail in keeping their flock together because anti-incumbency is never a factor unless leveraged and reiterated; and that requires engagement. All parties and leaders need to approach politics as a starting-from-scratch effort; past experience has shown that only those groups which engage in earnest during the lull between elections, and not on the crutches of past record or existing fatigue, stand a chance of winning any favour with the people.

For those watching politics from the sidelines, the most wonderful experience is always when people manage to catch the weak ears of the leaders, nowadays through social media meltdowns, to raise a noise and play some politics themselves. It is not rare anymore to find groups of 10, or even less, come together and claim to speak for all the people and vent. Until a few years back, they would have just been scoffed away, but in these times of social media dominance, they are carry an impact. But this is a lop-sided approach to communication and serves the interest of parity for leaders and their parties to establish more organised platforms for engagements, one that promotes civility and does not carry the element of desperation and finality that Facebook videos are almost always laced with. Engagement can then be consultative and not reactive as it is nowadays. From that could be established a support base which is not as fickle as mid-level leaders have traditionally been in Sikkim.

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



Catholic Church response to sexual abuse must centre on survivor well-being, not defensiveness

CATHY DRISCOLL
theconversation.com

In light of the recent discovery of 215 Indigenous children in unmarked graves at a former Catholic-run residential school in British Columbia and investigations at other former residential schools, there have been renewed calls for the Pope to apologize for residential schools and for the Catholic Church to release its records.

The story has also turned public scrutiny on how the Catholic Church has responded to other calls to apologize and be accountable to victims in cases of sexual abuse both in residential schools and throughout the church.

In 2020, I received a federal grant to study the Catholic Church as an organization that can be engaged in potentially contradictory practices to their principles, mission and values. This includes examining the content of websites and electronic documents — including safe and responsible ministry policies, protocols and codes of conduct — of the 18 Catholic archdioceses across Canada. Chiedza Chigumba, a doctoral student at Saint Mary's University, is working with me as a research assistant on the project.

The guidelines on clergy sexual abuse issued by the Canadian Conference on Catholic Bishops, which were updated in 2018, state that “victims must come first.”

But preliminary research has provided some evidence of how parts of the church are trapped within defensive and legalistic language in their policies and codes of conduct related to preventing, addressing and reporting sexual abuse.

A main implication is that not only is it time for church leaders to better walk the talk of putting the needs of the vulnerable and victims first, it is also time to change the tone of the talk.

The church must move towards a victim-focused and trauma-informed language and corresponding practices of accountability dedicated to acknowledging and transforming a church culture of denialism, complicity, conformity and protectionism.

DEVASTATING EFFECTS

Much of my earlier research involved studying business from a critical perspective, often involving case studies of irresponsible corporate practices.

In 2010, as a practising Catholic, I blew the whistle when I learned a priest who was convicted of sexually abusing boys in the 1990s in Newfoundland was participating in ministry with young children in a Nova Scotia parish.

After this, I decided to explore ways in which

religious organizations are both unique from and similar to non-religious organizations in contexts of responsible leadership.

Clergy sexual abuse and its coverup have resulted in devastating effects for direct victims: children, young seminarians, nuns and other vulnerable adults, as well as families and communities.

Investigative research has found that church leaders' response to sexual abuse charges have often prioritized concern about reputation and assets over well-being and healing of victims of abuse.

TRAUMA-INFORMED

In archdiocesan communications and policies pertaining to sexual abuse, we have noted a broadening and sanitizing of sexual abuse. Of the 10 archdioceses we have studied, only one has “Reporting Clergy Sexual Abuse” on its home page. Information on sexual abuse is most often found under a tab for “Safe Environment” on archdiocesan websites.

Policies mention a legal obligation to contact civil authorities when reporting sexual abuse of a minor and some mention deferring an internal investigation until after a civil investigation is completed. However, some archdiocesan webpages and policies continue to list only church phone numbers to report misconduct instead of, or in addition to, providing outside contact numbers for police or child services.

By contrast, the Archdiocese of Vancouver recently started using an independent third-party to report abuse by clergy.

In most Canadian archdioceses we have studied so far, internal investigations and resolutions continue to be carried out by a church official.

An obvious barrier to victims and others suspicious of abuse is in not knowing if reporting systems are safe and effective.

SOME GAINS BUT TRANSPARENCY LACKING

Many policies now include a statement of commitment to pastoral support for victims. However, we found that some policies and protocols appear to be buried in a place where people consulting other guidelines for pastoral services might not come across them, such as under a tab for “Admin Services.”

Very few archdioceses mention a specific person or office dedicated to victim assistance.

In addition, there is little to no information on care and assistance to secondary victims, such as families and communities. None of the archdioceses we have studied so far include a policy on public transparency to notify the surrounding community of credible or substantiated allegations.

As well, the narrative is more often focused on

church crisis rather than a crisis for the abused. In the Canadian Conference on Catholic Bishops 2018 guidelines on protecting minors from sexual abuse, the word crisis was used in reference to the church or the accused priest in all but one of 40 occurrences.

We also found a common narrative of collective responsibility and collective blame within church language. However, a focus on collective responsibility and penance can distract from individual leader accountability — and also from prioritizing justice and care for the victim-survivor.

RECENT CHANGES

The recent changes announced this month to the Vatican's Code of Canon Law (the official rules and regulations of the Catholic Church) on abuse, and a new system recently announced by the Canadian Conference for Catholic Bishops on reporting sexual abuse or coverups have some positive elements, such as expanding the scope of abuse to vulnerable adults. However, to date, survivors and advocates have said these changes are disappointing.

Developments in the global church, such as German Cardinal Reinhard Marx recently offering his resignation, accepting personal and institutional responsibility for the systemic failures of the Catholic church in preventing sexual abuse, represent a sign of accountability and truth, but also highlight the urgent need for reform.

LOOKING AHEAD

We will provide a full review of archdiocesan policies once this research is completed. However, it is already apparent the following is needed: centring victim representation and consultation in all relevant processes; appointing a dedicated office for victim assistance; listing civil authorities as first contacts when reporting abuse; and implementing transparency policies.

Our preliminary research also points to the need for lay people — church members who aren't clergy — to work towards safer and more accountable Catholic communities.

Lay-led organizations such as Voice of the Faithful and The Catholic Whistleblowers draw on their Catholic faith and teachings to seek to empower lay Catholics.

The research also suggests how a need for greater public accountability from the Catholic Church is connected to the need to change internal church norms and relationships — and to raise awareness of the wider society's urgent quest for justice, truth, healing and reconciliation.

[the writer is Professor, Department of Management, Saint Mary's University]

COVID: The three barriers that stop people being vaccinated

TRACY EPTON
theconversation.com

Getting everyone in a country vaccinated is like watching software updates load: it whizzes along for the first 80% or so and then seems to take forever to finish the rest. Around 80% of the UK adult population has received at least one dose of the vaccine.

To fully vaccinate all adults is going to take a final big push. For it to be successful, those responsible for the vaccine rollout need to ensure that the public are sufficiently capable, have sufficient opportunity, and are sufficiently motivated to take the vaccine.

Capability is about having the knowledge and skills to take up the vaccine. For example, some people might not have had enough information to convince them that the vaccine is safe. They may not know when, where and how to get the vaccine. Or they may not be able to make plans to have the vaccine.

