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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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AstraZeneca says its vaccine effective against variants identified in India

LONDON, 23 JUN [REUTERS]: AstraZeneca Plc's COVID-19 vaccine is effective against Delta and Kappa variants, which were first identified in India, the company said on Tuesday, citing a study.

The study by the Oxford University investigated the ability of monoclonal antibodies in blood from recovered people and from those vaccinated to neutralize the Delta and Kappa variants, the statement said.

Last week, an analysis by the Public Health England (PHE) showed that vaccines made by Pfizer Inc and AstraZeneca offer high protection of more than 90% against hospitalization from the Delta variant.

The latest Oxford study results are built on the recent analysis by PHE, the company said.

The Delta variant is becoming the globally dominant version of the disease, the World Health Organization's chief scientist said on Friday.

Chennai's Virtual Warriors save hundreds of lives during pandemic

CHENNAI, 23 JUN [NDTV]: From their Chennai home, sisters Grace Priyadarshini Emmanuel, an IAS aspirant, and Preethi Esther Emmanuel, an architect, both Covid survivors, are virtually helping other patients and their families every day.

They share verified information on availability of beds, oxygen, ambulance, medicine, oxygen concentrators and even food on their Instagram pages. The siblings work 18 hours a day, glued to their devices, talking on their phones or texting those in need of help or hospitals and service providers. Their timely leads, they say, have helped several thousands of patients as the messages were shared and went viral when cases in Tamil Nadu peaked amid the second wave, with acute shortage of oxygen and beds.

The sisters lost their maternal grandparents to Covid after five members in their family, including their mother Pamila Emmanuel, contracted the virus. It was then the family, just like thousands of others, faced the ground reality of shortage of beds and oxygen facilities and struggled without leads that led to wastage of time.

Once the sisters recovered, they decided to reach out and help others like them with credible leads. On what motivates them, Preethi Esther, who's also a gospel singer, said, "People found beds when they were on the verge of dying. What more in life can one ask for? In the ambulance, when you hear the beep sound, you know the person could die any moment and I find a bed and they stabilise. What more can one want?"

In just weeks, they evolved a unique model. More than a hundred individuals from around the world who benefitted from their help volunteered to join hands with them. They verify every lead before sharing. Their reach has now expanded across south India. "People don't have to call us as we share only verified leads and we receive so many thank you messages and calls about how the information helped them," said Priyadarshini Emmanuel.

Low testing spikes positivity rate, but reassuringly no new Covid deaths in last 24 hours

SAGAR CHHETRI GANGTOK, 23 JUN:

The number tests being conducted in the State have dropped substantially, and while this could be because fewer primary contacts of Covid-positive people have still not been screened, it is also something that the concerned authorities should address and expand mass testing system. And as can be expected with fewer tests, when people who suspect exposure show up for tests, Sikkim's test positivity rate has also gone up and was recorded at 19.80% after having dropped close to 5% only a few days back. Sikkim recorded 131 new cases of Covid-19 in the last 24 hours from the testing of 659 samples.

On the other hand, continuing its record of posting more recoveries

than new cases, the same 24 hours also saw 171 Covid patients make full recoveries and get discharged from home isolation.

These two figures combined to reduce the number of active Covid cases in the

State to 2,390.

At the same time, the State witnessed no new COVID deaths in the last 24 hours in the State, and this reassuring since only a day earlier, it had lost three lives to Covid. Sikkim's COVID death toll stands at 296. The

second wave has claimed 160 lives since 22 April.

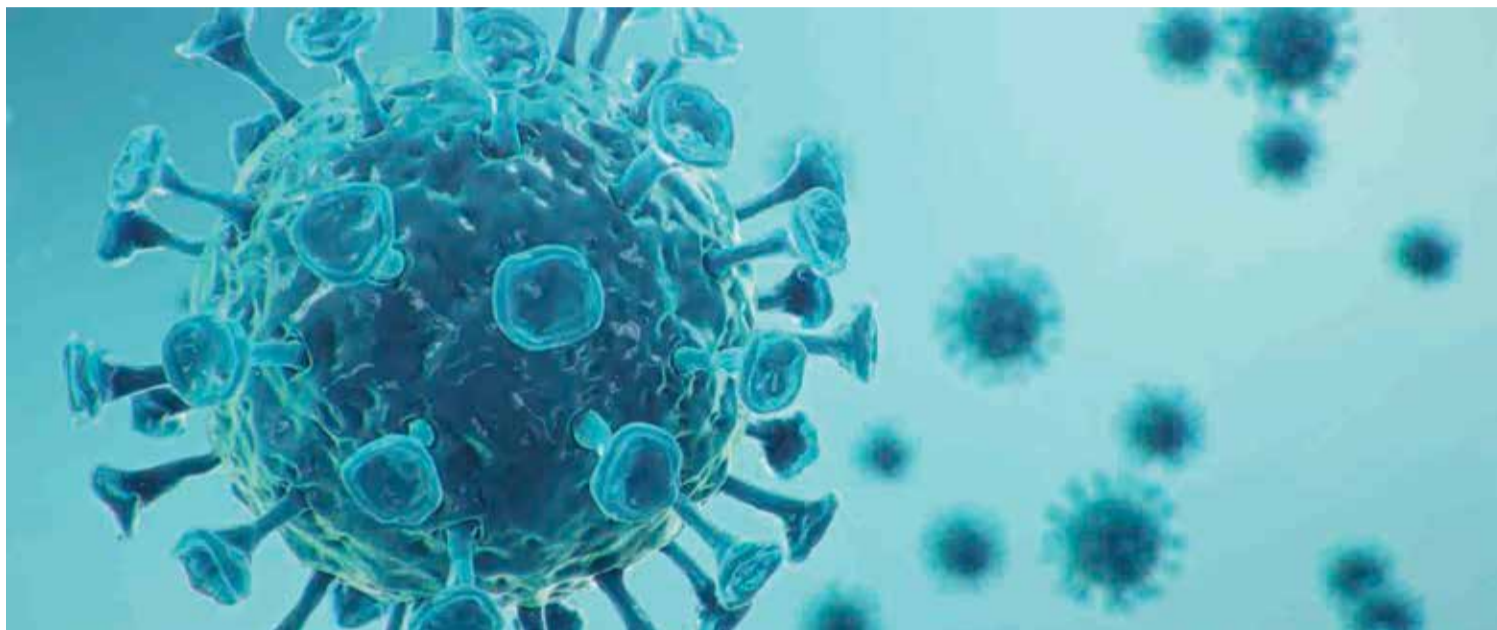
As per the Daily Report of Covid-19 released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department, while 89 of the new cases were picked up in RT-PCR testing of

386 samples, 42 samples returned positive in rapid antigen testing of 262.

Sikkim's tally of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 has increased to 19,589.

Out of 131 new cases, 75 were registered in East District, 20 in

West District and 36 in South District. Only eight COVID patients were admitted to hospitals today while 12 patients are currently admitted in ICU facilities of STNM hospital and Central Referral Hospital, Tadong.



District officials inspect damage on road to Saffo



WANGCHUK BHUTIA MANGAN, 23 JUN:

A team led by DC North inspected the road [which was supposed to connect Saffo village in Dzongu] which was severely damaged by the recent landslide.

The team, which included the ADC North, SDM Dzongu & Chungthang and

officials from the line departments, was received by the Panchayats and public of Saffo.

During the visit, a meeting was also held at the spot in the presence of officials from GREF.

GREF has assured restoration of this stretch within 12 to 13 days.

The DC North also

ensured transport of all essential commodities for the public of Saffo through transhipment.

Around a 250 metre span of road formation has been damaged and sunk about 15 feet below the original formation at two points by slides between Ship-Gyer and Saffo villages.

India reports around 40 cases of Delta plus variant

NEW DELHI, JUNE 23 (PTI): Around 40 cases of the Delta plus variant, classified as a variant of concern (VOC), have been detected sporadically in Maharashtra, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh, the Union Health Ministry said on Wednesday.

Delta variant as well as all Delta sub-lineages including Delta plus are classified as VOC, it said.

"As of now among the samples sequenced (45000+) in India, Delta plus variant -- AY.1 -- has been observed sporadically in Maharashtra, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh, with around 40 cases identified so far and no significant increase in prevalence," the ministry said in its statement.

These three states have been advised to strengthen surveillance and take appropriate public health measures.

After the report of AY.1 by the Public Health England (PHE) on June 11, retrospective analysis of samples revealed the first occurrence of this lineage from a sample collected from Maharashtra. The sample was collected on April 5.

As of June 18, 205 sequences of AY.1 lineage was detected worldwide, with the USA and the UK having over half of the

known cases, the statement said.

INSACOG had recently identified a viral variant (delta, B.1.617.2). This viral variant has also been seen in nine other countries of the world.

INSACOG is an Indian consortium of 28 labs, established by the Government of India to carry out genome sequencing of the virus causing the COVID-19 pandemic.

The World Health Organisation has introduced a classification as VOC (variant of concern) and VOI (variant of interest), with the evolution of several variants around the globe.

Delta variant as well as all Delta sub-lineages including Delta Plus are classified as VOC, the statement said.

The Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortium (INSACOG) reported the evolution of Delta plus variant (B.1.617.2) + K417N lineage of SARS-CoV2 called as B.1.617.2.1/AY.1.

The Delta plus variant B.1.617.2.1/ (AY.1) is characterized by the K417N mutation in spike protein, the statement said.

The spike protein aids the virus to gain receptor-mediated entry into human cells. K417N corresponds to the change

of amino acid lysine (K) to asparagine (N) at the 417th position of spike protein. There are other Delta plus variants with other mutations.

The AY.1 is the most well-known, but these are not identical. A second clade found in sequences uploaded to GISAID from the USA, is now designated AY.2, but is not seen in India yet, the statement said.

"All Delta sub-lineages are treated as a variant of concern VOC, although properties of AY.1 are still being investigated. Currently, the variant frequency of AY.1 is low in India. Cases with AY.1 have been mostly reported from nine countries of Europe, Asia and America," the ministry statement said.

The SARS-CoV-2 virus causing COVID-19 disease is mutating continuously with increase in the number of infections both across the world and in India.

Mutations help the virus to become either more transmissible or more virulent or both. With time these mutations known as Variants of Interest (VOI) increase in frequency in the selected population and are considered then as VOC.

Sports Minister launches Road to Tokyo Olympics 2020 in Sikkim

SAGAR CHHETRI GANGTOK, 23 JUN:

An Olympic awareness campaign, 'Road to Tokyo Olympics 2020' was launched by Minister to Sports & Youth Affairs Department, Kunga Nima Lepcha here at White Hall, today.

The month-long campaign will feature quiz competitions, debates, talks and other activities from 23 June to 23 July to build up interest in the Olympic Games.

The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, in coordination with Sports Authority of India and Sports Department of all States is organizing this month-long Olympic awareness campaign.

In his address, the Minister mentioned that the campaign will create wider awareness on Olympics and Olympians of the country and also take the



Olympic movement forward in the State.

He stressed that every Sikkimese should support the campaign to boost the morale of the Indian contingent. He also conveyed his best wishes to the Indian contingent.

The Minister mentioned that the government has been work-

ing hard to groom Olympians from Sikkim. He stated that everyone needs to work together to support local athletes to take them to the higher levels.

Secretary, Sports & Youth Affairs Department, Raju Basnet, in turn mentioned that India is participating in around 15 disciplines at Tokyo Olympics.

He added that Tokyo Olympics was not only important for India but for Sikkim as well as Tarundeep Rai was also part of the Indian contingent. While conveying his best wishes, he expressed that the country was hopeful for a medal from Tarundeep Rai.

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SummitTIMES IN NEPALI

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PMKSY gets underway at Gyalshing-Bermiok with handing over of work order for community water tank at Hee-Martam Block

GYALSHING, 23 JUN [IPR]: A general awareness session on the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sicchai Yojana [PMKSY] (OI & MI) was held at the auditorium of Hee-Martam Block Administrative Centre in West District today.

