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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Covid claims three more in Sikkim; Second Wave has now claimed 143 lives in 49 days

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 10 JUN:**

Three more people lost their battle against Novel Coronavirus in the last 24 hours in Sikkim, taking the State's COVID-death toll to 279 today.

Covid's second wave has been brutal across the country, and Sikkim has not been spared either. This newspaper marks 22 April, 2021, as the day when second wave fatalities began in Sikkim. On 22 April, after a gap of more than two months [save one death due to co-morbidities earlier in April], Sikkim lost its 137th life to the virus.

And the death toll has not paused for any meaningful period since then. In the 49 days that Covid has snatched people away in Sikkim, the State has seen 143 Covid patients breathe their last. These 49 days have thus seen more Covid deaths in Sikkim than the entire previous year when 136 lives were lost.

A record number of nine fatalities were reported on 13 May. This desolate day fell in the middle of a especially



worrying set of five days, when, between 11 to 15 May, the State recorded 34 deaths.

To get a sense of how morbid the second wave has been, one must bear in mind that over these 49 days, there were only three days when Sikkim saw no Covid deaths. Two of these no Covid deaths were right at the beginning - 23 and 24 April - and the third was a few days back on 07 June. Comfort however can be drawn from the fact that infections have been coming down and Test Positivity Rate has substantially

reduced in the past few days.

The Daily Report of Covid-19 released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Project of the Health Department this morning informs that Sikkim recorded 287 fresh cases of novel coronavirus in the past 24 hours taking the state's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 to 17,943.

The daily positivity rate clocks in at 12.6% with the detection of these 287 new cases from the testing of 2270 samples on Wednesday. A total of 192 samples returned positive for COVID-19

during RT-PCR testing of 929 samples, 93 persons were found positive in rapid antigen testing of 1323 samples and two more cases were reported in TruNat testing of 18 samples.

Out of the 287 new cases, 119 were registered in East District, 46 in West District, 96 in South District and 26 in North District.

The number of recoveries also continue to be high with 113 more people getting discharged from home isolation on Wednesday after making full recoveries. Sikkim's

figure of recovered cases of COVID-19 has further improved to 13,378 and the official recovery rate stands at 74.5%.

The number of active Covid cases currently stands at 4040 in Sikkim, of whom 16 are in ICU at STNM hospital and seven admitted in the ICU of Central Referral Hospital, Tadong.

Against the 287 cases detected today, hospitals saw only 19 new admissions, 21 were referred for quarantine at COVID Care Centres set up by the government and the rest are in home isolation.

CM hands over temporary appointment letters to 99 health workers



GANGTOK, 10 JUN (IPR): Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang handed over temporary appointment orders to 99 healthcare workers under various categories in a brief programme held at Samman Bhawan today. These individuals have been voluntarily providing their services in the

public health sector during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Congratulating the recipients, the CM extended gratitude to all for their support and voluntary assistance during the unprecedented public health emergency caused by the COVID-19. He expressed that the soli-

darity exhibited by these individuals through volunteering has been heartening.

He urged all to continue exhibiting collective effort and dedicated services necessary to counter the challenges thrown by the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic.

'Unknown persons' charged with Lockdown violation for burning Bhaichung's effigy: South DC and SP

**BIKASH CHHETRI
NAMCHI, 10 JUN:**

The South district administration today informed that the group, which they have not yet been able to identify, which had taken out a protest rally against Hamro Sikkim Party's Bhaichung Bhutia and burned his effigy in the heart of Namchi, have been booked under sections covering lockdown violation.

Addressing a press conference here today, the DC-South, M Bharani Kumar, clarified that no permission had been sought for the rally and



added that the incident was clearly pre-meditated.

SP-South, Thakur Thapa, in turn added that the perpetrators

have not yet been identified but a case under Section 188 of the IPC (Disobedience of an order duly promulgated by a

...turn Pg2

Sikkim Police team brings back stranded girl from Bangalore



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 10 JUN:**

A special team led by SI, Joshna Gurung has been successful in bringing back a young girl from Sikkim who was in a destitute condition in Bangalore, Karnataka.

The woman named Anu Rai [Pavitra] hails from Zoom Salghari, West Sikkim, and a video of her on the streets of Bangalore had recently gone viral on social media. On learning of the case, Chief Minister, PS Tamang had immediately directed the Police Department to look into the matter and initiate a process for her swift return to Sikkim.

The team also had a member of the girl's family and reached Bangalore on 09 June. The team reached Bagdogra Airport today.

SIKKIM REACTS TO NAMCHI'S EFFIGY-BURNING EPISODE

Namchi incident highlights growing intolerance of dissenting voices

TSETEN TASHI BHUTIA

The recent incident in Namchi raises serious question whether the people who took part in the incident were overzealous activist or were supporters of a party trying to prove their loyalty by trying to suppress a voice of dissent.

During this time of pandemic and lockdown it is surprising that law enforcement has neither given any official statement of the incident nor taken any action against the people who broke the law.

The incident of Namchi highlights the growing intolerance of ruling parties towards dissenting voices towards their policies and use of different methods to suppress and threaten opposition from voicing their opinions.

The constitution of India gives the sacred right of speech so that every citizen can give his opinion, it is up to the government whether to accept or reject the opinions but in no way try to muzzle the citizen by threatening him.

Bhaichung Bhutia and former Chief Minister, PK Chamling had both placed their opinions about the government's handling of the Covid-19 situation in the state but the government reaction to both were different, while the government gave a press briefing against the former chief minister's opinions, the reaction towards Bhaichung Bhutia was more robust through their proxies though the government denies any hand in it.

Various incidents of intolerance during this pandemic period has come to light with NGOs and persons giving aid and consultation to Covid-19 affected people being forced to abandon their social work because they belong to a different party or differ with the way the government is implementing its duties.

There is a time for everything even political differences but during this time of pandemic and economic difficulties it is up to the government to take a more progressive and mature stance to involve all to tackle the present problems and give relief to the suffering of the public. It is not proper of a responsible government to attack opposition parties to divert the attention of the public to hide their own weaknesses in tackling the present situation.

The leadership of a state is judged by the way it handles problems during time of difficulties and the solutions it come up with to solve the problems and not by the way it suppresses public opinions pointing to its weaknesses.

Our organization condemns the incident at Namchi and appeals to the public to refrain from any illegal activities which can endanger the lives of the people by spreading the Covid infection. We appeal to all to lend their hand in tackling the pandemic and to abide by the safety instructions of the government. Our organization is ready to participate in any activity towards alleviating the problems caused by this pandemic.

[The writer is Convenor, Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee]

'Questioning construction of a new hospital is an attempt to discredit Govt'

MANOJ PRADHAN

Governance is a continuous process. Even during crisis time, it never stops. A proactive and visionary leadership foresees future contingencies and prepares accordingly. In this context the 300 bedded hospital was conceived and the work is being started at Namchi.

Climate change, population growth and changing ecological profile is being witnessed throughout the world. COVID-19 has come as a rude shock and shaken the conscience of the people; leaving behind a trail of death and misery. The only way to prepare ourselves is to create more medical facilities so that we are ready to face any medical emergencies in the future.

If some people feel that the priority of the government is not correct then I would like to question their true intentions in contending as such. It seems more like an attempt to not let the government take credit for a project which will be very beneficial to the people of South and West districts.

As for the contention, the said hospital is being constructed in a playground. Here it is so obvious that more than anything else it is the frustration which is on show as an alternate stadium is almost ready.

Since the pandemic started 40 new doctors have been appointed. Similarly an equal numbers of nurses, paramedics and other support staff have also been appointed. The government takes decision with the inputs of experienced bureaucrats, medical experts and other domain experts to cater to the need of the hour and future contingencies.

Under the able and dynamic leadership of CM, PS Tamang and the joint efforts of everyone, Sikkim has been able to control the current crisis and is also prepared to face the future.

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e-Procurement Notice (National Competitive Bidding)
e-Tender No: IRCON/2046/SRRP/e Tender/Const./Building/2021_IRCON_78835_1 Dated: 11.06.2021

e-tender in two packet system is invited from bidders meeting qualifying requirements for the work "Construction of Four Single Storied (Appx. 500 sqft each) RCC House Building as per approved plan including electrification & sanitary line with fittings at Riyang Railway Station Mouza for shifting of four family from Proposed Riyang Yard in connection with Sivok- Rangpo New BG Rail Link Project."

Estimated Cost of the Work	₹ 65,98,303/- including GST @12%
Last Date and Time of e-Bid Submission	01.07.2021, 15.00 Hrs. (IST)

For further details, visit Website: <https://tenders.gov.in/e-procure/app> Amendments/Corrigendum/ Addendum, if any would be hosted on the website only.

PD/SRRP

SDF condemns effigy-burning episode, sees it as sign of growing intolerance of free speech

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 10 JUN:**

Sikkim Democratic Front has condemned the recent incident in Namchi in which a group of people raised slogans against Bhaichung Bhutia and burnt his effigy in the heart of town. This display of intolerance and aggression goes against the very culture and tradition of constructive politics and democracy, an SDF press release states.

While tagging the incident as an illegal and criminal act, the party has demanded that the culprits be brought to task as per law.

The party asserted that Bhaichung had ex-

pressed his views and had made certain suggestions regarding the hospital project in Namchi. "To express one's views and opinions regarding certain policies of the government is a Fundamental Right guaranteed under the Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression," the release states.

The release also draws attention to the fact that the protest occurred while the State was under lockdown and rues that the State Government continues to remain silent on the issue.

The release adds that Bhaichung Bhutia is a son-of-the-soil and an asset to the state and in

view of his exceptional performance in the field of sports, he has been awarded prestigious national awards like the Padma Shree and the Arjuna Award.

The party points out further that Bhaichung has built an enviable image for Sikkim not only at the national level but also at the international level and that it was in appreciation of his talent and contributions that the then SDF government had conferred the Sikkim Seva Ratna Puruskar (Sikkim's highest civilian award) on him.

It was the SDF Government which had named the Namchi stadium in his honour when it

was being upgraded.

The release further contends that the hospital project had originally been approved by the SDF Government in the year 2018 and also tendered for execution.

"However, the tender was later cancelled by the incumbent government. The sanctioned amount for the project then was Rs. 375 crores whereas, the present cost of the project has been escalated to Rs. 585 crores. It is a matter of great concern that the government intends to carry on with the project with such huge escalation of cost," the release states.

The release adds that as per the proposal made

by the SDF government, the hospital was to be built in the Administrative Block and the TB ward within the premises of the existing Namchi District Hospital and contends that this would have been very convenient for patients and visitors.

"The present public playground where the government proposes to construct the new hospital was earlier the District Office of the Animal Husbandry Department and the same was later converted into a public playground in view of the continuous demand placed by the public of Namchi and surrounding areas," the release adds.

Alkem Foundation provides 50 oxygen cylinders to Govt



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 10 JUN:**

The Alkem Foundation, under its CSR activities, provided 50 oxygen cylinders to the State Government today, a press release informs.

