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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## Sikkim's second wave deaths go past 200 with four more Covid fatalities

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 29 JUL:**

After a day's pause in Covid deaths, Sikkim recorded four more Covid fatalities in the past 24 hours, taking the Covid toll here to 337. The "Daily Report of Covid-19 in Sikkim" released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department covering Covid statistics for the past 24 hours as of 8AM Thursday morning informs that all four deaths were reported from STNM Hospital here.

The second wave has been brutal all over the country, and Sikkim has not been spared its impact. With these four deaths, Covid's second wave has now claimed more than two hundred lives in the State.

This newspaper marks 22 April, 2021, as the start of the second wave in Sikkim since it was on this date that Covid deaths returned to the State after a nearly two-month pause. Covid deaths have been a regular feature since then, and the longest that the State has gone without any fatalities during the second wave has been three days.

In the 98 days that the second wave has been in Sikkim, there have been only 19 days without any Covid deaths. On average, Sikkim has lost 2.05 lives every day during the second wave which has claimed 201 lives, nearly 60% of all the lives



lost to Covid here.

While the peak of the second wave in mid-May saw as many nine deaths in a day and upwards of 400 new cases, the situation has been less traumatic over the past two months. While Covid deaths have not ended, the numbers have come down. The last time that the State reported more than three deaths in a day, for instance, was on 06 June when five lives were lost to the virus.

The vaccination process has been strong in Sikkim, and as of today, 4.89 lakh people here have received the Covid vaccine, 1.47 lakh of whom have received both the doses. The above-18 age-group for whom vaccination is available has been nearly covered, and it is this which perhaps explains the drop in the number of fatalities

and hospitalizations being seen in the State.

That said, every death is traumatic, and doctors have come on record often to explain that Covid patients have been showing up too late to hospitals. The only way people can be provided medical assistance in time is for testing to be more effectively deployed and positive cases identified in time and placed under professional observation before their condition worsens.

It is important for everyone to realize that it is only a handful, those with co-morbidities and/or high levels of exposure and falling oxygen levels, who will require dedicated medical attention and it is possible that Covid-death numbers can be brought down with more accurate testing and

follow-up.

For instance, while 276 new cases were detected in the past 24 hours, there were only 14 more hospitalizations. This suggests that the number of Covid-positive people with severe symptoms is low in Sikkim. Of the 3,297 active Covid cases in the State, there are only 113 in hospital and the rest recovering at home or facility isolation since their symptoms are not too severe.

It is those in hospital and in ICU [13 at present], who could have benefitted even more if their infections had been detected earlier. Most Covid deaths in the State are being reported with 3-4 days of them testing positive, suggesting that people are not getting tested the moment they fear

exposure, and are coming for testing only after their symptoms have become severe [this, at least in the case of most Covid deaths]. If policy could be worked in a way that encourages testing and does not make things inconvenient or disruptive, may be more people will choose to get screened in time.

Meanwhile, the 276 new cases were picked up from the screening of 1,715 samples on Wednesday giving the State a daily test positivity rate of 16%.

Sikkim's count of confirmed cases of COVID-19 detected so far now stands at 26,132. Nearly 73% of this overall figure - 18,974 - was reported during the second wave alone. In that sense, the fatality rate has been lower in the second wave even if the absolute numbers have been high. While the first wave had a case fatality rate of 1.89% [130 deaths out of 6,846 cases], the CFR for the second wave works out to 1.05% [201 deaths out of 18,974 cases].

As for the day's numbers, of the 276 new cases, 78 were registered in East District, 100 in West District, 97 in South District and 01 in North District.

On the other hand, Sikkim's count of recovered cases further improved to 22,229 with the discharge of 90 more persons from home and facility isolation on Wednesday after they made full recoveries.

## CM and Edn Minister join event marking one year of NEP



**GANGTOK, 28 JUL:** Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang and Education Minister Kunga Nima Lepcha were part of a program commemorating the completion of one year of the National Education Policy 2020, a press release from the Chief Minister's Office informs.

On the occasion, the Prime Minister launched several portals for the education sector which included, Launch of Vidya Pravesh, Launch of Indian sign language as a subject, Launch of NISHTHA 2.0 & SAFAL, Launch of AI for Public Awareness, Launch of Academic Bank of Credit & Multiple Entry-Exit, Launch of First-Year Engineering Programmes in Regional Languages, Guidelines for Internationalisation of Higher Education, Launch of National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR) & National Education Technology Forum (NETF).

Chief Secretary SC Gupta and Secretary to the CM, SD Dhakal, were also present for the occasion, the release adds.

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## GNLF team visits Rani Baan Ghanti Dhara landslide

**SUMMIT REPORT  
DARJEELING, 29 JUL:**

The landslide at Rani Baan Ghanti Dhara under Singmari Takbar Constituency, Darjeeling has damaged 3 houses and poses a threat to other houses in the area as well.

Chairman of the Disaster Management Committee of Gorkha National Liberarian Front (GNLF), Y Lama, informed that he and his team visited the landslide hit area today after the Darjeeling hills saw heavy rains.

"A video of the terrible landslide had gone viral on social media and because of that we came to check the area. As we can see the condition of Rani Baan Ghanti Dhara is dangerous. The



locals who reside in the surrounding villages are also terrified due to the landslide in the area," said Mr Lama.

He added that the condition of the area is worrying and a situation like that of the floods that hit Arubotey in the past could be repeated.

"As Rani Baan Ganti Dhara comes under

Bijanbari block, we request the section development officer to visit and inspect this area as soon as possible," he stated. He added that they will also inform MP, Raju Bista and MLA, Niraj Zimba as soon as possible and appealed to them to inspect the area.

It would also be advisable for the

GTA administration as well as the GTA Disaster Management Department and the Darjeeling District Officer to visit the area to prevent a major incident in future.

He said that locals have complained that no one has come from the concerned departments so far.

## Covid Lockdown negatively impacted women's nutrition in India: Study

**WASHINGTON, 29 JUL [PTI]:**

The nationwide lockdown in India in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on women's nutrition in the country, according to a study conducted by a group of researchers in the US. The study by Tata-Cornell Institute for Agriculture and Nutrition in four economically backward districts of Uttar Pradesh's Maharajganj,

Bihar's Munger, and Odisha's Kandhamal and Kalahandi indicate a decline in household food expenditures and women's dietary diversity in May 2020 compared to May 2019, particularly for non-staples like meats, eggs, vegetables, and fruits.

It occurred despite the special Public Distribution System (PDS), direct benefit transfer and ration from

aanganwadis reaching 80 per cent, 50 per cent and 30 per cent of the surveyed households, respectively, said the study published in the latest issue of Economia Politica journal.

"Our findings contribute to the growing body of evidence of women's disproportionate vulnerability to economic shocks, the impact of a staple

grain focused safety net programme, and restricted markets on the access and availability of diverse nutritious foods," says the paper which makes a case for policy reforms towards PDS diversification to include nutrition-rich foods and market reforms to remove supply-side bottlenecks and expansion of direct benefit transfers for healthy food access.

## Former Congress prez slams State Govt for implementing ONORC

**SURAJ LIMBOO**

**GANGTOK, 29 JUL:**

Former State president of the Congress party (Sikkim), Bharat Basnett, today slammed the SKM Government for implementing the "One Nation, One Ration Card" scheme in Sikkim.

Mr Basnett has termed it "extremely unfortunate" for Sikkim and its people that the State Government has decided to implement the ONORC scheme in the state.

He said that he has been protesting against ONORC since he was the state Congress president. He alleged that the scheme violates the constitutional protection provided to Sikkim under Article 371F and would not benefit Sikkim.

Mr Basnett also called on the state's opposition parties, organizations and conscious citizens to raise their voice against it. He claimed that influx will increase in Sikkim after the implementation of ONORC.

He also stated that ONORC is a step towards the Uniform Civil Code that the BJP Government at the centre aims to ultimately bring in the country.

"This will prove to be against the interests of Sikkim in the long run," said Mr Basnett.

He lashed out at the SKM government alleging that SKM has betrayed the people of Sikkim due to its greed. SKM has forgotten its promise to the people of Sikkim



that it will protect Article 371F of the Constitution, he added.

He questioned the SKM government's hurry to implement ONORC without even discussing it in the Assembly when even some BJP-ruled states of the country have not implemented the scheme. He also

criticized Governor Ganga Prasad for failing to protect the Sikkimese.

"The Governor should exercise his special powers to protect the Sikkimese people. If he cannot then he should resign and go back to Bihar. He should not act like a BJP worker," said Mr Basnett.

## Five held for harassing women from Darjeeling in Delhi

**NEW DELHI, JUL 29 (PTI):** Days after a 30-year-old woman and her friends were allegedly harassed by a group of men in southwest Delhi's Hauz Khas Village area, police said on Thursday they have arrested five accused in the case.

The accused were identified as Dinesh Ram

(34), a resident of Jhansi in UP; Ashish Shivhare (39), Vikas Shivhare (38), Naveen Shivhare (41) and Ankit Shivhare (29), all residents of Chattarpur in Madhya Pradesh, they said.

According to police, they got the phone numbers of the accused during investigation

and called them to the national capital after informing that a complaint had been received against them.

Interrogation revealed that the accused were returning after visiting the Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu and Kashmir. Their train bound for Madhya

Pradesh from Delhi was scheduled for departure at 4 am on July 19. Since they had time, the accused went to Hauz Khas Village, where the incident took place, a senior police officer said.

All the five accused are known to each other. They were not involved in any

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# PM addresses education community to mark first anniv of NEP 2020

**NEW DELHI, 29 JUL [PIB]:** The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi addressed policy makers in the domain of education and skill development, students and teachers, across the country via video conferencing, to mark the completion of one year of reforms under the National Education Policy 2020. He also launched multiple initiatives in the education sector.

Congratulating the countrymen and students for New Education Policy completing one year, the Prime Minister lauded the hard work of teachers, professors, policymakers in realizing the New education policy on the ground, even during the difficult time of Covid-19. Noting the significance of the year 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav', the Prime Minister said that the new Education Policy will play a major role in this important period. The Prime Minister said our future progress and growth is dependent on the level of education and direction given to our youth today.

"I believe that is one of the bigger factors in 'mahayagya' of national development", said the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister

noted the changes brought by the pandemic and how normal online education became for the students. More than 23 hundred crore hits on Diksha portal bear testimony to the utility of portals like Diksha and Swayam.

The Prime Minister noted the strides made by the youth from small towns. He cited great performance at the Tokyo Olympics by the youth from such towns. He lauded the efforts of the youth in the fields of robotics, AI, start-ups and their leadership in industry 4.0. He said if the younger generation gets the environment suitable for their dreams, there is no limit to their growth. He stressed that today's youth wants to decide their systems and their world on their own terms. They need exposure and freedom from the shackles and restrictions. New Education Policy, assures our youth that the country is fully with them and their aspirations. Artificial Intelligence programme which was launched today will make the student future oriented and will pave the way for AI-driven economy. Similarly, National Digital Education Architecture,

(NDEAR) and National Education Technology Forum (NETF) will go a long way in providing a digital and technological framework to the entire country, the Prime Minister said.

The Prime Minister highlighted the openness and absence of pressure in the New Education Policy. He said that there is an openness at policy level and openness is also visible in the options available to the students. Options like multiple entry and exit will free students from the restrictions of staying in one class and one course. Similarly, modern technology based Academic Bank of Credit system will bring revolutionary change. This will give confidence to the student in choosing stream and subjects. 'Structured Assessment for Analyzing Learning levels', SAFAL will take away the fear of examination. The Prime Minister reiterated that these new programmes have the capability to change India's destiny.

Quoting Mahatma Gandhi, the Prime Minister emphasized the importance of local languages as medium of instructions. The Prime

Minister informed that 14 engineering colleges of 8 states are starting to impart education in 5 Indian languages Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi and Bangla. A tool has been developed for translating engineering course in 11 languages. This emphasis on mother tongue as the medium of instruction will instil confidence in the students from poor, rural and tribal background. Even in the elementary education mother tongue is being promoted and Vidya Pravesh programme, launched today, will play a big role in that. He also informed that Indian sign language, for the first time, has been accorded the status of language subject. Students will be able to study it as language also. There are more than 3 lakh student who need sign language for their education. This will give a boost to Indian sign language and will help the divyang people, said the Prime Minister.

