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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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**COVID-19:**  
*India records 12,881 new cases*

**NEW DELHI, FEB 18 (PTI):** India's tally of COVID-19 cases rose to 1,09,50,201 with 12,881 new infections being reported in a day, while the recoveries have surged to 1,06,56,845, according to Union Health Ministry data updated on Thursday.

The death toll increased to 1,56,014 with 101 daily new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The COVID-19 case fatality rate has dropped to 1.42 per cent, while the number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,06,56,845 which translates to a national COVID-19 recovery rate of 97.32 per cent.

The COVID-19 active caseload remained below 1.5 lakh.

There are 1,37,342 active cases of coronavirus infections in the country which comprises 1.25 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

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

According to the ICMR, 20,87,03,791 samples have been tested up to February 17 with 7,26,562 samples being tested on Wednesday.

## CM hands over vehicles to 7 FPOs ANNOUNCES AWARDS FOR BEST PERFORMING FPOS

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 18 FEB:**

Chief Minister, PS Tamang today handed over vehicle keys to seven FPOs and flagged off the transportation vehicles under MOVCD-NER Phase 1. The CM was at the state level stakeholder workshop on Farmers Producers Organization (FPO) under the scheme "Mission Organic" Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCD-NER) organized by department of Agriculture, Government of Sikkim at MananBhawan.

The vehicles have been provided to FPOs for marketing purpose of the agricultural produce. Twenty-eight FPOs have been constituted in the state.

In his Facebook page, the CM also announced awards for the best performing FPOs and urged the FPOs to be upbeat and initiate cluster farming and cover maximum area to enhance



farmer membership.

"To make agriculture and horticulture an attractive sector for income generation our government is leaving no stone unturned.

Those who are ready to break the stereo type and

find their feet in the field of agriculture, horticulture and livestock our government is ready to extend every possible help and support to them," said the CM.

He also appealed to the state's growers not to keep any

land barren but try and grow something or the other.

"The global pandemic has taught us to be self-reliant, therefore we should try and be producers and self-sufficient in the field of agriculture," the CM wrote.

## 12-year-old girl swims 36-Kilometre in Arabian Sea to create Autism awareness

**MUMBAI, 18 FEB:** A 12-year-old daughter of a Naval sailor created history by swimming from Bandra-Worli Sea Link to Gateway of India, a distance of 36 kilometres, in 8 hours and 40 minutes.

The young girl, Jiya Rai, swam 36-km with an aim to raise awareness about Autism, a statement released by the Ministry of Defence said.

She commenced her record-setting feat at 03:50 am on Wednesday from Bandra-Worli Sea Link and completed at Gateway of India at 12:30 pm.

The swimming event was conducted under the

observation of the Swimming Association of Maharashtra, a recognised body of the Swimming Federation of India. The event was also associated with the Fit India Movement by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.

An award ceremony was held at Gateway of India in Mumbai on February 17, where Jiya was felicitated with a trophy by Zarir N Baliwala, President of Greater Mumbai Amateur Aquatic Association (GMAAA).

Jiya earlier swam from Elephanta Island to Gateway of India, a distance of 14 Km in



three hours, 27 minutes and 30 seconds on February 15 last year and holds the world

record for the youngest girl with ASD to swim 14 kilometres in open waters.

## Bhim Army chief, 5 Indian-origin persons on TIME's emerging leaders list

**NEW YORK, 18 FEB [PTI]:** Five Indian-origin personalities, including Twitter's top lawyer Vijaya Gadde and UK's finance minister Rishi Sunak, and an Indian activist feature in TIME magazine's annual list of 100 "emerging leaders who are shaping the future".

The 2021 TIME100 Next, released on Wednesday, is an expansion of TIME's flagship TIME100 franchise of the most influential people in the world and highlights 100 emerging leaders who are shaping the future.

"Everyone on this list is poised to make history. And in fact, many already have," Dan Macsai, the editorial director of the TIME100, said.

Other Indian-origin personalities on the list are Instacart founder and CEO Apoorva Mehta, doctor and Executive Director of nonprofit Get Us PPE Shikha Gupta and founder of nonprofit Upsolve Rohan Pavuluri.

Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Aazad is also on the list.

Mr Sunak's profile in the TIME feature says that a little over a year ago, the 40-year old was an

"unknown junior minister in the British government" but after he was named to lead Britain's Treasury last year, he "quickly became the benevolent face of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, approving large handouts for many citizens whose jobs were disrupted by the virus."

Mr Sunak has however also been criticised for advocating early relaxation of lockdown rules, the profile said.

"Nonetheless, Sunak remains the country's most popular politician, according to the pollster YouGov. And he's the oddsmakers' favourite to be Britain's next Prime Minister," it added.

On Ms Mehta, 34, the TIME profile said that in the initial days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Instacart "faced a tidal wave of orders, as people with means opted en masse to pay the service's workers to buy groceries for them." Ms Mehta describes that period as a "wartime moment," it said.

However, later Instacart also "faced new criticism about the way it treated its workers, including labyrinthine sick-pay policies,

frequent rule changes for shoppers and demanding performance metrics." Instacart continues its focus on expansion.

"The smartphone is the supermarket of the future. We are going to help co-create that," Ms Mehta said in the TIME article.

The TIME profile described Ms Gadde, 46, as "one of Twitter's most powerful executives" who was the one to convey the news to CEO Jack Dorsey that President Donald Trump's Twitter account had been suspended following the Capitol attack of January 6.

Mr Dorsey "has delegated to her Twitter's content-moderation decisions; she was the architect of the 2019 decision to ban all political advertising, and is responsible for the warning labels that Twitter applied to COVID-19 and election-interference misinformation in 2020.

"While Twitter is still home to much misinformation and harassment, Gadde's influence is slowly turning the company into one that sees free speech not as sacrosanct, but as just one human right among many that need to be weighed against one another," the TIME profile said.

## Over 50,000 people in Delhi died due to air pollution last year: Study

**NEW DELHI, 18 FEB [PTI]:** Air pollution caused by hazardous PM2.5 fine particulate matter led to the death of 54,000 people in Delhi last year where pollution levels remained almost six times above the prescribed WHO limits, according to a new study.

According to a Greenpeace Southeast Asia analysis of IQAir data, 1800 deaths per million were estimated due to PM2.5 air pollution in Delhi.

"The PM2.5 air pollution claimed approximately 54,000 lives in India's national capital in 2020," the study said.

PM2.5 refers to fine particulate matter smaller than 2.5 micrometers in diameter. Exposure to PM2.5 is considered the most important environmental risk factor for deaths globally, and was attributed to 4.2 million premature deaths in 2015, the study said. The study noted that the damage is equally worrying in other Indian cities.

"An estimated 25,000 avoidable deaths in Mumbai in 2020 have been attributed to air pollution. Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad and Lucknow estimated an approximate 12,000, 11,000, 11,000, and 6,700 avoidable deaths respectively due to polluted air," it said.

Noting that the air pollutant

levels in Delhi remained almost six times above the prescribed WHO limits of 10 g/m3 annual mean, the study said the estimated air pollution-related economic losses were USD 8.1 billion (Rs 58,895 crore), which amounts to 13 per cent of Delhi's annual GDP.

"Despite a temporary reprieve in air quality owing to the lockdown, the latest figures from the report underscore the need to act immediately. The need of the hour is to rapidly scale up renewable energy, bring an end to fossil fuel emissions and boost sustainable and accessible transport systems," the study said.

Globally, approximate 160,000 deaths have been attributed to PM2.5 air pollution in the five most populous cities of Delhi (30 million), Mexico City (22 million), Sao Paulo (22 million), Shanghai (26 million) and Tokyo (37 million), it said.

Despite recording relatively better air quality this year due to strict lockdown, air pollution continues to be a serious public health issue which also drastically impacts our economy. For the governments of the day, it is crucial that investments are made towards green and sustainable solutions. When we choose fossil

fuel over clean energy, our health is put at stake. Polluted air increases the likelihood of deaths due to cancer & stroke, spike in asthma attacks and worsens severity of COVID-19 symptoms, said Avinash Chanchal, Climate Campaigner, Greenpeace India.

"We need to ensure our growth demand is fuelled by sustainable and cleaner sources of energy and cities should promote low cost, active and carbon-neutral transport options that prioritises walking, cycling, and public transport, the increased use of clean energy and clean transport will not only improve the public health but it will also strengthen the economy and public money" added Chanchal.

Commenting on the revelations made by cost estimator CEO of IQAir, Frank Hammes says, Breathing should not be deadly. The fact that poor air quality claimed an estimated 160,000 lives in the five largest cities alone should give us pause, especially in a year when many cities were seeing lower air pollution levels due to less economic activity. Governments, corporations and individuals must do more to eliminate the sources of air pollution and make our cities better places to live.

## SDF loses two spokespersons and Zilla Panchayat to SKM



**SAGAR CHHETRI  
GANGTOK, 18 FEB:**

Sikким Democratic Front today lost two of its spokespersons and a Zilla Panchayat in one sweep when they left the front and formally joined Sikким Krantikari Morcha on Thursday.

Three office bearers of SDF party, Krishna Lepcha, who was the party spokesperson and general secretary in-charge, Ashit Rai, also a party spokesperson, and Tshering Gyatso Lepcha, who was North district president and sitting Zilla Panchayat, joined SKM during their meeting with the SKM president, Chief Minister PS Tamang, this morning.

Addressing a press conference later in the afternoon, SKM spokesperson and Political Secretary to the CM, Jacob Khaling, informed that the party president officially welcomed the trio into SKM after they expressed the desire to work with the SKM impressed by its "inclusive politics and humanitarian ideology and principles."

"We will be happy to work with them for the people of Sikким in the days to come," Mr Khaling said.

Krishna Lepcha, while addressing a press conference, stated that the people of Sikким have given the mandate to SKM and that the party was growing in popularity with its pro-people works and initiatives.

"SDF is presently in the dark and directionless so all party workers are in confusion. We gave our prime years and youth to the SDF but now we are compelled to leave the party because we see no hope for the people in SDF. We will work to take SKM ahead by working on the farsighted vision of the CM," he said. Mr Lepcha also alleged today that even though SDF came into politics with the promise to restore democracy, there was no democracy within the party and voices of the party workers have been suppressed.

Likewise, Tshering Gyatso Lepcha mentioned that a team of panchayats from Dzongu had met the CM on 03 February and all were impressed with his desire and vision for Dzongu.

"I am very impressed with the vision and love of the CM for Dzongu where he has directed more work than constituencies won by the SKM party. So, we desire to come to the mainstream to take forward the vision and dream of the CM for Dzongu," he expressed. Ashit Rai also expressed gratitude towards the SKM president for giving them an opportunity to work for SKM and assured to work hard for the party. He also alleged that there was no democracy in the SDF and hence there was no future for youth in it.

"So, there was pressure on us to either choose the party where young minds meet or sit in the same set where big people's rule," he said.



