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SummitTIMES

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CM ATTENDS NESAC MEETING IN SHILLONG Space technology can help in natural resource management in Sikkim: CM

**SUMMIT REPORT
SHILLONG, 24 JUL:**

Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang was part of the North Eastern Space Application Centre (NESAC) meeting chaired by the Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah, a press release from the Chief Minister's Office informs.

Minister DoNER, Tourism and Culture, G. Kishan Reddy, Chief Ministers of the Northeast states and other dignitaries were also part of the meeting held at NESAC headquarters at Umiam, Shillong, today.

In his address, the Chief Minister gave a brief background of Sikkim providing the geological features and terrain of the state. He stated that Sikkim being part of the Eastern Himalayas which is a young mountain system and prone to frequent landslides, adding that it also falls under the seismic zone 04 which poses a constant threat.

Speaking about climate change, he said,

"The impact of climate change is becoming evident in the Sikkim Himalayan region, and the effects are visible".

He elaborated and stated that this has manifested in extreme rainfall resulting in a large volume of water received in a short duration of time.

Further, he added that these abnormal rainfall events generate high-velocity storm-flow downstream, creating massive soil erosion in gullies and river banks, risking the life and property of the people.

The Chief Minister emphasised the need for an urgent plan for minimizing soil erosion and its consequences over the slopes of the Sikkim Himalaya. In this context, he stated that Remote Sensing and GIS applications are significant in the decision-making process and long-term planning of natural resources management. He informed that NESAC under the Department of Space, Government of



India, Shillong has identified different areas for the application of space technology in Sikkim.

The Chief Minister expressed his gratitude to the Union Home and Cooperation Minister, Amit Shah and Minister DoNER, Tourism and Culture, G. Kishan Reddy.

He also thanked the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Conrad Sangma and Secretary of the North Eastern Council, K. Moses Chalai for the warm hospitality.

During his address, the Chief Minister presented some of the key areas of interventions

which are as follows;

1. Interlinking water surplus with deficit areas for water security and identifying the shortest distance for interlinking etc.
2. Identification of dried-up lakes for their rejuvenation and development of water storage by linking with the water surplus area.
3. Minimizing soil erosion and floods during extreme events by identifying the vulnerable gullies and points in river banks for engineering interventions. Tentatively, 35 such vulnerable areas have

been identified for detailed analysis using space technology for protection and restoration measures.

4. Around 14 potentially vulnerable glacial lakes in Sikkim Himalaya have been identified, continuously expanding in their size and volume due to the melting of glaciers.

5. The expanding glacial lakes have posed a serious threat of Glacial Lake outburst flood. Therefore, to avoid and minimize the risks to hydropower, human settlements, defence establishments, etc. iden-

tifying sites for the construction of check dams is the state's priority.

6. Mapping and Monitoring of forest cover dynamics and human-wildlife conflict using Remote Sensing and Geographical Information System.

7. Geo-tagging and Monitoring of projects funded by the Government in Sikkim using Geospatial Technology and Tools.

8. Identification of agriculture fallow land for the establishment of community organic farming centres in Sikkim.

9. Developing a Medical Emergency mobile application for telemedicine support in linkage with nearest Health centre, District Hospital, as well as State Hospital.

10. Deployment of Early Warning System and hydrodynamic modelling For Floods using Space-Based Technology in 2 Potentially Vulnerable Glacial Lakes in Sikkim.

Minors from Assam rescued from Sikkim homes

**AARON RAI
GANGTOK, 24 JUL:**

Child labour is an open secret when it comes to Sikkim even if camouflaged by excuses of providing the children a "better life," and while the people here have convinced themselves that child labour is some kind of "social service," the obvious insensitivity of the practice occasionally makes headlines and shames Sikkim at the national level.

One such moment arrived today when Assam Police arrived in Sikkim on a mission to rescue 24 children and two grown-up women from servitude in Sikkim homes. The minors were aged between 8 to 18 years old and the two ladies were aged 35 and 50, DIG-Range, Sikkim Police, Prawin Gurung, confirmed in an exclusive interview to SummitTimes.

He pointed out that 26 people were rescued and not 42, as some na-

tional media reports are claiming.

A team from the Assam Police rescued 40 children and 2 adults belonging to Chirang district of the state's Bodoland Territorial region. The police also arrested the kingpin of the child trafficking racket, Krishna Jogi and his accomplice in connection with the case.

The entire operation took over a month wherein the Assam Police with assistance from its Sikkim counterparts managed to rescue 26 persons from Sikkim. The Assamese team was led by Assam Police Special Director General of Police, LR Bishnoi and Chirang Superintendent of Police Gaurav Upadhyay.

Police said that the children were taken to Sikkim from three villages of the Chirang district of Assam on the pretext of providing education but were instead engaged in domestic work.

New cases see 50% jump over previous week but test positivity rate records 4% drop



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 24 JUL:**

Sikkim's Covid death toll reached 330 today with one more Covid patient succumbing to novel coronavirus in the last 24 hours. This death was reported from Central Referral Hospital, Tadong. Covid deaths continue to traumatize Sikkim, and this week [18-24 July], the state lost nine lives to the virus.

The week has also seen a substantial spike in the number of new cases. With the 225 new cases reported in the past 24 hours, the week's overall count stands at 1,586. This is a nearly 50% jump over the 1,075 cases detected the previous week [11-17 July].

As per Daily Report of Covid-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department this morning, the 225 new cases

were picked up from the screening of 1,972 samples, giving Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 11.40%.

The overall test positivity for the week is 16.20% - the 1,586 cases detected from 9,789 tests conducted over the seven days. In comparison, much fewer tests were carried out the previous week when only 5,337 samples were screened to deliver 1,075 cases and giving the previous week a much higher overall test positivity rate of 20.14%.

Sikkim's overall test positivity rate thus far is 13.21% - its 24,823 confirmed cases of Covid picked up from the screening of 1,87,876 samples since 28 February, 2020.

Returning to the day's Covid figures, the Daily Report also informs that 171 more people were discharged in the past 24 hours from home and

facility isolation after making full recoveries. With this, the number of fully recovered cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim has climbed to 21,380.

There are currently 2,849 active cases of Covid in the State of whom only 100 are in hospitals, including the 15 who were hospitalized in the last 24 hours and the 16 who are in ICU. The rest of the Covid-positive people are with mild enough symptoms to recuperate under home or facility isolation.

Of the 225 new cases, 137 were detected in rapid antigen testing of 1,185 samples at different parts of the state on Friday, while 88 more were found positive for Covid in RT-PCR testing of 779 samples.

Of the new cases, 72 were registered in East District, 81 in West District, 71 in South District and 01 in North District.



**GORAL GIVES BIRTH IN DARJEELING ZOO
DARJEELING, 24 JUL:** A Goral has given birth to one female fawn at Dowhill conservation breeding center under Padmaju Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park. The zoo now has 26 Gorals. Both the mother and fawn are in good condition, it is informed. [from SMRITA KHAWAS]

Brazil suspends Bharat Biotech's Covaxin clinical trials

HYDERABAD, JULY 24 (PTI):

Brazil has suspended the clinical studies of Bharat Biotech's COVID-19 vaccine, Covaxin following termination of the company's agreement with its partner there, the South American Country's health regulator said.

Bharat Biotech on Friday announced cancellation of the MoU it signed with Precisa Medicamentos and Envixia Pharmaceuticals LLC for its COVID-19 vaccine Covaxin for the Brazilian market. The termination of the pact comes after the deal with the Brazilian

government for supply of 20 million doses of the vaccine landed in controversy and attracted investigation by authorities in that country. In the Coordination of Clinical Research at Anvisa (Copec/GGMED) determined this Friday (23/7) the precautionary suspension of clinical studies of the Covaxin vaccine in Brazil.

The suspension was carried out as a result of a statement from the Indian company Bharat Biotech Limited International, sent to Anvisa on Friday (23/7), Anvisa, the Brazilian health regulator, said on Friday.

CISCE results for classes 10, 12 announced

NEW DELHI, JUL 24 (PTI): The CISCE on Saturday announced results for classes 10 and 12, with class 10 girls and boys achieving the same pass percentage.

In the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) class 12 results girls outshone boys by a margin on 0.2 per cent.

The board said that like last year, there will be no merit list this time too in view of the exceptional circumstances in which results have been prepared.

The CISCE had cancelled exams for both classes this year in view of the aggressive second wave of COVID-19.

The results has been

prepared on an alternate assessment policy decided by the board.

"In class 10, girls and boys have achieved a pass percentage of 99.98 per cent. In class 12, the pass percentage of girls is 99.86 per cent while that of boys is 99.66 per cent," CISCE Chief Executive and Secretary Gerry Arathoon said.

call for submissions

CONVERSE CHRONICLES

CONVERSE SIKKIM is pleased to announce its first publication showcasing writings from Sikkim entitled Converse Chronicles. It will be an anthology containing poems, short stories, essays and book excerpts. As such, entries are invited for possible inclusion from established and aspiring writers.

Mail in your entries at - converse.sikkim@gmail.com

General guidelines for both prose and poetry -

- The entries should be in Word (Document) format, mailed as an attachment with a small introduction of the writer, name and other relevant details.
- The subject of the mail should be - 'Entry For Converse Chronicles'
- Prose can be fiction/non-fiction/essays/narrative pieces.
- Word limit - 2000

Last date of submission - 10 August 2021

CANINE PARVOVIRUS IN A NUTSHELL

NOOR SAKNIM LEPCHA

Canine Parvovirus (CPV) infection also referred to as Parvo is an extremely transmissible virus infecting dogs, usually puppies of less than 6 months of age. It is one of the most prevalent virus. Parvovirus has an incubation period of about 5-7 days. Parvo can be fatal if not treated immediately within 42-72 hours. The virus mainly targets the gastrointestinal tract.

There are two forms of parvovirus:

- 1) Intestinal form: shows symptoms like vomiting, dry mouth, dehydration, lack of appetite, bloody diarrhoea with odour, low body temperature, intestinal bleeding, depression.
- 2) Cardiac form: cardiac form is most common in puppies less than 16 weeks of age and shows symptoms like difficulty in breathing, weakness, irregular heartbeat, dehydration.

HOW IS THE VIRUS TRANSMITTED?

It is transmitted through contact with the infected faeces, vomit, blood, kennels, clinics, public places. Parvovirus can survive under any environmental conditions. Pets are exposed to virus at any moment they sniff, lick or consume infected faeces.

TREATMENT :

Parvovirus causes life threatening dehydration and bloody diarrhoea. The best treatment would be taking your pet to a veterinary clinic.

- IV fluid therapy is needed for rehydration and nourishment.

- Medication to prevent secondary infections and to control vomiting and diarrhoea.

- Hospitalisation to monitor the health of the patient.

Home treatment can also be give if the infection is not severe by giving fluids and nutritional broths and feeding electrolytes through syringe feeding.

PREVENTION: The best way for prevention is by timely vaccination. First dose at

the age of 45 days, booster does after 28days of first dose and subsequent vaccination should be done yearly. The newly vaccinated puppy should be kept away for the other dogs.

DIAGNOSIS: It is done by urine and blood test, test for intestinal parasite, abdominal X-ray, ultrasound to check blockage of intestine, necrosis of the intestinal lining (especially in dogs which are not vaccinated), history of the animal, fecal viral antigen testing or viral PCR testing.

TO HELP YOUR DOG FROM RECOVERY :

- Proper rest and isolation (avoid outdoor contact with other animals)

- Medication : proper medication schedule should be followed

- Proper diet : Small portion of bland food should be fed.

Save your pets and provide a better environment for them to Live.