Agriculture Minister Lok Nath Sharma was present as the chief guest accompanied by Advisor, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services, Durga Prasad Pradhan.

The programme was also attended by the Additional Director, AH&VS, Dr Narad Cintury, Joint Director Agriculture TN Bhutia, Joint Director Horticulture Karma Sherpa, Block Development Officer Hee Martam BAC Pratiba Tamang, officials, Panchayats, beneficiaries and others.

The Minister handed over the Work Order for the construction of a Community Water Tank to the beneficiaries of identified cluster of Chingthang, Burfok and Rungdu Berthang ward under PMKSY scheme.

In his address, the Minister stated that the implementation of



PMKSY would be a milestone in availing required water during the dry and winter season. Throwing light on the concept of "per drop, more crop", drip irrigation, sprinkle irrigation system, he urged beneficiaries to adopt significant components of the schemes to increase the production levels.

He also asked officials, field functionaries, panchayats and farming households to get actively involved in ensuring quality works in

constructing Community Water Tank to meet up the objectives behind the visionary scheme.

He expressed gratitude to the Chief Minister of Sikkim on behalf of the Department for prioritizing Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry, Livestock Farming sectors and initiating farmer-friendly policies with attractive financial incentives in Dairy Farming, Piggery farming, production of five notified crops.

He highlighted newly

initiated financial incentives of Rs 5,000 in piggery farming sector and elaborated comprehensive procedure of conducting survey and guidelines to be framed for smooth disbursement of allocated fund of Rs 03 Crore in the initial stage.

Mr Sharma also expressed gratitude towards the Chief Minister for according approval for the establishment of Medhavi University in the constituency. The development will have

significant impact in witnessing a paradigm shift in terms of overall progress and reformation, he said.

Mr Sharma also underlined various developmental works accomplished in the health sector as well. He also informed that allotted Housing under Chief Minister Garib Awas Yojana within Gyalshing Bermiok constituency, are being constructed on a war-footing and urged all concerned to complete construction work

within the stipulated time period.

Further, he urged people to follow COVID appropriate behaviour and the guidelines issued by the concerned authority to save ourselves from COVID pandemic.

Earlier, the Joint Director gave an overview on the PMKSY scheme.

He informed that the capacity of Community Water Tank will be based on the size of cultivable land area. The scheme incorporates prime objectives of covering One hectare of land with 8,000 Litres of water during the winter/dry season. A total of 32 Community Water Tanks of 50,000 Litres, 30,000 Litres, 20,000 Litres and 10,000 Litres will be constructed within the identified cluster.

Further, he mentioned that a Water Reserved Committee will be formed for each Tank and the Committee will be responsible for the maintenance of the Community Water Tank after handing over of the tank after the completion of construction work.

ICICI donates ambulance for Sikkim's fight against Covid



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 23 JUN:

The ICICI Foundation for Inclusive Growth and ICICI Bank donated an ambulance to the State Government as assistance towards Sikkim's fight against COVID-19, a press communique from the Chief Minister's Office informs.

Suvjit Talpatra, Regional Head, Santosh

Roy, Branch Manager, Rekha Pradhan, Branch Manager and Ravi Jha, Assistant Manager called on the Chief Minister at his official residence and presented the token here today.

The Chief Minister expressed his gratitude towards them and the organization for their kind gesture, the release states.

Minister visits Hee Kyangbari Milk Producers Coop Society



GYALSHING, 23 JUN (IPR): Minister, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services, Lok Nath Sharma and the Advisor, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services, Durga Prasad Pradhan made a brief halt at Hee Kyangbari Milk Producers Cooperative Society, on their way to Hee Patal, West Sikkim, today morning.

The Minister enquired about the functioning of the Milk Co-operative and assured to provide AMCU, a fat measuring device within a week. He spoke to

the Managing Director, Sikkim Milk Union, over telephonic call and directed for the installation of the same machine.

It may be mentioned here that the Kengbari Dairy cooperative collects 280 (Two Hundred and Eighty) Litres of Milk per day. The new installation of the device will certainly encourage the dairy farmers to increase milk production in the locality, the Minister stated. He also extended his best wishes for new progress and achievement of dairy farmers and the Cooperative.

3 educational institutions turned into CCC in South

NAMCHI, 23 JUN (IPR): As per the State Government's directive to set up Covid Care Centres so as to provide extensive medical care to COVID-19 patients and other Covid related management, the South District Administration has converted 3 educational institutions into Covid Care Centres (CCC). These Centres can accommodate upto 250 covid positive patients ranging from mild to severe symptoms.

The three Covid Care Centres in South District are namely:

1. Hostel of Namchi Girls Senior Secondary School.
2. Namchi Government College (Kamrang)
3. Chisopani Centre for Computers and Communication Technology (CCCT).

Regarding, Namchi Girls Senior Secondary School (NGSSS) this centre started from 10 May, 2021 and has been set up at the Girls Hostel of the School. Since then, this covid care centre caters treatment to covid patients ranging from mild to severe symptoms. This centre also provides the patients with daily meals, medicines, PPE kits and other basic amenities for which minimal charges are levied sometimes some items are also given free of charge.

In addition, the centre has been equipped with Oxygen Supply and other medical equipment under the supervision of a medical team consisting of Doctors and Nursing officers. It is supported by 5 IRB personnel and 2 Janitors of the School.

Currently, a total of 11 covid patients are undergoing their treatment at this centre and the total bed capacity to accommodate is 60 patients.

Similarly, Namchi Government College

Covid Care Centre provides institutional isolation to patients limiting to asymptomatic, mild patients.

The patients admitted to this Centre are usually shifted from their residence who do not have space for self-isolation or home quarantine in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) mandated by the Health Department.

Healths of covid positive patients are observed daily with the help of a paramedical team. If in any case of severity, the patient will be referred to a Covid designated hospital.

At present, a total of 29 patients are getting treated in this centre and the centre accommodates up to 40 patients.

The third Covid Care Centre which is Chisopani Centre for Computers and Communication Technology (CCCT) provides treatment to symptomatic covid patients living in its proximity areas such as Jorethang, Karfector and Nandugan. The centre has been upgraded and holds the capacity to accommodate upto 150 patients. In addition, the centre has four blocks in which two blocks are reserved for female patients while the other for male patients. Currently, 16 covid patients are getting treatment in the facility. The management is comprised of medical team alongwith 10 IRB personnel and 2 Janitors at the centre.

Additionally, the South District Administration has also identified Indian Himalayan Centre for Adventure and Eco-Tourism Institute (Chemchey) and Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (Ravangla) as two additional Covid Care Centres which shall soon be functional.

ECI releases Atlas on General Elections 2019

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 23 JUN:

Chief Election Commissioner, Sushil Chandra along with Election Commissioner, Rajiv Kumar and Election Commissioner, Anup Chandra Pandey released 'General Elections 2019 - An Atlas' on 15 Jun, a press release informs.

Mr Chandra commended the officers of the Commission for compiling this innovative document and expressed hope that this would inspire academicians and researchers to further explore the vast landscape of the Indian elections.

The Atlas encompasses all the data and statistical figures of this monumental event. It has 42 thematic maps and 90 tables depicting various facets of the elections. The Atlas also shares interesting facts, anecdotes and legal provisions related to the Indian elections, the release adds.

Since the first General Elections in 1951-52, the Commission has been publishing compilation of electoral data in the form of narrative and statistical books. 17th General Elections conducted in 2019 were the largest democratic exercise in human history which witnessed the participation of 61.468 crores Voters at 10.378 Lakhs polling stations spread over 32 Lakhs square kilometer territory of India.

In Indian elections, electoral data is primarily collected during

the preparation of Electoral Roll by the Electoral Registration Officers and also in the process of conduct of elections by the Returning Officers. This data is then collated by these statutory authorities. Thereafter, after the culmination of the electoral process, the Election Commission of India collects this electoral data and prepares various reports for compilation, record and dissemination purposes.

In October 2019, the Commission released statistical reports based on the electoral data made available by the Returning Officers of 543 Parliamentary Constituencies. The maps and tables as placed in this AC as depict that information and provide for better understanding and appreciation of electoral diversity of the country. In addition to contextualizing the data, these detailed maps reveal electoral patterns at various levels as well as indicate its spatial and temporal settings. With an aim to better visualize and represent the electoral data, this AC as serves as an informative and illustrative document that brings to light the nuances of the Indian electoral process and empowers readers to analyze trends and changes.

The Atlas brings out salient features such as data of the 23 States and UTs where women voting percentage was more than the male voting percentage; information about the largest & smallest parliamentary constituency in terms

of electors, candidates and performance of political parties amongst other parameters.

The Atlas depicts the elector's data in different categories and through various comparison charts like Elector Gender Ratio and electors in different age categories. The 2019 General Elections witnessed the lowest gender gap in the history of Indian elections. The Elector Gender Ratio which has shown a positive trend since 1971 was 926 in 2019 General Elections.

The Atlas also compares the average number of electors per polling station in different states during 2014 & 2019 General Elections. The Election Commission of India set up over 10 Lakhs polling stations in General Elections 2019 with the lowest number of electors per polling station (365) in Arunachal Pradesh.

Amongst the various other categories, the atlas compares the number of contesting candidates in the General elections since 1951. In the 2019 General Elections, there were 8054 qualified contesting candidates after rejection of nominations & withdrawals from a total of 11692 nominations filed across the country.

To check out the details, the e-Atlas is available at <https://eci.gov.in/eBooks/eci-atlas/index.html>. Suggestions, if any, can be shared with the EDMD division of the Commission.

SKM team begins assessment of SGYA progress

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 23 JUN:

Assessment of Sikkim Garib Awas Yojana (SGAY) under Yangang Block is being carried out by a team headed by Additional Political Secretary (South) to CM, Anjita Rajalim, a press release informs.

SKM Government's flagship Sikkim Garib Awas Yojna which aims to provide pucca houses to 3,050 odd beneficiaries from all across the State is in progress.

- SGAY houses will specifically cater to the States rural populace.
- SGAY house is estimated to be built at the cost Rs.17,51,000/-.

The construction modalities of SGAY are:

- 3 Rooms with Kitchen and Bathroom
- 1 Sofa set
- 1 Center table
- 2 Cupboards
- 2 Single beds
- 1 Double bed &



- 32" Television set.

The team is scheduled to visit several GPUs under Yangang Block to get the technical report from the Department and conduct site visit as well.

The team also has Area In-charge, 15 Rangang Yangang, Raj Kumar Basnet, SKM CLC President, Tengayla Namka, ADC (Develop-

ment), Sunil Mohte, BDO Yangang, Bishnu Thapa, DLC Secretary, Youth Wing, Anil Gurung, SKM CLC, General Secretary, Gopal Timsina, SKM CLC Youth Convenor, Til Bdr Basnet, SKM CLC, Vice Convenor, Somnath Khanal, SKM CLC Secretary 1, Durga Basnet, SKM BLC President, Sripatam Gagyong GPU, Yurba Subba.

Moody's cuts India growth forecast for 2021 to 9.6 pc

NEW DELHI, JUN 23 (PTI): Moody's Investors Service on Wednesday slashed India's growth projection to 9.6 per cent for 2021 calendar year, from its earlier estimate of 13.9 per cent, and said faster vaccination progress will be paramount in restricting economic losses to June quarter

In its report titled 'Macroeconomics India: Economic shocks from second COVID wave will not be as severe as last year's', Moody's said high-frequency economic indicators show that the second wave of COVID-19 infections hit India's economy in April and May. With states now easing restrictions, economic activity in May is likely to signify the trough. "The virus resurgence adds uncertainty to India's growth forecast for 2021; however, it is likely that the economic damage will remain restricted

to the April-June quarter. We currently expect India's real GDP to grow at 9.6 per cent in 2021 and 7 per cent in 2022," Moody's said. Earlier this month, Moody's had projected India to clock a 9.3 per cent growth in the current fiscal ending March 2022, but a severe second COVID wave has increased risks to India's credit profile and rated entities.