Underlining the critical role of teachers, the Prime Minister informed that from the formulation stage to implementation, teachers are active part of New Education Policy. NISHTHA 2.0, launched

today will provide training to teachers as per their needs and they will be able to give their suggestions to the department.

Prime Minister launched the Academic Bank of Credit that will provide multiple entry and exit options for students in Higher education; 1st Year Engineering Programmes in Regional Languages and Guidelines for Internationalization of Higher Education. The initiatives to be launched also included Vidya Pravesh, a three month play based school preparation module for Grade 1 students; Indian Sign Language as a Subject at secondary level; NISHTHA 2.0, an integrated programme of teacher training designed by NCERT; SAFAL (Structured Assessment For Analyzing Learning Levels), a competency based assessment framework for Grades 3, 5 and 8 in CBSE schools; and a website dedicated to Artificial Intelligence. The event also witnessed the launch of National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR) and National Education Technology Forum (NETF).

## CCTV of Jharkhand Judge's murder spurs outrage, raised in Supreme Court

**DHANBAD, 29 JUL [PTI]:** The death of a judge in Jharkhand on Wednesday in what was initially believed to be a hit-and-run has taken a chilling turn with security footage of the incident pointing at murder. As the incident was raised in the Supreme Court today, Chief Justice of India NV Ramana said he had spoken to the Jharkhand High Court and asserted: "We are aware of the case and we will take care."

The driver of an auto-rickshaw that hit District and Additional Judge Uttam Anand in Dhanbad has been arrested along with an associate, the police say.

Judge Uttam Anand was on his morning run yesterday when he was hit by "an unidentified vehicle" just half a km from his home in Dhanbad, according to the police.

CCTV footage that surfaced online shows the judge jogging at around 5 am by a deserted stretch of road as an auto takes a turn and appears to go straight for him. The auto rams the judge and drives off.

Judge Anand was found lying on the road, bleeding, by a

man who took him to hospital. He died in hospital, according to the police. He remained unidentified, however, for hours.

His family reported him missing when he did not return at 7 am. The police finally tracked him down to the hospital and established him as the man who had died in the accident.

The police say the CCTV footage makes it clear the auto hit him deliberately. Investigations have revealed the vehicle was stolen just a few hours before the judge was hit. The clip circulating on social media spurred calls for a bigger investigation.

The police are focusing on Judge Anand's cases. He had been handling many cases of mafia killings in Dhanbad town and had recently rejected the bail requests of two gangsters.

When the Supreme Court Bar Association raised it before him, Chief Justice NV Ramana said he had spoken with the Chief Justice of the Jharkhand High Court. "The High Court Chief Justice has taken up the

issue and the case is now on at the High Court. We are aware of the case and we will take care," Justice Ramana said.

Earlier, raising the incident before a bench led by Justice DY Chandrachud, lawyer Vikas Singh had said: "It is a brazen attack on judiciary. This is a matter which should go to the CBI. The local police is usually complicit in such matters. It is shocking. A judge is on a morning walk and is hit by a vehicle. He was dealing with bail applications of gangsters. This is an attack on judicial independence."

Justice Chandrachud said he would inform the Chief Justice.

The judge's death was also informally discussed in another courtroom of the Supreme Court.

Who shot the video, questioned Justice MR Shah. Lawyer Vikas Singh said the footage was "not normal CCTV" and was recorded "deliberately" for circulation. "This is very brazen. They want to record it and circulate it. It's not just any CCTV camera because you can hear voices while that is being recorded," Mr Singh told Justice Shah.

## High Court issues notice to Centre on forest clearances for Shimla Smart City

**SHIMLA, 29 JUL [PTI]:** The Himachal Pradesh High Court on Wednesday issued notices to the Central and State Governments and other respondents in the matter regarding grant of forest clearance for Shimla Smart City Project.

The Court directed the respondents to file reply within a period of four weeks.

A division bench comprising the Acting Chief Justice Ravi Malimath and Justice Jyotsna Rewal Dua passed the order on a petition filed by Namita Maniktala. As per High Court PRO, the petition was converted by the Court into a Public Interest Litigation as the matter involves public interest.

The petitioner has alleged that a news item dated June 22, published under the title "Key Shimla Projects Delays-Forest Clearance Awaited", said that some of the developmental projects,

which were required to be undertaken as part of Smart City Project were delayed for want of forest clearance under the Forest Conservation Act.

The petitioner has alleged that Smart City Projects include "lift and escalator at Lakkar Bazar, escalator to Jakhu Top, a smart path from Sanjauli to Indira Gandhi Medical College, Shimla, Vending Zone in Khalini, Krishna Nagar-Combermere Nallah and widening of work in Dhalli area."

She has also alleged that Shimla town is facing traffic hazards and various other problems pertaining to the pedestrians and commissioning of these projects is intimately connected with the Right to Life of the residents of the city in particular and the general public at large as they will make the life of the residents much easier.

The petitioner has alleged that these projects are being funded under the Smart City Missions of the

Government of India and end of the deadline for completion of these projects shall cause irreparable loss and in case the same is not processed and decided, the funding for these vital projects may also lapse.

"The deadline for completion of these projects would be ending very soon next year. The applications for grant of forest clearance under the Forest Conservation Act are required to be considered expeditiously by the Centre Government," the petitioner said and prayed that the Centre government may be directed to consider the applications for grant of forest clearances with respect to the aforesaid projects and the State Government and other respondents may be directed to complete these projects in a time-bound manner after receipt of forest clearances.

The court posted the matter after four weeks.

## Five held for harassing women from Darjeeling in Delhi

case previously. Two of them run their DJ business and two others are doing business of tent houses, police said.

The incident took place in southwest Delhi's Hauz Khas area on the intervening night July 18 and 19 when the victim along with her three friends -- all residents of Darjeeling in West Bengal -- were waiting for a cab outside a bar.

Three to four persons made lewd comments about them, according to the complaint lodged on July 21 at Safdarjung Enclave police station.

The complainant got annoyed, police had said, adding: she shouted at the men and made their video.

Later, their cab arrived and the women left the area. On the basis of the complaint, a case under section 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) was lodged.

The video made by the complainant was posted on social media, prompting Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) to issue a notice to police, asking them to register an FIR.

In the video, the women can be heard objecting to the indecent remarks, while the men can be seen apologising for the comments they had made before the woman started recording.

## 27% quota for OBCs, 10% for economically weak sections in medical courses



**NEW DELHI, 29 JUL [NDTV]:** Medical and dental courses in the country will have a 27 per cent reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs), 10 per cent for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) under the All India Quota Scheme for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on Thursday.

This will apply to courses like MBBS, MD, MS, BDS, MDS and diploma medical programmes from this academic year. Around 5,550 seats will be reserved in all for the communities thanks to this order.

The decision is also being seen in the context of next year's Uttar Pradesh elections where caste and

communal allegiances play a big role. The BJP had demonstrated the calculation earlier this month when it revamped the union cabinet with special emphasis on these communities and sent detailed information packets to media outlets with the caste and sub-caste of their ministers.

According to a statement issued by the health ministry, PM Modi had directed the union ministries concerned to "facilitate an effective solution to this long-pending issue" at a meeting held on Monday. On Wednesday, a group of BJP MPs from the OBC community also met the PM on the same issue.

"This decision would benefit nearly 1,500 OBC students in MBBS and 2,500 OBC students in post-graduation

and also around 550 EWS students in MBBS and around 1,000 EWS students in post-graduation," the health ministry said.

"The present government is committed to providing due reservation both to the backward category as well as the EWS category. The Union government has now taken a historic decision to provide for 27 per cent reservation for OBCs and 10 per cent reservation for EWS in the AIQ scheme," the ministry said.

OBC students from across the country shall now be able to take the benefit of this reservation in the AIQ scheme to compete for seats in any state. Being a central scheme, the central list of OBCs shall be used for this reservation.

## BJP's Nishikant Dubey demands Shashi Tharoor's removal as IT panel head

**NEW DELHI, 29 JUL [PTI]:** BJP MP Nishikant Dubey on Wednesday demanded the removal of Congress leader Shashi Tharoor as the head of the Parliamentary panel on Information Technology, alleging that he was using his position in a discriminatory manner.

Mr Dubey raised the issue in the Lok Sabha, saying a letter has already been submitted to the Speaker in this regard on Tuesday.

The parliamentary panel's meeting that was set to question government officials on Wednesday on the Pegasus spyware issue was postponed due to lack of quorum.

A number of members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information and Technology sat in Parliament to discuss "Citizens' safety and date protection".

However, BJP members of the panel who were present in the meeting room didn't sign the attendance register in protest leading to a lack of quorum required for holding the meeting.

The panel's chair Mr Tharoor had said the panel members will question officials from the Information and Technology Ministry and the Home Ministry who will depose before it on the Pegasus issue.

BJP members opposed this alleging that when the Congress is not allowing discussion on this issue in Parliament then it can" be discussed in the committee meeting.

"BJP members come to the IT Committee and refuse to sign the attendance register to deny a quorum. Further,

all the witnesses called from MiEIT and MHA wrote in excuses and didn't appear as called to testify. It's very clear that Pegasus is a no go area for this government," the Congress' Karti Chidambaram, who is a member of the panel, said on Twitter.

Since the beginning of the Monsoon Session on July 19, both Houses have seen repeated disruptions as opposition parties have been demanding a Supreme Court-monitored judicial probe in this matter.

The 32-member Parliamentary Standing Committee on IT was scheduled to meet on Wednesday, for which the listed agenda was -- Citizens' data security and privacy -- according to a notification by Lok Sabha Secretariat.

The panel, which has the maximum members from the ruling BJP, had summoned officials from the Ministry of Electronics, Information and Technology and the Ministry of Home Affairs.

An international media consortium has reported that over 300 verified Indian mobile phone numbers were on a list of potential targets for surveillance using Israeli firm NSO's Pegasus spyware.

Opposition leaders including Rahul Gandhi, two union ministers -- Prahlad Singh Patel and Railways and IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnav, businessman Anil Ambani, a former CBI chief, and at least 40 journalists are on the list on the leaked database of NSO. It is, however, not established that all the phones were hacked.

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# Sikkim Weightlifting Association congratulates Mirabai



**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 29 JUL:** Sikkim Weightlifting Association [SWA] has congratulated Indian weightlifter Saikhom Mirabai Chanu on winning a silver medal for the country at the Tokyo Olympics 2020.

A press release from SWA general secretary, Sonam Paljor Bhutia mentions that Sikkim Weightlifting Association congratulates the pride of the nation, Saikhom Mirabai Chanu for her

achievement in weightlifting in the Tokyo Olympic Games 2020. The association has further expressed its best wishes for her future competitions. The release states that Sikkim has talented athletes in different

sporting disciplines and further expresses hope to see more Olympians from the State in the near future. The association has further extended its best wishes to other Indian athletes for their upcoming competitions in Tokyo Olympics.

## Madhya Pradesh has highest Covid antibodies, Kerala the least: Sero Survey

**NEW DELHI, 29 JUL [PTI]:** At least two-third of the population surveyed in 11 states were found to have developed coronavirus antibodies, according to the findings of a serosurvey by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) done between June 14 and July 6.

Madhya Pradesh leads the chart with 79 per cent seroprevalence while Kerala is at the bottom with 44.4 per cent. Seroprevalence in Assam is 50.3 per cent and Maharashtra 58 per cent.

The findings of the fourth round of national serosurvey conducted by the ICMR across 70 districts of India was shared by the Union Health Ministry on Wednesday.

Seroprevalence was found to be 76.2 per cent among the



surveyed population in Rajasthan, 75.9 per cent in Bihar, 75.3 per cent in Gujarat, 74.6 per cent in Chhattisgarh, 73.1 per cent in Uttarakhand, 71 per cent in Uttar Pradesh, 70.2 per cent in Andhra Pradesh, 69.8 per cent in Karnataka, 69.2 in Tamil Nadu and 68.1 per cent in Odisha.

Referring to the findings, the Health

Ministry has advised states and Union Territories to conduct seroprevalence studies of their own in consultation with the ICMR to ensure that those studies follow a standardized protocol.

The findings of such serosurveys can then be utilized quickly by the states to guide objective, transparent and evidence-based

public health response to COVID-19.

"The national serosurvey by ICMR was designed to capture the extent of the spread of Covid infection at the national level. Therefore, the national serosurvey results do not reflect the heterogeneity of seroprevalence between districts and even between states," a statement said.

