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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Sikkim completes week without Covid deaths, the longest in second wave

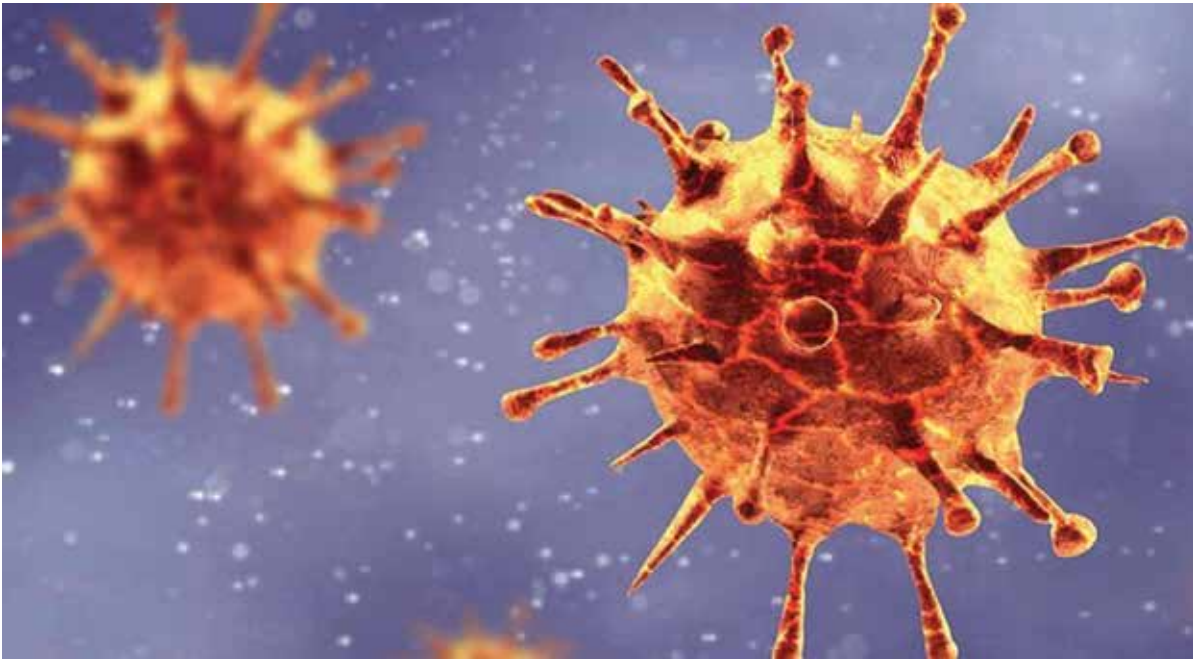
**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 09 OCT:**

Sikkim today completed a full week without any Covid deaths, the longest it gone without the pall of the virus claiming a life in the second wave which has ravaged Sikkim since 22 April, 2021. The Covid toll has held at 388 since 02 October, last Saturday.

In further reassuring news, Sikkim's daily test positivity rate slipped further to 4% today with just 18 new cases reported from the testing of 446 samples in the State in the past 24 hours.

On the other hand, the number of active Covid cases has also gone down to 278 with 65 new recoveries. With this, the active cases have gone below 300 in a long while.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Sur-



veillance Programme of Health Department, 12 people were found positive for COVID-19 from RT-PCR testing of 217 samples and six more cases were detected in rapid antigen testing of 227 samples.

Of these 18 new cases, 13 were registered in

East District and five in West District. South and North districts returned no new cases in the past 24 hours.

The tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported so far in the State since testing began on 28 Feb, 2020, has reached 31,654.

The figure of recov-

ered cases has accordingly further improved to 30,671 and the state's current recovery rate stands at 97.8%, a notch higher than the national average.

As for new hospitalizations, eight more COVID patients were hospitalized yesterday and of those in

hospital, five are currently admitted in ICU.

In the meantime, a total of 5,332 people received their Covishield jabs on Friday, of whom 5,017 completed their vaccination schedule with their second dose and 315 received their first dose.

Blackout warning for Delhi if coal supply not restored in 2 days

NEW DELHI, 09 OCT [NDTV]: There could be a blackout in the national capital in the next two days if coal supplies to power plants do not improve, a Delhi minister said today. Delhi joins a long queue of states including Tamil Nadu and Odisha that have raised concerns over long power cuts due to shortage of coal in power plants.

