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SummitTIMES

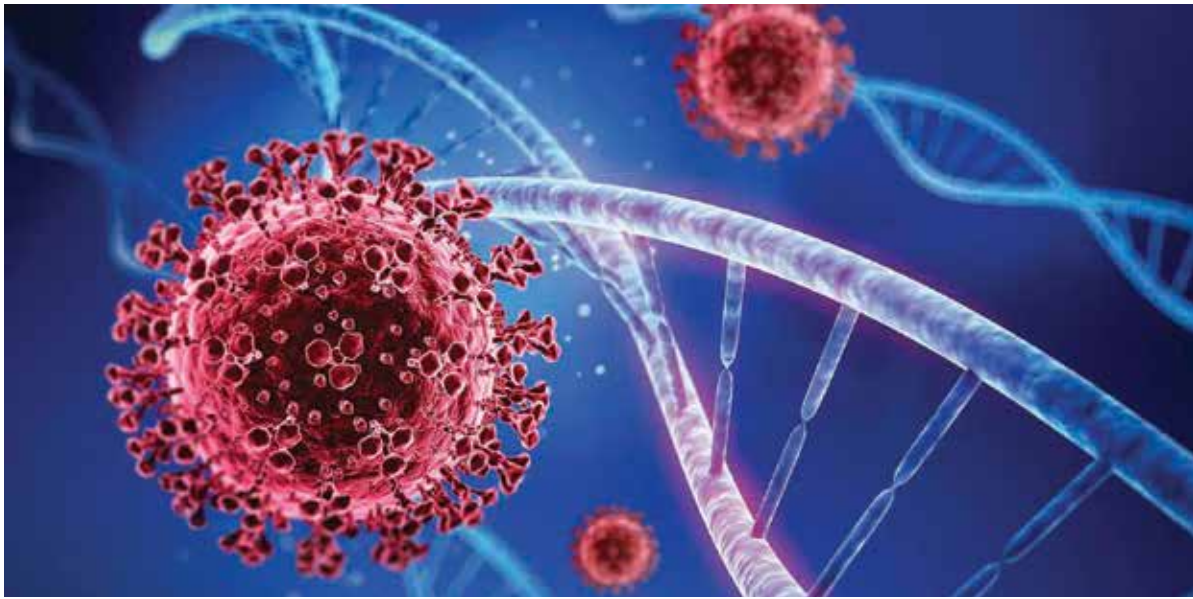
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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Covid claims two more lives in Sikkim and infects 104 in 24 hours



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 16 AUG:

Covid claimed two more lives in Sikkim the past 24 hours to take the State's Covid toll to 363. The second wave, which has been coursing through Sikkim since 22 April and is showing signs of having plateaued at a level substantially lower than its peak but has still not gone away, has claimed 64% of all the lives lost

to Covid here. 227 of the 363 lives lost to Covid have come 117 days that the State has grappled with the second wave.

A total of 21,672 cases, 75% of confirmed cases detected in Sikkim since 28 Feb, 2020, were reported in the second wave alone. While the numbers are staggering, what it also reveals is that the case fatality rate has been lower in the second wave even though

the absolute numbers are much higher than detected in the little over a year until the second wave hit.

As for the two deaths reported in the last 24 hours, while one Covid patient passed away at STNM Hospital, the second fatality was of a patient under home isolation in West District.

In the meantime, 104 new cases of novel coronavirus were re-

ported in the state taking the state's tally of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 to 28,830. These 104 cases were detected from the testing of 856 samples on Monday giving Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 12%.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department, while

49 cases were picked up in RT-PCR testing of 328 samples, 55 more were detected in rapid antigen testing of 526 samples.

Of the 104 new cases, 52 were registered in East District, 37 in West District, 12 in South District and 03 in North District.

On the other hand, the State continued to record more daily recoveries than new cases with 188 formerly Covid-positive patients making full recoveries and getting discharged from home and facility isolation.

Thus far, a total of 26,206 people have beaten the virus in Sikkim.

There are currently 1,982 active Covid cases in the State, the number slipping below 2k after a long while. Of these, 106 are admitted in hospitals across the State. Of these 11 were admitted in the last 24 hours and another 11 are currently admitted in ICU facilities at STNM Hospital and Central Referral Hospital.

PHE Minister inaugurates SYSS library in Gangtok



SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 17 AUG:

A library of Sukhim Yakthung Sapsok Songchumbho [Sikkim Limboo Literary Society], 'Thunwamukma Saplu- phim' was inaugurated by PHE Minister, Bhim Hang Limboo here at Limboo Bhawan on Monday evening. The inaugural function was also attended by Lok Sabha MP, Indra Hang Subba as special guest among other dignitaries.

Sukhim Yakthung Sapsok Songchumbho [SYSS] expressed its gratitude to Late Bishnu Maya Subba for her gen-

erous contributions to establish this library and to other individuals who lent support by contributing books. Librarian Ayushri Nembang is in-charge of the library.

Addressing the inaugural function, the Minister congratulated SYSS for establishing the library and further encouraged the organisation to continuously work to preserve and promote culture and tradition, language and practices of the community and bring members of the community together in unity. He also assured to provide all

possible support to the organisation in its initiatives in days to come.

The Minister spoke about various developmental and other welfare works taken up by the government for the Limboo community. He urged SYSS and other Limboo organisations to follow up on the announcements and programmes of the government in the interest of the community. He also expressed that the State Government is very serious about resolving the LT Assembly seat reservation issue at the earliest.

turn to pg02

YES launches free tuition for students in Melli Aching

SURAJ LIMBOO
GANGTOK, 17 AUG:

YuwaEktaSangh (YES) started free tuition classes at Melli-Aching GPU, under Yuksom-Tashiding Constituency, West Sikkim, from today.

YuwaEktaSangh is an NGO with around 30 educated youths from Melli-Aching and was established on 12 August 2021.

The main aim of YES is to contribute to the society which is why they started free tuition classes for students from primary level

up to class 10. More than 50 students have joined the first day of classes and many more will be joining, informed spokesperson of the NGO, Sudeep Limboo.

Social worker Namgyal Lepcha sponsored books, pens, and pencils for all the students. Chairs and tables were sponsored by Pandim Society of Melli, West Sikkim.

Sudeep Limboo informed that if they get more support they plan to start free tuition classes in other GPUs of Yuksom-Tashiding Constituency as well.

Sikkim's Mukesh Rai in Indian Boxing contingent as coach



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 17 AUG:

Mukesh Rai from Singithang, Namchi, is representing India as a Coach in the Asian Boxing Championship from 17 to 31 Aug 2021 at Dubai, UAE.

He along with 3 other coaches are part of the Junior Boys Boxing national team participating in the championship.

There are 13 boxers and 4 coaches in the Indian team.

Yuksam-Dubdi GPU helps out PHC and Police Outpost



PRITAM LAMA
YUKSAM, 17 AUG:

Yuksam-Dubdi GPU in West Sikkim donated furniture to Yuksam Primary Health Centre and a computer along with printer to Yuksam Police Outpost on the Nation's 75th Independence Day.

Yuksam-Dubdi Gram Panchayathanded over 50 chairs, two tables along with Rs.10,000 cash to the Yuksam Primary Health Centre at the PHC premises on Monday. The

items were bought using the GPU's funds, it is informed.

"We had donated the much needed furniture items to Yuksam Primary Health Centre. Similarly, we noticed the requirement of computer and printer at Yuksam police outpost for issuing various certificates, NOCs, etc," said Yuksam-Dubdi Panchayat President In-charge, Bhim Gurung.

The gesture was planned for Independence

Day as a mark of respect for health care workers and police personnel, he added.

Yuksam PHC Medical Officer/In-charge, Rewati Raman Pokhrel, Panchayat Secretary/VAA, Khabindra Gurung, Panchayat members and hospital staff were also present during the program on Monday.

Yuksam PHC and Police have expressed their gratitude to Yuksam-Dubdi Gram Panchayat for the initiative.



NEAR KRISHI BHAWAN
ABOVE WESTSIDE,
TADONG

MEGA SALE

**13th - 22nd
AUGUST**

17th Annual Convocation of KIIT

PROF ACHYUTA SAMANTA

The times left behind and the ones those followed, in 2021, were a mixed bag of fortunes those went through a tremendous fluctuations. The year 2021 began with a sigh of relief after facing an unprecedented crisis in the previous year which had affected and impaired all forms of life and livelihood. But a few months into it, the time that descended was more devastating a wave that engulfed us in a way that we saw Covid-19 very closely. All of us witnessed the loss of some and felt proud of some those who fought but did not succumb. But amid the darkness there were glimmers of euphoria and that of the academics. An academic year that ushered in uncertainty and unpredictability and the disease grew more menacing and rolling out of vaccination.

SPARKS IN THE GLOOM
Amid Covid-19, a natural calamity, Yash worsened the levels of poverty due to lockdown and mental stress, yet the batch of 2021 fared well all with their perseverance and resilience. KIIT Deemed to be University, which is well known for its student-friendliness, compassion and humanitarianism, stood by its students like a rock and anchored them to success in such testing times.

CLIMBING ON RANKINGS
KIIT has earned what it deserved. KIIT has earned global acclaim and reputation in a very short period of time - ranked 30th among Indian universities (overall) by the London based Times Higher Education, Asia University Rankings 2021 and 15th Rank in the General Engineering in the country, retaining its position among top institutions in India.

The list of the leaps it took is long and today KIIT is among a handful of Indian universities to enter the Asia University Rankings 2021 of Times Higher Education ranking and the only Deemed to be University from Odisha to make it to the enviable list.

KIIT was ranked at 251–300 in the World University Rankings-2021. It is the first Indian University to achieve “Five Stars Rating” from the prestigious QS Star Ranking System. More significantly, KIIT has acquired an impressive rank in the band 201-300 in the overall impact ranking by the Impact Rankings for its impact and efforts at sustainable development - Education, Alleviation of Poverty, Accelerating Peace, Gender Equity and fostering partnerships.

OUTREACHING BEYOND HUMAN
Notably, even during the pandemic, it did not lose sight of its mission of charity and humanitarianism, and has taken a series of initiatives right from the outbreak of the disease and has been at the forefront of Odisha's war against the coronavirus. In one of the most significant measures in Odisha's war against Covid-19, Kalinga Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS), a constituent of KIIT Deemed to be University, set up four ultramodern dedicated Covid hospitals with over 2000 beds with the support of the Govt. of Odisha, located in Bhubaneswar and in three tribal-dominated districts of Odisha.

The interventions which were model and philanthropic included the distribution of food materials and other essentials to over 3 lakh pandemic-hit people, including the marginalized people living in various slums, stranded migrant labourers.

KIIT also made an outstanding outreach to thousands of animals scattered over the

city providing them food during the pandemic as all eateries were closed and tourist spots were bereft of human presence leaving huge stock of animals habiting there in a doll-drum. Community outreach activities of KIIT & Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) strived to reach the hardest-hit and commonly overlooked people – transgender, sportspersons, physically challenged, sex workers, etc.

PATH-BREAKING INITIATIVE OF KISS
KIIT has been funding KISS that has been sending study materials, dress and generous amount of dry foods at the doorsteps every month for last one and a half year. In one of its kind gesture, KIIT has been providing free education to the children of the Covid deceased in Odisha. The facility will be available for two academic years: 2020–21 and 2021–22.