Opportunity is about having the necessary conditions to take up the vaccine. For example, someone might not have the encouragement or social support from family and friends. Or the vaccine might not be available in their region, so they don't have the opportunity to be immunised.

Motivation is about having the desire to have the vaccine. For example, some people might not believe the vaccine will protect them from COVID-19, or they may not be able to overcome their fear of needles.

People differ in their capabilities, opportunities and motivations, so steps to increase vaccination uptake need to target the appropriate barrier. For example, it is not helpful to tell people about the positive outcomes of COVID-19 vaccination if the vaccination isn't available to them. It would be irresponsible to increase people's fear by telling them about the health risks of not vaccinating but not ensure they can easily get to the

vaccination centres at a time that's convenient for them.

NEW GUIDANCE

Researchers in the UK recently reviewed the evidence about what works to encourage people to take up vaccinations in pandemics and epidemics. They found that the focus of previous interventions were mainly on changing capability (explaining why vaccines are safe and correcting misunderstandings) and motivation (telling people about the benefits of vaccination). There was little in the interventions that seemed to address opportunities.

This research formed the basis of a guidance, written by the British Psychological Society, to be considered by people in public health when trying to get people to have the vaccine. It recognised that people's capability, opportunity and motivation to take up the vaccine differed because of factors that are often outside of people's control.

For example, some countries have low opportunity because of the cost of the vaccine prevents mass vaccination. Some people may have low capability as there may not be enough information about vaccine safety for their particular group – for example, pregnant women. And some people may have low motivation if they are afraid of leaving the home after shielding.

A person can have different capability, opportunity and motivation over time. For instance, some may worry more about vaccine safety for the first dose but have problems with opportunity, because of a lack of local vaccination sites, for the second dose. Public health experts need to address all of these barriers to ensure that people can have the vaccine so we can all be protected from COVID-19 and get back to normal life.

[the writer is Lecturer in Health Psychology, University of Manchester]

Cult leader's influence affecting Meghalaya vaccination drive: Officials

SHILLONG, 20 JUN [PTI]: A cult leader in Meghalaya, who had earlier convinced his followers to reject government schemes for the poor, has come in the way of the COVID-19 vaccination drive with his followers rejecting the need for taking Covid jabs, senior district officials said.

There are reports of low Covid vaccination in remote villages of Khasi Jaintia Hills region, comprising seven districts, where the cult leader has influence in some pockets, the officials said on condition of anonymity.

The cult leader, Pastor Phawa or Phawa to his followers, in the Christian-dominated state, has gone into hiding since 2018 as he was under the radar of the state government during the 2018 assembly elections as many people reportedly abstained from voting because of his influence, they said.

"I am not going to get myself vaccinated. Jesus will cure and protect us from all sickness," Juliana (name changed), one of his followers at Jongksha Wahshnong village, told PTI.

"There is no way I am going to take the vaccine," she said.

When asked, a senior law officer said, "We have the Disaster Management Act in place and Epidemic Diseases Act which empowers the state to take direct action against any campaign that may hamper public health."



Juliana and her family of five, including her 80-year-old grandmother, had not availed of any government support scheme for the poor housing, foodgrains, toilets and all three adults in the family have not exercised their franchise.

Principal secretary, Health, Sampath Kumar said, to encourage people to take the vaccine, the district administrations are using the nudge approach to effect behavioural change among people.

"This is being done through the issuance of notifications, advisories, counselling in the interest of the masses, with the greater interest of saving their lives and those of their near and dear ones," Mr Kumar said.

Meanwhile, the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Assembly has denied the presence of such a

"Pastor-turned rogue" in their fold.

"We have never heard of such a man leading such a cult. We are not aware. If there is any such man, he should be arrested," an official of the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Assembly told PTI.

A doctor at the Public Health Centre of the village told PTI, none of the 30 plus families in the locality has taken polio drops and even refrain from taking medicines for their ailments.

During last months COVID-19 outbreak at Jongksha village for which it was declared a containment zone, only about 400 of the 2,000 residents came forward to getthemselves tested for the viral infection, the doctor said.

Phawa has managed to convince residents of Jongksha to break away from the Presbyterian Church sometime during

2010-12, according to the concerned elders in the village.

Phawa goes around asking parents to stop sending their children to schools, reject MGNREGA jobs, reject foodgrains available to BPL/APL ration cardholders and abstain from Aadhaar enrolment as the unique identification number is akin to being marked by the devil in Christianity, the officials said.

In the last assembly polls, low voters' turnout was recorded as many of the members of the cult abstained from exercising their franchise.

"Some had used sticks while some covered their fingers with plastics to press the button in the EVMs as to avoid direct contact with the voting machine while casting their votes in 2018 and many others simply did not vote," K Sangriang, a journalist in South West

Khasi Hills district said.

The identity of this man is yet to be officially verified by the police while some say he was a former truck driver who went around the villages claiming himself to be a "true leader of the Church".

A senior police official said he too is aware of the rumours doing the rounds since 2018 but the police are yet to ascertain the identity of the cult leader.

So far, the state has completed vaccination of 5.77 lakh people of the 3.5 million population and only a fraction of the target group has received their second dose (about 75,000 only), according to Health Minister AL Hek.

When asked about the cult leader, Hek said he was informed of the same during his tour to interior villages and legal actions are being considered against Phawa.

Families displaced by Melamchi floods refuse Covid-19 tests fearing separation

Arjun Poudel Kathmandu, 20 Jun [KathmanduPost]: On Friday, the Primary Health Center, Melamchi had planned to perform 600 antigen tests on the flood victims sheltering at the camps for the displaced at various places of the municipality.

However, only five people agreed to undergo testing.

"Most of the victim families, who are still in shock from the devastation caused by the floods, refused to undergo tests," Gyanendra Ghorasaini, chief of the Primary Health Center, Melamchi, told the Post over the phone. "They fear they would be separated from their family members in the event of testing positive for Covid-19."

Tests are not being performed in any of the camps for the displaced at Melamchi and Helambu, the two local units most affected by Tuesday's Melamchi river floods, despite the high risk of Covid-19 outbreaks in such camps.

Doctors warned that temporary camps for the displaced people could turn into new Covid-19 hotspots while such camps are also highly prone to outbreaks of other seasonal diseases.

"Six people at the camps in Melamchi suffered food poisoning, caused by the unhygienic drinking water," Dr Amir Awal, who has been deployed at Melamchi by the Dhulikhel Hospital, told the Post. "They suffered from diarrhoea

and vomiting. The risk of Covid-19 outbreak is also high as the Covid-19 positivity rate in the district was up to 90 percent until a month ago."

There are around 600 flood victims placed at different makeshift camps in Melamchi. Likewise over 400 people have been placed in four temporary camps in Helambu Rural Municipality.

"I don't need to elaborate on the magnitude of the devastation caused by the floods and grief experienced by the victims," said Sigdel. "We are not in position to counsel them. They asked the health workers if they were trying to separate them with their family members."

They said they want to be with their family members even if some of them are infected.

Similar is the response of the displaced people in the Helambu Rural Municipality. Of over 400 displaced in Helambu, no one has undergone a coronavirus test yet. The displaced have been placed in makeshift camps made up of tarpaulins sheets at three places, and at a school.

Road access to the rural municipality remains cut off as several motorable bridges were swept away by the floods.

