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SummitTIMES

Vol 06 | Issue 174 | Gangtok | Saturday 10 July 2021

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | Rs. 5

CM takes stock of GMC, PHE and Sport Depts, issues directives

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 09 JUL:**

Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang conducted three separate meetings with the GMC, PHE and Sports Department, at Samman Bhawan today, a press release from the Chief Minister's Office informs.

The meeting were held in the presence of Ministers, MLAs, Mayor, Dy Mayor, councillors, ACSs, Principal Secretaries, secretaries, commissioner, SDGP, DIGP, ASP (Traffic), SHO, officials from various department, Administration section, Accounts section, Engineering Cell of the department and other officials at Samman Bhawan today.

In the first meeting, the GMC submitted a detailed report and made a comprehensive presentation of the prevailing conditions, status quo of the drainage system in and around Gangtok, additional projects, proposals, financial viewpoints, manpower management, various schemes towards cleanliness of the jhoras, jhora tending and widespread construction were apprised to the house.



The Chief Minister also inquired about plans related to jhoras, traffic, constructions, solid waste management, etc and was briefed about it by the concerned officials. They also placed several concerns and issues regarding office space, urgent requirement and other internal issues of the department which needs to be addressed. The installation of CCTV cameras in all the strategic places of Gangtok was also discussed during the meeting.

In the meeting with the PHE Department, the concerned officials pre-

sented a brief overview of financial expenses and progress of the work under their respective charge and also updated the Chief Minister about the current work under the department including cleanliness activities, water supply and areas which need further improvement. The Chief Minister also put forth his suggestions and directed the officials to take the necessary step to reach the vulnerable spot using multiple protective measures.

Similarly, the third and final meeting was held with the Sports De-

partment who briefed about the successes in the field of sports, progress and achievements of sports academies and individuals, the status of sports in the state, various programs aimed at promoting youths, various national and state-level sports. They also projected plans and proposals to strengthen the sports department in the state.

The Chief Minister stressed the need to move ahead by being involved in professional sports. He also expressed the commitment of the government, the department and all the concerned

clubs and organizations to remain active for the advancement of the aspiring youth of Sikkim.

Chief Minister shared some valuable suggestions towards creating more facilities for the people and urged all the departments to pay more attention towards the enhancement of numerous schemes and small scale projects which can be availed by the common people in Sikkim. He also extended his best wishes to the Indian contingent for the upcoming Olympic event and hoped they come out with flying colours.

170 new cases, 137 recoveries and no new Covid deaths in Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 09 JUL:**

Sikkim recorded 170 fresh cases of novel coronavirus in the last 24 hours taking the state's tally of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 to 21,965. In comparison, 137 more people registered full recoveries over the same period and were discharged from home and facility isolation. With this, Sikkim's count of recovered Covid cases has further improved to 19,219.

While number of daily cases are refusing to calm down substantially, what did come as reassuring news today was that no new Covid deaths were reported in the past 24 hours and the COVID death toll holds at 312 for now.

Out of the 170 new cases, 70 were registered in East District, 53 in West District, 43 in South District and 04 in North District.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department this morning, the 170 cases were picked up from the testing of 987 samples on Thursday giving Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 17.2%.

A total of 83 new cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 432 samples, while 86 people tested positive in rapid antigen testing of 550 samples and one more new case was reported in TruNat testing of five samples.

Today, hospitals saw 15 new Covid admissions taking the number of hospitalized Covid patients to 87 of whom eight are in the ICU.

There are 2,177 active cases of Covid in the State at present, more than two thousand of whom are nursing mild or no symptoms and are doing fine with home isolation.

"Empty Gesture": Farmers body on mandis allowed finance from agri-infra fund

NEW DELHI, 09 JUL

[PTI]: The Samyukt KisanMorchha, an umbrella body of farmers' union, on Friday said the Centre's decision to allow APMC mandis to avail financial support from the 1 lakh crore Agriculture Infrastructure Fund is an "empty gesture".

Reference to the 1 lakh crore Agriculture Infrastructure Fund is "highly misleading", it alleged, adding the aim of the three contentious Central farm laws is the collapse of the agricultural produce market committees (APMCs).

APMC markets are set up to provide market linkages and create an ecosystem of post-harvest public infrastructure open to all farmers.

The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved modification in the central scheme making the APMC mandis eligible to avail financial support from the 1 lakh crore Agriculture Infrastructure Fund to expand the regulated markets' capacity and provide better facilities to farmers.

Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar has asserted that the decision to further strengthen the APMCs always protesting farmers' fear that these mandis will be scrapped with the

implementation of three controversial agriculture laws. However, on Friday, the SamyuktKisanMorchha said, "To begin with, referring to a 1 lakh crore Agriculture Infrastructure Fund is highly misleading because there has been no allocation of even a thousand crore rupees from the government. It has merely created a new head under which loans can be accessed from banks."

The government has presented a "minor and insignificant decision", it said in a statement.

"The actual financing is dependent on regular commercial banks, and India's story of banking sector mismanagement and collusion with big capitalists is well-known. The government's role is only to provide an interest subvention of a mere 3 per cent and some credit guarantee coverage," the SamyuktKisanMorchha said.

Only 208 crore was allocated for Agriculture Infrastructure Fund in the revised budget of 2020-21 and ₹ 900 crore in the 2021-22 Budget, the umbrella body of farmers' unions claimed.

"In terms of loans, only 3,241 crore was sanctioned from the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund as of March 2021 (Rs

4,300 crore according to some media reports). The fund was announced to be a COVID-19 rescue package and was supposed to immediately infuse 1 lakh crore in the agriculture sector."

"Most importantly, when the NarendraModi government stands by its corporate agriculture laws which undermine the whole legal framework of the APMC markets with the aim of collapsing them, merely allowing APMCs to access some more loans is an empty gesture," the SamyuktKisanMorchha said.

Farmers have been protesting in huge numbers at Delhi's borders since November 2020, demanding the repeal of the three farm laws.

Enacted in September, the three legislations have been projected by the Centre as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove the middlemen and allow farmers to sell their produce anywhere in the country.

The protesting farmers, on the other hand, have expressed apprehension that the new laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) and do away with the APMC markets, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates.

Second wave not yet over, warns government's top adviser

NEW DELHI, 09 JUL [NDTV]:

The second wave of Covid, which caused an unprecedented number of infections in March-April, is not yet over, the government warned today, urging people to keep following precautions like avoiding crowds and wearing masks.

"The war is not over yet," said VK Paul, who heads the government's Covid task force, said at the Union Health Ministry press conference.

"The second wave is not over yet. There is still danger. It is necessary to keep following Covid protocol in order to close the second wave fully," he added.

At the briefing, a video of a huge maskless crowd at Mussourie's Kempt Falls was played out. The visuals from tourist spots are "a serious cause of concern" and such negligence causes virus spread, said the government.

"Is it not an open invitation to the virus to infect us," questioned Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Top officials said the country was not yet done with the second spike and "we need to introspect if we can afford misplaced belief that COVID-19 is over."

According to the government, 66 districts

in the country reported more than 10 per cent positivity on Thursday. Most of the cases now are being reported from Maharashtra and Kerala.

"Fifty-three per cent of the cases are coming from Maharashtra and Kerala. Maharashtra (21%) and Kerala (32%). There are 86 districts with less than 100 daily cases. Eighty per cent of new cases are coming from 90 districts - indicating the need for focused attention in these areas," Mr Agarwal said.

Warning strongly against dropping one's guard even as large parts of India are emerging from strict lockdowns, the government pointed out that several countries, including the UK, Russia and Bangladesh, are witnessing a surge in infections.

"In the UK, during Euro 2020 matches, a sudden surge in cases was observed. During the second wave peak, 59,000 cases were recorded in the UK. Now the surge has been observed there. The UK is reporting 20,000 cases daily on an average," he said.

The country today reported 43,393 new COVID-19 cases in 24 hours, down from more than 400,000 in May.

SPYF welcomes taxi fare hike, wants bus service expanded

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 09 JUL:**

Sikkim Progressive Youth Forum [SPYF] has welcomed the revised taxi fare released by the Transport Department and said that it will end the anarchy prevailing in the public transport fare rates.

In a release SPYF has said that the notification also mentions punishment for taxis found overcharging but alleges that action on such complaints is rarely taken.

It is hoped that this fare rate will be enforced in letter and spirit by the department, the release states.

SPYF has also sug-

gested that state-run buses, if operated regularly, will be a lifeline for commuters. Other than maxi cabs operated by private individuals there is no alternative transport facility for commuters, it adds.

Giving the example of Namchi-Melli bus service as an example of a successful public transport service, SPYF has said that similar bus service should be available across the state.

"It is not that the public do not want to use bus as a means of transportation. But the fact is that like all other Governmental institutions, people have little trust

on SNT. Whatever few bus services are in operation, they are too erratic in timing and very irregular. Sometimes they do not run, they suffer mechanical failure little too, which fail to win the public trust. As a result the department has conceived a wrong notion that people don't like to transport through bus. But we can see from examples like Namchi-Melli services, if the busses are run regularly without fail people not just use but prefer busses for their almost half fare charge compared to other private cabs and sheer comfort and safety," the release further states.

Sikkim-Darjeeling Merger Proposal is the Devil Citing the Scriptures

JIWAN RAI

If Sikkim were a person as it were, the term 'merger' would have triggered post-traumatic stress disorder. The merger has been Sikkim's single most significant political event that changed the entire course of history. I wonder if any history books would have ever been written about Sikkim by outsiders if the merger hadn't occurred. The 'political will' shown by the Indira Gandhi led government forever cemented India's position as an Asian Giant against the ever growing stature of China as the world's militaristic superpower. If Sik-

kim were still a separate kingdom, what China would have done by now is predictable. In that sense, the contribution Sikkim has given for the territorial integration of India is unparalleled. Simply put, the merger of Sikkim with the Republic of India cost her a kingdom and her nationality and forever strengthened India as a nation.

Several books have been written justifying and condemning the merger. Those books, in the present context, hold no significance other than addressing academic interest. It is a fate accompli. The best part is Sikkim has been generally a

happy and prosperous state, enjoying her special status provided for by the Indian constitution under Article 371F.

Make no mistake, it took a long time for the Sikkimese conscience to feel Indian. In fact, the "De-Merger" issue had become a winning political agenda in the 1979 election. Although the late NB Bhandari backed out of the issue after becoming Chief Minister, his political heroics in Sikkim were precisely due to his cry for a de-merger. We in Sikkim, continued to call the plainspeo-

ple 'Indian' - emotionally othering them for a long time. Sikkim's emotional in-

ViewPoint

tegration with her new-found nation of India, campaigned by PawanChamling since 1994, ironed out any remaining creases. Let history judge the legacies of these leaders and others as they deserve but that is our internal matter within Sikkim. Just when Sikkim was healing from the traumatic first merger, **turn to pg02**

SPU adjudged most inspirational university of the year by EkkUpdesh

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 09 JUL:

Sikkim Professional University was adjudged the most inspirational university in Education Excellence Conclave for the year 2021 at an awards function has been organized by EkkUpdesh in support of the Ministry of Ayush and Fit India.