That should be seen as an exemplary gesture from the KIIT family and in addition, to the magnanimity the KIIT & KISS have adopted and are taking care of about 100 such orphans and providing them monthly allowance ranging from Rs.5000 to Rs.10000, depending upon the family size. As and when the academic institutions reopen, they will be provided with free education and subsequently complete higher education in KIIT & KISS.

STAND-OUT POSITIONING
In a stand-out positioning we are also the only educational institutions in India to provide Rs. 5,00,000/- (Rupees Five lakhs) as a token of assistance to the family of employee (who has succumbed to Covid-19) in order to alleviate his/her hardships to a little extent. We believe that no amount of money can compensate the loss, but this amount can give temporary relief.

Besides, one eligible person from his/her family will be employed suitably in KIIT, KISS or KIMS depending upon his/her educational qualification. KIIT will provide free education to the eligible children of their family in KIIT. KIIT has a multidimensional reach and impact.

A LOOK THROUGH WINDOW OF ERUDITION

KIIT has immense contribution to Education, Healthcare, Sustainable Development, Literature and Culture, and more specifically Sports. KIIT Deemed to be University is the only varsity in India to have three of its students, (separate events) Dutee Chand, Shivpal Singh and CA Bhavani Devi represent in the same Olympics - Tokyo Olympics in 100m & 200m sprint, Javelin (Athletics) and Fencing (Sabre) events respectively. KIIT and KISS have produced over 5000 sportspersons playing at different zonal, state and international level.

KIIT A GLOBAL VILLAGE
KIIT Deemed to be University stands out as it is a student and parent friendly University. A humongous number, 30000 Students from all over India and 65 countries study here and find a home in the University, which is a melting pot of culture.

RECORD PLACEMENTS
KIIT is known for its excellent track record of placements since its inception. We have been able to achieve excellent placements for 2019-20 batch despite the pandemic being at its peak. Keeping up with our past trend, KIIT is on its way to achieve record placement for the 2021 graduating batch due to the dedicated efforts of our training and placement department.

Our students have bagged 2500 single offers, 4000 multiple offers with the highest CTC of 30 Lakhs and an average of 6 lakhs. Even the School of Management has broken its previous records of placement. It wasn't an easy task to accomplish given the circumstances - trimming company sizes and layoffs.

BESIDES STUDIES
We value research as a potent form of

ViewPoint

learning. Besides in house publications by various schools, the researchers and faculty members of various schools regularly publish their research papers in reputed journals, authored books, got research projects and fellowships to research abroad and on joint projects. Currently about 100 research and consultancy projects funded by various national and international funding agencies.

BEYOND THE NORMAL
KIIT is the only University in India to have 22 Nobel laureates visiting campus and addressing the students. Over hundreds of collaborations made with universities far and wide across the globe have been facilitating student and faculty exchanges, research collaborations and membership in international associations for cooperation in raising standards of education around the globe and global visibility with an aim to make KIIT globally acclaimed Centre of Excellence in education, embracing Internationalization of Education.

The students and staff have worked relentlessly to help reach KIIT at the position it is today. We hope that this pandemic subsides soon and our students come back to the campus.

Meanwhile, we are recalibrating our campus to be prepared to welcome our students with all safety precautions and protocols in mind. For the batch graduating in 2021, it has been really disappointing that they could not come to the campus. We have tried to provide the most personal touch through use of technology and augmented reality this Convocation.

The 17th Convocation of KIIT Deemed to be University will be graced by Prof. Jean-Marie Lehn, Noble Prize in Chemistry (1987), France who will deliver the Convocation lecture. Minister of Education and Minister of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Dharmendra Pradhan, Government of India will preside as the Chief Guest at the 17th Annual Convocation of KIIT. It is a matter of great pride that Mata Amritanandamayi Devi (Amma) has given her kind consent to receive Honorary Doctorate of Letters (DLitt Honoris Causa). Founder of ENAM group, Vallabh Bhanshali and Desh Apnayen Sahayog Foundation and Founder-Director, FLAME University will also be conferred with Honoris Causa degree.

To the Class of 2021, I completely understand that last thing that you want to hear right now is Stay Home. But still, one can be close to home and near and dear ones, not physically but emotionally. I urge everyone to pursue every ambition and dream and embrace the responsibility to build this community - your priority. I reiterate that remember one thing - you are and will always be kings and queens, like your hostels say, Kings Palace and Queens Castle. Go kiss the world.

SDF East District committee meets, discusses party's work culture

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 17 AUG:

Sikkim Democratic Front party convened a coordination meeting of its East District working committee here at the party headquarters on Tuesday.

An SDF press release mentions that the meeting, which was conducted by following social distancing, was also attended by members of the frontal organisations of the party.

The release states

that the meeting was chaired by advisor and founding member of the party, Uday Lama and wherein the work-culture of the party was discussed. It adds that the meeting has decided to take SDF policies, principles and programmes to the villages to strengthen the organization of the party at the grassroot level.

The release mentions that representatives of frontal organisations also placed their suggestions

and decided that the East District committee will take part in party activities by working along with frontal organisations, leaders and active members of the party. The East District president also spoke about the future programme of the party.

The meeting was conducted by East District general secretary, Hemant Rai and concluded with the vote of thanks by East District general secretary [in-charge], Sharad Khadka.

India achieves highest ever COVID-19 vaccination in single day

NEW DELHI, AUG 17 (PTI):

India has administered more than 88.13 lakh COVID-19 vaccine doses in the last 24 hours, the highest ever vaccination achieved in a single day, the Union Health Ministry said on Tuesday.

In a tweet, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said, "India achieves the highest single-day record in #COVID19 vaccine doses. Yesterday will go down in the history of the world's

#LargestVaccineDrive. Congratulations."

Cumulative, 55,47,30,609 vaccine doses have been administered through 62,12,108 sessions across India, as per the provisional report till 7 am.

Besides, the ministry said more than 56.81 crore vaccine doses have been provided to states and UTs so far through all sources and a further 1,09,32,960 doses are in the pipeline.

Of this, the total consumption including wastage is 55,11,51,992 doses, according to the data available at 8 AM.

More than 2.25 crore balance and unutilised COVID vaccine doses are still available with states,UTs and private hospitals to be administered, the ministry stated.

The new phase of universalisation of COVID-19 vaccination commenced from June 21.

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PHE Minister inaugurates...

On the occasion, the Lok Sabha MP expressed gratitude to all the people who have worked hard in the past to promote Limboo language in the State. He added that students can learn Limboo language at the school, college and university level due to their contribution, commitment and determination and now one can even do PhD in Limboo language in Sikkim University.

"We cannot isolate ourselves in this globalised world but it is important to practice and promote the Limboo language. To speak and promote culture and tradition, language and practices of the community is not being communal but equally respecting culture, tradition, language and practices of other communities," he said.

He encouraged youth to take full advantage of the library to gain more knowledge and to promote reading habit and library culture in the State.

On the Limboo-Tamang seat reservation issue, he said that the State government and the CM have been constantly working with the Centre to resolve the issue at the earliest.

"I have been raising this issue constantly in the Parliament and will continuously raise it until it is resolved," he said. However, he asserted that everyone needs to ensure that this issue does not become a means for political propaganda that brings division in the Sikkimese society.

Separate "North Bengal..."

minister to save us from Mamata Banerjee's rule of oppression," he said.

Meanwhile, several BJP workers, including party MLA Sankar Ghosh, were detained by the Siliguri Metropolitan Police for gathering without permission amid the COVID-restrictions, officials said.

Mr Bista said they gathered for taking part in the "Yuva Sankalp Yatra" to mark the 75th year of Independence.

Union minister Subhas Sarkar, who was scheduled to lead one part of the "Shahid Samman Yatra" from the BJP's state headquarters in Kolkata to Burdwan city, claimed he was stopped by police from travelling with party supporters.

The Minister of State for Education continued his journey in his car and visited Belur Math on the way.

"We were not violating COVID protocols. As the police did not allow BJP supporters to accompany me, I can only say that they are scared of democratic

The function was also addressed by an eminent literary figure, JR Subba.

Earlier, SYSS president, CS Limboo mentioned that the new executive body took charge of SYSS on 06 February early this year and has been working to preserve and promote culture, tradition, literature, language and practices of the community. He also spoke about various future plans and programmes of the organisation.

He thanked the former executive committee and other individuals for their contributions towards the community and SYSS. He also thanked Late Bishnu Maya Subba and other individuals for their support and contributions to this library.

Librarian Ayushri Nembang mentioned that the library has around 7000 books and a dedicated section for more than 500 books and literature in Limboo language. She informed that the library has both fiction and non-fiction books and were mostly donations. She added that JR Subba and HB Khamdak donated most of the books while 1500 books were donated by student's wing of the SKM party.

Ms Nembang mentioned that Late Bishnu Maya Subba donated Rs 2.50 lakhs to establish the library and others have also supported the library. She informed that SYSS also plans to make rooms for scholars and to start Limboo language classes in Limboo Bhawan.

protests. We will continue to raise voice against atrocities by Trinamool," he said.

Earlier, the police detained BJP workers at Birati in North 24 Parganas where they gathered to take part in another leg of the "Shahid Samman Yatra", officials said.

Union Minister of State for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Shantanu Thakur alleged that he was also detained by the police at Birati even though he was in the area to offer puja at a temple. Police claimed that the BJP leader himself boarded a police van.

Speaking to reporters, West Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh said one leg of the Yatra was scheduled in north Bengal, another at Birati and the third from the state party headquarters in Kolkata.

"The Shahid Samman Yatra was aimed at letting the world know what was happening in West Bengal," Mr Ghosh said.

Union Health Minister reviews COVID-19 response in NE States

GUWAHATI, 17 AUG [PIB]:

Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Mansukh Mandaviya chaired a review meeting on Public Health Response to COVID-19 with the Health Ministers of Northeast States in Assam today. The Minister arrived in Assam with a Central Team to review the COVID-19 situation in the region.

The Minister announced a special package of Rs 1,352.92 crores for Northeastern States to strengthen its health infrastructure to fight the pandemic effectively. Utilising this fund the states can enhance the health facilities to combat the pandemic more aggressively, the minister said.

The minister also said that this fund will assist the States to procure medicines, keep buffer stock, for keeping adequate stock of oxygen



and creation of sufficient numbers of beds in hospitals at district and local levels including beds for ICUs. The Minister assured that Centre will ensure regular supply of vaccines to the States of Northeast so that maximum number of people are vaccinated within the next few months.

The Union Health Minister also informed that in-depth discussions

were held during the review meeting where State Health Ministers offered their suggestions to combat the pandemic better in this region and to achieve vaccination for their people at the shortest possible time.

The Minister appreciated the State governments of the Northeast States for their efforts for controlling the spread of the pandemic during the

period when this region was hit by the second wave.

While enquired about the possible threat of third wave in the Northeast region, the Minister was hopeful that the State governments are fully prepared and are equipped to thwart the possible third wave in this region.

The Minister also informed that Centre has

been constantly monitoring the situation of Covid in this region and is committed to provide all necessary assistance to all the States to tackle the pandemic better.

In today's meeting the Health Minister of Assam, Keshav Mahanta and Ministers from other States of Northeast gave an overview of Covid situation and their strategies to combat the pandemic in their respective states through brief presentations.

