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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Daily Test Positivity Rate drops below 10% on the back of high testing

NO COVID DEATHS IN SIKKIM IN PAST 24 HOURS

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 JUL:**

Sikkim recorded 240 new cases in the last 24 hours taking the state's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 to 25,856. While the number of new cases remain high, what could be taken as slightly reassuring is that the test positivity rate dipped below 10% after many days; the 249 new cases coming from 2,495 tests and giving Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 9.60%.

What also came as a welcome break was the pause in Covid deaths. With no new deaths reported in the past 24 hours, the Covid toll held today at 333.

In the meantime, Sikkim's count of recovered cases further improved to 22,139 with the discharge of 198 more formerly Covid-positive people getting discharged from home and facility isolation after making full recoveries.

As per the Daily

Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department, while 175 of the new cases were detected in rapid antigen testing of 1,463 samples, 65 more people tested positive in RT-PCR testing of 1,024 samples.

Out of the 240 new cases, the most, 111, came from West district, while East Sikkim contributed 62, South District 52 and 15 in North District.

There are now 3,117 active Covid cases in the State, of whom only 117 are in hospital and the rest in home or facility isolation since they have mild enough symptoms not to require hospitalization. Of those in hospital though, 13 are in ICU facilities at STNM Hospital and Central Referral Hospital.

Despite the high number of new cases reported in the past 24 hours, there were only 14 new hospitalizations.

India adds 43,645 COVID-19 cases, 640 deaths



NEW DELHI, JUL 28 (PTI): India recorded 43,654 fresh COVID-19 cases on Wednesday that took its tally to 3,14,84,605 while 640 more fatalities pushed the death toll to 4,22,022, according to Union health ministry data.

The number of active cases stood at 3,99,436, an increase of 1,336 in a span of 24 hours, and comprises 1.27 per cent of the total infections. The national COVID-19 recovery rate has improved to 97.39 per cent, the data updated at 8 am showed.

As many as 17,36,857 COVID-19 tests were conducted on Monday, taking the total number of tests conducted so far to 46,09,00,978.

The daily positivity rate increased to 2.51 per cent from 1.73 per cent on Tuesday. The weekly positivity rate stood at

2.36 per cent, the data showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 3,06,63,147, while the case fatality rate stands at 1.34 per cent, it stated.

The total number of Covid vaccine doses administered so far as part of the nationwide vaccination drive has reached 44.61 crore.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

The caseload crossed the grim milestone of 2 crore on May 4 and 3 crore on June 23.

Sikkim begins implementing One-Nation, One-Ration Card initiative

CM LAUDS SCHEME AS BENEFICIAL FOR BPL FAMILIES AND MIGRANT WORKERS

GANGTOK, 28 JUL [IPR]:

Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang launched the implementation of the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) and Fair Price Shops (FPS) Automation through e-POS devices in the State of Sikkim at Samman Bhawan, Gangtok, today.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister lauded this flagship program of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and expressed his gratitude for his concern for the wellbeing of the people especially, BPL families and migrant labours. Further, he added that this will create a proper database and will put an end to the misuse of ration cards and fraudulent beneficiaries.

He also acknowledged the prime benefit of this program which enables beneficiaries to avail ration throughout the country and will be of great help to the migrant labours.



The main aim and objective behind the implementation of ONORC and FPS automation are to promote transparency and accountability for the distribution of food grains under the public distribution system. This flagship initiative will enable the beneficiaries to avail ration from any Fair Price Shops in the

country. This will also enable the migrant workers to draw their authorised ration with ease.

The Department of Food & Civil Supplies will be implementing the flagship program to meet the Nationwide portability of the PDS commodities under the National Food Security Act, 2013 through

ONORC which aims to provide an option to all Antodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) & Priority Households (PHH) beneficiaries using their existing Ration Card with Aadhaar authentication on the Electronic Point of Sale (e-POS) devices available in all Fair Price Shops (FPS).

The FPS automation through e-Pos devices

has been categorically designed given the difficult terrain of Sikkim with three modes of distribution:

- Online distribution through biometric authentication of beneficiaries under NFSA, 2013.

- Fully offline distribution in the dark zone or border areas where no internet

connectivity is available.

- Partially/Hybrid distribution in the fluctuating network due to being a difficult terrain and e-POS application will automatically switch to online-offline mode as per network availability.

The Chief Minister also congratulated the Food & Civil Supplies Department on the launch of the program and expressed his belief that they will swiftly implement the program in the state. He also thanked the NIC, New Delhi and Hyderabad for organising the event and also distributed tokens to three beneficiaries.

Minister (Food & Civil Supplies, UDD) Arun Upreti, Advisor (Food & Civil Supplies), Chairperson (Food & Civil Supplies), Chief Secretary, Secretary (Food & Civil Supplies), Secretary (Chief Minister's Office) and other dignitaries from Department of Food & Public Distribution, Government of India, were also present during the event.

"Need to come together to defeat BJP": Mamata Banerjee meets Sonia Gandhi

NEW DELHI, 28 JUL [NDTV]: Mamata Banerjee met with Congress president Sonia Gandhi in Delhi today in their first interaction since the two parties contested as rivals in the Bengal election in April-May. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was also present in the talks that are significant amid opposition moves to join forces for a united fight in the 2024 national election.

"Sonia ji invited me for a cup of tea and Rahul ji is also there. We discussed Pegasus and the Covid situation in the country. We also discussed the unity of the opposition. It was a very good meeting, positive meeting. To defeat the BJP, everybody needs to come together. Everyone will have to work together," Ms Banerjee said after the 45-minute interaction with Sonia Gandhi, with whom she has always had cordial ties.

The Bengal Chief Minister, in Delhi for five days, had met with senior Congress leaders Kamal Nath and Anand Sharma yesterday. After the Gandhis, Ms Banerjee also met Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

Since her Bengal victory, Mamata Banerjee has emerged as a pivotal figure in the opposition's attempts to consolidate anti-BJP forces ahead of the next general election.

Ms Banerjee won despite an aggressive campaign by the BJP, which staked all its top leaders and its mighty election machinery on Mission Bengal. The election is now held up by many in the opposition as a template for taking on the BJP in future polls.

In Delhi for the first time after the win, the Chief Minister has lined up meetings with several key opposition leaders.

"Poore desh me khela hoga. It's a continuous process... When general elections come (2024), it will be (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi vs country," she told reporters earlier today.

"After the parliament session there will be talks, there should be a common platform to work together. I am meeting Sonia Gandhi and Arvind Kejriwal. I spoke to Lalu Prasad Yadav yesterday. We will be talking to all parties."

On who could lead an opposition front,

she replied: "I am not a political astrologer, it depends on the situation."

Asked to comment on the view - bolstered by a series of listless Congress campaigns - that the grand old party is now a weak link for the opposition, Ms Banerjee said: "I don't want to interfere in the internal math of any political party. But I think Sonia Gandhi wants opposition unity."

Ms Banerjee had earlier said she was open to an opposition front but any such grouping would be impossible without the Congress.

Since its failed outing in Bengal, the Congress has sought to demonstrate its goodwill towards the Trinamool.

Congress leaders recently tweeted on the Chief Minister's nephew Abhishek Banerjee being one of the potential targets of the Pegasus spyware. Trinamool MP Sougata Roy welcomed the tweet as a Congress gesture of unity. "It should strengthen bonds between opposition parties."

Prashant Kishor, who managed Mamata Banerjee's successful campaign, recently met all three Gandhis.

"Downright illegal": Congress on Rakesh Asthana being made Delhi top cop

NEW DELHI, 28 JUL [PTI]: Hitting out at the Centre over Gujarat-cadre IPS officer Rakesh Asthana's appointment as the Delhi Police Commissioner, the Congress on Wednesday said it was in "direct contravention" of a Supreme Court judgment and asked whether any "quid pro quo" was involved.

Rakesh Asthana, a senior IPS officer of the Gujarat cadre, was appointed the Commissioner of Delhi Police on Tuesday. He took charge as the Commissioner of Delhi Police Wednesday.

Attacking the government over the appointment, Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera said that with four days left for Mr Asthana's superannuation, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued the notification naming him as the Police Commissioner of New Delhi, effectively granting him a one-year extension from the date of his superannuation "as a special case in public interest". "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," Mr Khera alleged.

While clearing his appointment as the CP Delhi, the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet



(ACC), headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the inter-cadre deputation from Gujarat to Arunachal Pradesh-Goa-Mizoram and Union Territory (AGMUT) cadre.

Mr Khera said that in the landmark matter of Prakash Singh and others versus Union of India and others, the Supreme Court stated that the recommendation for appointment to the post of Director General of Police by the Union Public Service Commission and preparation of panel should be purely on the basis of merit from officers who have a minimum residual tenure of six months i.e. officers who have at least six months of service prior to the retirement.

"With just four days left before the retirement of Rakesh Asthana, this notification by the Modi government issued under the seal of approval by (Home Minister) Amit Shah is downright illegal and in direct

contravention of the judgment of the Honourable Supreme Court of India," Mr Khera said.

Chief Justice N V Ramana, while expressing reservations to the candidature of YC Modi and Rakesh Asthana (for the post of CBI chief), had reminded the prime minister of the Prakash Singh judgment of 2019, he said.

"As both the officers had less than six months for retirement, based on the observations of the CJ, their names were dropped despite being the two senior most IPS Officers in fray to become the Director, CBI," Mr Khera said.

"Despite being apprised of this, yet again, this government deemed it fit to arbitrarily proceed with the appointment of Rakesh Asthana as the Delhi Police Commissioner," he said, adding that this is not the first instance of this government indulging in "favouritism over merit".

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ODF-Plus manuals under Swachh Bharat Mission released

NEW DELHI, 28 JUL (PIB): Union Minister for Jal Shakti, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and the Minister of State for Jal Shakti & Food Processing Industries, Prahlad Singh Patel released the ODF Plus Manuals under Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) Phase - II at an event here today organized by Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS).

The launched manuals pertain to key components of ODF Plus (Grey Water Management, Plastic Waste Management, Faecal Sludge Management, Biodegradable Waste Management and IEC) and provides detailed information on technologies, technical specifications of assets, estimated costs and possible O&M arrangements. DDWS has developed manuals to support states, districts, and rural local bodies implement solid and liquid waste management initiatives.

Addressing the media after the release of Manuals, Union Minister for Jal Shakti, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said that SBMG has transformed rural India by manifesting into a Jan Andolan for sanitation under the guidance and leadership of Prime Minister, Narendra Modi achieving Open Defecation Free (ODF) rural India milestone in mission mode (2014-19).

Taking forward the extraordinary success, Phase - II of the SBM (G) aiming at achieving ODF Plus goal was launched early last year, which focuses on ODF sustainability and Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) aiming at comprehensive cleanliness in villages.

The Union Minister stressed on the importance of access to safe sanitation facilities in terms of



social, economic and health benefits to rural community members especially the vulnerable and marginalized community. The manuals launched today will contribute significantly towards capacity building and knowledge enrichment at various levels strengthening SBMG Phase II initiatives.

Shri Shekhawat also added that for FY 2021-22 as part of approved Annual Implementation Plan (AIP); SBM (G) Phase -II is poised to support over two lakh villages achieve solid and liquid waste management (SLWM) arrangements through an investment of over Rs. 40,700 crores. While the Central share would be around Rs. 14,000 crores, the States shall spend over Rs.8300 crores. Funds to the tune of Rs. 12,730 crores will be made available through the Fifteenth Finance Commission and over Rs. 4,100 through convergence with MGNREGS.

P r o g r a m m e Implementation this fiscal year will see construction of over 50 lakh Individual Household toilets (IHHs), one Lakh Community toilets, Plastic Waste Management Units in over 2400 Blocks of India, Grey Water Management in around

1.82 lakh villages, Gobardhan projects in 386 Districts, and Faecal sludge management arrangements in over 250 Districts.