[the contributor is 3rd Year student at College of Veterinary Science, Khanapara]

Noida cops reunite 78 children with parents

NOIDA, JUL 24 (PTI):

As many as 78 children languishing in shelter homes have been reunited with their families in a period of one month by the Noida Police as part of a special campaign, officials said on Saturday.

The statistics of Operation Muskan were shared during a programme at the head-

quarters of the Noida Police here, with Commissioner Alok Singh and other senior officers participating in it.

The one-month-long campaign started on June 20 during which a total of 78 children were reunited with their families, a police spokesperson said.

The campaign was driven by the anti-human

trafficking unit (AHTU) under supervision of Additional Commissioner of Police (Headquarters) Pushpanjali Devi and DCP (Women and Child Safety) Vrinda Shukla, the official said.

During the drive, the police officials involved in the campaign went across shelter homes, collected information

from the children and efforts were made to trace their families, the spokesperson said.

The experts engaged by the police also counselled the children who had been staying at shelter homes ever since separating from their families, the official said.

Police chief Alok Singh lauded the team for the big achievement

and assured commitment of the department in continuing efforts towards reuniting more such children with their families, according to an official statement.

Joint Commissioner Love Kumar, other senior officers, parents and relatives of the 78 children and representatives of NGOs were present in the programme, it added.

Study on to restore elephant corridors: TN govt to HC

CHENNAI, JULY 24 (PTI):

The Tamil Nadu government has informed the Madras High Court that a comprehensive study was being undertaken with the assistance of World Wildlife Fund to ensure that elephant corridors and habitats in the Nilgiris area, if invaded, are restored to the forests and



the animals.

International experts are also part of

the initiative, the first bench of Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Jus-

tice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy was told on Friday when a PIL petition from animal activist Muralidharan and another came up.

Recording this, the bench adjourned the matter till September 2 with a direction to the state government to file within four weeks, an affidavit indicating the

status of the area, the manner in which it was in use and its present state.

Earlier, the petitioner informed the court that one of the areas considered as a corridor was restored as it was later discovered to be a habitat and the restoration of the same was also upheld by the Supreme Court.

Thousands protest lockdown in Sydney, several arrested



SYDNEY (AP): Thousands of people took to the streets of Sydney and other Australian cities on Saturday to protest lockdown restrictions amid another surge in cases, and police made several arrests after crowds broke through barriers and threw plastic bottles and plants.

The unmasked participants marched from Sydney's Victoria Park to Town Hall in the central business district, carrying signs calling for "freedom" and "the truth."

There was a heavy police presence in Sydney, including mounted police and riot officers in response to what authorities said was unauthorized protest activity. Police confirmed a number of arrests had been made after objects were thrown at officers.

New South Wales Police said it recognized and supported the rights of free speech and peaceful assembly, but the protest was a breach of public health orders.

"The priority for NSW Police is always the safe-

ty of the wider community," a police statement said.

The protest comes as COVID-19 case numbers in the state reached another record with 163 new infections in the last 24 hours.

Greater Sydney has been locked down for the past four weeks, with residents only able to leave home with a reasonable excuse.

"We live in a democracy and normally I am certainly one who supports people's rights to protest ... but at the present time we've got cases going through the roof and we have people thinking that's OK to get out there and possibly be close to each other at a demonstration," said state Health Minister Brad Hazzard.

In Melbourne, thousands of protesters without masks turned out downtown chanting "freedom." Some of them lit flares as they gathered outside Victoria state's Parliament House.

They held banners, including one that read:

"This is not about a virus it's about total government control of the people."

A car protest rally is also planned in Adelaide, which is also under lockdown, with police warning they will make arrests over unlawful activity.

By Friday, 15.4% of the nation's population aged 16 and above have received both jabs for COVID-19.

"We've turned the corner, we've got it sorted. We're hitting the marks that we need to make, a million doses a week are now being delivered," Prime Minister Scott Morrison said. "We are well on our way to where we want to be by the end of the year and potentially sooner than that."

The federal government said it will send thousands of extra Pfizer doses to Sydney while adults in Australia's largest city are also being urged to "strongly consider" AstraZeneca in view of the scarcity of Pfizer supplies.

SBI opens branch in President's Estate

NEW DELHI, JUL 24 (PTI):

The country's largest lender State Bank of India (SBI) on Saturday opened a branch at President's Estate.

The branch was inaugurated by President Ram Nath Kovind along with First Lady Savita Kovind, in the presence of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, SBI said in a statement.

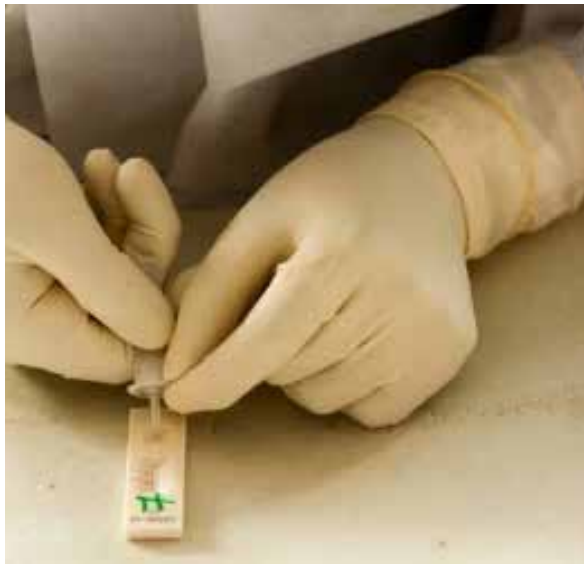
The branch will provide all types of banking services including safe deposit lockers to the residents of President's Estate, it said.

Secretary to the President K D Tripathi, SBI Chairman Dinesh Khara and other senior officials of the bank were also present at the inauguration ceremony, it said.

This branch at President's Estate is a jewel in the crown for SBI and will offer a convenient and seamless banking experience to all the customers, said Khara.

SBI has the largest network of more than 22,000 branches and 60,000 ATMs serving around 45 crore customers through its 2.5 lakh employees.

2 more test positive for Zika in Kerala; total now 46



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JULY 24 (PTI): Two more people tested positive for Zika virus in Kerala, taking the total number of reported cases of the infection to 46, out of which five are active.

A 42 year-old woman from Kumarapuram in Thiruvananthapuram and a 30 year-old woman from Kottarakkara in

Kollam were the ones who tested positive for the virus, a state government release said.

The virus was confirmed in tests conducted at the virology lab of the Thiruvananthapuram Medical College.

None of the infected patients have been admitted in the hospital and they all are stable, the release said.

NESAC will transform Shillong into Space Tech capital of the east



DELHI, 24 JUL [PIB]:

G Kishan Reddy, Union Minister of Culture, Tourism and Development of North East Region said that NESAC (North Eastern Space Applications Centre) has enabled the States to address issues and challenges of North Eastern region with the support of space technology. "The organisation can also provide the required strategic inputs for the entire region for its overall development and strategic planning", he said.

Speaking at the NESAC Society Meeting, held today at NESAC, Shillong, Kishan Reddy informed that between 2014 and 2021, the assets of NESAC almost tripled from Rs 41.6 crores to Rs 112 crores. And this is a clear example of the Prime Minister's commitment and his mantra, "Sabka Saath, Sab Ka Vikas, Sab Ka Vishwas" being implemented on the ground. Activities of NESAC are focused on the practical applications of space technology in agriculture, and allied fields like silk farming where it can help in early detection of diseases, etc, he added.

"As all of us know, Shillong is called the 'Scotland of the East' due to its scenic beauty. However, with the efforts of NESAC, I am sure it will soon be known as the 'Space Tech Capital of the East,' the Union Minister said. He further stated that it was Prime Minis-

ter Narendra Modi's vision that all the states of the North Eastern region have the same opportunities as other states to develop on part with the rest of India.

Acknowledging NESAC's achievements, the Union Minister said that the Center has helped preserve forests by assessing forest fires and protecting endangered wildlife such as rhinos by studying the changing land cover. It is also noteworthy that NESAC has used satellite communication for telemedicine, and tele-education and about 1000 programs are conducted each year, he added. This apart, NESAC has helped to address the unpredictability of mother nature through weather prediction, and forecasting thunderstorms, lightning, and providing early flood warning and provides urban planning support and States can leverage on this to assess traffic congestion, property encroachments, and the mapping of utilities and assets, he said.

Recently, with support from NEC, NESAC has released North Eastern Spatial Data Repository (NeSDR) with about 950 datasets. These datasets are related to infrastructure, land and water resources, assets & utilities, terrain, disaster management support inputs and action plan inputs to empower developmental planning and monitoring activities in

NE region. All the States are to take advantage of this data sets by signing MoUs with NESAC for specific activities such as detecting encroachments, and epidemic planning. "We must also effectively use the facility of NESAC for promotion of culture and tourism as well, which has lots of potential in the region. As India celebrates 75 years of Independence, I invite the Chief Ministers of North eastern states to collaborate, co-ordinate and celebrate our freedom through 'Azadi ka Amrut Mahotsav' events. These events should concentrate on the overall development of the region," said Kishan Reddy.

Extending his appreciation to NESAC for undertaking crucial projects and working under the able guidance of Amit Shah ji, the Union Minister said, "As Amit Shah ji is the President of the NESAC Society and the Chairman of the North Eastern Council (NEC), I am confident that NESAC would expand its footprint and prove to be a model of development for other States as well, as it paves way for holistic development of the region."

The Union Minister for DoNER then joined the Union Home Minister, Amit Shah Ji at the foundation stone laying ceremony for Multi-purpose Convention Centre cum Space Exhibition Facility of NESAC.

Mizoram extends total lockdown in Aizawl Municipal Corporation till July 31



AIZAWL, JUL 23 (PTI):

The Mizoram government on Friday extended the total lockdown in Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC) and imposed certain COVID-19 restrictions in other parts of the state till July 31 to curb surging infections, officials said.

The ongoing shutdown was scheduled to be lifted on Saturday.

The state government, in an official release, said the present COVID-19 positive detection rate is "extremely high" despite stringent measures taken to arrest rising cases.

"It is felt necessary to continue with the current restriction for preven-

tion of the further spread of coronavirus, and to facilitate the ongoing mass testing conducted by the health and family welfare department," it said.

Lockdown or other restrictions may be imposed in other places in the state by deputy commissioners depending on the pandemic situation, the release said.

Essential services like water and electricity supply, healthcare, vaccination and LPG distribution will function normally.

All shops will be closed in the AMC area except those dealing with essential commodities, it said.

There is, however, no restriction on travel and transportation of goods

outside the AMC area.

Meanwhile, Mizoram on Friday reported 847 new COVID-19 cases, the highest single-day spike since the pandemic struck in March last year, a health department official said.

The state's tally stands at 30,492, of which 7,559 are active cases.

As many as 22,802 people have recovered from the infection, including 185 since Friday.

A total of 131 people have succumbed to the virus so far, he said.

According to State Immunisation Officer Lalzawmi, over 6.16 lakh people have been inoculated in the state thus far.

Neil Tara Academy organizes blood donation camp

**SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 24 JUL:**

Fifty persons donated blood during a blood donation camp held here at Neil Tara Academy on Church Road on Saturday. The day-long blood donation camp was organized by Neil Tara Cares in collaboration with International Human Rights Council, Sikkim State Board with the support of the Blood Bank of STNM hospital.

Neil Tara Cares is an organization under Neil Tara Academy to carry out social and humanitarian activities.

Speaking to media persons, Vice Principal, Neil Tara Academy, Beenu Sharma mentioned that

the main objective of this social initiative is to help people in need of blood in this present pandemic situation.

"Hospitals have been facing blood scarcity in this present pandemic situation. It is important for us to help other humans during this difficult time. We also want to give a message to the society and to encourage other people to come forward for blood donation to save someone's precious life," she said.