## ViewPoint

# Can Sikkimese life get slower than this?

JIWAN RAI

Like most young people newly employed in the government, my salary was never my preoccupation. I could have cared less about when I would get my first salary. That was partly because I had no financial responsibility over anyone and partly because I was too young to be money minded. However, I was surprised to discover later that my first salary would take about two to three months to be disbursed. And guess what? Yes, I ended up receiving three months' salary at one go. I was on cloud nine. In hindsight, I realize that such a delay in the disbursement of the first salary could partly be due to our inept bureaucratic system. Can there be any genuinely justifiable reasons for such a delay?

On a closer look, our Sikkimese life is stagnated in delay everywhere. A drive from Ranipul to Gangtok during the rush hour pretty much depicts our life in general. Just as these traffic jams are attributable to our unplanned construction, poor road engineering, encroachment onto road reserve space and traffic errors by inefficient drivers, the delays that cripple Sikkimese life are self-inflicted.

Government offices are one area where our life compulsorily encounters speed bumps. Have you ever done any official work in one visit other than paying bills? Some offices do not even take bill payment on time, citing computer defects, power outages, clerks on leave, etc. If you are inexperienced with no connections, it could take at least two visits to a particular office even to obtain a form. How many trips does it take to obtain a trade license? One gentleman jokingly said that the passport size photograph that he submitted for his Sikkim Subject Certificate looked like his son's picture when he finally got his long-awaited document. I have had the bitter experience of spending two full days in the HRDD headquarter to get the "permission to inaugurate lavatories" constructed under the AusAID GWSS project some years ago. I know a man who waited for nearly a year for the approval of the blueprint of his house. How often do we frequent the PHE department for water connection? Getting a BSNL telephone connection was like winning the Wimbledon open. I do not know the conditions now. One of the reasons our loan interest adds up is due to the inordinate delay in transactions between our departments and banks.

How about life outside government offices? Where else can you find a bunch of well-dressed men sitting together for days on end playing cards? They look like people who are wholly prepared to go for a grand mission but there they are completely 'rooted to the ground', blissfully laid back and hopelessly engrossed in their gambling. Imagine two vehicles stopping side by side on a busy road and drivers unhurriedly chatting, elsewhere. Sometimes a man can be seen standing on the road, resting his arms on the driver's window, chatting away with his rear end jutting out. Imagine men and women, young boys and girls strolling Gandhi Marg during working hours on weekdays. Can life get slower than this?

What can one say of how business is run in Sikkim and the rest of India? If a businessman says that your ordered material will arrive in a week's time, he is meaning at least two weeks. One minute in the Indian business world (when uttered by a businessman) could mean anything between one hour to several hours.

Undeniably, Sikkimese people are big on socializing. However, the lack of sense of time makes socializing an unnecessary burden for the hosts. For example, in weddings, most of the invitees ignore the time mentioned in the invitation card and come as per their convenience - which, for the most part, means the evening. Now there will be some among them who like to give themselves to drinking. They will be taking up a seat for eons, drinking away, totally unaware of the inconvenience others are facing by the snarled-up queue. Also do you notice the visitors flocking to the hospital to see a newborn baby, thus keeping the completely exhausted mother and baby awake the whole time. No one seems to know that both mother and baby need and deserve complete rest. Visitation can wait. Can't it?

Our life may be slow but make no mistake about it, there is a strange honour associated with delay. The arrival of any VIP has to be strategized to be late. A punctual VIP is considered either a novice or second-rate. Once a newly appointed chairman arrived at a function half an hour before the scheduled time and he became the butt of the joke. Some VIPs send their envoys ahead of time to inform them when the crowd has waited long enough for their arrival.

## Community outreach program at Kanamtek ward by SAATHI



### SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 18 FEB:

A community outreach program was organized by SAATHI with the support from Titan Company Ltd at Kanamtek ward, South Sikkim, which was attended by 28 local residents, a press release informs.

Sudeep Sharma (trained teacher

coordinator) from Namthang Senior Secondary School was the resource person of the day. He interacted with the participants on everyday challenges faced because of substance abuse and said that the community has to tackle such challenges.

He also highlighted the scenario of his area,

where he said that alcohol addiction is high. He briefly explained the roles and responsibilities of communities and parents, and urged everyone to intervene if we found any child or youth affected with substance abuse.

He informed people about various social evils of our society and asked people to be careful

and vigilant about their children.

Ward Panchayat, Shantimith Lepcha spoke on the need of such awareness adding that this kind of program will also educate parents/guardians. She added that substance abuse is one of the very important issues as this affects our economic as well as our social life.

## Road Safety Campaign at Chujachen School



### SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 18 FEB:

Road Safety Month campaign was organized by Chujachen Senior Secondary School at Rongli bazaar on 17 Feb, 2021. Thirty students participated in different activities held during the program, a press release informs.

The rally was held at Rongli bazaar where students shared important messages through placards. Road safety awareness skit was also performed by the students of Chujachen Senior Secondary School. The students were escorted by teachers Sagar Rai, Ratan Tamang and Anita Sharma.

## Block level Inter-School Junior Olympics at Samdong

### SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 18 FEB:

Block Level 1st Inter School Junior Olympic games under "Sports for peace and development 2020-2021" under-14 and under-17 boys and girls kicked off today at Samdong Senior Secondary School ground in East Sikkim.

A press release informs that the competition was organized in different sports like athletics, archery, boxing, badminton, football, karate, taekwondo, table tennis, etc.



The event was organized by Department of Sports & Youth Affairs, Government Sikkim, Rakdong Tintek BAC in collaboration with Rural Development Department under GPDP Fund.

The function was attended by Samdup Bhutia, SKM In-charge Tumin-Lingee constituency as chief guest in the presence of Panchayat President Rakdong Tintek GPU, Tika Maya Pandey,

Principal Samdong SSS, ML Koirala, Principal Dikchu Sr SS, Santosh Kumar Chettri, YN Sapkota, AD Sports, panchayat members from different wards and other officials. AD Sports, Bhanu

Chapagai highlighted the brief report of the competition. The function also saw the oath taking ceremony by the participating students.

The chief guest appreciated the event organized for the students and urged all to play with a sporting spirit. He further announced that the Samdong Sr Sec School will have a good playground.

The function ended with the vote of thanks delivered by Prem Kumar Chettri, panchayat member.

# Exclusive: Govt develops its own WhatsApp, it's being tested now

**NEW DELHI:** Amid the raging controversy over privacy on WhatsApp, the government is planning a whole new approach - its own version of the messaging app.

Sources in the Ministry of Electronics and Information and Technology (MeITY) have confirmed to NDTV that two such apps are being tested in their beta stage. They have been codenamed Samvad and Sandes, literally "conversation" and "message", respectively.

"These apps are being developed completely by the government of India. It is going to be an instant messaging app like WhatsApp," said a MeITY functionary. NDTV has learnt that the government also has plans for an app called GIMS - Government Instant Messaging Service - meant only for government of India employees to communicate.

"A need was being felt within the government for a very long time to have our own, independent, and self-owned

instant messaging service. Development of these apps began way before the present WhatsApp controversy," said the source.

The biggest advantage of this app will be that "we will never have to worry about data being stolen and used for commercial gains by big tech".

However, its acceptance among people can be gauged only after a public roll-out - it isn't clear still if both Samvad and Sandes or only one of them will have one. Sources say once beta testing is over, Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself is expected to dedicate the app to the nation.

Sandes is available on Apple store for a few people to test. It has a blue-and-white interface with the Ashok Chakra as its logo. It authorises and verifies only government employees for now.

"It may entirely be possible that one of these apps shall remain for the internal

consumption of government employees and not be rolled out for the public," the source said.

WhatsApp came under criticism recently when it unilaterally changed its service and privacy policy asking for data to be shared with Facebook, its parent firm. Though it later put the plans on hold amid the privacy debate, a feeling remained within the government that the best way forward was to have one's own alternative. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court deemed it a fit case for intervention if people's privacy was at stake.

The leak of WhatsApp chats in recent months, involving several prominent people and well-known faces, too, has added to the overall anxiety over privacy and security. All the more so since the platform has increasingly become a handy tool in business ventures at all levels.

The new apps, meanwhile, are being developed under the Digital India rubric by the National Informatics Centre (NIC). Functioning under MeITY, NIC provides the support system for the delivery of the government's IT services and Digital India initiatives.

Earlier this month, a Bengaluru-based startup launched Koo, a Twitter-like microblogging platform. Recognised as a star example of the Centre's Make In India initiative, Koo immediately drew key government officials and arms as users. Within five days of its launch, its user base soared by over 900,000. That happened amid Twitter's faceoff with the Indian government over free speech and local laws.

"These initiatives are all a part of the government's Aatmanirbhar initiative," a source said referring to Sandes.

The time line for the rollout of this app remains unclear.

### ANTHYESTHI KRIYA



The Anthyesthi Kriya of our beloved father late Samiran Chettri who left for heavenly abode on 12th February, 2021 falls on 23rd February, 2021 (Tuesday).

All relatives, family, friends and well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence at Kolabari, Champasari, Siliguri. We also express our gratitude to all those who stood by us during our time of bereavement.

**Roshan Chettri, Indira Chettri**  
(son & daughter-in-law),

**Bikash Chettri, Mani Chettri**  
(brother & sister-in-law),

**Sushma Chettri (daughter), grand son & daughters,**  
**And all family members.**

**Contact: 9832041015, 9832352085, 6294333070.**

## RUCHI DIAGNOSTIC CLINIC

Behind telephone Exchange Near Old STNM Hospital. Gangtok

PH: 03592-203333, 204876, 8509373970

### EXISTING FACILITIES:

- ULTRASOUND
- DIGITAL X-RAY
- ECHOCARDIOGRAPHY
- COLOR DOPPLER
- PATHOLOGY
- MICROBIOLOGY
- BIOCHEMISTRY
- ENDOSCOPY
- B M D
- E C G
- DENTAL O P G
- GASTRO CLINIC
- PAEDIATRIC CLINIC
- MEDICAL CLINIC
- ORTHO CLINIC
- E N T CLINIC
- GYNEA CLINIC
- PHYSIOTHERAPY
- SPECIALISED TESTS

### BLOOD COLLECTION CENTRES AT :

- Sushruta Medical, Ranipool.
- Arihant Medical, Opp. CRH gate, 5th Mile.

### COMPLETE E N T FACILITIES UNDER ONE ROOF

**ENT O P D Monday to Friday**  
10.00 am to 2.30 pm

1. ENT OPD CLINIC
2. ENT ENDOSCOPES
3. MICROSCOPIC PROCEDURES
4. MINOR O T PROCEDURES
5. VERTIGO MANAGEMENT
6. AUDIOMETRY, TYMPANOMETRY AND HEARING AIDS.

### CONSULTANT ENT SURGEON DR. ONGDEN GYATSO, MS (AIIMS)

**GASTRO CLINIC & O P D**  
8.00 am to 9.00 am

**MEDICAL CLINIC & O P D**  
9.30 am

**ORTHO AND GYNEA CLINICS & O P D**  
3.00 pm

**PAEDIATRIC CLINIC & O P D**  
8.00 am And 6.00 pm

**VACCINATION CLINIC**



# Career counselling on village tourism at BorongPhamtam

**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 18 FEB:**

Under the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) 2020-21, Borong Phamtam GPU South Sikkim organized one Career Counselling Programme on Village Tourism to local unemployed youth, a press release informs.