## Delhi demands reversal of Rakesh Asthana's appointment as top cop

**NEW DELHI, 29 JUL [NDTV]:** The assembly of Aam Aadmi Party-ruled Delhi has passed a resolution against the appointment of former CBI officer Rakesh Asthana as the Delhi Police Commissioner. The resolution has sought a reversal of the appointment from the Union Home Ministry, which controls the Delhi Police. Mr Asthana got the appointment on Tuesday, just three days before he was to retire.

The ministry order said he was getting an "inter cadre deputation" from the Gujarat cadre to AGMUT, from where

Delhi Police chiefs are picked.

The order also said his service was being extended "initially for a period of one year beyond the date of his superannuation... as a special case in public interest".

"The BJP wants to say that all the commissioners appointed by the Modi government so far were useless, and for the first time in 7 years, they have brought a good officer," said senior AAP leader Satyender Jain at the assembly.

"Supreme Court gave the ruling -- six months should be left in the

appointment of DG level, Rakesh Asthana had 4 days' tenure left," the Delhi minister added.

The Congress has also slammed the appointment, saying it is in "direct contravention" of a Supreme Court judgment and questioned if any "quid pro quo" was involved in it.

"Not just is it an issue of inter-cadre appointment; the issue expands to another instance of blatant disregard towards the Supreme Court of India and the laws of the land," senior Congress leader Pawan Khera has said.

The Supreme Court order these leaders cited

came into the picture two months ago, when Mr Asthana was ruled out of the race for the post of CBI Director because he was about to retire.

At a meeting of the panel -- headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi -- to select the CBI chief, Chief Justice NV Ramana reportedly cited a Supreme Court decision that officers with less than six months left in service should not be considered for police chief posts.

This ruled out at least two names on the government's shortlist, including Mr Asthana, who was to retire on July 31.

## "Khela Hobe" across India: Mamata Banerjee's warning for next elections

**NEW DELHI, 28 JUL [PTI]:** There will be "khela" across the country, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said today as she threw down the gauntlet to the BJP with her now-famous election war cry of "Khela hobe" (game is on) that led her to victory over the BJP in Bengal.

"If Bengal could do it, so can the other states," she said.

The Trinamool Congress chief, who is

a bitter critic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, said in a lighter vein that she has learnt Hindi from him and even chided "Kem cho" (how are you) in Gujarati, which, she said, she learnt from Home Minister Amit Shah.

When asked how her Hindi has significantly improved over the last few years, Ms Banerjee said: "Have learnt Hindi from Narendra Modi and Gujarati from Amit Shah." Asked if she has

decided on a slogan for a united opposition like "Khela Hobe" which was used in her assembly poll campaign, Ms Banerjee said: "Poore desh mein khela hoga (The game will be played across the country)." "It is a continuous process... When Modi will fight the next election, it will be with the country," the chief minister, who is on her first visit to the national capital after defeating the BJP in West Bengal, said

implying that it will be PM Modi versus a united opposition in the next Lok Sabha polls.

The landslide victory in the West Bengal Assembly polls has buoyed Ms Banerjee to try and reach out to the rest of the country.

She is being positioned by her party as the face of a united opposition in their bid to oust the BJP in the 2024 general election. The chief minister, however, has been ambivalent about it.



## Red panda 'Kitchi' gives birth to 2 cubs

**SMRITA KHAWAS**

**DARJEELING, 29 JUL:**

Another red panda, 'Kitchi', has given birth to two cubs at Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park (PNHZP), Darjeeling.

Press Director of Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park (PNHZP) Darjeeling, Dharm Deo Rai said, "I'm very happy to inform

you that Kitchi, a red panda has given birth to two cubs. Father of the cubs is Satwik. Both mother and cubs are doing well. This birth took place at PNHZP main campus and this is seventh birth of red panda in this season."

It may be mentioned that the Darjeeling zoo is the coordinator zoo for red panda breeding for the entire country.

## Jharkhand reports 27 new COVID cases; one virus death

**RANCHI, JUL 29 (PTI):** Jharkhand reported 27 new COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours, which pushed the tally to 3,47,049, a health department bulletin said.

The COVID-19 death toll rose to 5,126 in the state with one fresh fatality due to the contagion reported from East Singhbhum in the last 24 hours, it said on Wednesday.

Of the 27 new cases, Bokaro reported six cases followed by four from Ranchi and three from Deoghar.


No new COVID-19 case was reported from Chatra, Dumka, Garhwa, Gumla, Jamtara, Pakur, Palamu, Saraikela, Simdega and West Singhbhum districts.

Jharkhand now has 237 active COVID-19 cases, while 3,41,686 patients have recovered from the disease including 36 during the last 24 hours, the bulletin said.

The COVID-19 mortality rate in the state remained at 1.47 per cent, higher than the national average of 1.30 per cent.

The COVID-19 recovery rate in the state has improved to 98.45 per cent, better than the national average of 97.40 per cent.

Altogether, 1,14,91,499 samples have been tested for COVID-19 in Jharkhand, including 58,148 on Wednesday, it added.


**REHABILITATION COUNCIL OF INDIA (RCI)**  
 (A Statutory Body of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment)  
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**ADMISSION NOTIFICATION**  
**CERTIFICATE IN COMMUNITY BASED INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT (CBID)**  
 (A COMPETENCY BASED TRAINING PROGRAMME)  
 Jointly Developed By RCI & University of Melbourne, Australia

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CBID programme has been developed with an objective to create a pool of grass-root rehabilitation "Divyang Mitra" at community level who can work alongside "ASHA" and "Anganwadi workers" to deal with Cross Disability issues and facilitate main streaming of persons with disabilities in the society. The programme has been designed to provide competency based knowledge and skills among these Divyang Mitra to enhance their ability for rehabilitation of persons with disabilities.

Duration	Eligibility	Mode	Training Contents	Age
06 Months	10 <sup>th</sup> Pass (Min.)	Face to face/ Online	Practical (60%)	Theory (40%) 18 Years (Min.)

**RCI's approved Training Institutes for CBID Training Programme**

1. AYNISHD Mumbai, 2. NIEPMD, Chennai, 3. NIEPID, Secunderabad, 4. SVNIRTAR, Cuttack, 5. NIEPVD, Dehradun, 6. NILD, Kolkata, 7. CRC, Sundernagar, 8. SIRTAR, Rohtak, 9. Aakashna Lions Institute, Raipur, 10. BPA, Ahmedabad, 11. Bethany Society, Shillong, 12. CBM Bengaluru, 13. Holy Cross Service Society, Trichy, 14. HCH, Herbertpur, Dehradun, 15. SNEH, Nagda, MP, 16. Shishu Sarothi, Guwahati, For further details like phone number, e-mail id, website of the above training institutes, candidates are advised to visit Council's website [www.rehabcouncil.nic.in](http://www.rehabcouncil.nic.in).

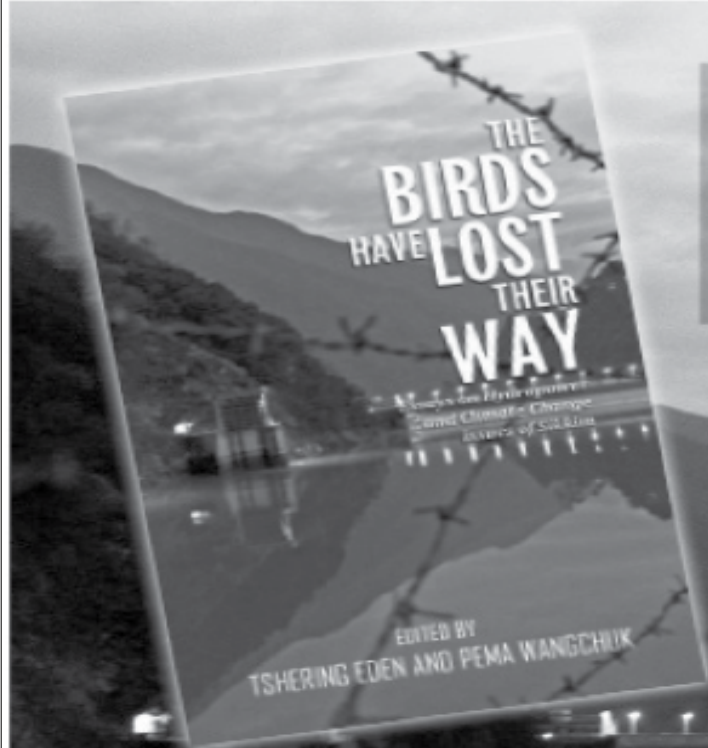
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Salient Features	
No Admission fee, no entrance test, admission will be given on merit basis (Marks obtained at class Xth).	Local candidates having working experience in the community work and persons with disabilities with lived experience.
On successful completion of training followed by examination, the CBID workers will be termed as 'Divyang Mitra'.	Parents/ Siblings of persons with disabilities, Women candidates are encouraged to apply.
Candidates possessing higher qualification will be given preference. Certification by National Board of Examination in Rehabilitation (NBER).	At present this training programme will be conducted in Hindi and English Languages only.
Selected candidates (PwD Candidates Rs. 700/- per month & General Candidates Rs. 500/- per month) will be eligible for stipend, subject to fulfillment of stipulated guidelines. Candidates can opt any three Institutes of their choice in order of preference.	
Interested candidates are advised to visit the Council's website for further details like course details, application form, last date for submission of application form etc. Interested candidates may download the application form from the Council's as well as training institutes website.	
Application form will be available from 27 July, 2021	Last Date for Submission of Applications : 10 August, 2021

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**1<sup>st</sup> BATCH OF CBID TRAINING PROGRAMME WILL BE COMMENCED FROM LAST WEEK OF AUGUST, 2021.**

dovp 38115/11/0003/2122



Eight essays put the spotlight on the journey coursed by hydel projects in Sikkim and the region, the cost exacted by this "development" and some of the stories it birthed, not all of which have been shared before.

Also finding place in this collection is the arrival of Climate Change and its impact on Sikkim and how the State could negotiate with this new disruption.

**THE BIRDS HAVE LOST THEIR WAY**

EDITED BY  
TSHERING EDEN AND PEMA WANGCHUK

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**ESSAYS ON TEESTA, HYDEL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN SIKKIM**



## Government by Discussion

***Side-step consultations, and there will only be disinterest, diktats and protests***

¶ ***Democracy is not just about ballots and votes, but also about public deliberation and reasoning, what - to use an old phrase - is often called ‘government by discussion,’ writes Amartya Sen in “Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny”*** ¶

The book is now nearly fifteen years old, but even when it came out, this was not really a paradigm-shifting revelation. It was an act of stating the obvious, and with that, the Nobel laureate made a strong statement. By devoting an entire chapter to fleshing out this point, he holds up the mirror to the country forcing us to admit that the world’s largest democracy appears to have forgotten what democracy is all about. Democracy has meant politics in India for far too long, leading to the aberration of politicians and political commentators wearing their ignorance on their sleeves, and without the slightest hint of embarrassment, holding forth on important issues and claiming to speak for the people of the country without having made any genuine attempt at consultations. The effortlessness with which false narratives are foisted and incomplete information circulated to influence public opinion is worrying. Also worrying is when important decisions are taken without the counsel of experts or consultations with interested and affected parties. These should have been standard practices, but have become abandoned courtesies which have reduced democracy to elections. It should hence not surprise that politics itself has been reduced to the segregated equation of those in power and those in the Opposition.

And when politics becomes only about being in office or waiting in the wings, debates stop being about ideology and get established by positions. Those in office do what suits their interests and the Opposition protests everything. With vote-banks already identified and appropriated, the focus is only on keeping these secure. A sorry state of affairs... When a writer who also presented a case for the ‘Argumentative Indian’ reminds the same Indians of the need for public deliberations and reasoning, the message should become clear – the nation needs to relearn many things. Amartya Sen’s “The Argumentative Indian” was the highest selling book in India in 2005-06. His next, quoted above, should also have been read more widely, and then, maybe, the nation would have invested in some introspection and that might have saved us from the chagrin of watching the political rhetoric of people’s representatives mouthing empty platitudes on issues which concern the entire nation and its future. Instead of genuine concern, one is being subjected to pompous self-righteousness and embarrassing self-praise.