She thanked International Human Rights Council, Sikkim State, for collaborating in the initiative and also thanked the team of blood bank



of STNM hospital for supporting the initiative.

The Vice Principal thanked parents of students of the school and other friends and well-wishers for donating a unit of blood to

save someone's life. She said that if a small school can take such a social and humanitarian initiative then others can also spare some time to donate a unit of blood to save someone's precious

life.

She mentioned that Neil Tara Cares is an organization of the school to carry out various social works and is always ready to reach out to the people.

Amid Taliban offensive, India's word of caution for citizens

NEW DELHI, 24 JUL [NDTV]:

Terror groups in Afghanistan have escalated violent activities, including targeting of civilians, the Indian Embassy in Kabul has warned in its latest advisory, urging "utmost caution". The statement comes nearly a week after Reuters journalist and Pulitzer prize winner Danish Siddiqui was killed while covering a clash between Afghan security forces and Taliban fighters.

All Indians - visiting, staying and working in Afghanistan - are "advised to exercise utmost vigilance and caution with regard to security at workplace, place of residence and also during the movement to their place of work," the advisory reads, stressing the "security situation in Afghanistan remains dangerous in several provinces".

"It is recommended that all types of non-essential movements be avoided. Movements especially during peak commuting hours should also be avoided. While traveling on roads, maintain distance from possible targets like military convoys, vehicles of government ministries or offices, high ranking officials, law enforcement



agencies, and avoid visiting crowded markets, shopping complexes, mandis, restaurants, and other public places," it said.

Indian firms operating in the country have been told to make special arrangements for their employees.

"As recent tragic events showed, it is essential that all Indian press-persons covering events on the ground establish contact with the Public Affairs and Security Wing of this Embassy for a personalised briefing, including specific advice for the locale they are traveling to," the statement further read.

From UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres to Joe Biden administration, the death of Danish Siddiqui had led to worldwide outpouring of tributes.

Amid widespread Taliban offensive, Afghanistan on Saturday

imposed a night-time curfew across 31 of the country's 34 provinces to curb surging violence, news agency AFP reported.

"To curb violence and limit the Taliban movements a night curfew has been imposed in 31 provinces across the country," except in Kabul, Panjshir and Nangarhar, the interior ministry said in a statement.

Afghanistan has witnessed widespread violence after the US and NATO forces began withdrawing in early May, nearly 20 years after the arrival in the war-torn country.

Earlier this month, India evacuated about 50 Indian diplomats and other staff members at the consulate in Afghanistan's Kandahar. The personnel at the consulate were flown to Delhi by special Air Force planes which avoided Pakistan air space, sources said.

"Insult to people of Delhi": Arvind Kejriwal on Lt Governor's latest move

NEW DELHI, 24 JUL [NDTV]:

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday said Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal's decision to reject a panel of lawyers picked by the city government for cases against the farmers protesting against the centre's three new farm laws was "an insult to the people of Delhi".

"Overturning decisions taken by the cabinet is an insult to the people of Delhi. The people of Delhi chose the AAP government with a historic majority and defeated the BJP. Let BJP run the country, let AAP run Delhi. Such interference in everyday work is an insult to the people of Delhi. BJP should respect democracy," Mr Kejriwal tweeted in Hindi.

Rejecting a list of lawyers picked by the Mr Kejriwal's Delhi government, Mr Baijal has approved a team selected by the Delhi Police, which reports to the BJP-led government at the centre, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said.

On Monday, Mr Kejriwal's cabinet had decided that lawyers picked by the Delhi government would become

public prosecutors of the Delhi Police in the cases filed against the farmers over the January 26 violence and vandalism when parts of a rally organised by them strayed off agreed routes.

But the Lieutenant Governor rejected the decision of the Delhi cabinet and approved the panel of Delhi Police.

In a letter to the Delhi government, the Lieutenant Governor said that the matter had been referred to President Ram Nath Kovind, but since it is an urgent matter, exercising his powers, 11 lawyers named by the Delhi Police were appointed as public prosecutors in the cases.

"I want to ask what is the interest of the centre in choosing lawyers? If they have to choose the lawyers also, what is the point of the elected government of Delhi?" Mr Sisodia said.

The Deputy Chief Minister said that the Lieutenant Governor had powers to refer to the centre decisions of the city government that he did not agree with. But this applies to only "exceptional circumstances" and not "every other matter", Mr Sisodia said.

"They are using these powers in nearly every matter," he alleged.

Lifestyle announces Biggest Sale of The Season



SILIGURI, 23 JUL:

Lifestyle, India's leading fashion destination for the latest trends, has announced its much-awaited SALE, offering incredible discounts on national and international fashion brands of up to 50% and more. Customers shopping at the Lifestyle Sale can find the best deals in-store as well as online at lifestylestores.com.

The Lifestyle Sale will be valid across all Lifestyle Stores, online at lifestylestores.com and on the Lifestyle app available for Android and iPhone users. In Siliguri, Lifestyle store is located in City Centre Mall, Uttorayan Twp.

SBI Credit Card holders can avail 5% cashback on a minimum purchase of Rs. 5000 across Lifestyle Stores, lifestylestores.com and on the Lifestyle mobile apps (T&C apply).

About Lifestyle: Lifestyle is India's leading fashion destination for the latest trends. Part of Dubai based retail and hospitality conglomerate - The Landmark Group, Lifestyle brings multi-

and more as well as from a wide variety of leading brands like Jack & Jones, Vero Moda, ONLY, Maybelline, Lakme, Titan, Tommy Hilfiger, Levi's, Louis Philippe and more. From menswear, kidswear, womenswear - both western & ethnic, beauty & make-up to watches, fragrances, footwear, handbags and accessories, customers can get the best of trends at attractive prices. Shop now at your favorite fashion destination and give your wardrobe a stylish makeover. Make the most of all the latest trends with irresistible offers and exciting deals.

The Lifestyle sale promises to be a true delight for fashion lovers who will find compelling offers on latest trends across categories and brands. At the stores, customers can choose from Lifestyle's successful portfolio of fashion brands like Forca, Ginger, Melange, Kappa, CODE, Bossini, Fame Forever, Juniors

ple categories including men, women and kids' apparel, footwear, handbags, fashion accessories and beauty under the convenience of a single roof. Lifestyle provides seamless and hassle-free shopping, offering leading national and international brands along with the convenience of a true omni-channel experience with its online store lifestylestores.com.

TMC nominates Jawhar Sircar for Rajya Sabha by-election

KOLKATA, JUL 24 (PTI):

The Trinamool Congress on Saturday nominated former bureaucrat Jawhar Sircar as its candidate for the upcoming Rajya Sabha by-election in the state.

The Election Commission had on July 16 said that bypoll to the Rajya Sabha seat from West Bengal vacated by Dinesh Trivedi earlier this year will be held on August 9.

"We are delighted to nominate Jawhar Sircar in the Upper House of Parliament," a party statement said.

Sircar spent nearly 42 years in public service and was also the former



CEO of Prasar Bharati, the ruling party in the state said.

"His contribution to the public service shall help us serve our country even better," it said.

Reacting to his nomination, Sircar said, "I was a bureaucrat. I am not a political person but I would work for develop-

ment of the people and raise the issues concerning the masses in parliament," he said.

The bypoll to the Rajya Sabha seat from the state will be held if the opposition BJP fields its candidate for the same, otherwise, the TMC candidate will be declared elected unopposed.

Mehbooba Mufti's family, Kashmiri journalists among Pegasus 'targets'

NEW DELHI, 24 JUL [NDTV]:

Family members of PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti, a former ally of the BJP, some Delhi-based Kashmiri journalists, key separatist leaders, human rights activists, business persons are among the people listed as potential targets of Israeli spyware 'Pegasus' - available only to governments - in the latest tranche of explosive revelations by news portal The Wire.

The Wire, which is part of a media consortium investigating alleged surveillance using Pegasus, said at least two members of Peoples Democratic party (PDP) chief and former chief minister of Jammu And Kashmir Mehbooba Mufti's fam-

ily were on the list.

Their selection as potential targets of surveillance happened when Ms Mufti was still the chief minister of the erstwhile state and in a coalition with the BJP, The Wire said.

Ms Mufti's family members were chosen for potential surveillance just months before the government collapsed as the BJP pulled out of the coalition in June 2018, it said.

The leak also shows that the current head of the Hurriyat conference Mirwaiz Umar Farooq was a potential target of surveillance between 2017 and 2019, according to the report. Separatist leader Bilal Lone and the late SAR Geelani, who

worked as a lecturer in Delhi University and died in 2018, were also on the list.

J&K Apni Party president Altaf Bukhari's brother Tariq Bukhari is also in the list which also has at least four members of Kashmiri separatist leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani's family, The Wire said.

The France-based journalism non-profit, Forbidden Stories, and international human rights advocacy group Amnesty International accessed a massive list of 50,000 numbers which are believed to have been selected as potential targets of surveillance by 10 countries.

The records were then shared with a group of 16 media houses

across the world - including The Wire - who worked collaboratively to investigate the scope of this intended or actual surveillance over several months in an initiative termed as the Pegasus Project.

Rahul Gandhi, poll savant Prashant Kishor, two current Union Ministers - Prahlad Patel and Ashwini Vaishnaw - virologist Gandeep Kang, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee, former Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa were among the big names in the list released earlier.

The government has maintained that there has been no unauthorised intercept-

tion by its agencies, adding that allegations regarding government surveillance on specific people has no concrete basis or truth associated with it whatsoever.

"In the past, similar claims were made regarding the use of Pegasus on WhatsApp by Indian State. Those reports also had no factual basis and were categorically denied by all parties, including WhatsApp in the Indian Supreme Court.

"This news report, thus, also appears to be a similar fishing expedition, based on conjectures and exaggerations to malign the Indian democracy and its institutions," it said in a detailed statement.

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SummitTIMES

Children Still Labour

...and clearly no one cares enough

Assam Police, despite the pandemic and despite their colleagues in the region keeping their hands full with enforcing Covid protocols, were in Sikkim recently on a rescue mission. They were here to extracting 24 children and two women from laboring as domestic servants in Sikkim's homes. Yes, we are consciously referring to the 26 as domestic "servants" because the more "sensitive" terminology of domestic "help" is sensitive only towards those who want to fig-leaf their criminality by referring to servants from outside the state as "help" and those sourced locally as country-cousins brought to the city for better education. The Sikkim excursion appears to have been part of a larger exercise in which many more children were rescued from elsewhere in the region and news-reports datelined Guwahati clubbed all these numbers and reported as them rescued from Sikkim. Child labor, as mentioned, is an open secret in Sikkim and continues here because of social sanction and administrative incompetence. It does not matter whether it was 40 children who were rescued from Sikkim or 24. What matters is that the evil continues, and it is obvious that nothing is being done to stop it beyond finding excuses and saving slave-owners. It is absurd that people continue to find nothing majorly amiss with children still being employed as servants despite child labour being explicitly defined as a criminal offence.

The reason this evil continues is because Sikkim clearly does not care, and few examples illustrate this better than the preposterousness exposed in the Comptroller & Auditor General of India's Report on Sikkim for the year ended 31 March 2010. Yes, eleven years ago, accountants had attested to this disgusting disregard for children from less privileged families and we recount that finding in detail because it is necessary to be recounted.