On the occasion, Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof JaswantSokhicongratulated and thanked all the faculty members and staff and also assured that in future, the University will secure many more achievements like this.

Sikkim Professional University, formerly Vinayaka Missions University, was established in 2008 and renamed in 2020 and has accreditation and recognition of UGC, INC, SNC, PCI and is offering Arts, Commerce, Science, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Allied Health Sciences, Agriculture Sciences, Nursing, Engineering and Tech, Physiotherapy programmes.

Two cases of Kappa Covidvariant detected in Uttar Pradesh

LUCKNOW, 09 JUL

[NDTV]: Two cases of the highly transmissible Kappa variant of COVID-19 have been detected in Uttar Pradesh through the genome sequencing of samples, the state government said today.

The samples returned positive for the variant in Lucknow's King George medical college, according to an official statement.

The Delta Plus variant of COVID-19 was found in 107 samples, said the statement, adding that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had been informed.

"Both the variants are not new for the state. The facility of genome sequencing is being increased in the state," the statement issued after Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's Covid review meeting said.

Genome sequencing is a laboratory process that is instrumental in characterising the mutations and tracking disease outbreaks.

At present, the daily positivity rate in the state is 0.04 per cent.

When asked about the Kappa variant, Additional Chief Secretary (Health) Amit Mohan Prasad said earlier also cases of this variant were found in the state.

"There is nothing to worry about. This is a variant of coronavirus and its treatment is possible," Mr Prasad was quoted saying by news agency PTI.

Mr Prasad, as a measure of caution, did not divulge the names of the affected districts or places of its origin.

Even as the virulent second wave of infections seems to be ebbing, state governments are on the watch as variants like Delta, Alpha, and Kappa are said to be more transmissible.

SIBLAC wants all workers registered; Sees influx as adding burden on state exchequer

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 09 JUL:

Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee [SIBLAC] has suggested that the State Government make it compulsory for all workers, local and nonlocal, to be registered to avoid any confusion or denial of benefits because some section did not get registered.

In a letter to the Chief Minister yesterday, SIBLAC Convenor, Tseten Tashi Bhutia, points out that there is much confusion whether local workers need to be registered

or not and states that if non-registration leads to denial of benefits, it will go against the very purpose of protection of local workers.

SIBLAC had already shared its views on the new labour registration rules promulgated by the State government and yesterday, shot off additional suggestions.

It has also suggested that registration and renewals be done only for one year at a time and "specify very clearly that registration will not grant the workers any right

of settlement in Sikkim or any other benefits or rights extended to the local population or claim domicile and voting rights."

SIBLAC recommends that this be done to "prevent future controversy from the registered workers claiming to be old settlers and claiming rights and benefits from their long years working in Sikkim."

"This is also to prevent migration and attempt to change the demographic status of the state and to protect the local population," the letter adds.

SIBLAC also contends

that migrant workers cause a host of social, economic and political problems and hence the State Government "must draw up a holistic policy and laws to prevent the adverse effect of migration of workers and protect the local population from the adverse effect of influx."

The letter also comments on the need to protect the rights of migrant workers but its focus is clearly on how to keep them in check and monitored.

"So far as living con-

dition is concerned; they leave in cluster in a very unhygienic condition. Migrant workers are contributing to growth of slums in the state and overcrowding of living spaces in urban areas. The department of labour must discourage this growing problem through proper rules and regulation. Most workers tend to bring their families to Sikkim to avail the free education and health facilities etc which is proving to be a burden on the state exchequer," the letter contends.

Education Dept launches website for online admission

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 09 JUL:

Education Department has launched a web portal for centralized online admission for Class XI, ATTC and CCCT students of Sikkim, a press release informs.

The portal was launched by the Additional Chief Secretary, GP Upadhyaya in the presence of Secretary, Anil Raj Rai, Director Secondary Education, Hondalagyaltsen and SPD SamagraShiksha& Director Elementary Education, BhimThatal.

This initiative of the Department to admit students in Class XI, ATTC and CCCT through the online method has been taken due to the pandemic, the release mentions.

It is also to centralise the entire admission system and create database of the students seeking admission in different schools, diploma institute and further streamline the flow of admission and maintain records. This portal was initially introduced last year for Class XI only but this year and henceforth the feature is available for the students seeking admission to ATTC and CCCT for Diploma courses as well.

Some of the criteria for admission to Class XI are:

1. Students who have passed class X from Senior Secondary Schools

must apply in their respective schools only.

2. Those students who have passed class X from a Senior Secondary School can apply to other nearby Senior Secondary School if their preferred Streams are not available at home school.

3. Admission in Science and Commerce Streams shall be as per the criteria laid down by respective schools. Preference for admission shall be given to the feeder schools and the other schools in the surrounding depending upon the availability of seats.

4. Compartmental candidates can apply for provisional admission in their own schools. However, students of a Secondary School can apply at a nearby school.

Students who have passed Class X as regular students from any of the recognized boards and from National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) can apply online. Kindly be informed this this is the only centralized site for admission to Class XI, ATTC and CCCT in Sikkim. The portal will go live as and when Class X results is declared by CBSE. Hence students are required to visit the site: www.edndeptsikkim.in and apply online.

This website has been designed by PGT (Physics), PD Chhetri of Sir TNSSS with the support of Bolds Innovation Pvt Ltd.

Safety equipment distributed to Power Dept staff

MANGAN, 09 JUL (IPR):

A coordination meeting with officials and staff of Power Department, North 1 (Phodong) and North 2 (Mangan) circle cum distribution of safety equipment to line staff was conducted at KVK Hall, Mangan today.

Minister for Power and Labour Department, Mingma. N. Sherpa was the chief guest and he was accompanied by the guest of honour MLA (Dzongu) cum Advisor Power Department Pinto. N. Lepcha, Additional Political Secretary to CM (North) Tshering Wangyal Bhutia, Chief Engineer Power Department Dilip Sharma, Additional Chief Engineer Tshering.T. Bhutia, officers from North District and staff from respective departments.

The Minister thanked the officials of Power Department for their dedication towards their work. He asked them to work diligently and in tandem with the state

government in generating revenue for economic development.

MLA (Dzongu) thanked the field staff for their hard work in making sure that a basic necessity like electricity is provided to every household, even during difficult weather predicaments. Keeping in mind the safety of the field staff, he asked them to be cautious while on the field.

Superintending Engineer, Karma Zamyang Dadul presented a PPT on Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana and Integrated Power Development Scheme.

Retired employees were felicitated with a certificate of appreciation.

Distribution of Safety equipment to line staff such as Raincoat, Reflector Jacket, Safety shoes, Safety belt and Safety gloves were provided.

A Utility Van was handed over by the Minister for the power maintenance under Chungthang Division.

Agri Minister convenes meeting on cardamom cultivation



GANGTOK, 09 JUL (IPR):

Minister, Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services, Lok Nath Sharma convened a meeting with the department officials on the production of Large Cardamom, its incentive schemes and post production activities, at his official chamber at Tashiling Secretariat, today.

The meeting was attended by Advisor, Information and Public Relations Department, Birendra Tamling, Secretary Horticulture Department, M. T. Sherpa, Additional Director (Spices section) Horticulture B.L. Dahal, Scientists Grade 'C'- Spices Board Dr. T.N. Deka, Deputy Director M.S. Ramalingam and concerned officials.

The meeting had detailed discussion on the cardamom cultivation, challenges and strategic mechanism to revive and enhance its productivity.

The Minister stressed on creating massive awareness on the Production Incentive Scheme and revised financial incentives initiated by the state government to encourage farming community and upscale the rural economy.

It may be mentioned here that the state government has recently re-

vised financial incentive per Kilogram of Cardamom from Rs 20 to Rs. 100 along with other focused crops.

The Minister directed the department to constitute a committee in order to ensure smooth conduct of activities pertaining to cultivation of large cardamom, production, disease management and marketing along with other spices varieties. He advised for setting up of production unit of Pseudomonas, a bio agent, in each district of Sikkim for disease management in Large Cardamom. Sharma also came out with an advice for packaging and marketing of large cardamom in tourist destinations besides usual marketing points.

He also suggested to work in active coordination with the Spices Board, Government of India in execution of spices related activities including the time bound distribution of cardamom seedlings and other related works.

The meeting also discussed about awarding dealer license to FPOs and to organize auction of large cardamom by SIMFED in support of Spices Board and the Horticulture Department.

Thereafter, the Minister called a separate meeting with Sikkim State Co-operative Supply and Marketing Federation Ltd. (SIMFED), which was attended by Managing Director Bhasker Basnett, Chief General Manager, Deoraj Dewan, General Managers, Yogesh Gurung & Kailash Rai and other officials.

During the meeting, the Minister threw light on the initiation of financial incentives for new varieties of crops and vegetables and underlined the need to work tirelessly and strengthen field exercise for the welfare of the farmers. He also advised to promote packaging and branding of agriculture and horticulture produce and ensure benefit to the farmers/vegetable growers at large.

It may be noted that the state government has accorded approval to provide financial incentives for new varieties of vegetables that includes Rs. five per kilogram of Cabbage, Rs. 7 / KG of Cauliflower, Rs. 8/KG of Green Pea, Rs 20/ KG of Dalley Khorsani, Rs. 7/ KG of Radish, Rs. 7/KG of Carrot and Rs. 20/ KG of Kiwi, which need to be sold through organised sectors.

Niyara Production thanks SYSC for support

AARON RAI

GANGTOK, 09 JUL:

A special event was organized at Manbir Colony by Niyara Productions to thank Sikkim YakthungSapsokChumbo[SYSC] for providing continuous support to the organization since 2016.

Retired Secretary, Department of Animal Husbandry, State Government, SB Mangyung, was the chief guest at the event. Also present were CS Tamling, Chairman, Sikkim YakthungSapsokSanjumbo (SYSS) and RatnaLucksom, General Secretary, ChinmayaMission (Sikkim Chapter) were present as special guests.

On behalf of Niyara Productions, the members of SYSC were presented tokens of love by the chief guest.

Similarly, members of SYSC were awarded certificates by RatnaLucksom for participating in the 'Online National Youth Convention' cultural program organized by Chinmaya Youth Center, North East on behalf of Chinmaya Mission, Sikkim Chapter. The event was held from 10 to 12 January 2021.

Similarly, SYSC was presented a Limboo traditional dress as a gift from Niyara Productions by the chief guest SB Mangyung.

NiyaraSubba, Head of Production, Niyara Productions expressed her gratitude to all the members of SYSC, SYSS and Chinmaya Mission (Sikkim Chapter) as well as other collaborators.

In addition, Niyara production has announced that it will soon be organizing 'YakthungInak' (Yakthung Song Singing Idol).

Sikkim-Darjeeling

a few leaders from Darjeeling are spooking Sikkim with another 'merger proposal', invoking a small selective portion of the pre-merger, pre-Independence history.