Indian economy contracted by 7.3 per cent in fiscal 2020-21 as the country battled the first wave of COVID, as against a 4 per cent growth in 2019-20.

Stating that stringent lockdowns in economically significant states will mar April-June quarter economic activity, Moody's said the 10 states that have been hardest hit by the second wave collectively account for more than 60 per cent of the pre-pandemic level of India's GDP.

Sports Minister...

He mentioned that the Chief Minister and Sports Minister have already felicitated and expressed best wishes to Tarundeep and also provided a Rs 5 lakh assistance.

The launch function had started with a welcome address by Director Sports & Youth Affairs Department, Doma Tshering and concluded with vote of thanks proposed by Special Secretary to the department, Suchitra Thapa.

The function was also attended by president, Kuber Bhandari and general secretary and former Olympian, Jaslall Pradhan of Sikkim Olympic Association and officials and staffs of SYA Department.

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

email us: news@summittimes.com

OMAS presents awards to Online Music Competition winners

AARON RAI
GANGTOK, 23 JUN:

Organization of Musicians and Artists of Sikkim (OMAS) today distributed prizes to the winners of the Online Music Competition it had organized recently.

The objective of the competition was to spot talent, provide a platform for such artists and also raise awareness on their initiative of contributing protective gear to health workers.

Shubh Peter Gajmer won the competition followed by Pem Udela in second place and child artist, Nijang Palmu Bhutia in third place.

The first, second and third place winners were awarded cash prizes of Rs 50,000, Rs 20,000 and Rs 10,000 respectively.

Similarly, Sonam Leno Lepcha was awarded the consolation prize.



The competition was organized in collaboration with Sarathi NGO.

MLA of Upper Tadong constituency, GT Dhungel, was the chief guest at the function held in a local hotel.

On the occasion, OMAS handed over PPE kits and other materials from various donors meant for health workers to Sarathi. The materials were handed over to

Hari Rijal, former district chairman of Sarathi, by the chief guest.

The NGO will distribute the materials to health workers across the state.

OMAS further appealed to people to contribute these materials for health workers of the state.

Chief guest, Mr Dhungel said that the online competition was orga-

nized expressing solidarity with health workers and to honor them for their dedication.

The three winners were presented the award by chief guest, GT Dhungel, distinguished guests and Advisor of the Department of Culture, Government of Sikkim, Bhim Kumari Sharma and Chairperson of SKM Student Cell, Sonam Chopel Sherpa.

Vi offers users chance to connect back

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 23 JUN:

With the commencement of gradual state-wise unlocking efforts, India's migrant working populations have started returning from their home towns to their work locations. During the lockdown period, a segment of prepaid telecom users were unable to recharge due to several reasons.

Vi is inviting all such customers back to its network as they resume work.

To reconnect these low income group customers, Vi is giving 50 Vi to Vi calling minutes along with 50MB of data. This complimentary benefit comes with a validity of 15 days, post which customers can recharge with their preferred value recharge packs.

To check for eligibility Vi customers can avail the Unlock 2.0 benefit through these routes: (1) Toll Free IVR 121153 / USSD Code *444*75# from Vi number (2) Follow steps in the SMS received in his/her inbox of Vi Number (3) Visit nearest retailer who will assist with the eligibility check and offer activation.

Banks get part of Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi's seized assets

NEW DELHI, 23 JUN [PTI]:

Assets worth ₹ 9,371 crore belonging to fugitive businessmen Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi have been transferred by the Enforcement Directorate to state-run banks that will help them recover losses on account of the fraud.

So far, the agency has seized assets worth ₹ 18,170.02 crore, which include assets worth of ₹ 969 crore located in foreign countries. The value of those assets represents 80.45% of the total bank loss.

"As on date, out of the total seized assets of ₹ 18,170.02 crore, under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA), assets worth of ₹ 329.67 crore were confiscated and assets worth ₹ 9041.5 crore, representing 40 per cent of the total loss to the bank have been handed over to the Public Sector banks," the Enforcement Directorate said today.

Citing the move, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in a tweet, said, "Fugitives & economic offenders will be actively pursued; their properties attached & dues recovered."



Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi - all facing extradition trials - have defrauded Public Sector Banks by siphoning off the funds through their companies which resulted in total loss of ₹ 22,585.83 crore to the banks.

After the CBI FIR in the matter, the Enforcement Directorate unearthed a web of domestic and international transactions and stashing of assets abroad linked to the borrowed money.

Investigation has also proved, says the ED, that these three accused persons used proxies, or dummies, for rotation and siphoning off the funds provided by the banks.

Upon completion of the probe in the money laundering case, extradition requests were sent for these

three persons to the UK and Antigua and Barbuda.

The extradition of Vijay Mallya has been ordered by the Westminster Magistrates Court and confirmed by the UK High Court. Since, Vijay Mallya has been denied permission to file appeal in the UK Supreme Court, his extradition to India has become final.

Recently, the ED has transferred shares attached by it (worth of ₹ 6,600 crore approx) to SBI-led consortium as per order of PMLA Special Court, Mumbai. Debt Recovery Tribunal, on behalf of the consortium of banks, has sold the shares for over ₹ 5,800 crore. The transferred attached assets also include real estate properties and other movable assets of the fugitives.

Covid awareness at Sikkim GPU



SUMMIT REPORT
NAMCHI, 23 JUN:

COVID-19 awareness was carried out at all the Gram Panchayat Units of Sikkim Block today. These activities included sessions on COVID-appropriate behaviour and other guidelines of the Government

on lockdown measures.

The Health Department, Police Department, AWWs with assistance of South District Disaster Management Department along with the block staff, Panchayats and volunteers are playing key roles in imparting awareness.



Lunch and snacks as thanks on behalf of the people

NAMCHI, 23 JUNE: SAKA Samaj of Namchi treated frontline workers engaged at the vaccination drive at Bhaichung Stadium with snacks and lunch from 21 to 23 June as an expression of gratitude towards their selfless service to the people.

SIKKIM STATE LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY

Development Area, Gangtok: Sikkim
Phone: 03592-207753, Fax : 03592-207753

"MESSAGE".

Sikkim State Legal Services Authority is organizing National Lok Adalat on Saturday the 10th July, 2021 for the following types of pre-litigation and pending cases viz:

Pre-Litigation

- N.I Act cases under Section 138;
- Money Recovery cases;
- Labour disputes cases;
- Electricity and Water Bills (excluding non-compoundable)
- Maintenance Cases.
- Other (Criminal Compoundable and other Civil dispute).

Pending in the Courts / Tribunals:

- Criminal Compoundable Offences;
- N.I. Act cases under Section 138;
- Money Recovery cases;
- MACT cases;
- Labour disputes cases;
- Electricity and Water Bills (excluding non-compoundable)
- Matrimonial disputes (except divorce);
- Land Acquisition cases;
- Service matters relating to pay and allowances and retiral benefits;
- Revenue cases (pending in District Courts and High Courts only);
- Other civil cases (such as rent, easmentary rights, injunction suits, specific performance suits) etc.

Any individual or any department having such matters either pending in Courts/Tribunals/ Departments or in pre-litigation stage may approach directly before the Sikkim SLSA, District Lok Adalats or Taluk Lok Adalats for settlement on or before 03.07.2021 at the following address:

- Sikkim State Legal Services Authority, Development Area, Gangtok, East Sikkim. E-mail: sikkim_slssa@live.com Phone No.03592-207753.
- High Court Legal Services Committee, Development Area, Gangtok, East Sikkim. E-mail: sikkim_slssa@live.com Phone No. 03592-207753.
- District Legal Services Authority (East) District Court's Complex, Sichey Gangtok, East Sikkim. Phone No. 03592 284462.
- Taluk Legal Services Committee (East), District Court's Complex, Sichey, Gangtok, East Sikkim. Phone No. 03592 284462.
- District Legal Services Authority (North) District Court Complex, Mangan, North Sikkim. Phone No. 03592 234694.
- Taluk Legal Services Committee (North), Court of Civil Judge-cum-Judicial Magistrate, Pentok, Mangan, North Sikkim. Phone no.03592 234694.
- District Legal Services Authority (South) District Court Complex, Namchi, South Sikkim. Phone No. 03595 264654.
- Taluk Legal Services Committee (South), Court of Civil Judge-cum-Judicial Magistrate, District Courts Complex, Namchi, South Sikkim. Phone no.03595 264654.
- District Legal Services Authority (West) District Court Complex, Kyongsa, Gyalshing, West Sikkim. Phone No. 03595 250010.
- Taluk Legal Services Committee (West), Court of Civil Judge-cum-Judicial Magistrate, Kyongsa, Gyalshing, West Sikkim. Phone no.03595 250010.
- Taluk Legal Services Committee, Court of Civil Judge-cum-Judicial Magistrate, Chungthang, Sub-Division, North Sikkim. Phone No. 03592 234502.
- Taluk Legal Services Committee (West), Court of Civil Judge-cum-Judicial Magistrate, Soreng, Sub-Division, West Sikkim. Phone n o: 03592-253000.

(published by Sikkim State Legal Services Authority).

R.O. No. 73/IPR/Pub/Classi./21-22

Date: 21.06.2021.

ABD PROJECT DIVISION ROADS & BRIDGES DEPARTMENT GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM NIRMAN BHAWAN

Ref No. 01/E-Tender/GoS/R&B(ADB)/2021-22

Dated: 22.06.2021

E-PROCUREMENT NOTICE

The Project Director, ADB Cell, Roads and Bridges Department, on behalf of the Governor of Sikkim invites percentage rate bids through e-procurement online in the website www.sikkimtender.gov.in by contractors of appropriate class registered with state government for execution of work. The bidders should have necessary portal enrolment with his/her own Digital Signature Certificate (DSC). The demand draft in the form of hard copy for tender fee is to be submitted to the office of the Sr. Account Officer, Roads and Bridges Department latest by 27.07.2021 by 4.30 pm. The bids whose hard copy is not received by Account cell during the time given will be considered non responsive for bidding even if submitted online.

Sl. no	Name of Work	Tender Value / Bid Value (Rs. In Lakh)	Eligibility of Contractor	Bid Security (EMD) 2.5% of the Bid Value (Rs. In Lakhs)	Cost of Tender Form / Bid Form (Rs. In Lakh)	Completion Period.
1	Restoration work along Melli-Nayabazzar Road (SK-01) and along Nayabazzar to Namchi (SK-02) South Sikkim.	1723.90	Class I-A	43.10	1.00	12 months.

The date and submission of completed bid document is as under;

1	Advertising the Notice Inviting Tender	
	a) Letter to IPR for Publication of Press Notice	22.06.2021
	b) Publication of online Tender in e-procurement portal	23.06.2021
2.	Uploading of bidding documents in e-procurement portal	24.06.2021
3.	Date & time for seeking clarification w.r.t tenders	09.07.2021 at 1500 hrs.
4.	Last date of online submission of completed bids	23.07.2021 upto 1600 hrs.
5.	Date of submission of hard copies (Tender Fee and Security Bid).	26.07.2021 upto 16 hrs.
6.	Date of opening of Tender bids	27.07.2021 at 1100 hours.
7.	Place of opening of bids	Office of the Project Director (ADB), Roads and Bridges Department, Nirman Bhawan, Gangtok.

R.O. No. 75/IPR/Pub/Classi./21-22
Date: 22.06.2021

Sd/-
Project Director, ADB
Roads and Bridges Department.