The Labour Department, yes, Sikkim has one, received an enquiry from the Union Ministry of Labour in March 2007 asking it to suggest names of "reputed and independent" agencies of Sikkim [does such a thing exist?], to conduct an "intensive child labour survey". The Department was to send its recommendation by 15 May 2007. Even till January 2008, the Labour Department could not furnish this recommendation list, which is hardly surprising given the funds-driven, issue-flexible nature of such "agencies" in Sikkim. So what did the Department do? It went right ahead and selected an organisation for the job on its own. It entrusted the Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation [DESME] to carry out the survey at an estimated cost of Rs. 51.25 lakhs. The Ministry probably did not mean a government agency when it said "reputed and independent", but that was obviously lost on the Labour Department. In March 2008, the Department transferred Rs. 33 lakhs as advance to DESME to carry out the survey. It did not bother to set a deadline for the work. Data on child labour is time-specific since people age. Child labour relates to children below the age of 14 made to work, even as domestic help. Data on them needs to be detailed and refreshed every year because many of them would cross the protected age every year as would many more join the ranks. But these things probably don't matter when no one is serious about the issue at hand. So, a year down the line, DESME intimidated Labour Department that it had utilised all of the Rs. 33 lakh released to it and submitted its provisional report on child labour in Sikkim. DESME had spent Rs 33 lakh to discover and certify, hold your breath, that Sikkim had 213 child labourers. This, in 2009, when the Census of 2001 had already recorded 16,457 children under the age of 14 as being illegally made to labour in Sikkim. When the funds to survey findings are broken down, it transpires that DESME billed Labour Department Rs. 15,493 per child labour discovered!

The listlessness with which a social challenge as staggering as child labour was approached by the nodal department for labour is distressing. Things have clearly not changed much in the decade that has passed since. The Act banning child labour has been around for many more years, but it has done nothing to curtail the practice. Having a base data to start work from is necessary before an action plan can even be mooted. For that to happen, the government agency shouldered with the responsibility to look out for the abused young ones [and child labour is the abuse of both, the law and the child] will have to dust itself awake. As for the civil society here, well, it can present itself as and when one is fabricated.

After the high of [appearing] to save under 14 years olds even from the servitude of domestic help, the law remains largely ignored, save the extremely rare occasion when some 'rescues' are made. The only real change which has transpired at the ground level is that all those 'lost' notices of domestic servants who have gone missing record their age as 14, conveniently matured to save the masters and mistresses from attracting legal action. What this makes amply clear is that awareness on child labour laws is universal. Unfortunately, so is the disregard for these rules, a disregard born not from an evil design to exploit children but from a nonchalance nurtured by a disinterest among the concerned agencies to enforce the rules and rescue children.

To get a clearer idea on how these 'concerned' agencies have measured up to their new tasks, one needs to be reminded of how the National Child Labour Project [NCLP] was implemented in Sikkim. NCLP, a Central Plan Scheme, was aimed, on paper, to rehabilitated children withdrawn from now illegal employment. This was part of the 11th Plan and in March 2007, the Union Ministry for Labour & Employment asked the State Government here to suggest names of "reputed and independent" agencies in Sikkim to carry out an "intensive" child labour survey. The State was to do so by 15 May 2007. Admittedly, it is not easy to find "reputed and independent" agencies for any task in Sikkim and even by January 2008, the State had not furnished any names. What it did do in Jan 2008, however, is pass on the job to carry out a child labour survey to the Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring & Evaluation. After spending Rs. 33 lakh on the survey, DESME, in February 2009, submitted the result of the survey – as per its enumerators, there were 213 children employed as domestic servants in Sikkim! Even this figure was padded up with inclusion of some 20 and one 58 year old domestic help. This was obviously an offensively irresponsible exercise, especially since the Census 2001 had recorded 16,517 instances of child labour in Sikkim. This disinterest underlines what is wrong with the effort to save minors from illegal servitude, no one is taking it seriously.

Anyone harbouring mistaken notions of child labour not being a 'serious enough' issue in Sikkim needs to be reminded that it was here that a pre-teen domestic servant was admitted in hospital with arthritis brought on from being made to carry excessively heavy loads. Young domestic servants have committed suicide in homes here and there has been at least one incident of the rape of a minor domestic servant in her home of employ in recent years. Even without these references, it should be the responsibility of not only the Department tasked with enforcing the new laws and the society at large to rescue more children from their service in homes. Too many under-14 year olds are growing into adulthood scarred because no one did enough to save them even though law required them to be rescued and just because a majority of them might be from outside the State should not be reason enough to blindside the issue. Working in homes here should not be justified any more on the ground that the children receive a better life here, because, with the Right to Education laws, no child should be subjected to repetitive mind-numbing tasks, menial errands, isolation or denigration which service in alien families means. Admittedly, there are millions of other children elsewhere in the world engaged in much more hazardous work, but that is elsewhere in the world, the challenge in Sikkim should be to allow children under-14 years of age to get a fair chance at being children. What is worrying is that even the token nods in this direction are not being made any more.

The Tokyo Olympics will be the Games of all mothers

JANE THORNTON & MARGIE DAVENPORT
THECONVERSATION.COM

In March, the International Olympic Committee and the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Organizing Committee announced that the Tokyo Games would be the "first gender-balanced Olympic Games in history."

The gender gap in sport is well-established. Men have historically dominated elite sport for centuries, but thanks in part to the advocacy of organizations like the IOC Women in Sport Commission, global female representation in sport is greater than ever.

Central to this movement is the increased visibility of elite female athletes competing and succeeding at the Olympic Games, inspiring future female Olympians across the globe. Yet, major barriers still remain, particularly those faced by athletes who are mothers.

BREASTFEEDING AT THE OLYMPICS

Mothers have been competing at the Olympics since the Paris 1900 Games when women's events were first added. But the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games have highlighted the barriers faced by mothers and mothers-to-be as they vie for coveted spots on the Olympic roster.

Veteran Canadian basketball player Kim Boucher recently made a plea via social media to be allowed to bring her three-month-old daughter (whom she was still breastfeeding) to Tokyo. The organizing committee's initial answer was no, given pandemic restrictions. When international media pressure mounted, the

committee's stance shifted.

In a statement to the CBC, the committee said: "It is our understanding that no children stayed at Olympic Villages during previous Games. Nevertheless, there may be special circumstances, particularly with regard to infant children."

With the ultimate reversal of their decision, Boucher and her daughter will be attending the Olympic Games together.

FIGHTING TO QUALIFY

In 2018, Canadian Olympic boxer Mandy Bujold's dream of starting a family became a reality when her daughter was born.

Knowing she wanted to compete at another Olympic Games, Bujold set her sights on Tokyo 2020. Her plans were nearly put on hold when the International Olympic Committee's boxing task force announced that the qualification criteria for the Tokyo Games would be based on rankings at three tournaments where Bujold had not competed due to her pregnancy.

Bujold fought back, bringing her case to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, which ruled on June 30 that accommodation must be made for women who were pregnant or postpartum during the qualification period.

MOTHERS MAKING WAVES

After a nearly two-decade career highlighted by six Olympic gold medals over the course of four Games and countless world championship victories, American sprinter Allyson Felix could have retired with an unmatched legacy in track and field when she became pregnant in 2019.

But she didn't. Instead, the decorated Olympian is returning to Tokyo for her fifth Olympic Games — and her first as a mother.

After a break with long-time sponsor Nike, Felix's vocal advocacy has forced major corporations to reconsider how they support female athletes before and after pregnancy.

Shortly after facing public backlash regarding its treatment of pregnant athletes like Felix, Nike announced a new maternity policy for sponsored athletes back in August 2019. The new policy expanded the amount of time a pregnant athlete's pay and bonuses cannot be cut, from 12 to 18 months.

Another mother making waves in elite sport is Helen Glover, who became the first mother named to a British Olympic rowing team last month. The remarkable part of Glover's story is not only that the right personal supports are now in place for her, but that it has taken so long for one of the sport's best funded and most prolific national teams to achieve this milestone.

THE RESEARCH IS CLEAR

While participation in elite sport typically declines in pregnant athletes, female athletes are pushing against the societal narrative that they should "take it easy" during pregnancy and beyond by smashing stereotypes and continuing to compete.

As female participation in elite sport has grown during pregnancy and the postpartum period, so has our understanding of the health impacts of elite sport participation during this time. Extensive research has

demonstrated the safety and benefits of engaging in physical activity during pregnancy for both mother and child.

The research is clear: from a reduction in major pregnancy complication from gestational diabetes to pre-eclampsia, to improved mental health and delivery outcomes, the best advice for most pregnant individuals is to exercise regularly.

We recently conducted research that's been published examining the impact of elite sport participation during and following pregnancy on health outcomes and return to sport. This data provided reassuring evidence of the safety of elite sport participation during pregnancy: elite athletes had similar pregnancy, labour and delivery outcomes to sub-elite and recreational athletes, and there is some evidence of reduction in common pregnancy ailments such as low back pain.

Now that pregnancy no longer marks the end of an athlete's career, many elite athletes not only return to sport, but go on to break personal and world records as new moms. As more female athletes train and compete at the elite level during the reproductive years, it is critical sport policies evolve to support the health and well-being of all athletes.

[Jane Thornton is Clinician Scientist, Canada Research Chair in Injury Prevention and Physical Activity for Health, Sport Medicine Physician, Western University; Margie Davenport is Associate Professor, Christenson Professor in Active Healthy Living, Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation, University of Alberta]

COVID: Media must rise above pitting scientists against each other – dealing with the pandemic requires nuance

Trish Greenhalgh & Dominic Wilkinson
THECONVERSATION.COM

At the start of the pandemic, there was a striking sense of shared resolve and solidarity. Facing a public health crisis greater than any in living memory, people were largely united in their support of difficult measures to protect the vulnerable, safeguard the health system and sustain key workers.

There were, of course, differences of opinion. For example, some disagreed about the severity of the threat posed by COVID, about the wisdom of different national approaches to lockdown, about the timing of restrictions, and the effectiveness face masks.

More recently, there has also been disagreement on how vaccines should be distributed, whether vaccine passports are a good idea, and whether vaccination should be mandatory for certain occupations.

Throughout the pandemic, scientists attempting to explain their findings have had to deal with unprecedented levels of dissent, anger and abuse from the lay public and occasionally from other scientists.

Since the government lifted COVID restrictions on July 19, views on how best to handle the pandemic have become more polarised than ever, broadly splitting into two camps: the "open up" camp and the "not yet" camp.

TWO CAMPS

The "open up" camp emphasises the UK's successful vaccination programme (88% of adults have had one jab, 69% have had two), which has led to low rates of hospitalisation and death, the mild nature of COVID in children (only a fraction of under-18s are admitted to hospital, and almost all deaths have been in children who were already very ill with other conditions), potential waning of people's patience with preventive restrictions, the dangers of lifting restrictions closer to winter, and the need to get back to normal for the sake of the economy.

The "not yet" camp calls attention to a different set of facts. COVID infections are rising rapidly in almost every region of the UK. Hospitalisation rates are rising and putting pressure on an overstretched NHS. Mild (non-hospi-

talised) COVID in children may still lead to long COVID, whose long-term outlook is unknown. And masks and physical distancing are evidence-based measures to reduce the spread of an airborne virus – measures that cause relatively minor inconvenience.

"Not yet" advocates propose delaying re-opening until everyone, including adolescents, have been offered vaccination and all possible measures have been put in place to make our schools, workplaces and public transport as safe as possible.

With the battle lines thus drawn, media interviewers have set up head-to-head encounters between the "open ups" and the "not yet's". We have been in the ring for such debates on opposite sides and found that these formats add heat but little light to public understanding.

It is time we recognised that this pandemic is a complex phenomenon unfolding in a complex system.

COMPLEX SYSTEMS

Complex systems are non-linear. In other words, small things can have large effects (the delta variant entered the UK, perhaps in just one infected person, and became dominant within weeks). And large things can have small effects (a huge, centralised test and trace system has proved inefficient and contributed little). Such dynamics make accurate prediction of the effect of interventions impossible. While scientists can estimate and speculate, none of us know for sure what will unfold.