"Take Darjeeling back as it was a part of Sikkim until 1835" is the sweet proposal. As generous an offer as it seems, when the offer is unwrapped, it is merely an unethical bait. If Sikkim was still a separate country, the proposal would have been one of the most magnanimous offers in diplomatic history. Or are they also saying in effect that Sikkim in 1835 was not a part of British India and so be it now? Or else, why invoke history partially? Proposition such as this is as deceptive as the devil quoting the scriptures. The proposal at this stage of post-merger history is simply a ploy to destroy Sikkim's peace, special status and future. Seen from our lens, it is nothing more than an opportunistic ploy to sacrifice Sikkim on the altar of the aborted Gorkhaland movement. We are now a nearly half century old Indian state. Much water has flown under the bridge. Just as Darjeeling has been arguing that it does not fit in West Bengal and its growth has been obstructed there, pro-mergerists must admit that Sikkim does not fit in Darjeeling and Sikkim's growth will be obstructed. The late Madan Tamang, a Darjeeling leader I admired, used to say "[West] Bengal is the grave of the Gorkhas. We do not have future in Bengal". We can say the same thing should Sikkim be merged with Darjeeling, "Darjeeling will be the grave of Sikkim. We have no future there". It is not merely a merging of lands of geographical congruity. It is a merging of people, their realities, dreams, problems, blessings, privileges, prerogatives, portions, lives and their futures. We have evolved as a distinct civilization within the Indian Republic. The addition of another population will unsettle Sikkim's cultural, social, political, economic and demographic stability forever. What kind of political thinking would ever propose the disturbance of a peaceful and prosperous state to solve the problem of another state? Robbing Peter to pay Paul is not ethical no matter how genuine Paul's need could be.



Pro-merger leaders are invoking the example of the abrogation of Article 350 in Jammu and Kashmir. Are they not aware that the abrogation of article 350 necessitated the caging of the people and leaders of Kashmir? Do they want the same fate for the Sikkimese simply to cater to their whims? We must all concede that if the Centre wants a Sikkim-Darjeeling merger, it is possible. But the possibility doesn't always operate within the bounds of validity. If a Sikkim-Darjeeling merger is meant to be a mutually benefiting partnership, then what the people of Darjeeling want shouldn't take a monopolistic takeover. What the people of Sikkim want should be given equal weightage in the process. If the pro-merger leaders and commentators are talking about the "Centrist political will", devoid of space for the Sikkimese people's desire, then call it the annexation of Sikkim in Darjeeling. Merger is the wrong term.

Of the most ridiculous arguments I have heard is that the merger will strengthen Sikkim as a border state of India. What in the world does this mean? It is akin to saying that dividing Ladakh from Kashmir has weakened it as a border state.

Thankfully, a Sikkim-Darjeeling merger has not been gathering force among the people of Darjeeling. It has remained confined to the hearts of a few desperate leaders. Sikkim's longstanding open support and deep sympathy for the Gorkhaland movement deserves genuine respect. Sikkim's status as a separate state from Darjeeling and Sikkim has not been let down so far – long may that fact remain true.

LOST

Mr.Damber Kumar Chhetri son of Shri Dilli Ram Chhetri resident Phong, Namthang South Sikkim has lost his Class X Original Marksheet of CBSE Board bearing Roll No.3111781.Examination Year 1993 from Government Secondary School Namthang. If anyone found or any has information please inform at 8016453378

 LOKAYUKTA SIKKIM GANGTOK	
Ref No: 672/lok/2021	Date: 9/7/2021
NOTICE	
<p>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:</p>	
<p>Lokayukta, Sikkim Bhanupath (Below TNA) Gangtok, East Sikkim PIN- 737101.</p>	
 Protocol Officer, Lokayukta, Sikkim BAL KUMAR CHHETRI Protocol Officer Lokayukta Sikkim Gangtok	

Service to Mankind receives Gubernatorial pat on the back



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 09 JUL:
Service to Mankind, a social organization, was felicitated by Governor Ganga Prasad here on 06 July in recognition for having worked diligently in the service of the people during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

On behalf of the organization, a team comprising of Sikkim Newar Guthi president, Dil Kumar Pradhan, Service to Mankind director, Sujit

Pradhan, East District coordinator, Durga Shrestha, South District coordinator, Kishor Baniya and Legal Advisor, Saloni Pradhan received the felicitation and cash of Rs One lakh.
A press release informs that the team also wished the Governor on his birthday.
The organization was formed on the initiative of Sikkim Newar Guthi and has been working for the people weather the pandemic in association

with organizations like National Integrity Forum of Artist and Activist, VBDAS, Zest, Sai Mobile Blood Bank, Sikkimese All Bhutia Association, South District, Help Others, Sikkim Himalayan Sporting Club, Shanti Nagar Sudharak Samiti and others.
It is added that the organization has been providing protein diets, medicines and medical equipment and other essential materials to needy people.

Gangtok's MS Taekwondo Academy bags six golds at national contest competed online

SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 09 JUL:
Gangtok-based MS Taekwondo Academy impressed at the 2021 Pride Cup Online Open National Taekwondo Poomsae & Speed Kicking Championship held on 23 to 25 June. The team bagged six gold medals, one silver medal and one bronze medal at this national-level championship.

Joyce Kuensel Tenzing in sub junior category, Yanchen Sherpa in sub-junior and Tshering Diki Tamang in cadet won gold medals in Speed Kicking girls, while Tenzing Keezom Bhutia in cadet bagged a bronze medal in Poomsae girls.
In Speed Kicking boys, Sanskar Subba in sub-junior category, Tenzin Dadul Bhutia in sub-junior and Akashat Raj Gurung in sub-junior clinched gold medals and Mingma Bhutia also in sub-junior category won a silver medal.

The online championship was organized by Leo Sports & SAI Sports Foundation with an aim to keep martial artists stay active physically and mentally during this pandemic.
Sabina Sundas [4th Dan black belt] is the founder of MS Taekwondo Academy and Sagar Sundas [2nd Dan black belt] is the team coach.

Sikkim Film Promotion Board holds first Board meeting



GANGTOK, 09 JUL (IPR):
Chairperson, Sikkim Film Promotion Board, Pooja Sharma chaired the first Board Meeting of the Sikkim Film Promotion Board with officers of various line departments here at Soochna Bhawan today.

The Board Meeting was attended by Secretary, IPR Department, Siphorah Targain, Director, IPR Department, Benu Gurung, Joint Director, IPR Department, Bishal Khawas, Additional District Collector, Headquarter (East), Hemant Rai, Additional District Collector, South, Satyen Pradhan and officers of various line departments.

The main objective of the meeting was to have a discourse on creating ease of entry and work for film-makers coming to Sikkim and promoting Sikkim as a film making destination, and to discuss about the proposed film city.

At the onset of the meeting, Secretary, IPR Department, Siphorah Targain gave a brief description about Sikkim being a film friendly state and a tourist destination. Today's meeting with the stakeholders was all about making the journey and stay in Sikkim comfortable for film-makers who come to

shoot in Sikkim, she said.
Chairperson, SFPB, Pooja Sharma emphasized on co-ordination between line departments to fulfill the objective. She touched on the subject of having a single window clearance for film makers for ease of work. Further, she said that cinema forms an integral part of promoting tourism in a state and also encourages youth to take film-making as a career.

The Chairperson also shared that the Board is in the process of collecting photographs and other resources to prepare a comprehensive literature featuring hundred shooting destinations in Sikkim. During the meeting, the Chairperson also spoke at length about the proposed film city in the State.

Director, IPR Department, Benu Gurung gave a brief background about the Film Policy and talked about responsibilities which are to be shouldered by the line departments to make the single window system open and robust, to film makers coming to the State.

At the outset of the meeting, the Chairman interacted with the officers of the line departments on issues such as permits and on creation of film city.

VBDAS conducts blood donation camp at Singtam hospital

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 09 JUL:
Amidst the Covid-19 situation in the state, Voluntary Blood Donors Association of Sikkim (VBDAS) has been continuously fulfilling the scarcity of blood in different hospitals of the state.

Today, the association conducted a blood donation camp at Singtam hospital wherein the volun-

teers from Singtam Police Station, UttamSamajSingtam, Lingzey Amar Jyoti-Sangh and the volunteers from Bardang donated 25 units of blood.

The camp was also attended by VBDAS Singtam, President, Arjun Kr. Chettri, Srijana Chettri, General Secretary VBDAS, Singtam, Coordinator NirajGiri and member CK Dhakal.



SIKKIM STATE TEACHER'S RECRUITMENT BOARD (Constituted Vide Notification No. 933/HRDD, 2015) Upper Syari, Gangtok, East Sikkim

Memo No. 59/SSTRB/ADM

Date: 08/07/2021

NOTICE

- I. Applications are invited from In-service eligible candidates serving in the Government Schools of Sikkim for filling up the following posts:

Sl. No.	Name of the post	Eligible Category	No of post	Post Ratio	Pay Scale
1	Headmaster/ Headmistress Secondary School (HM, SS)	(I)Graduate Teacher (II)Post Graduate Teacher (III) HM JHS	38*	(a)50% by promotion of Graduate/ Post Graduate Teachers (b) 50% by promotion of Headmaster/ Headmistress, Junior High School (HM, JHS)	Level 17
2	Pracharya (Principal) Sanskrit Pathshala	Post Graduate Teacher	01	100% by promotion of Post Graduate Teachers.	Level 18
3	Pradhan Adhyapak (HM) Sanskrit Pathshala	Graduate Teacher	02	100% by promotion of Graduate Teachers.	Level 17

Note: At Sl. No. 1. In the event of non-availability of eligible candidates from category (b) the post of HM, SS shall be filled from among the eligible candidates of category (a) and vice versa in order of merit.

***(In the case of Sl. No. 1, a panel list of 15 names on merit basis will be maintained for a period of 11 months from the date of declaration of the result, to meet subsequent vacancies likely to arise because of promotion, retirement or falling vacant by any other means.)**

- II. Eligibility criteria, Educational and Professional qualifications and Teaching Experience for the post of (1) Headmaster/ Headmistress, Secondary School, (2) Pracharya (Principal), Sanskrit Pathshala and (3) Pradhan Adhyapak (HM) Sanskrit Pathshala, are given below:

Sl. No. and Post	Eligible Category	Qualifications		Teaching Experience
		Academic	Professional	
1) HM, SS	From Post Graduate Teachers	Post Graduate Degree in any subject from a recognized University	B. Ed Degree from an institute recognized by the NCTE	09 (nine) years of uninterrupted regular service as Post Graduate Teacher as on June 30, 2021
	From Graduate Teacher	Graduate Degree in any subject from a recognized University	B. Ed Degree from an institute recognized by the NCTE	09 (nine) years of uninterrupted regular service as Graduate Teacher as on June 30, 2021
	From HM, JHS	Graduate Degree in any subject from a recognized University	B. Ed Degree from an institute recognized by the NCTE	05 (five) years of uninterrupted regular service as HM, JHS as on June 30, 2021
2)Pracharya (Principal), Sanskrit Pathshala	Post Graduate Teacher	Post Graduate Degree in Hindi or Nepali with Sanskrit as a subject in Graduation OR Acharya in Sanskrit, from a recognised university.	B. Ed Degree from an institute recognized by the NCTE	10 (ten) years of uninterrupted regular service as Post Graduate Teacher as on June 30,2021
3)Pradhan Adhyapak (HM) Sanskrit Pathshala	From Graduate Teacher	Graduate Degree in Shastri in Sanskrit from a recognized University.	B. Ed Degree from an institute recognized by the NCTE	10 (ten) years of uninterrupted regular service as Graduate Teacher as on June 30, 2021.
Note: Service period on deputation to other Department shall not be counted as uninterrupted regular service.				