Deciding Employment

The job market requires better sales persons

After nearly two decades of trying to inspire the youth towards gainful self-employment, entrepreneurship and private sector employment, and even throwing up the carrot of “unemployment allowance,” the State is soon going to have an entire university dedicated to skill development. Only the Act has been passed, so it is still early days to see what it will achieve and deliver. As for the unemployment allowance, it was a policy commitment announced by the previous government which one should perhaps explain away to an election year temptation, and some form of it was also promised by the dispensation now in office, and even that can be excused to the pressures of an election year. What that led to is a situation where the “policy announcement” remained only an expression of interest and no specific details of how this ‘allowance’ was to be dispensed were shared. Coming as it did in an election year and in a political charged time, and given the less than mediocre level of professionalism among its bureaucrats and the complete absence of an earnest civil society, it was always unlikely that this initiative will be allowed to be anything more than a sop. One had hoped though that the allowance did not end up encouraging indolence because the real role of an unemployment allowance is to support an unemployment youth in her/ his search for employment, not to ensure that they can continue living comfortably unemployed. It is important that if such an allowance is ever extended, it sustains efforts to find employment and does not become a sop which rewards the status of remaining unemployed. And this should be an initiative which the unemployed youth should lobby for to be made meaningful because if extended as a sop, the allowance will be a pittance because it will have to be spread wide and indiscriminately, but if drafted intelligently and with the interests of those genuinely interested to find employment, it can supplement the continuing efforts to equip Sikkim’s unemployed young with more employable skills. It will also ensure that desperate youth do not end up settling for jobs much below their skills.

And while on the topic of unemployment, employability and aspirations, it will be worthwhile for Sikkim and its people to also deliberate over the continuing obsession for government jobs. Government employment, with its job security, absence of accountability and lavish salaries, is understandably aspired for by the unemployed; but it is beyond comprehension how employment anywhere else is not even considered an employed status in Sikkim. People employed in the private sector can continue to secure ‘employment identity cards’ attesting to their unemployed status! While one may argue that remunerations in the still nascent private sector are rather low, it still does not explain why it is not considered employment. In fact, if they are so recognised, then such employers can also be pulled up when employees are paid unfair wages. Don’t even recognise it, and then the sector cannot even be regulated.

Attempts were made to make this system of “employment identity cards” more representative of actual employment status during such schemes as the CMSES, but these met with only limited success. Issues like these will also be need to be resolved when the unemployment allowance regime is brought into play. And then there is the still largely unaddressed situation under which attempts to inspire the youth towards self employment and private job markets continue to meet with only limited success. Sikkim needs to collectively address this issue and take the opportunity opened by the pandemic during which the list of benefits of having “local” employees has grown longer to address employment and its aspirations...

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

Campus Free Speech: Does it extend to what students say online?

DINO SOSSI
theconversation.com

Professors fiercely champion free speech. Many believe that unfiltered, even offensive, expression is fundamental to post-secondary academic life. But what about their students? Should student social media posts be punishable, even if they are made off-campus?

This emerging issue in the perpetual battle over free expression speaks to the perils of ever-present devices, ubiquitous wifi and instantaneous communication. Given Bill C-10’s potential impact on Canadian online speech, such as the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) potentially regulating content we view on social media, defining the contours of online expression is important.

This issue also relates to rapidly shifting demographics at Canadian post-secondary institutions. Namely, the difficulty in adjudicating diverse speech by even more diverse students.

Racialized students account for 40 per cent of undergraduates and graduates at Canadian universities. Weighing unrestricted expression via dynamic technologies against fostering a tolerant public sphere will test the fundamental freedoms we cherish in our democratic society.

THE CASE OF A PHARMACY STUDENT

Kimberly Diei is a graduate student at the University of Tennessee studying at the pharmacy school. Earlier this year, the university received anonymous complaints about her social media activity - more than 17 Instagram posts and tweets (all made under a pseudonym) - including rap lyrics she wrote based on Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion hit song WAP.

University of Tennessee administrators later expelled her for “crude” and “vulgar” posts. Diei appealed and her expulsion was reversed. She then filed a lawsuit alleging that the University of Tennessee violated her freedom of expression without valid educational purposes.

Evolving online communication practices raise important issues:

- What are the limits of student speech?
- How should institutions judge incendiary social media posts?
- Can we prevent problems similar to Diei’s from recurring?

TINKER TAILORS SPEECH: THE DISRUPTION TEST

Tinker v. Des Moines remains the iconic student

expression case. The case involved young activists who wore black armbands to school to protest the Vietnam War. Administrators expelled the students until they removed this “offensive” clothing. The students fought back.

In response, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Abraham Fortas wrote that students do not “shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or freedom of expression at the schoolhouse gate,” guaranteeing student speech constitutional protection in America.

The Tinker standard became determinative. Expression was protected as long as it did not disrupt education.

Subsequent cases refined Tinker’s broad speech protection. Bethel prohibited sexually vulgar speech made during a school assembly. Hazelwood School District vs. Kuhlmeier granted a school editorial control over sponsored activities like student newspapers. Morse v. Frederick permitted a school to restrict speech promoting drug use. Mahanoy Area School District v. B.L. involves a cheerleader who was suspended for posting expletives on Snapchat (she had expressed frustration over not making her high school cheerleading squad). This case is currently being decided by the U.S. Supreme Court. Substantial disruption remains the standard.

Canada has no formal case law equivalent to Tinker, so student online expression rules tend to vary depending on campus policies. For example, the University of Toronto Mississauga suggests that faculty, staff and students who post to institutional accounts follow the Golden Rule in guiding their posts, among other prudent recommendations.

Although Diei’s dilemma was not decided at trial, University of Tennessee administrators applied the Tinker standard. Anonymous student complaints show that she unsettled members of her learning community. However, Diei’s posts did not appear to meet existing disruption thresholds to justifiably limit her speech. This seems appropriate given the coarse nature of daily online discourse.

“Freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression” are enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, subject to “reasonable limits.” As such, Canadian post-secondary institutions could follow Tinker’s disruption standard to judge whether student speech should be reasonably limited.

Despite her vindication, Diei’s struggles speak to another issue. The role post-secondary institutions should play in policing student communications.

SHIFTING COMMUNICATION TOOLS – ONLINE

IDENTITY EXPLORATION

Many people support opening up academic spaces to new people. However, public-facing digital communication tools surface a new source of tension.

Academic spaces are used to accommodating a relatively finite amount of private expression, like traditional face-to-face interactions in classrooms. Now they are trying to keep up with a much higher volume of online speech occurring in an ever expanding number of virtual spaces via social media platforms.

In short, slow-paced post-secondary institutions with long histories in the physical world have difficulty responding to incredibly fast-paced student social media posts in the virtual world. And the university’s faculty may not realize that these online spaces are fundamental for youth identity exploration that may inadvertently violate inflexible communication norms of the institution.

Diei’s difficulties speak to the need for these formal places to become responsive to shifting technological mores. They should also welcome novel forms of informal expression that push against traditional forms of communication.

LETTING KIDS BE KIDS? – UNDERSTANDING PROFESSIONAL SPEECH

Many professors likely believe that discussing social media is beyond the scope of the classroom. Why should the average lecturer spend valuable time speaking about student posts when they are busy teaching?

Diei expressed confusion about what she could express online. Younger students may be even more perplexed about how their expression potentially breaches institutional communication standards.

Given the internet’s infinite memory, we should proactively discuss online speech across all levels of education. Otherwise, students could be increasingly penalized as communication becomes further disjointed. Languages intermingle and social media organically creates unique new idioms that are different from traditional academic and professional speech.

Youth must understand how their informal expression conflicts with the professional environments they are entering. Unless we discuss how traditional communities communicate, and even challenge their unforgiving standards, our students could face career difficulties that may only worsen while they are under our educational care and beyond.

[the writer is Instructional Assistant, University of Toronto]

How to teach writing to Grade 1 kids: New strategies for teachers and parents

PERRY DOUGLAS KLEIN
theconversation.com

Writing is a craft that is vital for both communicating and learning. However, many children struggle to learn to write. For most, their difficulties persist throughout elementary school unless they get help. As recently as 2018, there was very little research on how to teach Grade 1s effectively.

However, recent research shows how teachers can help Grade 1s make a strong start on writing. Parents have a vital role to play in laying a foundation for early writing success.

Many parents have likely heard children say, “I don’t know what to write.” Teaching children strategies for writing tackles this problem head-on.

BREAKING WRITING DOWN INTO STEPS

In 2019, a team of Spanish and British researchers published one of the first experiments on teaching writing strategies in Grade 1. They explored how a child can learn to write a story by asking themselves a series of questions: When did it happen? Where did it happen? Who is the story about? What did they do? What happened? How did it end? These questions help the child to generate and organize their ideas.

To help children remember this writing strategy, teachers in the study used a picture of a mountain with a path that led past six houses — one for each question. The teachers discussed the strategy, modelled how to use it and wrote together with the class. After instruction, the children wrote stories that were higher in quality, longer and more coherent.

STRATEGIES WORK

The value of teaching writing strategies in Grade 1 has been confirmed by additional studies that examine teaching specific kinds of writing: Procedural writing (instructions for someone on how to do something), and opinion writing (short essays meant to persuade someone of something). In this writing research, teachers combined strategy instruction with discussions, picture books and dramatization.

And in our own recent research, we found that strategy instruction is effective for Grade 1 students across the range of writing achievement levels: low, medium and high. These Grade 1 studies join over 100 previous studies with students in higher grades in showing that teaching writing strategies works.

PRINTING, HANDWRITING, SPELLING

Recent research also provides renewed support for the seemingly old-fashioned skill of printing. Grade 1s who can print accurately and quickly are able to create better and longer stories and reports. Teaching printing helps students to create better stories. Despite over 70 previous studies on the benefits of teaching printing and cursive writing, systematic teaching and assessment of these skills has declined in some curricula.

Spelling is another traditional skill, the importance of which has been confirmed by recent research. Better spellers create better and longer stories, while poor spellers struggle with composing, and Grade 1 spelling affects the development of composition in later years.

Spelling education works best if

it is formal, including, for example, lessons and practice activities. Additionally, teaching writing strategies combined with spelling and printing is more effective than teaching each of these skills alone.

Parents can help children practice spelling at home. Teachers and parents can also show children the “invented spelling” strategy of saying a word slowly, stretching out the sounds, and printing a letter (or letter combinations, such as “th”) for each sound. This will lead to some errors, but in kindergarten and Grade 1, invented spelling is an important driver of spelling development.

NEW UNDERSTANDING OF GRADE 1

This new understanding of the importance of Grade 1 is beginning to change writing education. In the past, many schools in Canada and the United States waited for struggling readers and writers to reach the middle elementary grades. Then, they were assessed by a school psychologist. If they were diagnosed with a learning disability, they were placed in a special education class.

However, in a new approach, response to intervention, teachers use evidence-based methods (like strategy instruction) to teach the whole class. They assess students regularly based on their daily writing, and if a child is below grade level, they receive help in a small group.

This approach is not yet common. However, it is almost certainly coming to some provinces in reading education. Reading education and writing education are intertwined, so we can expect the same approach to follow in writing.

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

The foundation for writing success is ideally being supported at home before children start kindergarten.

Parents can ask children to tell them stories, print the stories for them, then read them aloud for the child. They can teach children simple skills like forming letters and printing their name.

Parents can also practice printing with children at home; this is especially valuable for struggling writers. They can help children to write things that are important to them, like birthday cards for family members.

Parents can also encourage children to read and write independently. Once children begin to write, parents can be their best audience, praising their efforts and the good qualities of their writing, and making suggestions to help with ideas, printing, and spelling.

When children begin school, and into Grade 1, parents can watch for red flags in their child’s writing development. During Grade 1, the average student learns to print the letters of the alphabet legibly and fluently, spell one syllable words the way that they sound (cat, game) and spell common short words that are not spelled the way that they sound (you, they). They also learn to write a story a few sentences in length about a personal experience.

If your child is missing these basic skills, don’t wait and see — talk with your child’s teacher and make a plan to help them succeed.

[the writer is Associate Dean (Research), Faculty of Education, Western University]

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Bengal Speaker complains to Lok Sabha speaker against Governor's "Excessive Interference"



KOLKATA, 23 JUN [PTI]: West Bengal Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee has complained to his Lok Sabha counterpart Om Birla about the "excessive interference" of Governor Jagdeep

ing of the House.