Health Ministers of Sikkim, Mizoram and Nagaland were present in today's deliberation, while Education and Law Minister of Tripura and Adviser of Chief Minister, Manipur represented their respective States in the review meeting. Senior officials of the State Government and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare were present in the meeting.

SMU Pro Chancellor calls on Governor

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 17 AUG:**

Pro Chancellor of Sikkim Manipal University (SMU), Lt. Gen (Retd.) Dr. M. D Venkatesh called on the Governor of Sikkim, Ganga Prasad, at Raj Bhawan today, a press release from Raj Bhavan informs. He was accompanied by the Vice-Chancellor, SMU, Lt. Gen (Retd.) Dr. Ranjan S Grewal.

During the meeting, the Governor, who is the Chancellor of SMU em-

phasised on promoting innovation and research in the true spirit of AtmaNirbhar Bharat, envisioned by the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi.

The Governor asked both Pro Chancellor and VC to mentor faculty members in achieving excellence in higher education and strive to train the students in communication skills.

The Governor presented 'Om Thanka' as a token from Raj Bhawan to the Pro Vice-Chancellor.



Prototype military transport plane crashes outside Moscow

MOSCOW (AP): A prototype military transport plane crashed while performing a test flight outside Moscow on Tuesday, Russia's United Aircraft Corporation said.

The new light military transport plane, Il-112V, crashed in a forested area as it was coming in for a landing at the Kubinka airfield about 45 kilometers (28 miles) west of Moscow, spokespeople of the corporation told the Tass news agency.

Two test pilots and a flight engineer were aboard the plane, and their fate is still unclear, the corporation said. A rescue operation is underway.

The Baza online news outlet posted a video on its channel in the messaging app Telegram of an airplane crashing into the woods after one of its

engines caught fire. The plane flew to the Moscow region last week and was set to be unveiled at the Army-2021 forum later this month. It is the first military transport plane developed in Russia from scratch since the Soviet Union collapsed.

Il-112V has turbo-prop engines and is designed to transport personnel, military equipment and weapons. It is capable of carrying up to 5 tons of cargo.

The plane's first flight took place in March 2019, but it was reported to be too heavy and in need of improvements. Testing of Il-112V resumed only in March 2021.

Serial production of Il-112V is expected to begin in 2023 at the Voronezh Aviation Enterprise, which can produce up to 12 such planes a year.

Smart phones distributed to underprivileged students in Darj



SMRITA KHAWAS

DARJEELING, 17 AUG:

Head Masters Association Darjeeling Hills & Darjeeling Police Administration distributed 130 smart phones to un-

derprivileged students of Class 9 and 10 today at Darjeeling.

Present in the distribution program were Inspector General of Police [North Bengal],

D.P Singh, Deputy Inspector General of Police [Darjeeling], Amit P Javalgi and Superintendent of Police [Darjeeling], Dr. Santosh Nimbalkar.

Student Credit Card Scheme launched in Darjeeling



Summit Report Darjeeling, 17 Aug: Two students of Darjeeling were handed over their student credit cards by District Magistrate, S Ponnambalam, today.

The Higher Education department, Government of West Bengal has introduced the Student Credit Card Scheme for

students of West Bengal to enable them to pursue education without having any financial constraints.

District Magistrate of Darjeeling, S Ponnambalam informed that education loan of Rs 2.4 lakh was sanctioned by Central Cooperative Bank (Rimbik branch) for stu-

dent Dibya Gupta and Rs 1 lakh to Dibyatarung. Congratulating the two students, he stated that there is no age limit but students above 15 years can avail the scheme.

Dibyatarung thanked Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee for the scheme.

Taliban leader reported in Kabul for talks

KABUL, AUG 17 (AP): Senior Taliban leader Amir Khan Muttaqi is said to be in the Afghan capital negotiating with Kabul's political leadership, including Abdullah Abdullah, who once headed the country's negotiating council, and former President Hamid Karzai.

That is according to an official familiar with the talks and who spoke on condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to speak to the media.

Muttaqi was a higher education minister when the Taliban last ruled and he began making contacts with Afghan political leaders even before Afghan President Ashraf Ghani secretly slipped away from the Presidential Palace on the weekend, leaving

a devastating vacuum that Taliban who were surrounding the city strode in to fill.

The official says the talks underway in the Afghan capital are aimed at bringing other non-Taliban leaders into the government that Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen has said will be an inclusive Afghan government.

There is little indication about the substance of the talks, but Shaheen earlier told The Associated Press that a government will be announced after negotiations with non-Taliban leaders are completed.

Afghans familiar with the talks say some rounds have gone late into the night and have been underway since soon after Ghani's departure.

Aligarh to be renamed Harigarh? Panchayat says plan sent to UP govt

NEW DELHI, 17 AUG [NDTV]: A proposal to rename Uttar Pradesh's Aligarh to Harigarh has been cleared by the zila panchayat at a meeting on Monday, the local body's chief said today. The proposal has been sent to the Yogi Adityanath government. If the move to rename Aligarh is cleared by the UP government, it would add to a long list of renamed places in the BJP-ruled state, one of the most prominent in recent times being the renaming of Allahabad to Prayagraj, a few months before the Kumbh Mela in January 2019.

"We had a meeting of

the zila panchayat board yesterday (Monday). Some proposals were passed in the meeting. The first proposal was about renaming Aligarh to Harigarh. It was passed unanimously. We have sent it to the Chief Minister. I hope it will be approved," Aligarh district panchayat chief Vijay Singh told news agency ANI. The push to rename Aligarh to Harigarh came from block panchayat leaders Kohri Singh and Umesh Yadav, panchayat members said.

Another proposal cleared by the panchayat is to rename Dhanipur airstrip in Aligarh to Kalyan Singh airstrip, the local body members said.

30 BJP workers arrested ahead of rally in Siliguri

SILIGURI, 17 AUG: West Bengal Police on Tuesday arrested at least 30 Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) workers, including Siliguri MLA Sankar Ghosh, in front of their party office ahead of their "Yuva Sankalp Yatra".

The police said that they hadn't sought permission to embark on the rally.

"They have been arrested because they did not seek permission for the Yuva Sankalp rally," said Joy Tudu, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Siliguri Metropolitan Police.

Soon after the arrest, clashes erupted between the workers and police.

In another incident, the police arrested 35 Narayani Sena workers from the Bagdogra

airport when they assembled there to receive John Barla, BJP MP from Alipurduar and Union Minister of State in the Ministry of Minority Affairs.

Speaking to ANI, Raju Bista, BJP MP from Darjeeling and National Yuva Morcha General Secretary said, "BJP's Yuva Morcha workers were embarking on the yatra to mark 75 years of India's Independence. A total of 75 Yuva Morcha leaders were to commence the 75-km rally in 75 places to pay respect to the country and its people."

He further said that the police is trying to stop the yatra. "This clearly shows that West Bengal government and state police is anti-national.

It is a worrisome situation for the state and the country," Mr Bista added.

The BJP MP termed the day as "shameful."

According to him, several Trinamool Congress leaders had recently conducted a programme of 'Khela Hobe' without intimidating the state police, which was not interrupted.

"At least a 1,000 Trinamool workers had gathered without police permission and intimidation to conduct the 'Khela Hobe' programme. But at the same time, when BJP workers and its leader wish to carry out a programme for paying respect to the country, permission is not given and people are arrested," said the BJP MP.

Hearing Pegasus pleas, Supreme Court says Centre affidavit not satisfying

NEW DELHI, 17 AUG: The Supreme Court today said that an affidavit filed by the Centre on the issue relating to alleged snooping by the government has not satisfied allegations whether or not Pegasus spyware was used and asked whether it will file an additional affidavit. A bench headed by Chief Justice of India N V Ramana posted for tomorrow the hearing on a batch of pleas seeking a court-monitored probe into reports of the government allegedly using Israeli spyware Pegasus to spy on politicians, activists, court staff, and journalists.

"We will continue tomorrow. If you have a change of mind, let us know tomorrow. If Tushar Mehta may decide to file an affidavit, then we have nothing to say, else we will hear all of you,"

said Chief Justice Ramana, while adding that it cannot compel the centre to file an affidavit if it is "reluctant". Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the centre, said that the issue involved aspects of national security and was not simple enough to be addressed through affidavits.

Mr Mehta asked if the petitioners will withdraw petitions seeking an independent probe into the issue if the government files an affidavit denying using Pegasus.

"We are dealing with a sensitive matter but an attempt is being made to make this sensational. This matter will have national security implications. This matter cannot be handled like furnish an affidavit etc. Minister concerned with this department has given details as to how the

Pegasus issue has been raging fire over the past few years. The placing of facts will involve national security issues," Mr Mehta told the bench.

During the hearing, the petitioners' lawyers repeatedly told the bench that the central government has evaded answering the question if it or any of its agencies have ever used the spyware and urged the court to direct the government to come clean. Earlier in the day, the central government filed an affidavit and apprised the top court that it has decided to constitute a Committee of Experts which will examine the issue.

The centre also denied all the allegations of snooping and maintained that the petitions are based on conjectures and there is no substance in the accusations.



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM EDUCATION DEPARTMENT DIRECTORATE OF TECHNICAL EDUCATION TASHILING, GANGTOK

No. GOS/DTE/2021/567

Date: 10.08.2021

NOTICE

It is for information of all concerned that the following information relating to allotment of State quota seats for 2021 is hereby notified.

II. Registration. - Interested candidates are required to register themselves and fill up the forms online in the State web portal www.statequota.sikkim.gov.in as per the schedule indicated below.

(i) For BA/B.Com/B.Sc./BBA/BCA/Hospitality & Hotel Management /B.Sc. IT/BTMM/BHTM.

a) Registration opens : 12th August 2021 from 10:00 a.m.

b) Registration closes : 21st August 2021 at 4:30 p.m.

c) Choice filling opens : 14th August 2021 from 10:00 a.m.

d) Choice locking closes : 22nd August 2021 at 4:30 p.m.

(ii) For B.Sc Nursing/GNM/B.Pharm/B.Pharm (Lateral)/Dip.Pharm/BPT/B.Sc. Med.Biotech/Diploma in Paramedical.

a) Registration opens : 12th August 2021 from 10:00 a.m.

b) Registration closes : 21st August 2021 at 4:30 p.m.

c) Choice filling opens : 14th August 2021 from 10:00 a.m.

d) Choice locking closes : 22nd August 2021 at 4:30 p.m.

(iii) Diploma Engineering /Lateral Entry Diploma

a) Registration opens : 12th August 2021 from 10:00 a.m.

b) Registration closes : 21st August 2021 at 4:30 p.m.

c) Choice filling opens : 14th August 2021 from 10:00 a.m.

d) Choice locking closes : 22nd August 2021 at 4:30 p.m.

(iv) B.Tech/ Lateral Entry B.Tech.

a) Registration opens : 12th August 2021 from 10:00 a.m.

b) Registration closes : 21st August 2021 at 4:30 p.m.

c) Choice filling opens : 14th August 2021 from 10:00 a.m.

d) Choice locking closes : 22nd August 2021 at 4:30 p.m.

(v) BBA LLB(Intg), BA LLB(Intg), LLB

a) Registration opens : 12th August 2021 from 10:00 a.m.

b) Registration closes : 21st August 2021 at 4:30 p.m.

c) Choice filling opens : 14th August 2021 from 10:00 a.m.

d) Choice locking closes : 22nd August 2021 at 4:30 p.m.