1. Candidates fulfilling the above criteria can apply either online at the official website of Education Department i.e., www.sikkimhrdd.org or offline at the office of SSTRB, Syari, Gangtok. *The last date for filling up of the forms is July 23, 2021 by 4:30 pm. (candidates should strictly opt for only one mode)*
2. Bank Receipt of ₹ 200/- has to be credited in the State Bank of Sikkim under Revenue head 0202-102-03-Edn.
3. Candidates opting for online mode shall upload properly scanned copies of original of the following documents. Candidates opting for offline mode of submission shall submit the attested/self-attested (as applicable) copies of the following documents at the office of SSTRB.

- a. Marksheet and Pass Certificate of Class X and XII or equivalent issued by recognized Board in case of HM, SS.
b. Marksheet and Pass Certificate of Class X (*Purva Madhayama*) and XII (*Uttar Madhayama*) or equivalent issued by recognized Board in case of Pracharya and Pradhan Adhyapak.
c. Marksheet and Pass Certificate of Graduation/Post Graduation issued by recognised University.
d. B. Ed. Marksheet and Pass certificate recognized by NCTE.
e. Appointment Order of Graduate Teacher/Post Graduate Teacher /Promotion Order of Headmaster/ Headmistress Junior High School.
f. Joining Report of first appointment as Graduate Teacher/Post Graduate Teacher /Promotion as HM of Junior High School.
g. Last Increment Order.
h. Bank Receipt.
i. Two Passport size photographs
j. If on Deputation to
k. 1.Other Department: Deputation Order, Joining Report, clearance from the concerned Department and NOC from Education department.
I. 2.Education Department: Deputation letter, joining report..
m. Departmental Clearance/NOC from the concerned District heads.
n. Vigilance Clearance.
4. Syllabus for screening-cum-interview of HM, SS comprises of the following:
i) General Awareness
ii) Educational Policies
iii) Govt rules and orders pertaining to School Administration, duties and responsibilities of School Heads.
iv) Sikkim Government Servant's Conduct Rules, 1981, Sikkim Government Servant's (Discipline Appeal) Rules, 1985, Sikkim Government Service (Leave) Rules,1986, Sikkim Government Establishment Rules, 1974, and such other rules as applicable while discharging the duty as School Heads.
5. Syllabus for screening-cum-interview of Pracharya (Principal), Sanskrit Pathshala comprises of the following:
(a) *Vyakarana* (b)*Sahitya* (c) *Purana* (i) *Itihas*) (d) General Awareness (e) Educational Policies (f) Service Rules
6. Syllabus for screening-cum-interview of Pradhan Adhyapak (Headmaster), Sanskrit Pathshala comprises of the following:
(a) *Karma Kanda* (b)*Purana* (i) *Itihas*) (c)*Vyakarana* (d)General Awareness (e)Educational Policies (f) Service Rules
7. Admit Card shall be issued in due course of time.
8. No TA and DA shall be paid for attending the Interview
9. Date and venue of the Interview shall be intimated later.

Whereas, under Notification no. 09/ADM/EDN dated 30/06/2021, State Government has relaxed the provision relating to the matter of recruitment, under Rule 6 of the Education Department, (Head master/Head mistress/Secondary School) Recruitment Rules, 1992, limiting it to only screening-cum-interview as a one-time measure.

(NOTE: Incomplete application shall be rejected summarily. If found on verification that candidates do not fulfil prescribed criteria, candidature for the post will be cancelled by the Board without specifying any further reason.)

Ro No. 94/IPR/PUB/Classi/21-22
Dated: 08/07/2021

Sd/-
Secretary
Sikkim State Teachers' Recruitment Board

CONTACT
SUMMIT TIMES
REPORTERS
SINGTAM
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Quality. Transparency.
Fairness.

*Fair selection more important
than reservations*

Local protection is always an emotive issue. It is also a popular one and does have its benefits, even necessity. In Sikkim, there are laws and rules in place which guarantee stronger local protection in employment opportunities than any other State in the country. Everyone - from politicians to NGO volunteers, to association members - has been consistently demanding exclusive access to all job openings for local candidates. The matter, however, does not end with just local protection, because even within this protection, quotas have to be accommodated to make every community feel special and, well, protected. But, if the present generation at decision-making levels has any serious plans to ensure that at least the next generation gets a fighting chance to rise above the mediocrity that the generation on the wane has bequeathed Sikkim, instead of greater 'protection' they would be institutionalising fairer selection processes.

Reservations and blanket protectionism achieve very little in the long run. Take government jobs for instance, they are reserved for local candidates, but even they have dried up now. The State Civil Service exams held in 2014 had 25 vacancies at the Under Secretary level and a mere two for Deputy Superintendents of Police. And this slim a pickings even though the exams were being held after a gap of eight years! There has been only one more such exam since and the vacancies have been low.

So yes, government jobs, at least the ones opened to competition, are running low. Understandably then, the one reason why voices demanding stricter enforcement of local protection in jobs are getting more stringent nowadays is because employment opportunities with the government have become scarce. These demands however might not have been so urgent had the system equipped the young with the tools to secure appointments at the national and global job-markets, or even promoted entrepreneurship locally more effectively.

The youth are not competitive enough not because of some infected chip hotwired into their genetic code, but because they were not consistently encouraged to become competitive and pursue merit. This might be called of them in speeches and from formal platforms, but this not what they see being practiced. When a generation is allowed to grow up thinking that it is somehow entitled to sidestep merit, it will remain obsessed with its portion of the quota and that pursuit shrinks their ambition and worldview to a sliver of what everyone has potential for. Once that happens, they will have no respect for merit and eyes only for 'documents' and certificates.

A good place to begin a course correction will be to institutionalize selection on merit. Guaranteeing a fair selection process [in jobs], however, is easier said than done in Sikkim. Politicians and bureaucrats have traditionally placed individual concerns and selfish priorities ahead of common good. The regular appointment of a favoured few on ad-hoc basis to subvert the selection process and then regularization of their services when the dust kicked up by their appointment has settled, evokes no confidence.

But, it is still possible to institutionalize a fair selection process and enforce it.

Many will rightly comment that this requires political will and that commitment is easily arranged if there is a genuine demand from the voters that they want only the best to handle responsibilities which affect future generations. What Sikkim requires at this juncture is a demand for quality and fairness, not more reservations.

As mentioned, there is nothing inherently wrong with local protection, but to start with, at least within this structure, prioritize merit and while mediocrity need not be condemned, at least don't celebrate it at the cost of merit. One sees that happen too often in Sikkim. That said, there are earnest initiatives like the Chief Minister's Merit Scholarship scheme and the all-expenses paid scholarship on offer for Sikkim students who make it into any of the top-10 universities of world on merit. This attitude needs to percolate to all aspects of governance and education in Sikkim.

WRITE US:

Readers are invited to comment on, criticise, run down, even appreciate if they like something in this paper. Letters carrying abusive/ indecorous language and personal attacks, except when against people responsible in this newspaper (who are fair game), will have to be ignored. Letters which carry forward a conversation or initiate a dialogue will command immediate attention and receive prominence. Mail us at: news@summittimes.com



We Should Treat COVID Like Norovirus – Not the Flu

SARAH PITT
theconversation.com

Because COVID symptoms – fever, cough, aches – are similar to flu symptoms, it is tempting to compare the two. Indeed, the UK's new health secretary, Sajid Javid, recently said: "We are going to have to learn to accept the existence of Covid and find ways to cope with it – just as we already do with flu."

But have we picked the wrong disease to compare COVID-19 with? Outside of a pandemic, we accept that seasonal flu is an infection anyone might catch. We vaccinate only those who are particularly prone to complications and treat people with severe side-effects, such as pneumonia. Otherwise, people are left to go about their business. Global deaths from flu-related illness typically amount to around 400,000 each year.

While we do need to find some way of living with COVID-19, the numbers suggest we're still a long way from being able to treat it in the same way. There have been over 180 million cases around the world since early 2020, and at least 4 million people have died from the disease. On top of this, we're not sure of the real effect of long COVID yet, but lasting symptoms are common, with one in ten people still experiencing illness 12 weeks after their infection. Currently, the health effect of COVID-19 across the population is much greater than flu.

We also know that COVID-19 is more infectious. We can be sure of this because, over the last 18 months, measures to control COVID-19 have reduced flu cases to almost none, but they obviously haven't been as effective at stopping the coronavirus from spreading. Cases were close to zero in the southern hemisphere during its winter in the middle of 2020 and again in Europe and North America

between November 2020 and March 2021. Even in countries with high rates of COVID-19, such as South Africa and the UK, winter saw hardly any recorded cases of flu.

All of this suggests that using methods typically used to combat flu will have quite a different effect on COVID-19. Treating COVID-19 like flu will result in many more cases and deaths, and much more lingering illness, than seen in a typical influenza season.

ANOTHER COMPARISON

Of course, SARS-CoV-2 – the virus that causes COVID-19 – does share some characteristics with influenza viruses, which makes comparisons tempting. Around 20% of people have no symptoms at all when infected with SARS-CoV-2, and many people infected with a flu virus also don't get sick. Both viruses are prone to a lot of mutation. And with both diseases, older people and people with weakened immune systems are at a higher risk of severe illness than healthy young adults, with infections spreading rapidly in care homes, hospital wards and schools.

But a lot of these traits are also shared by another germ: the norovirus. It too can be asymptomatic in some people, and mutates rapidly – different strains of norovirus have been found circulating around the same hospital during one season. In fact, as it spreads around, norovirus sometimes changes so much that standard testing kits can't recognise versions of it that have evolved.

Most people with symptomatic norovirus infections have diarrhoea, but some experience projectile vomiting as well. This creates an aerosol full of virus that spreads around any room and leaves it on surfaces, waiting for others to pick it up, as happens with respiratory viruses. COVID-19 also

causes diarrhoea in some patients. Flu is not the only viral disease that COVID-19 can be compared to.

Equally, there are a lot of differences between SARS-CoV-2 and norovirus, so why labour the comparison? Well, as vaccines and other control measures get the virus under control, more and more parts of the world will join those others where lockdowns have been lifted, social distancing rules have been relaxed, and it's safe to leave the house without wearing a mask. But we must still expect outbreaks of COVID-19 for years to come and must have plans to deal with them as they arise.

Knowing what we know about these viruses, these plans should consider controlling SARS-CoV-2 more like we would norovirus than flu. With norovirus, we keep people with the infection away from others. We ask parents whose children have symptoms to keep them off school. And in hospitals and care homes, patients with norovirus are nursed separately from others, staff use PPE for protection, and surfaces are deep cleaned. Handling COVID-19 in the future should be more interventionist like this. It should be more akin to living with norovirus than the flu.