Mr Banerjee complained to Mr Birla about Mr Dhankhar during the virtual All India Speakers' Conference on Tuesday.

"I told the Lok Sabha speaker about the excessive interference of Governor Jagdeep

Dhankhar in parliamentary democracy and the functioning of the Assembly. Despite being passed by the Assembly, several bills are lying with the governor as he has not signed them. This is unprecedented in the history of West Bengal's parliamenta-

ry democracy. Such a thing has never happened before," Mr Banerjee told PTI.

Mr Dhankhar, who shares a strained relationship with the TMC government, is yet to react to the development.

"We have been saying this for a long time that

the present governor is acting as the mouthpiece of a specific political party. He is not only interfering in the functioning of the state of affairs but is also maligning the West Bengal government," senior TMC leader and MLA Tapas Roy said.

However, the West Bengal unit of the BJP came out in support of the governor and claimed that he has exposed the truth.

"The TMC is angry with the governor as he has exposed the lawless situation in the state. There have been complaints against him earlier, but all of them were baseless," BJP state chief Dilip Ghosh said.

The TMC government and Mr Dhankhar have been sharing an acrimonious relation since he assumed office in July 2019.

In Ramdev vs Doctors, Patanjali co-founder goes to Supreme Court



NEW DELHI, 23 JUN [NDTV]: Yoga teacher Ramdev -- who infuriated doctors across the country with his disparaging remarks on allopathic medicine -- has approached the Supreme Court seeking a freeze on the police cases against him over the issue. He has also asked that the First Information Reports filed across the country be clubbed together and transferred to Delhi.

Last month, as the second wave of Covid ripped through the country killing thousands, Ramdev stirred a controversy with his remarks on the efficacy of allopathic drugs against the virus.

In a widely shared video, he was heard saying, "Lakhs of people have died because of allopathic medicines, far

more than those who died because they did not get treatment or oxygen."

He even purportedly called allopathy a "stupid and bankrupt" science, offending the whole medical fraternity.

Later, challenging calls for his arrest, said, "even their baap (father) cannot arrest Swami Ramdev". His firm, Patanjali, said it would give a "befitting reply" to any defamation notice.

Various units of the Indian Medical Association filed complaints against him with the police, based on which multiple cases were lodged. The association, which had sought an apology within 15 days, later sued him for defamation and demanded a compensation of ₹ 1,000 crore.

The Delhi Medical Association also went to court, seeking a to-

ken compensation of Re 1 and an unconditional apology.

Ramdev had withdrawn his comments within days, following a communication from the Union health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan. But the Indian Medical Association has said they would drop the cases against him only if he withdrew his comments against allopathy in entirety.

"We have nothing against yoga guru Baba Ramdev. His statements are against vaccines for COVID-19. We think his statements could confuse people, may divert them. This is our big concern as he has many followers," said IMA chief Dr JA Jayalal.

Earlier this month, Ramdev said he would soon get the jab and described doctors as "God's envoys on earth".

10 new cases push COVID-19 tally of Andamans to 7,425

PORT BLAIR, JUN 23 (PTI): The COVID-19 tally of Andaman and Nicobar Islands rose to 7,425 on Wednesday as 10 more people tested positive for the infection, a health bulletin said. Two new patients have travel history, while eight fresh infections were detected during contact tracing, it said.

The COVID-19 death toll in the Union territory remained unchanged at 127 as no fresh fa-

tality was reported, the bulletin said. Four more people have been cured of the disease, taking the total number of recoveries to 7,195, it said. The archipelago now has 103 active cases, the bulletin said.

The administration has so far tested more than 4.03 lakh samples for COVID-19, with a positivity rate of 1.84 per cent. Over 1.40 lakh islanders have been vaccinated to date.

UP police to use drones to spot illegal liquor dens near Nepal border

BAHRAICH, 23 JUN [PTI]: Drone cameras will be used to find illicit liquor dens in forest areas near the Indo-Nepal border, an official said on Wednesday.

Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and the excise department will carry out a joint operation to check the smuggling and trade of spurious liquor, Bahraich District Magistrate Dinesh Chandra said.

Instructions have been issued to identify illegal liquor manufacturing and selling bases with the help of drone cameras, especially in the forests of the Mihinpura area of the district, he said. Police, excise, and administrative ma-

chinery have been asked to develop an effective informer network in this direction, the District Magistrate said, adding the Gangsters Act will be invoked against those involved in the trade.

After reports of deaths following consumption of spurious liquor in Aligarh, Pratapgarh, and other districts, the state government issued instructions of taking strict action against those involved in the trade, especially in the rural areas.

In Bahraich, police have arrested many in connection with it by raiding forest and rural areas near the Indo-Nepal border.

103 jail inmates among 430 new Covid cases in Mizoram

AIZAWL, 23 JUN [PTI]: Mizoram's COVID-19 tally soared to 18,398 on Wednesday as 419 more people, including 103 jail inmates, tested positive for the infection, a health official said.

All the infected prisoners are inmates of Central Jail, Aizawl, he said.

More than 70 children, six security personnel and two healthcare workers are also among the new patients, the official said.

Also, 16 fresh cases were detected in an orphanage and rehabilitation centre in Aizawl where 528 infections were reported on June 21. Aizawl district registered the highest number of new cases at 299, followed by Lawngtlai (52) and Kolasib (30), he said.

Four patients have travel history, while the

remaining 415 fresh infections were detected during contract tracing, the official said.

The new cases were detected among 3,974 samples that were tested, with the highest single-day positivity rate of 10.82 per cent. Mizoram now has 4,413 active cases, while 13,900 people have recovered from the disease and 85 patients have succumbed to the infection so far.

The state has thus far tested over 4.62 lakh samples for COVID-19. The recovery rate among the coronavirus patients in the state stands at 75.55 per cent, while the mortality rate is at 0.46 per cent.

Over 4.14 lakh people have been inoculated thus far, State Immunisation Officer Dr Lalzawmi said.

IndiGo offers discount for vaccinated passengers



NEW DELHI, JUN 23 (PTI): IndiGo will give 10 per cent discount from Wednesday onwards to all passengers who have taken at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, a statement said.

The discount would be given on base fare and only "limited inventory" is available under this offer, the airline's statement noted.

"The offer is only available to vaccinated passengers aged 18 years and above, who are located in India at the time of booking and have already received a (at least one dose of) COVID-19 vaccine in the country," it said.

Passengers who have

availed the offer at the time of booking will be required to furnish a valid COVID-19 vaccination certificate -- issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare -- at the airport check-in counter as well as the boarding gate, it mentioned.

"Alternately, they can display their vaccination status on the Aarogya Setu mobile application at the airport check-in counter/boarding gate," it added.

Sanjay Kumar, Chief Strategy and Revenue Officer, IndiGo said, Being the largest airline in the country, we feel it is our responsibility to contribute to the national vaccination drive, by

encouraging more people towards this common goal."

During April and May, India had been badly hit by the coronavirus infection's second wave, which is receding currently. Several states have been complaining about the COVID-19 vaccine shortage for the last couple of months.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said on Tuesday that more than 2.14 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses are still available with the states and union territories and over 33,80,590 vaccine doses are in the pipeline and will be received by them within the next three days.

Mosque demolition: HC issues notice to ex-Barabanki SDM

LUCKNOW, JUN 22 (PTI): The Allahabad High Court Tuesday directed the respondents to file their responses within three weeks in connection with the demolition of a mosque at Barabanki on May 17.

The Lucknow bench of the HC also issued a notice to the then Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) of Ram Sanehi Ghat in Barabanki for his reply as malice was alleged against him.

It also granted a week to the petitioner for filing a rejoinder affidavit, fixing July 27 as the next date of hearing.

A division bench of Justice Rajan Roy and Justice Saurabh Lavania passed the order on two writ petitions filed by UP Sunni Central Waqf Board and Hashmat Ali and others.

The bench had heard the matter on June 15 and reserved its order on the question of interim relief.

The bench recorded in its order that the senior advocate appearing for UP Sunni Central Waqf Board was unable, as of now, to show any documentary proof about the ownership right of the committee of management on the land where the mosque was constructed.

In the writ petitions, it has been alleged that the mosque was standing for hundred years on the land recorded as abadi land in revenue records.

It has been alleged further that the then SDM Ram Sanehi Ghat, due to personal grudges and mala-fide reasons, got it demolished on May 17, 2021 in the garb of

powers exercised under section 133 of CrPC.

"The matter was beyond the scope of exercise of power under Section 133 CrPC, yet, the SDM, only to satisfy his personal ego and out of malice, not only proceeded under the said provision unjustifiably and illegally, but ensured that the mosque is demolished," charged the petitioners.

It was also pleaded that there is no place for personal ego, whims and fancies in a country governed by rule of law.

The state lawyer opposed the petitions and pleaded that the writs were not maintainable.

After hearing the matters, the bench issued notices to the respondents and asked them to file their detailed reply.



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.

1. Proof of age: Birth Certificate/ Class X Mark Sheet.
2. Degree Certificate of DMLT /BMLT.
3. Sikkim Subject / Certificate of Identification.
4. Employment Card(renewed) in case of unemployed candidates.
5. No Objection Certificate (NOC) in case of in – service candidates.
6. 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/Class./21-22
Date:17.6.2021**

Ayton soars for last second alley-oop, Suns beat Clippers

PHOENIX (AP): Devin Booker sat in a chair with a crooked and swollen nose, complete with tape over three fresh stitches.

He also had a big smile on his face, remembering Jae Crowder's pass, Deandre Ayton's tip-in dunk and a play that will live in Phoenix Suns lore for a long, long time.

Ayton jammed an alley-oop pass from Crowder with 0.7 seconds left, lifting the Suns to a 104-103 win over the Los Angeles Clippers on Tuesday night in Game 2 of the Western Conference finals.

It was a game that looked as if it was all but over, but Booker's Suns were not going to be denied.

"I believed it could happen," Booker said. "100 percent."

The Suns were down one with 0.9 seconds left when Crowder lofted a high pass on an out-of-bounds play on the baseline. A soaring Ayton came down the lane and stuffed it through the net over L.A.'s Ivica Zubac as the crowd roared in disbelief. Booker — playing with a stitched up nose following a collision with Clippers guard Patrick Beverley — had a key screen on Zubac on the final play, which helped free Ayton.

"The celebration and reaction were a little shaky," Ayton said. "Because I wasn't sure what I did. I wasn't sure if it counted."

The referees spent about a minute reviewing the play before ruling the basket was good and Booker spent some time jawing with Clippers players Rajon Rondo and Demarcus Cousins in the aftermath. The Clippers couldn't get a shot off in the final 0.7 seconds.

"Those are my Kentucky guys," Booker said with a grin. "I told them 'Go Big Blue.'"

The Suns now have a 2-0 lead in the series heading to Los Angeles for Game 3 on Thursday night.



The Clippers will be fighting from a 2-0 deficit for the third time in these playoffs after rallying to beat the Mavericks and Jazz.

The Crowder-to-Ayton connection negated a Clippers rally that was led by Paul George, who had 26 points.

George made a layup with 31 seconds left to give the Clippers a 101-100 lead for their first advantage since early in the third quarter. He added a 22-footer on their next offensive possession for a 103-102 lead.

But there was a lot more action left.

George — and 85% career free throw shooter — missed two free throws with 8.2 seconds remaining and the Suns had a chance to win, but it looked as if it wouldn't happen when Mikal Bridges missed a

corner 3-pointer and the ball was deflected out of bounds.

Instead, it set up Crowder's heave to Ayton, who was dominant in the paint all game long.

Even with his big late shot-making, George's missed free throws loomed large.

"Obviously, it was an opportunity that was missed," George said. "Pat made an unbelievable play that put me in the position to extend the lead. I am always confident at the free throw line. I have always been very successful in clutch moments at the free throw line. Tonight, I was just unsuccessful."