The programme was attended by Panchayat President, Rupa Gurung, Vice President, TB Pradhan accompanied by all the panchayat members and staff of the GPU and participated by local people and stake holders for tourism.

President of Namchi Luxury Vehicle Association cum general



secretary, Sikkim Stake Holders Welfare Association, Sachin Sharmawas theresource person for the programme. During his session, he talked about the scope of village

tourism and shared many creative ideas about village tourism while interacting with the resource person and participants.

He also highlighted that village tourism is

a sustainable way to earn a livelihood. He also talked about the different possibilities and strength for the sustainable development of village tourism at Borong Phamtam and Polokvillage.

Borong Phamtam GPU presented the resource person Sachin Sharma with token of love. The programme was also addressed by the Panchayat President, Rupa Gurung.

## Voluntary Blood Donation Camp at Namchi Blood Bank

**BIKASH CHETTRI**  
**NAMCHI, 18 FEB:**

Voluntary Blood Donation Camp organized by Voluntary Donors Association of Sikkim with the support of District Blood Bank Namchi was conducted at District Blood Bank, Namchi today.

During the camp, a total of 33 units blood has been collected. The donors were from Rateypani Pariwarta Pariwar, NSS Unit, Namchi Government College and regular donors of VBDAS.

The camp was supervised by Senior

Blood Bank Officer, Dr Rachana Lamichhane accompanied by the technical team of Blood Bank and attended by VBDAS State President VBDAS Kishore Baniya, General Secretary, Som Bahadur Rai and Executive Member, Randeep Rai.

All the donors were awarded with donors' card and through the State Blood Transfusion Council and District Blood Bank Namchi presented a Certificate of Appreciation to Rateypani Pariwarta.

VBDAS has been organizing such Mini Voluntary Blood



Donation Camps for four days consecutively since 15 February to fulfil the requirements of blood at Namchi District Hospital. VBDAS State

president, Kishore Baniya informed that on 19 Feb, 2021 there will be another camp at Namchi District Blood Bank and Blood Bank

Singtam. Doctor and technical team of Namchi District Blood Bank is working tirelessly to fulfil the requirements of blood at the hospital.

## Marathon Man leaves for Dharan 10K Run

**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 18 FEB:**

Marathon Man of Sikkim, Amar Subbaleft for Nepal today to participate in the "Dharan 10K Run" which will be held in Dharan, Nepal on 20 Feb, 2021. Mr Subba will be participating in the run along with many international personalities, a press release informs.

Mr Subbasaid that this 10km short run will be a new learning experience for him and he aims to finish this run within 45 minutes.

He has thanked social worker cum Government Contractor, Kessa Limboo for his support.



## New curbs in Mumbai as daily cases cross 5,000 in Maharashtra after 75 Days

**NEW DELHI, 18 FEB [NDTV]:** The civic authorities in Mumbai today clamped down with fresh safety measures as Covid numbers in the state and the city remained in an upward trajectory for a week, logging over 5000 cases on Thursday.

Citizens flouting rules for home isolation, weddings and public gatherings will be prosecuted, said an

order from Municipal Commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal.

In two districts of the state - Amravati and Yavatmal - restrictions were put in place. Amravati has been placed under lockdown over the week-end - from Saturday evening to Monday.

The Mumbai civic body said 300 marshals will be appointed to take action against passengers

travelling without mask in suburban railways. The aim will be to catch 25,000 offenders every day.

Orders have been issued to raid marriage halls, clubs, restaurants etc. to check Covid-appropriate behaviour. Buildings with more than 5 COVID-19 patients will be sealed and patients who test positive and are advised home quarantine will have their hands stamped.

# HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

email us: [news@summittimes.com](mailto:news@summittimes.com)

## NorthEast United score late to hold Chennaiyin FC 3-3

**BAMBOLIM, FEB 18 (PTI):** The race for the Indian Super League play-off berths took another twist as NorthEast United FC were held to a thrilling 3-3 draw by Chennaiyin FC at the GMC Stadium here on Thursday. Three teams -- Hyderabad FC, FC Goa and NorthEast -- are now tied on 27 points from 18 matches, intensifying the race for the last two play-off spots. ATK Mohun Bagan and Mumbai City FC have already qualified for the play-offs.

When it looked like Chennaiyin would inflict a first defeat on NorthEast United this

season, Luis Machado scored a stoppage-time equaliser to extend their unbeaten run to seven games.

Chennaiyin were in the lead through goals from Lallianzuala Chhangte (8th, 52nd) and Manuel Lanzarote (50th) while Imran Khan (14th) and Deshorn Brown (43rd) had replied for NorthEast.

Csaba Laszlo had made his intent to attack clear during the pre-match press conference and his side delivered early in the game with an eighth-minute lead.

After a miserable season in front of the goal, Chhangte finally

found his scoring boots as he put Chennaiyin ahead. Jakub Sylvestr picked up Chhangte with an accurate pass from the left and the latter took a touch before firing past Subhasish Roy.

However, it took the Highlanders just six minutes to get back into the game. Luis Machado played a low cross which took a deflection and fell to Imran Khan, who headed in.

Chennaiyin were rescued by Kaith's brilliance when he came up with a double save to deny Machado and Brown from close in quick succession.

At the other end, NorthEast United had the framework to thank. Roy fumbled Manuel Lanzarote's freekick from outside the box, but the ball deflected off his back and hit the post, before being cleared away.

NorthEast finally took the lead from a quick counter. Chhangte lost possession outside the NorthEast box and Khassa Camara played a long ball which found Brown. He won the battle against Enes Sipovic before slamming the ball into the back of the net.

The Highlanders nearly doubled their

lead soon after the restart. Machado delivered a perfect free-kick into the six-yard area which was met by Suhair Vadakkepeedika, but Kaith produced yet another save.

Chennaiyin, however, won a penalty when Ashutosh Mehta brought down Chhangte inside the box forcing the referee to point towards the spot. Lanzarote sent the keeper the wrong way to restore parity.

Chhangte then scored his second and put Chennaiyin ahead again. Edwin Vanspaul found Chhangte outside the box. His effort took a deflection off Benjamin

Lambot before entering the goal.

NorthEast kept pressing for the equaliser but were denied by Kaith's brilliance.

However, Chennaiyin's hero soon turned villain, giving away a penalty in stoppage time when he brought down Idrissa Sylla in the box. Machado kept his composure to convert the spot-kick.

## Seiko Hashimoto takes over as Tokyo Olympic president

**TOKYO (AP):** Seiko Hashimoto has appeared in seven Olympics, four in the winter and three in the summer — the most by any "multi-season" athlete in the games.

She made even more history on Thursday in Japan, where women are still rare in the boardrooms and positions of political power.

The 56-year-old Hashimoto was named president of the Tokyo Olympic organizing committee after a meeting of its executive board, which is 80% male. She replaces 83-year-old Yoshiro Mori, a former Japanese prime minister who was forced to resign last week after making sexist comments about women.

Essentially, he said women talk too much.

"Now I'm here to return what I owe as an athlete and to return back what I received," Hashimoto told the board, according to an interpreter.

Hashimoto had been serving as the Olympic minister in the cabinet of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga. She also held a portfolio dealing with gender equality and women's empowerment. She said she would be replaced as Olympic minister by Tamayo Marukawa.

She brought up the issue of gender equality repeatedly, and focused on problems at the organizing committee, which is male-dominated, has no female vice presidents and has an executive board made up of 80% men. It employs about 3,500 people.

"Of course, it is very important what Tokyo 2020 as an organizing committee does about gender equality," she said, sitting between two males — CEO Toshio Muto and spokesman Masa Takaya. "I think it will be important for Tokyo 2020 to practice equality."

International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach said Hashimoto was "the perfect choice" for the job.

"With the appointment of a woman as president, the Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee is also sending a very important signal with regard to gender equality," Bach said in a statement.

Hashimoto competed in cycling in three Summer Olympics (1988, 1992 and 1996) and in speedskating in four Winter Olympics

(1984, 1988, 1992 and 1994). She won a bronze medal — her only medal — at the 1992 Albertville Games in speedskating.

According to historian Dr. Bill Mallon, her seven appearances is the most by any "multi-season" athlete in the games.

Japan-born Naomi Osaka, speaking about Hashimoto after her semifinal victory over Serena Williams at the Australian Open, said "you're seeing the newer generation not tolerate a lot of things."

"I feel like it's really good because you're pushing forward, barriers are being broken down, especially for females," Osaka said. "We've had to fight for so many things just to be equal. Even a lot of things we still aren't equal."

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Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation  
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Nominations/applications for Prof. P. C. Mahalanobis and Prof. C. R. Rao National Awards for the year 2021

As part of the celebration of Statistics Day on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2021, the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation invites applications/nominations for Prof. P. C. Mahalanobis and Prof. C. R. Rao National Awards 2021 for achievements in the field of Statistics. The last date for the receipt of applications/nominations is 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2021. Details of the award and format for application/nominations are available at the Ministry's website at <http://mospi.gov.in>.

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## Water!

*To meet the challenge, engage the young*

The thunder showers that the region received over the past few days were not the Nor'westers yet. Maybe they were Westerly Disturbances bringing down some violent moisture. Irrespective of what they were, these showers have been working wonders for farms already pampered by low pollution levels due to the lockdown. Winter has not been harmfully dry this time around, but 2020 was an aberration in many more ways than just a "normally" moist winter. Otherwise, it has been routine to have dry spells set over most of North India and even the North-East after barely normal monsoons leading to dry winter scorching the fields and bringing many hydel projects to sputtering stops. Of course the fall in demand can also be blamed for some of the sputtering and one needs to only look at the sliver that the Teesta has become to realize the amounts that the reservoirs are holding back thumbing their collective noses at the fiction of "run of the river" model. And this after a normal monsoon because the Winter stayed without anything more than a drizzle right until the end of the season. It goes without saying that if the main rivers [on which hydel projects are developed] are running low, the feeder streams and jhoras and springs on which mountain people rely on for drinking and agricultural water supply must also be drying out. The region is thus facing an irrigation and drinking water shortfall along with a power crisis. And all this because even though Winter had been better than of late, it has been drier than is required for watersheds to be replenished until by monsoon arrives. So yes, the recent rains have been welcome.

The situation has not been too dire for Sikkim although fields which rely on rains for irrigation have suffered. A possible reason why Sikkim fared better than the rest of the similarly parched regions is perhaps because it retains a better forest cover in comparison to what has happened elsewhere. The nation requires 33 per cent of its land mass to be under forest cover. At present, this cover in the country stands at 23.68%. When one speaks of the Indian landmass, the 10% shortfall in forest cover presents a monumental task, especially when not much is being done to meet this target. Given the national average and targets, some might say that Sikkim need not have undertaken the State Green Mission given the fact that nearly 46% of the State is already under forests. And yet it did and should the Green Mission sustain, the State will be all the richer from the initiative. It is after all the green cover which keeps the watersheds replenished and wet even if the winters are dry. Gangtok, for example, has not suffered a water supply problem. Taps run dry here because of distribution problems, not because the source at Ratey Chu does not have enough water. Few regions are as well naturally provided and sustained as Gangtok and most other parts of Sikkim. The areas which have a supply problem have inherited a traditional challenge or have messed up the sources with poorly planned 'development' projects like roads which have choked up springs with debris or runaway construction which has not planned for supply.