What's more, making decisions about the pandemic necessarily involve moral uncertainty, at both a personal and policy level. Decisions involve weighing and trading off ethical values. While we can all agree that these values are important, it can be difficult to know how and when to balance them. For example, many pandemic choices involve competition between medical risk (both to the individual and their wider contacts), equity and liberty. We can promote one or two but cannot maximise all the values at stake.

Complex systems must be handled in ways that embrace scientific and moral uncertainty. We need to observe the system, divine its patterns and key relationships, and empower people to respond to change

in an agile and creative way. Above all, we need dialogue and deliberation to examine this highly complex problem from many different angles. The pragmatist philosopher John Dewey argued that only when people engage meaningfully with other people and with their ideas can we realise the potential of democracy. When we move beyond "us versus them", we can come to better understand ourselves and be more likely to arrive at the best collective decisions.

Media hosts must rise above the catchism of both-sides journalism, which demands a superficial bare-knuckle fight between a "pro" and an "anti" voice. Instead, they should acknowledge common ground (we all want to protect our young; we all yearn to return to work and social activities) and help scientists, ethicists and others with different perspectives to work through the possibilities and trade-offs, to find common ground, to accept reasonable disagreement, to seek compromise.

For example, there are arguments both for and against giving children over 12 the COVID vaccine. Differences may be resolved partly by new data (randomised controlled trials of the benefits and harms of vaccines in this age group, or observational studies to confirm or refute the risk of long COVID), and partly by identifying sub-groups (high-risk, low-risk and low-risk but living in a household with a vulnerable person).

But the decision to vaccinate or not also requires moral deliberation on how to weigh up a putative risk to the child against a putative benefit to another household member. It also requires deliberation on how much a vaccine campaign in children would divert supplies or policy attention away from the increasingly difficult task of reaching every eligible adult that remains unvaccinated. These are issues on which the "yes" and "no" camps need to meet and talk.

None of us wanted a third (or fourth) wave. But we're in it, and the ride will not be smooth. For the sake of our future, let's discuss this in a way that goes beyond "oh yes it is", "oh no it isn't" soundbites.

[Trish Greenhalgh is Professor of Primary Care Health Sciences, University of Oxford; Dominic Wilkinson is Consultant Neonatologist and Professor of Ethics, University of Oxford]

Odisha's seafood export cross Rs 3,000 crore

BHUBANESWAR, JUL 24 (PTI): The Odisha government has decided to frame a dynamic and facilitating policy for tapping the available potential of brackish water aquaculture as the sector has recorded a significant growth in the last 10 years, an official said. The decision in this regard was taken at a meeting held on digital mode under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary S C Mohapatra on Friday.

Secretary Fisheries and Animal Resource Development R Raghu Prasad said that there was significant growth in the sector over the last 10 years. The production of brackish water fish has increased from 11,460 MT in 2011-12 to 97,125 MT in the year 2020-21 thereby marking a record growth of 747.51 per cent.

The area under brackish water aquaculture also increased from 5,860 hectares to 17,780 hectares during the same period, he said.

The seafood export value from Odisha also increased from Rs 801 crore in the year 2011-12 to Rs 3,107 crore in the year 2020-21 despite the economic slowdown



caused by COVID-19. The quantum of export in the year 2011-12 was around 21,311 MT which increased to 60,718 MT in the year 2020-21.

"Odisha seafood has caught the global market more particularly in Japan, China, USA, countries in the European Union, South East Asia and the Middle East," said Prasad.

He also said: "There is greater potential of brackish aquaculture in the state both in the government and private land. The sector also can attract more private investments".

Keeping the potential of the sector, the chief secretary directed the departments of Revenue and Disaster Management, Fisheries and Animal Resources Development, Forest and Environment department and the Odisha Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (IDCO) to work out a dynamic and facilitating policy for tapping the available potential of brackish water aquaculture in the state.

IDCO was directed to identify the potential land in different districts and develop a land bank for the purpose in close

coordination with fishery officers and respective collectors. The chief secretary also directed IDCO to identify land in clusters and develop the facilities like saline water drainage, road and power connectivity for building aquaculture parks.

The officers of the Fisheries and Animal Resource Development operating at different levels were asked to drive the programme in a proactive manner.

Additional Chief Secretary Forest and Environment Dr Mona Sharma advised to iden-

tify the land patches for brackish water aquaculture keeping in view the regulations of coastal area regulatory zone (CRZ) notification and coastal aquaculture authority Act so as to avoid any possible embarrassment to the farmers in future.

Further, the chief secretary directed to hold consultations with the operating farmers, farms along with other stakeholders; and, take their input for making the policy more forward looking, facilitating and effective.

The chief secretary

also directed to tap the potentialities in the sector by bringing in the self-help groups, primary fishermen cooperative societies, women cooperatives, educated unemployed enterprising youths, partnership farms and state owned cooperatives on commercial basis.

Official sources said around 2,000 applications for brackish water aquaculture were submitted to different tehsils in five major coastal districts namely Balasore, Bhardak, Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur, Puri and Ganjam.

Assam's small tea growers demand MSP for green leaves



GUWAHATI, JUL 24 (PTI): Small tea growers of Assam have urged the state government to fix a minimum support price for their produce as the low price realisation has been a longstanding issue for them, a statement said.

Small tea growers sell their crops to bought leaf factories (BLFs).

During an interaction with Industry and Commerce Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary on Thursday, representatives of small tea growers' associations of the state raised the issue of low price realisation and sought the MSP for their produce in the peak and lean seasons.

They requested the state government to fix a fair price or minimum rate of their tea leaves.

The issue of over-priced manure and challenges of the small tea growers of Assam were raised in the meeting, the statement said on Friday.

There will be no compromise on the quality of tea leaves and fair price, the minister said, adding that their grievances will be addressed.

The minister will hold a meeting very soon with all the deputy commissioners of districts to monitor that BLFs buy only quality tea leaves and ensure a fair price for the small growers, the statement said.

Patowary asked Tea Board India's executive director (north-east zone) Arunita Phukan Yadav to instruct all its development officers to visit the BLFs and monitor strict compliance with the quality of tea leaves.

The minister also urged small tea growers to ensure the quality of their produce and encouraged them to opt for orthodox variety that can help fetch remunerative prices in the international markets.

He also advised them to set up bought leaf factories through self-help groups.

Around 2 lakh small tea growers in Assam contribute nearly 50 per cent of the state's annual production.

Of the 618.20 million kg of tea produced in the state in 2020, small tea growers' share was 285.19 million kg.

Prez to visit J-K, Ladakh from July 25-28

NEW DELHI, JUL 24 (PTI): President Ram Nath Kovind will visit Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh from July 25 to 28, a statement issued by the Rashtrapati Bhavan said on Saturday.

On Monday, the President will pay homage to the indomitable courage and sacrifice of

the Indian armed forces during the Kargil conflict in 1999 at the Kargil War Memorial Dras (Ladakh) on the 22nd anniversary of the Kargil Vijay Diwas, it said.

On July 27, he will grace and address the 19th annual convocation of the University of Kashmir in Srinagar, the statement said.

President appoints vice chancellors of 12 central universities

NEW DELHI, JUL 23 (PTI): President Ram Nath Kovind, who is the Visitor to Central universities, has approved the appointment of vice chancellors in 12 varsities, according to Ministry of Education (MoE) officials.

"The VC appointments have been approved by the President for 12 central universities," an MoE official said.

The newly appointed vice chancellors include Tankeshwar Kumar (Central University of Haryana), Prakash Bansal (Central university of Himachal Pradesh), Sanjeev Jain (Central university of Jammu), Kshitij Bhusan Das (Central university of Jharkhand), Battu Satyanarayana (Central University of



Karnataka), Muthukalingan Krishnan (Central University of Tamil Nadu) and Basuthkar J Rao (Central University of Hyderabad).

Kameshwar Nath Singh (Central University of South Bihar); Prabha Shankar Shukla, North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Shillong; Alok Kumar Chakrawal (Guru Ghasidas University, Bilaspur); Syed Ainul Hasan, Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) and Lokender Singh, Manipur Univer-

sity. Union Minister of Education Dharmendra Pradhan had on Thursday informed the Rajya Sabha that a total of 22 posts of vice chancellors in central universities are vacant, out of which appointments to 12 posts have already been finalised by the Visitor.

The 10 universities, which still continue to operate without full time vice chancellors, include Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Osho aide Ma Anand Sheela bares all in memoir

NEW DELHI, JUL 24 (PTI): Osho Rajneesh's former aide Ma Anand Sheela has come out with her memoir in which she bares it all - her lessons, her beliefs, her inspiration and the 18 rules that define her life.

Writing "In By My Own Rules" was not an easy task for the irrepressible, honest, bold and charming Sheela but she did not want to pass up this opportunity and took it as "yet another adventure".

Over the years she had developed a reputation of being controversy's favourite child. Whether it be her portrayal in "Wild Wild Country", or the Osho International Foundation's take on the Netflix series, a wide spectrum of opinions has cloaked the real Sheela for too long.

In the 1980s, she was the personal secretary of Bhagwan Rajneesh and the manager of the Rajneesh commune in Wasco County, Oregon, US. She was eventually sentenced to prison, where she served her time and walked out after three years.

Adored and vilified at the same time by the world, she has seen it all - from rebuilding her life from scratch to being the subject of the web series.

"Wild Wild Country" has definitely altered many perceptions, Sheela claims.

"It has drawn attention to my fearlessness, courage, hard work and love. I have received thousands of letters and messages after its release from people who have seen the series, opening their hearts out to me. The younger generation is receptive to these qualities and feels inspired by me. They saw in the film my hard work and dedication to Bhagwan, then and now," she writes.

In the book, published by Penguin Random House, Sheela elaborates in detail the 18 rules that define her life.

These rules include pain cannot be avoided, pain has to be endured; everybody deserves a second chance; love has no limits; build your life on love, patience and acceptance; follow your dream, and make it come true; al-

ways remember, "This too shall pass"; accept life as it comes; if you believe in it, your wish will come true; face challenges with all you have; and a daily routine provides discipline and structure to our lives.

The remaining rules are sex and sexuality are natural; accept the opportunities that come your way with an open mind; don't hesitate to speak the truth; be adventurous; love enough so you can let go;

live in the moment, be positive and make the most of what you have without any expectations; make new mistakes every day instead of repeating the same mistakes; and never forget your roots.

Ban on long-route transport lifted in Nepal amid virus concerns

KATHMANDU, 24 JUL [KATHMANDUPOST]: On Friday, the District Administration Office, Kathmandu issued a notice urging public bus operators to make arrangements for the operation of medium- and long-distance transport services by following health safety protocols.

The notice stated that as exams of the Tribhuvan University and the Public Service Commission were going to take place, the decision was taken to facilitate the movement of the examinees as well as the general public.

However, according to Chief District Officer Kali Prasad Parajuli, the points mentioned in the notice are not the only reasons for allowing operation of long-route vehicles.

"We have also received complaints from the public that despite the restrictions in place, some transporters were carrying passengers on long routes by charging them exorbitant fees," said Parajuli.

"As people were travelling to their preferred destinations anyhow by paying extra, we allowed long-route vehicles to operate officially so that people do not have to pay hefty amounts."

While long-route vehicles remain garaged for nearly three months due to the prohibitory orders, several reports suggest that some unscrupulous operators of small vehicles have been serving long routes and charging passengers up to four times the normal fares.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Sunil Jung Shah at the Traffic Police Division in Kathmandu also confirmed that some people were carrying passengers in private vehicles by charging expensive fares.

"We have taken action against over 100 people



for illegally operating on long routes and fleeing passengers," said Shah.

The notice issued by the District Administration Office, Kathmandu also urges the public to buy tickets from official ticket counters only.