Addressing the media, Minister of State, Prahlad Singh Patel said under the inspiring leadership of Prime Minister and his strong will power, India achieved the massive challenge of ODF declaration of all villages in mission mode in five years (2014-19). As Swachhata is an eternal journey, the Phase II of SBM (G) aims at achieving the goal of complete cleanliness or Sampoorna Swachhata by addressing ODF SLWM issues. This can be achieved by ensuring collective responsibility and commitment. The manuals released today will equip all with relevant and necessary technical information, technologies, and references.

The success of SBM (G) - the largest ever behavior change programme in the world, can also be attributed to the extensive focus on capacity building of a range of key stakeholders. An important aspect of SBMG Phase -II is continuous engagement and capacity strengthening of all stakeholders at various levels to ensure effective and expedited

implementation. The availability of reference materials pertaining to program's approach, technical specifications, cost estimates, technical drawings etc. for various elements of ODF Plus is important.

The Biodegradable Waste Management (BWM) manual focuses on important processes and activities related to segregation, Collection and Transportation, Treatment and disposal of biodegradable solid waste (both dry and waste). It also highlights various technology options available like Composting techniques at various levels (Households and Community).

The Greywater management (GWM) manual addressed the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle) which focuses on minimizing the generation of greywater (from kitchen, washrooms, livestock cleaning and others) and effective treatment using various technologies like Community leach pit, Waste Stabilization pond, constructed wetlands, Phytoid, Decentralized Wastewater Treatment system, Soil Bio Technology and others.

The Plastic Waste Management (PWM) manual provides details on necessary steps to

establish a system of segregation, collection and storage and setting up of Plastic Waste Management Unit at various levels for further processing into useful products and forward linkage in other sectors. The manual will help in building capacity of functionaries at district, block and rural local bodies for minimizing plastic consumption and addressing single use plastic (SUP) waste in particular.

The Faecal Sludge Management (FSM) manual provides technical information on the selected technology based on the FSM implementation approach as outlined in the SBM (G) Phase-II guidelines. It also provides design and engineering for the technologies specified in the guidelines. This manual will help district officials in the preparation of Detailed Project Reports (DPRs), construction of Faecal Sludge Treatment Plants (FSTPs) and their Operation and Maintenance.

The Information, Education and Communication (IEC) manual will serve as a reference guide to all programme managers, implementers and c o m m u n i c a t o r s around each ODF Plus

components. Aiming at behavior change of the community, the manual will be useful in facilitating the development of quality communication and capacity development tools which integrate the key elements of community-led/IEC approaches.

SBM (G) Phase-II has been uniquely designed to leverage the capacity of individuals and communities in rural India to create a people's movement to ensure that the ODF status of rural areas is sustained, people continue to practice safe hygienic behaviour and that all villages have solid and liquid waste management arrangements. The Government of India, in February 2020, approved Phase-II of the SBM (G) with a total outlay of Rs. 1,40,881 crores to focus on the sustainability of Open Defecation Free (ODF) status and Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM). SBM (G) Phase-II is planned to be a unique model of convergence between different verticals of financing and various schemes of Central and State Governments.

ODF Plus Manuals link: <https://swachhbharatmission.gov.in/sbmcms/technical-notes.htm>.

Governor calls on Union Minister Piyush Goyal



SUMMIT REPORT

NEW DELHI, 28 JUL:

Governor, Ganga Prasad called on Union Minister of Commerce & Industry, Consumer Affairs & Food & Public Distribution and Textiles, Piyush Goyal at Parliament House, New Delhi, today.

A press release from Raj Bhavan informs that the Governor congratulated Mr Goyal, who recently took charge

of the Ministry. The Governor discussed various projects and initiatives for the development of textiles and other various issues concerning the state with the Union Minister.

Later in the day, the Governor also met national president of BJP, JP Nadda at Parliament House, New Delhi. It was a courtesy call by the Governor.

Harappan city Dholavira gets World Heritage tag

NEW DELHI, 28 JUL

[NDTV]: Dholavira in Gujarat, which got the tag of a UNESCO World Heritage Site today, is a Harappan-era city sprawled over 100 hectares on Khadir, one of the islands in the Rann of Kutch.

One of the five largest cities of the Indus Valley Civilisation, Dholavira is located about 250 km from Bhuj. It has two seasonal streams, Mansar and Manhar, and journey to the site takes one through the wildlife-rich desert plains of Rann of Kutch. The property comprises two parts, a walled city and a cemetery to its west, a government release said, adding that Dholavira flourished for nearly 1,500 years.

According to an Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) note on Dholavira, excavations at the site have revealed seven cultural stages documenting the rise and fall of the Indus Civilisation. The city, it said, is also remarkable for its planning and architecture. Among the marvels in Dholavira are the remains of two open air stadiums and a water harvesting system.

"The salient components of the full-grown cityscape consisted of a bipartite 'citadel', a 'middle town' and a 'lower town', two 'stadia', an 'annexe', a series of reservoirs all set within an enormous fortification running on all four sides," said the ASI note.

A release from UNESCO World Heritage Committee said it is "one of the most remarkable and well-preserved urban settlements in South Asia dating from the 3rd to mid-2nd millennium BCE".

"Discovered in 1968, the site is set apart by its unique characteristics, such as its water management system, multi-layered defensive mechanisms, extensive use of stone in construction and special

burial structures," it added.

Also noteworthy is the art associated with the city. During the excavations, artefacts made of copper, stone, jewellery of terracotta, gold and ivory have been found. The ASI note says that initial stages of the civilisation show the inhabitants' preference for colourful clay for plastering buildings, but this came to an "abrupt end...as if under a royal decree or by a resolute public consensus".

The excavations point to a general decline in the city's maintenance before a temporary desertion. The ASI note says that when the city is populated again, ceramic traditions make an appearance and "classical planning was largely given a go-by".

"Bricks were no longer in use. While many of the pottery forms and decorative motifs were still in vogue, new ceramics in the form of white painted black-and-red and white painted grey wares along with a coarse ware bearing incised or appliqué or both kinds of designs and also some Bara related pottery made their appearance," it said.

Celebrating the listing of Dholavira as a World Heritage site, Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted, "Dholavira was an important urban centre and is one of our most important linkages with our past. It is a must visit, especially for those interested in history, culture and archaeology."

Minister for Culture, Tourism and Development of North Eastern Region G Kishan Reddy tweeted, "It gives immense pride to share with my fellow Indians that Dholavira is now the 40th treasure in India to be given @UNESCO World Heritage tag. Another feather in India's cap as we now enter the Super-40 club for World Heritage Site inscriptions."

Juvenile Justice Bill passed in Rajya Sabha amid protests

NEW DELHI, 28 JUL [PTI]: Rajya Sabha proceedings were disrupted on Wednesday as Opposition parties kept up their protests over Pegasus snooping row, farm laws and price rise.

Amid the din, the House approved the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Bill, 2021. The Bill is already passed by Lok Sabha. The Upper House, which has seen continuous protests by the opposition since the Monsoon session started on July 19 to press for discussions on Pegasus and farm laws, was adjourned thrice before the Chair finally adjourned it for the day.

While moving the bill for consideration in the House, Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani said, "Some of the renowned Parliamentarians, who have always prioritised the needs of the vulnerable...however,

politics demands that they stand right here in the Well and attract attention towards the issue which they feel fit."

She added that despite this disruption, the House will agree that the children of this country deserve their attention for protection and support.

However, the opposition members did not return to their seats and Raja Sabha witnessed continuous uproar.

Early in the day, as Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu called for the Zero Hour, where MPs raise issues of public importance, MPs belonging to Congress, TMC and other opposition parties started raising slogans on Pegasus snooping, farm laws, fuel prices and other issues.

They also brought placards. As some of them tried to move into the Well of the House, Mr Naidu ordered that

no placards will be displayed.

He instructed the Rajya Sabha Secretariat to publish the name of MPs and the issue they wanted to raise in the Zero hour.

This is to give people an idea of the issue that MPs wanted to raise but could not because of disruption.

"These things should go to the public," he said before adjourning the proceedings till 12.00 hours.

When the House resumed at noon, Deputy Chairman Narayana Singh managed to take up all questions listed for the Question Hour amid the din.

While Opposition members were shouting slogans in regional languages standing in the Well, the ministers concerned responded to members' queries amid the commotion.

The Chair requested the protesting members to maintain

order in the House, but they did not yield to his request and continued sloganeering.

Since all the listed questions were responded to by the concerned ministers, the Chair adjourned the House till 2 pm.

As soon as the House resumed after lunch, BJP member Bhubaneswar Kalita, who was in the Chair, called Irani to move The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Bill, 2021 for the consideration of the House.

Even as the minister briefed the House about the Bill, Opposition members continued raising slogans.

"This bill is regarding children, please listen to it," Mr Kalita said.

O p p o s i t i o n members refused to relent despite repeated requests by the Chair to go back to their seats and allow the Bill to be

passed as it concerns children.

Mr Kalita then adjourned the House for half an hour till 2:45 PM.

As proceedings again resumed, Mr Kalita told the House that a member, who was unwell due to high blood pressure during the proceeding, was taken to RML hospital and the member is fine now.

Mr Kalita then called the listed members for participating in the debate on the bill. However, nobody turned up for discussion on the bill.

Some members including TMC's Derek O'Brien demanded a division of votes on the bill. However, Mr Kalita asked the members to first go back to their seats.

When the members refused to give any heed to the Chair, Mr Kalita asked the Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani to move The Juvenile

Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Bill, 2021 for passage.

The minister moved the bill and it was passed amid the din. Thereafter, Mr Kalita adjourned the House for the day.

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Bill, 2021, which seeks to amend the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, proposes to increase the role of district magistrates and additional district magistrates with issues concerning child care and adoption, she said.

When the House met for the day, Naidu mentioned about Dholavira, a Harappan-era city in Gujarat's Rann of Kutch, being added to the list of World Heritage Sites by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

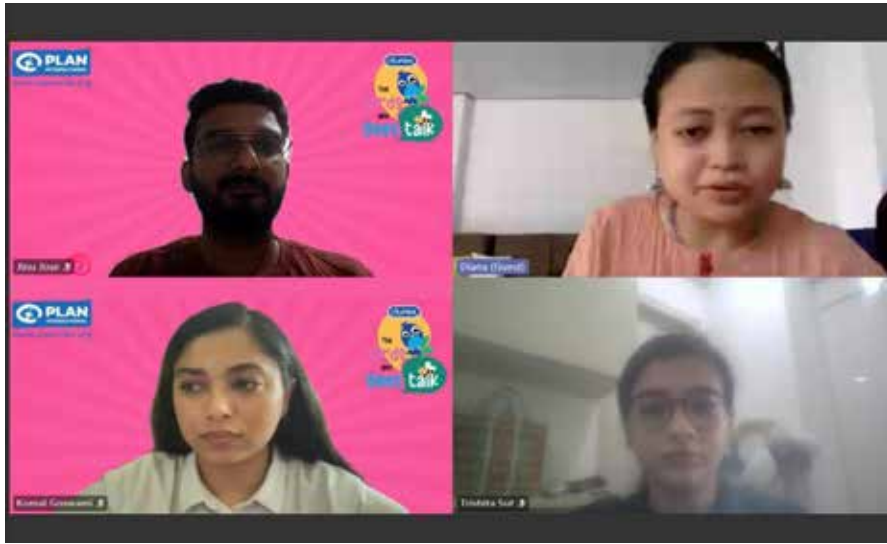
Thereafter, listed official papers were laid on the table of the House.

Durex-led Birds & Bees Talk celebrates World Hepatitis Day

GANGTOK, 28 JUL: Reckitt, the global leader in consumer-healthcare led The Birds and Bees Talk programme, celebrated World Hepatitis Day in the six states of North-Eastern India - Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur and Mizoram. To mark the occasion, the Durex-led "The Birds and Bees Talk" (TBBT), a purpose initiative supported by Reckitt and Plan India, initiated a webinar to increase outreach amongst community, students and teachers through experts, influencers and talented artists to raise awareness about the disease.