Alkem Vice President, R Chakilam and other officials handed over the cylinders on behalf of the company to Minister of Transport, Sanjit Kharel and other officials today.

It is to be noted that the state government has constituted a committee to address the issue of oxygen deficiency under Sanjit Kharel.

Over the past year the foundation has supported the State Government by setting up Covid

Testing Lab along with other types of assistance and this year too, the company plans to spend more than Rs 1.5 crore on health, education and other social services under CSR, Mr Chakilam informed.

Claiming that there is no shortage of oxygen in Sikkim, Minister Kharel said that work has already started to set up oxygen plants in all the district hospitals of the state and an oxygen plant with capacity of 1000 litres is being set up at Rangpo.

Member of the Oxygen Supply Committee cum GM, Sikkim Transport Department, Karma

Namgyal Bhutia mentioned that after the formation of Oxygen Supply Committee under the direction of Chief Minister, PS Tamang, the Chairman of the Committee, Sanjit Kharel has managed to get 851 cylinders in stock in the state today. Mr Bhutia also mentioned that before forming the oxygen supply committee, there were 260 oxygen cylinders in the state at STNM Hospital.

He also mentioned that not a single rupee has been spent from the state treasury for oxygen cylinders. He claimed that all the cylinders were received through various industrial units, NGOs and social workers.

Lingdong residents complain against Power Grid



**WANGCHUK BHUTIA
MANGAN, 10 JUN:**

The public of Lingdong in Dzongu, North Sikkim, have complained against Power Grid regarding settlement of boundary dispute.

The SDM Dzongu directed Power Grid officials to resolve the matter and make the necessary compensation payments.

The SDM further directed them to take up immediate action and take measures in mitigating further damages by the Company.

Instructions have been given to the General Manager, Power Grid Sikkim and contractors to be physically present at the site to resolve all issues related to compensation of property damage and settlement of boundary issues.

Court says Centre's allocation of Black Fungus drug irrational, supply to Maharashtra inadequate

MUMBAI, 10 JUN [PTI]:

The Bombay High Court today said the Union government's allocation of Amphotericin-B, a key drug used in the treatment of Mucormycosis or Black Fungus, appeared to be irrational, and the supply to Maharashtra was not adequate considering the number of cases in the state.

Flagging the same issue during the hearing of a separate Public Interest Litigation, another bench of the court said the Centre must take steps to increase the supply.

After the state government informed that 82 people died of Mucormycosis in Maharashtra in the last three days, a division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice G S Kulkarni at Mumbai asked Advocate General Ashutosh Kumbhakoni to find out if delay in the administration of necessary drugs led to these

fatalities.

It also directed the Maharashtra government to maintain real-time record of Mucormycosis cases and the available stock of drugs and convey this information to the Union government so as to procure the medicines in time.

Mr Kumbhakoni told the court earlier that while the state had witnessed 512 deaths due to Mucormycosis till June 7, the figure climbed to 600 by June 10.

Additional Solicitor General Anil Singh, the Union government's lawyer, said it had allocated an average of 4,060 vials of Amphotericin-B, a key drug used in the treatment of the fungal infection, per day to Maharashtra between May 11 and June 9.

The bench, however, noted that Maharashtra accounted for 25 per cent of the total 23,254

cases in the country, and the drug allocation was inadequate and not proportional to the number of active cases in the state.

Daman and Diu had no active Mucormycosis case but the Union Territory received 500 vials, Tripura had one case but did not receive any vial while Manipur and Nagaland with one active case each received 50 vials of the medicine apiece, the court said, citing the Centre's affidavit.

"This allocation doesn't seem rational. Are the medicines really reaching where they are required? What is the distribution criteria?" the high court asked.

"The quantity (of Amphotericin-B) allocated to Maharashtra is very short. Allocation has to be dynamic and need-based pan-India. No patient should suffer for want of medicine," the court added.

If the domestic production was inadequate, the government must think about importing the drug, the court said.

The court was hearing a bunch of PILs on Covid management in Maharashtra.

Mr Kumbhakoni also told the bench that Maharashtra had started vaccination against coronavirus in prisons to inoculate staff and inmates. While most of the staff was vaccinated, 27,000 inmates were yet to be fully vaccinated, he said.

RT-PCR tests were also being conducted frequently in jails, he said, adding that in Talaja prison near Mumbai, which is highly congested, there were only five active cases of Covid.

The court said the state must not become complacent because of the decline in cases, and must keep adequate stocks of Tocilizumab and other necessary

drugs.

It directed the state to file a fresh affidavit on all issues by June 15, adjourning the hearing to June 16.

Besides the principal bench at Mumbai, the Aurangabad bench also raised the issue of shortage of drug used in the treatment of Mucormycosis.

Hearing a PIL, a division bench of Justices R V Ghuge and B U Debadwar said the shortage was worrisome, and unless urgent steps were taken by the Union government for improving the supply, the death rate would not come down.

It expected the Union government to make a statement on June 16 about an increase in the supply of the drug, the court said, while asking the chief public prosecutor -- the state's lawyer -- to furnish details of recovered and active patients as well as deaths due to Mucormycosis till June 15.

SRP condemns effigy-burning incident

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 10 JUN:**

Sikkim Republican Party has joined the chorus of condemnations of the Namchi incident in which an effigy of Bhaichung Bhutia was burnt.

SRP contends that the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha did not have any excuses to dodge accountability in the incident and has condemned the episode as one harkening to a very dangerous

development for justice and democracy.

Not only is the effigy-burning episode unhealthy in a democracy, it was also a very cheap display of political muscle, the party has stated.

NHPC posts highest-ever profits of Rs 3,233 Crore

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 10 JUN:**

NHPC declared its audited financial results for the Financial Year 2020-21 at e-meeting of the Board of Directors today and reported its highest ever net profit [after taxes] of Rs 3,233.37 Crore on standalone basis in the FY 2020-21 compared to Rs 3007.17 Crore for the last fiscal, an NHPC press release informs.

Revenue from operations for the FY 2020-

21 stood at Rs 8506.58 crore compared to Rs 8735.15 crore in the last fiscal year. Consolidated net profit for 2020-21 stood at Rs 3582.13 crore, compared to Rs 3,344.91 crore in 2019-20. The total income of the group in 2020-21 was Rs 10,705.04 crore as against Rs 10,776.64 crore in 2019-20.

Despite the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, NHPC Power Stations achieved generation of 24471 Million Units

(MU) in FY 2020-21, the release adds.

The Board of Directors have also recommended final dividend of Rs 0.35 per share for Financial Year 2020-21 in addition to interim dividend of Rs 1.25/- per share already paid by the Company in March 2021. The total dividend payout for FY 20-21 is Rs 1607.21 crore as compared to total dividend payout of Rs 1506.76 crore for FY 19-20. NHPC, today has about seven lakh shareholders.

Chinese man held at India-Bangladesh border over "suspicious activities"

NEW DELHI, 10 JUN [PTI]:

A 35-year-old Chinese was intercepted by the Border Security Force near the India and Bangladesh border today, officials have said. He was detained in West Bengal's Malda district near the border over "suspicious activities", they said.

A Chinese passport with a Bangladeshi visa, a laptop and three SIM cards were found with the man identified by security officials as Han Junwei.

"He was intercepted at 7 am. We brought him to Kaliachak post

and informed other agencies. He is being questioned by them," a senior officer told NDTV, asking not to be named.

The officer said the Chinese "intruder" doesn't seem to know English and so they had difficulty in communicating with him initially. "A security officer who knows Mandarin was then called. He is being questioned by intelligence agencies now," the officer said.

Malda shares an international border with Bangladesh and is one of the most porous borders. The area is often used for

smuggling of drugs, arms, cattle and illegal immigrants.

The BSF's South Bengal Frontier guards the India-Bangladesh border in Malda region.

Security agencies are trying to find out whether Han Junwei was alone or more like him have managed to sneak into Indian territory. The agencies have also asked him about the purpose of his visit to Bangladesh.

"More details and the reasons for him venturing into the Indian side will be known once the (questioning) session ends," another officer said.

'Unknown persons' charged with Lockdown violation....

public servant) and the relevant sections of the Disaster Management Act has been registered on the incident.

The DC South told a press conference that the premeditated incident happened so quickly that the group managed to disperse before the police could respond.

Detailing the incident, he informed that the group entered the Central Park from Axis Bank alley at around 1:40 pm and after raising slogans against Bhaichung Bhutia, burned an effigy. The entire episode was over in 3-4 minutes, he said.

He also informed that he had not received any letter seeking permission for any kind of rally.

After the incident, the SHO-Namchi wrote to the DC about the incident and flagging it as a violation of the Disaster Management Act. Following this letter, the district administration wrote to the Chief Judicial Magistrate about the incident. He also informed that a case has been registered and investigation has started.

SP South, Thakur Thapa, informed that the case has been registered against unknown persons U/S 188 of IPC and U/S 51 of Disaster Management Act.

He also explained that since most of the police personnel have been deployed to rural areas following rise in Covid cases there, the deployment in Namchi was low.

ANTHYESTI KRIYA



The Anthyesti Kriya of Late Padam Narayan Pradhan who left for his heavenly abode on 25.04.2021 falls on 15.06.2021 (Tuesday)

All relatives, friends and well-wishers are requested to join us in offering prayer for the departed soul at Hotel Chawtara, Deorali Bazar, Gangtok, East Sikkim.

We also express our gratitude to all those who stood by us during our time of bereavement. Request to strictly follow the COVID 19 protocols.

Man Maya Pradhan (Wife)
Geeta Pradhan (Elder Daughter) 9593262871
Kanchan Pradhan (Younger Daughter) 7908308536
Mahindra Rai (Son in Law) 9832343176
Anil Pradhan (Son in Law) 9593772014

A Supernova called Dingko

POONAM MEHRA

NEW DELHI, JUN 10 (PTI): He exploded on the scene like a seasoned superstar. Not many fit this description in Indian sports, especially without an Olympic medal, but then Dingko Singh was unlike most.

All of 42 and four years after losing over 70 per cent of his liver to cancer, Dingko breathed his last at his Imphal home on Thursday, leaving Indian boxing stunned and the many he inspired with a deep sense of void in their lives.

His single biggest sporting achievement was an Asian Games gold in the 1998 Bangkok edition, which was India's first in 16 years. But bigger than that was the impact he had on those who watched him out-punch two Olympic medallists that year.

"Oh my god, he was spectacular. That style was something else," recalled M C Mary Kom while talking about how she excitedly queued up to watch him fight in a show bout in Manipur after he came back from the Asiad.

For her it was like finding a hero closer home as she chased her boxing dreams.

That was the Dingko effect on a generation of accomplished north-eastern boxing stars, including M Sunranjoy Singh, L Devendro Singh and L Sarita Devi among several others.

"I never knew I had that kind of impact. I never intended to," Dingko had told PTI in an interaction back in 2010.

He was in the capital to watch the Common-



wealth Games at that time and was enjoying his anonymity in the spectators' gallery before PTI caught up with him.