"We know that people residing in the camps are at high risk, as there is every chance of outbreak of the coronavirus and other seasonal diseases," Gyanendra Sigdel, health coordinator of the rural municipality, told

the Post over the phone. "Two ambulances of our rural municipality are stuck at Kiul [village] after the road was damaged. It can take months to repair the road."

Both Ghorasaini and Sigdel said that people traumatised by the devastation, are in immediate need of psychological counselling, which is not available at the local health facilities.

"We have requested the District Health Office to send counsellors," said Ghorasaini. "We might need more help if there is an outbreak of Covid-19 or other seasonal diseases at the camps."

The Primary Health Center, Melamchi, which had been running a Covid-19 isolation center, has shut down the center and directed the staffers to disinfect the center to prepare it for treating other seasonal diseases.

"We may have to treat patients other than those infected with the coronavirus. So we decided to shut down the isolation center," said Ghorasaini. "If Covid-19 infection is found, we will refer the infected to the isolation facility run at Dhulikhel Hospital's outreach clinic at Bahunepati, four kilometer from Melamchi."

Doctors say that the monsoon mayhem in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic has now doubled the risk of infections. There is no other option than to keep the displaced at temporary shelters, which, in turn, can turn into coronavirus hotspots, they say.

31 new cases push COVID-19 tally of Andamans to 7,394

PORT BLAIR, JUN 20 (PTI): The COVID-19 tally of Andaman and Nicobar Islands rose to 7,394 on Sunday as 31 more people tested positive for the infection, a health bulletin said. our new patients have travel history, while 27 infections were detected during contact tracing, it said.

Thirty-four more people have been cured of the disease, taking the

total number of recoveries to 7,162.

The Union territory now has 105 active cases, while the death toll in the islands stands at 127.

The administration has thus far tested over 4 lakh samples for COVID-19, in which the positivity rate was 1.84 per cent, the bulletin said.

More than 1.37 lakh people have been inoculated to date, it added.

Malda murders: Arms and ammunition seized, 2 more arrested

MALDA (WB), JUL 20 (PTI): The West Bengal Police on Sunday seized a huge cache of arms and ammunition and arrested two more persons in Malda district after interrogating Asif Mohammad, who had allegedly killed four members of his family and buried them in their house, police said.

The arrested persons, identified as 19-year-old Sabir Ali and 21-year-old Masum Sheikh of Gurutola village in Kaliachak police station area, claimed that they had kept the firearms in their respective houses as per the direction of Asif, a police officer said.

Five 7mm pistols, 80 cartridges and 10 magazines were seized, he said.

The three arrested persons will be produced before the Malda District Court during the day and police custody will be

sought, the officer said.

Based on a complaint lodged by the murder accused's elder brother Arif Mohammad, police arrested 19-year-old Asif after exhuming four bodies from a room in their house in Gurutola village on Saturday.

Preliminary investigation suggests that Asif had spiked the cold drinks of his father Jawad Ali (50), mother Ira Bibi (45), sister Arifa Khatun (17) and grandmother Alekjan Bibi (75) with sleeping pills on February 28 and as they fell unconscious, he tied them up and drowned them in a reservoir before burying the bodies in the house. The accused's elder brother managed to escape from the spot and changed locations for four months, before informing the police about the incident on Friday night.

Bengal plans more COVID beds for women amid third wave threat



Kolkata, Jun 20 (PTI): The West Bengal government is planning to allot more hospital beds for women as it prepares to deal with the possible third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, a senior health official said on Sunday.

The state is planning to reverse the gender ratio in the 26,000 COVID beds at state-run and private hospitals, Director of Health Services Ajay Chakraborty told PTI.

"The gender ratio for COVID-19 beds in West Bengal at present is around 60:40 for males. We are planning to reverse this by reducing the number of beds for male patients and increasing those for the females and make it 40:60," he said.

The plan is being formulated to cope up with a possible increase in the demand for beds for children during the third wave, Chakraborty said.

"The new COVID vari-

ant (Delta) is affecting all in a family. So, there will be high possibilities of children getting infected as well as their mothers. We have planned to keep them together even in case the mothers are negative or they have recovered," he said.

The government is consulting health experts to chalk out the plan, the official said.

"We have set a September deadline to be battle-ready for the possible third wave," he added.

"The admission rate of children was much less compared to the adults since the outbreak of the pandemic. But, it went up during the second wave and going by the warnings of the doctors and scientists, we presume that it will go up by two-fold in the coming months," Chakraborty said.

In view of this, the state government has decided to reserve at least

5 per cent of the critical care unit beds and another 10 per cent of the high dependency unit (HDU) beds, he said.

Chakraborty said the Health Department is planning to scale up paediatric intensive care unit (PICU) beds to 500 and HDU beds to 1,000.

Six new PICUs are being set up in Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, North Dinajpur, Purulia, Rampurhat and Diamond Harbour, he said.

For infants, aged below a month, the Health Department has decided to set up COVID beds at 68 special newborn care units (SNCUs) and newborn intensive care units (NICUs) in different parts of the state, he said.

The Health Department is also planning to procure paediatric oximeters and send paediatricians and nurses of the SNCUs and NICUs to different facilities to train healthcare workers, the official said.

Ladakh records 53 fresh cases of coronavirus

LEH, JUN 20 (PTI): Ladakh recorded 53 fresh COVID-19 cases taking the overall tally to 19,783, even as one new fatality pushed the death toll to 201, officials said on Sunday.

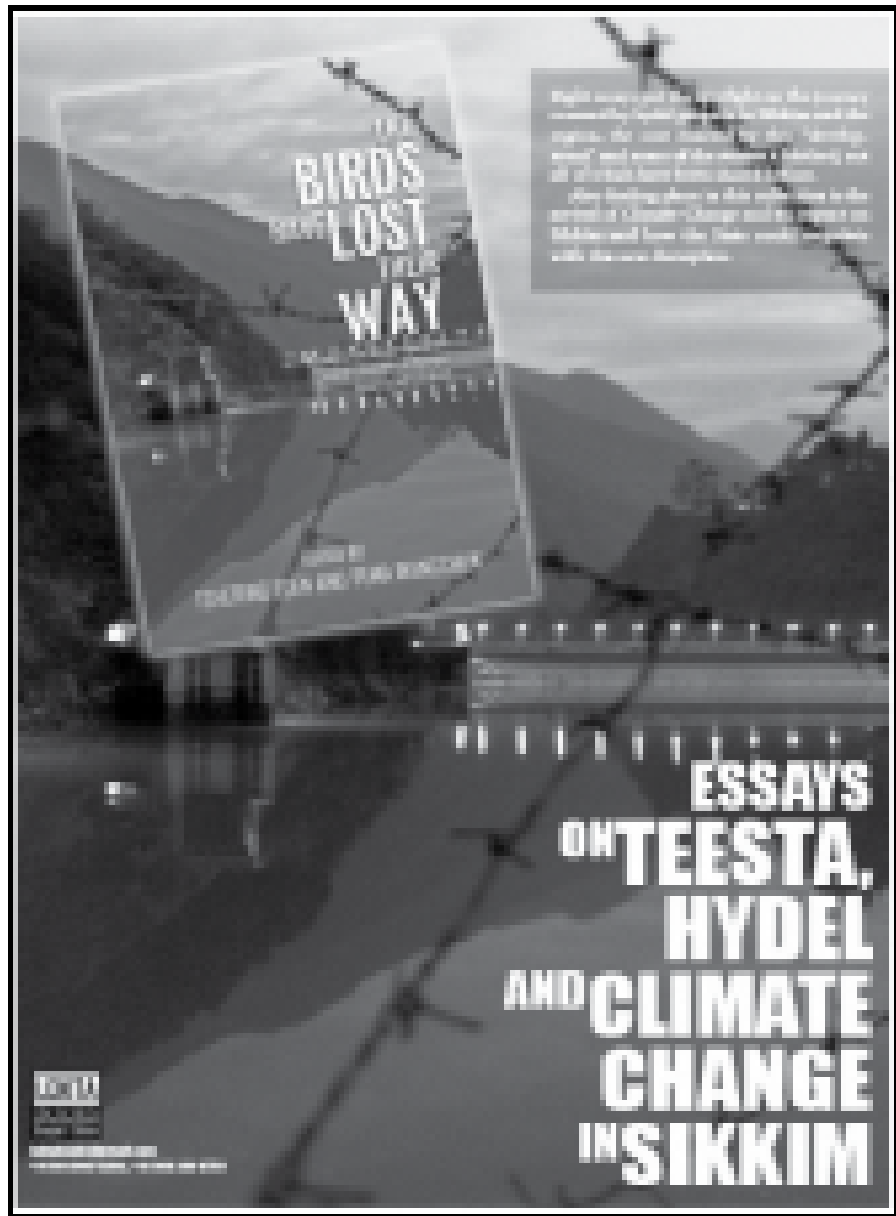
However, the active cases in the Union Territory stood at 432 317 in