Over half of India's 135 coal-fired power plants, which in total supply around 70 per cent of the country's electricity, have fuel stocks of less than three days, data from the central grid operator showed, news agency Reuters had reported earlier this week.

"If coal supply doesn't improve, there will be a blackout in Delhi in two days," the national capital's Power Minister Satyendra Jain said today. "The coal-fired power plants that supply electricity to Delhi have to keep a minimum coal stock of one month, but now it has come down to one day," Mr Jain said.

"Our request to the centre is that railway wagons should be arranged and coal should be transported to the plants soonest. All the plants are already running in only 55 per cent capacity," the minister in Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government said.

Mr Jain alleged the coal crisis appears to be "man-made, just as the crisis of medical oxygen supply during the COVID-19 second wave."

"There is politics going on. If you create a crisis, it will seem that some great work has been done by solving it," the Delhi minister said.

Delhi has a 1,300 megawatt (MW) gas-fired power plant in Bawana on the city's outskirts. "All three companies in Delhi are distributors and not power producers. We depend on the centre's plants. If the supply does not come, then after two days there will be a blackout in the whole of Delhi," Mr Jain said.

A Reuters analysis of daily load despatch data from the central grid regulator showed India's power supply deficit in the first seven days of October amounted to 11.2 per cent of the country's total shortages throughout the year.

The data is publicly available but the analysis provides a first concrete indication of the extent of the problem. Energy supplies are under strain globally as prices surge and demand and supply chains are strained by the recovery of consumption following lockdowns to contain the pandemic. Mr Kejriwal today tweeted he has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his intervention in making adequate arrangements of coal and gas to power plants supplying electricity to the city.

Bhaichung Stadium inauguration will "create history": Jacob Khaling



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 09 OCT:**

A coordination meeting regarding the inauguration of Bhaichung Stadium scheduled for 20 Oct was held at the Officer's Club, Namchi, in South District on Saturday. The meeting was chaired by Political Secretary to the Chief Minister, Jacob Khaling.

As per a press release, the main purpose of the meeting was to discuss agendas for the inauguration ceremony. Mr Khaling said that Chief Minister PS Tamang not

only wants the inauguration ceremony to create history in Sikkim but he also wants the stadium to be the pride of the state. He also urged the public of Namchi-Singithang and Poklok-Kamrang to be a part of the ceremony for its grand success. Mr Khaling appealed to all sportspersons of the state and sports lovers to participate in the inauguration.

The release mentions that the Bhaichung Stadium Opening Ceremony Coordination Committee was also formed during the meeting to coordi-

nate the event.

The meeting was also attended by president Namchi Nagar Panchayat, Ganesh Rai and other municipal councillors, president Naya Bazaar Jorethang Nagar Panchayat, Pavitra Manav, Chairperson, Roma Tamang, Advisor, Satish Chandra Rai, Chairman, Tashi Dorje Tamang, Joint Director Sports, South and other dignitaries. The meeting was conducted by SJ Lepcha and ended with the vote of thanks given by Tashi Dorje Tamang.

"Biased against facts": Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Ressa on Facebook

MANILA, 09 OCT [REUTERS]: Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Ressa used her new prominence to criticise Facebook as a threat to democracy, saying the social media giant fails to protect against the spread of hate and disinformation and is "biased against facts".

The veteran journalist and head of Philippine news site Rappler told Reuters in an interview after winning the award that Facebook's algorithms "prioritise the spread of lies laced

with anger and hate over facts." Her comments add to the pile of recent pressure on Facebook, used by more than 3 billion people, which a former employee turned whistleblower accused of putting profit over the need to curb hate speech and misinformation. Facebook denies any wrongdoing.

A representative for Facebook in the Philippines did not respond to requests for comment on Ressa's remarks.

Ressa shared the No-

bel with Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov on Friday, for what the committee called braving the wrath of the leaders of the Philippines and Russia to expose corruption and misuse, in an endorsement of free speech under fire worldwide.

Facebook has become the world's largest distributor of news and "yet it is biased against facts, it is biased against journalism," Ressa said.