It is possible that readers will notice a surge in water-related events in the State as the World Water Day [22 March] draws closer, and it would apt to begin discussing water issues now. The timing is perfect as March sits in the cusp of acute shortage [winter] and the problem of plenty [monsoons]. The policy-makers or event managers will be well advised to engage the young in more meaningful discussions on water. Saving them from indoor speeches and taking them out to where water is sourced from would be a good place to begin. That will establish a connection which can be complemented with sessions on how watersheds need to be nurtured and conservation returned as an instinctive habit. This engagement is necessary because if such issues are to be addressed and resolved in the long run, the young need to be involved. And unless the young re-establish a more organic connection with nature, the involvement will not move beyond participating in awareness programmes.

For instance, how many youngsters in Gangtok know where the town gets its water from? Most of those who think they know will say Seleph [which is the reservoir, not the source] and only very few of those who know the source to be Ratey Chu would have actually seen it. But take them up to Ratey Chu on an excursion and most of them will return with a clearer appreciation of the need to conserve. More earnest commitments to lifestyle changes to support conservation will then follow...

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## Why Farmers' Protest is Being Called a 'Satyagraha' – Which Means 'Embracing the Truth'



**SUMIT GANGULY**  
**THECONVERSATION.COM**

For the past few months, farmers protesting in India's capital, New Delhi, have been demanding the repeal of three farm laws that were passed last year. These largely peaceful protests have been referred to as a "satyagraha" by many in the Indian media, politicians and activists.

As a political scientist who writes on Indian politics and society, I argue that the choice of this word, which means "embracing the truth," is important to note.

It evokes a long political history that goes back to the Indian nationalist movement against British rule.

**THE FIRST SATYAGRAHA**

In 1917, Mahatma Gandhi, one of the leading icons of the Indian nationalist movement, started a political protest in the village of Champaran in what is today the eastern state of Bihar.

The movement was on behalf of poor farmers who had been forced to grow indigo used in the making of dyes. The British colonial authorities who saw this as a lucrative trade coerced the farmers into growing

the crop even as they were poorly paid. If the farmers refused, they were heavily taxed.

Gandhi organized a nonviolent protest on behalf of the farmers. That was when the word satyagraha was used for the first time in the context of a political protest.

The use of this form of protest was both ethical and instrumental. The moral dimension sprang from Gandhi's convictions. The practical element had to do with the realization that violence against the might of the British colonial empire was counterproductive.

Gandhi had first arrived at the idea of using nonviolent protest as a tactic in his early years as a lawyer in South Africa, where he was concerned with the maltreatment of the Indian community under British rule.

The concept of satyagraha was in turn drawn from his extensive reading of the works of the British poet and social critic John Ruskin, the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy and the American philosopher Henry David Thoreau.

Gandhi melded their ideas into what he had learned from the ancient Jain faith about the

concept of "ahimsa," which involves minimizing harm to all living beings.

**DANDI MARCH**

In Gandhi's view, and that of his followers, satyagraha involved a passionate commitment to nonviolent civil disobedience. To that end, he and his followers not only shunned all violence but steadfastly fought against social injustices.

Gandhi used the concept effectively in a protest against the colonial salt tax laws.

The Salt Law under colonial rule had prohibited the private production of salt, forcing Indians to buy this vital dietary staple at high market prices set by the British.

In 1931, Gandhi organized a march that went across much of the country to the seaside town of Dandi, in the western state of Gujarat. In a gesture of defiance to the Salt Law, Gandhi and his followers picked up natural salt from the beach as a way to demonstrate that they had a right to produce their own salt.

The British colonial authorities met this resistance with considerable violence and imprisoned Gandhi along many of the protesters. However, Gandhi and

his supporters refused to back down. They conceded that they had broken the law by collecting salt from the seashore and were prepared to suffer the legal consequences.

The memories of this episode have become part and parcel of the history and folklore of the Indian nationalist movement. Accordingly, it is hardly surprising that the protesting farmers embraced the concept of satyagraha as part of their protests.

For over six months they have led protests as a tactic and have steadfastly refused to budge from their principal demands, which involve repealing the three new farm laws that the Indian Parliament passed in September 2020 which, if implemented, would dramatically cut back on government support for agriculture and move farmers toward an open national market.

Farmers fear these drastic changes and, despite government entreaties as well as crackdowns, they have refused to budge.

*[the writer is Distinguished Professor of Political Science and the Tagore Chair in Indian Cultures and Civilizations, Indiana University]*

## How the Media May be Making the COVID-19 Mental Health Epidemic Worse

**J. BRIAN HOUSTON & JENNIFER M. FIRST**

**THECONVERSATION.COM**

Since the pandemic began, anxiety rates in the U.S. have tripled; the rate of depression has quadrupled. Now research is suggesting the media is part of the problem. Constantly watching and reading news about COVID-19 may be hazardous for your mental health.

We are professors who study the psychological effects on people caught up in crisis, violence and natural disasters. COVID-19 surely qualifies as a crisis, and our survey of more than 1,500 U.S. adults clearly showed that those experiencing the most media exposure about the pandemic had more stress and depression.

It's understandable. The intimations of death and suffering, and the images of overwhelmed hospitals and intubated patients can be terrifying. COVID-19 has created an infodemic; members of the public are overwhelmed with more information than they can manage. And much of that information, especially online, includes disturbing rumors, conspiracy theories and unsubstantiated statements that confuse, mislead and frighten.

**STRESS WORSE FOR SOME THAN OTHERS**

A June 2020 study of 5,412 U.S. adults says 40% of respondents reported struggling with mental health or substance use issues. This finding did not address whether respondents had COVID-19. Since then, some people who had COVID-19 are now reporting mental health issues that appeared within 90 days after their illness subsided.

Taking care of a relative or friend with the virus might result in mental health problems, and even just knowing someone with COVID-19 can be stressful. And if a family member or friend dies



from it, anxiety and depression often follow the grief. This is even more likely if the individual dies alone – or if a memorial isn't possible because of the pandemic.

Essential workers, from hospitals to grocery stores, have a higher risk for COVID-related mental health problems. This is particularly true for health care workers caring for patients who ultimately died from the virus.

Black and Hispanic adults also report more mental health issues, including substance abuse and thoughts of suicide. Having access to fewer resources and experiencing the systemic racism running through much of U.S. health care may be two of the factors. The COVID-19 pandemic also intersected with episodes of police violence toward Black Americans. This alone may have exacerbated mental health problems.

Children, young adults and college students also show comparatively worse mental health reactions. This could be due to the disconnect they feel, brought on by the isolation from

peers, the loss of support from teachers and the disappearance of daily structure.

**SETTING LIMITS**  
**ESSENTIAL**

Staying informed is critical, of course. But monitor how much media you're consuming, and assess how it affects you. If you are constantly worrying, feeling overwhelmed, or having difficulty sleeping, you may be taking in too much COVID media. If this is happening to you, take a break from the news and do other things to help calm your mind.

Parents should frequently check in with children to see how they are affected. Listening to and validating their concerns – and then

providing honest responses to their questions – can be enormously helpful. If a child is having difficulty talking about it, the adult can start with open-ended questions ("How do you feel about what is happening?"). Reassure children that everything is being done to protect them and discuss ways to stay safe: Wear a mask, socially distance, wash hands.

Finally, you can model and encourage good coping skills for your children. Remind young people that good things are still happening in the world. Work together to list healthy ways to cope with COVID-19 stress. Then do them. These activities will help your children cope – and it will be good for you too.

*[J. Brian Houston is Associate Professor of Communication and Public Health, University of Missouri-Columbia; Jennifer M. First is University of Tennessee, College of Social Work, University of Tennessee]*



# High probability of Uttarakhand-scale flood in Bhutan

**THIMPU, 18 FEB [KUENSEL]:** The devastation caused by the Uttarakhand floods earlier this month has once again brought into sharp focus the vulnerability of the fragile mountain ecosystem in the Himalayas. The probability of such climate-induced events, according to experts, is high in Bhutan.

With over 70 percent of the settlements in the valleys and major hydropower projects development along basins, a glaciologist with the National Hydrology and Meteorology Centre (NCHM), Toeb Karma, said that a flood of Uttarakhand-scale was likely to occur in Bhutan.

Although media reports attributed the cause of the Uttarakhand flood, which killed hundreds of people and damaged two hydropower projects, to ice breakage, avalanche, and collapse of a rock's edge, Toeb Karma said that it could have been caused by rupturing of a lake hidden beneath or within a glacier called in-glacial lakes.

Although the lakes are not visible on the surface, occurrence of in-glacial lakes are common in the Himalayas. Bhutan does not have official records of the in-glacial lakes, but Toeb Karma said that it was prominent in the country. "There is a 13km in-glacial lake at Tshojong in Lunana."

Rupturing of in-glacial lakes can be triggered by



earthquakes, which might cause rockslides and landslides in steep terrain.

Records with NCHM show that the incidence of small-scale Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) has increased since the 1994 flood. "Uttarakhand incidence is a good reminder to Bhutan," said the director of NCHM, Karma Dupchu.

He said that the Mangdechu project was at a higher risk. Mangdechu has five potentially dangerous glacial lakes upstream. "Mangdechu is a flashy river and the gradient is high."

In flashy rivers, floods occur and recede suddenly in a short period of time.

NCHM estimates show that, from the monitoring room in Jongthang to Mangdechu dam site, the flood will

only take about 50 minutes, and 88 minutes from Jongthang to the power plant.

According to reports, if the moraine dam breaches at Thorthormi lake, there will be 53 million cubic metres of water rushing down.

**WHAT CAN BE DONE?**

The government has identified 17 potentially dangerous lakes in the country. Water levels of Thorthormi and Rapstreng lakes have been reduced to safe levels. Hazard zonation maps and early warning systems (EWS) have been installed along Mangdechu, Chamkharchu, and Punatsangchu.

This, however, is not enough, according to Karma Dupchu.

He said that there was a need to upgrade EWS to a flood forecasting

system, which needs more funds and government support. "EWS is the future. The casualties in Uttarakhand dam site could have been minimised if they had EWS."

Most of the victims were power projects' workers.

Although EWS had a life span of only five years, Karma Dupchu said that the EWS along Punatsanghu was used for over 10 years. They were maintained with the help of the United Nations Development Programme.

He said that the centre and Druk Green Power corporation should enhance partnerships to install and sustain the EWS infrastructure instead of depending on donors. Punatsangchu and Mangdechu projects co-financed the initial installation but not

maintenance.

Installation of EWS along Wangchu is underway with support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency. A recent assessment has shown expansion of glacial lakes in the Pachu basin.