In the meantime, we have developed some good hygiene habits during the pandemic, such as washing hands a bit more often and ventilating buildings better. Those who can wear a mask should think about keeping it up in enclosed spaces and on public transport. These simple measures should help to stop the spread of lots of viral diseases – whether against influenza, norovirus or COVID-19 – before bigger interventions are needed.

[the writer is Principal Lecturer, Microbiology and Biomedical Science Practice, Fellow of the Institute of Biomedical Science, University of Brighton]

Knowing how heat and humidity affect your body can help you stay safe during heat waves

JOHNERIC W. SMITH
theconversation.com

Less than a month into North America's official summer, heat waves are blistering much of the West. California and the Southwest are facing excessive heat watches for the second time, after a mid-June heat wave pushed temperatures above 100 F (38 C).

And in late June an intense heat dome settled over the Pacific Northwest for four days, setting all-time temperature records in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. The effects were most evident in Lytton, British Columbia, which reported a temperature of 121 F (49.5 C) on June 29, far above its average high for the date of 76 F (24.4 C). A day later, the town was engulfed by a wildfire.

As an exercise physiologist, I know that the human body is an amazing machine. But like all machines, it functions effectively and safely only under certain conditions.

People frequently debate whether wet heat in places like Florida or dry heat in desert locations like Nevada is worse. The answer is that either setting can be dangerous. Hot desert climates are stressful due to extreme temperatures, while humid subtropical climates are stressful because the body has trouble removing heat when sweat doesn't evaporate readily. As recent events have shown, hot is hot.

THE INFLUENCE OF HUMIDITY

North America has a wide range of climates, but when people talk about heat, they often compare the Southwest and the Southeast. Some communities in the Southwest's hot desert climates, such as Las Vegas,

have average summer high temperatures over 100 F (38 C), with relative humidity typically around 20%. This means the air is holding about one-fifth of the maximum amount of moisture it can hold at that temperature and pressure.

In contrast, Southeast locations like Orlando, Florida, typically have average temperatures around 90 F (32.2 C), with humidity regularly approaching 80%. Looking only at temperature, the desert clearly is hotter on average.

However, it's also important to consider how heat affects the body. Weather reports often do this using the heat index, which calculates how the human body perceives conditions factoring in humidity as well as heat.

Sweating is your body's primary way of cooling you off. When sweat evaporates away from your skin, it takes heat with it. But when humidity is high, the air already holds a lot of moisture, so the sweat remains on your skin. As it saturates clothing and drips from the body, it can remove only a small amount of heat compared with the cooling that comes with the evaporation of sweat.

As a result, when we account for humidity, the heat exposures people experience in Las Vegas and Orlando are very similar.

ADAPTING PEOPLE AND PLACES TO HEAT STRESS

As people go through their daily lives, their bodies work continuously to maintain a temperature close to a normal level of about 98.6 F (37 C). In regions that regularly experience high heat stress, such as the Southeast and Southwest, most buildings and homes now have air conditioning, which helps people maintain healthy temperatures.

But in areas where heat is unusual, such as the Pacific Northwest, many buildings and residences lack cooling. As a result, people are exposed to higher heat for longer periods of time during events like the region's late June heat wave than they would be in regions where hot weather is the norm.

Just as buildings and residences in areas chronically exposed to heat are equipped with ceiling fans and air conditioning, bodies that are regularly exposed to heat can acclimatize, or adapt and improve their ability to cool. This starts to occur with the first heat exposure – for example, the beginning of fall sports practices in August – but take weeks of regular exposure to reach maximal levels.

One of the first things our bodies do in adapting to heat is to produce more plasma – the watery portion of blood. This enables our circulatory systems to move heat to the skin more effectively so that sweating can remove it from the body.

We also begin sweating earlier than people who are not acclimatized to heat, and our maximal sweat rate increases. These adaptations improve our bodies' ability to dissipate heat to the environment.

Behavior changes are another way of adapting to heat stress. Since midday is typically the hottest part of the day, it makes sense to avoid physical work and exercise then. When people are active, their bodies break down nutrients – carbohydrates, fats and protein – into energy. This powers movement and also generates metabolic heat, which adds to the body's heat stress.

Taking advantage of shade is another important strategy. Heat radi-

ating from the Sun adds to the stress produced by warm air temperatures. Staying in the shade can significantly reduce the external heat load on people who have to be outdoors during hot spells.

Many of the hundreds of deaths and hospitalizations that experts have attributed to the recent heat dome in the Northwest probably reflect that buildings there were less equipped to keep people cool than in hotter regions, and residents were less acclimatized to heat.

THE OLD AND YOUNG ARE MOST VULNERABLE

A healthy adult body can acclimatize to heat, but older people and children are less able to adjust. As people age, their cardiovascular systems change in ways that cause them to pump blood less effectively. This reduces the body's ability to move heat to the skin to be transferred to the environment.

Children and older adults may also have less active sweat responses, which can reduce their potential to cool off through sweating.

Humans can tolerate most areas of the Earth, but extreme heat requires extra steps. If there's a heat wave in your local forecast, seek out shade and begin to acclimatize by increasing your activity gradually when things get too hot. Drink more fluids to account for increased fluid loss from sweat, while also making sure not to overhydrate. And avoid outdoor activity during the hottest hours of the day if possible.

Whether heat waves are humid or dry, they are health threats that everyone should take seriously.

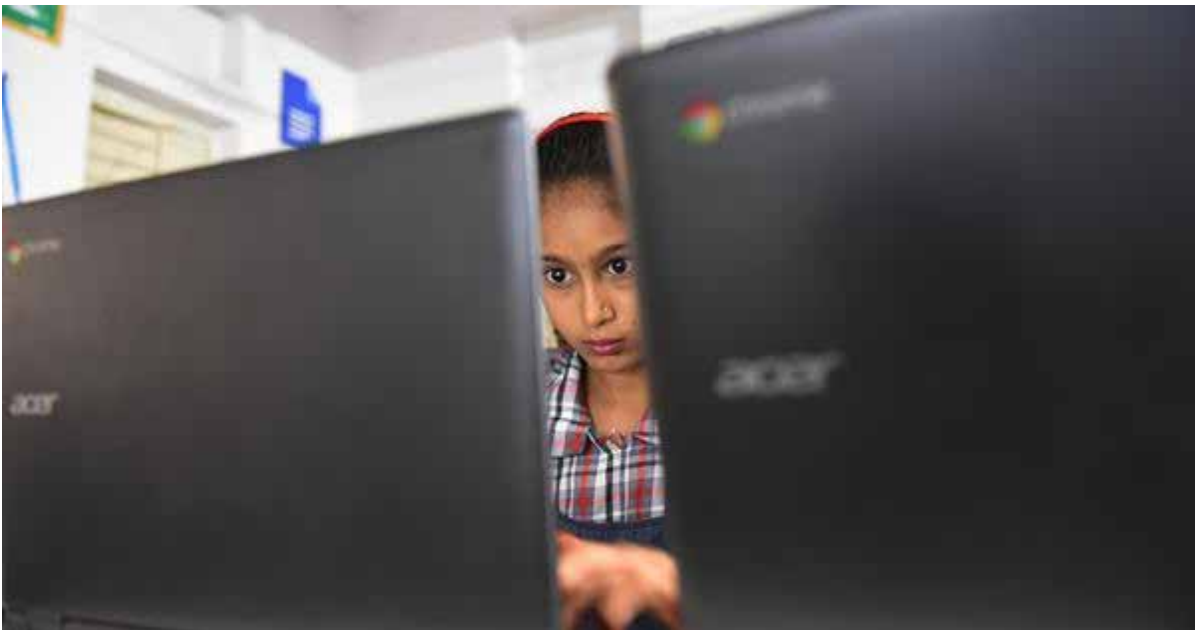
[the writer is Associate Professor of Exercise Physiology, Mississippi State University]

Assam Digital Divide: Village students get 4g network, but no smartphones

GUWAHATI, 09 JUL [NDTV]: Dimpi Das, a Class 10 student, lives in Kurua village in Darrang district, about 50 kms from Guwahati. There is a 4G mobile internet tower just 200 meters away from her home. Yet the 15-year-old has not attended a single online class in the last 15 months, as her father - a daily-wage worker - cannot afford a smartphone. Dimpi, however, has managed to "attend" a few classes beamed on FM network on her father's basic mobile handset.

"We don't have TV or mobile since my father is only a daily wage. We can't afford such luxury. My father did get a normal phone and I was able to listen to some of the evening radio classes. I am not alone struggling to continue my studies. There are 10 to 12 students around here who are having same problem as they don't own a digital device for online classes," Dimpi Das told NDTV.

Dimpi Das is among the thousands of stu-



dents bereaved of online classes that have been the preferred form of medium amid the Covid pandemic.

"This is a big reason of worry for us as children would fail to continue their curriculum if this continues and schools don't open. We are poor people, we can't buy these smartphones," Dimpi's father Kargeshwar Das added.

Dimpi's next-door neighbour, 13-year-old Banashri Das is also in Class 10 and struggling

with online classes. Her father had lost his job in the nearby industrial zone during the first wave of the pandemic. The family borrowed money to buy a smartphone so Banashri does not have to miss online classes but constant internet recharges have added to their financial strain.

"During the first wave of lockdown I had no means to do online classes. Now my parents managed a smart phone but internet pack ends

fast and we always don't have money to recharge," Banashri Das told NDTV.

Her mother, who is a cloth weaver says lockdown has pushed them into poverty and paying ₹ 300 to 500 for mobile internet recharge is difficult.

"Her father does not get work every day - just once in three days. Thus running the house is difficult. Managing two square meal is a challenge now. I used to earn by weaving cloths, now even I can't go out to sell

the clothes," said Sabya Das.

Assam has over 60 lakhs students in schools including both the government-run and the private ones.

A survey of Annual Status of Education report (ASER -Rural), 2020 had found that only one in every two government school students in Assam have access to a smartphone for online classes and three in every four students in private schools have a digital device.

Book examines legacy of Kissinger's 1971 China visit

NEW DELHI, JUL 9 (PTI): A collection of critical essays examines the impact, consequences and legacy of the then US National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger's secret visit to China in 1971 and how it has shaped world order.

"A New Cold War: Henry Kissinger and the Rise of China", edited by Sanjaya Baru and Rahul Sharma, has contributions from Teresita Schaffer, Kanti Bajpai, Hoo Tiang Boon, Sujan Chinoy, Bill Emmott, Frederic Grare, Quah Say Jye and C Raja Mohan among others.

After Kissinger made the door-opening visit to China in July 1971 to meet top Chinese leaders, it inaugurated a new phase not just in US-China relations but in contemporary history.

That visit and subsequent US-China relation-

ship, including the US decision to invest in China's economic rise and admit it into the World Trade Organisation, combined to firm up the foundations of China's rise as a world power, the book, published by HarperCollins India, says.