Leh and 115 in Kargil as 53 infected patients recovered during the past 24 hours. With this, the number of cured patients has gone up to 19,150, the officials said.

The fresh fatality was reported from Kargil on Saturday, taking the district tally to 58.

Of the new cases, they said 51 cases were detected in Leh and two in Kargil, taking the individual district's tally to 16,323 and 3,460 respectively.

Thirty-eight patients were discharged in Leh and 15 in Kargil, they said.



Nelly Korda shoots 62, takes 3-shot lead in Michigan

GRAND RAPIDS, JUN 20 (AP): Nelly Korda shot a career-best 10-under 62 to take a three-stroke lead over Leona Maguire into the final round of the Meijer LPGA Classic.

"Everything was falling and I was just on a roll," Korda said. "You don't take these days for granted."

Putting with her left-hand low, Korda had 11 birdies and one bogey to get to 20-under 196 at Blythefield Country Club. She broke the tournament 54-hole record of 17 under set by Lexi Thompson in her 2015 victory. "A bit of everything," Korda said. "Mental, putting, especially left low again. I went back, and then I just feel like my putting is better left-hand low."

The 22-year-old American, ranked No. 4 in the world, birdied the last three holes and five of the last six in the round interrupted by a rain delay.

"Definitely got a lot softer," Korda said. "You can be a lot more aggressive on the greens. As I said yesterday the greens get bouncy, they're a little slower but bouncy. For them to be soft, I can just aim at the hole and shoot at it."

Korda birdied the first three holes, added three more on Nos. 6, 8 and 10 before dropping a stroke on No. 11. She birdied Nos. 13 and 14 and closed with three straight to push the lead to three. She won the Gainbridge LPGA in Florida in Orlando, Florida, in February after older sister Jessica won the previous tour event for her fourth LPGA Tour victory.

"Every time is different I guess in a sense," Korda said. "I've gone to sleep and I haven't been nervous, and there has been times where I couldn't even sleep I woke up so many times during the night. We'll see tomorrow if I'm rested or not."

Younger brother Sebastian won tennis' Emilia-Romagna Open in Italy in May for his first ATP Tour victory.

Second-round leader Maguire was second after a 70. The 26-year-old former Duke player is trying to become the first Irish winner in LPGA Tour history.

"All the pressure is on Nelly. Everybody expects Nelly to win tomorrow," Maguire said. "She's ranked whatever she is in the world, top five. Nobody expects me to do anything tomorrow. I've really got nothing to lose. I can just go out and play golf and see what happens." Madelene Sagstrom was third at 16 under after a 65, and Su Oh (69) was another stroke back. Anna Nordqvist (68), Georgia Hall (65), Charley Hull (67) and Mina Harigae (68) were 14 under.

Jessica Korda was eight strokes behind after a 67. Thompson (68) and Inbee Park (68) also were 12 under.

The major KPMG Women's PGA Championship is next week at Atlanta Athletic Club.

Germany thrash Portugal 4-2 in Group-F clash in Munich

MUNICH, 20 JUN [AFP]: Germany got their Euro 2020 campaign back on track -- and blew Group F wide open -- with a 4-2 romp against Portugal in Munich on Saturday.

France's 1-1 draw with Hungary earlier in Budapest and Germany's win mean there is all to play for in Wednesday's final group games when the Germans host Hungary and the French meet holders Portugal.

After Cristiano Ronaldo claimed his 107th international goal, leaving him two short of Ali Daei's all-time record, to give Portugal an early lead, the Germans roared back with four unanswered goals. German pressure forced own goals by Ruben Dias and Raphael Guerreiro to put the hosts 2-1 up at half-time.

A Kai Havertz goal underlined Germany's dominance before left-back Robin Gosens capped his man-of-the-match display by heading in Germany's fourth goal to add to his two assists.

Portugal hit back when Diogo Jota tapped in Ronaldo's hooked volley to make it 4-2 with 23 minutes left.

Germany continued their domination of Portugal, who they have now beaten five consecutive times at World Cup or European Championship finals since Euro 2000.

Germany created a huge amount of chances compared



to Tuesday's 1-0 defeat by France, while Portugal lacked the composure of their 3-0 win over Hungary the same day.

The match began at a frantic pace amid sweltering conditions in the Bavarian capital.

The Germans had a goal disallowed after five minutes when VAR spotted Serge Gnabry was offside as Gosens hit a spectacular volley.

However, sloppy Germany defending saw Portugal take the lead.

With only Gosens and Havertz defending at a German corner, Bernardo Silva started a counter-attack, then picked out Jota in the area with a world-class pass.

The Liverpool forward squared to Ronaldo, who sprinted into the box to slot the ball past Germany captain Manuel Neuer with less than 15 minutes gone.

It was Ronaldo's first goal against Germany to extend his record tally to 12 goals at five European

Championship finals.

However, two own goals inside four minutes turned the game.

Germany drew level when another Gosens volley was flicked towards the net by Havertz, with Dias getting the final touch as the ball flew past Rui Patricio on 35 minutes.

The second goal soon followed when Guerreiro turned Kimmich's cross into his own net while trying to stop the ball reaching the on-rushing

German forwards.

Gosens caused Portugal problems all afternoon on the left flank.

His low cross was tapped in by Havertz six minutes after the break.

The Atalanta player then capped a superb display by powering in a close-range header from Kimmich's cross on the hour mark.

German fans sang their approval, with "Oh, wie ist das schoen" (oh, is that beautiful) echoing around the Allianz

Arena. Gosens was substituted soon after with his name being chanted.

Portugal pulled a goal back when Guerreiro's free-kick was hooked back by Ronaldo and turned in by Jota.

Germany nearly claimed a late fifth goal when Havertz's replacement Leon Goretzka fired over after another surging attack by the hosts.

This is the first time Portugal have conceded four goals since losing 4-0 to Germany at the 2014 World Cup.