This year 'Hep Can't Wait', the International theme highlights the urgency of efforts needed to eliminate hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030 which would prevent approximately 36 million infections & save 10 million lives.

The webinar was chaired by esteemed guest speakers - DC Imphal East, Manipur, Diana Khumanthem an IAS officer from the Northeast, DDSE, Namsai, Koing Samon Umbon, an educationist and social activist, former ADEO - Assistant District Educational Officer and currently working for women rights and development, DRCHO-District Reproductive Child Health Officer, NHM, Dr Tope Yomcha former GDMO- General Duty Medical Officer and a recipient of the State Gold Medal for improving immunization status in Changlang District and Dr Banikanta (Influencer), a Consultant Physician & Diabetologist and a renowned YouTuber who creates live webinars and videos to bridge the gap between medical science and the general public. Through this



initiative the speakers touched upon the risks, prevention along-with discussing the key solutions for the disease.

Hepatitis B and C are silent epidemics, hitting children and marginalized populations and kill more people annually than from HIV/AIDS, Malaria & tuberculosis. 90% of people living with hepatitis B and 80% living with hepatitis C are unaware they are living with such disease, resulting in the real possibility of developing fatal liver disease or liver cancer at some point in their lives and in some cases, unknowingly transmitting the infection to others, although Hepatitis B is vaccine preventable, and Hepatitis C is curable. Through this initiative, TBBT aims to encourage people to take action, make them aware of the deadly disease- risk factors, early signs, etc. and share information on preventive measures.

DRCHO (District Reproductive Child Health Officer), NHM, Dr Tope Yomcha said, "It is important to educate the future generation about the severity of Hepatitis and its adverse effects. The youth contributing to 70% of our population, it is imperative to understand the implications of this fatal disease as it can seriously

damage the liver, cause cancer and premature death. Through this webinar, we initiated a much needed dialogue and raised awareness about the disease among the masses. We hope we were successful in fulfilling the goal of educating the younger generation and being one step closer to eradicating the disease."

SVP, South Asia from Reckitt, Gaurav Jain said, "The recent pandemic has brought home the importance of health literacy among populations as a powerful tool to boost health outcomes and resilience. Hepatitis is a highly preventable disease which can be beaten if vulnerable groups are provided the right information at the right time. By bringing experts on board to educate adolescents on hepatitis, the Durex Birds and Bees Talk campaign is helping adolescents and youth with the right tools to protect themselves by raising awareness and encouraging them to make health a priority."

Executive Director, Mohammed Asif, Plan India stated, "Plan India has been working for more than two decades to improve sexual and reproductive health services and wellbeing for all children, adolescent girls and

young women and men. With one person dying every 30 seconds from any hepatitis related illness - and which is likely to get accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic, we cannot wait to act. On World Hepatitis Day, we aim to inform adolescents and community members with knowledge on prevention strategies, which is one of the pillars of our program 'The Birds and Bees Talk'. We believe that adolescents and young people must be enabled, equipped and empowered to participate in their own development and therefore raising their awareness on hepatitis related illnesses is an important public health intervention."

In 2015, viral hepatitis was included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in 2016 the world's first global hepatitis strategy to eliminate the disease was ratified.

About Reckitt: Reckitt* is the global leading consumer health and hygiene company. Driven by a purpose to build healthier lives and happier homes, Reckitt has operations in over 60 countries. From the foundations of wellness and infant nutrition to the fundamentals of a hygienic home, its global

brands help people live healthier, happier lives. RB has world-leading Power brands which include household names such as Dettol, Harpic, Lizol, Veet, Durex, Strepsils, Mortein, Vanish, Air Wick, Enfamil, Nutramigen, Nurofen, Strepsils, Gaviscon, Mucinex, Scholl, Clearasil, Finish, Calgon, Woolite. Reckitt's unique culture is at the heart of its success. Its drive to achieve, passion to outperform and commitment to quality and scientific excellence are manifested in the work of over 40,000 Reckitt employees worldwide. For more information, visit <https://www.reckitt.com>. *Reckitt is the trading name of Reckitt Benckiser group of companies.

About PLAN India: Plan India is a nationally registered not for profit organisation striving to advance children's rights and equality for girls, thus creating a lasting impact in the lives of vulnerable and excluded children and their communities. Plan India is a member of the Plan International Federation, an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. Plan International is active in more than 70 countries. Plan began work in India in 1979. Over the years, Plan and its partners have helped communities throughout India to support themselves so that children have access to their rights including the right to Protection, Basic education, Proper healthcare, healthy environment, Livelihood opportunities and their participation in decisions making process which affect their lives.

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ADVISORY

It is notified for the information of all concerned that applicants interested in pursuing course under State Quota in Delhi University are required to have themselves registered for admission in the Delhi University portal www.du.ac.in. Parallel registration is mandatory for the applicants to be eligible for listing their names in the merit list of State Quota seats.

*Sd/-
Director
Higher & Technical Education
Education Department
Government of Sikkim*

R.O. No. 121/IPR/Pub/Classi./21-22 dt. 28.07.2021



LOKAYUKTA SIKKIM GANGTOK

Ref No: 672/LOK/2021

Date : 9.7.2021

NOTICE

This is for information of all concerned that the Office of the Lokayukta, Sikkim has been shifted from its previous location Vidhayak Aawas, (Block 'C') VIP Colony, Gangtok to Old State Guest House (Below TNA), Bhanupath, Gangtok. Henceforth the official address of Lokayukta Sikkim shall be: Lokayukta, Sikkim

Bhanupath (Below TNA)\
Gangtok, East Sikkim
PIN 737101.

*Sd/-
Protocol Officer
Lokayukta, Sikkim.*



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY Secretariat Annexure - I, Sonam Tshering Marg, Gangtok, Sikkim.

Notice Inviting Tender for "Selection of Firm for Appointment of Project Consultant and Transaction Advisory for Sikkim IT Special Economic Zone" Department of Information Technology, Government of Sikkim invites Tenders for "Selection of Firm for Appointment of Project Consultant and Transaction Advisory for Sikkim IT Special Economic Zone". The last date of receipt of Tender is 23rd August 2021. For further details please visit : www.sikkim.gov.in.

*Sd/-
Additional Director,
Department of Information Technology
Government of Sikkim.*

**R.O. No. 113/IPR/Pub/Classi./20-21
Date. 23.7.2021**



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM OFFICE OF THE SR.SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE STATE RESERVE LINES COMPOSITE BUILDING, BELOW PALZOR STADIUM, GANGTOK (737101) Ph: (03592) 202933/202055

TENDER NOTICE

Sealed Tenders are invited from reputed reliable and experienced firm for stitching of uniform items for personnel of Civil Police, Sikkim Armed Police and India Reserve Battalions for the year 2020-2021. Tender form may be obtained from office of the Sr. Superintendent of Police, State Reserve Lines, Composite Building, Below Palzor Stadium, Gangtok on production of the Bank challan for Rs. 5000/- (Five thousand) only of the State Bank of Sikkim under receipt Head 0055-Police, Sub-Head-103 Fees Fines & Forfeiture.

Tender Forms may be collected during working hours from 16/08/2021 to 20/08/2021 Tender form duly filled in and sealed along with the certified copies of Licence, Tax Clearance Certificate Along with the TDR of Rs. 50,000/- (Fifty Thousand) only as earnest money (refundable) should reach the office of undersigned before 1300 Hrs on 24/08/2021 which will be opened on 24/08/2021 (Tuesday) at 1400 Hours by the Committee in presence of the tenderers or their representatives, if any.

The Department reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders with or without assigning any reason thereof.

*Sd/-
Sr. Superintendent of Police
State Reserve Lines
Gangtok.*

**R.O. No. 114/IPR/Pub/Classi./21-22
Dt. 26.7.2021**

48% parents not willing to send their kids to schools till they get Covid vaccines: Survey

NEW DELHI, JUL 28 (PTI): Nearly 48 per cent parents are not willing to send their children to schools till they are vaccinated against the novel coronavirus infection, says a new survey.

The survey conducted with over 32,000 parents across 361 districts in the country found that 30 per cent parents are willing to send their wards to schools if coronavirus cases in their districts come down to zero.

"Vaccinating children in the coming months is

going to be key if children are to go to schools for physical classes. Forty-eight per cent of the surveyed parents said they are not willing to send their children to schools till they are vaccinated.

"At least 21 per cent of parents said whenever the schools reopen, they are ready to send their wards there," said the survey by an online platform, Local Circles.

Nearly 47 per cent of the respondents of the survey were from tier 1 districts, 27 per cent

from tier 2 and 26 per cent respondents were from tier 3, 4 and rural districts.

Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya had on Tuesday told BJP MPs that Covid vaccination for children was likely to start soon.

Schools across the country were ordered shut in March last year ahead of a nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of the highly contagious infection.

While several states started partial reopening

of schools in October last year, physical classes were again suspended following the exponential rise in the COVID-19 cases during the second wave.

The states that have partially reopened schools this month include Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh have announced reopening of schools in the first week of August.

had said the unity of opposition parties will take shape on its own.

"I am a simple worker and want to continue as a worker," Banerjee, who is in the national capital for the first time after her party's resounding victory in the assembly polls, said on Wednesday.

"I want to see sachcha din, bahut din acha di dekh liya," Banerjee added, in a jibe at the BJP's poll slogan.

was more serious than Emergency and accused the Centre of being unresponsive.

"Everywhere they are sending ED, IT for raids. Here there is no response. In a democracy, the government has to respond.

"The situation is very serious, it's more serious than the emergency," the Trinamool Congress chief said.

On Tuesday, Banerjee

Will depends on situation, no problem if someone else leads: Mamata Banerjee on being face of Oppn

NEW DELHI, JUL 28 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday remained ambivalent on being the face of the Opposition to take on the BJP, saying it will depend on the situation.

"I want to help all the opposition parties to bell the cat. I don't want to be a leader, but a simple cadre," she said on the leadership issue.

"I am not a political astrologer. It depends on the situation, structure. I have no problem if someone else leads. When the matter is discussed we can decide. I cannot impose," Banerjee told a select group of reporters here when asked if she would be the face of the Opposition.

On the Pegasus row, she said the situation

Have We Failed the Young?

Of course we have. Now, to make amends

Youth evolve from the societies they grow in. They are after all, products of what they are exposed to, groomed by influences that surround them. Juvenile delinquency, like teen rebellion, is expected; but when the lines delineating youthful experimentation from criminal malefaction get blurred and digressions into darker aberrations surface, it is time to worry.

At around this time last year, a couple of years ago, there was a rash of bag snatching and assault with intent to rob incidents around Gangtok. Those incidents have stopped now, but from what the victims recalled, the assailants were all “young” boys, fresh out of their teens. Not that long ago, a “gang” attacked a motorist in Gangtok and left him severely battered. Across the state borders, although the cases of arson and overnight attacks have gone down, it would not surprise if these were commissioned to “young” people, youth who should ideally be more moved by ideas of sacrifice and idealism than assault and mindless arson. Agreed, these isolated incidents are not representative of the entire generation, but they are still worrying signals.

Worry, in fact, might be too mild a reaction, it’s probably time to panic. Panic, not against the young who crossed over into near morbid criminality, but a society that has so disassociated itself from the grooming of its young that it did not even notice the spiral it has pushed innocence into. And there have been other incidents in between, some got reported, others were covered-up. So, yes it is time to panic.