Speaking about the book, Baru says, "Marking the 50th anniversary of the Nixon-Kissinger outreach to China, this unique collection of essays by eminent scholars and diplomats from around the world offers critical perspectives on America's contribution to China's rise and the origins of the New Cold War"

Co-editor Sharma says, "Kissinger's was a path-breaking visit, which changed the world forever. China's rise is a reality that the world will continue to grapple with for a long time to come.

The essays in this book attempt to analyse what prompted the Americans to open the doors to China, as well as the challenges that it has created for just about every nation today."

According to Swati Chopra, executive editor at HarperCollins India, "There is no doubt today of the impact that one man has had on the geopolitics of the past few decades - USA's former National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger. His contribution to the rise of China is perhaps a lesser known aspect of this, which is what a new cold war is about."

The essays are divided into two sections: those that examine the global implications of the US-China reset and those that look at this process from the perspective of select countries.

First consignment of Sinopharm's Vero Cell vaccines bought from China arrives in Kathmandu

KATHMANDU, 09 JUL [KATHMANDU-POST]: The first consignment of Vero Cell Covid-19 vaccines purchased by the government from China, arrived in Kathmandu on Friday.

Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal Spokesperson Raj Kumar Chhetri informed that a Nepal Airlines wide-body aircraft that had flown to Beijing to bring the vaccines on Thursday, landed at Tribhuvan International Airport at 6:16 am today.

The first consignment brought in 800,000 doses of the vaccine. Flights are

also scheduled for July 15 and July 22, each of which is expected to bring 1 million doses, according to Health Ministry officials.

The government has purchased 4 million doses of vaccines from China under a non-disclosure agreement with an affiliate of the state-backed pharmaceutical giant Sinopharm.

China, last month, had provided 1 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine that was used to inoculate those between the ages of 60 and 64 in Kathmandu Valley and those between 62 and 64 outside the Valley.

399 new COVID-19 cases push Arunachal Pradesh's tally to 38,682

ITANAGAR, JUL 9 (PTI): Arunachal Pradesh's COVID-19 tally rose to 38,682 as 399 more people tested positive for the infection, a senior health official said here on Friday.

The COVID-19 death toll in the frontier state increased to 185 with one more person succumbing to the disease in the past two days, he said.

A 52-year-old woman from the Capital Complex Region died at her home in Lower Subansiri district on Wednesday due to acute respiratory distress syndrome with Covid Pneumonia, State Surveillance Officer (SSO)

Dr LobsangJampa said.

The Capital Complex Region remained at the top of the list in terms of fresh cases with 109, followed by East Siang (42), Changlang (29), West Kameng (28), Upper Subansiri (27), Lohit (24), Longding (19), Papumpare (17), Namsai and Lower Subansiri with 13 cases each. New cases were also recorded from Kamle, West Siang, Shi-Yomi, East Kameng, Tawang, Siang, Lower Siang, Lower Dibang Valley, Leparada, Anjaw, Upper Siang, KurungKumey and one in Tirap district, the official said.

Of the 399 new cas-

es, 378 were detected through rapid antigen test 8 through RT-PCR and 13 by TrueNat method, the SSO said, adding that 172 people were found symptomatic.

Arunachal Pradesh now has 3,460 active COVID-19 cases, he said.

The total number of COVID-19 recoveries in the northeastern state rose to 35,037 as 301 more patients were cured of the disease on Thursday, Jampa said.

The COVID-19 recovery rate in the state now is 90.58 per cent while the active percentage stands at 8.94 and the positivity rate at 7.12 per cent, the official said.

2 killed, several injured as bus skids off road in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, 09 JUL [PTI]: Two persons died and several others were injured as a passenger bus skidded off the road and fell 200 metres below in the Leparada district of Arunachal Pradesh, police said on Friday.

The incident happened around 9.30 pm on Thursday near Tirbin, they said. The bus with 13 passengers on board was on the way from Daporijo in Upper Subansiri of Arunachal Pradesh to Silapathar in Dhemaji district of neighbouring Assam, Leparada's Superintendent of Police PN Thongdok said.

The driver, RK Singh (57), and co-driver A Biswakarma (24) died on the spot, he said. The injured were admitted to the district hospital at Basar, he added.

ED to probe fake COVID vaccination camps in Kolkata

KOLKATA, JULY 9 (PTI): The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has decided to probe the dubious COVID vaccination camps in Kolkata, sources said on Friday. The matter is at present being probed by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Kolkata Police's Detective Department, which has already arrested nine persons, including fake IAS officer Debanjan Deb who masqueraded the fraud.

"The ED has filed an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) over the matter. The ED will probe the money laundering angle, if there is any," a source in the investigative agency said.

Deb was arrested in June for masquerading as the joint commissioner of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation and operating dubious immunisation camps in different parts of the city.

In Nepal, with majority population unvaccinated, concerns abound over hasty lifting of Covid-19 restrictions

ANUPOJHA KATHMANDU, 09 JUL [KATHMANDU-POST]: ShishirThakuri works at a printing press at Putalisadak in the Capital. Like a majority of Nepalis, he has not received a Covid-19 vaccine yet. His job requires working with half a dozen colleagues in a small room and he attended his office regularly even during the two-month-long strict lockdown.

It was not easy for him to follow the health protocols such as maintaining social distance. But after the Valley's chief district officers eased the prohibitory orders this Tuesday, allowing a full-fledged operation of public vehicles, he started feeling panicked.

"I hear that cases are surging again, and Putalisadak over the past few days has been so crowded that I am scared to go out for lunch," said Thakuri, 24.

"Except for the press owner, none of us are vaccinated so we fear contracting the virus," said Thakuri, who hails from Dadeldhura district and is staying with his cousin at Ghattekulo.

SaritaBhattarai, 55, of Boharatar hasn't been vaccinated either. She started going back to her office at the Balaju Industrial District Management Office two weeks ago. She was diagnosed with breast cancer two years ago and falls in the high-risk category for Covid-19 infection.

also increased. Public vehicles are carrying passengers beyond their seating capacities, streets and business hubs are crowded and restaurants are providing dine-in services.

"With the easing of restrictions, crowding has increased in the Balaju industrial district and many people are not even wearing masks or observing social distancing. I am more anxious than ever about the virus," said Bhattarai.

It is not just there is more movement of people. Political protests are also ongoing. The student wings of the five parties in the opposition alliance organised whistle rallies in all 77 districts across the country on Thursday. They also demonstrated at the office of the Nepal Oil Corporation in Kathmandu against its decision to hike fuel prices.

RajibDhungana, president of Nepali Congress affiliated Nepal Students Union, said they will continue to continue the demonstrations.

"We cannot stay idle when Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli is taking one step after another against the constitution and the rule of law," he told the Post. "We are aware of the pandemic. We follow the safety protocols and social distancing."

Meanwhile, a high number of infections with a high positivity rate continues.

On Wednesday, Nepal reported 2,077 new cases of Covid-19 from a total of 7,835 polymerase chain reaction tests in the past 24 hours, putting the infection rate at 26.5 percent. Compared to the past six days, the infection rate has increased by five percent. The government's report on July 2 showed that out of 6,566 polymerase chain reaction tests, 1,391 new cases were reported which is 21.18 percent.

tors and people are behaving as if there is no virus. The government failed in its duty to warn the public that the threat has not gone yet."

Marasini alleges that a lack of proper coordination among the three tiers of government is responsible for the current chaos.

KhimLalDevkota, a national assembly member who holds a PhD on development economics, agrees.

"The problem we have is the result of the tussle between Home Ministry and the Health Ministry over handling the pandemic, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's government giving all the powers to the chief district officers and a lack of coordination among government agencies," said Devkota.

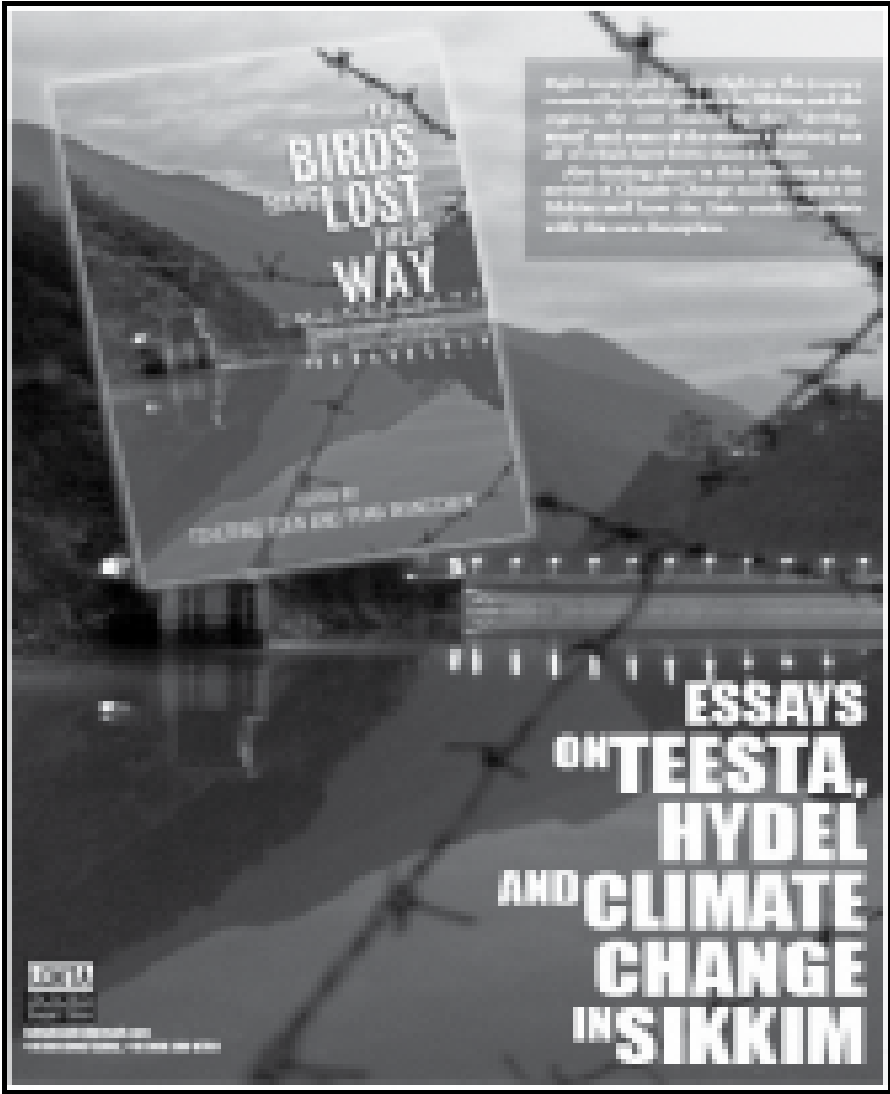
The Epidemiology and Disease Control Division has already confirmed that the Delta and Delta Plus variants of the coronavirus have been circulating in the country. It is reported that both sub-lineages of the virus are highly contagious. Research suggests that the Delta variant, officially known as B.1.617.2, is the most contagious of all the known variants to date, possibly 40 to 60 percent more transmissible than the Alpha variant, though studies are ongoing.