Antoine Griezmann saves France from big upset at Euro 2020

BUDAPEST, JUN 20 (AP): Antoine Griezmann scored a second-half equalizer to give France a 1-1 draw with Hungary at the European Championship.

Hungary, playing in front of a raucous crowd yet again, nearly pulled off the biggest upset of the tournament at the Puskas Arena.

After Kylian Mbappe and Karim Benzema wasted chances, Griezmann scored in the 66th minute to dampen the spirit of a crowd which gave Hungary unwavering support throughout

the Group F match.

It was Griezmann's 38th goal for France, moving him three behind third-place Michel Platini on the national team's scoring list, and he did a little celebratory dance in front of the blue-shirted fans.

The 67,215-capacity Puskas Arena in Budapest is the only stadium at Euro 2020 to allow full crowds, and it produced an atmosphere to remember.

Hungary's fans went wild when Attila Fiola gave the home team the lead.

Latching onto the ball after Roland Sallai won a header down the left flank, Fiola burst into the penalty area and held off defender Raphael Varane before clipping the ball into the bottom corner.

Some flares were lit and Hungary goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi had to remove paper thrown from the stands which landed in his penalty area.

The Hungarian players lined up in front of their home fans behind one goal after the match and stood with their hands on their hearts as the crowd sang.

Karachi qualifies for PSL playoffs and knocks out Lahore

ABU DHABI, JUN 20 (AP): Defending champion Karachi Kings squeaked into the Pakistan Super League playoffs after beating Quetta Gladiators by 14 runs in its do-or-die last league game.

Karachi finished on 10 points alongside Lahore Qalandars, but its better net run-rate knocked out the 2020 finalist from the playoffs.

Quetta finished on the bottom of the table with only two wins from 10 games.

Danish Aziz's whirlwind knock of 45 runs off 13 balls lifted Karachi to 176-7. The left-hander smacked 33 runs in Jack Wildermuth's penultimate over of the innings from four consecutive sixes and two boundaries.

Quetta, which made five changes in its last league game, ended up at 162-7. Captain Sarfaraz Ahmed was unbeaten on 51 off 33 balls.

Quetta debutant left-arm spinner Arish Ali Khan grabbed 4-28 as Karachi slipped to 121-5 in the 17th over. But Aziz's masterful knock turned the tide in Karachi's favor.

Wildermuth was brought into the attack in place of fast bowler Naseem Shah, who pulled a calf muscle just before he was about to bowl the penultimate over, and limped off the field.

Fast bowler Mohammad Ilyas (3-

39) ran through the Quetta top order and Arshad Iqbal chipped in with 2-39.

Fast bowler Mohammad Amir twice came close to his first wicket in five PSL games, but first Wildermuth successfully overturned an lbw decision through television referral and Amir dropped a sitter off his own bowling off the next delivery to end up with 0-21.

Later Saturday, PSL leader Islamabad United beat second-placed Multan Sultans by four wickets to consolidate its spot at the top of the standings.

Mohammad Wasim took 4-31 from four overs as Islamabad restricted Multan to 149 from its 20 overs after captain Shadab Khan won the toss and elected to field first.

Shan Masood top scored for Multan with 59 off 37 balls, with six boundaries and three sixes, but the opener lost partners regularly as the Sultans innings never got going.

Khan led the reply for Islamabad with 35 from 27 blls and shared handy partnerships with Muhammad Akhlaq (26) and Hussain Talat (34) to win with two balls to spare.

The two teams meet again on Monday in a qualifying final, with Karachi to play Peshawar in an elimination final on Tuesday.

PV Sindhu will be under pressure in Olympics, tough to win medal, says Jwala Gutta

NEW DELHI, 20 JUN [PTI]:

Rio Games silver medalist PV Sindhu will be under a lot more pressure at the Tokyo Olympics and it will be tough to repeat her medal-winning performance given the lack of match practice in the run-up to the showpiece event, reckons former doubles player Jwala Gutta. All the focus was on London Olympics bronze medallist Saina Nehwal in the run-up to the Rio Games but it was Sindhu who stunned the world with her silver medal-winning feat five years back.

However, this time Sindhu will carry a billion hopes as she remains one of the favourites to claim a medal at the delayed Tokyo Games, beginning July 23.

"I hope that she gets a medal. There is definitely going to be more pressure than last time on Sindhu," Jwala said during a discussion on "Indian badminton Prospect" in bakstage app.

"In Rio, the circumstances were completely different for Sindhu, now the situation has completely changed, the focus is more on her and it depends on her how she takes this pressure.

"I hope she takes it positively. Rio wasn't easy but Tokyo definitely won't be easy. Everybody knows her game, everybody watched her."

Jwala also said, the fact that players have not been able to play a lot of tournaments this time due to COVID-19 is also a concern.

"Even before the second wave, the situation wasn't favourable for



Indians, while in Europe few tournaments happened. The problem with the Indian system is that Sindhu is one of a kind.

"When she is sparing with somebody, it is not of the same level, while the Chinese, Koreans are a team of 20-30 players. Whether it is Tai Tzu Ying or the Chinese, I am definitely sure they are working really hard. Koreans are also playing well. Thai girls are playing well. The Japanese too.

"Sindhu was going through a personal thing with the confusion of coaches, so there has been no consistency in the way things should be before the Olympics.

"Our players didn't get enough match practice also because Indians

were blacklisted from travelling due to COVID, that is the biggest disadvantage for Indians."

Jwala says Sindhu should scan through all the videos of her past matches and work on her strategy.

"Every tournament, the strategy keeps changing and I hope she is sitting back and watching her matches with big players against whom

she has won and lost. If I were Sindhu I would work on my strategy and mind-strength because in top-20, everybody is at the same level physically."

Besides Sindhu, World Championship bronze medalist B Sai Praneeth and world number 10 men's doubles pair of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy also qualified for the Olympics.

"I always like Sai's game and always believed in him. The problem is he never believed in himself. Now after the World championship bronze he has started to believe himself. There is inconsistency but I hope he performs well," Jwala said.

"Chirag and Satwik, they are juniors and still have a long way to go. They have nothing to lose so they should go all out and can give everything without any fear. They can take advantage of this opportunity, because probably no one is talking about them."

Jwala once again questioned chief national coach Pullela Gopichand's multiple roles in the country's badminton

set-up, saying unless this "conflict of interest" stops, India can never produce quality players.

"After Sindhu there is going to a lot of gap. There is only one Sindhu, tell me another name. We have failed to make a proper system for badminton, we don't have enough quality coaches. After a certain point, players need exposure but only one academy is getting all the exposure," Jwala said.

"Chief coach can't run his own private academy. He can't be given a national camp. It has been done since 2006 till now. The person has been given all the money, resources and he hasn't made one doubles player, so this person should not be in that position.

"...Conflict of interest has to stop. He is the District Association President, secretary of Telangana Association. We need to speak the truth, even umpires are also favouring one academy. The line umpires, the PBL players are decided by this person.

"If badminton has to do well from here, there has to be a drastic change," she signed off.

Pak to complete fencing of border with Afghanistan by June end: Minister

SAJJAD HUSSAIN

ISLAMABAD, JUN 20 (PTI): In the wake of looming uncertainty in Afghanistan due to the withdrawal of the US troops, Pakistan has announced that it would complete the fencing of its border with the war-torn country by the end of June.

Minister for Interior Sheikh Rashid Ahmed stated this on Saturday on the floor of the National Assembly, the lower house of parliament, the Dawn newspaper reported.