He said that to create a vibrant, research- and science-driven centre, there should be a separate office instead of being embedded within the ministry compound. "The science-based organisations should be well-equipped. We don't even have enough space in the current office."

He said that, during the lockdowns, it was difficult to maintain data and monitoring activities. Duplication of weather and climate-related projections by individuals, agencies, and institutions impeded

the centre's role in disseminating correct projections.

The centre also faces challenges due to lack of technology and equipment, inaccessibility to glacial lakes, and lesser window of opportunity to carry out surveys and monitoring works.

Bhutan has 700 glaciers in Bhutan that are losing their mass or retreating at an alarming rate. Experts warn that glaciers could disappear in the next 50 years if the trend continues.

The region has about 15,000 glaciers, which are retreating at a rate of 100 to 200 feet per decade. In Nepal, Bhutan, India and Pakistan, a large number of glacial lakes have been deemed imminently dangerous by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development.

## SC closes suo motu proceedings to probe larger conspiracy to frame ex-CJI Gogoi

**NEW DELHI, FEB 18 (PTI):** The Supreme Court on Thursday closed the proceedings initiated to probe a larger conspiracy to frame ex-CJI Ranjan Gogoi in an alleged sexual harassment case and "fixing" of benches in the top court.

A bench headed by Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul said that nearly two years have passed and the possibility of retrieving electronic records is very less in the probe.

The top court, while closing the suo motu proceeding in the case, said the in-house proceedings has already completed the probe into the sexual harassment allegations against then CJI Gogoi and the three-member panel headed by Justice S A Bobde, now the CJI, has already given the report exonerating him.

The bench also comprising justices AS Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian said that the Justice (retd) AK Patnaik panel was not able to get electronic records like WhatsApp messages to probe into the conspiracy and

hence no purpose would be served by continuing with the suo motu case.

The top court referred to the letter of the Director of Intelligence Bureau that some conspiracy might have ensued due to some tough decisions taken by former Chief Justice Gogoi like verdict on preparation of the National Register for Citizens (NRC) in Assam.

There are strong reasons to believe that some kind of conspiracy might have been undertaken against the then CJI Gogoi, the bench said, while quoting the report of Justice Patnaik.

It said, in view of the mandate of the order dated April 25, 2019 Justice Patnaik's report opines that it cannot really inquire whether the decisions of the then CJI on the judicial side had triggered the conspiracy against Gogoi.

On April 25, 2019, the top court had appointed Justice Patnaik to hold an inquiry into the sensational allegations of a lawyer about "larger conspiracy" to frame Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi and fixing of benches in the top court.

## Ruling MNF sweeps Aizawl Municipal Corporation polls

**AIZAWL, FEB 18 (PTI):** Retaining its political wave since the assembly polls three years back, the ruling Mizo National Front (MNF) on Thursday swept the Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC) polls by bagging 11 out of the 19 wards.

The MNF won the same number of seats it had bagged in the last civic body polls held in 2015.

As per the civic body polls results declared after counting Thursday, main opposition party Zoram People's Movement (ZPM), which fought on all the 19 wards, won 5, while the Congress, which fielded 19 candidates, including 2 incumbent councillors, bagged 2.

The BJP, which contested 9 seats, drew a blank.

Seven incumbent councillors (MNF-5 and

Congress-2) have been re-elected while 12 others are freshers.

Of the 6 reserved seats for women, ZPM won 5 while MNF bagged 1.

Altogether, 8 women candidates have been elected and the remaining 11 were male.

Among the prominent figures, incumbent deputy mayor Lalringliana of MNF from ward-II defeated his nearest opponent Lalthazuala Rawite of ZPM by a margin of 716 votes.

Congress leader Rosiamgheta won the civic polls for the third consecutive term by defeating his opponent MNF nominee Rochhunga Ralte by a margin of 232 votes.

Of the three TV personalities, Chuaazikpuii of MNF and ZPM nominee Baryl Vanneihsang have been declared elected.

## Aizawl FC thrash Mohammedan Sporting 3-0 in I-League

**KOLKATA, FEB 18 (PTI):** Former champions Aizawl FC thrashed Mohammedan Sporting 3-0 in a fine display of attacking football in an I-League match here on Thursday.

A Malsawmtluanga goal from a free-kick in the 16th minute and strikes from Lalremsanga (64th) and Lalliansanga (67th) in the second half led Aizawl's dominant win over the Black Panthers, who could not create many goal-scoring chances.

Yan Law's Aizawl FC started the game with their usual style of attacking football, while keeping possession and rotating the ball around the opponent's penalty box.

In the 11th minute, Brandon Vanlalremdika's header off a Lalliansanga free-kick came close to



handing Aizawl FC the lead, but the opposition goalkeeper's quick reaction thwarted the attack.

However, five minutes later, Mohammedan's Priyant Singh was beaten by a moment of sheer

brilliance.

Malsawmtluanga's swirling free-kick from 25 yards left Priyant in absolute disarray as the ball curved and crashed into the bottom left corner to hand Aizawl FC the lead out of nowhere.

Aizawl FC should have been two goals up going into the half-time, but Lalliansanga's shot from inside the box, shortly before the breather, rattled the bar and went out.

Lalliansanga was once again unlucky with

his strike, seconds into the second half. This time, his glorious effort from outside the box crashed against the bar and went out of play once again.

With Aizawl dominating from the beginning of the match, Mohammedan Sporting had made substitutions at the break to bring in fresh legs.

Like the first half, the second also needed a moment of sheer brilliance from Aizawl FC to double their lead. That moment came in the 64th minute when Lalremsanga provided a fine strike.

From the left side of the box, the forward saw a narrow opening and capitalised on it to its fullest, as his shot sent the opposition goalkeeper wrong-footed and slammed into the

bottom left corner.

A few minutes later, Aizawl FC made it three. This time Lalliansanga headed home from close range and found the net after Lalmalsawma's delicious cross beat the entire Mohammedan defence, finding Lalliansanga at the back post.

The win, their third of the season, took Aizawl to 12 points from eight matches, two points clear of fifth-placed TRAU.

## CPIM slams govt over hike in petrol prices

**NEW DELHI, FEB 18 (PTI):** The CPI(M) on Thursday slammed the government over the hike in petrol prices and claimed that over the last six years the Modi government has hiked excise duties on petroleum products by "217 per cent".

The Left party demanded an immediate rollback of the price hike on petrol.

For the first time ever, the price of petrol crossed the Rs 100 per litre mark in Rajasthan

on Wednesday after fuel rates were hiked for the ninth day in a row.

Petrol and diesel prices were increased by 25 paise per litre each, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers. In Sriganganagar town of Rajasthan, petrol price soared to Rs 100.13 a litre on Wednesday.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) in a statement said what is worse is that the hikes have come at a time when international oil prices

have fallen with the base price for petrol being Rs 47.12 in 2014 to Rs 29.34 in 2021, which is nearly 50 per cent,

"The main reason for these escalating prices is the unbridled hike in the excise duties by the central government, which today is 38 per cent of the cost of petrol. The tax levied by the Centre increased by a whopping 217 per cent since this Modi government assumed office in 2014," it said.

"These hikes in excise duties are clearly meant

to offset the losses to government revenues due to the tax concessions provided to the corporates and income tax payees. There is a significant reduction in the corporate and income tax revenues from 6.81 and 6.38 lakh crores respectively last year a reduction to 5.47 and 5.61 lakh crores respectively, as shown in the 2020-21 budget," the party alleged.

The government's "bonanza to the rich and its cronies" is sought to be made up by these

excise duty hikes, the CPI(M) said.

"Further, the hikes in prices of petroleum products will result in higher transportation costs which will increase the prices of all essential commodities

The cascading inflationary effect will further worsen the economic recession. The politburo of the CPI(M) calls upon all party units across the country to organise protest actions demanding that the Centre withdraw these excise duties," it said.

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*Real Sociedad's Mikel Merino: 'I am who I am because of the Premier League'*

SID LOWE

**LONDON, 18 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]:** Mikel Merino was going into battle but at least he had a song to sing. There's a pause, a smile and he begins, memories of St James' Park. "He comes from Spain and he's effing class. In fact, he's better than Fàbregas: it's Merino, la, la, la, Merino." The lyrics haven't left him, then. None of it has, he says laughing. "What I most take with me, the thing I'll remember when the years pass, is the fans; the way they lived football." A former Newcastle, Manchester United, Manchester City and Arsenal player walk into a club. It could be the start of a joke; on Thursday, it's part of Real Sociedad's lineup: Merino, Adnan Januzaj, David Silva and Nacho Monreal facing an English team for the first time since departing the Premier League. "We talk about it sometimes," Merino says. "It's unique, special, we miss it. But we're delighted to be here now."

How could they not be? San Sebastián may be the nicest city in Spain, boasting beautiful bays and the most Michelin stars per capita in Europe, and la Real might well play the nicest football. Fifth in La Liga, they have a Copa del Rey final in three weeks. And for Merino, it was a homecoming, just 83km from Pamplona where he was born and raised. He was only 22, but he had set off early and alone, and needed this. The move was good for him; his form outstanding, an international call-up followed.

The son of a professional footballer and a basketball player, Merino began at Osasuna, where his dad had played more than 200 games and where he watched Patxi Puñal, Pierre Webó and Savo Milosevic reach a cup final and the Champions League, but departed having led them to promotion back to the first division. He had just turned 20 when he joined Borussia Dortmund under Thomas Tuchel – "very methodical, with a very clear style" – and 21 when he went to Newcastle. "An adventure", he calls it, but it wasn't always how the midfielder had imagined it. "There are moments you're not happy. Sometimes people think a footballer is a machine, but I went not knowing how to do anything for myself, and at times you're lonely. I wasn't playing much and had to mature. The situation forced that on me. You grow or you sink. But I don't regret it: I wanted to leave my comfort zone, take a step forward, see the world, and as a life experience it was enriching: a new country, a new culture."

A new football, too. In Navarra, they talk about "rasmia", a will to win, pride, "bad milk", as Merino calls it: that edge, a competitiveness and toughness that stands apart from much of Spain. But even then Germany was different and England different again. "When people ask about the Premier League, I tell them: when I was going to play, I was preparing myself mentally to go to war," he says. "I was going out thinking about the fight."

## Morris becomes most expensive IPL buy; Gowtham goes for Rs 9.25 cr as 'SRK' makes presence felt

**CHENNAI, FEB 18 (PTI):** Chris Morris on Friday became the most expensive buy in the IPL auction history with Rajasthan Royals shelling out Rs 16.25 crore for the South Africa all-rounder even as uncapped players such as Karnataka's K Gowtham also hogged the limelight with hefty deals here. Spin bowling All-rounder Gowtham was bought for a record Rs 9.25 crore by the Chennai Super Kings. The 32-year-old is currently with the Indian team as a net bowler for the ongoing Test series against England.

Tamil Nadu's Shahrukh Khan, named after the Bollywood superstar, expectedly got a handsome Rs 5.25 crore deal from Punjab Kings, more than 51 times his base price of Rs 20 lakh. Shahrukh has been in the limelight with his exploits in the recent Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy.