He couldn't be faulted for being blissfully unaware of his impact. He never really got the time to assess it.

Dingko was born to a poor family in Imphal's Sekta village and meagre resources forced his parents to leave him at a local orphanage.

It was there that scouts from the Special Area Games Scheme (SAG) started by the Sports Authority of India (SAI) first noticed the raw boxing talent in him.

Talented he definitely was, add to that mix a famously mercurial personality and it all added up to make a fearless campaigner in the ring and a daunting man to manage outside it.

"He could not be controlled by anyone. He could not be subdued by anyone," recalled Akhil Kumar, a Commonwealth games gold-medallist who has been with him in national camps.

Indian boxing got the first glimpse of Dingko's talent at the 1989 sub-junior nationals in Ambala where he became a champion as a 10-year-old.

be his undoing after the Games as well, ultimately causing the many health issues that he battled.

Early exits from the 2000 Olympics and the 2002 Commonwealth Games left Dingko's career at crossroads.

It wasn't too long before he hung up his gloves and took to coaching at Imphal's Sports Authority of India centre.

He was suspended from that job in 2014 after allegedly beating up a female weightlifter at the facility for merely professing her affection towards him.

There were countless other tales as well of Dingko losing his cool while being at the peak of his prowess.

He once tried his kit right in front of the federation officials after his complaints of it being ill-fitting were dismissed by them.

Dingko, in his inimitable style, made sure that the officials knew first hand, how unsuitable a size he had been handed. They had to ultimately change the kit for him.

"He never consciously tried to warm up to anyone for personal gains, be it coaches, the federation, officials, no one. He had such confidence in his talent. That's why he was a hero," Akhil said.

Dingko, however, remained unaware of this impact as well.

"I have mellowed, I don't get into trouble," he had said in a later interaction after tying the knot with Babai Nongam.

But Dingko did get into trouble, perhaps the

biggest of his life, in 2017 when he was diagnosed with liver cancer.

"Fighting comes naturally to me, I will fight this too," he would say.

However, every fight comes at a price. His treatment took a toll on his limited resources and there came a time when he had to appeal for help, which did come his way from several quarters.

His misery compounded with jaundice and COVID-19 in June last year, which needed one month of hospitalisation and he was overcome by a "sense of relief" on returning home, calling it the toughest one month in a long, long time.

"It's a miracle, how he fought all these ailments. Any other person wouldn't have survived this long. It shows what stuff he was made of," said Mary Kom.

The man himself seemed unaware of the magnitude of his health challenges as well.

In fact, in his numerous interactions with PTI, he made light of them.

"Main theek hun ji, ghabraiye nahi kuch nahi hota mujhe (I am fine don't worry, nothing will happen to me)," was his oft-repeated response to a how-are-you call.

He fought hard and was determined to beat the odds just like those Olympic medallists he thrashed in a career which is perhaps comparable to a supernova explosion.

Indian boxing won't get another Dingko Singh. Better boxers will be found but fighters like him don't come easy anymore.

Durex led The Birds and Bees Talk launches 'Let's Talk About It' campaign to empower adolescents in Northeast region

The catchy tune of the campaign's music video aims to empower adolescents with critical lifesaving information that promotes healthy behaviours to grow into responsible, healthy adults



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 10 JUN:

Reckitt, the global leader in consumer-healthcare launched Year 2 of the 'The Birds and Bees Talk' programme, which is directed towards the adolescents between the age group - 10 to 19 Years in the six states of North-Eastern India- Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur and Mizoram with the aim to reach 2 million children in three years. The programme has launched its theme song- 'Let's Talk About It', to mark its second year, and to celebrate Pride Month.

Launched last year with the support of the state governments of Manipur, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, the Birds and Bees programme has a 2-level interactive, animated curriculum that covers growing up and life skills, to promote the core principles of inclusion, awareness, consent, awareness and protection. In year 2, the programme is building and launching its digital ecosystem to ensure that the COVID pandemic does not hinder learning and development. The digital ecosystem of the programme includes an e-learning platform to deliver sessions to students across the states, with a rewards and recognition programme linked to encourage schools, teachers and students to intensively engage with the content. Supporting the e-learning platform is an AI-enabled chatbot, and a podcast channel, along with a website that gives a complete overview of the programme. The holistic approach of the program envisages celebrating special days and important health days across the states leveraging its rich music, art and culture ensuring that knowledge is not limited till the restraints of physical classes.

The campaign will also be rolled out on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, shared with key influencers to help reach the masses. The campaign will include a series of digital content that will focus on reiterating the issue and will be used to help reach a larger audience.

Pride month is an opportunity for the programme to promote inclusivity and awareness about the LGBTQIA community, and help adolescents and youth overcome the challenges of the lack of information, knowledge, stigma and discrimination that forces them to suppress their queries in the absence of correct information.

SVP, SoA, Reckitt, Gaurav Jain said "The Birds and Bees Talk campaign is a colourful campaign that leverages the power of arts, music and culture to engage adolescents and youth in fun-filled and positive manner. The TBTT anthem intends to convey that growing up can be fun and safe and sends a positive message that communicates the importance of the knowledge of power, protection and pleasure through this campaign we aim to raise awareness and make adolescents and the young LGBTQI population in the Northeast feel included and encourage community engagement."

Executive Director, Mohammed Asif, Plan India stated "Plan India has been working for more than two decades to improve sexual and reproductive health services and rights for all children, adolescent girls and young women and men in different parts of India. In sync with the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) of the Government of India, we believe adolescents and young people must be enabled, equipped and empowered for their holistic development. They should

be aware of their sexual and reproductive rights, make informed choices for themselves and lead healthy lives, free from violence, discrimination and abuse. I am happy to share that the "The Birds and The Bees Talk" Project seeks to enable and equip millions of adolescents and young people with awareness and access to the sexual and reproductive health services and rights, which is important for strengthening gender equality in our country."

The voices behind the song who are successfully bringing the flavour of North East are Andrea Tariang- actor in path-breaking movies like PINK, a performer at key venues around the country and grazed some festival stages as well including CALM Festival 2015, Bacardi NH7 Weekender 2016, 2017, 2019 Nowhere is Here festival 2018; Arsenal Jamir- Hailing from the hills of Nagaland, a Fashion Stylist and also a designer and creative director for her sustainable clothing brand 'Otsu Clothing Co'; and Rahul Rajkhowa- Vh1, and Rolling Stone featured Singer/Songwriter having toured 35 cities in India and abroad. Rahul is also the most written about artist from Northeast India for his music addressing social and environmental issues.

Music has been the best source of communication since the beginning of time and the TBTT theme song helps to set a strong foundation for this initiative, sharing the crucial message of acquiring the right knowledge of power, protection and pleasure to ensure healthy development and well-being. The song strongly promotes inclusivity and also encourages adolescents to make the right choice.

Mini blood donation camp by VBDAS at STNM Hospital

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 10 JUN:

Voluntary Blood Donors Association of Sikkim (VBDAS) organized a mini blood donation camp in collaboration with Jagriti Club Jholungey Lower Maneydara, Namthang, South Sikkim at STNM Hospital Socheygang today, a press release informs.

The camp was supported by Blood Bank STNM Hospital Socheygang Gangtok and Services to Mankind Sikkim. A total of



22 Units of blood were collected in the camp.

The camp was attended

by Senior Blood Bank Officer cum Additional Director Health and Fam-

ily Welfare Department Socheygang Gangtok, Dr Chintamani Sharma who

was also accompanied by the technical staffs of the hospital along with VBDAS president, Kishore Baniya, general secretary, Som Bahadur Rai along with advisors and other executive members. There were 14 donors from Jagriti Club Jholungey Lower Maneydara and others were regular donors who are associated with VBDAS.

Jagriti Club Jholungey was awarded with certificate of appreciation by Sikkim State Blood Transfusion Council.

14 new cases push COVID-19 tally of Andamans to 7,168

Port Blair, Jun 10 (PTI): The COVID-19 caseload in Andaman and Nicobar Islands rose to 7,168 as 14 more people tested positive for the disease in the Union Territory, a health department official said on Thursday. Of the new patients, four have travel history and 10 were detected during contact tracing, he said.

The death toll re-

mained at 125 as no new fatality due to the infection was reported in the last 24 hours.

At least 17 more people were cured of the disease during the period, taking the total number of recoveries in the archipelago to 6,952.

The Union Territory now has 91 active cases. South Andaman is the

worst-affected district as it currently has 87 active cases. The local administration has been strict to contain the spread of the disease and has adopted an approach of tracking, testing and treating, the official said, adding that people arriving here from the mainland are mandatorily required to undergo COVID test.

SAKA Samaj cleans up New Secondary School campus



NAMCHI, 10 JUN [IPR]: Members of SAKA Samaj carried out a cleanliness drive in and around the New Secondary School premises today. They removed the bushes, picked up the accumulated garbage and other types of waste. Pavements, stairs and school premises which are frequented by the public.



NOTICE

The last date for submission of applications for the post of City Data Officer under Gangtok Smart City Development Limited is hereby extended till 17th June 2021, 1600 hours. Candidates may submit their application via email to deepankarlama77@gmail.com.

Further details shall be provided to the candidates on their email id provided by them.

Nodal Officer

Gangtok Smart City Development Limited

Government of India Ministry of AYUSH

Financial assistance for skill development in AYUSH sector

Ministry of AYUSH invites application in the prescribed format under Central Sector Scheme for Skill Development under Champion Services Sector Scheme for Medical value Travel for the year 2021-22 from the institutions recognized by Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM)/ Central Council for Homoeopathy (CCH)/ Healthcare Sector Skill Council under Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.

2. Financial assistance to conduct skill development training in AYUSH sector up to Rs. 1.5 lakh (for short term courses) / 3.00 lakh (for mid-term course) per training program will be provided to the institutions and Rs. 9000 will be provided to the students as stipend.

3. The eligible institutes may submit complete applications in prescribed format along with the required documents/ information to judge the eligibility of the institution. The detailed guidelines are available on the website of the Ministry of AYUSH i.e. <https://main.ayush.gov.in/schemes>

4. The applications in triplicate complete in all respect along with check list should reach to the Advisor (Ay.), Champion Services Sector Scheme Medical Value Travel, M/o Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha & Homoeopathy, Room No. 207, 2nd Floor, Ayush Bhawan, B-Block, GPO Complex, INA, New Delhi-110023 on or before 30th June, 2021.

davp 17201/11/0011/2122

Introductions Before Conservation

A face-to-face makes the intangible, real

Every so often, government departments surprise us with a brave display of spine and priorities in the right place. Unfortunately, these episodes don't happen too often, which is why we begin today with something from nearly a decade back. For World Biodiversity Day in 2012, the Forest Department organised a slogan-writing contest for students to come up with something catchy and emotive to save Gyamtsona. This was a public appeal by the Forest Department to save Gyamtsona, a collateral damage of the nation's need to secure its borders. This was a brave stand because even though conservation and protection of forests and environment is in the name of the Department, it has rarely delivered and only very timidly stood up to its charter especially when issues like national security and development are played into the argument. Given that track-record, when the department made a public appeal to Save Gyamtsona, it was more than welcome, it was, in an expression which has been mischievously and wrongly claimed, unprecedented.