According to Parajuli, they have instructed the traffic police to monitor if the vehicles are following the health safety measures.

"We will also ensure that the long-route vehicles are carrying passengers not more than what they can seat and they are not being overcharged."

Despite assurances by the authorities that health safety protocols would be strictly enforced on long-route vehicles, there are concerns to the contrary as the authorities have paid little attention to effectively enforcing the restrictions.

As permission has been given for the resumption of long-route transport services, public health experts have warned of a possible catastrophe as Nepal's case positivity rate is still too high and the percentage of fully immunised people against the coronavirus is very low at four per cent.

The loosening of the restrictions has already increased crowds at public places and people are behaving as if the pandemic is over.

According to Dr Sher Bahadur Pun, clinical research chief at Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital, with the resumption of long-

route transport services, the virus will now travel to the remote places of Nepal where the number of Covid-19 cases is fewer.

"Despite knowing that one should observe basic health safety measures like wearing masks and washing hands to keep the virus away, people tend to ignore these rules and continue socialising thinking that their known persons or relatives are not infected," said Pun.

Pun believes that it will be difficult to enforce health safety protocols on long-route vehicles as people will eat dinners in groups compromising their safety.

"After a gap of some months, I personally have started getting calls again from my relatives and known people who are reinfected. They ask me ways to deal with it," said Pun.

Nepal on Friday reported 1,982 new coronavirus cases taking the nationwide infection tally to 676,708, according to the Health Ministry.

Close to 1,000 people tested positive in a total of 3,610 antigen tests.

In its regular situation report, the ministry did not mention the death toll over the past 24 hours. It, however, reported 18 Covid-19-related fatalities, which included the number of deaths managed by Nepal Army on different dates.

The nationwide death toll has now reached 9,679. The number of active cases stands at 27,661.

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India beat New Zealand 3-2 to open hockey campaign positively in Olympics

TOKYO, JUL 24 (PTI): The Indian men's hockey team overcame some anxious closing moments before defeating New Zealand 3-2 in an intense Pool A match to open their Olympic campaign on a positive note here on Saturday.

Harmanpreet Singh (26th and 33rd minutes) scored a double for India, while Rupinder Pal Singh (10th) was the other goal-getter for the eight-time former champions, currently ranked fourth in the world.

For New Zealand, Kane Russell (6th minute) and Stephen Jenness (43rd minute) scored the goals.

India will next play mighty Australia on Sunday.

Disappointed to not score big, focussed to build from here: Suryakumar Yadav

Colombo, Jul 24 (PTI): India batsman Suryakumar Yadav is disappointed not to score big in his debut ODI series but said his fate in international cricket is in his own hands and he will look to build on his experience from Sri Lankan tour.

The 30-year-old from Mumbai clinched the man of the series award for amassing 124 runs with a highest score of 53 in his debut ODI series against Sri Lanka.

"Obviously everyone dreams of playing for India. And it has been a lot of effort, grind, a lot of patience behind this. And it has been worth the wait and I am really happy about it," Yadav said at the virtual post-match press conference on Friday.

"From here on how I build it, it is all in my hands and I am really excited for the journey ahead."

Yadav, however, expressed disappointment for not being able to get a big knock.

"...the way I started in the first game, I got good confidence and in the second game, it was a perfect situation in the middle to win a game for the team, but that time also, it was not the way I play and I got out," he said.

"Really disappointed with that. And in the third game also, it was a good opportunity, wickets were falling from one end, to hold one end and try and play till the end, but could not do it.

"So that's the two things I am really keeping in mind, how do I build from here, but ya that is how you learn and move forward."

Yadav, who made his T20I debut earlier this year against England, attributed his variety of strokes to being a Mumbai player.

"...whenver you grow up in Mumbai, the types of wickets you get over there in club games and in domestic cricket, they are very challenging, so there you automatically have to think what strokes you have to play on those kind of wickets.

Tokyo Olympics: Indian judoka Sushila loses her round of 32 clash

TOKYO, JUL 24 (PTI): Indian judoka Sushila Devi's challenge in the Tokyo Olympics came to an early end as she lost her contest to Hungarian Eva Csernoviczki, who qualified for a round of 16 clash against Japan's Funa Tonaki, here on Saturday.

Csernoviczki, a 2012 London edition bronze medallist, pinned Sushila for a full 20 seconds to claim the Ippon and win the round of 32 match.

Sushila fought hard for a major part of the bout until she committed a small error, which proved to be disastrous for the Indian and cost her the match.

It was always going to be tough for the 26-year-old from Manipur at the world's premier sporting competition.

Sushila was the only Indian Judo athlete at this



year's Olympic Games.

Sushila, who considers boxing icon M C Mary

Kom as her inspiration, started well against the Hungarian but floun-

dered after that.

Sushila, who competes in the 48kg cate-

gory, had qualified for her maiden Games via continental quota.

Sensational Saurabh fires his way into finals as topper, Abhishek Verma misses out



TOKYO, JUL 24 (PTI): The sensational Saurabh Chaudhary fired his way into the finals of the men's 10m air pistol event by topping the qualifications with a mind-blowing performance in the Tokyo Olympics here on Saturday.

Abhishek Verma, the other Indian in the fray, was also in contention to make the cut after staging an excellent rally, but two eights in the final series dashed his hopes. He finished 17th with 575.

Appearing in his maiden Olympics, wunderkind Chaudhary shot a total of 586 in the qualifications, including a perfect 100 in the fourth series following back-to-back 98, to march his way into the eight-man summit showdown, which comprises a world-class field.

Even as Chaudhary went about his task in his typical composed manner, his roommate and friend Verma, battled hard at the Akasa Range.

Chaudhary, an Asian Games and Youth Olympics gold medallist, started in an excellent fashion, shooting 10 out of 10 before slipping in the second part of the first

series.

The 19-year-old multiple World Cup gold-medallist then rallied from the 19th place, in a field of 36, to inch closer to the top eight qualifying spots.

Once inside the safe zone, Chaudhary continued to sizzle and scored a perfect 100 with a 10 out of 10 after back-to-back 98s, making his way up to the top of the highly competitive field comprising multiple world and Olympic champions in Chinese shooters Pang Wei, Zhang Bowen and Serbian Damir Mikec.

Korean legend and four-time Olympic champion Jin Jin Jongoh could not make the finals.

Verma started with a 94 and and after being behind, got his act together and continued his march up the leaderboard until two 8s and as many 9s in the last series did him in.

In the 10m air pistol qualification, each shooter fires six series of 10 shots each with the top eight qualifying based on cumulative scores.

Chaudhary and Verma have been by far the two best air pistol shooters in the world over the past three years, with both taking turns to be world number one.

India beat New Zealand 3-2 to open hockey campaign positively in Olympics



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in the world.

For New Zealand, Kane Russell (6th minute) and Stephen Jenness (43rd minute) scored the goals.

India will next play mighty Australia on Sunday.

Olympic organisers announce 17 new Games-related COVID cases

TOKYO, JUL 24 (PTI): The Olympics organisers announced 17 new Games-related COVID-19 cases on Saturday, including one athlete and an event-related personnel staying at the Games village, taking the total number of infections to 123.

As per the official count, the total number of infected athletes now stands at 12. The Olympics officially began on Friday with an opening ceremony here.

The athlete, who has tested positive most recently was not staying at the Games village.

So far, 65 Games-related contractors have tested positive for the virus after the addition of



14 new cases to the tally on Saturday.

Thirteen of the overall 123 cases have been

found to be among Games Village residents.

The Czech team has been among the worst

Sharath and Manika outplayed in Tokyo Olympics opener



TOKYO, JUL 24 (PTI):

India's glimmer of hope for a table tennis medal at the Tokyo Olympics vanished in no time with Sharath Kamal and Manika Batra losing to third seeds Lin Yun-Ju and Cheng I-Ching of Chinese Taipei in the mixed doubles round of 16 here on Saturday.

The Indians had to make all chances count against a superior opponent but they couldn't do so after leading 5-1 and 5-3 in the first two games. In the end, it was a comfortable 11-8 11-6 11-5 11-4 win for the Chinese Taipei pairing.

The power of 19-year-old Lin from both the flanks was too much to handle for the 12th seeded pairing of Sharath and Manika, who came into the Olympics having won the qualifying competition.

"We should have won the first game from 5-1 and build pressure on them. You need to do that against a high quality team. Lin is one of the best players and he showed," Sharath told PTI.

"They made us commit errors. We didn't serve long yet he managed to produce winners on return. Shows his class. We had felt good about our game going

into the match.

"The practice match against Romanian pair yesterday I felt really good about our game. The draw could have been better too but all focus on the singles now," he added.

The Indians had no answer to Lin's bullet-like tops-spin drives from both forehand and backhand.

Manika did trouble Lin and Cheng whenever she could use her long pimped rubber but the Chinese Taipei duo had come well prepared and did not let the top women's paddler to play her game.

The Indians had to make the 5-1 lead count in the first game to have any chance in the match but Lin and Cheng won eight points in a row to gain control.

Sharath and Manika had practised together for just three days in the national camp before boarding the flight to Tokyo.

With their performance in the qualifying event, the Asian Games bronze medallists had raised hopes of a historic medal at the Olympics.

Manika and Sutirtha Mukherjee will play their women's singles first round matches later on Saturday.

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Biden stumps for McAuliffe in early test of political clout

ARLINGTON, VA. (AP): President Joe Biden led the kind of campaign rally on Friday that was impossible last year because of the pandemic, speaking before nearly 3,000 people in support of a fellow moderate Democrat whose race for Virginia governor could serve as a test of Biden's own strength and coat-tails.

Biden motorcaded across the Potomac River to back Terry McAuliffe, a former governor looking for a second term whose centrist leanings in many ways mirror those of the president. The race is seen as an early measure of voters' judgment on Democratic control of all branches of the federal government.

The president stood before an enthusiastic and largely unmasked crowd who gathered around a park pavilion and playground on a warm July night. He emphasized that he shared the same vision as McAuliffe about the need for greater public investments in order to drive economic growth. But Biden was also focused on the political stakes.

"You're not gonna find anyone, I mean anyone, who knows how to get more done for Virginia than Terry," Biden said. "Off-year election, the country's looking. This is a big deal."

Biden pointed to his management of the pandemic and highlighted the economic recovery during the first six months of his term, providing a window into his



party's messaging as it tries to maintain narrow margins next fall in both houses of Congress. He also highlighted the relative popularity of his \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill and called for action on his infrastructure plan, much as he has done in official visits to congressional districts expected to see close races next year.

It was a clear return to politics as normal after 2020, when Biden had to speak to supporters who stayed in their cars at drive-in rallies or give remarks in front of sparse and socially distanced audiences. The rock songs and tightly packed people standing before center stage suggested that Democrats will not be waging campaigns via Zoom meetings and conference calls this year.

Protesters against an oil pipeline interrupted Biden and the president took a shot at his 2020 opponent as he told the crowd to not shout them down.

"It's not a Trump rally," Biden said. "Let them

holler. No one's paying attention."

McAuliffe's win in his state's gubernatorial primary was one of a string of recent victories by self-styled pragmatic candidates in relatively low-turnout elections — which tend to draw the most loyal base voters — and his race is being carefully watched by Democrats looking to shape their messaging for next year.

"It's an important test for the Biden administration. The margins are so small, and he needs to be able to use his clout to help candidates get across the finish line," said Adrienne Elrod, a senior adviser to Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign who also worked on Biden's inaugural. "His message is simple: that he is delivering on promises on vaccines, record job growth and infrastructure."