The minister informed the house that 88 per cent work on the fencing of the border with Afghanistan has been completed and the rest would be completed by June 30, it said.

The fencing of the 2,640 km land border with Afghanistan began in March 2017 after a spate of attacks from across the porous border. Pakistan shares a



long and porous border with Afghanistan, which runs through mountainous terrain and is largely unpatrolled. The Durand Line was drawn by the British rulers in 1896 and is disputed by Afghanistan, which also resists Pakistani attempts

to erect any border fence.

The barrier consists of two sets of chain-link fences, which is separated by a 2-metre space filled with concertina wire coils. The double-fence is 3.6 metres high on the Pakistani side and 4 metres on the Afghan

side. Surveillance cameras and infrared detectors have been installed and about 1,000 check posts are part of the security system along the fence. The movement across the border will be possible only through 16 designated crossings.

Initially, it was expected to be completed by April 2021 but due to some delay, now the government is committed to complete it by the end of June.

Officials said that Pakistan is working to augment the security apparatus on the western

border due to withdrawal of the US troops which is feared to create a vacuum in Afghanistan, complicating the already fragile security situation with possible impact on Pakistan.

US President Joe Biden in April announced that all US troops would be withdrawn from Afghanistan by September 11 to end America's longest war that has cost trillions of dollars and the lives of over 2,400 American soldiers.

Alluding towards the situation in Afghanistan in the context of the US troops pullout, the minister noted that the next two to three months were very important for Pakistan because right now infighting is going on at some 38 locations in Afghanistan.

The minister also said that as many as 2,400 Afghan security personnel had joined the ranks of Taliban.

France elects regional leaders, preps for presidential vote

PARIS, JUN 20 (AP): Marine Le Pen's far right party is riding high on her tough-on-security, stop-immigration message as French voters start choosing regional leaders Sunday in an election that's seen as a dress rehearsal for next year's presidential vote.

President Emmanuel Macron's young centrist party is expected to fare poorly, lacking a strong local political base and suffering from frustration at his government's handling of the pandemic. Turnout in Sunday's first round could hit a record low. Those who do show up to vote must stay masked and socially distanced and carry their own pens to sign voting registries.

The elections for leadership councils of France's 13 regions, from Brittany to Burgundy to the French Riviera, are primarily about local issues like transportation, schools and infrastructure. But leading politicians are using them as a platform to test ideas and win followers ahead of the April presidential election. Le Pen and Macron are expected to dominate that race. Par-

ties that win more than 10 per cent of the votes in Sunday's first-round regional voting advance to the decisive runoff June 27.

Polls suggest that Le Pen's National Rally party may win control of one or more regions, which would be a big boost for her decade-long effort to legitimize a party long seen as an anti-democratic, anti-Semitic pariah. A major question for the runoff is whether French voters will band together to keep the party out of power as they have in the past.

Traditional conservative party The Republicans looks set to keep control of several of the seven regions it currently runs, including the all-important Paris area.

Among the strongest National Rally candidates is Thierry Mariani, running to lead the region that includes Provence, the French Riviera and part of the Alps. Mariani has said he wants more police and no more public funding for groups promoting individual communities, which many see as targeting Muslim associations or LGBTQ movements.

Prominent UAE activist Alaa al-Siddiq dies in London car crash

LONDON, 20 JUN [AL-JAZEERA]: Alaa al-Siddiq, a prominent dissident Emirati rights activist and critic, has died in a car crash in London.

Alaa was the executive director of the United Kingdom-based ALQST, a non-profit organisation that advocates for greater freedoms and human rights in the UAE and the wider Gulf region.

"With deep sadness, ALQST mourns the sudden death of its loved and respected Executive Director Alaa Al-Siddiq on Saturday 19 June 2021," the group said in a tweet. "May she rest in power."

Her father, Mohammad al-Siddiq, is also a prominent activist who has been held in detention by Emirati authorities since 2013.

"Today, the able Emirati researcher and honest sister, professor Alaa al-Siddiq, left this world, while her father, Mohammad al-Siddiq languishes in the notorious prisons of the [United Arab] Emirates," wrote Saudi activist Abdullah al-Awda.

According to Doha

News, Alaa and her husband sought asylum in Qatar in 2012, where they had been living with their relatives.

The activist's presence in Qatar, and Doha's stance towards political activists at a time when the UAE was cracking down on voices of dissent, led to a rift between the two neighbours.

In 2018, Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani said a dispute had taken place between Qatar and the UAE in 2015 concerning a political dissident's wife.

Abu Dhabi had sent an envoy to Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani to ask that the woman in question be handed over to Emirati authorities, a request that was turned down by the Qatari ruler.

Though kept secret, Abdullah al-Athbah, the editor in chief of Qatar's al-Arab newspaper, later said it was Alaa who the Emiratis sought to repatriate.

Shafali Verma will be very important for us in all formats: Mithali

Bristol, Jun 20 (PTI): Shafali Verma's spectacular debut has caught the imagination of the Indian women's team Test skipper Mithali Raj, who feels the teenager would be a key member of the side in all the formats of the game in future.

The 17-year-old, who had smashed a stroke-filled 96 in the first innings, made 63 in the second innings, to become the youngest woman and fourth overall to score twin half-centuries in her debut Test and was rightfully adjudged player-of-the-match.

"She will be very, very important to the Indian batting unit in all formats. She beautifully adapted to this format," Mithali said in a virtual media interaction after India, following on, salvaged a draw in the one-off Test against England. "She didn't go like how she would go bonkers in the T20 format. She played sensibly against the new ball and it's great to have her."

Asked what prompted the Indian team management to hand Verma a Test debut in England, Mithali said: "She has great range of shots, and she can be very, very, effective in a format like this if she gets going. In no time, we could see that the score would be somewhere else if she gets going."

"Once we knew that it's a used wicket and there won't be much of a movement, we thought it would be a good time

to give her a Test debut and she lived up to it."

Mithali rated the young opener's knock in the second innings ahead of her first innings score of 96 as the teenager showed utmost composure and maturity.

"The (second innings) fifty came with a little more sorted head and a little bit more experience. Those sweetly-timed drives, it was beautiful to watch her. I'm sure she will grow from strength to strength from here on."

In reply to England's first innings score of 396 for 9, India, playing their first-ever Test in seven years, collapsed to 231 from 167 for no loss, courtesy the fine start given by Verma and Smriti Mandhana.

Following-on, India had a familiar collapse after fifties from Verma and Deepti Sharma and they were staring at a loss before debutants Sneha Rana (80 not out) and wicketkeeper Taniya Bhatia (44 not out) frustrated the English bowlers to pull off a thrilling draw in the final session.

Rana, who was playing her first game for India in five years, was handed a surprise debut and Mithali said the off-spinner's ability to bat clinched it for her.

"It was important for us to pick spinners who have been doing well because we didn't have much of a camp or tournament before

this. Sneha (Rana) was bowling very well along with Deepti. Her bonus was that she was a batter and we wanted to lengthen our batting order."

The India veteran also backed her English counterpart Heather Knight's call for a five-day Test format for women's cricket.

"It's a good idea to have a five-day Test, but we actually have to start a Test match regularly. Having a Test match in a series is important, and then maybe you can take it to five-day Tests."

"I'm okay with it as it gives more chances of a result. But I would prefer having a Test match in every series, and take it from there," Mithali said.