Please note that no extension of dates for online registration is permissible.

III. Registration fees - The registration fee of Rs. 150/- per course has to be paid online for the above indicated course except for B.Tech and Lateral Entry B.Tech. The registration fee for B.Tech/Lateral Entry B.Tech if Rs. 450/- only. A provision for payment of registration fees through offline mode has also been facilitated by the State Bank of Sikkim. A candidate who desires to pay offline needs to visit the nearest State Bank of Sikkim branch.

IV. Documents required : All candidates are advised to upload the following documents online for verification. Incomplete forms will be summarily rejected.

1. Sikkim Subject Certificate or COI of father or of candidate.

2. Valid Community Certificate in the name of candidate.

3. Residential Certificate or Trade License in the name of father or Parents employment certificates in case of Others community candidates.

4. Recent BPL certificate (issued by DESME), if any.

5. Date of Birth Certificate.

6. Class X & XII marksheet.

7. PWD certificate (issued by Disability Screening Board), if any.

Online registration does not confer the applicant a right to quota seat. The allotment of seats will be purely on merit of the marks obtained in the qualifying examinations via a vis reservation and roster policy of the State Government.

Candidates are advised to regularly log on to Education Department web portal www.sikkimhrdd.org where all information relating to counseling dates and other related information will be uploaded from time to time.

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Blame Games

Whenever everyone plays victim, who will take the initiative?

Anyone who has been following political developments and public statements of public figures in Sikkim, or for that matter at the national level, would have noticed that everyone is quick to take the position of a victim. This propensity is not limited to those in the Opposition or in minority, and is as frequently adopted position even by those in power or in majority. And this is not even a new ploy; in fact, it is a dated move. But it continues to remain in vogue because playing the victim presents the easiest recourse and offers a convenient way to dodge accountability – after all, if you sign up among the victims as someone [or some people] somehow wronged, you escape being lined up as perpetrators. This dodge has worked consistently well and is hence so infectious; and need one add, dangerously counter-productive because it obsesses over denials and slights, real and imagined, but ignores individual and societal shortcomings which also contribute to the situation.

Politicians in power blame those in opposition of distractions and digressions which delay development, those in opposition blame the ones in power of corruption which siphons away progress, people blame each other for personal failures, locals blame non-locals of stealing away opportunities, non-locals accuse locals of sloth, doctors blame patients for having come to them too late and patients blame doctors of being too inept... Students blame teachers, teachers reciprocate, and the blame-game plays on and everyone sulks as a victim. Soon the role-play becomes so convincing that the young start buying in and now a generation is in grooming which is quick to blame everything on someone else, becoming intransigent and perfectly mirroring the very system and situation that they have issues with. Finger-pointing is a preferred pastime that the young see around them every day – leaders who fail to convince voters to trust them, blame money power or even the EVMs, parties which cannot attract an audience, blame intimidation of supporters; departments which scandalize with their inefficiency, blame blackmailing agents of spreading canards; panchayats who bungle, blame MLAs who blame Ministers who blame babus who blame political pressure... and the buck keep rolling.

The young always inspire hope and keep optimism alive and they do so by rebelling, by announcing that they will be different. Ominously for Sikkim, those claiming to speak for the young are screaming deeper colours of victimhood. When they should be open and pursuing excellence, they obsess over perceived slights, celebrate mediocrity, abandon reason and chase conspiracies. The young receive “attitude” from one side and condescending advise from the other, and very soon their issues get sidelined as the discussions move to places which serve politicking very well, but offer no resolutions. And when solutions can’t be worked out, everyone collapses backing to playing victims of subterfuge.

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

As the Taliban returns, 20 years of progress for women looks set to disappear overnight

AZADAH RAZ MOHAMMAD & JENNA SAPIANO
theconversation.com

As the Taliban takes control of the country, Afghanistan has again become an extremely dangerous place to be a woman.

Even before the fall of Kabul on Sunday, the situation was rapidly deteriorating, exacerbated by the planned withdrawal of all foreign military personnel and declining international aid.

In the past few weeks alone, there have been many reports of casualties and violence. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of people have fled their homes. The United Nations Refugee Agency says about 80% of those who have fled since the end of May are women and children.

What does the return of the Taliban mean for women and girls?

THE HISTORY OF THE TALIBAN

The Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 1996, enforcing harsh conditions and rules following their strict interpretation of Islamic law.

Under their rule, women had to cover themselves and only leave the house in the company of a male relative. The Taliban also banned girls from attending school, and women from working outside the home. They were also banned from voting.

Women were subject to cruel punishments for disobeying these rules, including being beaten and flogged, and stoned to death if found guilty of adultery. Afghanistan had the highest maternal mortality rate in the world.

THE PAST 20 YEARS

With the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the situation for women and girls vastly improved, although these gains were partial and fragile.

Women now hold positions as ambassadors, ministers, governors, and police and security force members. In 2003, the new government ratified

the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which requires states to incorporate gender equality into their domestic law.

The 2004 Afghan Constitution holds that “citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law”. Meanwhile, a 2009 law was introduced to protect women from forced and under-age marriage, and violence.

According to Human Rights Watch, the law saw a rise in the reporting, investigation and, to a lesser extent, conviction, of violent crimes against women and girls.

While the country has gone from having almost no girls at school to tens of thousands at university, the progress has been slow and unstable. UNICEF reports of the 3.7 million Afghan children out of school some 60% are girls.

A RETURN TO DARK DAYS

Officially, Taliban leaders have said they want to grant women’s rights “according to Islam”. But this has been met with great scepticism, including by women leaders in Afghanistan. Indeed, the Taliban has given every indication they will reimpose their repressive regime.

In July, the United Nations reported the number of women and girls killed and injured in the first six months of the year nearly doubled compared to the same period the year before.

In the areas again under Taliban control, girls have been banned from school and their freedom of movement restricted. There have also been reports of forced marriages.

Women are putting burqas back on and speak of destroying evidence of their education and life outside the home to protect themselves from the Taliban.

As one anonymous Afghan woman writes in The Guardian: “I did not expect that we would be

deprived of all our basic rights again and travel back to 20 years ago. That after 20 years of fighting for our rights and freedom, we should be hunting for burqas and hiding our identity.”

Many Afghans are angered by the return of the Taliban and what they see as their abandonment by the international community. There have been protests in the streets. Women have even taken up guns in a rare show of defiance.

But this alone will not be enough to protect women and girls.

THE WORLD LOOKS THE OTHER WAY

Currently, the US and its allies are engaged in frantic rescue operations to get their citizens and staff out of Afghanistan. But what of Afghan citizens and their future?

US President Joe Biden remains largely unmoved by the Taliban’s advance and the worsening humanitarian crisis. In an August 14 statement, he said: “an endless American presence in the middle of another country’s civil conflict was not acceptable to me.”

And yet, the US and its allies — including Australia — went to Afghanistan 20 years ago on the premise of removing the Taliban and protecting women’s rights. However, most Afghans do not believe they have experienced peace in their lifetimes.

As the Taliban reassert complete control over the country, the achievements of the past 20 years, especially those made to protect women’s rights and equality, are at risk if the international community once again abandons Afghanistan.

Women and girls are pleading for help as the Taliban advance. We hope the world will listen.

[Azadah Raz Mohammad is PhD student, The University of Melbourne; Jenna Sapiano is Australia Research Council Postdoctoral Research Associate and Lecturer, Monash Gender Peace & Security Centre, Monash University]

How Joe Biden failed the people of Afghanistan — and tarnished US credibility around the world

WILLIAM MALEY
theconversation.com

In April 1961, just months after the young John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as the 35th president of the United States, his reputation for expertise in foreign policy took a battering as a result of the Bay of Pigs fiasco, a covert action against the Cuban government that collapsed within a matter of days.

The collapse in Afghanistan that has flowed from current President Joe Biden’s decision to proceed with a complete US troop withdrawal is more than likely to be seen as his own Bay of Pigs moment.

But it may be something worse, akin to the Suez crisis of 1956, which not only humiliated the British government of Sir Anthony Eden, but marked the end of the United Kingdom as a global power.

When historians look back at the shameful US exit from Afghanistan, it may increasingly appear a critical marker of America’s decline in the world, far eclipsing the flight from Saigon in 1975.

THE PATH TO DISASTER

How did this come to pass? Afghans, turning on themselves, are already pinning the blame on now-departed President Ashraf Ghani, and Biden’s defenders are sure to join the chorus. Yet this is an oversimplification of how things unravelled.

Ghani’s domineering style, poor personnel choices, and reluctance to delegate power to others all played significant roles in the current crisis.

However, the institutional and political problems that were festering long before Ghani became president are perhaps more to blame: a seriously overcentralised state; a presidential system that placed far too much formal power in Kabul; and the development of “neopatrimonial” politics, based on patronage networks that had flourished under former President Hamid Karzai, which in turn fostered electoral fraud.

An even more significant role was played by Pakistan, the Taliban’s longstanding patron and supplier of sanctuaries, logistical support, and equipment.

But the (unintentional) green light for Pakistan’s “creeping invasion” of Afghanistan, with the Taliban as its proxy, ultimately came from Washington.

First, there was the catastrophic exit agreement signed with the Taliban on behalf of the Trump admin-

istration by the US special envoy to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, in February 2020. The flaws of this deal were immediately obvious. Following

standing beliefs than by a methodical, cerebral appraisal of the dangers.

Biden may also have been influenced by a deep, almost visceral,



that was Biden’s conscious choice to adhere to it.

Biden has since sought to emphasise that he inherited the agreement from Trump, but it was his decision to stick with it, and to retain its architect, Khalilzad, as his own representative. Appalling US decision-making lies at the heart of the tragedy.

WHAT LIES BEHIND BIDEN’S FAILURES?

What factors might explain Biden’s gross misjudgement? At this point, several come to mind.

A first factor, universally overlooked, is his lack of relevant experience in dealing hands-on with complex and dangerous foreign policy challenges.

Until becoming president in January 2021, Biden had never held an office with distinct executive authority. He was a longtime legislator and then vice president, and he was a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for 12 years, including several years as chairman.

But he never occupied a position where he was routinely required to make final decisions on matters of high policy with significant associated risks.

Having an interest in world affairs is not the same thing as having strong judgement or a talent for developing and implementing foreign policy. Robert Gates, a former defence secretary in both Republican and Democrat administrations, argued in his 2014 memoir that Biden had been “wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and national security issue over the past four decades.”

Some reports suggest Biden’s decision to follow Trump’s path was driven more by instinct and long-

suspicion of the advice of the US military, going back to his failed attempts while vice president to argue against the “surge” of US troops in Afghanistan, which President Barack Obama ultimately decided to do.

A second factor at play is likely US domestic politics. Biden and his supporters have quoted polling in support of a complete US troop withdrawal, but it is unlikely this was much of a contributor to the final decision, as Afghanistan has never generated anything like the heat in US politics that was associated with the Vietnam War.

A more likely contributor was the internal politics of the Democratic Party. Biden had endured considerable criticism from the left over his ardent support for the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Supporting an Afghanistan troop withdrawal had the potential to ameliorate some of those concerns, and to appeal to the party’s progressive wing and ideological isolationists.