McAuliffe, who previously served as governor from 2014 to 2018, is facing Glenn Youngkin, a political newcomer who made a fortune in pri-

vate equity. Despite the state trending blue over the last decade, the race is seen as competitive. As one of only two regularly scheduled governor's races this year, is drawing outside national attention as a potential measuring stick of voter sentiment ahead of the 2022 midterms.

Biden and McAuliffe profile similarly, as moderate Democrats who don't necessarily electrify the party's base but who won their primaries on a promise of electability. The Virginia race could serve as a checkup on Biden's status, and the Democratic National Committee has pledged to spend \$5 million to help McAuliffe's campaign this year, a clear signal that the White House has prioritized the race.

Even as much of the Republican Party remains in the thrall of the Donald Trump, Youngkin has positioned himself as a more moderate Republican in a state Trump lost by 10 points in 2020. He has said he was "hon-

ored" by the former president's endorsement of his campaign.

Democrats on Friday repeatedly tried to link Youngkin with Trump.

"I tell you what, the guy Terry is running against is an acolyte of Donald Trump, for real," Biden said. "I don't know where these guys come from."

Biden has long been an eager campaigner on the road — and on the rope line — during his time as senator and vice president, and emerged as a successful surrogate in 2018 when Democrats won back control of the House.

But the COVID-19 pandemic eliminated campaigning for the bulk of the 2020 race, and the events that were held for the general election stretch run were socially distant and infrequent. As the pandemic receded this spring, Biden, always the most tactile of politicians, has reveled in interacting with people, spending an hour chatting with supporters at a recent Philadelphia event.

Aides said he was eager to do the same in Arlington on Friday. But privately, there was increased worry about the danger posed by the virus's highly contagious delta variant.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Biden would follow federal health guidelines, which offer no restrictions for vaccinated individuals.

Biden has pledged to work with Republicans

and has spent enormous political energy on the bipartisan infrastructure deal. But he still went after the GOP on Friday, saying it "offers nothing more than fear, lies and broken promises."

White House aides have pointed to polling that suggests Biden's agenda is broadly popular with voters of both parties, even though it has received little support from GOP lawmakers in Washington. But Republican strategists cast doubt on whether Biden's poll numbers would translate into votes.

While both Biden and McAuliffe have been active in Democratic politics for decades, they have relatively few direct political connections, though McAuliffe ran the state campaign for Biden in 2020. But their political and ideological similarities are extensive.

Virginia's off-year elections have always been looked at as a sort of national bellwether, and "with the Democratic nominee being so philosophically close and similar to Biden, many may see Virginia as a stronger bellwether than usual," said Mark Rozell, a political science professor at George Mason University.

Current Democratic Gov. Ralph Northam, like all Virginia governors, is prohibited from seeking a second consecutive term. The other notable off-year election in 2021, for New Jersey governor, is not expected to be competitive, with Democrats likely maintaining control.

To reach a peace deal, Taliban say Afghan president must go

ISLAMABAD (AP): The Taliban say they don't want to monopolize power, but they insist there won't be peace in Afghanistan until there is a new negotiated government in Kabul and President Ashraf Ghani is removed.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Taliban spokesman, Suhail Shaheen, who is also a member of the group's negotiating team, laid out the insurgents' stance on what should come next in a country on the precipice.

The Taliban have swiftly captured territory in recent weeks, seized strategic border crossings and are threatening a number of provincial capitals — advances that come as the last U.S. and NATO soldiers leave Afghanistan.

This week, the top U.S. military officer, Gen. Mark Milley, told a Pentagon press conference that the Taliban have "strategic momentum," and he did not rule out a complete Taliban takeover. But he said it is not inevitable. "I don't think the end game is yet written," he said.

Memories of the Taliban's last time in power some 20 years ago, when they enforced a harsh brand of Islam that denied girls an education and barred women from work, have stoked fears of their return among many. Afghans who can afford it are applying by the thousands for visas to leave Afghanistan, fearing a violent descent into chaos. The U.S.-NATO withdrawal is more than 95% complete and due to be finished by Aug. 31.

Shaheen said the Taliban will lay down their weapons when a negotiated government acceptable to all sides in the conflict is installed in Kabul and Ghani's government is gone.

"I want to make it clear that we do not believe in the monopoly of power because any governments who (sought) to monopolize power in Afghanistan in the past, were not successful governments," said Shaheen, apparently including the Taliban's own five-year rule in that assessment. "So we do not want to repeat that same formula."

But he was also uncompromising on the continued rule of Ghani, calling him a war monger and accusing him of using his Tuesday speech on the Islamic holy day of Eid-al-Adha to promise an offensive against the Taliban.

Shaheen dismissed Ghani's right to govern, resurrecting allegations of widespread fraud that surrounded Ghani's 2019 election win. After that vote, both Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah declared themselves president. After a compromise deal, Abdullah is now No. 2 in the government and heads the reconciliation council.

Asked about the Taliban demand that Ghani be removed as a condition of a peace agreement, White House press secretary Jen Psaki on Friday affirmed President Joe Biden's support for the Afghan president.

"The President and the administration supports the leadership of the Afghan people, including Ashraf Ghani," Psaki said.

In a phone call Friday, Biden told Ghani that he's included \$3.3 billion for Afghan security forces in his fiscal year 2022 budget request, according to the White House.

The military aid includes \$1 billion to support the Afghan Air Force and Special Mission Wing, \$1 billion for fuel, ammunition and spare parts, and \$700 million to pay salaries for Afghan soldiers.

China's Xi visits Tibet amid rising controls over religion

BEIJING (AP): Chinese leader Xi Jinping has made a rare visit to Tibet as authorities tighten controls over the Himalayan region's traditional Buddhist culture, accompanied by an accelerated drive for economic development and modernized infrastructure.

State media reported Friday that Xi visited sites in the capital, Lhasa, including the Drepung Monastery, Barkhor Street and the public square at the base of the Potala Palace that was home to the Dalai Lamas, Tibet's traditional spiritual and temporal leaders.

Xi's visit was previously unannounced publicly and it wasn't clear whether he had already returned to Beijing.

China has in recent years stepped up controls over Buddhist monasteries and expanded education in the Chinese rather than Tibetan language. Critics of such policies are routinely detained and can receive long prison terms, especially if they have been convicted of association with the 86-year-old Dalai Lama, who has lived in exile in India since fleeing Tibet during an abortive uprising against Chinese

rule in 1959.

China doesn't recognize the self-declared Tibetan government-in-exile based in the hillside town of Dharmasala, and accuses the Dalai Lama of seeking to separate Tibet from China.

Meanwhile, domestic tourism has expanded massively in the region during Xi's nine years in office and new airports, rail lines and highways constructed. China's official Xinhua News Agency said that while in Lhasa on Thursday, Xi sought to "learn about the work on ethnic and religious affairs, the conservation of the ancient city, as well as the inheritance and protection of Tibetan culture."

A day earlier, he visited the city of city of Nyingchi to inspect ecological preservation work on the basin of the Yarlung Zangbo River, the upper course of the Brahmaputra, on which China is building a controversial dam.

He also visited a bridge and inspected a project to build a railway from southwestern China's Sichuan province to Tibet before riding Tibet's first electrified rail line from Ny-



ingchi to Lhasa, which went into service last month.

Xi's visit may be timed to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the 17 Point Agreement, which firmly established Chinese control over Tibet, which many Tibetans say had been effectively independent for most of its history. The Dalai Lama says he was forced into signing the document and has since repudiated it.

It also comes amid deteriorating relations between China and India, which share a lengthy but disputed border with Tibet.

Deadly encounters last year between Indian and Chinese troops along their disputed high-altitude border dramatically altered the already fraught relationship between the nuclear-armed neighbors.

That appears to

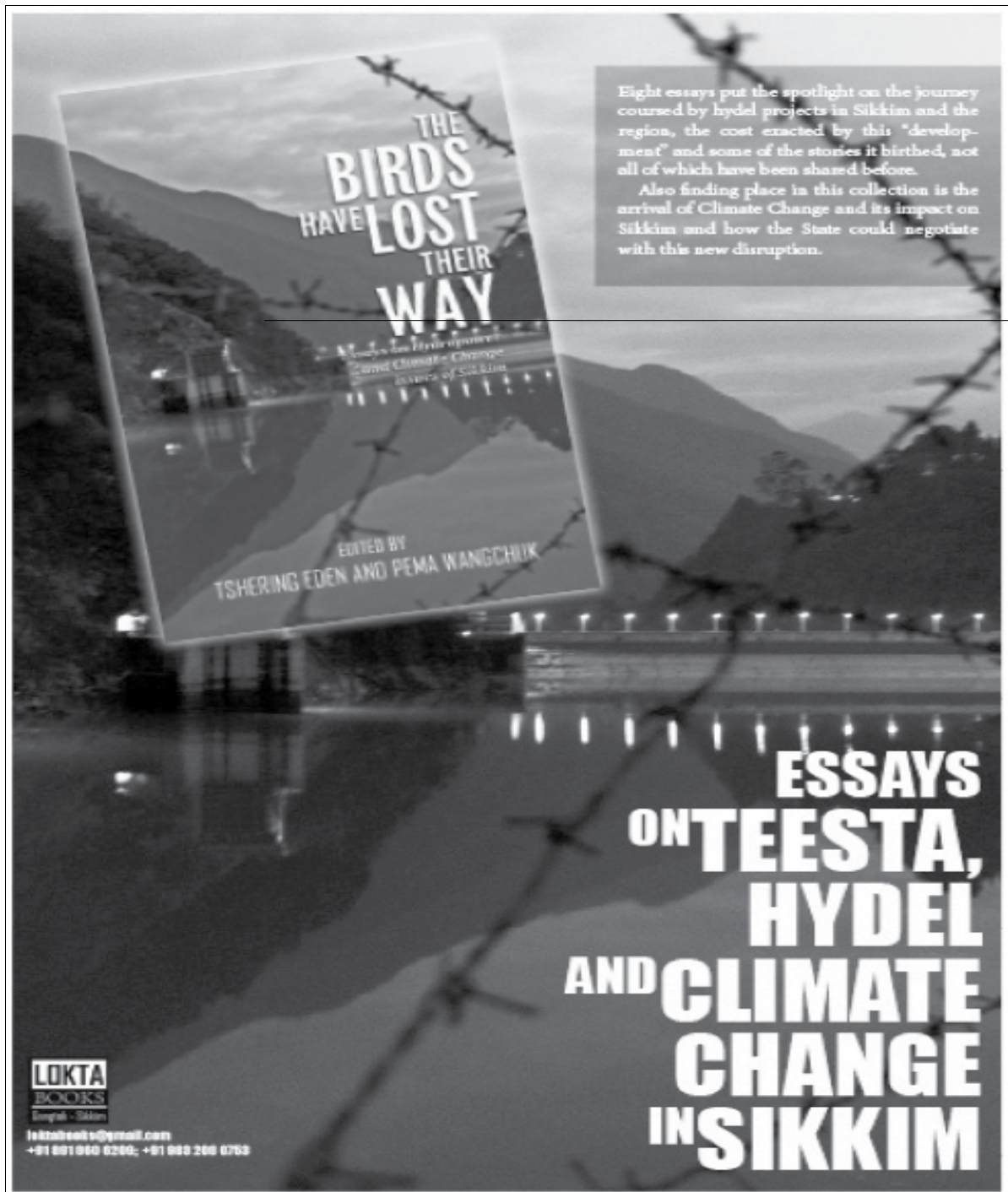
have prompted Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to wish the Dalai Lama well on his birthday this month on Twitter and said he also spoke to him by phone. That was the first time Modi has publicly confirmed speaking with the Dalai Lama since becoming prime minister in 2014.

In a statement, the advocacy group International Campaign for Tibet called Xi's visit "an indication of how high Tibet continues to figure in Chinese policy considerations."