Let’s reflect on Sikkim. Has anyone heard of public deliberations here? No, claims, denials and rejections do not constitute public deliberation since they are dictated by political positions, not built on informed opinion. And that is why in Sikkim there is rarely consensus, only diktats and protests. It is unfortunate that a people who at one time were so enamoured by the idea of democracy that they took on a 300 year old monarchy and even gave up their individuality as a nation state just so that they could have democracy, have, since then, pulled away from public participation in the public domain. Public deliberation does not mean that the people start debating at formal seminars; it is enough for them to become more involved in the process of democracy and its implementation. With their involvement, they will secure accountability – first at the local body level and from there upwards and across to the executive. Their involvement will force the elected representatives to make the right noises at the right places and times and motivate them to get more involved in the decision-making process themselves.

# What is a Breakthrough Infection?

**SANJAY MISHRA**  
**THECONVERSATION.COM**

If you’ve been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, maybe you figured you no longer need to worry about contracting the coronavirus. But along with the rising number of new COVID-19 cases globally and growing concern about highly transmissible strains like the delta variant come reports of fully vaccinated people testing positive for COVID-19.

Members of the New York Yankees, U.S. Olympic gymnast Kara Eaker and U.K. health secretary Sajid Javid are some of those diagnosed with what is called a “breakthrough infection.”

As scary as the term may sound, the bottom line is that the existing COVID-19 vaccines are still very good at preventing symptomatic infections, and breakthrough infections happen very rarely. But just how common and how dangerous are they? Here’s a guide to what you need to know.

WHAT IS ‘BREAKTHROUGH INFECTION’?

No vaccine is 100% effective. Dr. Jonas Salk’s polio vaccine was 80%-90% effective in preventing paralytic disease. Even for the gold standard measles vaccine, the efficacy was 94% among a highly vaccinated population during large outbreaks.

Comparably, clinical trials found the mRNA vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna were 94%-95% effective at preventing symptomatic COVID-19 – much more protective than initially hoped.

A quick reminder: A vaccine efficacy of 95% does not mean that the shot protects 95% of people while the other 5% will contract the virus. Vaccine efficacy is a measure of relative risk – you need to compare a group of vaccinated people to a group of unvaccinated people under the same exposure conditions. So consider a three-month study period during which 100 out of 10,000 unvaccinated people got COVID-19. You’d expect five vaccinated people to get sick during that same time. That’s 5% of the 100 unvaccinated people who fell ill, not 5% of the whole group of 10,000.

When people get infected after vaccination, scientists call these cases “breakthrough” infections because the virus broke through the protective barrier the vaccine provides.

HOW COMMON IS COVID-19 INFECTION IN THE FULLY VACCINATED?

Breakthrough infections are a

little more frequent than previously expected and are probably increasing because of growing dominance of the delta variant. But infections in vaccinated people are still very rare and usually cause mild or no symptoms.

For instance, 46 U.S. states and territories voluntarily reported 10,262 breakthrough infections to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention between Jan. 1 and April 30, 2021. By comparison, there were 11.8 million COVID-19 diagnoses in total during the same period.

Beginning May 1, 2021, the CDC stopped monitoring vaccine breakthrough cases unless they resulted in hospitalization or death. Through July 19, 2021, there were 5,914 patients with COVID-19 vaccine breakthrough infections who were hospitalized or died in the U.S., out of more than 159 million people fully vaccinated nationwide.

One study between Dec. 15, 2020, and March 31, 2021, that included 258,716 veterans who received two doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, counted 410 who got breakthrough infections – that’s 0.16% of the total. Similarly, a study in New York noted 86 cases of COVID-19 breakthrough infections between Feb. 1 and April 30, 2021, among 126,367 people who were fully vaccinated, mostly with mRNA vaccines. This accounts for 1.2% of total COVID-19 cases and 0.07% of the fully vaccinated population.

HOW SERIOUS IS A COVID-19 BREAKTHROUGH INFECTION?

The CDC defines a vaccine breakthrough infection as one in which a nasal swab can detect the SARS-CoV-2 RNA or protein more than 14 days after a person has completed the full recommended doses of an FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccine.

Note that a breakthrough infection doesn’t necessarily mean the person feels sick – and in fact, 27% of breakthrough cases reported to the CDC were asymptomatic. Only 10% of the breakthrough-infected people were known to be hospitalized (some for reasons other than COVID-19), and 2% died. For comparison, during the spring of 2020 when vaccines were not yet available, over 6% of confirmed infections were fatal.

In a study at U.S. military treatment facilities, none of the breakthrough infections led to hospitalization. In another study,

after just one dose of Pfizer vaccine the vaccinated people who tested positive for COVID-19 had a quarter less virus in their bodies than those who were unvaccinated and tested positive.

WHAT MAKES A BREAKTHROUGH INFECTION MORE LIKELY?

Nationwide, on average more than 5% of COVID-19 tests are coming back positive; in Alabama, Mississippi and Oklahoma, the positivity rate is above 30%. Lots of coronavirus circulating in a community pushes the chance of breakthrough infections higher.

The likelihood is greater in situations of close contact, such as in a cramped working space, party, restaurant or stadium. Breakthrough infections are also more likely among health care workers who are in frequent contact with infected patients.

For reasons that are unclear, nationwide CDC data found that women account for 63% of breakthrough infections. Some smaller studies identified women as the majority of breakthrough cases as well.

Vaccines trigger a less robust immune response among older people, and the chances of a breakthrough infection get higher with increasing age. Among the breakthrough cases tracked by the CDC, 75% occurred in patients age 65 and older.

Being immunocompromised or having underlying conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, chronic kidney and lung diseases and cancer increase the chances of breakthrough infections and can lead to severe COVID-19. For example, fully vaccinated organ transplant recipients were 82 times more likely to get a breakthrough infection and had a 485-fold higher risk of hospitalization and death after a breakthrough infection compared with the vaccinated general population in one study.

HOW DO VARIANTS LIKE DELTA CHANGE THINGS?

Researchers developed today’s vaccines to ward off earlier strains of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Since then new variants have emerged, many of which are better at dodging the antibodies produced by the currently authorized vaccines. While existing vaccines are still very effective against these variants for preventing hospitalization, they are less effective than against previous variants.

Two doses of the mRNA vaccines were only 79% effective at preventing

symptomatic disease with delta, compared with 89% effective in the case of the earlier alpha variant, according to Public Health England. A single dose was only 35% protective against delta.

About 12.5% of the 229,218 delta variant cases across England through July 19 were among fully vaccinated people.

Israel, with high vaccination rates, has reported that full vaccination with the Pfizer vaccine might be only 39%-40.5% effective at preventing delta variant infections of any severity, down from early estimates of 90%. Israel’s findings suggest that within six months, COVID-19 vaccines’ efficacy at preventing infection and symptomatic disease declines. The good news, though, is that the vaccine is still highly effective at protecting against hospitalization (88%) and severe illness (91.4%) caused by the now-dominant delta variant.

SO HOW WELL ARE VACCINES HOLDING UP?

As of the end of July 2021, 49.1% of the U.S. population, or just over 163 million people, are fully vaccinated. Nearly 90% of Americans over the age of 65 have received at least one dose of a vaccine.

Scientists’ models suggest that vaccination may have saved approximately 279,000 lives in the U.S. and prevented up to 1.25 million hospitalizations by the end of June 2021. Similarly, in England about 30,300 deaths, 46,300 hospitalizations and 8.15 million infections may have been prevented by COVID-19 vaccines. In Israel, the high vaccination rate is thought to have caused a 77% drop in cases and a 68% drop in hospitalizations from that nation’s pandemic peak.

Across the U.S., only 150 out of more than 18,000 deaths due to COVID-19 in May were of people who had been fully vaccinated. That means nearly all COVID-19 deaths in U.S. are among those who remain unvaccinated.

The U.S. is becoming “almost like two Americas,” as Anthony Fauci put it, divided between the vaccinated and the unvaccinated. Those who have not been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 remain at risk from the coronavirus that has so far killed more than 600,000 people in the U.S.

*[the writer is Project Coordinator & Staff Scientist, Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Vanderbilt University]*

## Here’s why the CDC recommends wearing masks indoors even if you’ve been fully vaccinated against COVID-19

**PETER CHIN-HONG**  
**THECONVERSATION.COM**

Vaccinated people need to mask up again, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. On July 27, 2021, the CDC recommended that everyone in areas with high COVID-19 infection rates wear masks in public indoor spaces, regardless of vaccination status.

It’s a reversal from the CDC’s May 2021 advice that the fully vaccinated could leave their masks at home and brought U.S. guidelines more in line with World Health Organization recommendations.

WHAT SCIENCE SUPPORTS MASKING AFTER VACCINATION?

Masks help stop the spread of the coronavirus. They’re a literal layer between you and any virus in the air and can help prevent infection.

The reason public health officials are calling for more mask-wearing is that there is clear and mounting evidence that – though rare – breakthrough COVID-19 infections can occur in people who are fully vaccinated. This is particularly true with emerging variants of concern. The good news is that COVID-19 infection, if it does happen, is much less likely to lead to serious illness or death in vaccinated people.

Some conditions make a breakthrough infection more likely in a vaccinated person: more virus circulating in the community, lower vaccination rates and more highly transmissible variants.

If vaccinated people can get infected with the coronavirus, they can also spread it. Hence the CDC recommendation that vaccinated people remain masked in indoor public spaces to help stop viral transmission.

WHERE WILL THE GUIDELINES APPLY?

The CDC mask recommendation targets areas in the U.S. with more than 50 new infections per 100,000 residents or that had more than 8% of tests come back positive during the previous week. By the CDC’s own definitions “substantial” community transmission is 50 to 99 cases of infection per 100,000 people per week, and “high” is 100 or more.

Los Angeles County, for example, far surpassed that mark in mid-July, with more than 10,000 coronavirus cases per week.

Using these criteria, the CDC guidance applied to 63% of U.S. counties on the day it was announced.

WHO’S ACTUALLY PROTECTED BY MASKING RECOMMENDATIONS?

The recommendation that fully vaccinated people continue wearing masks is primarily intended to protect the unvaccinated – which includes kids under age 12 who are not yet eligible for vaccines in the U.S. The CDC further recommends masking in public for vaccinated people with unvaccinated household members, regardless of local community transmission rates.

Unvaccinated people are at a substantially higher risk of getting infected with and transmitting SARS-CoV-2, and of developing complications from COVID-19.

HOW DO NEW VARIANTS LIKE DELTA CHANGE THINGS?

Preliminary data suggests that the rise of variants like delta may increase the chance of breakthrough infections in people who received only their first vaccine dose. For instance, one study found that a single dose of the Pfizer vaccine had an effectiveness of just 34% against the delta variant, compared with 51% against the older alpha variant in terms of warding off symptomatic disease.

The data is more reassuring for those who have been fully vaccinated. After two doses, the Pfizer vaccine still provides strong protection against the delta variant, according to real-world data from Scotland and a variety of other countries; and in preliminary studies out of Canada and England, researchers noted only a “modest” decrease in effectiveness against symptomatic disease, from 93% for the alpha variant to 88% for delta.

Other recent preliminary reports from highly vaccinated countries like Israel and Singapore are sobering, however. Before the delta variant became widespread, from January to April 2021, Israel reported that the Pfizer vaccine was 97% effective in preventing symptomatic disease. Since June 20, 2021, with the delta variant circulating more widely, the Pfizer vaccine has been only 41% effective in preventing symptomatic disease, according to preliminary data reported by Israel’s Ministry of Health in late July. An analysis using government data from Singapore demonstrated that 75% of recent COVID-19 infections were in people who were at least partially vaccinated – though most of them were not severely ill.

In all reports and studies, however, vaccines

remain very good at preventing hospitalizations and severe disease due to the delta variant – arguably the outcomes we most care about.

All of this emerging data supports the WHO’s global recommendation that even fully vaccinated individuals continue to wear masks. Most of the world still has low vaccination rates and uses a range of vaccines with variable efficacies, and countries have different burdens of circulating SARS-CoV-2 virus.

With U.S. case counts and breakthrough infection numbers headed in what public health officials consider the wrong direction, it makes sense that the CDC would modify its masking recommendations to be more conservative.

WHAT CONDITIONS WARRANT MASKING UP (AGAIN)?