It is inexcusable that such incidents should transpire. Harrowing as it is for the victims, Sikkim’s collective failure in addressing the issue - not as individual cases or in terms of victims and perpetrators, but in terms of figuring out how the young can be counseled better and kept safe – is shameful. The young are obviously growing in a vacuum, untouched by proper nurture despite all the talk of moral education. The schools perhaps concentrate too much on regimented teaching to have time for grooming, and parents too obsessed with other priorities to notice how an entire generation is coming unhinged. Teenagers are committing suicide in Sikkim, some are falling to fatal over-doses of substances of abuse, still more are buying substances of abuse on the streets and as they grow more asocial, some have lost the faculties to differentiate between right and obvious criminality.

Slightly older, and these juveniles would have been dismissed by the society at large as ‘no-good, anti-social elements’. But in many cases, the perpetrators are still “young” enough to have the need for their parents/guardians to be informed of their actions. What we hence end up staring at is a reflection of our failings. For this situation, there are no prescribed solutions or government-funded interventions to bring NGOs crawling out of the woodwork to implement. The young, the victims and the perpetrators, need to be saved from our failings. A good place to begin would be to accept that we have failed collectively. Then can begin the process of figuring out how the right counseling and right inspirations can be dispensed to ensure that innocence grows into maturity in Sikkim, and does not derail into antisocial excesses as is obviously happening at present...

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Taliban ‘has not changed,’ say women facing subjugation in areas of Afghanistan under its extremist rule

HOMA HOODFAR & MONA TAJALI
THECONVERSATION.COM

The Taliban insurgents continue their deadly war to seize control of Afghanistan after the departure of United States and NATO forces. As they close in on major cities that were once government strongholds, like Badakhshan and Kandahar, many Afghans – and the world – fear a total takeover.

Afghan women may have the most to fear from these Islamic militants. We are academics who interviewed 15 Afghan women activists, community leaders and politicians over the past year as part of an international effort to ensure that women’s human rights are defended and constitutionally protected in Afghanistan. For the safety of our research participants, we use no names or first names only here.

“Reform of the Taliban is not really possible,” one 40-year-old women’s rights activist from Kabul told us. “Their core ideology is fundamentalist, particularly towards women.”

FROM SUBJUGATION TO PARLIAMENT

The Taliban ruled all of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. Everyone faced restrictions under their conservative interpretation of Islam, but those imposed on women were the most stringent.

Women couldn’t leave their homes without a male guardian, and were required to cover their bodies from head to toe in a long robe called a burqa. They could not visit health centers, attend school or work.

In 2001, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, toppled the Taliban regime and worked with Afghans to establish a democratic government.

Officially, the U.S. war in Afghanistan was about hunting down Osama bin Laden, mastermind of the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks. The Taliban had sheltered bin Laden in Afghanistan. But the U.S. invoked women’s rights as a

justification for the occupation, too.

After the Taliban was driven out, women entered public life in Afghanistan in droves. That includes the fields of law, medicine and politics. Women make up more than a quarter of parliamentarians, and by 2016 more than 150,000 women had been elected to local offices.

RHETORIC VERSUS REALITY
Last year, after 20 years in Afghanistan, the U.S. signed an accord with the Taliban agreeing to withdraw American troops if the Taliban severed ties with al-Qaida and entered into peace talks with the government.

Officially, in these talks, Taliban leaders emphasize that they wish to grant women’s rights “according to Islam.”

But the women we interviewed say they believe the Taliban still reject the notion of gender equality.

“The Taliban may have learned to appreciate Twitter and social media for propaganda, but their actions on the ground tells us that they have not changed,” Meetra, a lawyer, shared with us recently.

The Taliban included no women in its own negotiating team, and as their local fighters are taking over districts, women’s rights are being rolled back.

A schoolteacher whose district in northern Mazar-e-Sharif province recently fell to the Taliban told us that, “In the beginning, when we saw the Taliban interviews on TV, we hoped for peace, as if the Taliban had changed. But when I saw the Taliban up close, they have not changed at all.”

Using mosque loudspeakers, Taliban fighters in areas under their control often announce that women must now wear the burqa and have a male chaperone in public. They burn public schools, libraries and computer labs.

“We destroy them [and] put in place our own religious schools, in order to train future Taliban,” a local

fighter from Herat told the channel France 24 in June 2021.

In Taliban-run religious schools for girls, students learn the “appropriate” Islamic role of women, according to the Taliban’s harsh interpretation of the faith. That consists largely of domestic duties.

Such actions demonstrate to many in Afghanistan that the Taliban disagree with the basic principles of democracy, including gender equality and free expression. Taliban negotiators are demanding Afghanistan adopt a new Constitution that would turn it into an “emirate” – an Islamic state ruled by a small group of religious leaders with absolute power.

That’s an impossible demand for the Afghan government, and peace talks have stalled.

A HISTORY OF EQUALITY

Many Muslim countries have steadily increasing gender equality. That includes Afghanistan, where women have been struggling for and gaining new rights for a century.

In the 1920s, Queen Soraya of Afghanistan participated in the political development of her country alongside her husband, King Amanullah Khan. An advocate for women’s rights, Soraya introduced a modern education for women, one that included sciences, history and other subjects alongside traditional home economics-style training and religious topics.

In the 1960s women were among the drafters of Afghanistan’s first comprehensive Constitution, ratified in 1964. It recognized the equal rights of men and women as citizens and established democratic elections. In 1965, four women were elected to the Afghan Parliament; several others became government ministers.

Afghan women protested any attacks on their rights. For instance,

when religious conservatives in 1968 tried to pass a bill banning women from studying abroad, hundreds of schoolgirls organized a demonstration in Kabul and other cities.

Afghan women’s status continued to improve under Soviet-backed socialist regimes of the late 1970s and 1980s. In this era, Parliament further strengthened girls’ education and outlawed practices that were harmful to women, such as offering them as brides to settle feuds between two tribes or forcing widows to marry the brother of their deceased husband.

By the end of the socialist regime in 1992, women were full participants in public life in Afghanistan.

In 1996 the rise of the Taliban interrupted this progress – temporarily.

RESILIENT REPUBLIC
The post-Taliban era demonstrated Afghan women’s resilience after a grueling setback. It also highlighted the public’s desire for a more democratic, responsive government.

That political project is still in its infancy today. The U.S. withdrawal now threatens the survival of Afghanistan’s fragile democratic institutions.

The Taliban cannot win power at the ballot box. Only around 13.4% of respondents in a 2019 survey by The Asia Foundation expressed some sympathy with the group.

So the Taliban are forcing their authority over the Afghan people using warfare, much as they did in the 1990s. Many women hope what comes next won’t repeat that history.

[Homa Hoodfar is Professor of Anthropology, Emerita, Concordia University; Mona Tajali is Associate Professor of International Relations and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Agnes Scott College]

Swimming gives your brain a boost – but scientists don’t know yet why it’s better than other aerobic activities

SEENA MATHEW
THECONVERSATION.COM

It’s no secret that aerobic exercise can help stave off some of the ravages of aging. But a growing body of research suggests that swimming might provide a unique boost to brain health.

Regular swimming has been shown to improve memory, cognitive function, immune response and mood. Swimming may also help repair damage from stress and forge new neural connections in the brain.

But scientists are still trying to unravel how and why swimming, in particular, produces these brain-enhancing effects.

As a neurobiologist trained in brain physiology, a fitness enthusiast and a mom, I spend hours at the local pool during the summer. It’s not unusual to see children gleefully splashing and swimming while their parents sunbathe at a distance – and I’ve been one of those parents observing from the poolside plenty of times. But if more adults recognized the cognitive and mental health benefits of swimming, they might be more inclined to jump in the pool alongside their kids.

NEW AND IMPROVED BRAIN CELLS AND CONNECTIONS

Until the 1960s, scientists believed that the number of neurons and synaptic connections in the human brain were finite and that, once damaged, these brain cells could not be replaced. But that idea was debunked as researchers began to see ample evidence for the birth of neurons, or neurogenesis, in adult brains of humans and other animals.

Now, there is clear evidence that aerobic exercise can contribute to neurogenesis and play a key role in helping to reverse or repair damage to neurons and their connections in both mammals and fish.

Research shows that one of the key ways these changes occur in response to exercise is through increased levels of a protein called brain-derived neurotrophic factor. The neural plasticity, or ability of the brain to change, that this protein stimulates has been shown to boost cognitive function, including learning and memory.

Studies in people have found a strong relationship between concentrations of brain-derived neurotrophic factor circulating in the brain and an increase in the size of the hippocampus, the brain region responsible for learning and memory. Increased levels of brain-derived neurotrophic factor have also been shown to sharpen cognitive performance and to help reduce anxiety and depression. In contrast, researchers have observed mood disorders in patients with lower concentrations of brain-derived neurotrophic factor.

Aerobic exercise also promotes the release of specific chemical messengers called

neurotransmitters. One of these is serotonin, which – when present at increased levels – is known to reduce depression and anxiety and improve mood.

In studies in fish, scientists have observed changes in genes responsible for increasing brain-derived neurotrophic factor levels as well as enhanced development of the dendritic spines – protrusions on the dendrites, or elongated portions of nerve cells – after eight weeks of exercise compared with controls. This complements studies in mammals where brain-derived neurotrophic factor is known to increase neuronal spine density. These changes have been shown to contribute to improved memory, mood and enhanced cognition in mammals. The greater spine density helps neurons build new connections and send more signals to other nerve cells. With the repetition of signals, connections can become stronger.

BUT WHAT’S SPECIAL ABOUT SWIMMING?
Researchers don’t yet know what swimming’s secret sauce might be. But they’re getting closer to understanding it.

Swimming has long been recognized for its cardiovascular benefits. Because swimming involves all of the major muscle groups, the heart has to work hard, which increases blood flow throughout the body. This leads to the creation of new blood vessels, a process called angiogenesis. The greater blood flow can also lead to a large release of endorphins – hormones that act as a natural pain reducer throughout the body. This surge brings about the sense of euphoria that often follows exercise.

Most of the research to understand how swimming affects the brain has been done in rats. Rats are a good lab model because of their genetic and anatomic similarity to humans.

In one study in rats, swimming was shown to stimulate brain pathways that suppress inflammation in the hippocampus and inhibit apoptosis, or cell death. The study also showed that swimming can help support neuron survival and reduce the cognitive impacts of aging. Although researchers do not yet have a way to visualize apoptosis and neuronal survival in people, they do observe similar cognitive outcomes.

One of the more enticing questions is how, specifically, swimming enhances short- and long-term memory. To pinpoint how long the beneficial effects may last, researchers trained rats to swim for 60 minutes daily for five days per week. The team then tested the rats’ memory by having them swim through a radial arm water maze containing six arms, including one with a hidden platform.

Rats got six attempts to swim freely and find the hidden platform. After just seven days of swim training, researchers saw improvements in both short-

and long-term memories, based on a reduction in the errors rats made each day. The researchers suggested that this boost in cognitive function could provide a basis for using swimming as a way to repair learning and memory damage caused by neuropsychiatric diseases in humans.

Although the leap from studies in rats to humans is substantial, research in people is producing similar results that suggest a clear cognitive benefit from swimming across all ages. For instance, in one study looking at the impact of swimming on mental acuity in the elderly, researchers concluded that swimmers had improved mental speed and attention compared with nonswimmers. However, this study is limited in its research design, since participants were not randomized and thus those who were swimmers prior to the study may have had an unfair edge.

Another study compared cognition between land-based athletes and swimmers in the young adult age range. While water immersion itself did not make a difference, the researchers found that 20 minutes of moderate-intensity breaststroke swimming improved cognitive function in both groups.

KIDS GET A BOOST FROM SWIMMING TOO
The brain-enhancing benefits from swimming appear to also boost learning in children.

Another research group recently looked at the link between physical activity and how children learn new vocabulary words. Researchers taught children age 6-12 the names of unfamiliar objects. Then they tested their accuracy at recognizing those words after doing three activities: coloring (resting activity), swimming (aerobic activity) and a CrossFit-like exercise (anaerobic activity) for three minutes.