HOW THE US-TALIBAN DEAL ERODED CONFIDENCE

The US decision also reflected a grave misunderstanding of power dynamics in Afghanistan.

As I have previously noted, mass psychology is a critical determinant of political trajectories in an environment as threatening and de-institutionalised as that in Afghanistan.

As in an avalanche, a small shift can rapidly snowball, resulting in what social scientists call “cascades”.

The collapse of the Afghan government provides a perfect example of a cascade at work. The 2020 US-Taliban deal created deep and widespread apprehension about what the future might hold. Then, it only took a

few localised failures to sap the confidence of all sorts of actors, both military and civilian, in the survival of the government. Side-switching became a rational strategy, then spun out of control.

The US troop withdrawal also seems to have reflected a failure on the part of Biden – although not the US military — to appreciate how destructive the February 2020 agreement had been to the effectiveness of the Afghan military.

In requiring the withdrawal not just of US troops but US maintenance contractors, it compromised the ongoing capabilities of key assets in the inventory of the Afghan National Army, as well as depriving the army of critical air cover. As an insightful analysis put it, “in the wake of President Biden’s withdrawal decision, the US pulled its air support, intelligence and contractors servicing Afghanistan’s planes and helicopters. That meant the Afghan military simply couldn’t operate anymore.”

THE LONG-LASTING DAMAGE TO US CREDIBILITY

It is hard to see how Biden can emerge from this disaster without his credibility shredded, but the greater loss is to the credibility of the United States, which increasingly appears a fading power internationally (as well as a failing state at home).

For no great gain, it sold out the most pro-western government and public in the region to a brutal terrorist group, all this after having long promised the Afghans that they would never be abandoned.

The implications of this abandonment stretch far beyond Afghanistan’s borders. As a group of eminent retired ambassadors has put it, “an ignominious American departure from the country would send a terrible signal to other countries as the United States competes with China and other authoritarian states. If US security guarantees are not credible, why not cut deals with China?”

In May 1940, in a scathing indictment of the failures of the Chamberlain government to stand effectively by its allies, former British Prime Minister David Lloyd George observed cuttingly that “our promissory notes are now rubbish on the market”.

As a result of its failures over Afghanistan, the Biden administration is rapidly heading in a similar direction.

[the writer is Emeritus Professor, Australian National University]

Mizoram MLA Andrew H Thangliana dies at 43

AIZAWL, AUG 17 (PTI): Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) MLA Andrew H Thangliana died at a hospital in Aizawl on Tuesday, officials said. He was 43.

The Tuirial legislator died of several complications, including liver failure and heart attack, Ebenezer Medical Centre managing director DrVanlalsiama told PTI.

The legislator was admitted to the hospital on August 5 and was shifted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) when his condition deteriorated on August 12, he said.

His condition further deteriorated since August 16 as he had a heart attack, which slowed his blood pressure while being on ventilator support, Vanlalsiama said.

Thangliana died around 6.35 am, he said. Family sources said



that Thangliana was admitted to the state-run Civil Hospital in Aizawl on July 21 when CT-Scan result showed a lump in his liver.

On August 12, he was shifted to Ebenezer Medical Centre to be under the care of doctors, who knew his health condition from the past, they said. Born in October 1977, the ZPM leader had

poor health since childhood, they said. He lost his father Sameul H Thangliana at the age of 19 in 1996 and mother C Lalhmingliani in 2014.

He completed schooling at Kodaikanal in Tamil Nadu and joined Ramjas College under Delhi University to pursue Bachelor of Arts (BA).

However, he had to

leave the college in his final year as he suffered from a certain illness.

Thangliana entered active politics in 2017 and joined the erstwhile Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP), founded by former IPS officer Lalduhoma.

Later, the ZNP along with other minor parties formed an alliance, which was named Zoram

People's Movement (ZMP).

The alliance was later converted into a political party, which obtained a registration from the Election Commission in July 2019, eight months after the state assembly polls in November 2018.

During the 2018 assembly polls, a political novice Thangliana was named as the official candidate of ZPM for the Tuirial seat but had to contest as an Independent as the ZPM was yet to obtain party registration at that time.

He defeated his nearest opponent Sailothangasailo of Mizo National Front (MNF) by a margin of 204 votes. Thangliana is survived by three children and wife.

His funeral was held at his residence in Aizawl'sChawlhmun locality.

"Poaching not our style. However...":Trinamoolon new recruit SushmitaDev



SushmitaDev, Congress member of three decades and daughter of party stalwart Santosh Mohan Dev, joined the Trinamool Congress on Monday.

New Delhi: Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien on Tuesday said his party were not in favour of "poaching" leaders from other outfits but will always welcome "those who are committed to journey with us for a better India", a day after the Congress's SushmitaDev joined the party.

"Poaching and breaking political parties not our style. However, always glad to welcome those who are committed to journey with us for a better India," he said at a news conference with Ms Dev.

He also dismissed questions whether such switchovers will affect the ties among the opposition, saying, "Mamata Banerjee will be part of the August 20 meeting called by Sonia Gandhi. Opposition parties

showed unity during the monsoon session of parliament."

SushmitaDev said her joining the Trinamool Congress is "unconditional" and she will take any responsibility given to her by party president and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

MsDev, who was the chief of the women's wing of the Congress, joined the Trinamool in the presence of senior party leaders Abhishek Banerjee and Derek O'Brien in Kolkata on Monday.

"I don't think I have compromised my ideology in joining the TMC... My joining the TMC is unconditional and I will take any responsibility given to me by Mamata Banerjee," MsDev told reporters.

A former MP, Congress member of three decades and daughter of party stalwart Santosh Mohan Dev, MsDev was the national spokesperson of the Congress and the chief of the All India

Mahila Congress.

She sent her resignation letter to Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, sources said but offered no reason for her quitting.

"In my 30 years in politics, I haven't demanded anything from the Congress high command," MsDevsaid.

In a video statement released later, she said, "(Mamata Banerjee) clearly has an excellent future vision for the party and I hoped that I would be helpful in that regard."

The latest exit drew a stinging, public attack on the party's leadership from KapilSibal, one of the veterans rooting for big changes in the organisation.

"SushmitaDev Resigns from primary membership of our Party While young leaders leave we 'oldies' are blamed for our efforts to strengthen it The Party moves on with : Eyes Wide Shut," wrote the former Union Minister in a post on Twitter.

Andaman & Nicobar reports one new COVID-19 case

PORT BLAIR, AUG 17 (PTI): Andaman and Nicobar Islands recorded only one new COVID-19 case in the last 24 hours, pushing the tally in the union territory to 7,549, a health official said on Tuesday.

The new COVID-19 case was detected during testing at the airport. All passengers arriving by flight have to undergo mandatory RT-PCR test before they are allowed entry into the islands.

"A Resident of Aberdeen Bazaar travelling from Kolkata carrying negative RTPCR report was tested positive on arrival at #PortBlairAirport.This is very risky, may increase the risk of transmission of the COVID-19 virus. Follow #COVIDAppropriateBehaviour," the Andaman and Nicobar Administration tweeted.

The archipelago now

has only one active COVID-19 case and the patient is in the South Andaman district. The other two districts - North and Middle Andaman and Nicobar - are COVID-19 free, the official said.

A total of 7,419 people have recovered from COVID-19 so far, he said.

The COVID-19 death toll in the union territory remained at 129 as no fresh fatality due to the disease was reported in the last 24 hours.

So far 4,61,421 samples have been tested for COVID-19 and the cumulative test positivity rate is 1.64 per cent.

A total of 3,27,480 beneficiaries have been inoculated in the union territory so far, of which 2,29,040 people have received the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and 98,440 have received both doses of the vaccine, he said.

In Nagaland, plan to form all-party Government to facilitate peace talks

This is the second time that Nagaland will have an all-party government. The first such government was seen in 2015 when eight MLAs of the opposition Congress merged with then ruling Naga People's Front.

Guwahati: Major political parties of Nagaland have agreed to come together and form an all-party government in the state to facilitate an early solution to the vexed Naga political issue and achieve an acceptable solution. This is the second time that the northeastern state will have an all-party government.

The first such government was seen in 2015 when eight MLAs of the opposition Congress merged with then ruling Naga People's Front.

The decision on the formation of the Nagaland United Government was taken unanimously by the ruling People's Democratic Alliance or PDA partners -- the Nationalist Democratic Progress Party, the BJP and two Independent MLAs, which are supporting the PDA government.

Modalities to include the principal opposition party Naga People's Front in the proposed government was also discussed and adopted unanimously, said the state's Parliamentary Affairs Minister NeibaKronu.

The resolution to form the all-party government was signed by nine legislators including Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, Deputy Chief Minister Yanthungo Patton and Leader of the Opposition TR Zeliang.

The other signatories included president of NDPP ChingwangKonyak, state BJP chief TemjenImna Along and NPF president ShurhozelieLiezietu.

The political parties involved in the five-point resolution maintained that they will aim at promoting the Naga peace talks with a positive approach to find a political solution at the earliest.

They also resolved to stand together to achieve an honorable settlement and appealed to all Naga political groups to make efforts for unity and reconciliation.

On July 19, the NPF legislature party had resolved to support and contribute to the Parliamentary Committee.

It had unanimously endorsed the concept of an all-party government with People's Democratic Alliance to facilitate the peaceful settlement and solution to the issue.

The Naga group NSCN(IM) has been engaged in dialogue with the Centre since 1997 and had signed the Framework Agreement on August 3, 2015.

COVID-19: Assam Relaxes Curfew Timings, Allows Inter-District Movement

ASSAM COVID-19 CURBS: The new guidelines, which also permits the opening of final year classes of technical education, will be effective from 5 am on Wednesday until further orders, he added.

Guwahati: Curfew timings have been relaxed and inter-district movement of passengers allowed, except to and from Kamrup Metropolitan district, as per the revised COVID-19 SOP for the state, Assam Health Minister KeshabMahanta said on Tuesday.

The new guidelines, which also permits the opening of final year classes of technical education, will be effective from 5 am on Wednesday until further orders, he added.

These orders will be applicable throughout the state.

Addressing a press conference here, the minister said the decision to relax the SOP was taken at a meeting on Monday evening, chaired by the chief minister, in view of improvement in the overall COVID situation in the state.

He said, "The number of new COVID-19 cases has been coming down in the state. But, the situation in Guwahati is not satisfactory. We are keeping a close watch."

As per the revised guidelines, all shops, commercial establishments, offices, banks, will be allowed to remain open till 6 pm and curfew will be clamped from 7 pm to 5 am.



Hotels, resorts, bars, will also be allowed to remain open till 6 pm, though cinema halls will remain closed.

Inter-district movement of private passenger vehicles has been allowed, though entry and exit from Kamrup Metropolitan district, under which Guwahati comes, will remain suspended, the minister said.

Movement of goods carrying vehicles was already allowed and public transport between the districts remained suspended.

The odd-even rule for plying of vehicles has been lifted, the minister said.

Regarding reopening of educational institutions, Mahanta said final year classes for MBBS, engineering, aeronautical engi-

neering and BSc and GNM nursing courses will resume from Wednesday.

"Students should preferably be fully vaccinated to attend the classes," he added.

The minister also said public meetings in open spaces will be allowed with a maximum of 200 people and in auditoriums, with 50 per cent seating capacity, and all attendees must be fully vaccinated, with the onus to ensure compliance on the organisers.