"If you have no facts, you can't have truths, you

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Mattress store goes up in flames in Mangan

MANGAN, 09 OCT: A fire broke out in a shoe and mattress shop in Mangan Bazaar this morning. Although most of the inventory in the shop was lost in the blaze, there are

no reports of any injuries. A collective effort of firefighters and residents of the area got the fire under control by 11:30AM. [from WANG-CHUK BHUTIA]

Govt promotes Development Through Credit, Agri Minister hands-over Rs 40 lakh worth for loans for farmers



NAMCHI, 09 OCT [IPR]: An Awareness cum Distribution Programme & Comprehensive Credit Camp was held at the recently-inaugurated Community Recreation Centre at Salghari for farmers from Poklok-Kamrang constituency today.

Agriculture Minister, Lok Nath Sharma, was present as chief guest accompanied by Advisor, Land Use and Environment Board, Bhagirath Rai, Chairperson, Farmers Welfare Board Phurden Lepcha, Chairperson, Urban Development Department KB Rai, Chairman, Roads and Bridges Suk Raj Rai, Zilla Adhakhshya (South) Tshering Dem Bhutia, and officials of the concerned department.

At the onset of the program, Minister Lok Nath Sharma congratulated the people for infrastructures, namely Mushroom Spawn Production Unit, Mini Haat Shed and Community

Recreation Centre inaugurated recently at Dorop/Salghari.

He also expressed gratitude towards the concerned department for accomplishing construction of these necessary and useful infrastructure under their respective heads.

He added that infrastructure like Mushroom Spawn Production Unit and Haat Ghar also carry huge significance to benefit the farming community.

He rhetorically articulated the vision of the state government under the able leadership of Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang and his consistent support towards the farming community through conceptualizing and implementing exemplary programmes with a prime objective to make them self reliant.

He also highlighted Mukhya Mantri Krishi Atmanirbhar Yojana and

detailed marketing procedure to receive the benefit of exemplary financial incentives. He also marked the initiative of financial incentive in Dairy Farming as a historic scheme to support dairy farmers economically.

He also touched upon provision of Mukhya Mantri Macha Utpadan Yojana and Mukhya Mantri Pashudhan Samridhi Yojana that have been dedicated to the farmers of all districts.

He recalled adoption of some of the rural area as Agriculture Model Village (Mamley Kamrang Model Village) and urged farmers to enhance production so as to obtain sustainable income for livelihood.

He also expressed gratitude to the people of Poklok Kamrang constituency for their contributions and support in the formation of new government.

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Congress top body to meet on Oct 16 to hold talks over new party cshief

NEW DELHI, 09 OCT [NDTV]: The Congress's top body will meet on October 16 to hold talks over the new chief, the "current political situation", and state elections next year.

"A meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) will be held on Saturday, October 16, at 10 am," at the party headquarters in Delhi, a statement read.

On agenda will be - the country's "current political situation", "forthcoming assembly elections", and organisational elections, it further read.

Last month, as the party faced turmoil in Punjab amid the leadership change - after it picked the state's first Dalit Chief Minister Charanjit Channi to replace Amarinder Singh, one of Punjab's tallest leaders -spokesperson Randeep Surjewala had told the reporters that a meeting of the CWC was expected soon.

This was after veteran leader Kapil Sibal shot off a new letter to the Gandhis: "In Congress there is no elected president now. Who is taking calls? We don't know who is taking decisions in the party."

"We are G-23, definitely not Ji Huzoor-23. We will keep



raising issues," said Mr Sibal, shooting punches at the Gandhis without naming them.

Hours later, party workers protested outside his house with "Get well soon" placards, threw tomatoes and damaged his car.

The demonstrations were criticised by the leaders of "G-23" or group of 23 party dissidents, who had sent a letter to Sonia Gandhi last year demanding sweeping changes

in the party. Since then, various leaders have reminded the Gandhis that nothing has changed on the ground and the Congress down spiral continues.

Elections are due next year in five states, including Punjab - that has witnessed tremendous political crisis - and Uttar Pradesh.

The Gandhis have been relentlessly attacking the BJP in UP where Priyanka Gandhi

Vadra is in charge. This week, Rahul Gandhi's and sister Priyanka's visit to families of those killed in UP's Lakhimpur district was preceded by Ms Gandhi Vadra's arrest, which she had described as "illegal".

On Friday, poll strategist Prashant Kishor's tweet on "deep-rooted" problems in the Congress, months after his visit to the Gandhis raised speculation about him joining the party, also started a new de-

bate about the party's revival.