Gyamtsona, or the puddle that remains of it now, is the only brackish water lake in Sikkim and one which used to be so big at one time that apart from its name meaning "Ocean Lake", it also was the only lake in Sikkim with "noisy waves". This lake, which falls on the traditional trade route to Tibet [before Nathula and Jelepale rose to prominence] across Kongra La in the notorious "Fingertip" area of North Sikkim survived thousands [perhaps even more] of years of human traffic, but withered away within decades of falling under the watch of people uninitiated on the significance of the water body. While involving students on issues of environment and biodiversity is well intentioned, the irony of inviting them to write slogans to save a lake which none of them has seen underlines things which are going wrong with biodiversity conservation efforts. In the decade that has passed since that contest, even students who assiduously drafted slogans that day, are unlikely to even remember the name any more.

Without a face-to-face introduction, conservation is not possible. Too many issues of pressing concern like climate change and water for example, languish in alienation. A more involved approach should be attempted if the earnestness of the young is to be leveraged to reinforce conservation efforts. A talk on Gyamtsona will excite interest, but a longer lasting commitment to conservation will require a visit to the marsh that it has become now and hearing the yak herders speak of what the Ocean in the Sky used to once be like. But that is no longer easily arranged anymore because visiting the lake requires army clearance even for locals, and this is not easily organized. In fact, it was the hardening of the border which killed the lake. As the border with Tibet was closed even for the Dokpas [yak herders of North Sikkim] despite the fact that their lifestyle had evolved to include seasonal migrations across the passes, army was deployed in huge numbers to guard the border. The cold desert of North Sikkim was never bountiful and the Dokpas knew this well, which is why they lived scattered across the pastures and moved often to allow the limited natural resources to replenish. When the army was stationed in this sparse land, they arrived without enough briefing on minimizing their footprint and unlettered on the requirements of conservation. Experts believe that it was the diversion of a small stream draining into Gyamtsona by the armed forces personnel stationed there some decades back which eventually led to its drying up. This lake is a remnant of the Tethys Sea, which means it was formed at the time when the Himalaya was created by the crushing together of two continental plates. A lake of such antiquity should have occupied a special place and should have been handled with much more respect than the senseless intrusion which killed it.

Saving what remains of Gyamtsona and achieving any meaningful progress towards conservation will have to begin with more direct introductions to what is at stake. This is not empty speculation. Most children in Gangtok do not know where the water they get in their taps at home comes from. Inviting them to get involved in conservation efforts around Ratey Chu will thus fetch only superficial engagement. Conservation efforts will also require for the personnel posted in the forward regions [which are invariably more ecologically fragile] to first undergo a detailed briefing on what makes the regions special and what their environmental code of conduct should be like. And then Sikkim needs to sponsor more visits by experts to study and document these regions better so that even the State is better informed and speaks with more conviction when it speaks of conservation.

China's three-child policy is unlikely to be welcomed by working women

JIEYU LIU
THECONVERSATION.COM

China's new policy of allowing couples to have three children (replacing the previous limit of two) is an attempt to respond to ageing population concerns and a slowing birth rate. But the policy's implications for working women and their families mean few will welcome the change with open arms.

Population ageing is a significant concern in China. According to the latest national census in November 2020, the number of people in the country aged 60 and above has reached 260 million – or 18.7% of the population. By 2050, this number is expected to increase to 500 million.

Though societies are ageing around the world, the challenges are more acute in China due to the number of people involved (nearly 20% of the global population), their relatively low income level, and the country's stage of economic development.

While improved living standards have increased life expectancy, the state's family planning policy – the "one-child policy" – has contributed most to the ageing trend. This policy was formally introduced in 1979 in response to concerns that uncontrolled population growth would jeopardise economic development and modernisation, and was strictly and effectively implemented in urban areas through workplace fines and other punitive measures.

But almost four decades on, the first generation of one-child policy children have now become parents themselves, placing on their shoulders the responsibility of potentially

each having to support two parents and four grandparents.

To address this inverse population pyramid, the state ended the one-child policy in 2015, introducing a national two-child policy in its place. Since the state had already (from the mid-1980s) allowed rural couples to have a second child if their first was a girl, this new policy targeted the urban population.

But few couples – just 5% or 6% – opted for a second child, given the inadequate childcare and increased family living costs in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai.

The new three-child policy has sparked a wave of online discussion among Chinese citizens, with many expressing shock and resentment about the state's renewed efforts to manipulate citizens' childbearing decisions.

Some posted online pictures of previous state slogans dating from the period of the one-child policy. One such slogan stated, "if one person exceeds the birth quota, the villagers of the whole village have to undergo tubal ligation".

Social media discussions among women commented on how unfairly the new policy initiative would affect their employment and family life, given that childcare remains a woman's job in China. Only a very small minority were hopeful that implementation of the three-child policy would lead the state to improve housing, education, medical and old-age care facilities.

URBAN V RURAL

The policy's impact will depend on where in China you look. In major cities and provincial capitals, my five-year study of Chinese family life

reveals that only a very small proportion of couples born in the 1980s – the first cohort of the "only-child generation" – had a second child even once they were allowed.

So it seems unlikely that couples of the 1980s cohort would take advantage of the three-child allowance. Married interviewees born in the 1990s, acclimatised to only-child culture, have adopted a "wait and see" approach towards the possibility of having even a second child.

The comments of one interviewee (born in 1991) capture the dilemma facing him and his wife as they contemplate a second child:

It's possible. But I won't be making the final decision. If my wife suffers a lot from bringing up our first child, we will definitely not have a second child. Before their first child arrived, many of my friends were so confident in their plans to have a second child. But as soon as they had their first child, they all hesitated to have a second one. We will see if our future financial situation allows and it will also depend on whether our parents are in good health.

Younger couples in urban areas also showed no strong preference for sons.

By contrast, my study found that in rural areas many of the married cohorts of the 1980s and 1990s already had a second child. Whether or not rural couples respond positively to the new three-child policy will depend on the genders of their existing two children.

Despite the increased investment in girls' education in rural China, I found consistent son preference across three generations. If a couple's two children are both

girls, it is therefore highly likely that they will try to have a third child. Indeed, in rural Fujian, where there is a much stronger lineage culture and custom than in many northern provinces, some villagers born in the early 1990s already had three or four children in their efforts to produce a boy heir.

THE BURDEN OF CARE

Having three children will have gendered and generational consequences. Gender discrimination is deeply institutionalised in the Chinese labour market. When asked if they planned to have a second child, some of my women interviewees acknowledged that their employers' unwillingness to bear the costs of their reproductive decisions made it difficult to decide. Unless gender discrimination in the labour market is addressed systematically, choosing to have three children will have a detrimental effect on women's employment trajectory.

The limited provision of childcare availability for infants under the age of three means that when a new mother's maternity leave ends (currently after around four months), her mother or mother-in-law will take on childcare responsibilities for their new grandchild. Given the shortage of good quality care homes for elderly people, these grandparents will also have to care for their own parents. In short, having three children will serve only to increase the burden of care on all generations.

[The writer is Reader in Sociology of China and Deputy Director of China Institute, SOAS, University of London]

Deforestation is driven by global markets



RUBEN VALBUENA & THOMAS LOVEJOY
THECONVERSATION.COM

The world is at a crossroads, as humanity tries to mitigate climate change and halt biodiversity loss, while still securing a supply of food for everyone. A recent study in Nature Communications shows that global demands for commodities, especially in connection with agricultural development, are the main drivers of land use change in the global south.

A land use change is defined as a permanent or long-term conversion in the type of cover of an area of land, for instance from forest to urban use, agricultural crops or savanna, or vice versa. The researchers used modern satellite technology, now able to detect changes like deforestation in near real time, to evaluate global trends.

They suggest global land use changes may be happening at a much higher rate than previously thought. The authors found that 17% of the Earth's land surface has undergone change at least once since 1960, which works out to an area the size of Germany every year. Over that period there was a net forest loss of 0.8 million km², while agricultural crops expanded by 1 million km² and rangelands and pastures by 0.9 million km². No wonder the conversion of forests into agriculture has been flagged by both the Paris Agreement on climate change and its conservation equivalent the Convention on Biological Diversity, as one of the major causes of deforestation.

To halt the destruction of natural habitats, we urgently need to incorporate our "natural capital" – in this case, the environmental benefits of forests and other key ecosystems – into global and national economics. This would be in line with the recommendations of the Dasgupta Review on The Economics of Biodiversity, commissioned by the UK Treasury.

Creating and maintaining woodlands, wet-

lands and other key ecosystems should become more economically worthwhile than activities like agriculture or mining, or producing fossil fuels, plastics or cement. These activities harm our planet yet still receive US\$5 trillion in subsidies and other economic incentives each year, according to the recent United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report Making Peace with Nature.

In practice, this would mean governments subsidising local communities directly to maintain the natural habitats surrounding them, including prevention of wildfires, sustainable use of forest products, managed environmental tourism, to name some examples. This would maintain local communities and encourage them to preserve ecosystems, rather than destroy them to grow crops.

Forest restoration incentives are already bearing fruit in China, and the new study shows the tide of deforestation is being turned in most of the US, Europe and Australia. However the trend in the global south is the opposite, and its evolution over time shows clear connections with global trade and demands for commodities such as beef, sugar cane, soybean, oil palm and cocoa.

While the rate of land use change has decreased in the world overall since 2005, the production and export of commodity crops has expanded in the global south in that period. The above graph from the new study shows decreases in land use change occurring during economic recessions like those in 2007-2009 and also the 1970s energy crises.

There are clear links between land use change and global market demands. Over the long term, the general trend has been an increase in economic production mostly associated with environmental destruction. Even moments of

environmental awakening such as the major conventions in 1992 could not stop the destruction, as the population continued to grow and consumption increased, shrugging off the constraints of frugality learned in the Great Depression and then reinforced by rationing in the second world war. As the new study shows, in recent decades economic growth in the northern hemisphere has depended in large degree on resource destruction in the developing world.

Much more will be needed to reverse deforestation in the global south, and national subsidies and conservation measures are not enough. We need a system that actually counteracts global markets. We are convinced the solution lies in how each nation calculates its overall income, which nowadays is just done as gross domestic product, or GDP.

The Dasgupta Review set the basis for such national income accounting of natural assets, primarily focusing on ecosystem services – natural pollination, provision of clean air and water, and so on. We would go further and add biodiversity itself – the extension of primeval habitats, or species and genetic richness, for instance. If accounting for such natural assets becomes routine, we believe the global economic system would pay them as much attention as to the more conventional GDP. Such a move would go a long way toward respecting and conserving the planet's biodiversity and ecosystems.

If not, we will keep undermining them and running down the planet's ability to support the inseparable: intertwined human wellbeing and the rest of life on Earth.