The Suns have won a franchise-record nine straight in the playoffs.

The Suns were led by Cameron Payne, who was brilliant while

subbing for All-Star Chris Paul. He finished with a career-high 29 points. Ayton had 24 points and 14 rebounds, while Booker added 20 points.

"We just had no answer for Cameron Payne," Lue said. "He got downhill all night. His speed and his quickness really hurt us all night."

Payne repeatedly carved through the Clippers defense, making tough buckets at the rim with pretty left-handed finishes. He made what looked like a crucial layup with about 90 seconds left, finishing high off the glass to give the Suns a 100-95 lead.

But the gritty Clippers responded and nearly pulled this one out.

"It is a hard game to swallow because look at this game, we've got this game won," Beverley said.

"But we have been in the trenches before. We respond well in the trenches and we will respond well. We always do."

It was a tough night for the stars from Game 1 until the final minutes. Booker shot just 5 of 16 from the field and missed part of the third quarter with a bloody nose. George was 10 of 23 from the field and missed his first seven 3-point attempts before his late buckets.

Ayton continued his eye-opening performance in these playoffs. The No. 1 overall pick in 2018 out of Arizona often has been overshadowed by later picks in the same draft like Atlanta's Trae Young and Dallas' Luka Doncic. But he has carved out quite a niche in Phoenix and now has a signature play that will live on in franchise histo-

ry. The Suns were playing without Paul for the second straight game. The 11-time All-Star has been in the league's COVID-19 health and safety protocol for the past week and the team isn't sure when he'll return.

Clippers star Kawhi Leonard missed his fourth straight game with a right knee sprain, and he stayed in Los Angeles to get treatment on the injury.

The action was physical from the opening minutes. Referee Scott Foster gave technicals to Crowder and Clippers forward Marcus Morris Sr. after some jawing following a scrum for a loose ball.

BLOODY BOOKER, BEVERLEY

Booker took a shot to the nose late in the third after he bumped heads with Beverley, who was playing tight defense. The Suns guard fell to the floor and was down for a minute before walking back to the locker room with the medical staff with a towel over his nose.

Beverley was also left bloody on the forehead from the exchange and had to leave the game and change jerseys.

A foul was called on Beverley. The referees ruled it was not flagrant. Booker jogged back out onto the court before the fourth quarter to a big roar from the crowd.

TIP-INS

Clippers: Lue shook up the starting lineup, using Beverley and Zubac in place of Nicolas Batum and Terance Mann. ... Leonard and forward Serge Ibaka (back surgery) didn't play. ... Morris was dealing with a sore right knee that limited him in Game 1, but he started on Tuesday.

Suns: Paul and forward Abdel Nader (right knee arthroscopy) didn't play. ... The Suns had the same starting lineup for the second straight game, using Payne in Paul's place.

Hungary's PM uses soccer to push vision of right-wing Europe

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY (AP): Populist Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has long used soccer to advance his right-wing politics, and now widespread international criticism of a new law seen as targeting the LGBT community has turned this month's European Championship into a major stage for his challenge to Europe's liberal values.

Last week, as more than 60,000 soccer fans poured into Budapest's Puskas Arena, an emblem of Orban's famous devotion to soccer, the Hungarian Parliament approved a controversial bill that bans sharing with minors any content portraying homosexuality or sex reassignment.

Human rights groups and liberal politicians in Hungary and from around Europe denounced the law as conflating homosexuality with pedophilia and as a draconian effort to push any representation of LGBT people into the shadows. Nearly half of the European Union's 27 member countries issued a statement calling it a "clear breach of (LGBT people's) fundamental right to dignity," and officials are examining whether the legislation contravenes EU law.

In a direct rebuke to the law, Munich's mayor and city council called for its stadium to be lit up with rainbow colors in a show of support for tolerance and gay rights when Germany plays Hungary on Wednesday at Euro 2020.

But UEFA, European soccer's governing body, denied the request because it considered it a political move, though other stadiums in Germany unaffiliated with the tournament will be allowed such displays and the team captain will wear a rainbow armband.

The controversy has turned the game into a symbolic showdown between competing visions for the future of Europe, pitting Orban's promotion of what he calls "illiberal democracy" against Western



Europe's "liberal consensus."

Orban has been challenging that consensus ever since he returned to power in 2010: frequently criticizing multiculturalism, curtailing media freedoms, and relentlessly campaigning against the EU itself, portraying Brussels as a modern heir to Soviet Moscow, which dominated Hungary for decades.

His message resonates with many Hungarians who resent interference and perceived condescension from the EU — and he has frequently shown himself adept at maneuvering around its policies, such as when he went out on his own to make Hungary the first EU country to procure Russian and Chinese COVID-19 vaccines not approved by European regulators.

The move — which has led Hungary to have the second-highest rate of vaccination in the EU — offered validation for his strategy of bucking the bloc's dictates, both increasing his power at home and challenging the EU's credibility and liberal values.

Fiercely opposed to immigration, he has blasted European leaders, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, for

plans in 2015 to distribute the burden of that year's wave of refugees from the Middle East and Africa and refused to accept asylum seekers. His crack-downs on the media have led to "a degree of (state) media control unprecedented in an EU member state," according to Reporters Without Borders.

More recently, after his ruling Fidesz party broke with its center-right political group in the European Parliament, Orban has embarked on a mission to unite Europe's right-wing forces into a new political formation.

By all accounts a soccer fanatic and a former player himself, Orban has often used the sport as his preferred venue for pushing his political vision and amplifying his image as a man of the people.

Since the days of Hungary great Ferenc Puskas — widely regarded as one of the best players of all time who led "the Mighty Magyars" to the 1954 World Cup final and an Olympic gold medal at the 1952 Helsinki Games — the country has never again achieved world-class status in soccer. But Orban has attempted to rekindle some of the old magic.

In 2007, he founded the

Puskas Soccer Academy in his home village of Felcsut, where he had played semi-professionally in the 1990s. His government also introduced a scheme where companies may donate money to sports clubs in lieu of paying corporate tax, an arrangement that since 2010 has netted clubs as much as \$2.7 billion — money that critics say would have been better spent on Hungary's ailing health care sector.

The government also directly funds the sport, paying for several of the 32 stadiums that have been built or renovated in Hungary since Orban assumed power, making the structures something of a symbol of state largesse.

This major injection of capital into soccer has made games a popular meeting place for politicians and the politically connected. Orban is often photographed at games with some of Hungary's most successful businessmen, including billionaire Sandor Csanyi, Hungary's second wealthiest person who is also the president of the Hungarian soccer federation and a UEFA vice president.

The games themselves have

also become battlegrounds for displays of Hungary's values. After a recent game in Budapest between Hungary's national team and Portugal, UEFA received complaints that Hungarian fans were carrying homophobic banners.

Video from the game also showed Hungarian fans chanting "Cristiano homosexual!" at Portugal captain Cristiano Ronaldo during the match. In 2017, FIFA, soccer's international governing body, fined the Hungarian soccer federation \$22,000 after Hungarian fans directed the same chant at Ronaldo at a World Cup qualifier in Budapest.

Earlier in the tournament, during a friendly match in Budapest between Ireland and Hungary, Hungarian fans booed Irish players as they knelt on the field as a sign of solidarity against racism.

Orban seized the opportunity to denounce the gesture that has swept Europe and the United States amid calls for action against racial injustice. He defended the fans, asserting that "politics has no place in sports," and chided the Irish national team, telling them not to "provoke the host if you come as a guest."

Hungarians only kneel before God, their country, and their lovers, he said.

Levente Toth, 45, a Hungarian fan who traveled to Munich to view Wednesday's game, said that he thought the push to illuminate Germany's stadium in rainbow colors "has no place in sports," adding that he thought opposition to the new law was "overblown" and echoing the typical message that the legislation protects children.

"No one wants to harm gays or people who think differently or people of different sexual orientations," he said.

But Toth said those displaying homophobic banners or engaging in hateful chants at games "should be lifted out of the crowd."

Japanese soccer player Yokoyama comes out as transgender

TOKYO (AP): Japanese soccer player Kumi Yokoyama said they are transgender — a revelation praised in the U.S. where they play in the National Women's Soccer League but an identity not legally recognized in Japan.

The 27-year-old forward for the Washington Spirit said they felt more comfortable with their own gender identity while living in the United States, where teammates and friends are more open to gender and sexual diversity.

"I'm coming out now," Yokoyama said in a video talk on former teammate Yuki Nagasato's YouTube channel. "In the future, I want to quit soccer and live as a man."

Yokoyama's revelation was praised by President Joe Biden.

"To Carl Nassib and Kumi Yokoyama — two prominent, inspiring athletes who came out this week: I'm so proud of your courage. Because of you, countless kids around the world are seeing themselves in a new light today," Biden tweeted. Nassib is the first active NFL player to come out as gay.

The Spirit also expressed the team's support and pride in Yokoyama. "Thank you for showing the world it's ok to embrace who you are!" the team tweeted, adding that the player uses they/them pronouns.

Support and awareness of gender and sexual diversity has slowly grown in Japan, but LGBTQ people lack many legal protections and often suffer dis-

crimination, causing many to hide their sexual identities. An equality law pushed by rights groups was scrapped recently due to opposition from the conservative ruling party.

Transgender people in Japan also must have their reproductive organs removed to have their gender recognized on official documents — a requirement that human rights and medical groups criticize as inhuman and unnecessary and say should end.

Yokoyama said they weren't enthusiastic about coming out but it was a choice made while thinking about the future and that it would be harder to live closeted. "I would not have come out in Japan," they said.

They thanked their teammates, friends and girlfriend for their support and courage.

Yokoyama played for Japan at the 2019 Women's World Cup in France and moved from Japanese club AC Nagano Parceiro to the Washington Spirit.

Yokoyama said they felt a strong pressure to conform and remain closeted in Japan but hoped to live as a man after retiring as a professional soccer player and to help raise awareness for sexual minorities in Japan.

"More people in Japan are becoming familiar with the word LGBTQ and it's seen more (in the media), but I think awareness won't grow unless people like myself come out and raise our voices," Yokoyama said.

Iran likely had failed rocket launch, preparing for another

DUBAI, JUN 23 (AP): Iran likely conducted a failed launch of a satellite-carrying rocket in recent days and now appears to be preparing to try again, the country's latest effort to advance its space program amid tensions with the West over its tattered nuclear deal.

Satellite images, a US official and a rocket expert all confirmed the failed launch, earlier this month, at the Imam Khomeini Spaceport in Iran's Semnan province. The attempt comes as Iran's space program has suffered a series of high-profile losses, while its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard runs its own parallel program that launched a satellite into orbit last year.

As with other failed launches, Iranian state media did not acknowledge it took place. Iran's mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment early Wednesday.

Satellite photos from Planet Labs Inc. and Maxar Technologies show preparations at the spaceport on June 6. Those images include what appears to be fuel tanks alongside a massive white gantry that houses a rocket, while scientists fuel it and prepare for launch. Before the launch, workers tow the gantry away to expose the rocket.

The number of fuel tanks, based on their size, appear to have been enough to fill the first and second stages of an Iranian Simorgh rocket, said Jeffrey Lewis, an expert at the James Martin Center for Non-proliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies. The Simorgh is a satellite-carrying rocket that has been launched from that same area of the spaceport, he said.

Later satellite images on June 17 showed a decrease in activity at the site. Lewis said analysts believe Iran launched the rocket at some point in that window.

Nothing had blown up. There wasn't a giant stain like they had dumped the fuel and the vehicles had kind of just moved around," he said. "The overall level of activity at the site was much lower. So to our mind, that looked like a launch. CNN, which first reported on the failed launch, quoted Pentagon spokesman Lt. Col. Uriah Orland saying that U.S. Space Command is aware of the Iranian rocket launch failure which occurred early June 12. Orland did not elaborate. The Pentagon and U.S. Space Command did not immediately respond to a request for comment early Wednesday from The Associated Press.