When inquired about the threat of the new variants of the coronavirus, Kathmandu's Chief District Officer Kali Prasad Parajuli said his office is set to consult the Health Ministry and will revise the prohibitory orders accordingly.

Dhundi Prasad Niraula, chief district officer of Lalitpur, said his office is closely watching the situation. "We are holding a meeting with the Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre by Monday and may come up with a new decision," he said.

When asked about the allegations of lack of coordination among various tiers of government and agencies in dealing with the virus, Krishna HariPushkar, spokesperson at the Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre, said his office has been working for an improved coordination.

"Next week we will be consulting with all the local units and stakeholders to devise a strategy in view of a possible third wave," he said.



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Colombia and Peru play for honour, 3rd place at Copa America

BRASILIA, JUL 9 (AP): Few teams want to play a third-place match in any tournament, even less so during the COVID-19 pandemic, but that's not the case for Colombia and Peru at the Copa America.

They will square off Friday night at the Man Garrincha Stadium in Brasilia.

Both teams have improved their confidence and camaraderie at the South American championship and will return to World Cup qualifiers in September with renewed hopes of going to Qatar next year.

Colombia coach Reinaldo Rueda, who took over after Carlos Queiroz was fired, had only worked with his squad for two matches of World Cup qualifiers before the tournament. He then had to weather the criticism of James Rodriguez, who was left off the squad.

"Being third in South America with all the soccer potential we have here must not be irrelevant," Rueda said on Thursday in a news conference.

"This should inspire us into being better, into being the number one someday."

Colombia is currently fifth in South American World Cup qualifiers, leaving them short of a direct ticket to Qatar.

Peru had it even worse before Copa America, sitting last in qualifiers. Fans feared that coach Ricardo Gareca, a national hero after leading the team to the 2018 World Cup, had lost his magic. But he has directed Peru into the semifinal of the South American championship despite veteran striker Paolo Guerrero's injury.

The match gives Colombia a chance to exact revenge for Peru's 2-1 victory over them in the group stage nearly three weeks ago.

Colombia will return home knowing they troubled defending champions Brazil in the group stage and Lionel Messi's Argentina in the semifinal. Brazil only beat them 2-1 in the last minute and Argentina needed a penalty shootout.

Peru started slow, losing to the hosts 4-0. But then it beat Colombia and Venezuela to advance and eliminated Paraguay on penalties in the quarterfinals. The team lost again to Brazil in the semifinals, but with a much stronger performance, 1-0.

Peru also found a relevant striker in Benevenuto's GianlucaLapadula, who scored two goals and established productive partnerships with Christian Cueva and Andr Carrillo.

Argentina plays Brazil in the final on Saturday night.

Brazil vs Argentina final, more than just Neymar vs Messi

RIO DE JANEIRO, JUL 9 (AP): A contest between Neymar and Lionel Messi is how many fans perceive the Copa America final between Brazil and Argentina.

The players themselves, though, see the bigger challenge on Saturday at Maracana Stadium will be between one of the toughest defensive lines to break in world soccer and the protection around one of the best players in history.

With a dash of pepper off the pitch to spice up the rivalry.

Neymar's Brazil lineup has conceded only two goals in six matches at the Copa America. Veteran Thiago Silva, Marquinhos and der Milito are taking shifts as starters without putting the Selecao under too much if any risk. Defensive midfielders Casemiro and Fred are relentless. Right-back Danilo and left-back Renan Lodi are keener to defend than go running up front.

These players initially criticized the South American soccer confederation for shifting the continental tournament to Brazil in emergency mode. Before the final against Messi's Argentina, they've changed their narrative to winning at all costs. And keeping a clean sheet.

"The zone where Messi



plays is where I play, we face each other a lot during matches," Casemiro told a news conference on Thursday.

"I can't mark any player by myself, you need teammates. And you don't mark only one player."

"It starts with Neymar, Richarlison and it ends in the goalkeeper a team plays with 11, defends with 11 and attacks with 11."

Meanwhile, Argentina has found a formula to try protect Messi, who now at age 34 plays much closer to the final

third of the pitch. Midfielders Rodrigo de Paul and Giovani Lo Celso, notably creative players, are selflessly adding to a barrier around Messi.

Although they still manage to give good passes to aggressive wingers Lautaro Martinez and Nico Gonzalez.

Messi has scored four goals and given five assists during this edition of Copa America. Before the tournament, he said it was his dream to win his first major title with Argentina, which hasn't won major trophies in 28 years.

He is playing Barcelona-style for his national team, scoring from free kicks, dazzling adversaries with frequent runs despite his age and giving plenty of passes.

"Messi is one step ahead of all of us," De Paul said before the penalty shootout win against Colombia in the semifinals.

"One is here to grow, to help. We are all on the same path. What matters is to win and represent Argentina well."

The strengths of Brazil

and Argentina also belie some of their weaknesses.

The Selecao trusts so much in its defense that its strikers are under-performing at Copa America. Richarlison and Roberto Firmino scored only one goal each for Brazil. Gabriel Jesus, who is suspended from the final, didn't find the back of the net. Argentina's effort to protect Messi has also cost the team physically in the second half of most matches that is precisely when Brazil scores more goals.

The Copa America final is

the only game of the tournament which opens the possibility of extra-time before penalties. Argentina played its semifinal one day after Brazil advanced.

Juicy comments before the final could also affect the mood for the game. Brazil's Richarlison said his team will trash talk the Argentinians during the match.

"We can manage, it isn't just talking. We will talk and show it on the pitch," the striker said.

"We will provoke them, it will happen."

It wasn't very different in their previous clash in the South American tournament in 2019, when Brazil beat Argentina 2-0 in the semifinals with goals by Gabriel Jesus and Roberto Firmino. Neymar didn't play in that tournament because of injury.

Argentinian goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez also provoked Colombia players during the penalty shootout that put his team in the final. Martinez made three saves.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro kicked off the final rivalry in an online meeting with his Argentinian counterpart Alberto Fernandez.

"I will say what the result will be. It will be 5-0," said Bolsonaro, who is not expected to attend. Fernandez just laughed.

De Silva refutes Ranatunga's second string remark on visiting Indian side



MUMBAI, JUL 9 (PTI): The legendary Aravinda De Silva says the Indian cricket has so much depth that the team selected for the Sri Lanka tour can not be termed a "second-string" side, as claimed by his former teammate ArjunaRanatunga.

An Indian team packed with youngsters under the leadership of ShikharDhawan is in Sri Lanka for a white-ball tour, starting with a three-match ODI series from July 13.

The senior players under ViratKohli were named for the World Test Championship Final against New Zealand and the subsequent five-Test series against England.

World Cup-winning former captain Ranatunga had slammed the country's cricket board for agreeing to host a second string Indian team, saying that it is nothing short of an 'insult'.

"India has got (an) enormous amount of talent going around at the moment and there is no way you call any side a second string," De Silva said during a virtual group interaction.

"If you look at the current way of handling

players, looking at current situation(s) worldwide, there is a rotation (of players) all over the world and these players being in a bubble has become very challenging for some of these youngsters, it is not easy," added De Silva.

"...it is very important to keep their minds occupied, maybe it will come to a stage where rotating some of these players, even some of the officials to that extent, because they are put in some of these bubbles has taken the toll on some of these youngsters and officials."

"So, I guess, this method might be something for the future. Even if you send a second string team or third team string, it is not a third string team, it is a rotational sort of (arrangement)," he added.

"I guess I won't blame anyone for changing squads and sending different squads on various tours, that I guess is going to be the future, said 55-year-old De Silva, who has played 93 Tests.

The Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) had also responded to Ranatunga by saying: "Out of the 20-member India squad, 14 play-

ers have represented India across all formats or in some form and not a second-string team as claimed."

De Silva said that the current Sri Lankan team needs balance.

"They need to give the balance sorted out in the national team as soon as possible," he said, adding that balance was one of the hallmarks of the 1996 Sri Lankan team that lifted the World Cup.

"The English tour really showed us where we are at this juncture. It is certainly not a young team. It is quite an experienced team. It is lot to do with the balance of the team, that is where, I felt the combinations we had in those sort of conditions weren't the best, he elaborated.

Angelo Matthews, the senior-most among current players, pulled out of the upcoming series against India, citing personal reasons, but De Silva wasn't pleased with his decision.

"It is a pity if he (Angelo Matthews) has decided to quit at this stage, because I see him as a guy who contributed a lot to Sri Lanka cricket," he said.

Kyrgios pulls out of Olympics; cites injury, lack of crowds



SYDNEY, JUL 9 (AP): Nick Kyrgios pulled out of Australia's tennis team for the Olympics hours after Tokyo's governor confirmed a ban on fans in the city's stadiums during the games which start July 23.

Kyrgios posted a statement on social media early Friday local time to announce his withdrawal, citing a need to get healthy and the ban on fans at Tokyo Olympics venues as reasons.

"It's been my dream to represent Australia at the Olympics and I know I may never get that opportunity again," Kyrgios

posted. "But I also know myself. The thought of playing in front of empty stadiums just doesn't sit right with me. It never has."

The 26-year-old Australian, who also missed the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, said he also "wouldn't want to take an opportunity away from a healthy Aussie athlete ready to represent the country."

At Wimbledon last week, Kyrgios had to retire after the second set of his third-round match against Felix Auger-Aliassime because of a strained abdominal muscle.

He said it was a heartbreaking way to lose, and later foreshadowed his Olympic decision when he said if he played in Tokyo, he wanted to do it with full crowds, with his support team there and he wanted to be able to watch other athletes compete.

A ban on foreign fans was imposed earlier this year but local organizers had hoped to have local spectators for events in venues up to 50% capacity.

The decision to ban fans from all the Tokyo area Olympic venues came after Prime Minister YoshihideSuga put

the Japanese capital under a COVID-19 state of emergency because of rising new infections and the highly contagious delta variant. That means the Tokyo Games will be a largely TV-only event.

Kyrgios has stayed mainly in Australia during the pandemic and skipped the French Open before traveling to Wimbledon.

"I will also take all the time I need to get my body right," he said in the statement posted on Twitter.

"Good luck to all the Aussies competing and I'll see you back on the court real soon."

Lighting ceremony starts Tokyo leg of torch relay

TOKYO, JUL 9 (AP): Olympic organisers on Friday held a flame unveiling ceremony in Tokyo, celebrating the arrival of the Olympic flame in the city.

The event came a day after the government put Tokyo under a COVID-19 state of emergency because of rising new infections and the highly contagious Delta variant.

The uptick in infections forced the Tokyo city government to pull the torch relay off capital streets, allowing it to run only on remote islands off the Tokyo coast.

The relay has repeatedly been rescheduled, rerouted, and sequestered in public parks away from the public since it began in March from northeastern Japan.

It remains unclear how the torch will enter the stadium for the opening ceremony.

Spectators will be banned from Tokyo-area stadiums and arenas when the Olympics begin in two weeks.