It makes sense that the CDC didn’t immediately change its recommendations to fall in line with the WHO’s June guidelines. With an overall high countrywide vaccination rate and a low overall COVID-19 hospitalization and death burden, the U.S. has a COVID-19 landscape very different from that in most of the world.

Additionally, some experts worried that an official message that the vaccinated should don masks might dissuade unvaccinated individuals from seeking vaccines.

But as President Joe Biden put it on July 27, “new research and concerns about the delta variant” are behind the CDC’s change in masking recommendations.

Some locations are seeing further increase in community transmission, even among vaccinated people. New preliminary research yet to be peer reviewed suggests the delta variant is associated with a viral load a thousand times higher in patients than seen with older strains. And early reports show infected vaccinated people with the delta variant can carry just as high an amount of virus as the unvaccinated that they can in turn spread to others.

The shifting recommendations don’t mean that the old ones were wrong, necessarily, only that conditions have changed. The bottom line? Masks do help cut down on coronavirus transmission, but it’s still vaccines that offer the best protection.

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# Nagaland "King Chilli" Exported To London. Minister Recalls Market Visit

**NEW DELHI, 29 JUL [NDTV]:** Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said that the "king of chillies" from Nagaland, also known as the Bhoot Jolokia (ghost pepper), has been exported to the United Kingdom via Guwahati by air for the first time. Sharing images of the fiery chillies, also known as "Raja Mircha", the Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs recalled his visit to a vegetable market in Meghalaya with his wife and former diplomat Lakshmi Puri in August 2019 when they had a "brush" with the chillies at a local shop. The export has come as a major boost to the trade of products with Geographical Indications (GI) from the north-eastern region.



The images shared by him showed the Union minister and his wife walking down a vegetable market and buying the chillies. In 2008, Bhoot Jolokia got its GI certification, an intellectual property right that safeguards the creation and sale of a product originating in

distinct geography and culture. The Press Information Bureau said in a statement that the Bhoot Jolokia is considered the world's hottest chilli based on the Scoville Heat Units (SHU). The amount of capsaicin (a chemical compound) present in

peppers is checked with the help of the Scoville scale. Capsaicin is responsible for making the tongue burn, body sweat and ears turn red. The consignment exported to London was sourced from Tening area in Peren district of Nagaland and was packed in Guwahati for

its onward journey. Exporting fresh chillies posed a challenge because of their highly perishable nature. So, APEDA, the apex body which promotes the export of agricultural products from the country, collaborated with the Nagaland State Agricultural Marketing Board to ensure the product reaches its destination without any problem. APEDA said it would continue to focus on the north-eastern region to bring it on the export map. In 2021, it facilitated exports of Lemon of Assam to London, Assam red rice to the United States, Leteku 'Burmese Grape' to Dubai, jackfruits from Tripura to Germany and London

## No proposal to grant full statehood to Lakshadweep: Centre

**NEW DELHI, 29 JUL [PTI]:** There is no proposal for granting full statehood to the Union Territory of Lakshadweep, the government informed Parliament Wednesday. Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai said this in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha. He was asked if the government has considered granting full statehood to Lakshadweep and what steps was it taking to increase the participation of the people of Lakshadweep

in the democratic process. "No such proposal for full statehood for the Union Territory of Lakshadweep is under consideration," the minister stated. A d e q u a t e i n s t i t u t i o n a l arrangements exist for the expression of the democratic aspirations of the people in thinly populated union territories such as Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, he

said. "People residing in the UTs elect their Members of Parliament to the Lok Sabha," Mr Rai stated. He further added in his reply that Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu also have "a robust two tier panchayati raj system with village and district panchayat bodies, through which people's participation in the democratic process is ensured".

## 23 members of Prashant Kishor's firm, on visit to Tripura, get bail

**AGARTALA, 29 JUL [NDTV]:** All 23 members of poll strategist Prashant Kishor's IPAC (Indian Political Action Committee), in Tripura on assignment for Mamata Banerjee, have been granted pre-arrest bail without conditions as some of them face allegations of violating Covid rules. A few members of IPAC have been summoned by the police on August 1. They have been served notice under a section of criminal law that leaves them open to arrest. On Tuesday, the entire team complained of being confined to their hotel by the police. The IPAC team is in Tripura's Agartala to carry out surveys for

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress in the BJP-ruled state where elections are due in 2023. There is heavy presence of the Tripura police in and outside the hotel. The police yesterday did not allow anyone from the IPAC team to leave the premises, sources in the organisation told NDTV. "The outsiders - around 22 people - were roaming around in various places. Since Covid restrictions are in place, we are inquiring to verify the reasons behind their arrival and stay in the city. They all underwent Covid tests on Monday, the reports are awaited," Manik Das, Superintendent of Police,

West Tripura, was quoted as saying by news agency Press Trust of India. The results of their (IPAC members') RTPCR test are expected today, he said. Ms Banerjee has dispatched a team of Trinamool Congress ministers to Agartala to meet with the team. The ministers are Bratya Bose and Moloy Ghatak. The Chief Minister's Nephew Abhishek Banerjee and Derek O'Brien also headed to Agartala. "Khela has started in Tripura," Bratya Bose had said yesterday, referring to his party's popular election slogan "Khela Hobey (Game On)". "These IPAC members are Bengal residents and worked with the TMC in polls," Mr Bose said.

## Arunachal logs 342 new COVID-19 cases, 3 more fatalities

**Itanagar, Jul 29 (PTI):** Arunachal Pradesh on Thursday reported 342 new COVID-19 cases, which took the tally in the northeastern state to 47,142, a health department official said. The death toll rose to 224 as three more coronavirus-positive patients died while undergoing treatment in hospitals in the last two days, and they had comorbidities, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Dr Lobsang Jampa said. A 72-year-old woman from the Capital Complex Region died at a hospital in Chimpu on Wednesday due to acute respiratory distress syndrome with COVID Pneumonia, he said. Another woman, aged 40, from Lohit district had tested positive for COVID-19 and died at a health facility in Pasighat in East Siang district on Tuesday, the official said, adding that she had a kidney-related problem.



A 65-year-old COVID patient from Changlang breathed his last on the way to a hospital in Assam's Tinsukia district on Tuesday and he was suffering from acute respiratory distress syndrome, Jampa said. The Capital Complex Region registered the highest number of fresh cases at 109, followed

by Lower Subansiri (48), East Siang (23), West Kameng (22), Papumpare (14) and Lohit, Upper Subansiri and Lower Dibang Valley (13 each). The remaining new cases were reported from several other districts. At least 320 fresh cases were detected through rapid antigen

test, 13 through RT-PCR and nine through TrueNat method, the SSO said, adding that 137 people have symptoms of COVID-19. According to the official, 325 patients were cured of the disease on Wednesday, taking the total number of recoveries in the state to 42,617. The recovery rate

among coronavirus patients in the state currently stands at 90.37 per cent. Arunachal Pradesh now has 4,301 active cases, he said. The Capital Complex Region - comprising Itanagar, Naharlagun, Nirjuli and Banderdewa areas - has the highest number of active cases at 1,135, followed by Lower Subansiri (326), Papumpare (316), Lohit (313), West Kameng (265) and East Siang (231). Altogether, 9,21,482 samples have been tested for COVID-19 in the state so far, including 6,647 on Wednesday, and the positivity rate stands at 5.14 per cent, Jampa said. State Immunisation Officer Dr Dimong Padung said that 8,41,256 people have been administered doses of COVID-19 vaccines since the beginning of the inoculation drive in January.

# BJP backs out, Jawahar Sircar to be elected unopposed to Rajya Sabha

**New Delhi, 29 Jul [NDTV]:** The BJP will not contest the bypoll to a Rajya Sabha seat from Bengal, meaning the ruling Trinamool Congress' pick - ex-Prasad Bharti CEO Jawhar Sircar - will be elected unopposed. The seat fell vacant after Trinamool leader Dinesh Trivedi resigned to join the BJP ahead of the April-May election. "Today is the last date for nomination of Rajya Sabha bypoll in West Bengal. BJP is not putting up any candidate for this seat. Outcome of the poll is defined and known to all... Our fight against this irrational government will continue," the BJP's Suvendu Adhikari tweeted. Jawhar Sircar filed his nomination papers last week in the presence of the Trinamool's Secretary General, Partha Chatterjee. Mr Sircar thanked the party for placing confidence in him. "I will try to meet their confidence in me... I have been greatly touched

by the fighting spirit of Mamata Banerjee in the Assembly polls," he was quoted by news agency PTI. The party has said it picked Mr Sircar for his "invaluable contribution to public service". "Mamata Banerjee's victory (in the election) in the face of a vicious campaign and personal attacks proved that the more BJP attacks, the greater will be the fightback," Mr Chatterjee was quoted by PTI. The senior Trinamool leader also slammed the BJP over controversial allegations that police stopped members of poll strategist Prashant Kishor's IPAC from leaving their hotel in Tripura's Agartala. "The reaction of the BJP in Tripura to the visit of Prashant Kishor's team showed they (the BJP) are scared," Mr Chatterjee claimed. Mr Kishor helped mastermind Ms Banerjee's Assembly election win and has since been speaking to the Gandhi family and the



Congress ahead of crucial polls in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh next year. Jawhar Sircar, who spent over four decades in public service, made headlines after accusing Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Shah of not following

constitutional norms and provisions. He resigned from Prasar Bharati in 2016, four months before his scheduled retirement. "I have been a bureaucrat all my life... I am not a political person. But I will definitely work for the people and

raise issues concerning them," he had said when his nomination was announced. The Rajya Sabha bypoll was scheduled for August 9, but with the BJP now not contesting, Mr Sircar's election to parliament is now a formality.

## After over 4 months, Bihar Assembly debates manhandling of MLAs by police

**PATNA, 29 JUL [PTI]:** Sparks flew inside the Bihar assembly on Wednesday when a debate was held on the infamous police action during the budget session which involved manhandling and physical eviction of many opposition MLAs after an unprecedented disruption. The decision to hold a debate on the issue was taken after a meeting of the Business Advisory Committee convened by Speaker Vijay Kumar Sinha who had been held hostage inside his chamber by the opposition legislators on the fateful day, following which police was called as the marshals were found unequal to the task. The decision to conduct debate smoothed ruffled feathers of the opposition which had announced to boycott rest of the monsoon session if the issue was not discussed. The brief monsoon session of the Bihar bicameral legislature that started on July 26 will end on July 30. The debate on the incidents of March 23, termed as a "murder of democracy" by the opposition, began at around 4 pm and continued for more than an hour till the day's proceedings came to a close. Leader of the Opposition Tejashwi Yadav was, predictably, all fire and brimstone as he sought to squarely blame the Nitish Kumar government for the ill-treatment of opposition legislators at the hands of the police.

"Two constables have been suspended in connection with the incident, we are told. Can a mere constable dare to touch an MLA inside the House without orders from the above? I demand strongest possible action against those at whose instance our fellow members were kicked with boots and women were pulled by their hair and saris", Mr Yadav, the younger son of RJD chief Lalu Yadav, said. "I am told you have set up a committee to take action against MLAs who might have behaved inappropriately. If punishment is unavoidable, I offer myself. Take whatever action you want against me on behalf of my fellow members", said the 32-year-old with rhetorical flourish, asserting repeatedly that he was fighting for the "honour" of the legislators which was under attack from a high-handed bureaucracy. He pointed out that the Special Armed Forces Bill, which had led to the ruckus in March, was being opposed so vehemently "just because it was giving sweeping powers to the police. And, as we have seen in case of prohibition law in the state, the sufferers are always the poor". "Our fears of misuse of powers by the police were not unfounded. Only recently the Supreme Court has remarked that rule of the police seems to have replaced rule of law in Bihar.... so many bills have been introduced before and after that day. Never did it lead to such anxieties on part of

the opposition", said Mr Yadav. The government's reply came from P a r l i a m e n t a r y Affairs Minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, n o t w i t h s t a n d i n g repeated demands from many opposition members that a statement be made on the issue by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar himself. Mr Chaudhary underscored that as a former Speaker himself, he was aware of the powers and responsibilities vested in the Chair and that "the government did not have and cannot have any say in anything that takes place inside the premises of assembly". Defending the summoning of police, Mr Chaudhary said that he had a first hand impression of the gravity of the situation since "I too was locked up" inside the speaker's chamber when Mr Sinha was being thwarted by an irate opposition from reaching the House. The minister also chuckled at Mr Yadav's declamation that he was ready to be punished on behalf of other legislators. "Is it even permissible under rules? It is another thing that in a fit of passion the Leader of the Opposition went to the extent of saying that rules must be dumped (if these failed to safeguard the members' honour). "But I wonder why is there so much of anxiety. The opposition seems intact under his leadership", said Mr Chaudhary with a wry smile.