It wasn't immediately clear why Iran would have picked June 12 for a launch as Tehran typically schedules such launches for national commemorations. However, it did come in the run-up to Iran's presidential election last week, in which the Islamic Republic had hoped to boost turnout.

Germany hosts conference to push for progress in Libya

BERLIN (AP): Germany and the United Nations are bringing together representatives of Libya with powers that have interests in the country at a conference Wednesday which aims for progress toward securing elections in the North African nation and the removal of foreign fighters.

The meeting at the foreign ministry in Berlin, with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken among participants, follows up on a January 2020 conference where leaders agreed to respect an arms embargo and to push the country's warring parties to reach a full cease-fire. Germany has tried to act as an intermediary.

Countries that have been involved in the process include the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, along with Italy, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

Ahead of the conference, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas noted that much has been achieved in the past two years. An October cease-fire agreement that included a demand that all foreign fighters and mercenaries leave Libya within 90 days led to a



deal on elections, due to be held on Dec. 24, and a transitional government that took office in February.

But "many challenges still lie ahead of us," said Maas. "For the further stabilization of the country, it is crucial that elections take place as planned and that foreign fighters and mercenaries really do leave Libya."

He added that Wednesday's conference launches a new phase "in which we no longer only talk about Libya, but in which we are now speaking with Libyan men

and women about the future of their country."

Blinken said that "we share the goal of a sovereign, stable, unified, secure Libya free from foreign interference — it's what the people of Libya deserve, it's critical to regional security as well."

"For that to happen, national elections need to go forward in December and that means urgent agreement is needed on constitutional and legal issues that would undergird those elections," he said at a news conference with Maas. "And the Oct. 23 cease-

fire agreement has to be fully implemented, including by withdrawing all foreign forces from Libya."

The U.S. special envoy for Libya, Richard Norland, said it was important to start bringing all armed groups in the country under a joint military command. "When foreign forces leave, they're going to need to be replaced by a viable united Libyan national military and police structure," he said.

Meanwhile, aid group Doctors Without Borders said this week it was suspending

its activities in two detention centers in Tripoli after "repeated incidents of violence toward refugees and migrants held there." It said staff had witnessed guards beating detainees at one center and received reports of people being shot at in another.

Libya has been a key transit country for migrants from Africa trying to reach Europe, especially after the collapse of order when a NATO-backed uprising toppled and later killed longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi in 2011. The oil-rich country

was long divided between a U.N.-supported government in the capital, Tripoli, and rival authorities based in the country's east, each backed by armed groups and foreign governments.

In April 2019, eastern-based commander Khalifa Hifter and his forces, backed by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, launched an offensive to try to capture Tripoli. Hifter's 14-month campaign collapsed after Turkey stepped up its military support of the U.N.-backed government with hundreds of troops and thousands of Syrian mercenaries.

Little progress has been made so far on getting foreign forces out of Libya. Jalel Harchaoui, a senior fellow at the Geneva-based Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime who follows Libya closely, said that it is the presence of foreign mercenaries, acting as a sort of deterrent, that has led to the current, if uneasy, peace.

"That's what it comes down to, and of course it's not politically correct to say," he said. He cautioned that elections could deepen polarization if conducted too hastily.

Hong Kong's embattled Apple Daily says it will close



HONG KONG (AP): Hong Kong's pro-democracy Apple Daily newspaper will stop publishing Thursday, following last week's arrest of five editors and executives and the freezing of \$2.3 million in assets under the city's year-old national security law.

The board of directors of parent company Next Media said in a statement Wednesday that the print edition and online edition will cease due to "the current circumstances prevailing in Hong Kong." The paper later said Thursday's edition will be its last.

The silencing of a prominent pro-democracy voice is the latest sign of China's determination to exert greater control over the semi-autonomous territory after huge protests in 2019 shook the government. Since then, Beijing has imposed a strict national security law to curb dissent and revamped Hong Kong's election laws to keep opposition voices out of the legislature.

The Apple Daily announcement coincided with the start of the city's first trial under the national security law, which is being closely watched as a barometer of how strictly the courts will interpret it.

The widely expected move to close Apple Daily followed last week's arrests of the five edi-

tors and executives, who were detained on suspicion of colluding with foreigners to endanger national security. Police cited more than 30 articles published by the paper as evidence of an alleged conspiracy to encourage foreign nations to impose sanctions on Hong Kong and China.

The police action against Apple Daily was the first time the national security law had been used against journalists for something they had published, in an intensifying crackdown by authorities in a city long known for its freedoms.

Apple Daily reported that its management made the decision out of concern for employee safety and staffing issues.

Police also Wednesday arrested a 55-year-old man on suspicion of foreign collusion to endanger national security. According to Apple Daily, which cited unidentified sources, the man writes editorials for the newspaper under the pseudonym Li Ping.

Apple Daily has been outspoken in defending Hong Kong's freedoms, and in recent years has often criticized the Chinese and Hong Kong governments for limiting the city's democratic freedoms as well as restricting the rights of free speech and assembly not found on mainland China.

The paper has in recent years come under increasing scrutiny over its pro-democracy stance. Its founder, media tycoon Jimmy Lai, is facing charges under the national security law for foreign collusion and is currently serving a prison sentence for his involvement in unauthorized assemblies in 2019, during a time of massive anti-government protests in the city.

It was the freezing of assets that spelled the paper's demise. The board of directors had earlier this week written to Hong Kong's security bureau requesting the release of some of its funds so the company could pay wages.

The police operation against Apple Daily drew criticism from the U.S., the E.U. and Britain, which say Hong Kong and Chinese authorities are targeting the freedoms promised to the city when the former British colony was returned to China in 1997.

Chinese and Hong Kong officials have said the media must abide by the law, and that press freedom cannot be used as a "shield" for illegal activities.

The national security law imposed last year criminalizes subversion, secession, terrorism and foreign collusion.

The first person to stand trial under the law,

Tong Ying-kit, pleaded not guilty Wednesday to charges of terrorism and inciting secession by driving a motorcycle into police officers during a 2019 rally while carrying a flag with the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, the revolution of our times." Several officers were knocked over and three sustained injuries.

His trial will set the tone for how Hong Kong handles national security offenses. So far, more than 100 people have been arrested under the security law, including prominent pro-democracy activists such as Lai, Apple Daily's founder.

The slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, the revolution of our times" was often chanted during anti-government demonstrations demanding broader democratic freedoms. Protests accuse Beijing of walking back on its promise at the 1997 handover of Hong Kong from Britain that the city could retain its freedoms not seen elsewhere in China for 50 years.

China responded with tough measures silencing opposition voices, including the national security law.

The legislation makes calls for Hong Kong independence illegal, and a government notice last July said the protest slogan connotes a call for independence and subversion of state power.

A court ruled last month that Tong will stand trial without a jury, a departure from Hong Kong's common law traditions. Under the national security law, a panel of three judges can replace jurors, and the city's leader has the power to designate judges to hear such cases.

The law carries a maximum penalty of life in prison for serious offenses. Tong is on trial at the High Court, where sentences are not capped.

Pakistan receives another 2 million doses of China-made Covid vaccine



ISLAMABAD, JUN 23 (PTI): Pakistan has received another two million doses of a China-made coronavirus vaccine, as the country hopes to enhance its immunisation drive. A special flight of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) PK-6852 airlifted two million doses of Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine from the Beijing Capital International Airport to Islamabad on Tuesday.

It is in addition to 1.55 million doses of Sinovac vaccines from China to Pakistan on Sunday.

According to the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC), the main body to combat the virus, "The National

Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is spearheading the process of purchasing vaccines from the international market under the auspices of the NCOC.

The fresh doses will be sent to various vaccine centres across the country for which arrangements are already in place.

"With the arrival of this consignment, the daily average administering of doses across the country will be enhanced considerably," the NCOC said.

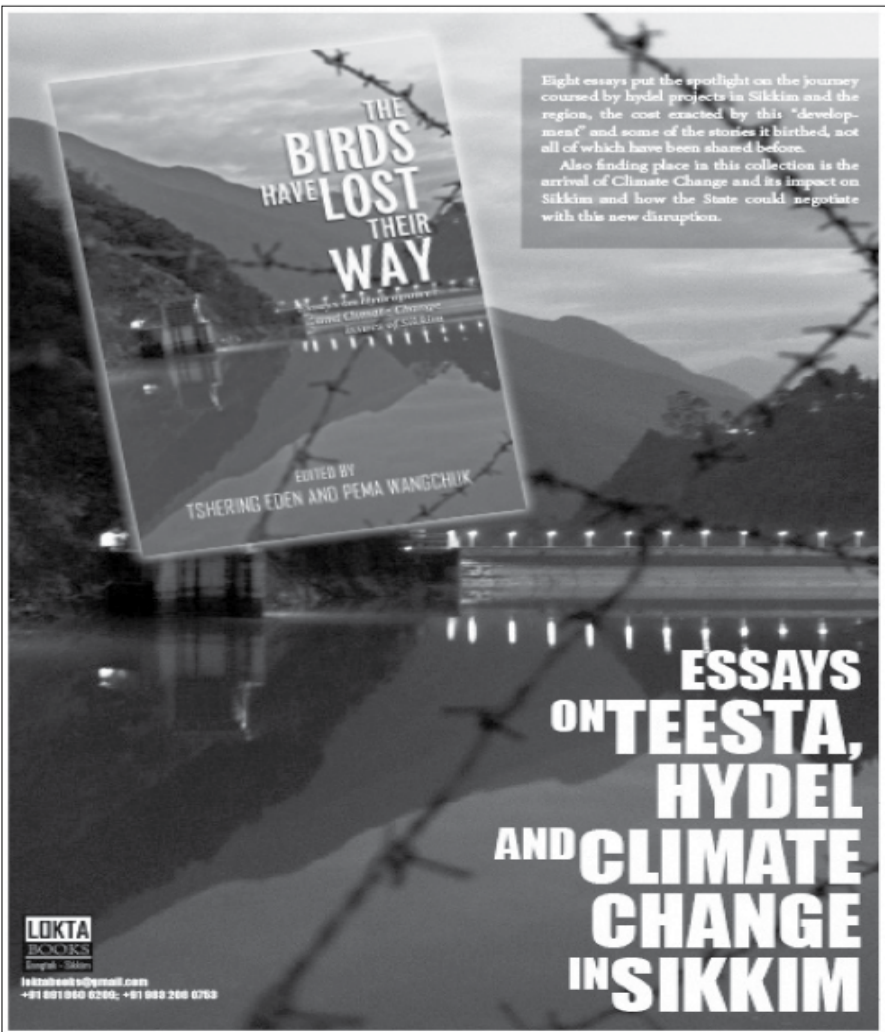
Meanwhile, the number of coronavirus cases in the country rose to 950,768 after 930 new cases were reported on

Wednesday. With 39 more deaths, the country coronavirus toll rose to 22,073, reported the Ministry of National Health Services.

Pakistani health authorities had launched a nationwide vaccination drive with around a million doses of Sinopharm vaccine donated by China, starting with older people and frontline healthcare workers, in March.

Initially, the government had to deal with vaccination hesitancy and a shortage of vaccine supplies and had limited shots for people aged 30 or over.

Now vaccines are available for people aged over 18 years.





BUSINESS CHIC! Model Irina Shayk looked chic in an oversized white button-down shirt in New York City.

Director Umesh Bist inks three-film deal with Balaji Telefilms, Sikhya Entertainment

Mumbai, Jun 23 (PTI): Filmmaker Umesh Bist is taking his association with Balaji Telefilms and Sikhya Entertainment a step further as the director has signed a three-film deal with the two production houses.

Bist had recently helmed Netflix's critically-acclaimed movie "Pagglait", starring Sanya Malhotra. The movie was co-produced by Ekta Kapoor-led Balaji Telefilms and Guneet Monga's Sikhya Entertainment.