For marriages, last rites, etc, the number of people permitted to attend has been increased to 25 by the new guidelines.

Iconic religious places have also been allowed to open for devotees with permission given for 20 visitors per hour, while for other religious places, the

number of devotees has been fixed at 10, Mahanta said.

Namghars (Vaishnavite places of worship) will be open for devotees with 50 per cent capacity, he added.

He further said female government employees with children below three years of age will be allowed to work from home. Earlier, those with children below five years of age were extended this exemption.

Altogether 758 people tested positive for COVID-19 in the state on Monday, pushing the total number of infections to 5,79,899, while the death toll has reached 5,502 with 10 deaths in the last 24 hours.

The COVID-19 recovery rate in the state stands at 97.49 per cent.

Minor among 2 killed in accident in J-K's Samba

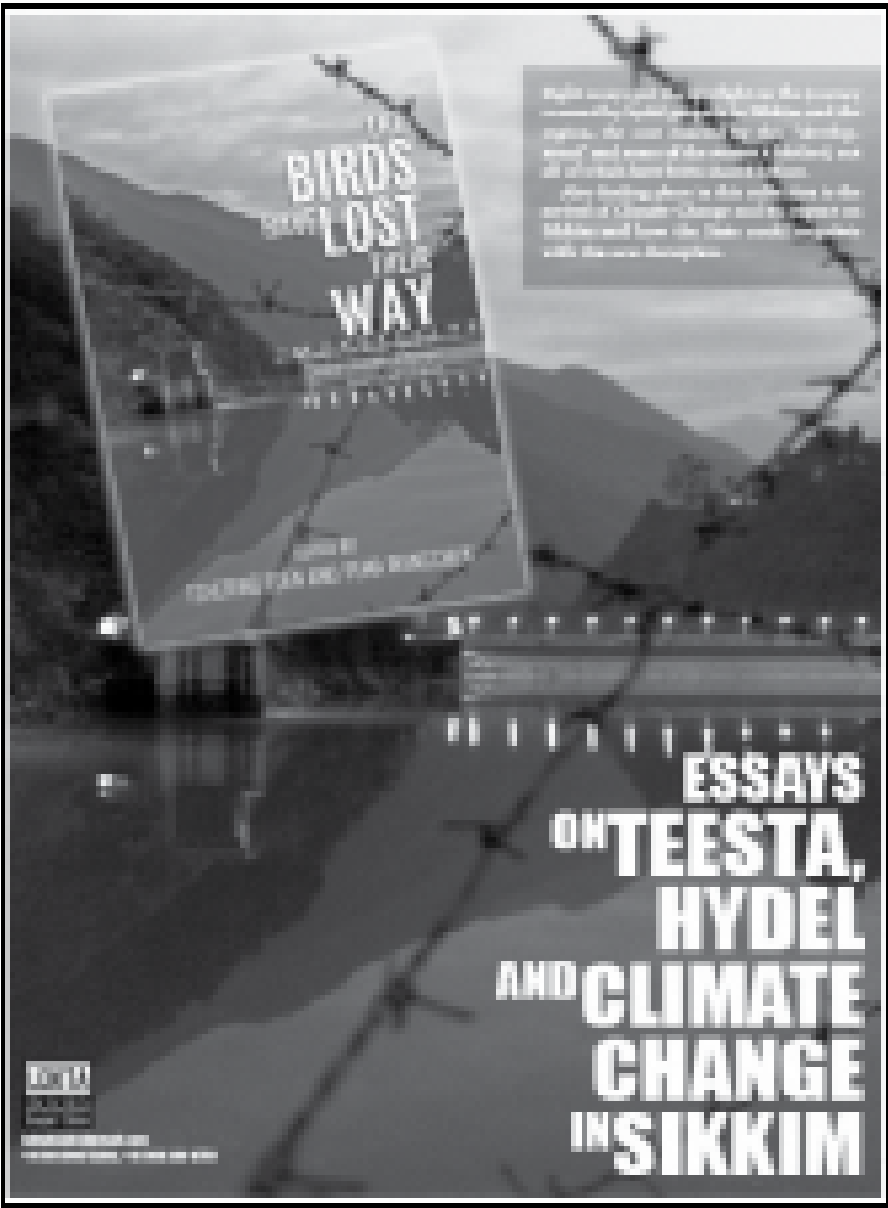
JAMMU, AUG 17 (PTI): A 28-year-old man and his eight-year-old nephew were killed when their motorcycle skidded off the road and fell into a canal in Jammu and Kashmir's Samba district, officials said on Tuesday.

AshuChoudhary and his nephew Harman Choudhary were on their way to SwankhaMorh residence from Vijaypur late on Monday on a motorcycle when the accident occurred, they said.

Quoting preliminary investigations, the offi-

cials said the motorcycle driven by Ashu hit the wall of a culvert before falling into the canal near ChaniManasa village.

The locals rushed to the spot and took them to a hospital, where both of them were declared brought dead, they said.



Cricketing world lauds India's resilience and grit during Test win against England at Lord's

LONDON, AUG 17 (PTI): Legendary batsman Sachin Tendulkar led the cricketing fraternity in saluting the Indian team's "resilience and grit" during the incredible win in the second Test against England at the iconic Lord's.

India's world class pace attack pulled off an incredible heist with the bat and then followed it up with a magnificent performance with the ball to help India beat England by 151 runs on the final day of the second Test here on Monday and take a 1-0 lead in the five-match series.

"That was some Test match #TeamIndia! Enjoyed watching every moment of it. The resilience and grit that the team displayed in difficult situations is something that stood out for me. Very well played!," Tendulkar tweeted.

BCCI President Sourav Ganguly also lavished praise on the fighting attitude of the Indian team.

"Fantastic win for in-



dia...what character and guts from the team ..each and every one ..such a pleasure to watch it from so close.."

Batting legend VVS Laxman termed it as a "sensational win".

"What an incredible day of Test Match Cricket and one to remember for a long time for every Indian Fan. Bumrah and Shami fighting with the bat early in the day,

and pace attack of Siraj, Ishant, Bumrah, Shami giving it their all and India registering a sensational win #LordsTest," he tweeted.

Former wicketkeeper-batsman Dinesh Karthik added: "From survival to revival, the final day at Lord's was no less than a binge-worthy thriller. Big win #TeamIndia. This one's highlights are gonna be

replayed many times in the future!"

Not just Indians, former stars from abroad like Shane Warne and Michael Vaughan too hailed Kohli and his team for their superb show.

"What a test match at Lords. Great pitch, great cricket & great character shown by India. Remember they lost the toss, got sent in, gave up a 1st inn lead & today ev-

eryone thought Pant out & Engwin ! India fought hard & deserved the win. India should be 2-0 up. Red hearttestcricket !," Warne wrote on his twitter page.

Former England skipper Vaughan added: "Amazing game of Cricket .. India today showed why they are so much better than England .. The belief to Win was immense ..#ENGvsIND".

Root admits to committing tactical blunders, says underestimated Indian lower-order



LONDON, AUG 17 (PTI): English captain Joe Root admitted to committing tactical blunders and said he underestimated the Indian lower-order after Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah's battling heroics fashioned an epic win at Lord's in the second Test.

England were in a dominant position before they lost control during an unanticipated unbroken ninth-wicket stand of 89 between Shami (56 not out) and Bumrah (34 not out) on the final morning at Lord's.

England were then bowled out for 120 inside two sessions to lose by 151 runs. Bumrah contributed three wickets and Shami one while the major damage on the Englishmen were done by Mohammed Siraj (4/32). Senior pacer Ishant Sharma took two wickets.

"I think a lot falls on my shoulders as captain. Tactically I could have done things slightly differently," Root said at the post-match virtual news conference.

"It (Shami and Bumrah partnership) was the pivotal moment of the game, without question, and I don't think I dealt with that well enough tactically. It put us in a difficult position," he

said.

The partnership was India's highest at Lord's for the ninth wicket, bettering previous best of 66 between KapilDev and MadanLal in 1982, and overall the fourth best outside the subcontinent.

"It's just disappointing we didn't manage to close out that innings how we could have. Probably I just underestimated how challenging and useful the lower order defence can be so as I said a lot falls on my shoulders," Root said.

During the England first innings, Bumrah had dished out some short stuff against number 11 batsman James Anderson who copped few blows to his body and it seemed Root lost the battle in carrying out the payback.

There was a barrage of short balls when the Indian late order duo were at the crease. Root admitted the short-ball ploy against Shami and Bumrah failed.

"Looking back, I'd look at some of the field placings and the way we bowled. We could have looked at maybe attacking the stumps a little bit more frequently and using short ball as more of a surprise," he said.

"We have to give them

some credit. They scored in unusual areas and made it hard to set conventional fields and you were trying to manage taking wickets but not letting the game get away from us.

"But I would have taken a little bit more time and probably brought more modes of dismissal into the game sooner."

The tension and flare-ups between the two teams were palpable but Root said there was no bad blood between them.

"Virat's got his style and his way of doing things that's probably contrasting naturally to the way I play my cricket. Fair play to Virat and his team, they've jumped on something emotional that's given them an edge and something to cling on to tactically.

"India as a side grabbed onto something and used that to their advantage on this occasion. As far as I'm concerned, I don't think there is any nastiness or hatred there between anyone out there on the field."

Root, Jos Buttler (25) and Moeen Ali (13) were the only players to reach double figures, as their top-three -- Rory Burns, Dom Sibley and Haseeb Hameed -- cut a sorry figure with scores

of 0, 0 and 9 in their second innings.

"I expected us to bat out so it's disappointing we didn't manage to. We need to score heavier. The guys will know that. Credit to India but I don't think there is any hiding from the fact we need to get better."

Root has been the pillar of strength for England and scored bulk of their runs in the series averaging 128.66. In contrast, their next best batsman is Jonny Bairstow who averages 29.50.

Asked if batting was becoming a burden on his captaincy, Root said: "There have been plenty of occasions in my career when others have carried me through games. We've just got to keep being better at building those big partnerships.

"I am an experienced captain now. I've played a lot of Test cricket as a batter and I'm at a different point in my career when compared with a lot of the other guys. Batting is a collective effort."

There's a nine-day break before the third Test begins on August 25 and Root urged the team to come back refreshed.

"We need to stay calm. It's not time to panic. There is a lot of cricket in the series.

Bond roped in as New Zealand's "fourth coach" for T20 World Cup

WELLINGTON, AUG 17 (PTI): Former fast bowler Shane Bond will join New Zealand team as "fourth coach" during the upcoming T20 World Cup in the UAE, soon after his Mumbai Indians stint in the remainder of the IPL.

Bond will also be with the New Zealand team in the three-game T20 International series against India after the World Cup.

New Zealand head coach Gary Stead said it was great to add Bond's experience to the group.

"Shane's been in our environment before and understands what we're about," Stead said in a statement issued by New Zealand Cricket (NZC).

"Being in the UAE (with the IPL) immediately prior to the world cup he'll hopefully bring some tactical insight into what's been happening in the competition.

"He'll be an extra set of hands especially around the bowlers, working with the spin and the pace bowlers and developing their plans in a tournament that moves pretty quick - so we need to be one step ahead of other teams."

The 46-year-old Bond will next month resume his role as bowling coach with the Mumbai Indians



in the remaining matches of IPL that will be held in the UAE from September 19 to October 15 ahead of the T20 World Cup.