[Ruben Valbuena is Lecturer in Forest Sciences, Bangor University; Thomas Lovejoy is Senior Fellow, UN Foundation and University Professor, George Mason University]

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Nepal's DV lottery winners dejected as visa eligibility deadline nears

SHUVAM DHUNGANA

KATHMANDU, 10 JUN [KATHMANDUPOST]: Bhim Kunwar, 24, from Tikapur of Kailali, was thrilled when he won the US Diversity Visa (DV) lottery in his second attempt, in May 2020. Although at that time the country was under a nationwide lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Kunwar was hopeful that things would become normal and his visa application would be processed.

"After winning the DV lottery, I had started dreaming of my future in the US. My case number was below 3,000, so I had a better chance of getting selected. However, due to the embassy closure, the application process has stalled," said Kunwar, who lives with two brothers, a sister and their parents in Tikapur. He was a bachelor's second year student but quit his studies after winning the lottery.

Kunwar is hopeful that the embassy will reopen soon and his visa process will start immediately. "This year has been very frustrating and depressing for me and my family, but we have not lost hope because there are still three months left," Kunwar told the Post over the phone from Kailali.

Each year, the US awards as many as 55,000 green cards to immigrants from countries around the world including Nepal through its

diversity visa lottery programme in a bid to promote diversity in the US.

However, in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, many diversity visa winners have been unable to cash in on the opportunity. By law, diversity visa eligibility expires at the end of the US fiscal year, on September 30. But as the pandemic has shut the US consular services, the clock is ticking on Kunwar and many other winners.

Nirmal is another DV lottery winner who has been waiting for the final interview at the US embassy, Kathmandu. "I had applied with my wife and I won the lottery in my very first attempt. We were very happy and excited," said Nirmal, who wished to identify himself only by his first name.

"It looks like the Covid-19 pandemic is not ending anytime soon, so the embassy should start the interview process soon," Nirmal told the Post on the phone. "We are ready to follow all the safety protocols and provide a negative PCR report while appearing for the interview," said Nirmal.

According to Anna Richey-Allen, spokesperson for the US Embassy in Kathmandu, their office will remain closed for all routine services as long as Kathmandu remains under lockdown.

"Once we are able to re-



open, we will begin processing the backlog of immigrant visa applications in a manner that safeguards the health and safety of our personnel, applicants, and the public," Allen told the Post in an email interview.

"We will prioritise immigrant visa applicants whose appointments were cancelled due to the lockdown and resume immigrant visa services following the guidance established by the US Department of State."

However, as September 30 is just about four months away and no visa interview has been conducted to date, hundreds of Nepali DV lottery winners are in fear of losing their possibly once-in-a-lifetime chance to build a

life in America.

When the Post asked about the possibility of the embassy extending the visa application deadline for Nepali DV lottery winners, spokesperson Allen said the DV-2021 winners may only be interviewed in the fiscal year 2021 or by September 30. According to her, the winners may re-enter the Diversity Visa program in future years.

"We acknowledge the stress and hardships all visa petitioners and applicants have borne during the past year of the Embassy's reduced operating capacity as a result of COVID-19. Our measures have been necessary to protect health and safety and to comply with local require-

ments in support of the Government of Nepal's efforts to control the pandemic, as well as COVID-related limitations on travel or visa issuance," said Allen.

"Prioritising family reunification takes prominence under the United States' immigration policy and law, as expressed in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). The US Congress has specifically set forth that the [US State] Department must adopt a policy of prioritising immediate relative visa applicants and K-1 fiancées of US citizens, followed by family preference immigrant visa applicants," Allen told the Post.

Amid the fear of losing the opportunity, many peo-

ple have come to social media with hashtags #SaveDiversityVisa and #wakeupeusembassy. "It has become a year of patience and hope. It has become a year of dreaming for DV selectees. One year felt like decades. We hope our @USEmbassyNepal #WakeUpUSEmbassyNepal consider us and start our interviews ASAP. We can't see our dreams shattered like this. SAVE #DV2021," wrote a twitter user.

The embassy closure has not only affected DV lottery winners but also many students, who want to pursue higher studies in the US.

Frustrated at the embassy closure, a student from Nepal, Nischal Katuwal, launched an online petition titled "The US embassy in Nepal needs to open visa interview slots for F1 visa candidates."

The petition has been signed by over 3,405 people.

"The US embassy has been closed for F1 visa interviews since March 2020 and all candidates who were applying for Fall 2020/Spring 2021 had to defer their admissions to Fall 2021. We sacrificed a year in our education and some of us even lost scholarships to promote safety and comply with COVID-19 guidelines. However, when the embassy reopened with interview dates in 2021

with very few slots, they canceled appointments with no information about when we would be able to book interview dates again," states the petition.

When the Post asked Allen if they are planning to conduct visa interviews virtually, Allen said that under the US law and regulations, applicants for immigrant and nonimmigrant visas are required to appear in person before a consular officer except in limited circumstances where they qualify for an interview waiver.

"Applicants who are renewing visas may see if they qualify to apply for renewal without an interview by reviewing the requirements," Allen told the Post.

According to Allen, the US Embassy in Kathmandu will restart visa-related work as soon as they are able to reopen after the government of Nepal lifts the lockdown in Kathmandu and allows applicants to travel for their interview.

Meanwhile, Nirmal feels the government of Nepal should intervene to help them. "The Minister for Foreign Affairs should take up our concerns seriously and ask the embassy to start the interviews," he said.

"Many of us are in mental stress as our US dreams are shattering in front of our eyes."

Assam launches "Nishtha Covid Sanchar" to monitor patients in home care

GUWAHATI, 10 JUN

[NDTV]: Assam on Wednesday launched a platform to remotely monitor Covid patients who are in home isolation in the state's Kamrup metro district. NISHTHA Covid Sanchar, which works through Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS), has been introduced in the state with support from United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) flagship project that has also been implemented by Jhpiego - a non-profit affiliated with US' Johns Hopkins University.

The platform, launched by Pomi Baruah, Officer on Special Duty (OSD), Assam National Health Mission (NHM) yesterday, aims to help authorities provide Covid patients access

to right care at the right time.

Speaking at the launch, Ms Baruah said that this new initiative will help the state monitor Covid patients and ensure that everyone has access to healthcare services. She also spoke about how the new partnership with US-AID will go a long way in effectively managing the state's response to COVID-19.

During the launch, Sangita Patel, Director, Health Office, USAID spoke about the organisation's commitment to support the state government of Assam.

She highlighted the need to create a strong, responsive, accessible, sustainable, and affordable primary healthcare system that is better prepared to manage future

public health threats and improve the health outcomes of the marginalised and vulnerable populations.

She also appreciated the new initiative which will help in early detection of Covid symptoms and enable linking them to appropriate care.

Dr Bulbul Sood, Country Director, Jhpiego, thanked the Assam government for collaborating with US-AID-NISHTHA to roll out the initiative that will help build a stronger and more responsive health system to address the needs of the communities.

NISHTHA Covid Sanchar model will ensure regular monitoring of patients and following up with those under home isolation and early identification of symp-

tomatic cases. This is a hybrid model that will be deployed using the IVRS technology, web-based google form, and tele-calling by trained human resources to ensure a seamless operation.

This IVRS-based initiative will augment the state's comprehensive efforts towards COVID-19 which will go a long way in increasing the recovery rates and thereby, reducing overall morbidity and mortality due to COVID-19.

Assam reported 3,751 fresh cases of coronavirus in 24 hours Wednesday with 55 deaths. The state has logged 4,46,445 Covid cases so far. There are 48,499 active cases in the state and 32,703 are in home isolation.

CBI files new case against Arunachal's ex-CM Nabam Tuki for "corruption"

NEW DELHI, 10 JUN

[PTI]: The CBI has registered a fresh case (FIR) against former Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Nabam Tuki for alleged "nepotism" and "corruption" related to a contract for construction of a Kendriya Vidyalaya school boundary wall in Salt Lake area of Kolkata, officials

said.

The CBI, after doing a preliminary enquiry, has alleged that officials of the Public Works Department, Arunachal Pradesh awarded the tender to firms controlled by family members of Nabam Tuki, the then minister of PWD in the state, at his behest without invit-



ing tenders, which caused wrongful loss to the state government and corresponding "wrongful" gain to the minister and relatives.

The work to

Arunachal Pradesh PWD was awarded by the then Commissioner of Kendriya Vidyalaya suo motu in 2005 despite the fact it "did not have required establishment and wherewithal" in Salt Lake area where construction was to take place.

Odisha districts on alert as weather office warns of extremely heavy rainfall

BHUBANESWAR, 10 JUN:

Odisha Special Relief Commissioner-cum-Additional Chief Secretary Pradeep Jena on Thursday directed all the District collectors and Municipal Commissioners to make all necessary arrangement after the India Meteorological Department (IMD) warned of five days of heavy rains in the state.

In a letter to all the District collectors and Municipal Commissioners, Pradeep Jena said: "As predicted by IMD, under the influence of low pressure is likely to be formed over North Bay of Bengal and neighbourhood around June 11, 2021, widespread rainfall ac-

tivity with isolated heavy to very heavy rainfall and extremely heavy rainfall very likely to occur over a large number of districts of Odisha during 10th to 14th June 2021."

He said that during such intense and continued rainfall, flash flood/flood-like situations may occur in different rivers, nullah and water bodies. In hilly areas, landslides may occur. Waterlogging may be experienced in different parts including urban/low-lying areas.

He further directed the administrations to take precautionary measures to prevent any damage to life and property during the period.

Suggesting the steps

to the authorities Mr Jena said, "The control rooms of all the offices dealing with flood/disaster management must operate round the clock with adequate manpower. It must be under the charge of a responsible officer on a 24x7 basis."

He further said that the field level functionaries to be in readiness to meet any eventuality including the possibility of landslides in hilly areas.

District administrations of landslide-prone districts are to take special precautionary measures to prevent damage and to make arrangement for evacuating people from vulnerable areas if required. "All cyclone and

flood shelters should be kept in readiness in all respect to evacuate people from in kutcha houses/hut and low-lying areas."

He also said that the flood-fighting materials may be kept ready at strategic places and immediate action may be taken to prevent any breach or to close the breach, damage of roads if any.

Urban Local Bodies are also instructed to make advance arrangements for dewatering from the areas likely to face waterlogging.

Local Fire personnel may be instructed to be in readiness with boat and other equipment for search, rescue and relief operation, as and when required.


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Ukraine's Euro 2020 shirt to keep Crimea design, lose slogan

NYON, Switzerland (AP): Ukraine must modify its team shirt for the European Championship after UEFA on Thursday upheld part of a Russian complaint about slogans and a map that included Crimea.

The yellow-and-blue shirt design unveiled on Sunday angered Russian officials by including an outline of Ukraine's land territory with the Crimea region which Russia annexed in 2014.

The fresh UEFA ruling allows the map to stay on the shirt, in line with international law which recognizes the Russian annexation as illegal.