Gowtham, an IPL regular who was released by Punjab Kings, was the second off-spinner CSK bought after England's Moeen Ali. With the hefty price tag, Gowtham became the most expensive uncapped buy in IPL history. His base price was also Rs 20 lakh.

Morris' big pay day came after another all-rounder and perennial under-performer, Australian Glenn Maxwell, once again managed to attract a winning Rs 14.25 crore bid from Royal



Challengers Bangalore.

Punjab Kings, who went into the auction with the maximum purse among eight teams, paid Rs 14 crore to rope in Australian pacer Jhye Richardson hoping he will plug the gap in their leaking bowling department.

The 24-year-old, who has played two Tests, 13 ODIs and nine T20Is for Australia, was the leading wicket-taker in the recent Big Bash League.

Punjab paid a big amount -- Rs 8 crore -- for another Australian pacer, the uncapped Riley Meredith. The 24-year-old has 43 wickets in 34 T20s that he has played.

Morris, who came with a base price of Rs 75 lakh, generated bids from four teams before it became a battle between Royals and Punjab Kings.

Royals eventually sealed it with a record bid which made Morris the costliest buy at the auction ever, surpassing

bat as well."

Earlier, KKR made the opening bid for Maxwell but it eventually became a two-way war between Chennai Super Kings and RCB before the Virat Kohli-led team won him with a bid which came to USD 1.96 million.

"We wanted to get an X-factor player and we are delighted to get Maxwell," RCB Director of Cricket Mike Hesson said.

Punjab Kings, who had paid Rs 10.75 crore for Maxwell in the previous auction, had released the 32-year-old following the 2020 edition in which he made 108 runs in 13 games at 15.42.

In 82 IPL games, Maxwell has made 1505 runs at a modest average of 22.13. England all-rounder Moeen Ali also went for a high price of Rs 7 crore to Chennai Super Kings. Both Maxwell and Moeen had base prices of Rs 2 crore.

He is a quality bowler through all phases of the game, and also he can win us the game with the

## Djokovic ends run of qualifier Karatsev to reach ninth Australian Open final

**MELBOURNE, 18 FEB [PA MEDIA]:** Even after a dramatic week like the last, filled to the brim with injury, frustration and doubt, the outcome for Novak Djokovic so rarely ever changes. With a wonderful performance, Djokovic ended the surprise run of qualifier Aslan Karatsev with a brisk 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 win to reach the Australian Open final once more.

Djokovic has now reached nine finals at the slam he has dominated for over a decade. It is ominous enough that he is historically a perfect 8-0 in those championship matches, but even more notably, he ended his time on Rod Laver Arena with a statement to be heeded. "This is [the] best I felt in the entire tournament," he said. "Felt great, I can swing through the ball. No pain. Just the best match so far. It came at the right time and I'm thrilled to feel this way, for sure."

After a win over Alexander Zverev that was more impressive for his clutch play than his consistent level, Djokovic finally played with a level of physical comfort, following his abdominal injury sustained in his third round against Taylor Fritz, that allowed him to soar. For the first time since the first week, he did not clutch his stomach or grimace during points and the bilingual monologues to



his camp were replaced by a searing focus.

On the other side of the court, Karatsev stood as one of the most fascinating stories of the past year. Before the tour hiatus last March due to the coronavirus outbreak, he was the definition of a journeyman. Ranked 263rd then, he had spent just one year of his nomadic life in the top 200. His pursuit of a meaningful career has taken him to different training basess, from his Russian hometown of Vladikavkaz to Israel, back to various parts of Russia, Germany, Spain, and now Belarus.

When he returned after the break last year, he immediately began a startling run across the European clay court challengers, winning 20 of 21 matches and rising to his current ranking of 114. A modest grand slam run, particularly on the clay courts of Roland Garros, looked a possibility but his presence in the final four

here is unprecedented. No male player in the open era had ever reached a slam semi-final on his debut; he has done so at the age of 27, after already spending so much of his life elsewhere.

As Karatsev stood before one of the all-time greats in his second home, he immediately looked like he was exactly at the level he should be. His vicious ball striking from both wings, driven by the force of his enormous calves, immediately penetrated Djokovic's defence not only because of his sheer power but his rare ability to drag opponents off the court with his wicked angles. And yet Djokovic still roared to a 6-3, 5-1 lead, the type of outlandish feat that only he can really achieve.

The world No 1 landed his returns at Karatsev's feet, redirected so many of the Russian's strongest blows and unflinchingly stepped into the court whenever the opportunity arose, hitting just one

unforced error in the first 77 points of the match. He offered his opponet absolutely nothing. Karatsev tried his hardest to fight back, and he did better than most.

When Djokovic's level finally dropped for a beat, he snatched a break back and pushed him all the way to two break points as he served for the set at 5-4, smiting a Djokovic set point by ending a 53-stroke rally with a winning drop shot. But even through his physical issues, the Djokovic serve has been lights-out on these lightning-fast courts. He saved both break points with enormous serves and punctuated his victorious set with a roar. He never looked back.

The past month in Australia is one that Djokovic will not soon forget. His early days in Adelaide were laced with controversy after his genuine but tactless attempts to help his players ended in another round of widespread criticism. Once the

"Absolutely buzzing to play for CSK. They have a massive fan base and I can't wait to meet them. I can't wait to play under Dhoni. My teammate Sam Curran is there too. This made my day, made my year," said Moeen in a video message.

Bangladesh star Shakib Al Hasan was lapped up by KKR for Rs 3.2 crore. He missed the IPL last year as he was serving a ban for failing to report a corrupt approach.

Australian pacer Nathan Coulter-Nile also ended up with a good deal, fetching a Rs 5 crore bid from Mumbai Indians. He had a base price of Rs 1.5 crore.

Australian Steve Smith, who was released by Rajasthan Royals, was bought by Delhi Capitals for Rs 2.20 crore, only Rs 20 lakh more than his base price.

At his base price of Rs 1.5 crore, England batsman Dawid Malan was a bargain buy for Punjab Kings, who went into the auction with the maximum purse among eight teams.

New Zealand fast bowler Adam Milne went to Mumbai Indians for Rs 3.2 crore, more than six times his base price of Rs 50 lakh.

Among the players who went unsold were Harbhajan Singh, Hanuma Vihari, Karun Nair, Alex Hales, Jason Roy, Adil Rashid, Kedar Jadhav, Mustafizur Rahman and Aaron Finch.

## Naomi Osaka into Australian Open final as Serena Williams makes tearful exit



**MELBOURNE, 18 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]:** Serena Williams's quest for a record-equalling 24th grand slam continues after the American veteran lost her Australian Open semi-final in straight sets to Naomi Osaka. The third-seeded Japanese is now the overwhelming favourite to collect her fourth major title, and second at Melbourne Park, on Saturday night against Jennifer Brady, who outlasted Karolina Muchová in the second semi.

Defeat clearly stung the 39-year-old, who left her brief post-match press conference overwhelmed. Asked to explain how she'd had such a bad day at the office, she replied, "I don't know." Then, choking back tears, added, "I'm done," and exited stage right.

This was a pairing fit for a grand slam decider, never mind a semi-final, but the quality on paper never materialised on court. This was the fourth meeting between these two modern greats, all of which have failed to live up to expectations.

At the end of an error-strewn first set both players were serving below 50% and both had struck more unforced errors than winners – Williams fourfold. Remarkably, the seven-time champion had a stats sheet featuring no winners but 10 unforced errors on her forehand side. "The difference today was errors," Williams later said. "It was a big error day for me."

This panoply of mistakes contributed to a staccato rhythm with only one rally extending beyond eight strokes. The action was a series of false starts without a false ever breaking out. The Flo-Jo inspired catsuit proved ultimately in vain.

The absence of a vocal crowd did not help. Despite Melbourne emerging from its snap five-day lockdown on Thursday, Rod Laver Arena was barely one-quarter full.

Outside the venue it was picture perfect. The temperature was around 30C but kept in check by a gentle breeze that rustled the leaves of the stately gum trees beside Court 5. In Garden Square spectators lounged in front of a puttering fountain. There was a relaxed holiday mood around the precinct, perhaps it spilled over on to centre court?

In losing the opening two games of the match Osaka looked twitchy. Williams had already unleashed the kind of ferocious return winner that knocked Simona Halep off her stride in

the quarter-finals, but it proved a false dawn. The third game of a match is too early to be a turning point, but at 30-30 Osaka double-faulted after a poor ball toss. She responded in sparkling fashion, opening her shoulders, shrugging off her anxieties and hitting her way to the next three points, sparking a run of five consecutive games.

"It's always an honour playing her," Osaka said afterwards about Williams. "I didn't want to go out without trying my best." She tried her best. She didn't go out.

Williams is no stranger to boom and bust tennis, but the boom was largely absent, with mishits ending rallies much sooner than expected. Osaka is not the kind of player such generosity can be extended to, not in this run of form.

This semi-final victory was Osaka's 20th win in succession. She has not lost to anyone since February 2020, a stretch that includes lifting the US Open title. So when Williams broke back to level the second set at 4-4 it came as little surprise to see the 23-year-old respond with a break to love. Beneath the winsome demeanour lies a warrior.

Osaka has now passed the fourth round at a slam on four occasions, the three prior to this she departed the event the champion. It would be a major surprise if her name was not once again engraved onto the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup.

Inevitably the post mortem will lead to soul searching from the Williams camp. Despite having her best form and fitness for four years, that elusive 24th slam remains tantalisingly unattainable. What is clear is she is no longer an irresistible force, winning only two major titles from her past 12 visits to a semi-final, compared to a success rate of 21 from 28 before that.

Attention now turns to Wimbledon (even the most optimistic Williams fan can hold out little hope at Roland Garros) and another shot at the holy grail. Approaching 40, the window is closing on a moment of history that once appeared a formality.

But even if Williams does not succeed in scaling the highest of peaks, her contribution to her sport remains extraordinary, and her legacy long-lasting. She need only look across the net for validation. "I was a little kid watching her play," Osaka said, "and just to be on the court playing against her for me is a dream."



# Australian media law raises questions about ‘pay for clicks’

**CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA (AP):** Timothy Berners-Lee, the British computer scientist known as the inventor of the World Wide Web, says Australian plans to make digital giants pay for journalism could set a precedent that renders the Internet as we know it unworkable.

“Specifically, I am concerned that that code risks breaching a fundamental principle of the web by requiring payment for linking between certain content online,” Berners-Lee told a Senate committee scrutinizing a bill that would create the News Media Bargaining Code. It’s a question dividing proponents and critics of the proposed Australian law: does it effectively make Google and Facebook “pay for clicks” and might it be the beginning of the end of free access?

The battle is being watched closely in the European Union, where officials and lawmakers are drafting sweeping new digital regulations.

Google contends the law does require it to pay for clicks. Google regional managing director Melanie Silva told the same Senate committee that read Berners-Lee’s submission last month she is most concerned that the code “requires payments simply for links and snippets.”