They found that children’s accuracy was much higher for words learned following swimming compared with coloring and CrossFit, which resulted in the same level of recall. This shows a clear cognitive benefit from swimming versus anaerobic exercise, though the study does not compare swimming with other aerobic exercises. These findings imply that swimming for even short periods of time is highly beneficial to young, developing brains.

The details of the time or laps required, the style of swim and what cognitive adaptations and pathways are activated by swimming are still being worked out. But neuroscientists are getting much closer to putting all the clues together.

For centuries, people have been in search of a fountain of youth. Swimming just might be the closest we can get.

[The writer is Assistant Professor of Biology, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor]

Alternative politics continues to be a chimera in Nepal

BINOD GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, 28 JUL [KATHMANDUPOST]: When the Janata Samajbadi Party was formed in April last year, after a merger between the Rastriya Janata Party and Janata Samajbadi Party, its leaders proclaimed that their goal would be creating an alternative force, as “traditional parties” had failed to address the country’s entrenched problems.

But on Monday, an Election Commission decision to award the party to the Upendra Yadav-Baburam Bhattarai faction came as a harbinger of a split in the party. The Mahatha Thakur faction has an option to register a new party or remain within the Janata Samajbadi, but it has become apparent that the alternative force idea has fallen apart.

Rajendra Mahato, who is close to Thakur, admitted that the plan did not work. “We became a united force with an aim to create an alternative force, but we didn’t succeed,” Mahato told the media at the Election Commission on Monday after the party was awarded to the Yadav-Bhattarai faction.

But long before the formation of the Janata Samajbadi Party, Bibeksheel Sajha Party had made a foray into politics, claiming to form an alternative force.

Coincidentally, on Monday, just as the the year-long unity efforts of the Janata Samajbadi Party unravelled, Rabindra Mishra, Bibeksheel Sajha’s president, created quite some ripples by calling for the abolition of federalism and a referendum on secularism, both guaranteed by the constitution promulgated in September 2015.

Making public a proposal on his personal website,

Mishra, the journalist-turned-politician, claimed that neither federalism nor secularism was the original agenda of the Nepali people. He went on to argue that “foreign forces” had a hand in making secularism a political agenda in Nepal. His proposal, which he calls his personal opinion, has met with objections from members of his own party.

Political analysts say the two events on Monday once again have driven home at least two essential facts: an alternative force is an idea that some individuals float for some immediate attention and that there is hardly any commitment to the cause.

There, however, are some distinctions. The divisions in the Janata Samajbadi show that it was not actually prepared to create an alternative force. As far as Mishra is concerned, many say, through his statement on Monday he simply spoke his mind, as he always carried a rightist agenda in the garb of introducing “welfare politics” in Nepal.

In an interview with Bijay Kumar in May 2017, Mishra said his party is “centre right” ideology, only to correct it seconds later, when he was asked again.

Convincing political programmes, backed by a strong political ideology, are a must to form a strong political party, according to analysts.

“Neither the Janata Samajbadi Party nor Bibeksheel Sajha, nor Mishra’s original party, had such programmes and ideologies,” said Rajendra Maharjan, a political commentator. “Just branding one’s party as an alternative force doesn’t mean that anyone can bring about changes. They should be able to provide an alternative

ideology and programme and they should have a certain working style.”

While the Janata Samajbadi Party failed to provide any substantive reason for the people to believe that they can be an alternative to the mainstream politics, Mishra’s credentials were always in doubt.

The Janata Samajbadi Party had the same set of leaders, mostly from the Madhes region barring a few like Bhattarai and Rajendra Shrestha, who had earned notoriety for running behind power and positions.

Mishra, who left a BBC job, had initially started with Sajha Party. Bibeksheel Party, launched by Ujwal Thapa who died on June 1, of Covid-19, was another party that was trying to create a space of its own in the name of alternative politics.

Since both Sajha and Bibeksheel were channelising their anger at “traditional parties” they merged in July 2017, but separated in January 2019—only to unite again in December 2020.

On Monday, by seeking the abolition of federalism and a referendum on secularism, Mishra aligned himself with the Rastriya Prajatantra Party, led by Kamal Thapa, which has consistently opposed the abolition of the monarchy and adoption of federalism and secularism.

Hari Roka, a political economist and commentator, says liberalism and Marxism-based ideology have dominated Nepal’s politics for a long time but of late, nationalism is taking over.

“Existing parties have failed to come up with new ideologies and programmes that suit the context of Nepal,” Roka told the Post.

“For instance, it was Yadav, the chairperson of the Janata Samajbadi Party, who brought the agenda of the Madhesi community to the mainstream, even though he couldn’t come up with any fresh idea or programme to transform Madhes.”

According to Roka, a long-term vision is necessary to form an alternative force with the goal of catering to people’s aspirations in line with the changing times.

In Nepal, an alternative force is an idea largely inspired from India’s Aam Admi Party (AAP)—or Common Man Party—which made a historic win in Delhi Assembly elections three times starting in 2013. The Aam Admi Party started as an idea of Arvind Kejriwal, a former tax official who launched a crusade against corruption, blaming the existing forces for creating all the ills in the Indian society.

When Bhattarai, a former Maoist leader, started his own party, naming it Naya Shakti, or new force, in June 2016, he also wanted to create an alternative force. The Naya Shakti Party made a foray into Nepali politics with a bang—advertisements were splashed on almost every daily newspaper (except the Post) published out of Kathmandu. He launched his party with great pomp, organising a huge gathering at the Dasharath Stadium in Kathmandu. However, it faced a debacle in the 2017 general elections. Bhattarai was the only one to make it to Parliament.

Bhattarai had quit the Maoist party, which launched the “people’s war” demanding a constitution through the Constitution Assembly, 11 days after the promulgation of the constitution.

Bhattarai’s Naya Shakti in 2019 merged it with Yadav’s Sanghiya Samajbadi Forum.

When Sanghiya Samajbadi Forum merged with the Rastriya Janata Party Nepal last year, it was basically Bhattarai’s pitch that the Janata Samajbadi Party should be transformed into an alternative force to counter the “traditional parties.”

Roka said the parties trying to become the Aam Admi Party must know it didn’t come to power overnight.

Kerjiwal and his team were involved in the India Against Corruption, a movement which campaigned for the Jan Lokpal Bill, under the leadership of Anna Hazare. They also campaigned for the Right to Information before forming the party.

AAP was formed in November 2012 and contested the Delhi Assembly elections a year later. Kejriwal became chief minister only for 49 days as his party didn’t have a majority. But the party swept the elections in the next assembly polls in 2015, winning 67 seats in the 70-strong assembly. In 2019, it won 62 seats making it a hat-trick.

Maharjan said it has become evident that the Janata Samajbadi Party and Bibeksheel Sajha Party failed to emerge as alternative forces. But he strongly feels that there is still some space for alternative politics.

“There is a frustration among the people about the working style of the traditional parties,” said Maharjan. “There is suppression and discrimination in society. Corruption is rampant. There is room for a new force that can inspire hopes” Even the return of Sher

Bahadur Deuba, the Nepali Congress president, to power, for the fifth time, has made people wonder if Nepalis will continue to make do with the same set of old faces who have been tried and tested.

Deuba as prime minister, many believe, does not inspire any hope, but his appointment at the cost of KP Sharma Oli, who was bent on damaging the constitution, has been described by many as something that can at least save the constitution.

But Mishra’s statement on Monday, raising questions against the fundamental tenets of the constitution, and the traction it garnered have made many raise quite an eyebrow.

It came as a massive turnabout from 2017 when Mishra expressed his commitment to the constitution.

“We have full commitment to the current constitution,” Mishra said in an interview with the news website Nepallive in November 2017. “We don’t have any intention to undo this constitution.”

After Rastriya Prajatantra Party’s Thapa, it was CPN-UML chair Oli who appeared to be trying to promote Hinduism and making statements against federalism. And Mishra joined the league.

Political analysts say some individuals’ statements do not matter but when it comes to forming an alternative force, someone visionary is required to translate the idea into reality.

“I see a fertile ground for an alternative party,” Lokraj Baral, a professor of political science, told the Post. “But I haven’t seen leaders and parties who can really connect to the people with such an idea.”

Cong MLA resigns from Manipur house and party

IMPHAL, JULY 28 (PTI): Govindas Konthoujam, Congress MLA and former president of Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) Wednesday resigned from the membership of state Assembly and primary membership of the party. K o n t h o u j a m submitted his resignation letters from the primary Yumnam Khemchand Singh and MPCC interim president Nameirakpam Loken Singh.

A six-time consecutively elected MLA from Bishnupur seat, he had resigned as MPCC president on July 20.

Assembly poll in the northeastern state is due in 2022.

Loken Singh told PTI that Konthoujam has submitted his resignation letter from the primary membership of the party at the Congress Bhawan here stating that he had taken the step due to personal reasons.

An Assembly official told PTI that Konthoujam submitted his resignation letter to the Speaker on Wednesday morning.

Congress had bagged more seats in the 60-member house than BJP in the 2017 state Assembly poll but had failed to cross the halfway mark and was unable to cobble up an alliance to form the government. The BJP had then managed to stitch up an alliance with other parties and came to power. Presently the House has an effective strength of 56 in which the BJP has 25 members and the Congress 17. With Kanthoujam’s resignation from the House and the party the figure for the Congress now stands at 16.

Centre to meet Assam, Mizoram officials, police chiefs over border row

NEW DELHI, 28 JUL [NDTV]: The Home Ministry will today meet senior Assam and Mizoram officials - chief secretaries and DGPs (Director General of Police) - in the wake of violence along the states’ shared border on Monday that claimed the lives of six policemen and a civilian, and injured over 50 people.

Home Ministry Secretary Ajay Bhalla will chair the meeting that will discuss the border dispute and sudden escalation of violence. The meeting will, it is hoped, be the first step towards restoring a degree of peace along the Assam-Mizoram border,

where an uneasy calm holds for now.

The centre has said it can only facilitate a settlement in case of border disputes between states, underlining that these can only be resolved with the co-operation of the concerned governments.

There are seven such disputes, and Assam is involved in four of these. In addition to Mizoram, the northeastern state has border disputes with Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Meghalaya.

Three districts in Assam’s Barak Valley - Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi - share a 164 km border with three in Mizoram - Aizawl,

Kolasib and Mamit.

A dawn-to-dusk bandh has been called in the entire Barak Valley region in Assam, with the Barak Democratic Front (a local political outfit) demanding a permanent solution to the border row.

Violence broke out in these areas on Monday, with each side accusing the other.

Assam accused Mizoram of building a road through a protected forest in Lailapur and setting up an armed camp. It said its security personnel were attacked by miscreants and later, Mizoram said the violence started after

Assam Police crossed the border and “over-ran” a police post at Kolasib, as well as damaging vehicles and opened fire on its police.

A member of Assam’s 6th Police Battalion, who was critically injured in the clashes, died this morning, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma tweeted. This takes the number of deaths to seven.

An uneasy calm has settled over the border areas since the violence, which was followed by appeals from both chief ministers to Home Minister Amit Shah. The violence took place two days after Mr Shah met all eight northeastern chief minsters Ministers

in Shillong.

The CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) has increased deployment in these regions, with five companies (total of 500 troops) standing between the police forces of Assam and Mizoram.

Another two companies are on standby.

An Assam Congress delegation is expected to visit the border areas today.

The border areas in question have seen clashes for decades, with the locals and security forces on each side accusing the other of intrusion. The last incident was reported in June

All possible assistance is being provided to the affected areas, he said, wishing for everyone’s safety and well-being.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah spoke to Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and Director General of Police Dilbagh Singh and took stock of the situation arising due to the cloudburst.

“Seven bodies were recovered from the cloudburst-hit village (Kishtwar), while 17 others were rescued in an injured condition so far,” a police official told PTI.