Fans from abroad were banned months ago, and the new measures will mean no spectators in stadiums and arenas around Tokyo

both indoor and outdoor venues.

The ban covers Tokyo and three surrounding prefectures Kanagawa, Saitama and Chiba.

A smattering of events in outlying areas, like baseball in the northeastern prefecture of Fukushima, will allow a limited number of fans. The state of emergency begins July 12 and runs through August 22.

The Olympics, which open July 23 and run through August 8, fall entirely under the emergency period, while the Paralympics open August 24.

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Conor talks trash, throws kick at Poirier before UFC 264

LAS VEGAS (AP): Conor McGregor wore a plaid purple suit and sunglasses when he performed some of his greatest Vegas hits at his UFC 264 news conference Thursday ahead of his latest attempt to roll back the mixed martial arts clock.

The biggest star in combat sports preened, strutted and misbehaved at T-Mobile Arena, delighting his fans in a raucous crowd anticipating the finale to one of the biggest fight trilogies in recent history on Saturday night.

McGregor threw a bottle of Dustin Poirier's hot sauce into the stands early on and then prowled the stage, security guards separating him from his opponent. He threw a kick at Poirier during their event-ending faceoff — when he was too far away to connect, of course.

In between, the loquacious Irishman insulted Poirier's wife, repeatedly vowed to kill Poirier in the cage, questioned Poirier's love for his native Louisiana and called Poirier a common epithet that's much less loaded on McGregor's side of the pond.

Poirier and the assembled fans got another recital of McGregor's classic verbal combination of dexterity and brutality, the secret to burrowing inside the heads of several opponents during his rocket ride into the sports stratosphere in the previous decade.

"On Saturday night, you're going to get walked around that octagon like a dog and then put to sleep," McGregor said to Poirier.

"He's not in the same stratosphere as me," McGregor insisted later. "The man looks disgraceful up here. He looks frail at this weight now. The weight cut is getting to him."

"He's going out on a stretcher in this fight," McGregor said finally.

And while McGregor's fans drank it up faster than a double shot of their hero's Proper Twelve whiskey, Poirier appeared to weather the verbal blows perfectly well.

"You used to be a lot better than that, man," Poirier said during a rare break in the barrage. "The trash talk was a lot better than that."

After all, McGregor's carefully crafted persona doesn't hit quite so hard when McGregor has had his hand raised in victory just once since the Obama administration: For all his fame, fortune and celebrity, he's 1-2 in the cage and

0-1 in the boxing ring since November 2016. Poirier laughed at the difference from the promotion for their second fight last January, when McGregor was disarmingly friendly and charming throughout. Even with a resumption of hostilities, Poirier insisted he won't allow McGregor into his head as he did in 2014, when McGregor knocked him out

has hinted at what he suspects to be the causes of his one-sided loss in January to Poirier, who leg-kicked McGregor into serious pain before finishing him with precise punches.

McGregor says he wasn't completely focused on MMA last year, and he had already arranged his post-fight boxing training camp to prepare for a lucrative



ROCKING GREEN! Model Iskra Lawrence headed to The Nice Guy in Los Angeles.

Hilaria Baldwin Defends Herself as "Fluid" After Attempts to Deny Her "Right to Belong"

Hilaria Baldwin shared a long message discussing her "very painful experience," and said she and Alec Baldwin want their kids to feel OK to be culturally "fluid."

Hilaria Baldwin continues to have a lot on her mind about cultural identity.

The 37-year-old yoga instructor shared a lengthy message to Instagram on Thursday, July 8, in which she shared how herself and husband Alec Baldwin spent time during the pandemic explaining to their six kids that people can feel part of more than one culture. Although Hilaria did not make it explicitly clear, the post appeared to reference her heritage scandal that was spurred late last year.

"We talked about how we grew up, our languages, our cultures-multi& very valid," she wrote. "We discussed belonging& how there are people who want to deny others their right to belong."

Hilaria continued, "When you are multi, it can feel hard to belong. You are constantly going back and forth, trying to be more this or more that. You feel you have to explain why you are the way you are, trying to fit into a world of labels when there might not be one that perfectly defines you. You will never quite fit in because the other parts of you shape and influence all your parts."

The fitness influencer, who tied the knot with Alec in June 2012, criticized those who would seek to "devalue" others rather than being accepting, curious and open to finding similarities between everyone.

"We need to normalize the fact that we are all unique—our culture, languages, sexual

orientations, religions, political beliefs are ALLOWED TO BE FLUID," Hilaria said. "What I had to learn through a very painful experience is that many people relate...so, if you are suffering, please know that a loving group see



your validity and belonging. We love& accept you, just as you are."

In late 2020, Hilaria was accused of faking her Spanish accent and misrepresenting her background, which stemmed from a Twitter thread about the star that had gone viral in December.

She defended herself numerous times before taking a month-long hiatus from Instagram. Hilaria returned in early February to apologize and say her "deep connection to two cultures could have been better explained."

Madonna Calls Britney Spears' Conservatorship a "Violation of Human Rights" in Impassioned Message

Madonna did not hold back in her strongly worded message about Britney Spears' ongoing conservatorship, which she shared to social media.

If you ask Madonna, Britney Spears shouldn't have to stand alone amid her ongoing conservatorship drama.

The 62-year-old "Like a Prayer" vocalist took to her Instagram Story on Thursday, July 8 to express unquestioned support for her co-performer from the 2003 hit

"Me Against the Music." Madonna's post included a photo of herself wearing a top that read "Britney Spears" in purple letters.

"Give this woman her life back," Madonna added. "Slavery was abolished so long ago! Death to the greedy patriarchy that has been doing this to women for centuries. This is a violation of human rights! Britney we coming to Get you out of jail!"

On the same day, Britney

herself shared her own strong message to fans as she wrote on Instagram that haters can "kiss my ass." This was an apparent reference to negative remarks the 39-year-old star had received about the topless photo she posted a day earlier.

Madonna's recent message was not the first time she had referenced Britney since the embattled "Toxic" singer pleaded with the court last month to end her years-long conservatorship. On June 29,

Madonna posted a photo of herself locking lips with Britney on-stage at the 2003 MTV Video Music Awards, in reference to Lil Nas X having kissed a male dancer during his own performance at the 2021 BET Awards two days prior.

#didditfirst" Madonna wrote on her post. For his part, Lil Nas X later responded to fans displeased with Madonna's message by saying the two are friends and that she was just joking.

Aries:

It's one of those days, Aries. Nothing seems to be working out in your favour and those around you are unavailable to offer support. What do you do in such cases? Do you let the topsy-turviness of life get the better of you, or do you make a conscious effort to transmute the heavy emotions? Something tells us your sass coupled with the ability to see the silver lining in every situation will come in handy.

Tip: It's time to transmute those heavy emotions.

Taurus:

It's one of those days, Taurus. Everything looks topsy-turvy and you feel like your head is not in the right place. While what's taking place isn't in your hands, your response is. So deal with the given situation in a mature manner. Loosen the grip whenever necessary, and cut the cords if need be. Remember, no matter what transpires, you want to leave with your dignity intact.

Tip: You know what needs to be done here. Honour your inner guidance.

Gemini:

It's a 'manage your expectations' kind of day in the Gemini HQ. You may feel like the people around you are not getting your jam, despite your best efforts to make them understand where you are coming from. What do you do in circumstances such as these? Do you let the

frustration get the better of you or take charge of your emotions? Investing your time and energy in feel-good rituals will help you power through it all.

Tip: Let's just blame it on the retrograde.

Cancer:

What you resist, persists. So instead of going into denial mode, take this opportunity to delve deeper. To have a one-on-one conversation with your fears. Something tells us you're stepping into a time of inner transformation, one that will change how you perceive yourself completely. Here's a witchy tip to aid you in the process of inner alchemy: 1. Write your woes on a piece of paper. 2. Burn the sheet with the intention of clearing this energy from your life. 3. Bury the ashes as a way of transmuting the stagnant energy.

Tip: Those suppressed emotions are calling for your attention.

Leo:

Remember when you struggled to do the things that are now child's play? Don't you love how you have evolved over a period of time and become the person you are today? Word for the wise: take a moment. Step back from what you are creating as you begin to trust the process. The task at hand may seem like an impossible one for now, but with patience and persistence you will attain mastery.

Tip: You are on the road to mastery, baby! Trust the process and keep going.

Virgo:

Manifestation is not a ritual, it's a lifestyle. Read that again, Virgo. The perfect house, the perfect job, the perfect city—they're all within your reach. So, shift your vibration and get in alignment with Spirit. Something tells us big things are about to take place in your world. As such, you're also likely to feel a surge in your creative energy today. Pay attention to those out-of-the-box ideas and adopt a no-holds-barred policy with your dreams.

Tip: Get in alignment with Spirit!

Libra:

Words of wisdom courtesy Albert Einstein, "The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift." Something to think about when you find yourself delaying the decision-making process. All the answers you seek are within you, and have been within you all along. There is no need to seek external validation, Libra. Circling back to the inner landscape, some of you may be called to play the role of the mystic and hold space for your circle. Draw from your past experiences and trust yourself to be a conduit of the light.

Tip: All the answers you seek are within you, and have been within you all along.

Scorpio:

But, how do "you" perceive yourself, Scorpio? Do you see yourself as strong, independent and capable of taking over the world, or battling with crippling self-doubt in private? Remember, no amount of external validation will help you reverse the damage. You've just got to sit down with the heavy emotions. You've just got to confront the hurt and the pain. Something tells us you're an alchemist at heart, blessed with the power to turn your wounds into wisdom.

Tip: It's time to believe in your own power and potential.

Sagittarius:

Your worth is not dependent on your productivity. But that's a lesson you learned a long time ago, Sagittarius. What you're being asked to honour this weekend: the process of non-doing, the process of allowing, and the process of integrating. Oh, the miracles you will make space for when you surrender to the flow!

Tip: Sometimes, you've just got to be in yin mode.

Capricorn:

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his description of the flow state said, "There's this focus that, once it becomes intense, leads to a sense of ecstasy, a sense of clarity; you know exactly what you want to do from one moment to the other; you get immediate feedback." This is as close as it gets to nirvana,

Capricorn, and you're about to have a taste of it in the days to come. So surrender to the process of creation. Give birth to that beautiful piece of art that you've been thinking about for days now. As you do, allow time and space to fade into oblivion.

Tip: It's all about the flow!

Aquarius:

We're all born with a unique blueprint. We all come here with a mission that can be fulfilled by us alone. While some excel in the arts, others thrive on numbers. What's special about this chapter in your life is that it is bringing forth clarity of purpose, and aligning you with fellow warriors who are playing the role of the catalyst in your path. Open your eyes to the signs, Aquarius!

Tip: It's time to get in alignment with your purpose.

Pisces:

You've been taking everything so seriously, Pisces, and the Universe wants you to know that's a real problem. What you want to do today is adopt the spirit of play. Bring an element of madness to everything you say and do. When it comes to your creative process, you're being reminded that there is no such thing as being too 'out there'. Your ideas are coming through from a sacred place and it's time for you to honour them.

Tip: Adopt that spirit of play.