## Expected to play with Deepika in mixed team: Das

**TOKYO, JUL 29 (PTI):** Indian archer Atanu Das on Thursday expressed his disappointment for being denied the chance to play the mixed team event with his world no 1 wife Deepika Kumari, whom he credited for his stunning win over two-time Olympic champion Oh Jin Hyek here.

A week after their mixed team partnership was split up, the duo's bonding was well evident during Das' upset last-32 win over Oh Jin Hyek, who had won the men's team gold here.

Deepika was seen shouting from the gallery to cheer her husband who came from being 2-4 down to win in the shootoff.

The duo thus remains the only Indian archers in medal fray, advancing to their respective pre-quarter finals.

"I was listening to her full time. She was pushing me: 'believe in myself', 'you can do it', 'just stay calm and handle the situation'," Das said in the mixed zone after his 6-5 (10-9) win.

"She is world number one and I'm privileged to have my wife in this competition. It was a great support and motivation for me."

Das was denied a chance to recreate his chemistry with Deepika in the mixed pair section after he slipped four places behind Olympian debutant Pravin Jadhav, who stood 31st in the ranking round.

The Indian think tank went by the rankings, ignoring the star couple's gold medal feat at the Paris World Cup, less than a month back.

The duo of Jadhav and Deepika, pairing up for the first time, made a quarterfinal exit going down to their Korean rivals.

"I expected to play with her in the mixed team but unfortunately it was not possible. I don't know why...," Das said.

"But it's quite satisfying (as we both are in the last-16). We are giving our best. Let's see what happens."

He next faces home favourite Takaharu Furukawa, an individual silver medalist at London 2012 and a team bronze medalist here.

Das and Deepika, who tied the knot in June last year following a two-year courtship, are the first Indian couple to take part in the same discipline in the Olympic Games.

Asked whether they stay together at the Games Village, he said: "I stay with the men's team. She stays separately in the Village, but most of the time we are together."

"Please pray for us, please encourage us. We need your support and hopefully we'll come out with the flying colours," Das concluded.

# Das knocks out Olympic champion in Tokyo, joins wife Deepika in last-16

**TOKYO, JUL 29 (PTI):** Indian archer Atanu Das on Thursday proved a point by knocking out two-time Olympic champion Oh Jin Hyek to join his wife Deepika Kumari in individual pre-quarterfinals of the Tokyo Olympics.

Das, who had lost his place to rookie Pravin Jadhav in the fancied mixed team event after slipping to 35th place in the ranking round on Friday, showed nerves of steel to edge out the legendary Korean in a one-arrow shoot-off. The individual Olympic champion from London 2012 and a team gold medalist here, Oh started the shoot-off with a 9 as Das delivered a perfect 10, hitting the bull's eye to seal the issue 6-5 (10-9) in an extraordinary fashion.

Earlier in the day, Das saw off a tough challenge from Chinese Taipei's Deng Yu-Cheng to win 6-4 from being locked 4-4.

Chasing India's first ever Olympic medal in archery, Deepika and Das, who are the first Indian couple to take part in the same discipline in the Games, are the only two Indians left in fray.

Deepika has been pitted against Russian world no 8 Ksenia Perova, a team silver medalist at



Rio 2016 and a former world champion in her pre-quarters on Friday, while Das will face home favourite Takaharu Furukawa, an individual silver medalist at London Olympics and a team bronze winner here in the last-16 clash on Saturday.

The mixed team and men's team had made quarterfinal exits on Saturday, while the Army duo of Tarundeep Rai and Pravin Jadhav lost out in their respective last-32 matches on Wednesday.

Returning to action a week after the 'break up' with Deepika Kumari for the mixed pair event, Das showed amazing resilience as he bounced back from being 2-4 down to edge out the 39-year-old Korean great by the thinnest of margins.

Incidentally, Das had beaten Oh earlier too in the shoot-off for a bronze medal in the Asian Championships in Bangkok in 2019.

But dealing with the utmost pressure and to win at the biggest stage of the Olympics was something "more special".

"Yahan pe dimaag chala raha tha, dil nahin. (Obviously there was a lot of pressure but I just tried to maintain my focus and didn't listen to my heart)," Das said after the win.

"We all know he is an Olympic champion and how great he's... Every match in the Olympics is like a final, so it feels more special."

On his 2019 match-up, Das said: "It was quite a tense moment, I just maintained my nerves. It was about handling the

situation better in that particular moment.

"I came to know that he is going to shoot first and he delivered a 9... I knew I've to either shoot a 10 or go out of the competition. I gave it a shot and won the match."

The dramatic finish saw both players tying three sets in an intense five-setter to force a shoot-off.

Oh, who was the first-ever Korean to win the individual Olympic gold medal in 2012, struggled to find a 10 in the first set but Das also had a slow start as the heavyweight archer took the first set by one-point margin (25-26).

Oh, the oldest-ever Olympic gold medallist in archery, finally found the 10-ring in his fourth arrow but only to hit in the red circle in his final arrow as a consistent Das

levelled the game (27-all) shooting three 9s.

Trailing 1-3, Das once again shot three 9s as the third set panned out in a similar fashion with both tying it 27-all for an overall 2-4 lead to the Korean giant, who delayed retirement to come back and compete in Tokyo.

Desperate to win a set for a turnaround, the Indian finally found a 10 after 11 arrows as Oh had his worst set, misfiring 7 and 6 in the last two arrows to concede the fourth set to the Indian 27-22 for an overall score of 4-4.

The decider also went down the wire as both shot an identical 10-9-9 to force a one-arrow shoot-off where the third seed Korean took on the target first.

The sequence of the shoot-off follows the sequence of the start of the match, something that was chosen by the higher seed player.

Earlier, Das had a thrilling first round match as he was tied 4-4 against Deng Yu-Cheng.

In the decider too, Das and Deng were going neck-and-neck till 19-all but the archer from Chinese Taipei crumbled under pressure, misfiring a 7 as Das held his nerve to drill in a 9 in the yellow-ring.

## Solid start by Lahiri in Tokyo as top stars Thomas, Matsuyama trail

**TOKYO, JUL 29 (PTI):** Playing in his second Olympics, India's Anirban Lahiri got off to a solid start, carding a 4-under 67 in the first round to be placed tied sixth at the weather-hit Tokyo Games golf competition at the Kasumigaseki Country Club here on Thursday.

The former Asian Tour No. 1 struck six birdies against two bogeys in a field in which many players were yet to finish their rounds because of a lightning storm at the venue.

The other Indian, Udayan Mane, who made the field of 60 at a late stage, also had a fine start and he was 1-under through 10 holes. He was T-30 though his position will change as the round ends.

The field was led by Austrian Sepp Straka, who came into the Games after six missed cuts in last seven starts.

He equalled an Olympic record of 8-under 63. Straka lipped out his birdie attempt on the 18th that would have created a new record.

Straka, ranked 161st in the world, equalled the record set by Matt Kuchar (US) and Marcus Fraser of Australia, who shot 63 in the 2016 Rio Games when golf returned to the Olympics for the first time in more than a century.

Belgium's Thomas Pieters and Mexican Carlos Ortiz shot 6-under 65 each, while Thailand's Jazz Janewattananond was also 6-under with three holes left when play was stopped due to dangerous weather in the area.

Lahiri, coming off a third place in Barbasol Championships on the PGA Tour, was happy with the start.

"It was good. I started off a little dodgy first

few holes, couldn't get my rhythm going early. But then I settled down nicely. I probably feel like I could have taken some more chances, some opportunities on the back nine I didn't make as many birdies as I could have.

"But I'm playing well, so I have to build on this and as you can see already there's a lot of opportunities if it keeps playing like this, soft, there's not much rain today, then you have to go out there and just really be aggressive and make a lot of putts."

Lahiri managed good practice too, which helped him on day one of the competition.

"I got a full 36 in, nine every day the four days leading up to the event, so I felt pretty comfortable on the golf course. Obviously the tournament setup's going to be a little different but I feel like it wasn't as hard as they could make it."

"Today we barely had any wind, so a good day to go out and take advantage. The greens are beautiful, they're perfect, they're rolling great, golf course is immaculate," he said.

Lahiri shrugged off a bogey start on the first by later sinking some huge putts. Two of his birdies on the ninth and 15th came from 28 feet.

He had a superb run of four birdies in five holes from fifth to ninth. Then he had back-to-back birdies on the 15th and 16th and closed with two pars. His dropped shots came on first and 12th.

Among the world stars, who did not have a great start, former World No. 1 Justin Thomas started with an even-par 71, while 2021 Masters champion Hideki Matsuyama shot 2-under 69.

## Take your time, you owe explanation to no one: Shastri on Simone Biles' withdrawal from Olympics

**LONDON, JUL 29 (PTI):** "Take your time, Simone Biles. You owe explanation to no one," said Indian cricket team's chief coach Ravi Shastri as he lent his support to the multiple Olympic medallist American gymnast after she pulled out of the team and all-round individual events at the Tokyo Games citing mental health concerns. The 24-year-old Biles, one of the most

decorated gymnast of all times, had withdrawn from the women's team final on Tuesday and all-around final on Wednesday to focus on her mental health.

"Take your time @Simone\_Biles. You have earned the right to owe it to yourself at this tender age. 48 hours or 48 days it might take. Just do it Champion. You owe no explanation to no one. @naomiosaka,

you too. God bless you girls #Olympics," Shastri wrote on his twitter handle.

In his comments, Shastri, who is currently in UK with the Indian team for next month's Test series against England, also referred to star Japanese tennis player Naomi Osaka, who had mentioned about the mental toll of her profession as the reason for her third round exit at the

Olympics.

A five-time World all-around champion, Biles, who had won four individual gold medals in Rio Olympics, had brought the spotlight back on mental health after she decided to withdraw.

"I have to do what's right for me and focus

on my mental health and not jeopardise my health and my wellbeing," she had said.

Following her decision, Biles received support from different corners of the world with fans and celebrities in different fields taking to social media to express themselves.

## Indian sailors continue to languish at bottom in Tokyo Olympics



**ENOSHIMA, JUL 29 (PTI):** Indian sailing pair of KC Ganapathy and Varun Thakkar finished a creditable seventh in one of the two races in men's skiff 49er but still languished at 17th position overall at the Tokyo Olympics here on Thursday.

Ganapathy and Thakkar ended at 16th in Race 5 before pulling off a seventh-place finish in the next to occupy 17th place out of 19

competitors with 76 net points.