“The concept of paying a very small group of website or content creators for appearing purely in our organic search results sets a dangerous precedent for us that presents unmanageable risk from a product and business-model point of view,” Silva said.

Facebook regional vice president Simon Milner agreed that the potential cost for news under the code was “entirely uncapped and unknowable.”

Uniquely, Australia’s code includes a negotiation safety net. An arbitration panel would prevent digital giants from abusing their dominant negotiating positions by making



take-it-or-leave-it payment offers to news businesses for their journalism.

In the case of a standoff, the panel would make a binding decision on whose best-offer wins.

Peter Lewis, director of the Australia Institute’s Center for Responsible Technology think tank, said the monetary value of public interest journalism has yet to be established.

“The reason it’s such as ephemeral process, if you like, is that no one’s ever tried this before,” Lewis said.

“How do you value fact-based news absent advertising? News has always been valued on the back of how much ads that the outlet can sell. Because Google and Facebook have dominated the advertising market and taken that out of the equation, we’re now trying to work out the value of public interest journalism,” Lewis added.

Google has reacted to the threat of compulsory arbitration by stepping up negotiations on licensing content agreements with Australian media companies through its own News Showcase model.

Facebook responded Thursday by blocking users from accessing and sharing Australian news.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg amended draft legislation after

weekend talks with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Sundar Pichai, chief executive of Alphabet Inc. and its subsidiary Google, to make it clear the platforms would not be charged per news snippet or link.

“We never intended that . . . if the arbitrator was overseeing a deal between a television station and one of the digital platforms, that they would make that digital platform pay 2 cents, for example, for every click over the forthcoming year,” Frydenberg said. “That was never the intention. It was always the intention was to have a lump sum payment and that’s what we have made explicit in the code.”

Dan Stinton is managing director of Guardian Australia and New Zealand which is negotiating a licensing deal through Google’s News Showcase.

Stinton said Google has benefitted from news through engagement with search users who link to journalism, the consumer data Google collects from publishers and from its revenue share from ads that are published with news articles.

“Google have been prosecuting an argument that they’re being asked to pay for links in Search and that is not the case,” Stinton said.

“They’re not stealing published content, but I

do believe they are using their market power to preference their own businesses to the detriment of publishers and that’s not right,” Stinton said.

“It’s not just paying for links and snippets within search, it’s paying for the entire benefit that Google receives,” he added.

Google has reached pay deals with more than 450 publications globally since it launched News Showcase in October.

The EU’s executive Commission has proposed new rules aimed at taming the biggest digital “gatekeepers.” Proposals working their way through negotiations among lawmakers from the 27-member bloc’s parliament could be amended to include elements of Australia’s model.

Britain, which recently left the EU, is planning similar digital reforms that include shaking up the relationship between online platforms and news publishers.

“There’s definitely an influence” from Australia, said Angela Mills Wade, executive director of the European Publishers Council, a lobbying group for media companies. “It is being closely monitored by all who have a stake in the outcome.”

The EU has already laid out a way for publishers and news companies to strike

licensing deals with online platforms under revamped copyright rules. France was the first country to adopt those rules into national legislation but Google initially balked at payments. However, a court ordered it into talks with a publishing group that resulted in a framework for negotiating individual deals.

One part of the Australian model that has caught attention in Europe is the requirement for binding arbitration if payment talks don’t lead to an agreement, which Google has resisted because it would give the company less control.

Mills Wade said several leading EU lawmakers want to add an arbitration mechanism to the digital regulations.

“Given that Google and Facebook have been undermining the scope of the publishers’ right it is clear that regulatory measures are needed, especially the final arbitration mechanism,” said Mills Wade. “Otherwise the majority of publishers won’t have the negotiating power to reach agreements.”

Google has been striking other news payment deals, including a multi-year agreement with tycoon Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp.

Mills Wade welcomed that deal, saying it shows Google puts “enormous value” on news content.

“However, regulators in Australia, but also in Europe, should not be misled into thinking that single deals, especially just before comprehensive laws come into effect, are the answer to ensuring the fair remuneration due to all publishers large and small, whose content is used by Google,” she said.

## Killings surge in Syria camp housing Islamic State families

**BEIRUT (AP):** The deaths stacked up: a policeman shot dead with a pistol equipped with a silencer, a local official gunned down, his son wounded, an Iraqi man beheaded. In total, 20 men and women were killed last month in the sprawling camp in northeastern Syria housing families of the Islamic State group.

The slayings in al-Hol camp — nearly triple the deaths in previous months — are largely believed to have been carried out by IS militants punishing perceived enemies and intimidating anyone who wavers from their extremist line, say Syrian Kurdish officials who run the camp but say they struggle to keep it under control.

The jump in violence has heightened calls for countries to repatriate their citizens languishing in the camp, home to some 62,000 people. Those repatriations have slowed dramatically because of the coronavirus epidemic, officials say. If left there, the thousands of children in the camp risk being radicalized, local and U.N. officials warn.

“Al-Hol will be the womb that will give birth to new generations of extremists,” said Abdullah Suleiman Ali, a Syrian researcher who focuses on jihadi groups.

It has been nearly two years since the U.S.-led coalition captured the last sliver of territory held by the Islamic State group, ending their self-declared caliphate that covered large parts of Iraq and Syria. The brutal war took several years and left U.S.-allied Kurdish authorities in control of eastern and northeast Syria, with a small presence of several hundred American forces still deployed there.

Since then, remaining IS militants have gone underground in the

Syrian-Iraqi border region, continuing an insurgency. Though attacks in Syria are lower than they were in late 2019, IS sleeper cells continue to strike Syrian government troops, forces of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces and civilian administrators.

Al-Hol houses the wives, widows, children and other family members of IS militants — more than 80% of its 62,000 residents are women and children. The majority are Iraqis and Syrians, but it includes some 10,000 people from 57 other countries, housed in a highly secured separate area known as the Annex. Many of them remain die-hard IS supporters.

The camp has long been chaotic, with the hardcore militants among its population enforcing their will on others and seeking to prevent them from cooperating with Kurdish authorities guarding it.

IS cells in Syria are in contact with residents of the camp and support them, said a senior Kurdish official Badran Cia Kurd. “Anyone who tries to reveal these contacts or stops dealing with Daesh is subjected to death,” he said, using the Arabic acronym for IS.

The U.S.-backed SDF tweeted last week that, backed by air surveillance from the coalition, they detained an IS family smuggler in the area of Hadadia near the camp.

“There are several reasons behind the increase of crime including attempts by Daesh members to impose their ideology in the camp against civilians who reject it,” said Ali, the researcher.

Of the 20 killings at al-Hol in January, at least five of the dead were female residents of the camp, according to the Rojava Information

Center, an activist collective that tracks news in areas controlled by the SDF. All the victims were Syrian or Iraqi citizens, including a member of the local police force, and most were killed in their tents or shelters at night, RIC said.

Most of the victims were shot in the back of their heads at close range, according to RIC and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based opposition war monitor.

On Jan. 9, a gunman killed a policeman in the camp using a silencer-equipped pistol, then as other police chased him, he threw a hand grenade that seriously wounded the patrol commander, the Observatory said. The same day, an official with a local council dealing with Syrian civilians in the camp was shot to death and his son critically wounded.

In another case, an Iraqi camp resident was decapitated, his head found some distance from his body, RIC reported. It is believed he was killed on suspicion he was cooperating with authorities.

Kurdish security officials did not respond for questions from The Associated Press about the situation.

The immediate cause for the jump in killings was not known. In November, Kurdish authorities began an amnesty program for the 25,000 Syrian citizens in the camp, allowing them to leave. Some speculate that, since those taking amnesty must register and work with authorities, the program may have prompted slayings to keep residents in line. Many Syrians fear leaving the camp because they may face revenge attacks in their hometowns from those who suffered under IS rule.

## China hits Canada for statement against arbitrary detention

**BEIJING (AP):** China lashed out at Canada on Thursday for joining the U.S. and 56 other countries in endorsing a declaration denouncing state-sponsored arbitrary detention of foreign citizens for political purposes.

The dispute is rooted in Canada’s campaign to free its nationals Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, who were arrested more than two years ago by China in apparent retaliation for Canada’s arrest days earlier of a top Chinese tech executive, Meng Wanzhou, who is wanted in the U.S. on fraud charges.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying on Thursday reiterated China’s demand

for Meng’s immediate release and told reporters Beijing has complained to Ottawa over the declaration, calling it a “despicable and hypocritical act.”

“Canada colluded with some countries to issue a so-called declaration against arbitrary detention, and deliberately let the relevant people slander China’s arbitrary detention of Canadian citizens Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor,” Hua said at a daily briefing.

“Canada’s so-called declaration looks more like a confession in which the Canadian side admits its mistake in the Meng Wanzhou case,” Hua said. “On the one hand, the Canadian side advocates

that it adheres to the rule of law, but on the other hand, it acts as an accomplice of the U.S. and arbitrarily detains Chinese citizens.”

Meng is a leading executive with Huawei and the daughter of the company’s founder.

China says it has charged Kovrig and Spavor with endangering national security, but little is known about the accusations. In detention, they have been allowed only occasional visits from Canadian diplomats while Meng resides in one of her Vancouver mansions under a loose form of house arrest.

In endorsing the declaration, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken called on “all like-minded

countries to work together to pressure the nations that engage in such detentions to put an end to this practice, to release those detained under such conditions and to respect the rule of law and human rights.”

The declaration is also meant to be a broad denunciation of coercive practice in other countries, such as Russia, Iran and North Korea.

Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Marc Garneau said the declaration is “country-agnostic” and that he wants to recruit more countries as signatories, which presently include the U.K, France, Australia, Germany and Sweden.