The way in which the visit was organized and the "complete absence of any immediate state media coverage of the visit indicate that Tibet continues to be a sensitive issue and that the Chinese authorities do not have confidence in their legitimacy among the Tibetan people," the group based in Washington, D.C., said.

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At surreal Olympics, a careful dance to push Tokyo tourism

TOKYO (AP): The tour bus arrived after nightfall at the closed museum's back door. Its passengers climbed out with reflective yellow bands dangling from their media credentials so they could be easily identified as journalists in quarantine for the Tokyo Olympic Games.

The couple dozen in attendance had won a lottery to attend this after-hours tour of the museum that chronicles the city's evolution from small fishing village to world-class Olympic host. They were ushered through the back door and into the otherwise-empty exhibition.

The guide tried to put a positive spin on things.

"It is open only for you," she beamed. "You are VIPs."

But really, the point of the nighttime visit was to keep attendees as far away from locals as possible.

Olympics host cities often offer the thousands of journalists excursions to advertise their tourist destinations. But this time around,



they are attempting to do so with a smaller group while keeping Olympic visitors within a carefully controlled bubble, cut off from Tokyo's 14 million residents.

The attendees of the "escorted and controlled tour" program had signed a pledge: No straying from the tour. No talking to residents. The consequence of breaking the rules: possible deportation.

The first stop had been the 400-year-old Hamamakyu Gardens on the edge of Tokyo Bay. About

600 people had visited that day. Then they closed the park, the locals went out and they let the outsiders in.

The sun was setting and the tour guide pointed out a perfect place for pictures of the quintessential Japanese scene: gleaming skyscrapers jutting up behind the garden's pine trees carefully trained to bend as bonsais.

Then the guide ushered the group back to the bus. The gardener stood at the massive stone gate waving goodbye, as Japanese custom

is to wish guests farewell until they turn out of sight.

The bus steamed onto the expressway, where tolls had been raised to discourage local drivers in order to accommodate Olympians. It wound into a residential neighborhood where the sidewalks were mostly empty as Tokyo's residents, suffering another surge of the virus, are restricted to slow its spread.

It arrived at the museum in the dark. There, the journalists wandered the empty hall alone. Many trained their cameras on an exhibit about the 1964 Olympics, held less than two decades after World War II. At that opening ceremony, 8,000 white pigeons were released as a symbol of peace.

Now the games are here again, though less celebratory: In the world around them, a virus has killed more than 4 million.

The tour left through the back door, and the bus returned them safely back to the Olympic bubble.

John Mulaney Files for Divorce From Anna Marie Tendler

Two months after artist Anna Marie Tendler said she was "heartbroken" by comedian John Mulaney's decision to end their marriage, he's taken steps to make the split official.

John Mulaney wants out of his marriage.

The comedian filed for divorce from Anna Marie Tendler in New York on Friday, July 23, court records viewed by E! News show. Mulaney's filing comes just over two months since the artist publicly expressed her sorrow about the split.

"I am heartbroken that John has decided to end our marriage," she said in a statement at the time. "I wish him support and success as he continues his recovery."

A spokesperson for Mulaney confirmed the former couple's separation, but declined to comment further citing the star's ongoing recovery from substance addiction.

This past February, 38-year-old Mulaney reportedly completed a 60-day stay in rehab after seeking treatment two months prior. He's since returned to the com-

edy world, and is enjoying a new romance with actress Olivia Munn. News of their relationship broke just three days after Mulaney and Tendler, 36, confirmed their split.

A source close to Munn told E! News that their chemistry blossomed out of an acquaintanceship, explaining, "[They] have known each other for a while and always been friendly."

Describing Munn as "very supportive" of Mulaney's recovery journey, the insider noted, "She will continue to help him in whatever ways she can and be there for him."

When asked in a New Beauty interview to weigh in on the speculation surrounding her relationship status, Munn insisted there's more to the story.

"I think what's more surprising is how much is incorrect," The Predator star remarked. "There is so much attention on things that aren't the truth. And if you speak up and try to say the truth, you're accused of being messy or just not believed. I've gotten used to it, but it hasn't made it easier."

Family of James Brown settles 15-year battle over his estate

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP): The family of entertainer James Brown has reached a settlement ending a 15-year battle over the late singer's estate, an attorney involved in the mediation said Friday.

David Black, an attorney representing Brown's estate, confirmed to The Associated Press that the agreement was reached July 9. Details of the settlement were not disclosed.

Legal wrangling over the Godfather of Soul's estate has been ongoing since his death at the age of 73 on Christmas Day 2006.

The performer's death touched off years of bizarre headlines, beginning with Tomi Rae Hynie — a former partner who claimed to be Brown's wife — being locked out of his 60-acre (24-hectare) estate while photographers captured her sobbing and shaking its iron gates, begging to be let in.

Brown was renowned for hundreds of iconic musical works including hits like "I Feel Good" and "A Man's World,"



and was known around the world for his flashy performances and dynamic stage presence. But years of drug problems and financial mismanagement caused his estate to dwindle.

More than a dozen lawsuits were filed over the years by people trying to lay claim to the singer's assets, which courts have estimated to be worth anything from \$5 million to more than \$100 million.

The fight over Brown's estate even spilled over into what to do with his

body. Family members fought over the remains for more than two months, leaving Brown's body, still inside a gold casket, sitting in cold storage in a funeral home.

Brown was eventually buried in Beech Island, South Carolina, at the home of one of his daughters. The family wanted to turn the home into a shrine for Brown similar to Elvis Presley's Graceland, but that idea never got off the ground.

Last year, the South Carolina Supreme Court ruled that Hynie had not been legally married to Brown and therefore did not have a right to his multimillion-dollar estate.

Justices also ordered a circuit court to "promptly proceed with the probate of Brown's estate in accordance with his estate plan," which outlined creation of a trust that would use his music royalties to fund educational expenses for children in South Carolina and Georgia.

like never before.

AQUARIUS: How do you measure your success, Aquarius? Do you wait on the outside world to shower you with praise and accolades or give yourself the pat on the back you deserve in every moment? Something tells us you are moving into a space of power, where you don't need anybody else to tell you your worth. But, that doesn't mean you are on this journey alone. The support and contribution of your team members is the key to your evolution. So, rise above your ego, and with a way to work in harmony with the crew.

PISCES: You're feeling all kinds of creative, Pisces, and it's making you want to weave a web of magic with your words. So, put pen to paper, beautiful. Who knows? You may just end up writing a verse or two that you will be remembered for. On the interpersonal front, however, you're being asked to practice tactfulness. It's not important to share every thought that crosses your mind. Centre yourself before you say anything that could potentially cause trouble.



LEGGY LADY! The actress, Vanessa Hudgens looks absolutely gorgeous in a high slit black gown at the Filming Italy Festival in Santa Margherita di Pula, Italy..

Jolie-Pitt divorce judge disqualified by appeals court

LOS ANGELES (AP): Angelina Jolie scored a major victory Friday in her divorce with Brad Pitt when a California appeals court agreed with her that the private judge deciding who gets custody of their children should be disqualified.

The 2nd District Court of Appeal agreed with Jolie that Judge John W. Ouderkirk didn't sufficiently disclose business relationships with Pitt's attorneys.

"Judge Ouderkirk's ethical breach, considered together with the information disclosed concerning his recent professional relationships with Pitt's counsel, might cause an objective person, aware of all the facts, reasonably to entertain a doubt as to the judge's ability to be impartial. Disqualification is required," the court ruled.

The decision means that the custody fight over the couple's five minor children, which was nearing an end, could just be getting started.

The judge already ruled the pair divorced, but separated the child custody issues.

Like many celebrity couples, Pitt and Jolie opted to hire their own judge to increase their privacy in the divorce proceedings.

"The appeals court ruling was based on a technical procedural issue. The facts haven't changed. There is an extraordinary amount of factual evidence which led the judge — and the many experts who testified — to reach their clear conclusion about what is in the children's best interests," a statement by Pitt's representative said. "We will continue to do what's necessary legally based on the detailed findings of what's best for the children."

Details of the custody rulings have not been publicly released.

Jolie and Pitt have six children: 19-year-old Maddox, 17-year-old Pax, 16-year-old Zahara, 15 year-old Shiloh, 12-year-old Vivienne and 12-year-old Knox. Only the five minors are subject to custody decisions.

Ouderkirk declined to disqualify himself when Jolie asked him to in a filing in August. A lower court judge ruled that Jolie's request for disqualification came too late. Jolie's attorneys then appealed.

The July 9 oral arguments in front of the appeals court focused on exactly which ethical rules should apply to private judges, who, like Ouderkirk, are usually retired superior court judges.

ARIES: Peace and love are granted to those who actively cultivate these qualities in their life. This is something you are beginning to understand on a deep level, Aries. The full moon finds you transmuting the pain, the sadness, the anger, and the rejection into higher vibrations and calling in the energy of miracles into your life. Trust that it is all going to go uphill from here as long as you move forward with faith in your heart.

TAURUS: Like the rams, you're transmuting the pain, the sadness, the rejection, and the loneliness into the higher vibrations of joy, creativity, and love. They say like attracts like, and you want to embody this love as fully as you can. The good news is, your outer reality is reflecting your shift in perspective as well. You are surrounded by that warm and fuzzy feeling and people who remind you of what being truly happy is supposed to feel like.

GEMINI: There's something amiss here, and you've known it for a while, Gemini. The fact that they don't look you in the eye when they say certain

things. The fact that there is a huge disconnect between what they practice and what they preach. It's time for you to pay attention to the red flags—and we mean *all* of them. It's time to hold space for the dreaded conversation.

CANCER: What the cards are bringing your attention to this full moon is the need for balance. You've been on the productivity train for a while now, and it's time to give yourself the break you deserve. One word: prioritise. Get the important stuff out of the way, so you can take the rest of the day off. Remember, nothing is more therapeutic than spending quality time with the people you love.

LEO: Maybe home is not a place. It's a feeling you feel in the company of those you love, and it's a feeling you are celebrating fervently today. Your romantic side is also coming to the fore, Leo, and it's inspiring you to make your lover feel special. We know it's all about the grand, sweeping gestures for you! But, just for today, be present to them and indulge them in small,

simple things that add value to their existence.

VIRGO: So it didn't work out the first time? So you faced resistance the second and third time around too? What makes you say victory will not ultimately be yours? This chapter of your life is about integrating your past learnings and moving forward with courage and conviction. You are supported in all of your ventures, Virgo. Trust that and give this your best shot.

LIBRA: Libra, you want to see the best in people and you believe in their inherent goodness. But, could this work against you on certain occasions? Saturday sees you taking your rose-tinted glasses off and seeing the situation for what it is. Some people are just not worth your time and effort, so it's best to redirect your attention towards yourself.

SCORPIO: Visualise this: a blank canvas in front of you. A blank canvas of infinite possibilities waiting to be painted in the colours of the rainbow. This is your moment, Scorpio. Your moment to trans-

mute all the pain, all the sadness, and all the rejection into the higher vibrations of joy, creativity, and love. The real question is, "What will you choose to focus on today?"

SAGITTARIUS: Big things do not happen overnight, and instant gratification isn't real. This chapter of your life is about committing to the hustle and watching your labour of love grow organically. As for the seeds you planted a long time ago? They're beginning to bear fruit now, reminding you that slow and steady truly does win the race.

CAPRICORN: 'Peace' and 'harmony' are your magic words, Capricorn, and the full moon is helping you call in the blessings you deserve. Things on the domestic front are looking especially lit this week. You and your (soul) family have a new found appreciation for each other's presence. For some of you, taking a step towards commitment may be on the cards too. Trust what your heart is telling you at this time as you remember that some risks are truly worth it. You and your (soul) family are appreciating each other's presence