Efforts are on to locate 14 missing people, he said, adding that the condition of five of the rescued persons was reported to

"How many of your kids in government schools?" Bihar asks Bureaucrats

PATNA, 28 JUL [NDTV]:

The Bihar government has written to all the bureaucrats in the state, seeking details on schooling status of their children. The government has sought to know how many of these children study in state-run schools. The move comes following a Patna High Court order seeking the same details.

The Additional Chief Secretary of the State Education Department, Sanjay Kumar, in a letter - dated July 23 - directed all the District Magistrates, Superintendents of Police (SPs) and district education officers to collect the information.

The High Court, on July 13, had sought from

the Bihar government details of the children of IAS, IPS and Grade-I and II officers of the state services studying in the government schools.

It also came down heavily on the condition of the education system in the state, terming it as “derailed”. It said that the education system cannot be improved as long as it is based on the concept of segregated system - “one for the elite and other for poor Biharis who have to be content with mid-day meal, free books, uniform and bicycles with poor or no teaching”.

Mr Kumar would also hold a review meeting through video conferencing with these officials on August 4, the order stated.

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Cloudbursts hit J-K, Himachal and Ladakh; 16 dead

SHIMLA/JAMMU, JUL 28 (PTI): A series of flash floods in Himachal Pradesh and the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh killed at least 16 people on Wednesday and damaged several residential houses, standing crops and a mini power plant, officials said.

In Kishtwar, a cloudburst hit a remote village around 4:30 am, leaving seven people dead and 17 others injured, while at least nine people are dead, two injured and seven reported missing in the flash floods in the hilly state, they said.

In Ladakh, two cloudbursts hit different areas of Kargil, causing damage to a mini power project, nearly a dozen residential houses

and standing crops, the officials said, adding that no loss of life was reported in the cloudbursts, which struck Sangra and Khangral on Tuesday evening.

Seven people died in Himachal Pradesh’s Lahaul-Spiti flash floods in Tozing Nullah in Udaipur, two injured and three are still missing, while two men died in Chamba, State Disaster Management director Sudesh Kumar Mokhta said.

Besides four people, including a woman, her son, a hydro project official and a Delhi tourist are feared dead in Kullu district, he added.

In Kishtwar, 19 houses, 21 cow sheds and a ration depot situated

on the banks of a stream, besides a bridge were damaged in the cloudburst.

A search and rescue operation by police, Army and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) is underway to locate over 14 people who are still missing from the scene of the cloudburst at village Honzar in Dacchan tehsil, the officials said.

Condoling the loss of lives due to a cloudburst in Kishtwar district, President Ram Nath Kovind said he was deeply saddened by the death of many people.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the Centre is closely monitoring the situation in Kishtwar.

be critical.

In Lahaul’s Udaipur, two tents of labourers and a private JCB were washed away in the flash floods around 8 pm on Tuesday, Mokhta said, adding that 12 labourers were washed away in the flash floods in Tozing Nullah in Udaipur.

Of them, seven bodies recovered, two rescued with injuries and three are still missing, he added.

Lahaul-Spiti Deputy Commissioner Neeraj Kumar told PTI that a team of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) had been requisitioned for rescuing the labourers trapped under the debris of the landslide.

In Jammu and Kashmir, Director General of Police-cum-Commandant General Home Guard, Civil Defence and SDRF, V K Singh, said two women are among the seven people killed in the cloudburst.

“One of our SDRF teams from Kishtwar reached the affected village and two more teams are on their way from Doda and Udhampur districts. Two more SDRF teams are waiting for the weather to improve to get airlifted from Jammu and Srinagar to the scene and join the rescue mission,” Singh said, adding that an NDRF team from Ludhiana in Punjab is also on the way to Kishtwar.

British swimmers make relay history; US doesn't even medal

TOKYO (AP): For the first time in more than a century, Britain claimed a relay gold at the Olympic pool. The United States, shockingly, didn't even make the podium. A dynamic quartet carried the British to a dominating victory in the men's 4x200-meter freestyle relay Wednesday.

Tom Dean, the 200 free gold medalist led off and 200 silver medalist Duncan Scott swam the anchor leg. James Guy — now a three-time Olympic medalist — and 18-year-old Matthew Richards took the middle legs.

"This has been years in the making," Dean said. "We've been getting stronger and stronger."

The British just missed the world record with a winning time of 6 minutes, 58.58 seconds.

The Americans set the record at 6:58.55 in rubberized suits at the 2009 world championships in Rome.

"We were so close to the world record in the end," Scott said. "If anything, I'm a bit gutted."

Imagine how the Americans must've been feeling.

For the first time in its proud swimming history, the U.S. failed to win a relay medal when entering an event.

Kieran Smith, Drew Kibler, Zach Apple and Townley Haas finished in 7:03.24, not only



far behind Britain but also trailing Russia and Australia, which claimed the silver and bronze respectively.

The result outraged Michael Phelps, who was part of so many winning relay teams during his career and is now at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre as a television commentator.

Phelps criticized the American coaches for not including Caeleb Dressel on the relay, even though it's not clear if he had any desire to add another event to his already busy schedule.

"It's shocking," Phelps said in an interview on NBC. "You know, in my opinion, he's probably the best 200 freestyler in the world. He can probably put up one of the best times that we've seen. Leaving him off that relay, to me, I think makes it a lot harder to win the gold medal."

Dressel swam a

single 200 free race at the U.S. Olympic trials, then withdrew from the event. His Tokyo program includes three individual events — including the semifinals of the 100 free Wednesday — and three other relays.

While known primarily as a sprinter, Dressel has turned in plenty of fast times over 200 meters.

Without him, the American not only didn't win gold, they were shut out altogether.

The only other times that happened were at 1912 Stockholm Games, when the Americans didn't enter a team in the women's 4x100 free relay, and the 1980 Moscow Games, when they didn't show up at all because the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Otherwise, the U.S. had been 94 of 94 in the relays — not all of them wins, of course, but medals at least. Make it 94 of 95.

The British made

their own bit of history.

It was their first relay gold since that a f o r e m e n t i o n e d women's 4x100 free in 1912, with their only victory coming in the men's 4x200 free relay at the first London Games in 1908.

But they hardly came out of nowhere.

They had the Americans in their sights ever since taking silver in the 4x200 at the Rio Games five years ago.

Now, with Phelps retired, longtime stalwart Ryan Lochte failing to make the Olympic team and Dressel focusing on other events, the British finally made it to the top.

"These four lads here, we're the best freestylers in the world," Guy said. "It's just amazing the way things have progressed. Racing Michael Phelps, Ryan Lochte in Rio, and now we are the Olympic champions."

India-NZ final most watched across all WTC series: ICC

DUBAI, JUL 28 (PTI):

The India-New Zealand final in Southampton last month was the most watched across all series that were part of the inaugural World Test Championship (WTC), with a total global audience of 177 million, the ICC said on Wednesday.

The live viewership of the Test played between June 18 and 23 had touched 130.6 million across 89 territories.

India contributed most of the audience with Star Sports and national broadcaster Doordarshan accounting for a whopping 94.6 per cent consumption of the intensely contested match that saw New Zealand complete an eight-wicket win on the reserve day.

In addition to the English-language world feed, Star had produced local language feeds in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada.

ICC Chief Commercial Officer Anurag Dahiya said, "The viewership data for broadcast and digital coverage of the ICC World Test Championship Final presents a really heartening picture, showing strong In the United



consumption across territories and languages as well as formats.

"The ICC always strives to give the best possible viewership experience and will continue to invest in resources that enhance the viewing pleasure and engagement of our fans," he was quoted as saying in an ICC release.

The viewership was also impressive in New Zealand, considering its small population and the inconvenient time of broadcast, with over 200,000 people staying up all night or waking up very early in the mornings to watch their team win the battle of attrition and lift the coveted Test Mace on Sky Sport.

Japan rallies in 9th to beat DR 4-3 in Olympic opener

FUKUSHIMA (JAPAN), JUL 28 (AP):

Hayato Sakamoto hit a game-ending, bases-loaded single that capped a three-run, ninth-inning rally, lifting host Japan over the Dominican Republic 4-3 in the Olympic baseball opener on Wednesday.

The Dominicans led 3-1 entering the ninth after starter Cristopher Mercedes dominated a lineup he knows well from his years in Nippon Professional Baseball.

Outfielder Johan Mieses threw out a runner at home in the eighth inning to preserve the lead.

Jairo Asencio (0-1) got the first out of the ninth, then forgot to cover first on Yuki Yanagita's grounder to first, letting him reach for Japan's fifth hit of the game. He allowed two more hits before Kai Takuya scored the tying run with a sacrifice bunt.

After Tetsuto

Yamada singled to load the bases, Jhan Martinez replaced Asencio. Sakamoto, the 2019 Central League MVP, then drove a ball to the warning track in center to earn the hosts a walk-off victory.

Just the way Japan wanted to open the tournament.

The Olympics host nation is pursuing its first gold medal in baseball after the sport was restored to the Summer Games for the first time since 2008. Few

ICC digital assets with 423 million views and 368 million minutes consumed on the ICC Page.

The Reserve Day saw the most views ever recorded across the ICC Facebook page on a single day, with 65.7 million individual views across the 24-hour period, surpassing the 64.3 million enjoyed during the final of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2020.

Instagram added a further 70 million individual views across the final. Further contributions from the ICC website and mobile app, as well ICC's channels on Twitter and YouTube, took the total video views to 515 million.

Tendulkar helps farmer's daughter to pursue dream of becoming doctor

MUMBAI, JUL 28 (PTI):

Cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar has once again shown his philanthropic avatar to help Dipti Vishwasrao, daughter of a poor farmer, realise her dreams of pursuing a medical degree.

"Dipti Vishwasrao from Zayre, Ratnagiri is now all set to become the first doctor from her village. Thanks to @sachin_rt's involvement! Her dream of going to medical college is now within reach. Thank you Sachin, for being

part of Dipti's, and several other students' journey," Seva Sahyog Foundation, a non-profit and a volunteer-driven organisation, said in a tweet.

In a video shared in the tweet, Dipti thanked Tendulkar for the support.

"Right now, I am pursuing my MBBS from the government medical college, Akola. In my family there are four members, including me, my parents and younger brother. My father is a

famer and mother is a housewife."

"But someone has said that hard-work is key to success and finally all my hard-work paid off and I got a seat in the government medical college. (I am) thankful to Sachin Tendulkar Foundation for awarding me the scholarship," she said.

Tendulkar on his part said: "Dipti's journey is a shining example of chasing one's dreams and making them a reality. Her story will inspire many others to work hard towards their goals.

True legend of Indian badminton: tributes pour in after legendary Nandu Natekar dies

NEW DELHI, JUL 28 (PTI):

An inspiration to many stalwarts of Indian badminton, the legendary Nandu Natekar's death on Wednesday was mourned by his fraternity with Prime Minister Narendra Modi also paying homage to his outstanding sporting legacy.

Natekar, who played a bit of cricket and tennis at the national level before becoming an international shuttler, died in Pune on Wednesday.

The 88-year-old, who won over 100 national and international titles in his career and was the first badminton player to be awarded the Arjuna (1961), was battling age-related ailments.

Condoling the death of Natekar, Modi said his achievements will continue to motivate budding players.

"Shri Nandu Natekar has a special place in India's sporting history. He was an outstanding

badminton player and a great mentor," Modi tweeted.

"His success continues to motivate budding athletes. Saddened by his demise. My thoughts are with his family and friends in this sad hour. Om Shanti," the prime minister said.

Natekar, who was considered one of the most popular sportspersons of his time, was also a former world number three.

Sports Minister Anurag Thakur described Natekar as "an exceptional badminton player."

"In 1961 he was conferred with the prestigious Arjuna Award. A generation of athletes have drawn inspiration from him. Sincere condolences to his family & friends," Thakur tweeted.

Chief badminton national coach Pullela Gopichand described Natekar as a "true legend" of the game

while Vimal Kumar credited him for his initiation to the sport.