However, one of the two slogans woven into the inside of the shirt collar — "Glory to the heroes" — must be removed. "Glory to Ukraine" can remain visible on the back of the shirt's neck.

Russian lawmakers linked the two slogans together as being used by Ukrainian nationalists, some of whom fought with the Nazis against the Soviet Union in World War II.

UEFA said it approved "Glory to the heroes" last December, separate from the other slogan which was allowed two years earlier.

"Following further analysis, this specific combination of the two slogans is deemed to be clearly political in nature, having historic and militaristic significance," UEFA said.

Euro 2020 kicks off on Friday, though Ukraine and Russia cannot play each other unless both advance deep into the 24-nation tournament.

A UEFA rule in place since 2014 separates the countries' national teams and club teams to prevent them from being drawn together.

Ukraine starts on Sunday against the Netherlands in Amsterdam.

Italy asks to replace injured Pellegrini with Castrovilli

ROME (AP): Italy asked UEFA for permission to replace injured midfielder Lorenzo Pellegrini with Gaetano Castrovilli on Thursday, a day before facing Turkey in the European Championship's opening match.

Pellegrini re-aggravated an injury to his left thigh that kept him out of two recent warmup games for Euro 2020.

Teams can replace injured players in their 26-man squads until 24 hours before kickoff of their opening game; and injured goalkeepers at any time.

Pellegrini was not expected to be a starter.

Italy enters the tournament opener on a 27-match unbeaten run.

A year late, Italy and Turkey play opening game at Euro 2020

ROME (AP): Somehow it seems appropriate that Italy, the first country in Europe that was overwhelmed by the coronavirus pandemic, is hosting the opening game of the European Championship.

Even if Euro 2020 is kicking off in 2021.

The biggest crowd to gather in Italy for a year and a half will witness an Azzurri squad aiming for the title play a Turkey team aiming to spring a surprise on Friday at Stadio Olimpico in Rome.

"We've been waiting a year for this European Championship and we can't wait to experience hearing 15,000 people singing the national anthem," veteran Italy defender Leonardo Bonucci said. "Soccer with fans inside the stadium is a different sport."

After embarrassingly failing to qualify for the 2018 World Cup, Italy won all 10 of its qualifying matches for Euro 2020 and enters on a 27-match unbeaten run.

"We want to go all the way," Bonucci said. "Other national teams have more experience but we can play with anyone. We don't have a (Romelu) Lukaku or a Cristiano Ronaldo. Our strength is the team."

Turkey took four points off France in qualifying, including a 2-0 win over the World Cup champions, and lost



only one of its matches to finish second in its group.

"Being in this tournament and playing in the opening match makes us proud," Turkey coach Şenol Güneş said. "In every opening game there are surprises and I hope we can also spring one."

The matchup also features some political undertones after Italian Premier Mario Draghi labeled Turkey President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan a "dictator" in April. Turkey summoned Italy's ambassador to protest, and a presidential spokesman demanded that Draghi retract his words. Draghi, however, did not issue a public apology or retraction.

Draghi is not expected to attend the match

since he'll be in Britain on Friday attending a G7 summit. Erdogan is also not expected to attend.

Wales and Switzerland, the other two teams in Group A, meet in Baku, Azerbaijan, on Saturday.

This year's tournament is being played in 11 cities scattered across the European continent.

FAN PROTOCOLS
The Italian government decided that the Stadio Olimpico can be filled to 25% capacity for the four games it will host.

That amounts to a maximum of 15,948 spectators.

Ticket-holders need to show one of three documents to enter

the Stadio Olimpico: either a certificate from Italian health authorities showing they have been vaccinated against COVID-19, another document from Italian health authorities showing they have recovered from the coronavirus within six months, or a negative test result issued within 48 hours of kickoff.

While more than 2,000 tickets for the opening game were sold in Turkey, many of those fans are not expected to travel to the match.

STRONG DEFENSES
Italy has won its past eight matches without conceding a goal and has 20 clean sheets in 32 matches since Roberto Mancini took over as coach.

While record-set-

ting

goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon retired from international soccer after the failed World Cup qualification, Italy remains solid at the position with 22-year-old Gianluigi Donnarumma now between the posts. Also, Bonucci and Italy captain Giorgio Chiellini form a strong and experienced pairing in central defense.

One of Turkey's main strengths is also its solidity at the back. It allowed only three goals in qualifying and managed to keep forwards Memphis Depay and Erling Haaland scoreless in recent World Cup qualifiers.

HIGH SCORERS
Both sides are also strong at center forward.

Ciro Immobile won the European Golden Shoe award when he matched the Serie A record with 36 goals in 2019-20.

Burak Yilmaz is Turkey's second second highest scorer of all time, with his 29 goals putting him behind only the retired Hakan Şükür (51 goals).

OPERA AND AIRPLANES
Andrea Bocelli will sing the Giacomo Puccini aria "Nessun Dorma" during the tournament's opening ceremony preceding kickoff.

The ceremony will also feature a virtual performance by U2 stars Bono and The Edge with the DJ Martin Garrix.

Nadal's French Open set streak ended earlier Wednesday. His pursuit of a record-breaking 21st Grand Slam title — and what would be a 14th in Paris alone — remained very much intact, however.

Nadal shrugged off dropping a set at his favorite event for the first time in two years by whipping violent forehands punctuated with fist pumps and yells of "Vamos!" en route to a 6-3, 4-6, 6-4, 6-0 victory over 10th-seeded Diego Schwartzman.

"For anybody, it's very difficult to play against him. He's feeling very comfortable on court," Schwartzman said after falling to 1-11 against Nadal. "He's Rafa, and he's always finding the way."

Nadal reached his 14th semifinal in Paris; Djokovic his 11th. It's Djokovic's 40th trip to the final four at any major, Nadal's 35th. Nadal and Roger Federer share the men's mark of 20 Grand Slam titles; Djokovic is at 18.

The semifinal will be the superstar duo's 58th matchup, more than any other two men in the sport's professional era; Djokovic leads 29-28. But Nadal is ahead 10-6 in Slam meetings, 7-1 at the French Open.

"I'm confident. I believe I can win," Djokovic said. "Otherwise, I wouldn't be here."

Chris Paul has another big night, Suns rout Nuggets 123-98

PHOENIX (AP): Chris Paul is a 36-year-old man who can still put together an NBA point guard's version of a virtuoso performance: Fifteen assists, no turnovers and it led to another blowout playoff victory for his rolling Phoenix Suns.

"I feel good," Paul said. "I feel really good."

Apparently so. The ageless Paul added 17 points, Devin Booker had 18 points and 10 rebounds and Phoenix routed the Denver Nuggets 123-98 on Wednesday night to take a 2-0 lead in the Western Conference semifinals.

Deandre Ayton had 15 points and 10 rebounds, and Mikal Bridges added 16 points for the balanced Suns in their fifth straight victory.

Paul was particularly impressive and it appears his ailing right shoulder — which greatly limited his play against the Los Angeles Lakers in the first round — isn't much of a problem anymore. The 11-time All-Star had 21 points and 11 assists in Game 1.

Nikola Jokic had 24 points and 13 rebounds for Denver, a day after getting the NBA's Most Valuable Player award. But the Nuggets couldn't find anyone else to score consistently, leaving them

reeling going back to Denver for Game 3 on Friday night.

"This was an embarrassing performance for myself all the way to the last player," Denver coach Michael Malone said. "We are walking out here with our heads held down and rightfully so. There was a reason that their crowd was yelling 'Suns in four!' and they are calling for a sweep because if we play like this in Denver, this is going to be a really quick series."

Later, Malone added he felt the Nuggets "quit tonight, which is something that you never want to see."

Said Jokic: "They are playing better than us. They are making shots, being more aggressive, finding the open man. It looks real bad out there. We need to change everything."

The Suns had a 10-point halftime lead and Jae Crowder added a pair of 3-pointers early in the third to make it 60-43. Phoenix took an 86-67 advantage into the fourth. The Suns led by 31 in the final quarter as they relentlessly pushed the ball even as the lead built.

"It's the NBA — crazy things can happen no matter how big of a lead you have," Suns forward Torrey Craig said.

Crowder had another good night as the Suns' long-range shooter and enforcer. He and Denver's Aaron Gordon were each called for a technical foul after they exchanged words and shoves midway through the third. On the next possession, Crowder coaxed Gordon into committing an offensive foul, much to the delight of the 16,529 at Phoenix Suns Arena.

"It was one of our better defensive halves of the year against a good offensive team," Suns coach Monty Williams said. "We were relentless with our effort, our communication and coverages."

Crowder said he isn't seeking to be the team's enforcer but the moments keep finding him. He joked that he's already given to much money to the NBA in the form of fines during this postseason.

"I got to be smart and protect my money a little," he added grinning.

Paul pushed the sellout crowd into a frenzy in the fourth, throwing his 15th assist to Craig after criss-crossing around helpless Denver forward Paul Millsap. Paul then hit a pair of 3-pointers and the celebration was on in the desert with the Suns rolling in their first playoff appearance in

11 seasons.

"It got a little loud, then it got really loud, then it got crazy," Paul said

Phoenix took a 52-42 halftime lead after a sloppy first half where both teams struggled to generate offense. Denver was shaky with its long range shooting, making just 1 of 13 3-pointers in the first quarter.

Booker had 13 points before the break. Jokic countered with 15 points.

HURTING NUGGETS
Some of Denver's better players are dealing with injuries, including forward Michael Porter Jr. (back) and guard Will Barton (hamstring). Both were listed on the injury report.

Porter started and played 27 minutes, finishing with 11 points and six rebounds but shot just 3 of 13 from the field. Barton played for the first time in about six weeks, entering the game late in the first quarter. He played 16 minutes and had 10 points and was also called for a technical foul in the third.

TIP-INS
Nuggets: Guards PJ Dozier (right adductor strain) and Jamal Murray (left ACL surgery) didn't play. ... Millsap had 11 points and six rebounds.

Suns: Forward Abdel Nader (right knee arthroscopy) didn't play. ... The Suns had a 52-46 rebounding advantage.

No. 1 Djokovic, 13-time French champ Nadal to meet in semis

PARIS (AP): Novak Djokovic wheeled toward his guest box in a nearly empty Court Philippe Chatrier as midnight neared and let out one yell, two yells, three, four.

Once two points from a straight-set victory and seemingly well on his way to a French Open semifinal showdown against Rafael Nadal, Djokovic had to deal with so much that went awry: consecutive unforced errors that gave away a tiebreaker; a 21 1/2-minute delay while spectators left because of a COVID-19 curfew; a face-down tumble that drew blood from his left palm.

Still, the top-seeded Djokovic held on and moved on, pulling out the quarterfinal victory against No. 9 Berrettini 6-3, 6-2, 6-7 (5), 7-5 Wednesday night.

"This match had it all: falls, crowd, break. It was a lot of intensity. I just felt under tension the entire time," Djokovic said. "The reaction (at) the end was just me liberating that tension that was building up for the entire match."