India stretched their unbeaten streak against England women to 26 years with this draw and Mithali said the visitors' outstanding show would put the home side on the back foot going into the limited overs series.

India will now play three ODIs and as many T20Is against England beginning with the first game here on June 27.

"Psychologically, I think it's a big boost and will definitely put England on back foot because they know that even though the main batters have not performed, the lower middle order stood up," she said.

"The Indian batting line up is deep now and

it's not just the top-order. The lower middle-order also can bat and put in match-winning partnerships," she said.

India women will play their first-ever pink-ball Test at the WACA during their tour of Australia in September and Mithali said the just-concluded match against England augurs well for them.

"These girls have shown even with lack of practice with the red ball and the longer format, they stood up and performed. I think confidence is what we will be carrying into the next Tests. I know it's a pink ball Test but preparation will be equally important."

"Having said that, the mental space that these young girls are in after today's performance will have a very positive impact, moving into a longer format for the coming Pink Ball Test," she concluded.

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US sending Taiwan 2.5 million vaccine doses, tripling pledge

TAIPEI, JUN 20 (AP): The US is sending 2.5 million doses of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine to Taiwan, tripling an earlier pledge in a donation with both public health and geopolitical meaning.

The shipment was due to arrive by plane later Sunday, the de facto U.S. embassy said.

The donation reflects our commitment to Taiwan as a trusted friend, and a member of the international family of democracies, it said in a Facebook post.

Taiwan, a self-governing island of 24 million people off China's east coast, has been scrambling to get vaccines after a recent outbreak. China, which has been ruled single handedly by the Communist Party since 1949, claims Taiwan as its territory and says it must eventually come under its control.

The US promised 750,000 doses for Taiwan on a brief visit to the island earlier this month by Senator Tammy Duckworth and two of her Senate colleagues. Taiwan's

President Tsai Ing-wen said the US had decided to increase the donation through efforts on both sides over the past two weeks.

On the democratic front, Taiwan and countries with similar ideas have always been able to interact closely, she wrote on her Facebook page in Chinese.

Whether it is for regional peace and stability or the virus that is a common human adversary, we will continue to uphold common ideas and work together.

At least 15 die in multiple attacks near US-Mexico border

CIUDAD VICTORIA (MEXICO), JUN 20 (AP): Gunmen aboard a number of vehicles staged attacks in several neighborhoods in the Mexican border city of Reynosa on Saturday, and at least 15 people died in clashes that caused widespread panic, according to local law enforcement.

The Tamaulipas state agency coordinating security forces said in a statement that the attacks began in the early afternoon in several neighborhoods in the eastern part of the city, which borders McAllen, Texas.

The agency said one person died during an attack on police near a bor-

der bridge, but it was not clear if the others were shot in random attacks or were targeted.

The shootings mobilized the army, National Guard, state police and other agencies. Authorities said they detained a person who had two women, apparently kidnapped, in the trunk of his car, and said they seized three vehicles. Reynosa Mayor Maki Esther Ortiz Domaguez sent a tweet demanding the attack be clarified and that the citizenry be protected.

The area's criminal activity has long been dominated by the Gulf Cartel, but there have been fractures within the gang.



global story with 'Jagame Thandhiram': Karthik Subbaraj

Noted writer-director Karthik Subbaraj says with his crossover gangster drama film "Jagame Thandhiram", featuring Tamil star Dhanush and "Game of Thrones" actor James Cosmo, his aim is to reach out to the both Indian and international audience.

The filmmaker, known for crime and action movies like "Jigarthanda", "Iraivi" and "Petta", is an ardent fan of the mafia genre.

"I felt I should make a film in New York with a known gangster face and a Tamil character from Madurai, it should be a global story.

"The initial idea was to do a cross country film bringing two worlds together. The aim was to make it enjoyable to Indian and international audiences," Subbaraj told PTI in a Zoom interview Based in London, "Jagame Thandhiram" (Tamil for Tricky World) revolves around Suruli (Dhanush), a nomadic gangster who has to choose between good and evil in a war for what one can truly call home.

The 38-year-old director initially set the film in New York and had researched the crime family scene in the American city, which also served as base for "The Godfather", considered the finest mafia movie ever made.

"The entire gangster scene is totally different, they call it a family, it is called Cosa Nostra (Our Thing in Italian). There are Italian-American gangster families, Irish gangster families, etc.

"I am from Madurai and I had ex-

plored that world with 'Jigarthanda' and I wanted to seamlessly merge both the worlds," he said, adding the film also taps into the theme of immigration.

He may narrate stories set in the world of crime, but Subbaraj said he

and international, with filmmakers like Mani Ratnam, Balu Mahendra, K Balachander, Martin Scorsese and Quentin Tarantino being his favourites. "... You watch their films, you love it. Their films excite you and you keep watching them. And subcon-



MINT CONDITION! Model Jordyn Woods rocks a mint green jumpsuit and matching Chanel purse at the UOMA Pride Month and Juneteenth Celebration in West Hollywood.

Nicholas Braun, Emilia Jones to star in 'Cat Person'



Succession star Nicholas Braun and "Coda" star Emilia Jones are teaming up for "Cat Person", a psychological thriller based on the short story by Kristen Roupenian.

Billed as the "hellscape of modern romance", the film will be produced by StudioCanal and Imperative Entertainment in association with 30West, reported Variety.

"Cat Person" will be directed by Susanna Fogel of "The Flight Attendant" fame, with script by Michelle Ashford, best known for "Masters of Sex". ?

Roupenian's short story turns on the casual, but increasingly discomfiting, relation-

ship between Margot, a 20-year-old college student, and Robert, 34, a man who goes to the movie theatre where Margot works.

"Using Kristen's excruciatingly well-observed short story about the horrors of dating as the jumping off point for an actual genre film, 'Cat Person' will explore the hellcape of modern romance and the idea that we have all been the villain in someone else's story, and the victim in others," Fogel said.

The short story was published by The New Yorker in 2017 and went on to become its most downloaded fiction that year.

You can't get impatient waiting for good work in the industry: Sandeepa Dhar

Actor Sandeepa Dhar says even though waiting for a right project can be a tedious process, it is important for artistes to grab every opportunity that helps in honing their skills. Dhar began her career with the Rajshri Productions drama "Isi Life Mein..." in 2010 and went on to feature in films like "Heropanti" and "Dabangg 2." Her career turnaround happened in 2019, when she featured on the ZEE5 series "Abhay".

In an interview with PTI, Dhar said getting offered a good project backed by a respectable platform doesn't happen "on a regular basis". "You sometimes get great scripts but they're not backed by great platforms and then there are also times when you have great platforms backing not such great scripts. So you have to wait for the right mix to happen. "The only thing you can do is keep yourself busy, keep honing your skills. You can't get impatient with these things," she added.

While waiting for interesting projects is the biggest challenge for an actor in the industry, Dhar said one should make sure they don't lose touch with being in front of the camera. "There will be that right opportunity that'll come your way but (till then) you can't get impatient. In order to survive in this industry, patience is what you need to really have.

"While you wait for the right thing to come, you keep doing workshops. An actor also needs 'riyaz' (practise) constantly... It's important to be a working actor because if you don't work for too long you do get a little rusty." The 32-year-old ac-

tor currently stars on the show "Chattis Aur Maina", streaming on Disney+ Hotstar.