"For us, he is a true legend in Indian badminton. He is someone who is well-respected and we have heard stories about him. He not only played badminton but tennis at the highest level.

"He belonged to that era, where he, along with Suresh Goel, Dinesh Khanna and Prakash Padukone, were up there," Gopichand, India's chief national coach, told PTI.

It was tennis' loss but badminton's gain as Natekar could have continued with the former had he not lost the 1951-52 National junior final to Ramanathan Krishnan.

"He was soft (spoken) person and a great gentleman. He was affectionate and always had keen interest in present day badminton. He had such precision and understanding of

angles, he was an athlete because he could adapt to tennis and badminton," Gopichand said.

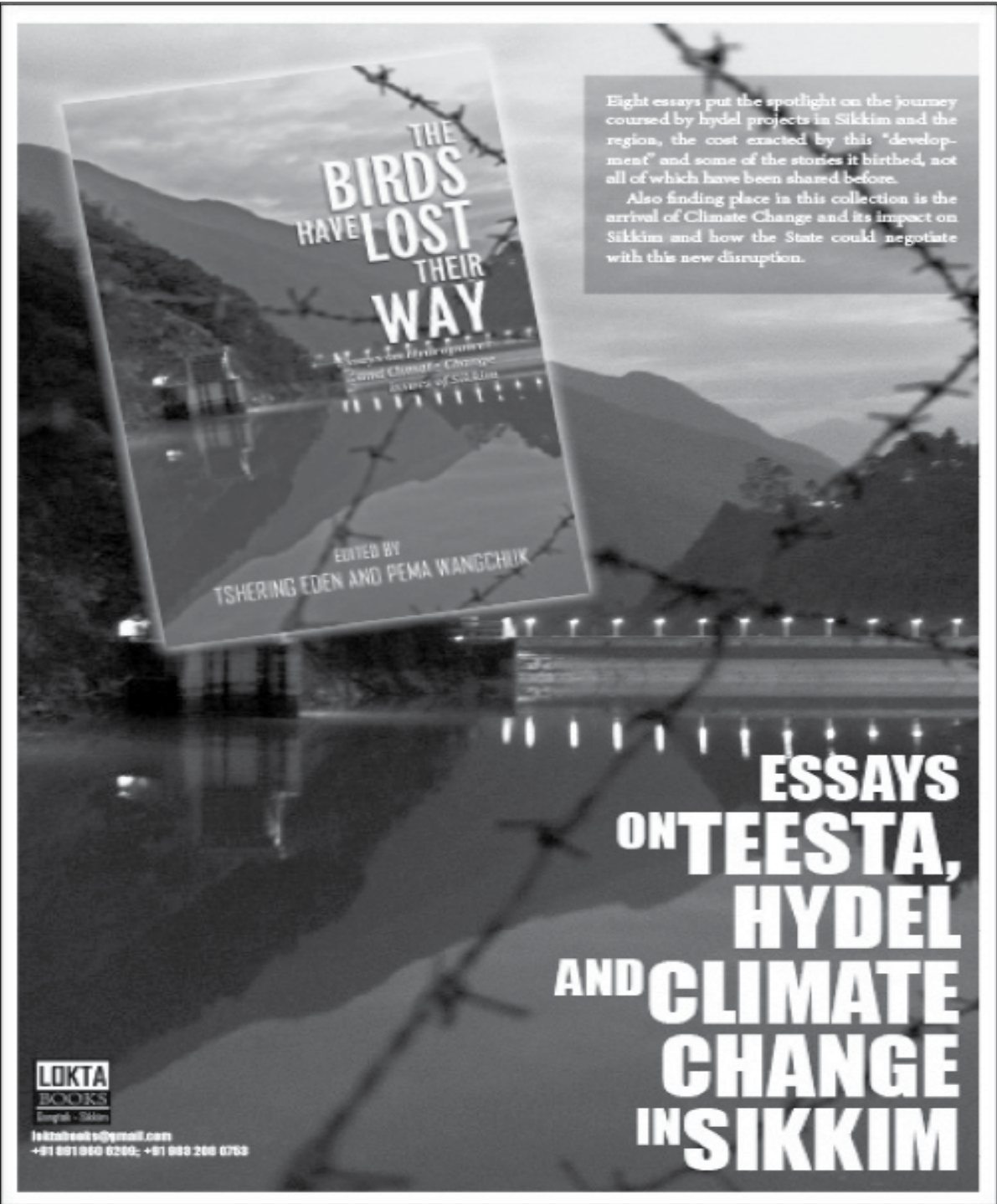
"He had such beautiful hands, skills and also his movement."

Former India coach Vimal Kumar said his father was a big fan of Natekar and that's how he got into the sport.

"My father was a big fan of him and in fact it was after he saw him during a national event at (then) Trivandrum that he put up an outside court at our house and that's how I got initiated into badminton," he said.

"I could only see him play when he won the veteran All England in the 1980s. He was as popular as the cricketers in the 50s and people used to line up to watch him play."

Abdul Shaikh, who played with Natekar in the Maharashtra team before shifting to Canada in 1967, also had a lot of good memories.



Iran's supreme leader criticizes US as nuclear talks stalled

TEHRAN, IRAN (AP): Iran's supreme leader on Wednesday called the U.S. "stubborn" in stalled nuclear talks in Vienna for discussing Tehran's missiles and regional influence, likely signaling challenges ahead in efforts to revive its tattered atomic accord with world powers.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's remarks come as his hard-line protege, President-elect Ebrahim Raisi, is posed to be sworn in next week as the head of the country's civilian government.

While Raisi has said he wants to return to the deal, which saw Iran limit its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions, Khamenei seemingly called for a more-adversarial approach in his remarks. They also appeared to describe outgoing President Hassan Rouhani's eight-year government as naive for its approach in reaching the 2015 agreement as its officials sat before him.

"Others should use your experiences. This experience is a distrust of the West," Khamenei said in remarks broadcast by state television. "In this government, it was shown up that trust in the West does not work."

He added: "Westerners do not help



us, they hit wherever they can."

The U.S. State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The Biden administration days earlier criticized Iran for saying America had delayed a possible prisoner-swap deal, calling it "an outrageous effort to deflect blame for the current impasse."

French Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Agnes Von Der Muhll also told journalists Monday that it was "urgent for Iran to return to the negotiating table."

"Through its actions, Iran continues to exacerbate the nuclear situation," she said. "If it continues down this path, not only will it delay the moment when an agreement might be reached providing for the lifting of sanctions,

but it could compromise the very possibility of concluding the Vienna talks and restoring the" deal.

In his remarks Wednesday, Khamenei described American negotiators as verbally promising to lift sanctions, but said any return to the nuclear deal must "include a sentence" on negotiating on other issues.

"By putting this sentence, they want to provide an excuse for their further interventions on the principle of (the deal) and missile program and regional issues," the leader said. "If Iran refuses to discuss them, they will say that you have violated the agreement and the agreement is over."

Rouhani sat off to the side at Khamenei's

office during the meeting along with his senior vice president, while officials in his government sat before the supreme leader in socially distanced chairs amid the country's raging coronavirus outbreak. All wore masks, making it difficult to see their expressions as Khamenei criticized any outreach to the West while only praising "some" of the country's diplomats in front of Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

"Westerners do not help us, they hit wherever they can," Khamenei said. He also said at another point: "They don't help, they are enemies."

Under the deal, Iran agreed to limit its enrichment of uranium gas to just 3.67% purity, which can be used in nuclear power plants but

is far below weapons-grade levels of 90%. It also put a hard cap on Iran's uranium stockpile to just 300 kilograms (661 pounds). Tehran also committed to using only 5,060 of its first-generation centrifuges, the devices that spin the uranium gas to enrich it.

Then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the accord in 2018. Today, Iran has broken all the limits it agreed to under the deal. It now enriches small amounts of uranium up to 63% purity, its highest level ever. It also spins far-more advanced centrifuges and more of them than allowed under the accord, worrying nuclear nonproliferation experts, though Tehran insists its program is peaceful.

UK ex-military chiefs urge more help for Afghan interpreters



LONDON (AP): Dozens of former military commanders are calling on the U.K. government to relocate more of the Afghans who worked with British troops over the last 20 years, arguing that they are likely to be murdered by the Taliban as foreign forces pull out.

Retired Gen. Richard Dannatt, the former chief of the General Staff, and other senior leaders of the campaign in Afghanistan, said the resettlement program for interpreters and other staff needed to act with more "generosity and urgency."

"Too many of our interpreters have unreasonably been rejected," they said in a letter to Prime Minister Boris Johnson that was published Wednesday. "We urge the government to review the policy

immediately. Only those constituting a national, security threat should be excluded."

The U.K. has a "moral obligation" to resettle people who risked their lives to help British troops, and failure to do so will damage the country's reputation abroad, Dannatt said in an interview with the BBC.

Among those currently ineligible for resettlement are Afghans who were dismissed for minor infractions, such as a man who took an unauthorized day of leave to visit his sick mother, Dannatt said. Expanding the program would allow about 4,000 more Afghan employees and their families to move to the U.K., in addition to the 3,000 who have already been resettled, he said.

"We are also gravely

concerned for Afghan staff who provided essential support to us but who are ineligible for relocation because they did not work in an 'exposed role' or were contracted through third parties," the former commanders wrote. "The Taliban make no such distinction."

At the peak of the post-2001 deployment there were almost 10,000 British troops in Afghanistan, mostly in Helmand province in the south. Britain ended combat operations in 2014, but about 750 troops remain in the country to train Afghan forces.

U.S. and other NATO troops are ending a deployment launched against al-Qaida and Taliban forces in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Japan minister urges young to get vaccinated

TOKYO (AP): As Olympics host Tokyo saw another record number of coronavirus cases Wednesday, Japan's vaccination minister said the speed of the country's inoculation campaign is less urgent than getting shots to young people, who some health experts are blaming for the current surge in infections.

Vaccination Minister Taro Kono told The Associated Press that Japan is "overshooting" its goal of a million shots a day, so "speed doesn't matter anymore." Japan is averaging about 10 million shots a week after a late start.

"Even if we slow down a little bit, I'm OK. Rather we need to reach out to the younger people, so that they would feel that it's necessary for them to get vaccinated," Kono said, speaking in English during an interview in his office.

Many in Japan fear that the tens of thousands of visitors allowed special entry for the Olympics will cause more huge spikes in



cases or a new variant of the coronavirus.

Tokyo reported 3,177 new coronavirus cases Wednesday, an all-time high for the city and the first time it exceeded 3,000 infections in a day. The new cases exceeded the earlier record of 2,848 set Tuesday and bring the total for the Japanese capital to 206,745 since the pandemic began early last year.

Japan has so far kept its cases and deaths lower than many other countries. But its vaccination campaign

started very late in comparison to other large economies, and there is fear that rising cases could overwhelm hospitals.

Tokyo is under its fourth state of emergency, which will last through the Olympics and into the Paralympics next month. Experts had earlier warned that the more contagious delta variant could cause a surge during the Olympics, which started Friday.

Health experts have noted that cases among younger, unvaccinated

people are rising sharply. While about two-thirds of Wednesday's cases were people in their 30s or below, people in their 50s now dominate Tokyo's nearly 3,000 hospitalized patients and are gradually filling up available beds. Authorities reportedly plan to ask medical institutions to increase their capacity to about 6,000.

Dr. Ryuji Wakita, director general of the National Institute of Infections Diseases and head of a government advisory board, said

vaccination progress has been limited mostly to elderly people, while younger people are still largely unprotected. Emergency measures should be firmly exercised, he said, to prevent the further spread of the virus during the Olympics and the summer vacation season.

Wakita acknowledged that the rise of serious cases is modest compared to the sharp increase of daily cases, but even so, the ongoing surge could cause younger and unvaccinated patients who overflow from hospitals to develop serious cases while being left at home and untreated.