Now comes a semifinal Friday against a familiar foe in a rematch of last year's Roland Garros final, but a round earlier: Nadal, who is 105-2 in the clay-court tournament.

"We know each other well," the third-seeded Nadal said. "Everybody knows that in these kind of matches, anything can

happen."

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Spain hopes 2 infected players will be back for Euros

MADRID (AP): Spain hopes captain Sergio Busquets and Diego Llorente will still have an impact on the European Championship after both players tested positive for the coronavirus.

Llorente's positive test on Tuesday may have been erroneous after further tests came back negative, coach Luis Enrique said on Thursday. The Leeds defender will undergo more tests on Thursday and Friday. If he clears those, the team said in a statement he can return to the squad before Spain's first match on Monday against Sweden.

Spain's preparations were thrown off after Busquets tested positive last Sunday. Players who test positive must stay in isolation for at least 10 days, meaning Busquets would miss the opener against Sweden.

Luis Enrique said of the Barcelona midfielder that "we are going to wait for him."

"The good thing is that he has time on his side. Busquets will be on the squad, no doubt," Luis Enrique said. "Busquets is fine, without symptoms, so he can train and stay in shape. We hope that it can all end up in a scare."

In Group E, Spain also plays Poland on June 19 and Slovakia on June 23 in Seville.

As Iran prepares to vote, its battered economy a major worry

TEHRAN, IRAN (AP): Almost six years ago, Iranians poured into the streets to celebrate Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers. They saw it as a chance for the Islamic Republic to re-enter the world economy and create opportunities like purchasing airplanes and selling its oil on the international market.

Today, that dream has faded into a daily grinding nightmare of high inflation, an ever-weakening national currency and high unemployment worsened by the coronavirus pandemic.

The West considers Iran's nuclear program and Mideast tensions as the most important issues facing Tehran, but those living in the Islamic Republic repeatedly point to the economy as the major issue facing it ahead of its June 18 presidential election.

Whoever takes the presidency after the relatively moderate President Hassan Rouhani will face the unenviable task of trying to reform Iran's largely state-controlled economy. Efforts to privatize it have seen corruption allegations swirl as many lose their life savings and nationwide protests rage.

"One day they said the nuclear deal was accepted, everyone was happy, the dollar rate went down over one day," said Mohammad Molaei, a 50-year-old commodities trader. "Then things start to happen. Missiles are fired. The nuclear deal is bust. One tears it apart, the other burns it. Only the people lose."

Iran's economic freefall accelerated when then-President Donald Trump in 2018 unilaterally withdrew America from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers.



That saw crushing sanctions target Iran, hurting its already ailing economy.

Perhaps nothing illustrates the crisis gripping Iran's economy as well as the battering of its currency, the rial. In July 2015 amid those raucous nuclear deal celebrations, \$1 bought some 32,000 rials. Today, \$1 buys 238,000 rials.

The weakening of the rial has seen the value of the money Iranians hold in the bank collapse, as well as the decimation of retiree benefits. The price of milk has risen by 90%, while the cost of imported foreign goods like mobile phones and electronics has skyrocketed.

Iranians able to exchange their rials for foreign currencies have bought precious metals like gold or invested in real estate. Those property purchases have fueled a spike in housing values, pricing people out of the market.

"In the past, buying a place to live in was a dream for the people," said Salimi, a 48-year-old man who declined to give his first name in order to speak freely with Associated Press journalists in Tehran's Grand Bazaar. "But ... unfortunately now rent-

ing a house has become a dream as well, because of the inefficiency of the officials, especially the president, who gave empty promises and deceived the people."

Salimi added: "Why is that? Are land, housing materials and workers under sanctions?"

The Tehran stock exchange became another refuge sought by investors, which saw its value shoot up to 2 million points in August 2020 as the government encouraged the public to buy. But values dropped by nearly half and now hover around 1.1 million points as some investors remain stuck with stocks they can't sell.

"The biggest challenge for the next president is to restore trust and confidence to the stock market," said Mahdi Samavati, a prominent economic analyst who runs his own investment firm. "Restoring confidence to the market is very difficult. The people have been seeing their money melting away for nine to 10 months. The longer the crash takes, the longer it would take to fix things and bring back the trust."

It's not immediately clear how the next Iranian president will handle

the economy, particularly if hard-liners take over and if Tehran doesn't reach an agreement on returning to the nuclear deal, which limits its atomic program and restores sanctions relief. President Joe Biden says he's willing for the U.S. to return, but weeks of negotiations in Vienna have yet to see public progress.

Iranian leaders in the past have relied on populist programs, such as cash handouts and subsidized housing. Without the hard currency of oil sales, Iran likely would need to print more rials to fund those programs, which in turn would lower the rial's value further. That would fuel Iran's high inflation, making goods even more expensive.

"If the (next) government prints money to fulfil those promises, without a doubt we will have an unleashed growth in inflation," Samavati said.

During the first televised presidential debate in Iran, former Central Bank chief Abdolnasser Hemmati warned that as an economist, he didn't see a way to fund the "colorful and fascinating promises" of his rivals.

"These friends are

not talking about distributing wealth, they are talking about distributing poverty," he said.

Hemmati, viewed as the sole surrogate for the outgoing Rouhani in the election, came under withering criticism from much of the field. The exception was hardline judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi, the presumed front-runner, who sought to appear above the fray.

"Different classes of people have started shouting about the inefficiencies, cruelty, poverty, discrimination and corruption," Raisi said.

Former Revolutionary Guard commander Mohsen Rezaei discussed Iran's dire economy by repeatedly referring to the desperately poor "eating out of trash cans." But none of the candidates apart from Hemmati offered any specific thoughts on economic policy, other than to promise more aid for the poor.

Salimi, the man in the bazaar, said he would still vote for hard-liners and would support Iran's theocracy no matter the challenges ahead. He blamed Rouhani for the nation's woes and said he'd vote for Raisi.

"I have no worries for my children. ... They are the children of the revolution," he said. "They won't bow down to difficulties."

Molaei, the commodities trader, said he hoped to send his children abroad for a better life as many other Iranians have.

"We have been wasted. When I opened my eyes (after birth) there was the revolution, and then came the (Iran-Iraq) war and killing and bloodshed," he said. "I've been working ever since then."

China says US revoking of China apps ban a 'positive step'

BEIJING (AP): China's Ministry of Commerce said Thursday that a U.S. move to revoke the Trump administration's executive orders intended to ban apps like TikTok and WeChat was a "positive step," amid strained relations between the two countries. "We hope that the US will treat Chinese companies fairly and avoid politicizing economic and trade issues," ministry spokesperson Gao Feng said at a regular news briefing Thursday.

Gao said the U.S. move to revoke previous government actions against apps such as TikTok and WeChat was a "positive step in the right direction."

The White House on Wednesday revoked some blanket-style orders made under former President Donald Trump against Chinese apps including the messaging app WeChat, short video app TikTok and the Alipay payments app. A new executive order from President Joe Biden said the U.S. would conduct an "evidence-based" analysis of transactions involving apps that are created, supplied or controlled by China.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated at a daily news briefing that China will continue to defend its interests. It urged the U.S. "to stop generalizing the concept of national security and abusing state power to suppress Chinese technology enterprises."

Courts blocked the Trump administration's efforts last year to ban TikTok and WeChat, but the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) is still conducting a national-security review of TikTok.

The Biden administration's stance reflects

concern that users' personal data could be exposed by popular apps tied to China if the ruling Communist Party pressures companies to share data.

The administration said in February that it was replacing Trump's approach with a more targeted strategy. It has not actually weighed in yet on whether TikTok and other apps pose a danger to Americans.

A senior administration official said Wednesday that the Trump actions weren't "always implemented in the soundest fashion." The aim of the review is to set clear criteria to evaluate specific data security and privacy risks for each app, he said.

That could lead to a range of potential future actions on an app-by-app basis.

"We want to take a tailored, tough approach here," he said.

CFIUS had set deadlines for TikTok to divest its U.S. operations, but such a sale has not happened.

Last week, the Biden administration expanded a list of Chinese companies on a blacklist from the Trump era purported to have links to Chinese military and surveillance. American companies and individuals cannot invest in these companies, which include telecommunications gear supplier Huawei and Chinese oil company China National Offshore Oil Corp.

Chinese officials and companies have denied that their products and services pose a security threat.

Relations between Beijing and Washington remain testy, with each side having imposed sanctions including tariffs on each others' exports.

China's legislature passed legislation Thursday laying down the legal basis for retaliation against foreign sanctions over issues such as Hong Kong and the northwestern region of Xinjiang, where China is accused of curtailing freedoms and committing human rights abuses. No specific measures were included in the anti-sanctions law.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said the law aimed to "resolutely safeguard national sovereignty, dignity and core interests and oppose Western hegemonism and power politics," and to "provide legal support and guarantees for the country to counter discriminatory measures by a foreign country in accordance with the law."

Wang lashed out over calls from Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin for greater attention to China's growing military power, accusing Washington of "playing the China card" as a pretext for increasing U.S. military spending and seeking to "contain China."

He also protested Japanese Prime Minister Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's reference to Taiwan as a country during a parliamentary debate Wednesday. China considers the self-governing island democracy as its own territory and is quick to chastise anyone or any company that refers to it as a country.

Suga made a passing reference to Taiwan, New Zealand and Australia while answering a question about pandemic measures, and then referred to them as "three countries."

Wang said the comment violated Japan's "solemn promise to not regard Taiwan as a country."

Europe leaves stimulus running hot ahead of recovery

FRANKFURT, GERMANY (AP): The European Central Bank left its key pandemic support for the economy running full blast even as the economy shows signs of recovery thanks to lower virus cases and fewer restrictions on activity in the 19 countries that use the euro currency.

The bank said in its policy statement Thursday that its emergency bond purchases would remain at "a significantly higher pace" over the coming quarter than during the first three months of the year. That mirrored language from its last meeting on April 22, changed only to extend the higher pace of purchases by a quarter.

ECB President Christine Lagarde is expected to walk a fine line at her news conference between acknowledging improving economic prospects and underlining that the stimulus will not be withdrawn before the recovery is on more solid ground.

Analysts say she will likely avoid any talk of a stimulus taper because that could send market borrowing costs higher for companies.

The central bank for the 19 countries that use the shared euro curren-



cy has been purchasing around 85 billion euros per month in government and corporate bonds as part of a 1.85 trillion euro (\$2.25 trillion) effort slated to run at least through early next year. The purchases drive up the prices of bonds and drives down their interest yields, since price and yield move in opposite directions. That influences longer-term borrowing costs throughout the economy, sending them lower. Purchases were stepped up in March amid lagging vaccinations and high COVID-19 case numbers.

That's exactly what the bank wants at a time when many companies are struggling with reduced demand and higher debt and need to keep credit lines open so they

can get to the other side of the pandemic.

Any hint, however, that the ECB is thinking about tapering the purchases could send market rates higher earlier than the central bankers would like. That's why any discussion could be postponed until the bank's Sept. 9 meeting or later.