Produced by CM Studios, the show features Dhar as the leader of a travel dance group whose dream is to become a top Bhojpuri star. Dhar said the show, co-starring Vikram Singh Chauhan, not only gave her the opportunity to explore a romantic-comedy on screen but also offered her the platform to play a strong woman in "a light-hearted setting".

Like his latest film, influence on Subbaraj's craft has also been a blend of Indian

never attempts to glorify the bad guys in his movies.

"Most of my protagonists are in grey shade because when they shift their focus to the good or bad side, you will be able to see the change and relate to it more. 'Jagame Thandhiram' is not glorifying evil. There is a reason for them (the characters) to do certain things and then the shift happens."

There are a lot of important messages that are communicated through the storytelling, whether it's women empowerment, female education, homosexuality and the amount of hurdles a woman has to face to chase her dreams in a male dominated society.

"The show handles these subjects sensitively and in a light-hearted manner. That for me was really engaging," she added.

The actor said digital platforms are a "boon" for artistes who are looking to feature in newer narratives.

Dhar, who had gone to Australia to study dance for three years after her film debut and subsequently featured in the international Broadway musical "The West Side Story", said she returned to the Hindi film industry at the right time when the OTT platforms were gaining relevance.

"Because I was doing musicals, I wasn't really a part of the industry, I was never fully in India. I would come for a couple of weeks and then fly back again. But ever since I've come back, in 2019, I did 'Abhay'. I think I came back at the correct time because the OTT boom happened

Asked if she got vaccinated, Lara Dutta had the best reply ever

Lara Dutta began trending on Sunday after she gave an ROFL reply to a fan on Twitter.

The 43-year-old-actress was recently asked by a fan on Twitter if she got her dose of the COVID-19 vaccination shot. The actress, adding a dose of humour, said that just because she did not post a picture from the session on social media, doesn't mean it did not happen.

"Did you get vaccinated," asked the fan. Lara Dutta's reply: "Yes! Just because I didn't post a picture doesn't mean it didn't happen." She accompanied her tweet with a couple of LOL emojis.

In terms of work, Lara Dutta awaits the release of her upcoming movie Bell Bottom, in which she co-stars with Akshay Kumar, Vaani Kapoor and Huma Qureshi.

The film will open in cinemas worldwide on July 27. Bell Bottom was Bollywood's first film to shoot at an international location after the nationwide lockdown last year. The film is co-produced by Vashu Bhagnani, Jackky Bhagnani, Deepshikha Deshmukh, Monisha Advani, Madhu Bhojwani and Nikkhil Advani.

Aries:

No two days are alike, Aries. On some days, we feel connected with the stream of creative consciousness in a way that adds an element of magic to everything we say and do. On other days, even getting out of bed seems like a colossal task. The same goes for our spiritual practices. While we're able to feel a sense of oneness with the divine forces on certain occasions, we struggle with the constant chatter of our minds on the others. Should that become the reason for your complacency? Anything but. Show up for yourself and your faith like never before. Something tells us you're three seconds away from that miracle moment!

Tip: Show up for yourself and your spiritual practice.

Taurus:

We all have that one person we go back to when we're feeling weak and vulnerable. Who is that person in your life, Taurus? Does retrograde season have you bending over backwards for them? It's time to recognise the situation for what it is and reaffirm your boundaries in a manner that feels authentic. Remember, we're not saying they're a bad person. We're simply saying they're not good for *you* at this moment.

Tip: Don't go back to the old ways.

Gemini:

Retrograde season has you reassessing your detrimen-

tal lifestyle patterns and making adjustments wherever necessary. For some of you, this may mean adopting the yogi life. Read: more movement, more meditation, more mindfulness, and high vibrational foods that help detox your body. While we all have a guru within who's guiding us at every step along the way, it doesn't hurt to have a teacher as well. Words of wisdom from somebody you look up to could help you make monumental changes today.

Tip: You're in the mood to adopt the yogi life.

Cancer:

Cancer, you've been surrounded by doom and gloom for a long time, and it's killing your mojo. What the cards are urging you to do today: shake things up a little. Transmute all of that pain and frustration into the higher vibrations of creativity and joy. It's time to reclaim your happiness, beautiful. It's time to create paradise for yourself exactly where you are.

Tip: It's time to shake things up a little.

Leo:

We all have a sense of who we are and what we're meant to achieve in this lifetime, and this mission becomes clearer to us as we go along. What the cards are urging you to do today: put pen to paper and allow the words to flow. Journaling with a clear intention in mind will not only help you gain clarity on your purpose, but

also follow your ikigai. Some of you may feel inspired to share your story on a public platform as well. Stay true to who you are, Leo.

Tip: It's time to journal.

Virgo:

We're so hung up on what tomorrow will bring that we forget to honour what this moment is offering us. Pay attention to your soul connections, Virgo, as well as the romantic ones that are awakening a spark within you. Sometimes, flirting like nobody's watching is the only therapy you need! As such, the cards are also emphasising on the importance of creative visualisation and journaling your intentions. I

Tip: Dream a little dream.

Libra:

There are oh-so-many kinds of love, Libra. As many kinds of love as there are people. The we-could-be-more-but-life-has-other-plans kind of love. The timing-was-just-not-right kind of love. The I'm-too-afraid-to-define-this-relationship kind of love. And, the I-know-we'll-find-each-other-in-another-lifetime kind of love. Today, you're being asked to acknowledge each one of these soul connections from your past, present, and future. If the thought of what you've had to let go of makes you feel heavy, allow yourself to grieve and to feel all of your emotions in their entirety. Remembering that what

you're making space for is far greater than what you've had to leave behind will help you get through all of this.

Tip: Allow yourself to grieve.

Scorpio:

We've all grown up with all kinds of beliefs about ourselves. Conditioning that keeps us from being the most empowered version of ourselves. Today, you're being asked to sit down with every one of these beliefs, as you release them one by one. It's time to take off that cloak of invisibility and come into your own, Scorpio. The world deserves to see you in your light and the world deserves to see that now.

Tip: It's time to own your place in the world.

Sagittarius:

Transformation is invisible, Sagittarius. Nobody understands this better than you. Friday finds you looking into the rearview mirror somewhat nostalgically and marveling at the ways in which you have grown. A good way to assess your evolution is by noticing the things that no longer evoke the emotion of fear within you.

Tip: It's time to marvel at all the ways in which you have grown!

Capricorn:

Given that we're still in the midst of retrograde season, the energy around you is rather unsettled. Tread with caution, Capricorn, and watch your triggers as you have

been watching your words. If and when you do find yourself losing your cool, though, step back from the situation and look within. The process of introspection will help you address deep-seated wounds and transmute the negative thought patterns.

Tip: Think of your triggers as an invitation to do the inner work.

Aquarius:

Spoiler alert: no amount of external validation can change how you feel about yourself, Aquarius. What the cards are urging you to do today is address those deep-seated wounds. The wounds that are keeping you from believing in your own power and potential. It's time to bring about an inner revolution, starting today. It's time to start affirming your own magic.

Tip: It's time to affirm your own magic.

Pisces:

You haven't always had a healthy relationship with wealth, but that doesn't mean you can't change things around now. This is a time of addressing those deep-seated wounds, and transmuting them with the light of love. This is a time of remembering that there is more than enough to go around, and that the Universe will provide for both your needs and your wants. Tip: It's time to rethink your relationship with money and success.