Bond had earlier served as bowling coach of New Zealand men's team from 2012-to 2015 and also helped out as recently as 2019 in a T20 series against England.

Since stepping down as Sydney Thunder coach earlier this year, Bond has been assisting the men's winter training squads at Lincoln and also helped the women's side prepare for their tour of England.

Stead has utilised the

services of a fourth coach during past home summers. The role has also been employed for away tours to England and Sri Lanka as well as world events, including the recent ICC ODI World Cup where current batting coach Luke Ronchi was the fourth assistant.

"The fourth coach for me is an opportunity to bring in different voices to the environment and we've used it in a whole host of ways in the past," Stead said.

"Shane is someone who always adds value and we're delighted to have him on board.

If you sledge one of our guys, it means you are sledging whole team: Rahul on on-field altercation

LONDON, AUG 17 (PTI): If any rival player tries to sledge one of ours, the remaining 10 would only come hard at the opposition and that's exactly what had happened with England during their 151-run defeat in the second Test, said India opener KL Rahul.

The on-field altercations started after Mark Wood dished out short-pitched stuff targeting Jasprit Bumrah's head, resulting in an argument with England skipper Joe Root and Jimmy Anderson. Even rookie Ollie Robinson was having a go at the Indian batters.

However, the tables turned when England were bowled out for paltry 120 in their second innings with India captain Virat Kohli leading the battle of sledges.

"It showed how badly both teams wanted to win. That's how Test cricket is played. We as a team are never shy to say a word or too," player-of-the-match Rahul, who scored 129 in the first innings, said after the match.

"Someone comes after our player and rest of the 10 guys get pumped as well. That's the kind of atmosphere and team bonding that we have. If you go after one of our guys that means you are going after whole team," Rahul said.

He, in fact, made it clear that all the four fast bowlers were ready to give England a test of their own medicine.

"Bowlers were really keen to have a go and have a crack out there in the middle and give it their all in 60 overs. This is what people come to watch and it only speaks about how badly each team wants to win."



He lauded Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami's record 89-run ninth-wicket stand, which set up the game nicely for the bowlers to do the job inside 60 overs. "Partnership between Bumrah and Shami was so so good and after they put up a fight like that, bowlers were waiting to have a crack at them. We knew after lunch the declaration is going to come.

"We knew each of them would have to bowl 10 or 12 overs. The pitch was behaving a bit up and down and opportunity like this to win a Test match always doesn't come. We were all very keen and excited and to go out there and put out a performance like that was very special," said Rahul, who has till now scored 244 runs in the series. The Indian team management didn't use Ravindra Jadeja much, save six overs out of 51.5 bowled during England's second innings.

Rahul said Jadeja wasn't pressed into operation as wickets fell at regular intervals.

"We would have used

Jaddu a lot more if wickets weren't falling and if the fast bowlers weren't able to do the job. Fast bowlers managed to get wickets each time they bowled and we didn't need to use Jaddu's services that much in this game.

"Going ahead in the series, if there is any spin in the wicket, he will make sure that he picks wickets for us."

Rahul's career went downhill after the 2018 tour of England and the opener spoke about what's been the basic difference from that tour to this one where he has had a century and a 80 plus score in two Tests.

"Last time, I was playing too many shots and I was thinking how I can score runs but this time I just wanted to enjoy batting and focus on role assigned. I didn't want to focus on personal goals. I am enjoying my batting more than before."

"Last time, I was just thinking about scoring my runs. Now when bowlers are in midst of good spell, I am trusting my technique, my defence. This is giving me results," he said.

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Malaysia's king to meet political leaders to find new PM

KUALA LUMPUR, AUG 17 (AP): Malaysia's king is set Tuesday to meet the heads of political parties as he swiftly began the task of finding a new prime minister amid a worsening coronavirus pandemic.

The resignation Monday of Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin after less than 18 months in office followed mounting public anger over what was widely perceived as his government's poor handling of the pandemic. Malaysia has one of the world's highest infection rates and deaths per capita, with daily cases breaching 20,000 this month despite a seven-month state of emergency and a lockdown since June.

The monarch has ruled out a general election as many parts of the country are COVID-19 red zones and health facilities are inadequate.

Muhyiddin was appointed caretaker prime minister until a successor is found.

Local media said Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah has summoned party leaders to the palace later Tuesday, all believed to be at the same time. This included parties formerly in Muhyiddin's government as well as the opposition.

The king plays a largely ceremonial role but he appoints the person he believes has majority support of Parliament to be prime minister. Muhyiddin took power in March 2020 after initiating the collapse of the reformist government that won 2018 elections. With a razor-thin majority in Parliament and an unstable coalition, he held office less than 18 months, making him the country's shortest-ruling leader.

Before choosing Muhyiddin, Sultan Abdullah interviewed all 222 lawmakers individually then sought nominations from party leaders in an arduous selection process. His choice of Muhyiddin as the prime minister was disputed by the predecessor he ousted, Mahathir Mohamad, and the opposition. An official from Mahathir's party confirmed it has been invited to the meeting Tuesday.

The selection this time will be another tough chore for the monarch because no coalition can claim a majority. The three-party alliance that is the biggest opposition bloc has nominated its leader, Anwar Ibrahim. But the bloc has less than 90 lawmakers, short of the 111 needed for a simple majority. That's also less than the 100 lawmakers believed to have backed Muhyiddin. Other contenders include former Deputy Prime Minister Ismail who is from the United Malays National Organization, the biggest party in Muhyiddin's alliance.

Local media said another possible candidate is Razaleigh Hamzah, an 84-year-old prince who was a former finance minister. Razaleigh, an UMNO lawmaker, is seen as a neutral candidate who could unite the warring factions in UMNO.

China warns Taliban against Afghanistan again becoming 'haven' for terror groups

BEIJING, AUG 17 (PTI): Hours after expressing hope that the Taliban will form an "open and inclusive" Islamic government and ensure a smooth transition in Afghanistan, China has warned the Afghan militant group against the country once again becoming a "haven" for terrorists.

The remarks by China's deputy permanent representative to the UN, Geng Shuang, came during an emergency meeting of the Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan on Monday after the sudden and rapid takeover of the Afghanistan government by the Taliban insurgents.

"Afghanistan must never again become a haven for terrorists. This is the bottom line that must be held firmly for any future political solution in Afghanistan," Geng told an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan held under India's presidency.

"We hope that the Taliban in Afghanistan will earnestly deliver on their commitments and make a clean break with the terrorist organisations," the state-run Xinhua news agency quoted him as saying.

"All countries should fulfil their obligations in accordance with international law and Security Council resolutions, work with each other in combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and take resolute actions to prevent terrorist organisations such as the Islamic State, al-Qaida and the ETIM from taking advantage of this chaos (in Afghanistan)."

The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which is stated to be an affiliate of al-Qaeda, is a militant group from China's volatile Xinjiang province. It is fighting for the independence of the province, which is home to 10-million Uygur Muslims.

The UNSC al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee has listed ETIM as a terrorist organisation in 2002.

The former Trump administration had removed the group from the US' list of terrorist organisations in 2020 amid allegations of human rights violations against Uygur Muslims by China in Xinjiang, including internment thousands of them in mass detention centres, which Beijing terms as education camps.

The US has termed China's security crackdown in Xinjiang as genocide against Uygur Muslims.

According to a recent UN report, hundreds of militants belonging to the ETIM are converging in Afghanistan amidst the military advances made by the Taliban.

Xinjiang shares borders



with Afghanistan, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir besides Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

In her media briefing here on Monday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Hua Chunying commenting for the first time on the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan has said: China has noted that the Afghan Taliban said yesterday (Sunday) that the war in Afghanistan is over and that they will hold talks aimed at forming an open, inclusive Islamic government in Afghanistan and take responsible actions to protect the safety of Afghan citizens and foreign diplomatic missions.

China hopes these remarks can be implemented so as to ensure a smooth transition of the situation in Afghanistan, keep at bay all kinds of terrorism and criminal acts and make sure that the Afghan people stay away from war and can rebuild their homeland," she said in updated comments posted on the Ministry's website.

She struck a cautious note while replying to a question on when will China recognise the Taliban government and whether Beijing attached any condition for that.

"On the basis of fully respecting Afghanistan's national sovereignty and the will of all parties, Beijing has been maintaining contact and communication with the Taliban and playing a constructive role in promoting a political settlement," she said.

A Taliban delegation headed by the head of its Political Commission Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar held talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Chinese city of Tianjin on July 24 during which Wang asked the militant group to make a clean break with all terrorist organ-

isations, especially the ETIM.

Recalling the visit of Baradar, Hua said We hope the Afghan Taliban can form solidarity with all factions and ethnic groups in Afghanistan, and build a broad-based and inclusive political structure suited to the national realities, so as to lay the foundation for achieving enduring peace in the country.

The Afghan Taliban said on multiple occasions that it hopes to grow sound relations with China, looks forward to China's participation in Afghanistan's reconstruction and development and will never allow any force to use the Afghan territory to engage in acts detrimental to China. We welcome those statements," she said.

China respects the Afghan people's right to decide on their own future independently. China is ready to continue to develop good-neighbourliness and friendly cooperation with Afghanistan and play a constructive role in Afghanistan's peace and reconstruction, she said.

The visit of the Taliban delegation headed by Baradar closely followed Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi's visit for talks with Wang.

China is banking on its all-weather ally Pakistan to pressure the Taliban to prevent the regrouping of ETIM militants on Xinjiang borders to stir up trouble there.

Critics say China is sceptical about the Taliban's will and ability to clamp down on groups like al-Qaeda and ETIM due to religious and ideological affiliations.

Blaming the chaos in Afghanistan to the hasty withdrawal of the troops by the US, Geng told the Security Council on Monday that the current humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is very dire.

China warns Taliban against Afghanistan again becoming 'haven' for terror groups

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Thousands evacuated as fire sweeps through French forests

PARIS (AP): Thousands of people were evacuated from homes and vacation spots near the French Riviera as firefighters battled a fire racing through surrounding forests Tuesday, the latest of several wildfires that have swept the Mediterranean region.

At least 22 people have suffered smoke inhalation or minor fire-related injuries in the blaze that started Monday evening about 40 kilometers (24 miles) inland from the coastal resort of Saint-Tropez, according to the top government official for the Var region. The extent of the damage was unclear while the fire still raged.

Fueled by powerful seasonal winds coming off the Mediterranean Sea, the fire had consumed some 5,000 hectares (12,000 acres) of forest by Tuesday morning, according to the Var regional administration.

Some 6,000 people have been evacuated from homes and a dozen campgrounds in the picturesque region popular with vacationers, while others were locked down in a holiday center for Air France employees.



Backed by water-dumping planes and helicopters, more than 900 firefighters worked Tuesday to contain the blaze, the civil security service spokesman Alexandre Jouassard said. Local authorities closed roads and blocked access to forests across the region, and urged

caution.

Such extreme weather is expected happen more frequently as the planet is warming. Climate scientists say there is little doubt climate change from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas is driving extreme events, such as heat

waves, droughts, wildfires, floods and storms.

Intense heat and wildfires have also struck countries around southern Europe and North Africa in recent weeks, with fires killing at least 75 people in Algeria and 16 in Turkey.