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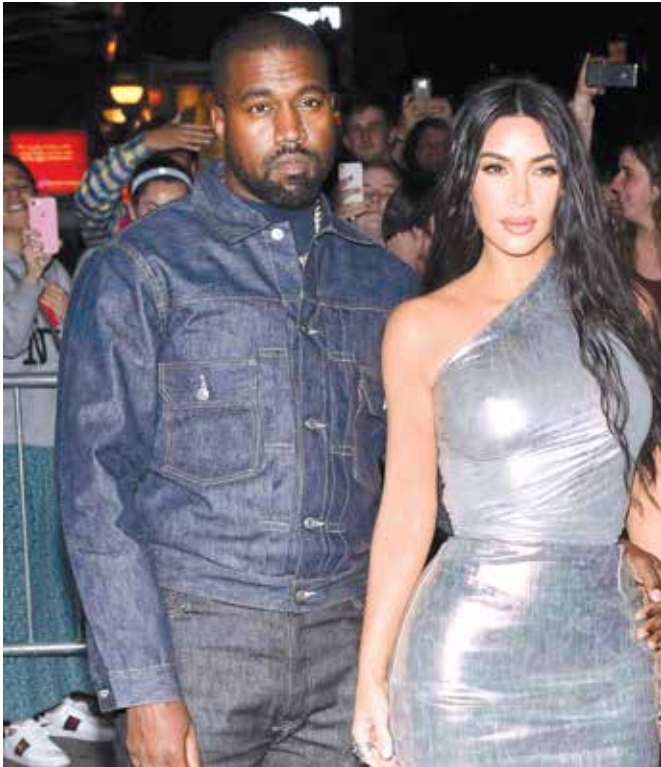
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# Kim Kardashian “Would Never Discourage” Kanye West From Seeing Their Kids as He Moves Out

A source told exclusively about Kim Kardashian and Kanye West’s new normal as they prepare to divorce. Kim Kardashian and Kanye West’s relationship may be nearing its end, but their kids remain the top priority. Even though Kim and Kanye are no longer on speaking terms, as per the source the musician is still an active presence in their four kids’ lives. The source shares, “He still wants to play a huge role in their lives and Kim would never discourage that.” Regarding the new family dynamic, a second source shares some insight on the living arrangement, revealing Kanye moved out of the minimalist home he and Kim shared during their relationship. “He is no longer living at the house with Kim and the kids,” the second insider explains. “When he sees the kids, he meets them elsewhere.” The same source adds the “Stronger” rapper can see North, Saint, Chicago and Psalm West “when he wants.” Prior to moving out, Kanye was living in Wyoming, but has since returned to California, where the second source says he’s been “focusing on his work.” The same source adds the Yeezy designer is “always meeting with different people and getting ideas out.” As for Kim, the first source says, “She is moving on and is having a lot of fun at this stage in her life.” And though the KKW Cosmetics guru “already feels like she is divorced,” the source reveals she and Kanye “are at a standstill currently and neither of them are pushing” to make their split official. “At this point in time, there is no rush for the paperwork to be finalized,” the first source shares. Kim was hesitant to pull the trigger, because “she wants



to make sure she’s making the right decision for the kids”, as previously reported. “It’s not about the marriage anymore, she’ll always care for Kanye but it’s over between them,” a source at the time. “Kim is only focused on what’s best for the kids. It’s a tough decision for her and she’s figuring it out.”

## Luke Combs apologizes for Confederate flag imagery

NASHVILLE, TENN. (AP): Country star Luke Combs has apologized for appearing with Confederate flags, saying he is now aware of how painful that flag is. Combs addressed the images during a conversation with singer Maren Morris on Wednesday during a panel for radio broadcasters about accountability in country music. It came weeks after another top country star Morgan Wallen was removed from radio stations and suspended by his label after being caught on video using a racial slur. Panel moderator and NPR music critic Ann Powers asked Combs about those images during a Q&A for the Country Radio Seminar, an annual country radio broadcasters conference, that was held online this year. “There’s no excuse for those images,” said Combs, a 30-year-old North Carolina singer-songwriter who has had two multiplatinum albums and several hit country songs. Combs said the images were from seven or eight years ago and as a younger man, he did not understand what that flag meant. “And as I have grown in my time as an artist and as the world has changed drastically in the last five to seven years, I am now aware of how painful that image can be to someone else,” Combs said. “I would never want to be associated with something that brings



so much hurt to someone else.” He said he was addressing the old images now because he wanted to show as a highly visible country artist that people can change and learn from their mistakes. He also wanted to encourage more people in the country music industry to have those hard conversations. The genre has been having a racial reckoning even before Wallen’s actions, but top artists have often been reluctant talk about race, both in the genre’s present and its past. “I am trying to learn. I am trying to get better,” Combs said. Morris also spoke about the Confederate flag, saying that as a native Texan, she also didn’t fully understand the history and context of the flag outside of just “Southern pride” until

she was a teenager. She said that seeing that flag being flown at country music festivals makes her not want to play those festivals and urged country artists to demand those flags be removed. She also is one of the few country artists to publicly criticize Wallen’s actions on social media and said that she’s had some backlash, but it was minimal compared to what Black people face regularly. “I appreciate Morgan saying ‘quit defending me’ to his fans, because it’s indefensible. He knows that. We know that,” Morris said. “All we can do, so there isn’t an elephant in the room, is say that out loud, hold our peers accountable. I don’t care if it is awkward sitting down the row from you at the next awards show.”

## Paris Hilton reveals engagement to entrepreneur Carter Reum

LOS ANGELES (AP): Paris Hilton received a special gift for her 40th birthday: an engagement. Hilton announced her engagement to entrepreneur Carter Reum in her social media post on Wednesday — the same day as her birthday. She said on her website that the proposal was everything she had “dreamed of.” Hilton said she and Reum took a pre-dinner walk on the beach before he dropped to one knee at a cabana with

flowers. She said the proposal was followed by a celebration with family and close friends. “There’s no one I’d rather spend forever with,” she said in the post. Hilton shared a series of photos with her wearing a white dress and crown, while 40-year-old Reum sported an all-white suit. The couple have been dating since 2019.



**HOLD ONTO YOUR HAT!** Selling Sunset’s Christine Quinn rocked head-to-toe Louis Vuitton in Los Angeles as she and businessman husband Christian Richard (not pictured) took off in their private jet for a romantic trip to Mexico with their dog.

## Demi Lovato reveals she has brain damage from 2018 overdose

LOS ANGELES (AP): Demi Lovato’s drug overdose in 2018 resulted in the singer having three strokes and a heart attack, leaving her with physical limitations that still affect her. Lovato reveals publicly for the first time details about the near-fatal incident in “Demi Lovato: Dancing With the Devil,” a four-part docuseries debuting March 23 on YouTube Originals. In the trailer, Lovato says doctors told her family she had five to 10 minutes to live. “I was left with brain damage, and I still deal with the effects of that today,” she said in a video call on Wednesday. “I don’t drive a car because I have blind spots in my vision. For a long time, I had a really hard time reading. It was a big deal when I was able to read a book, which was like two months later, because my vision was so blurry.” Lovato said the lasting repercussions “are still there to remind me of what could happen if I ever get into a dark place again.” The 28-year-old singer, who sported pink hair on the call, has been working since age 10, when she appeared on the TV series “Barney & Friends.” She went to rehab for the first time at 18, after struggling with bipolar disorder, anorexia and bullying. Lovato has shared her private struggles before, in a 2012 MTV documentary and in a 2017 YouTube doc in which she said she was still dealing with alcohol and cocaine addictions after undergoing further rehab. She said speaking publicly on those programs provided her with the accountability that kept her sober for six years until her relapse

in 2018. “My purpose in putting this out is to help people who have been on the same path as I have,” she said. “I wanted to set the record straight, and I wanted to reveal it all for my fans.” Lovato’s family, as well as Elton John and Christina Aguilera, are among those interviewed in the doc that was shot over a year. In the third segment, Lovato discusses past traumas in her life. Lovato doesn’t relate to artists who claim they are most creative when they are in a dark place or using drugs. “I feel like the best work that I make is when I’m present and when I am aware of what’s going on in my life,” she said. “That’s when the truth just flows out of me. As long as I continue to tell my truth, I’m going to make music that resonates with people.” Lovato re-launched her singing career at last year’s Grammy Awards and sang the national anthem at the 2020 Super Bowl before the coronavirus pandemic took hold. Last month, Lovato sang on a TV special marking President Joe Biden’s inauguration. Despite her near-death experience, Lovato wouldn’t change what happened to her. “Everything had to happen in order for me to learn the lessons that I learned,” she said. “I look back and sometimes I get sad when I think of the pain that I had to endure to overcome what I have. I’m so proud of the person that I am today. One of the main reasons I’m coming forward is so I never have to live that life again.”

THE DAY AHEAD

**ARIES:** There are periods of doing and periods of being, and they’re both just as important, Aries. What you’re experiencing right now is the latter. So, slow down. Come back to the present instead of oscillating between the past and the future. Trust that you will have some of the most profound revelations in moments of silence. **Taurus:** It’s now or never, Taurus. If you don’t break away at this point, you may be stuck in the given situation for a long time. So, take a stance—for yourself more than anything. You have what it takes to break the pattern. Remember, it’s not going to be easy. There will be withdrawal symptoms. But, once you get past the initial phase, it’s going to be an upward spiral. **GEMINI:** Everybody is entitled to their opinion, just like you’re entitled to yours. Do you really want to go on an ego trip trying to prove your point, though? Word for the wise: take a step back from the drama. Retreat into that space of silence within yourself. You will soon be able to understand why your peace of mind is more important than winning any argument. **CANCER:** At any point of time, you have two options: to stay

where you are, or to choose the path of expansion. Growth is on the cards, Cancer, and it requires you to say yes to the unknown. Don’t shy away from taking that first step. There are many, many adventures that await you on this journey. Remember, the mysterious forces have your back. **LEO:** Who says your dreams are too big or that what you’re trying to achieve is way out of your reach? Beware of buying into the illusion created by your three dimensional reality. Now is not the time to repeat that old story. The cards are reminding you that there is a parallel reality available to you, where you can create the life you desire for yourself. Be mindful of the choices you make today and ensure they’re in line with that big vision. **VIRGO:** This decision is yours and yours alone. Nobody on the outside can put themselves in your shoes and decide what needs to be done here. So, go into that space of silence. Tune into your inner Oracle. Trust what’s coming through from the unseen realms without letting your logical mind get in the way. Those who practice divination may feel inspired to turn to their tools for guidance. **LIBRA:** We all have an idea of what love should look and feel

like. We all have an idea of what our ideal partner should be like. But what you’re inviting into your reality is far better than all of your wildest dreams put together. So breathe out your inhibitions and breathe in the love. It’s time to make space for magic, Libra. It’s time to make space for what you truly deserve. **SCORPIO:** That the past year has been hard for those who have their own businesses is not news to you, Scorpio. But, that doesn’t mean it’s all downhill from here. There is a new and exciting opportunity on the cards for you this week, and it requires you to play your cards strategically. Word for the wise: do what it takes to make it yours. **SAGITTARIUS:** You’ve got love knocking on your door, Sagittarius, and it is not in any way being discreet. Open your heart and allow. Allow, allow, allow. Allow yourself to receive what has always been yours. Trust that connection is just as magical as you imagine it is. Yes, we know it’s not always easy for you to let your vulnerable side show. Challenge yourself to embrace the virtue of openness nonetheless, and know that it will change your life forever.

**CAPRICORN:** They call you when they need something, pretend to be close to you when it serves their fancy, and disappear as soon as you call upon them for help. This friendship had the word ‘toxic’ written all over it from the get-go. The cards are urging you to stop playing nice and recognise the relationships that are not serving you. It’s time to protect your space fiercely and prioritise the most important person in your life—aka you! **AQUARIUS:** Service is coming up as a big theme for you right now, and requires you to adopt selflessness as a virtue. That does not mean you have to change the course of your life or give up on what you have created. It simply means that it’s time to expand your work in a way that includes and uplifts other people. Remember your soul’s mission, Aquarius. You were sent here to inspire a major change in the collective. **PISCES:** Reality check, Pisces: you are only living a percentage of your potential. There is so much you’re yet to explore within yourself. The cards are urging you to stop playing small, take a deep dive and own the gifts that were given to you at birth. For some of you, this may be a time of stepping into a bigger role. Let ‘lead by example’ become your mantra, wild one.