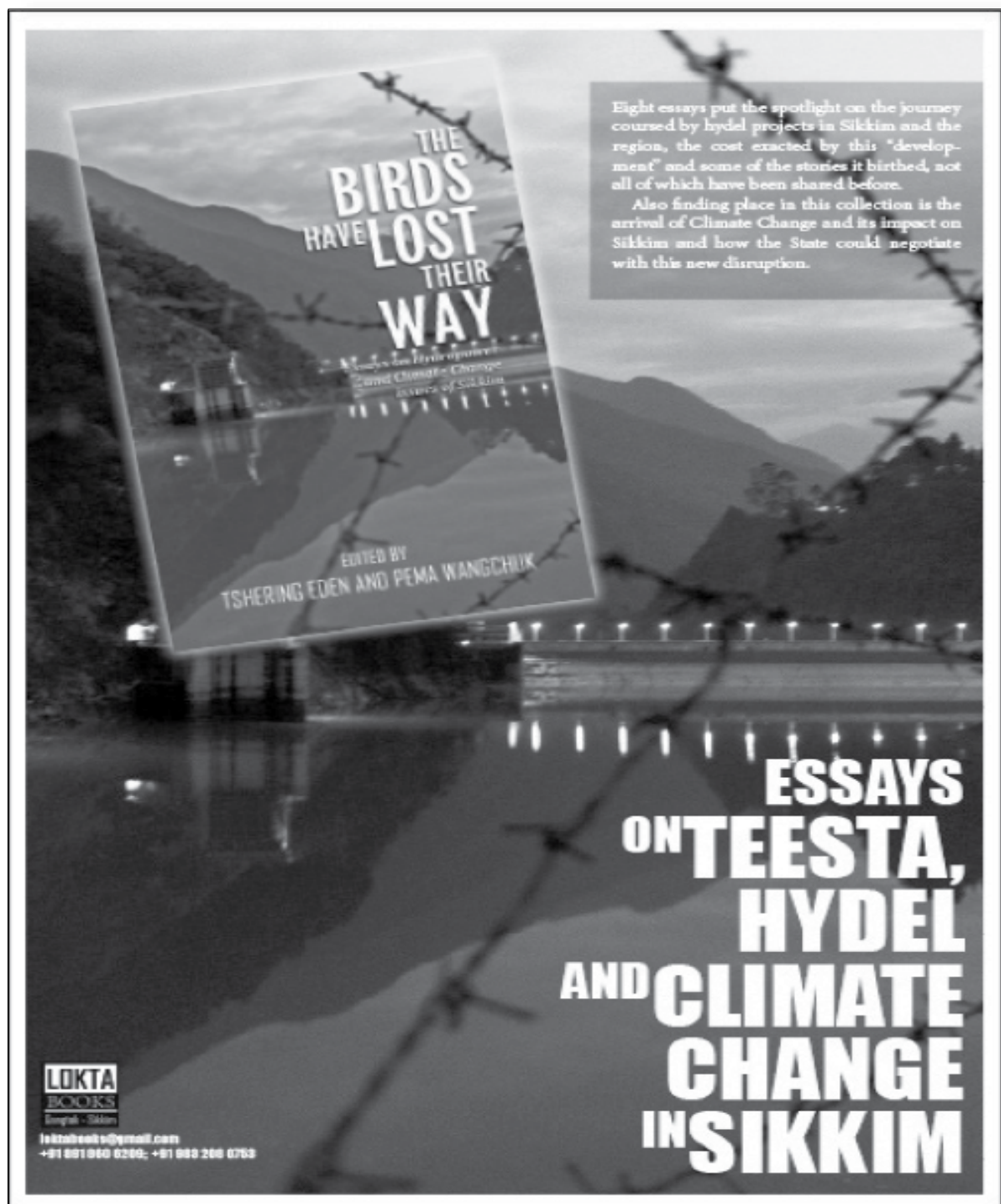
Six races and medal round still remain in the competition at Enoshima Yacht Harbour.

Another Indian, Vishnu Saravanan was at 23rd position overall out of 35 sailors in the laser event with 138 net points after finishing 27th and 23rd in Race 7 and 8 on Thursday.

Two more races and medal round remain in the event.

Nethra Kumanan also continued her disappointing form as she was placed 31st with 176 net points out of 44 sailors in the women's laser radial after finishing 22nd and 20th in the seventh and eighth races.

Each event consists of a series of races. Points in each race are awarded according to position: the winner gets one point, the second-placed finisher scores two and so on.





# Europe on vacation, but vaccinations not taking a break

**CARRY-LE-ROUET, FRANCE (AP):** Europe’s famed summer holiday season is in full swing, but efforts to inoculate people against the coronavirus are not taking a break. Instead, with lockdowns easing despite concerns about variants and nations looking to breathe new life into their ailing tourism industries, vaccinations are being taken to vacationers. It’s all part of an effort to maintain momentum in campaigns to protect against the pandemic that has killed more than 1 million across the continent, including in the European Union, the United Kingdom and Russia.

From France’s sun-kissed Mediterranean coast to the azure waters of Italy’s Adriatic beaches and Russian Black Sea resorts, health authorities are trying to make a COVID-19 shot as much part of this summer as sunscreen and shades for those who are not yet fully vaccinated.

The new drive to take shots to tourists is a way of adapting to Europe’s annual summer migration, when it seems whole cities empty of their residents for weeks. Those long absences from home pose a particular challenge for many nations European, where public health systems often focus on delivering vaccines to people based on where they live.

In Britain, where 70% of adults already are fully vaccinated, campaigns now are aimed at the younger generations



with walk-in pop-up clinics in parks, a recent event complete with DJ at the Tate Modern museum and shots on offer to music lovers at the Latitude Festival.

Mickael Bomard, from Le Plessis-Robinson in the Paris region, recently took his 15-year-old son Nolan to a squat building just meters (yards) from the gently lapping waves of the Mediterranean at Carry-le-Rouet, a popular holiday spot near the port city of Marseille.

“Given the measures that are being taken now and the obligations when school starts again in September, we have decided to get him vaccinated,” Bomard said.

The vaccination center is giving shots to about 200 people each day — vacationers and locals — says Agnes Gatto, a nurse who runs the facility.

In France, where resistance to the vaccine has been particularly stubborn, a new rule came into effect last week that forces those who

want to visit public sites ranging from cinemas to casinos to the Eiffel Tower to get a pass that shows they are either fully vaccinated, have tested negative for the coronavirus or recovered from COVID-19. The measure will be extended to restaurants and cafes from next month. That’s part of the reason more people are leaving the sand for a shot in the arm.

It was enough to push Bomard to take Nolan: “Not being able to go out for dinner together with the family, go to restaurants, and maybe having to find at the last minute an appointment in a packed vaccination center in September in order for him to go to middle school.”

After a slow start to vaccinations, 57% of adults in the European Union are now fully vaccinated against COVID-19, the bloc’s executive says.

Even so, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is warning against

complacency given the well-established presence in Europe of the highly contagious delta variant.

She recently said that the “variant is very dangerous. I therefore call on everyone — who has the opportunity — to be vaccinated. For their own health and to protect others.”

To that end, flexible vaccination initiatives are cropping up across Europe.

In Italy, a vaccination van is set to start circulating in the popular Adriatic Sea destination Rimini this weekend, following a similar mobile campaign at Lazio’s beaches, where many Romans have second homes. At Rome’s main airport, meanwhile, authorities opened a vaccination area this week where any traveler passing through can get a vaccine just before departure.

Still, some have complained of difficulties of getting vaccines outside of their home regions. Milan

residents on vacation along the Ligurian coast have not been able to get a second shot, Corriere della Sera daily reported, for instance. But Liguria’s regional governor, Giovanni Toti, said the bureaucratic bug responsible could be ironed out in days.

In Russia, which is struggling with widespread vaccine skepticism, the popular southern vacation destination of Krasnodar, a region home to the renowned Black Sea resort of Sochi, is trying to persuade the hesitant: Starting Aug. 1, it will only let visitors into hotels and spas if they have a negative coronavirus test or a vaccination certificate. Tourists with a negative test will be required to get vaccinated locally within three days of arrival.

“We will provide the vaccine,” Krasnodar Gov. Veniamin Kondratyev said.

In France, the pandemic pass appears to be having the desired effect of pushing some people skeptical of COVID-19 vaccines to get the shot anyway.

“I wasn’t really in favor of the vaccine because I’m young. I haven’t settled yet, I have no children, etc. so I’m a bit afraid of the long-term side effects,” said 24-year-old Carry-le-Rouet resident Noemie Cienzo. “But now, with the PCR tests we have to do every time we want to go out, I think I will (get vaccinated) otherwise it will become complicated.”

## Floods make thousands homeless in Bangladesh Rohingya camps



**DHAKA, BANGLADESH (AP):** Days of heavy rainfall have pelted Rohingya refugee camps in southern Bangladesh, destroying dwellings and sending thousands of people to live with extended family or in communal shelters.

Just in the 24 hours to Wednesday alone, more than 30 centimeters (11.8 inches) of rain fell on the camps in Cox’s Bazar district hosting more than 800,000 Rohingya, the U.N. refugee agency said. That’s nearly half the average July rainfall in one day while more heavy downpours are expected in the next few days and the monsoon season stretches over the next three months.

“The situation is further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is currently a strict national lockdown in response to rising cases across the country,” the agency said.

The agency said it was saddened by the deaths of six people at the camps earlier this week, five in a landslide caused by the rains and a child swept

away by floodwaters.

Citing initial reports, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees said more than 12,000 refugees were affected by the heavy rainfall while an estimated 2,500 shelters have been damaged or destroyed. More than 5,000 refugees have temporarily been relocated to other family member’s shelters or communal facilities, the agency said in a statement.

Refugees said they were struggling to eat or drink properly.

“Due to the continuous rainfall for the last four days, today my house is full of water,” says Khatija Begum, who has five children. “We are not even able to eat.” Begum says she fears her children will drown and die in their sleep.

Cyclones, heavy monsoon rains, floods, landslides and other natural hazards are an annual difficulty in the camps. More than 700,000 Rohingya have lived in refugee camps

in Bangladesh since August 2017, when the military in Buddhist-majority Myanmar began a harsh crackdown on the Muslim ethnic group following an attack by insurgents.

The crackdown included rapes, killings and the torching of thousands of homes, and was termed ethnic cleansing by global rights groups and the United Nations. While Bangladesh and Myanmar have sought to arrange repatriations, the Rohingya are too fearful to return home.

The International Organization for Migration says Cox’s Bazar district, where more than 1 million Rohingya refugees live, is one of the most disaster-prone parts of Bangladesh.

It is a delta nation crisscrossed by many rivers that gets intense rainfall regularly due to its monsoon climate and location on the Bay of Bengal, where the warm waters can generate destructive tropical cyclones.

## German jobless rate down in July as recovery rolls on

**BERLIN (AP):** Germany’s unemployment rate dipped to 5.6% in July, an unusual decline for the summer month as Europe’s biggest economy showed more signs of recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, official data showed Thursday.

The unadjusted jobless rate, the headline figure in Germany, was down from 5.7% in June. The Federal Labor Agency said the number of people registered as unemployed stood at 2.59 million - 24,000 fewer than the previous month and 320,000 fewer than a year earlier. The agency said it was the first July month-on-month decline since

2006.

In seasonally adjusted terms, the unemployment rate was down to 5.7% from 5.9% the previous month. That was better than economists’ forecast of 5.8%.

COVID-19 cases are rising gradually from a very low level in Germany. Although authorities are wary of the potential impact of the more contagious delta variant, they haven’t seen a need to reinstate the many pandemic restrictions that have been dropped.

Rises in unemployment in Germany and elsewhere in Europe have been moderate by

international standards during the pandemic. That is because employers made heavy use of salary support programs, often referred to as furlough schemes, which allow them to keep employees on the payroll while they await better times.

In Germany, the Federal Labor Agency pays at least 60% of the salary of employees who are on reduced or zero hours.

The labor agency said it paid support for 2.23 million people in May, the most recent month for which it had estimates. That was down from 2.47 million in April and far below a peak of nearly 6 million in April 2020.

# Thailand sets up hospital at airport; Cambodia closes border

**BANGKOK, THAILAND (AP):** Health authorities in Thailand raced to set up a large field hospital in a cargo building at one of Bangkok’s airports on Thursday as the country reported record numbers of coronavirus cases and deaths.

Other field hospitals are already in use in the capital after it ran out of hospital facilities for thousands of infected residents.

Workers rushed to finish the 1,800-bed hospital at Don Mueang International Airport, where beds made from cardboard box materials were laid out with mattresses and pillows. It is to be ready for patients in two weeks.

The airport, a domestic and regional hub, has had little use because almost all domestic flights were canceled two weeks ago.

The quick spread of the delta variant also led neighboring Cambodia to seal its border with Thailand on Thursday and order a lockdown and movement restrictions in eight provinces.

Thailand reported 17,669 new cases and 165 deaths on Thursday, its highest number since the pandemic began in early 2020.



Of those, 7,875 cases and 127 deaths were in metropolitan Bangkok, a region of nearly 15 million people.

Bangkok and its surrounding provinces have been in lockdown for more than two weeks, with overnight curfews and access only to supermarkets, pharmacies and essential services such as hospitals.

Authorities said about 6,100 patients in the Bangkok area are waiting for beds. Of those, 103 are in critical condition, 1,410 have moderate symptoms and 4,662 have mild symptoms. Nearly a quarter of a million people around the country are in medical facilities, some with symptoms and some without.

Thailand has recorded a total of 561,030 cases and 4,562 deaths. More than 90% have been reported during the surge that began in early April.

At a market near the airport, a few people were out shopping and many said they were concerned about the virus’s spread.

“I watched the news and I got so stressed and depressed about so many people needing help. I don’t leave the house very often anymore, only once in a while when it becomes necessary to buy some supplies,” said Chaninart Aimot, a 32-year-old office worker.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha’s government is facing harsh criticism over

its handling of the virus surge and slow vaccination program, amid reports of people dying in the streets or in their homes while waiting for treatment.