In Greece on Tuesday, hundreds of firefighters backed by water-dropping planes were battling a large forest fire that has led to the evacuation of a care home and several villages northwest of Athens.

Hundreds of wildfires have burned across Greece this month, fueled by the country's longest and most severe heat wave in decades that left its forests and shrubland bone dry. Italy has also seen several fire-related deaths.

Also Tuesday, Israeli firefighters worked for a third consecutive day to contain a wildfire that has consumed a large swath of forest west of Jerusalem and threatened several communities.

Worsening drought and heat — linked to climate change — have also fueled wildfires this summer in the western United States and in Russia's northern Siberia region.

Thai film festival to go digital



NEW DELHI, AUG 17 (PTI): The annual Namaste Thailand festival that was called off in 2020 due to the pandemic has returned for its fourth edition this year in a virtual format, organisers have said. Hosted by the Royal Thai Embassy here, the three-day event from August 20-22 will feature a collection of 10 Thai films across a range of genres including drama, romance, comedy, thriller, and documentaries.

The selected films, to be screened in Thai with English subtitles, will display

the unique and diverse Thai culture and tradition while portraying the quintessential folklores as well as the universal tales of friendship, love, companionship, and yearning, organisers said in a statement. The films will be available for viewing free of cost on online platform Festival Scope.

Among the films that are part of the festival are Homestay ,NhaHarn , Present Still Perfect , The Exchange , and Where We Belong .

According to the organisers the film

festival is aimed at fostering closer socio-cultural ties between Thailand and India. Thailand and India enjoy a deep tie of friendship, connected by a shared socio-cultural heritage. The Namaste Thailand Film Festival continues to be an event to celebrate the two countries' close ties and long-lasting relations, they said.

The Embassy's annual film festival made a debut in 2017 on the 70th anniversary of Thailand-India diplomatic relations.



BEACH BABES! Couple Brett Oppenheim and Tina Louise hit the beach in Santa.

Barbra Streisand says 'A Star Is Born' remake was a wrong idea



LOS ANGELES, AUG 17 (PTI): Veteran actor-singer Barbra Streisand believes the Bradley Cooper and Lady Gaga-led remake of her 1976 film "A Star Is Born" was a "wrong idea".

In an interview with Australian talk show The Sunday Project", Streisand said the 2018 remake was too similar to the 1976 film, in which she starred alongside Kris Kristofferson.

"At first, when I heard it was going to be done again, it was supposed to be Will Smith and Beyonce, and I thought, that's interesting. Really make it different again, different kind of music, integrated actors, I thought that was a great idea. So, I was surprised when I saw how alike it was to the version that I did in 1976, she said.

When the interviewer suggested that it may be a compliment to her, Streisand said,

"I don't know, but I thought it was the wrong idea. Look, it was a big success. I can't argue with success. But I don't care so much about success as I do originality.

For the 2018 movie, directed by Cooper, Gaga won her maiden Academy Award. The film also received a best picture nomination and grossed USD 436 million worldwide.

At the time, Streisand had praised the film in an interview with Extra.

"Of course I've seen it. I loved it. I think it's wonderful. She's wonderful," the music icon said. Cooper had also told Entertainment Weekly, that the team had Streisand's "blessings".

The first "A Star Is Born" movie, with Janet Gaynor and Fredric March, came out in 1937. A remake was released in 1954 with Judy Garland and James Mason playing the lead roles.

O-T Fagbenle boards Apple series 'WeCrashed'

LOS ANGELES, AUG 17 (PTI): Actor O-T Fagbenle will feature along with Anne Hathaway and Jared Leto in Apple's upcoming scripted series "WeCrashed".

Fagbenle, best known for starring in Hulu series "The Handmaid's Tale", joins the show's cast that also includes America Ferrera and Kyle Marvin, reported Deadline.

The limited series is based on the Wondery podcast of the same name.

It follows the greed-filled rise and inevitable fall of WeWork, one of the world's most valuable startups, and the narcissists whose chaotic love made it all possible.

Leto will play WeWork founder Adam Neumann, with Hathaway set to essay the role of his wife and co-founder Rebekah Neumann.

Both stars will also serve as executive producers on the show.

Fagbenle will portray Cameron Lautner, a partner at a powerful investment firm who is tasked with trying to instil discipline at WeWork and prepare it for its upcoming IPO, which brings

him into conflict with the company's eccentric and headstrong CEO. Ferrera will play the role of Elishia Kennedy, a brilliant young entrepreneur seduced into joining WeWork whose life is turned upside down as a result.

Marvin will be starring as Miguel McKelvey, the co-founder of WeWork.

Lee Eisenberg and Drew Crevello are on board as creators, while "This Is Us" duo John Requa and Glenn Ficarra will direct and executive produce.

Apart from "WeCrashed", another WeWork TV series is in the works with Nicholas Braun on board to play Adam Neumann in the drama created by Stephen Falk.

That series is based on a book from Wall Street Journal reporters Eliot Brown and Maureen Farrell.

Fagbenle most recently starred Marvel Studios' "Black Widow", fronted by Scarlett Johansson. He will next be seen Showtime's upcoming anthology series "The First Lady", in which he play the role of former US president Barack Obama.

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'Field of Dreams' series adaptation in the works at Peacock



LOS ANGELES, AUG 17 (PTI): A series version of Oscar-nominated baseball movie "Field of Dreams" is being developed by writer-producer Michael Schur for NBCUniversal's streaming platform Peacock.

The streamer has given a straight-to-series order to "Field of Dreams", with the film's producer Lawrence Gordon and Universal TV backing the project.

According to Deadline, Schur will serve as writer on the series and also executive produce via his Fremulon banner.

Through the years, Field of Dreams' has remained a fan favourite, maintaining its rightful position in the zeitgeist. It's whimsical and grounded, a space where Mike Schur excels, and we're looking forward to bringing a new version of this classic to Peacock," said Lisa Katz, president of NBCUniversal Television and Streaming.

Released in 1989, "Field of Dreams", was written and

directed by Phil Alden Robinson. It was based on WP Kinsella's 1982 novel "Shoeless Joe" and starred Kevin Costner as a farmer who builds a baseball field in his Iowa cornfield that attracts the ghosts of baseball legends.

"Field of Dreams' is an iconic Universal Film title from venerable producers Lawrence and Charles Gordon, that we could only have entrusted to Mike Schur.

"His talent, his love for baseball and his reverence for its themes make him the perfect choice to revisit this beloved film that evokes nostalgia and visceral emotion in so many of its fans," said Erin Underhill, president of Universal Television.

Field of Dreams is the second Universal title to get a series treatment at Peacock following Seth MacFarlane's comedy movie "Ted".

It also marks the second Peacock series that Schur has created or co-created, with the first being Rutherford Falls".

Aries:
You've got your mojo back, Aries, and you're in the mood to go forth and conquer! With the right mix of courage and confidence (not cockiness), you will be able to achieve what you have set out to. So, take initiative and trust the direction in which you are being guided. Ensure you don't make any hasty decisions, though. Calculated risks promise to pay off in the long run.

Tip: There's nothing you cannot achieve with the right mix of courage and confidence.

Taurus:
What if we said you're the only one standing in your way, Taurus? The truth has been in front of you. The truth has been in front of you all along. So, take your blindfold off and pay attention to the signs. Remember, there's nothing wrong with doing what's right for you or drawing a certain boundary. Free yourself from the guilt associated with self-preservation.

Tip: You're being called to do what's right for you, Taurus.

Gemini:
Endings and beginnings are a theme right now, Gemini. You're simultaneously writing the epilogue of certain chapters while vision boarding a new reality into being. Plant your seeds with intention as you perfect the art of surrender. The Universe knows what's best for you,

beautiful, and will deliver it to you in divine time.

Tip: Endings and beginnings are taking place simultaneously.

Cancer:
We all have an idea of how people in our lives should and shouldn't be, and these ideas keep us from honouring the love and light in each individual. So, pay attention to how your judgements and biases are affecting your relationships. As you do, bring the gifts of love and compassion into your equation. Loving people as they are is a revolution, Cancer, and that's what you're being called to start doing today.

Tip: Bring the gifts of love and compassion into the relationship.

Leo:
When our decisions are guided by fear, there is only one way to go, Leo, and it isn't upwards. What happens when we vibrate at the frequency of love, though? The pathways that have been blocked magically open up for us, bringing forth ideas and inspiration from the beyond. Trust the insights that you are receiving, even if they don't make sense on paper. They are leading you in the right direction and reminding you that there is a parallel reality that is "always" available to you.

Tip: Let your decisions be guided by love.

Virgo:

You may be two parts of fear, but you're also four parts courage and infinite parts awesomeness. What the cards are reminding you is that there ain't no mountain high enough for this Virgo. So, walk your demons to the exit door, dare to dream big dreams, and go after what you believe in with unbridled passion. Given all the cosmic support you have at the moment, you will rise from your ashes in no time, beautiful.

Tip: Remember who you are.

Libra:
We've all grown up with various stories about money. Stories that continue to determine the kind of experiences we attract. If we hold onto the fear narrative, fear is what we attract. If we operate from a space of lack, abundance refuses to come into our lives. What the cards are reminding you today is to transmute and transform the old fears. All that you need and all that you want will find its way to you. Trust in the mysterious workings of the Universe. Trust, Libra, trust.

Tip: You're being called to make that metaphorical shift from lack to abundance.

Scorpio:
Nothing in our life is without a purpose, Scorpio. The pain, the suffering, the challenges—they're all awak-

ening us to our truth. And the truth is that you have been preparing for this great change. You have been preparing for this great change for many lifetimes now. So, honour your circumstances as an opportunity to dedicate yourself to inner alchemy. This is the only way you will emerge from the muddy waters like a bright, radiant lotus.

Tip: Honour your circumstances as an opportunity to look within and transform.

Sagittarius:
This week is bringing with itself the gifts of hope and optimism. You can feel yourself stepping into the new. A phase where your dreams and desires are beginning to come true. There's oh-so-much to be thankful for, Sagittarius. So, take a moment to update that gratitude journal. What's more, a one-of-a-kind adventure may also be on the cards. Say yes to the unknown and allow life to surprise you in the best possible way.

Tip: This is a time of hope and optimism.

Capricorn:
Weekly reminder, Capricorn: This decision is yours to make. So rely on your intuition instead of being influenced by other people's opinions. Given their limited perspective, there is no way for them to fully understand your circumstances. Issues related to finances could also be a constant for some of you.

Yes, this is a challenging time for the collective. But, if you feel like somebody is simply making excuses, speak up for yourself and demand fair compensation.

Tip: It's time to speak up for yourself and ask for what is owed to you.

Aquarius:
Fight or flight, Aquarius? Flight or fight? Remember, walking away or choosing the path of denial is the easy way out. Standing up for what you believe in, on the other hand, will help you fulfil your karmic responsibilities. So do what's right for yourself and the collective. Know that you "do not" have to bring your weapons to the battlefield in order to emerge victorious. Fight your fight in a peaceful manner and know that you have all the help and support you need.

Tip: Stand up for what you believe in.

Pisces:
We're always talking about attracting love. But, how many of us are willing to stay in the energy of love? To expand our heart space consistently despite the risks this entails? Let go of the fears, Pisces. Let go of the fears that you will be let down by those who you allow into your sacred space. The Universe is offering you the gift of harmonious relationships, provided you're willing to make space.

Tip: "I am love."