Ruchikaa Kapoor Sheikh, Creative Producer and Executive Vice President at Balaji Telefilms, said the team is excited to reunite with Bist after the success of "Pagglait".

"Furthermore, the film established an equity between Balaji and Sikhya and we're thrilled to come together to tell stories that are both emotional and entertaining, stories that find their way to the hearts of the audience," Kapoor Sheikh said in a statement.

Monga lauded Bist for his "vision for stories" and said she is looking forward to collaborate with the "Pagglait" team again.

"We went through so many amazing experiences together that it feels quite natural to continue this partnership," Monga said.

The team is ready with the first film and

the announcement of the project is on the cards Bist, whose directorial credits also include 2014's "O Teri", said he is touched by the trust the producers have put in him.

"It all started when I first met Guneet in



2018 and there's no looking back since then. As a filmmaker, all you want is a collaborative ecosystem where the team puts all their might in doing the best for the movie and I am glad I found this in Sikhya and Balaji.

"The trust they put in a director is rare. As partners, they add on to each other's strength points, I am excited to take this journey forward with them," he added.

Film industry was monopolised by specific people, OTT gave chance to new actors: Priyanka Chopra

MUMBAI JUN 23 (PTI): Actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas says that people should embrace streaming platforms because they have not only allowed the audience to consume diverse stories but also democratised the film industry.

Chopra Jonas, who made her digital debut with Netflix movie "The White Tiger" this year, said that streaming services have made artistes think outside the "formula" of a Bollywood film. "That's what you're seeing in Indian cinema - the freedom of streaming services is allowing people to have larger thoughts than the formula that existed before. "That there should be five songs, a fight sequence. That formula has gone away. Now people want to tell great, real stories, with which they identify," the actor told reporters.

Chopra Jonas was speaking at a virtual press conference of streaming platform ZEE5's launch in the US, late Tuesday evening. The launch announcement was made by Archana Anand, Chief Business Officer, ZEE5 Global.

The 38-year-old actor said the boom of the streaming services, particularly in India, has broken down the monopoly of a "specific number of people", resulting in newer storytelling.

"It's amazing because it gives new writers, actors, filmmakers an opportunity to come into an industry that was monopolised for a long time by very specific number of people. It's a great time for growth, entertainment and spe-

cifically for Indian cinema," she added.

While nothing can be compared to a theatrical experience, the actor said the OTT platforms have brought in a remarkable comfort to the audience.

However, Chopra Jonas firmly believes that the current OTT boom is not

the present," she added. At the event, Chopra Jonas also said that as an Indian actor-producer working in Hollywood, she wants to use her power to create more space for South Asian artistes on the global stage. "I have been one of the very few people who have had the



an indicator that the "theatrical is going anywhere". "The freedom that streaming has provided to the audiences around the world is that you can watch a movie at the comfort of your homes. That's amazing.

"It's spreading culture, teaching people, educating them, there's a large, new audience that is being exposed to all kinds of Indian cinema," she added.

The Indian film industry is going through an "exciting time" and people should wholeheartedly "embrace streaming as much as we can", Chopra Jonas said. "It's not the future, it's

privilege of being able to be in the entertainment business in two of the largest entertainment industries in the world.

"My quest is to be able to create more recognition, representation and to be able to have South Asians feel seen and heard, especially within the international community outside of South Asia," the actor added. As part of the launch, ZEE5 unveiled its line-up of Originals and other films across languages to release on the platform in the coming months, which included filmmaker SS Rajamouli's much awaited "RRR" post its theatrical release.

Paramount unveils 'Transformers: Rise of the Beasts', offers details

Los Angeles, Jun 23 (PTI): Hollywood studio Paramount has revealed that the latest chapter of its blockbuster "Transformers" franchise has been titled "Transformers: Rise of the Beasts".

The details of the seventh installment of the action franchise were shared by director Steven Caple Jr and producer Lorenzo di Bonaventura during a virtual event on Tuesday, according to The Hollywood Reporter.

Set in Brooklyn, New York in the 1990s, the new movie will bring back the familiar lead hero Optimus Prime, serving as a kind of origin story for the character as he arrives on Earth for the first time and learns to become a leader.

"I want to discover more about Optimus Prime, get underneath the surface get underneath the metal, if you would and explore who he is and his experience on Earth," said Caple Jr, who previously directed Michael B Jordan-starrer "Creed II".

The film will draw from the "Beast Wars" animated series which focused on robots who transform themselves into animals as opposed to vehicles.

"There are different breeds of Transformers. In our particular film, they are prehistoric animals who travel through time and space, and we find them here on Earth," Caple Jr added.

The director also revealed that the movie will introduce the Maximals, Predacons, and Terrorcons to the existing battle on earth between Autobots and Decepticons.

"The Predacons in our film are more reptilian in nature. We've seen a few in

other Transformers films, but (in the new film), we get to see another side of them. It's all about building a backstory to these characters, and we'll see that more on the Predacon and Terrorcon side," he added.

The main villain in the movie will be Scourge, known for fusing parts of slain Transformers onto his own body.

The movie will also introduce two new human characters, played by "In The Heights" star Anthony Ramos and "Judas and the Black Messiah" actor Dominique Fishback.

Ramos, who will play Noah, a military veteran and electronics wiz, said, "The one thing I love about Noah is his tenacity and his heart and his will to never quit in spite of all the crazy things life is throwing at him."

Fishback described her character as "an intelligent artifact researcher".

"She works at the museum and she's trying to get a leg up in life, but her boss keeps taking credit for the work that she's done," the actor added.

"Transformers: Rise of the Beasts" is the seventh chapter in the franchise after "Transformers" (2007), "Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen" (2009), "Transformers: Dark of the Moon" (2011), "Transformers: Age of Extinction" (2014), "Transformers: The Last Knight" (2017) and spin-off "Bumblebee" (2018).

The movie's script has been written by Darnell Metayer and Josh Peters from an earlier draft by Joby Harold.

The film is scheduled to be released by Paramount Pictures on June 24, 2022.

Disney sets Rachel Zegler as lead for 'Snow White' live-action remake

Los Angeles, Jun 23 (PTI): Newcomer Rachel Zegler is set to play the lead role in Disney's upcoming live-action remake of animated classic "Snow White".

The 20-year-old actor will be making her film debut with veteran filmmaker Steven Spielberg's upcoming remake of "West Side Story".

She will also feature in Warner Bros/DC Films' "Shazam! Fury of the Gods", co-starring Zachary Levi. Described as a fresh take on the 1937 classic, the new movie will be directed by Marc Webb, the filmmaker behind 2009 hit "500 Days of Summer" and two "Amazing Spider-Man" films, reported Variety.

"Rachel's extraordinary vocal abilities are just the beginning of her gifts. Her strength, intelligence and optimism will become an integral part of rediscovering the joy in this classic Disney fairytale," Webb said in a statement.

The original movie, titled "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves", was based on the Brothers Grimm fairytale and released in 1937. It was Disney's first animated feature film.

It presented the story of a princess who is fed a poisoned apple by her step-mother, the queen and then falls into a deep sleep that can be broken only by a kiss from the prince.

Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, the song-writing duo behind "La La Land", "The Greatest Showman" and "Dear Evan Hansen", will write new music for the film. Songs such as "Heigh-Ho", "Some-day My Prince Will Come" and "Whistle While You Work" will be included in the soundtrack list.

Aries:

You may be two parts fear, Aries, but you're also four parts courage and infinite parts awesomeness. In other words, you can do whatever you have set out to, minus the fear of failure. What the cards want you to know: It's time to unlock the next level. It's time to out-do your past self. The good thing is that your support system is strong and your fellow warriors promise to catch you if you fall.

Tip: It's time to unlock the next level.

Taurus:

It's easy to speak our truth in the company of strangers. When it comes to our inner circle, though, we face all kinds of inner conflict. But what are you really afraid of, Taurus? Are you worried about being judged or rejected for standing up for what you believe in? What the cards want you to remember: you are loved and accepted for who you are (flaws and all). So give yourself the permission to be your most authentic self. Tip: You are loved. You are loved. You are loved.

Gemini:

You know what you are here to do, Gemini, and sharing your gifts is an important part of that growth and evolution process. So, stop shying away from the limelight. Stop shying away from talking about your mission and the things that matter to you on a deep

level. Your angels and guides are making space for you to move up the ladder, and reminding you that you are not your limitations.

Tip: It's time to take that cloak of invisibility off, baby!

Cancer:

You've been sent here with a sacred mission—a mission that can be fulfilled by you and you alone—and this mission is becoming clearer to you with each passing day. Today, you're being asked to set some time aside for introspection, to make a conscious effort to tune in, and to listen to all the ways in which you are being guided by that voice of wisdom within. Your spirit team is closer to you than they have ever been and they are making their presence felt in a multitude of ways.

Tip: Tune in and listen. You have all the cosmic support that is needed at this moment.

Leo:

Leo, you've got 99 problems at hand, and about 100 per cent of them are a product of your overactive imagination. So, breathe. Centre yourself. Create a sacred space where you can shake off your troubles (and with it, your booty) as you return to that state of inner balance. Your angels and guides are coming through with important messages from the beyond. Guidance that can help you power through at a time

like this. All you have to do is take some time to 'listen'. Tip: Important messages are being sent your way.

Virgo:

We've all had our share of disappointments. We've all had to face rejection by people we love at different points in our lives. Should that keep us from believing in the power of love? Anything but, Virgo. So, breathe into your heart chakra, and visualise this space expanding with every breath you take. Know that your commitment to staying open will bring about a significant vibrational shift.

Tip: Believe in the power of love.

Libra:

We all do what we have to do to survive and there's no shame in that, Libra. But, that doesn't mean you cannot dedicate yourself to public service simultaneously or find time to give back to your community. It all comes down to managing your schedule better. So, if you're being offered the opportunity to volunteer for a worthy cause, don't waste time weighing the pros and cons. Jump right in and give your best with an open heart.

Tip: The cards are speaking about the virtues of selfless service.

Scorpio:

What happens when we live somebody else's dream? We face rejection and disappointment at every step

along the way. What happens when we follow our own inner compass? Everything begins to align for us as if by sleight of hand. So, pay attention to what the Oracle within is urging you to follow. Commit to staying in the energy of passion, no matter what the cost. If it gives you a reason to wake up every morning despite how hard the previous day has been, it means you're on the right track.

Tip: Stay in the energy of passion.

Sagittarius:

The trouble is, you've been told your dreams are too big by those who never had the courage to believe in their own. Shake off that conditioning, Sagittarius. Free yourself from the story that there is only "so much" you can achieve. The truth is, you're infinite. You're infinite potential in human form. The more you stay committed to your path, the easier it will get as you go along.

Tip: It gets easier from here—we promise!

Capricorn:

Statutory warning, Capricorn: your inner control freak will be tested. Despite your best efforts to set things in motion, you will face opposition. Instead of descending into that downward spiral of emotions, take charge of the situation. Communicate how you are feeling in an open and honest manner and hold space for oth-

ers to do the same. They may or may not agree with you at that moment, and that's okay. Stepping away from the chaos will give both parties the perspective they need.

Tip: You just need some perspective. That's all!

Aquarius:

You could continue to do things as you have been, but where's the fun in that, Aquarius? It's time to embrace the spirit of adventure, to dance with life, to make love to the unknown and to create something you will be remembered for. Remember, perfection is an illusion. So, forget about that for now and allow yourself to be the most authentic version of yourself that you can possibly be.

Tip: Dance with life!

Pisces:

What if we said you can have anything you want if you believe? Yes, anything! The Universe has been plotting and planning in order to orchestrate a one-of-a-kind surprise for you, Pisces. This could even manifest as a new beginning on the romance front or a deeper connection with both your beloved and your family. So, look beyond the illusion of separation and breathe into that space of oneness within. You have chosen each other in this lifetime for a reason. Tip: Allow your heart to expand with joy and love.