Thailand hopes to provide 100 million doses of vaccines and inoculate 70% of its population within this year. So far it has administered 16.6 million doses nationwide. Around 18.5% of its 69 million people have received at least one dose while 5.5% are fully vaccinated.

On Wednesday, Swiss Humanitarian Aid dispatched 100 respirators and more than a million antigen tests to Bangkok to help fight the outbreak, while Britain is to send 415,000 doses of AstraZeneca vaccine within two

weeks.

Meanwhile, 1.5 million doses of Pfizer vaccine donated by the U.S. government are to arrive Saturday morning.

“We will be sending no less than 1.5 million doses of COVID vaccine, in fact the goal is 2.5 (million). But the first shipment will be 1.5 (million),” said Thai-born U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth.

Neighboring Cambodia is to receive its first batch of 1 million vaccines donated by the U.S. on Friday, as it takes steps to slow a surge around the country thought to be caused by Cambodian workers fleeing Thailand.

Prime Minister Hun Sen said the border will be shut to everything except commercial traffic until Aug. 12.

Cambodia’s health ministry on Thursday reported 765 new cases and 11 deaths. It has confirmed a total of 75,152 cases and 1,339 deaths.

Unlike Thailand, more than 40% of its population has had at least one vaccine dose.

Cambodia plans to vaccinate at least 12 million of its approximately 17 million people.

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## 'Toofaan' streamed in over 3,900 towns and cities in first 7 days, says Amazon Prime Video

**MUMBAI, JUL 29 (PTI):** Farhan Akhtar-starrer "Toofaan" was watched by more customers on Amazon Prime Video than any other Hindi Film in its opening week with viewers tuning in from over 3,900 towns and cities in the first seven days of its release, the streamer said on Thursday.

In a press release, the streamer said that it recorded its best ever viewership in the month leading-up to Prime Day (July 26 to 27).

The Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra-directed movie, which also featured Mrunal Thakur and Paresh Rawal in pivotal roles, had debuted on streaming service's platform on July 16.

"Toofaan" was watched

by more customers on Prime Video India than any other Hindi Film in its opening week. The boxing drama was also viewed in over 160 countries and territories across the globe, the streamer added.

Amazon further revealed that its local language titles -- "Narappa" (Telugu), "Sarpatta Parambarai" (Tamil) and "Malik" (Malayalam) -- were watched by its subscribers in over 3,200 towns and cities in India as well as in over 150 countries and territories globally.

The service, which rarely comes up streaming data, said the numbers indicate towards the "growing viewership and popularity of local language films not just in India but also around the world".

"Narappa", featuring Venkatesh Daggubati and

Priyamani, was released on July 20, while Pa Ranjith's period sports movie "Sarpatta Parambarai", starring Arya in the lead, debuted on Amazon on July 22.

Fahadh Faasil-starrer "Malik", a political thriller, premiered on the streamer's platform on July 15.

Amazon also announced that the sophomore season of comedy-drama show "Hostel Daze", which came out on July 23, was viewed in over 3,600 towns and cities in India.

Subscribers from over 100 countries and territories around the world had also streamed the show.

The show, directed by Amir Musanna and Sangram Naiksatam, features Adarsh Gourav, Luv Vispute, Shubham Gaur, Nikhil Vijay, Ahsaas Channa and Ayushi Gupta.

## Netflix sets premier date for 'Comedy Premium League' series

**MUMBAI, JUL 29 (PTI):** Netflix's upcoming comedy series, "Comedy Premium League", will arrive on August 20, the streamer announced on Thursday.

According to a press release issued by Netflix, the competitive series will see 16 experienced comics divided into four teams as they go head to head in this no-holds-barred battle of wits and words.

"Comedy Premium League", spread over six episodes, will explore multiple formats of comedy including improv, skit, stand-up, punchlines, presentation comedy and roast.

The participating comics are Sumukhi Suresh, Urooj Ashfaq, Kenny Sebastian, Samay Raina, Sumaira Shaikh, Aadar Malik, Aakash Gupta, Amit Tandon, Kaneez Surka, Mallika Dua, Prashasti Singh, Rahul Dua, Rahul Subramanian, Rohan Joshi, Rytasha Rathore, and Tanmay Bhat.

The series is hosted by Prajakta Koli and produced by OML.



## Praise or criticism cannot alter the type of stories, I want to narrate: Srijit Mukherji

**KOLKATA, JUL 29 (PTI):** National award-winning director Srijit Mukherji said praise or criticism cannot alter the type of stories he wants to narrate.

Mukherji, who has recently made two short films in the anthology 'Ray' on maestro's birth centenary on an international OTT platform triggering both barbs and praises, said Wednesday that he will not waver from his narrative style or readaptation technique in the wake of negative reactions.

The Gumnaami director had made 'Forget Me Not' and 'Bahrupiya' in the 4 film series 'Ray'.

Affirming that he will not waver from his own narrative style or readaptation technique in the wake of such negative reactions, the filmmaker told PTI, "Praise or criticism cannot actually alter the type of stories I want to tell and the way I tell them."

"I have always been kind of open-minded. I am open to criticism, I try to learn but at the end of the day I go by my instinct in terms of storytelling," Mukherji, whose debut feature film Autograph was a super hit, said.

"So I guess that is something that is going to continue," he added.

Mukherji, whose upcoming Bengali web series 'Robindronath Ekhan Kawkhono Khete



Aashenni' (REKKA) will be streamed from August 13 on a leading Bengali OTT, said "storytelling elements are different in OTT and feature films for the big screen."

The way the plot is unfolding, character arch, space devoted to character and plot everything is driven by different dynamics.

"Storytelling on OTT is not the same as storytelling in (feature) films, which is basically why OTT is a brilliant option. OTT gives you an alternative timeline, space, to structure narrative you want to unfold and the plot," the maker of Feluda Pherot web series said.

Now set to unveil his second web series in Bengali in REKKA, he said: "Definitely OTT is a very exciting development. It is an alternative medium for expressing oneself. So I think for directors it is a fantastic

conduit for storytelling. I am personally enjoying it a lot, I think a lot of directors will welcome it with open arms."

About REKKA, he said the novel by Mohammad Nazim Uddin has already been touted as one of the best Bengali thrillers of recent times, and I was very keen on adapting it.

"This title is something given by the author of the original novel Robindranath ekhan kakhono khete and I have used the acronym. The setting has shifted to this part of Bengal having twists obviously, which are organic and plot-driven," he said.

About helming the Taapsee Pannu-starrer sports drama, Shabaash Mithu, the biopic of Mithali Raj, captain of the Indian Women's ODI cricket team, Mukherji said: "Cricket has

always been my first love, So it is obviously dream project."

"Really looking forward to it. And yes sports and sports biopic have for long fascinated me. This was a very very apt opportunity," Mukherji who came on board to helm the biopic which was earlier being directed by Rahul Dholakia, gushed.

Mukherji had three years back bought the rights to Swapna Barman's story, the heptathlete who won gold in the 2018 Asian Games but the film is yet to materialise.

About X=Prem, shooting of which has been completed, Mukherji said: "a futuristic love story is what I would like to call x equal to the prem. I am leaving it like that."

"Yes from dark thriller to a love story It was an interesting change and I thoroughly enjoyed that," he added.

## Joe Manganiello boards AMC sci-fi series 'Moonhaven'

**LOS ANGELES, JUL 29 (PTI):** "Magic Mike" star Joe Manganiello is set to star in "Moonhaven", a science-fiction series from AMC Studios.

The show revolves around a utopian colony on the moon that might hold the key to preserving life on Earth, which has become increasingly perilous.

According to Deadline, Manganiello will play Tomm Schultz, an ex-military man with a philosophical bent who is the right

hand of the lead Earth diplomat to the moon. Tomm's ambitions change when he is injected with a mind-altering moon drug.

Created, written and executive produced by Peter Ocko, "Moonhaven" is a suspense thriller which focuses on Bella Sway (Emma McDonald), a lunar cargo pilot and smuggler 100 years in the future who finds herself accused of a crime and marooned on the titular utopian settlement.

Bella is sucked into a conspiracy to gain control of the artificial intelligence responsible for Moonhaven's miracles, and joins hands with a local detective called Paul Serno to stop the forces that want to destroy Earth's last hope.

Dominic Monaghan will play Paul in the show, which also stars Kadeem Hardison, Amara Karan, and Ayelet Zurer.

"Moonhaven" will air next year on AMC and its streaming platform AMC Plus.



**ON SET! The Jane the Virgin star, Gina Rodriguez is spotted on location filming her new movie Players in New York.**

### ARIES:

When we're low on energy, everything around us begins to trigger us. We tend to attract conflicting situations, which in turn make our shadows come out and play. Watch your tendency to pick fights with those around you. Watch your tendency to create mountains out of molehills.

### TAURUS:

Taurus, you're being reminded of Rumi's immortal words: "The wound is where the light enters." You've been to hell and back over the past few months, and you've found a way to turn your wounds into wisdom. Now, it's time for you to step into the role of a healer and lightworker, and share the wisdom you have acquired with those around you.

### GEMINI:

You're no rookie, Gemini. You're an alchemist and a sorceress. You've got magick coursing through your veins. The art of turning thoughts into things is something you have practiced over many lifetimes. So instead of affirming the negative, turn your attention towards the life you want

to create for yourself. Your crystal-clear intentions coupled with unyielding faith in the forces will help you make space for miracles.

### CANCER:

The worst is behind you, Cancer. We repeat: the worst is behind you. You attracted seemingly dark experiences into your life because you were meant to learn important lessons that help you evolve on a soul level. So, honour and acknowledge the past as you remember that this too shall pass.

### LEO:

Our body is blessed with its own intelligence, and is constantly communicating with us through different sensations. Today, you're being asked to tune into your body temple. To start a dialogue about what needs to be healed and integrated. Trust the messages you receive in moments of silence as you act upon them without delay. Remember, food is medicine. Providing your body with the right kind of nutrients \*and\* eliminating items that trigger your system will help you heal

on every level.

### VIRGO:

Like everything else in our reality, the process of manifestation requires you to find a balance between 'doing' and 'being'. Yes, this sounds contradictory. Take a moment to hear us out anyway. The first and most important step is for you to set crystal-clear intentions. The second? Taking inspired action. What happens after isn't in your hands.

### LIBRA:

Here's the thing, Libra: you're inherently a peace-loving person. But, in your need to maintain order, you sometimes avoid confrontation. Understand how this pattern is detrimental to your own growth and evolution. Observe how you could be rejecting your own feelings at this moment.

### SCORPIO:

Here's the thing, Scorpio: you'll always find something to dislike about every given situation. You'll always find somebody to blame for what's going on in your emotional landscape. You know what takes an insane amount of courage? The willing-

ness to rise above the murky waters and view matters from a higher vantage point. So, step away from the scene of crime. Take the timeout you need, beautiful. Distance has an uncanny way of providing us with much-needed perspective

### SAGITTARIUS:

Listen up, Sagittarius! You can't always be in yang mode, even if you want to. The law of balance states that you must make peace with the yin side of human existence as well. That you learn to 'be' as much as you 'do' without letting those hectic to-do lists get the better of you.

### CAPRICORN:

Here's the thing, Capricorn: playing the blame game isn't going to resolve matters. Making a conscious effort to understand things from the other person's perspective is the only way to heal the given situation. So, step away from the scene of crime, for just a second. Listen to what the voice of wisdom within has to say. Yes, there is a way to find an amicable solution. Your angels and spirit guides are holding space for a peaceful

negotiation.

### AQUARIUS:

Big things do not happen overnight. We repeat: big things do not happen overnight. It takes patience and persistence to get to a desired destination, which is something you are beginning to understand on a soul level. So, focus on that vision board, beautiful, and do what it takes to show up as the best version of yourself every single day. Remember, the key to your fulfilment lies in making the journey just as fulfilling as the destination.

### PISCES:

What happens when we're hung up on the pain narrative? We refuse to acknowledge how the other person could be affected by our words and actions. Something to think about, Pisces. What the cards are urging you to examine: your role in the grand scheme of things. Just for today, let go of the judgements and biases. Observe the situation from a higher perspective. This will help you understand their side of the story \*and\* bring in the energy of compassion.