The U.S. Federal Reserve will face a similar communications challenge; several officials have said that as the economy recovers, the U.S. central bank will eventually have to reassess its stance. Currently it is purchasing \$120 billion in bonds each month. Fed policymakers next meet June 15-16.

IHS Markit's surveys of purchasing managers

showed activity increasing sharply in May, including for the hard-hit services sector. The index reached 57.1, with anything over 50 indicating expansion. Statistics for economic output in the first quarter were revised up to minus 0.3% from minus 0.6%; the ECB expects a strong rebound in the second half of the year and growth of 4.0% for all of 2021.

Rising inflation also complicates the ECB's messaging. Normally, rising prices would lead a central bank to withdraw its stimulus. But in this case, ECB officials and economists say recent higher inflation figures are the result of temporary factors that will fade, leaving inflation below the ECB goal.

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Underwood wins at CMT Awards; Gladys Knight, H.E.R. perform

NEW YORK (AP): Carrie Underwood has another reason to rejoice — she extended her record as the most decorated artist in the history of the CMT Music Awards, thanks to her song “Hallelujah.”

The music video for the singer’s hit, a collaboration with John Legend, was named video of the year at Wednesday’s show, which aired from Nashville, Tennessee.

Underwood, who now has 23 CMT Awards, thanked her die-hard fans while accepting the honor: “You’re the reason we’re all here doing what we do, doing what we love (and) making music videos.”

She also shouted-out Legend, particularly for sending her the song, which appeared on her first holiday album “My Gift.”

“Congratulations on what I think is your first CMT Award. Whoa!” she exclaimed.

Though Underwood owned part of the night — she also performed with rock band NEEDTOBREATHE — other female stars, some outside of country music, took over the awards show honoring the year’s best country music videos.

Grammy-winning R&B star H.E.R. and fellow guitar slayer Chris Stapleton had the night’s best performance. They joined forces for a smoky, thrilling performance of “Hold On,” coming off like a veteran duo.

The legendary Gladys Knight won over audience members — not wearing masks — during a performance of “Friendship Train” with Mickey Guyton. Part of the show felt dedicated to Black female voices thanks to the top notch performances by Knight, H.E.R. and Guyton, who was nominated for two awards and presented the CMT Equal Play Award to Linda Martell, one of the pioneering Black acts in coun-

try music and the first Black woman to perform solo at the Grand Ole Opry.

Martell had a country hit with the song “Color Me Country” 50 years ago, and she had other songs reach the charts, but she dealt with major hardships. She experienced racism while performing onstage and was shunned by the music industry as a mainstream country performer. Her record label shelved her album and she was prohibited from finding a new deal.

“Hearing Linda sing makes it very clear that she had all the talent to be a huge star but her career was cut short for one reason: the color of her skin,” said Guyton, who made history this year as the first solo Black woman nominated for a country Grammy Award.

“I would not be standing here today without you, and none of us would be here without you, so thank you!”

Martell, 86, didn’t attend the awards show but CMT aired photos of the icon holding her award and said she was watching the show from her home in South Carolina.

Guyton also hit the stage with BRELAND, the Black singer who has mixed country, trap and R&B music and had a country hit with the platinum success “My Truck.”

And the night featured more collaborative performances like it.

Lady A kicked off the show with Carly Pearce and Lindsay Ell, Ingrid



Andress sang with pop singer-songwriter JP Saxe, while Miranda Lambert performed with Jack Ingram and Jon Randall.

Hosts Kane Brown and Kelsea Ballerini also performed onstage and won awards.

Brown won male video of the year for “Worship You” and collaborative video of the year for “Famous Friends” with Chris Young. CMT performance of the year went to Ballerini and Halsey’s “The Other Girl” from the 2020 CMT Music Awards.

Gabby Barrett, who was originally supposed to perform at the show but backed out, won female video of the year and the

best family feature award went to Taylor Swift’s “The Best Day (Taylor’s Version),” which was re-released this year and featured home movies starring the pop star, her brother and parents.

Little Big Town’s “Wine, Beer, Whiskey” won the night’s first award — duo/group video of the year.

“This is awesome. First of all, we’re back and making music people,” Kimberly Schlapman yelled, referring to the pandemic.

“I know you like drinking songs,” Karen Fairchild added.

Budapest orchestra performs live concert from moving truck

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY (AP): The Budapest Festival Orchestra wants its audience back.

The prestigious orchestra, led by renowned composer Iván Fischer, took to the streets with that message: Five members of the orchestra performed classical music to motorists and passers-by from a truck in the afternoon traffic in the Hungarian capital on Wednesday.

The musical parade was aimed at encouraging Hungarians to start returning to live performances in concert halls as the pandemic wanes, after more than a year in which people were home-bound and forced to take in their culture online.

“I believe that live concerts are very important,” Fischer said. “I think especially now that everyone is fed up with their computers and phones, people will throw them away. They will be back to socializing, getting to know each other, hugging, and talking.”

Wednesday’s performance on the truck was also a celebration of the orchestra’s reunion with music lovers amid an easing of government-imposed lockdown



measures to fight the virus. The pandemic hit Hungary particularly hard in the spring, making it for a time the country with the most virus deaths per capita in the world. But the numbers of new infections have now plummeted amid one of the European Union’s fastest vaccination campaigns.

The five musicians played Schubert, Mozart and Dvorak as the truck carried them over the Chain Bridge spanning the Danube River and past St. Stephen’s Basilica and other stunning city landmarks.

People on the streets stopped to enjoy the impromptu concert, applauding at the end of pieces. Children

clapped to the music while adults pulled out phones to film the performance.

Violinist Noemi Molnar said performing on the truck was a new and strange experience for the musicians.

“It was surprising that after we sat down and got settled, the truck started to move underneath us. We’ve never had this kind of experience before. It is new for all the musicians,” she said.

The Budapest Festival Orchestra has become one of Europe’s leading ensembles under Fischer, who co-founded it in 1983 with the late pianist and composer Zoltan Kocsis.

After a year of lockdown,

the orchestra is now selling tickets as it resumes concerts with audiences at limited capacity, while its regular 2021-22 season opens on Sept. 9.

“My message to music fans is not to be afraid,” Orsolya Erdodi, the orchestra’s managing director said. “We will do everything we can to make them feel safe in the future. Vaccination is the key to safety in concert halls.”

Said Maria Gal Tamasi, first violinist: “Music moves us forward, music connects us. Now as the audience can return to our concerts, I really hope that their hearts will beat in time with ours.”



MODEL BEHAVIOR! The Victoria’s Secret Angel, Candice Swanepoel wears a colorful T-shirt while out walking with a friend in New York.

ARIES:

It’s been a rollercoaster ride, Aries, with little or no respite. Here’s the thing, though: worrying about what tomorrow might bring isn’t going to make the journey any easier: The art of surrendering will. So slow down. Breathe. Call upon your spirit team for assistance. Allowing yourself to be in ‘yin’ or receiving mode will help you make space for miracles. What your guides want you to remember: you are so loved and so supported.

TAURUS:

It’s true that life on earth is all kinds of unpredictable, and that one may never know what the next day could bring. Here’s the thing, though: you are not sent here without power. You have the ability to course correct as and when you need to. So, exercise your power as a co-creator today and realign with your soul’s purpose. When you do what you’re meant to be doing, you will open the door to everlasting abundance.

GEMINI:

Hello and welcome to the energy of the Gemini moon! The good news is: you get a clean slate. The not-so-good news? You’re off to a rocky start. But nothing in your life is without purpose. It’s all unfolding in order to teach you an important life lesson. So take the changes in your stride and become aware of what needs to be transformed within. PS: Trust that all the help and support you need from the other side is available to you in this moment.

CANCER:

The energy of the Gemini new moon has you feeling all kinds of creative—creative in a way you haven’t felt in a while, Cancer. Embrace this energy fully. Even better, make love to it in a manner that’s fierce and passionate. Something tells us you could just end up creating your best work yet. But it’s not just the artists who are in for a wild ride.

LEO:

You like tea, and they like coffee. You want to surround yourself with dogs, and they have a thing for felines. You’d rather live in the mountains, but they’re a sucker for the fast life. When you look at things from the outside, it seems like there are so many differences. But you know that on a soul level you are connected and that this relationship is meant to be. So redirect your gaze towards what “is” working in your favour and trust that you’ll find a way to be together.

VIRGO:

We all have a sense of who we are and what we’re meant to achieve in this lifetime. Your earthly mission is becoming clearer to you with each passing day, Virgo. What the new moon in Gemini is activating for you: your creative juices + good juju. You’re feeling inspired to make magic, baby! To explore your unique gifts and share your voice in a manner that you’re being called to. This is also a time of being seen or acknowledged for all that you bring to the table. Don’t be afraid to get vocal on a public platform.

LIBRA:

Nothing good can come from obsessing over the past or

holding onto mementos from a time long gone. The cards are urging you to clear the trash can and start over with a blank slate. Oh, the blessings you will make space for when you move the stagnant energy, Libra! As such, this is also a time to set intentions and contemplate on where you would like to be a decade from now. Trust that the path will reveal itself when you are clear about the destination.

SCORPIO:

As empathists, we tend to absorb other people’s emotions and feel the pain of the collective, which could in turn be detrimental to our own well-being. Could this be true for where you are, Scorpio? Have you been struggling with your moods? Here’s a simple exercise to help you strengthen your boundaries: visualise a bright, radiant source of violet light pouring downward from your crown all the way to your toes.

SAGITTARIUS:

At any point of time, we have two options: to do what is required of us or to do what feels authentic. It may seem like following the tried-and-tested path will bring us all the riches in the world, but that is only partly true. This is because we cannot fully activate the portal of abundance when we’re living somebody else’s dream. What happens when we choose to answer the call, though? We get in alignment with our soul’s mission, thereby unlocking the door to miracles. So, tap into your warrior spirit, Sagittarius. Do that one thing you’ve been afraid to. Something tells us you’re capable of

bringing about a big change in the collective!

CAPRICORN:

What if the worst thing that happened to you is the best thing that happened for you? Read that again, Capricorn. The new moon is a time of inner illumination. A time of recognising that the Universe is your friend, not your foe. You finally understand that everything that didn’t work out (or was taken away from you) was a form of protection that was ultimately helping you move closer to your truth.

AQUARIUS:

We’re all born with a unique blueprint and purpose that only we can fulfill. While the purpose varies from person to person, what remains constant is the conflict between the voice of reason and the voice of intuition. Remember, the path is not going to be easy. You are *not* going to get a pat on your back for every right step you take, either. What you can, however, expect is lots of resistance and opposition.

PISCES:

Nothing good can come from holding onto the past or the memories attached with it, no matter how good they were. It’s time for a cleansing and purging ritual, Pisces. It’s time to release the evidence of a time long gone. The new moon in Gemini is offering you the blank slate you have been looking for. On the professional front, this is a time of stepping into your power. Accept the responsibility that is being given to you. Trust yourself to do justice to the role.