"The younger generations are largely unvaccinated, and that's why those in their 40s and 50s are increasingly getting infected and being hospitalized," he said. "The level of vaccinations in Japan has not reached a state where we can easily permit the number of infections to rise."



MEDAN, INDONESIA (AP): A rumbling volcano on Indonesia's Sumatra island on Wednesday shot billowing columns of ash and hot clouds down its slopes.

The ash released by Mount Sinabung in North Sumatra province reached more than 4,500 meters (14,760 feet) into the atmosphere, and an avalanche of searing gas clouds blew 1 kilometers (0.62 mile) to the east and southeast, Indonesia's Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Center said.

There were no casualties from the afternoon eruption, said Armen Putra, an

official at the Sinabung monitoring post, and an alert has been maintained at the second-highest level.

The 2,600-meter (8,530-foot) mountain has been rumbling since last year and villagers were advised to stay 5 kilometers (3.1 miles) from the crater's mouth. They've been warned about lava while authorities were closely monitoring sensors that picked up increasing activity in recent weeks.

The last such eruption was in early May, when ash fell on nearby villages.

The volcano, one of two currently erupting in

Indonesia, was dormant for four centuries before exploding in 2010, killing two people. Another eruption in 2014 killed 17 people, while seven died in a 2016 eruption. It has sporadically come to life since then.

About 30,000 people have been forced to leave their homes around Sinabung in the past few years.

Sinabung is among more than 120 active volcanoes in Indonesia, which is prone to seismic upheaval due to its location on the Pacific "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes and fault lines encircling the Pacific Basin.

Chinese farmer who praised lawyers sentenced to 18 years

BEIJING (AP): A prominent Chinese pig farmer who was detained after praising lawyers during a crackdown on legal activists by President Xi Jinping's government was sentenced Thursday to 18 years in prison on charges of organizing an attack on officials and other offenses.

Sun Dawu, chairman of Dawu Agriculture Group, was among 20 defendants who stood trial in Gaobeidian, southwest of Beijing in Hebei

province. They were detained after Dawu employees in August 2020 tried to stop a state-owned enterprise from demolishing a company building.

Sun also was fined 3.1 million yuan (\$480,000), the People's Court of Gaobeidian said in a statement.

Sun was convicted of gathering people to attack state organs, obstructing public affairs, picking quarrels, sabotaging

production, illegal mining, illegal occupation of farmland and illegally taking public deposits, the court said.

Other defendants received sentences ranging from one to 12 years, according to a statement from Dawu Group. It said the company was ordered to refund 1 billion yuan (\$155 million) in investment that was raised improperly.

Sun became nationally known in 2003 when he

was charged with illegal fundraising after soliciting investments for his business from friends and neighbors. The case prompted an outpouring of public support for Sun.

Since then, Sun has praised lawyers who help the public at a time when prominent legal figures have been imprisoned by Xi's government. Sun's lawyer in the 2003 case, Xu Zhiyong, disappeared

in February 2020. Fellow activists say he was charged with treason.

Sun was accused of provoking quarrels, a charge used against labor and other activists, when he was detained in August 2020.

The trial officially was open to the public but only one spectator from the family of each defendant and 10 from the company were allowed due to coronavirus restrictions, defense lawyers said earlier.

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NETFLIX bags worldwide rights for Will Smith-starrer 'Fast & Loose'

LOS ANGELES, JUL 28 (PTI): Hollywood superstar Will Smith's upcoming action thriller "Fast & Loose" has been acquired by streamer Netflix.

Filmmaker David Leitch, known for movies such as "Deadpool 2" and "Hobbs & Shaw", will direct the project from a script by Jon Hoeber and Erich Hoeber.

According to Deadline, Netflix recently won the worldwide rights to the action thriller after the project hit the market in February this year.

Smith, 52, will star in the movie as a man who wakes up in Tijuana, Mexico, with no

memories.

As he pieces together his past, he learns he's been living two lives, one as a crime kingpin and the other as an undercover CIA agent. Leitch and Kelly McCormick will produce for 87North along with STXfilms and Smith through his Westbrook Studios. Jon Mone, Ryan Shimazaki and James Lassiter will also serve as producers.

Smith will next feature in Warner Bros' biographical drama "King Richard". He is playing the role of Richard Williams, the father and coach of tennis players Venus and Serena Williams.

Slipknot founding drummer Joey Jordison dies at 46

DES MOINES, IOWA (AP): Joey Jordison, a founding member of Slipknot, who drummed for the influential metal band in its most popular period and helped write many of its best-known songs, has died Monday at age 46, his family said.

"We are heartbroken to share the news that Joey Jordison, prolific drummer, musician and artist passed away peacefully in his sleep," his family said in a statement. "Joey's death has left us with empty hearts and feelings of indescribable sorrow."

No cause or place of death was provided.

Jordison grew up in Des Moines, Iowa, the eldest of three children, and began playing drums at age 8. He was already a veteran of the city's metal scene when he founded the band that would become Slipknot in 1995, along with percussionist Shawn Crahan and bassist Paul Gray.

The three talked plans and concepts for the band in sessions at the gas station where Jordison worked. They would name the group after one of their early songs.

The group would become known for



its rousing, epic live shows, with nine members wearing masks and sinister costumes and creating a massive, sweeping sound that, like other metal bands of the era, included elements of hip-hop.

Jordison often wore a white mask with black paint drippings and a crown of thorns when he performed.

Buzz grew through touring, including show-stealing appearances on the Ozzfest tour, and the band broke through to international popularity with its 1999 self-titled album. That was followed by the even more popular 2001 album "Iowa."

Slipknot would become one of the bands credited with keeping hard rock

alive and vital in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with grunge-era bands aging and fading.

Jordison was dismissed from the band in 2013. He later said it was because he had transverse myelitis, a neurological condition that left him unable to play.

His family said there will be a private funeral.

'Prison Break' star Wentworth Miller reveals autism diagnosis

LOS ANGELES, JUL 28 (PTI): Wentworth Miller, best known for starring in the serial drama "Prison Break", has revealed that he has autism.

The 49-year-old actor opened up about his condition on Instagram Tuesday, said he received a formal diagnosis of autism a year ago, admitting that the news was "a shock but not a surprise".

"This isn't something I'd change," he added.

"No. I get got immediately being autistic is central to who I am. To everything I've achieved/articulated... I also want to say to the



many (many) people who consciously or unconsciously gave me that extra bit of grace + space over the years, allowed me to move thru the world in a way that made sense to me whether or not it made sense to them...

thank you (sic)," Miller wrote alongside a blank white square.

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), refers to a broad range of conditions characterised by challenges with social

skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication

The actor, a graduate from Princeton University, said that he will now be "re-examining 5 decades of lived experience thru a new lens (sic)"

Miller also criticised the diagnostic process for adults, calling it "a long, flawed process in need of updating".

"I'm a middle-aged man. Not a 5-year-old," he wrote.

The actor, who has been out since 2013, has been vocal about his struggles with mental health and how he tried to kill himself as a teenager.

Spielberg's semi-autobiographical film adds Judd Hirsch, Jeannie Berlin to cast

LOS ANGELES, JUL 28 (PTI): Oscar nominees Judd Hirsch, Jeannie Berlin, and veteran stage and screen actors Robin Bartlett and Jonathan Hadary have been roped in to star in master filmmaker Steven Spielberg's film based on his childhood.

The movie, which is loosely based on Spielberg's experiences as a child in Arizona, now has the working title of "The Fabelmans".

The quartet represents the older relatives in the fictional family of a young, aspiring filmmaker (played by Gabriel LaBelle) at the centre of the film, reported Variety.

They join a star-studded cast led by Michelle Williams and Paul Dano, who are playing versions of Spielberg's late parents, with Seth Rogen essaying a character based on the veteran director's favourite uncle.

Julia Butters is attached to play Spielberg's sister. Sam Rechner, Oakes Fegley, Chloe East and Isabelle Kusman are cast in the role of his high school classmates.

Spielberg has co-written the script with Tony Kushner, his regular collaborator on films like "Lincoln" and the upcoming



"West Side Story". They are also attached as producers on the film along with Kristie Macosko Krieger, backed by Amblin Partners.

Production is currently underway, with a release planned for next year.



SUMMER CROP! The model, Kendall Jenner shows off her physique in a striped crop top and black pants while out to lunch in L.A.

ARIES:

What do you do when your body asks for rest and rejuvenation? What do you do when that endless to-do list just doesn't make sense anymore? Breathe, Aries, breathe. Give yourself the timeout you need. They've been a rollercoaster ride, these past few months. Your guides want you to slip into yin mode, so that you become more receptive to the healing energy they're sending out.

TAURUS:

If Rumi's immortal words are anything to go by, then the wound is where the light enters, Taurus. This is something you will become acutely aware of over the next few days. So, without judging what's coming up or trying to put a label on it, observe the things that are showing up in your emotional landscape. Your inner light will help transform these wounds into wisdom.

GEMINI:

The trouble is, we create our own limitations. We repeat the story of failure and rejection, thus giving the negatives more

power than they deserve. What the cards are urging you to do today is shift the focus a little. Observe all the things that are blessed and beautiful in your world. The things that are working out seamlessly despite the opposition. Oh, the miracles you will make space for when you replace fear with faith!

CANCER:

There are two kinds of people in the world. People who become bitter as time goes by, and people who swallow poison and turn it into a sweet elixir that helps them rise above pain. You belong to the second category, Cancer, and possess the uncanny ability to expand your heart space with each passing day.

LEO:

They say that the Muse has a tendency to play the role of an elusive lover, but you would beg to disagree, Leo. In your humble opinion, she appears when you call her and opens up a whole new world of possibilities. So, pay attention to what is being shown to you. The ideas that you are channelling right now are pure gold.

Word of warning, though: being this sensitive is a double-edged sword. Remember to cleanse your aura regularly and strengthen your energetic boundaries.

VIRGO:

We've all grown with ideas of who we are and who we should be. But, these ideas are merely borrowed from the world around us. They don't define who we are on a soul level. They shouldn't and mustn't define our journey in the earthly realm. This is something you understand deeply, Virgo.

LIBRA:

Manifestation is a two-way process, Libra. A process of co-creation, if you may. You plant visuals onto the vision board of the Universe and you receive guidance on how to execute this vision through your intuitive channels. But in order to receive the guidance that's on point, you must send out crystal-clear intentions.

SCORPIO:

Summer shapeshifts into winter. The darkness of the night makes way for the radiance of the day. This physical realm

of ours works in accordance with the law of duality. As a result, it is important for us to honour each of the experiences we attract into our reality. Scorpio, this is precisely what you are focusing on today. Trust that the light of awareness will help you transmute the old wounds and emerge as the most invincible version of yourself.

SAGITTARIUS:

At any point of time, we have two options: to shut down as a result of pain or to turn the poison into a sweet elixir that transforms you on a soul level. It's time to make space for more love, more kindness, and more compassion. It's time to be a warrior of light in a world that's driven by selfish motives.

CAPRICORN:

Kindness is cultivated, Capricorn. So is compassion. What the cards are reminding you of today is the power to stay open. The power to expand your heart space no matter what your circumstances. Trust that it is this openness that will help you transform the challenges you are con-

fronted with at the moment. Remember, you are a warrior of light, and you are here to remind humanity that love is the ultimate intoxicant.

AQUARIUS:

There is never a dearth of love, wealth and opportunities in your world. We repeat: there is never a dearth of love, wealth and opportunities in your world. July sees you shifting your relationship with matter and adopting abundance as a lifestyle. 'As above, so below' is the principle on which you are rebuilding your life. The good thing is, the seeds you planted a while ago are beginning to bear fruit too, reminding you of your power as the co-creator of your reality.

PISCES:

This conversation isn't about other people, Pisces. It's about you and you. It's about how *you* perceive yourself. The cards are reminding you that your outer world is simply a reflection of your inner world. It is by owning your power that you will be able to attract opportunities that allow you to be in a leadership position.