"People looking for a quick, spontaneous revival of GOP led opposition based on #LakhimpurKheri incident are setting themselves up for a big disappointment. Unfortunately there are no quick fix solutions to the deep-rooted problems and structural weakness of GOP," Mr Kishor had said in his tweet - which got sharp reactions from party leaders.

Active COVID-19 cases in country lowest in 206 days

NEW DELHI, OCT 9 (PTI):

India saw a single-day rise of 19,740 COVID-19 infections, taking the country's total tally of cases to 3,39,35,309, while the number of active cases has declined to 2,36,643, the lowest in 206 days, according to Union health ministry data updated on Saturday.

The death toll has climbed to 4,50,375 with 248 more fatalities, the data updated at 8 am stated.

The daily rise in new coronavirus cases has been below 30,000 for 15 straight days, the ministry said.

The active cases have declined to 2,36,643 and comprise 0.70 per cent of the total infections, the lowest since March last year. The national COVID-19 recovery rate has been recorded at 97.98 per cent, the highest since March last year, it said.

There has been a decrease of 3,578 cases in the active COVID-19 case-load in a span of 24 hours, the ministry's data stated. The daily positivity rate has been recorded at 1.56 per cent. It has been less than three per cent for the last 40 days, it said.

The weekly positivity rate has been recorded at 1.62 per cent. It has been below three per cent for the last 106 days, according to the health ministry.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease has surged to 3,32,48,291, while the case fatality rate has been recorded at 1.33 per cent, it said. The cumulative doses administered in the country so far under the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination drive has exceeded 93.99 crore.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7 last year, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16 last year.

Odisha industries facing coal crisis, seek CM's intervention



BHUBANESWAR, OCT 9 (PTI):

The Utkal Chamber Of Commerce & Industry Ltd (UCCI), an association of industries, has urged the Odisha government to ensure adequate supply of coal to state-based industries which are facing an acute shortage of dry fuel to run their units.

In a letter to Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, the UCCI Friday said: "We would like to bring to your kind attention the current acute coal shortage situation in the state with many units having stock out or critical coal stock seriously affecting the viable operation of the industrial units."

While the suffering of small and medium industries are increasing day by day, large process industries like steel plants, aluminium smelters and others are operating at a level where their operations are likely to become unviable if the situation continues unabated, the letter said.

Since these units with small and medium industries of the state provide employment to lakhs of people, the UCCI apprehended that the coal shortage situation may give a deadly blow to the continuance of the employment of these people.

Though the state is blessed with abundant coal reserves, Odisha-based local industries are facing a coal deficit and forced to import coal /power as they are not getting enough share

of coal, UCCI president Brahma Mishra said.

The state has coal reserves (about 25% of country deposits), and Coal India Ltd (CIL) subsidiary Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL) produces 150 million tonnes of coal. The Odisha based power plants (16,000 MW) requires 90-95 million tonnes of coal per annum, which is 60% of Odisha's coal production for cost-effective sustainable industry operations.

However, over 65 per cent of Odisha's coal is being supplied to power plants based in other states. Hence, the Odisha-based local industries are facing a coal deficit and are forced to import coal /power as they are getting less than 45% of Odisha's coal production, the UCCI said.

The industries body said that this is depriving the state from domestic value addition and creating local jobs and MSMEs within Odisha. Also, the acute coal shortage in the state is jeopardizing the manufacturing sector in the state further hurting the sentiments of global investors.

The UCCI also requested the state government to communicate to the Ministry of Coal to give necessary direction to MCL and CIL to step up supply of coal to local industries in the state so that stock out of coal is obviated and safe level of coal stock is maintained in critical units to prevent any eventualities in operations.

Sikkim Univ campus progressing fast because of SKM Govt, party claims

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 09 OCT:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha claimed today that phase-1 of the Sikkim University campus construction at Yangyang in South District has been completed within a short period of two and a half years due to the supervision and direc-

tions of Chief Minister PS Tamang.

The party stressed that the Sikkim Democratic Front government had failed to even get the campus started in 11 years. SKM, in comparison, has ensured that around 60% of the construction work has already been finished

within the half a term of the SKM government.

An SKM press release issued by its secretary [press & publicity], Ranjana Pradhan, points out that work on the Sikkim University campus had started 14 years back but the SDF government showed no interest in its progress.

Maruti Suzuki Production Down By 51% In September 2021 Due To Chip Shortage

NEW DELHI, 09 OCT [NDTV]:

Maruti Suzuki India has announced production figures for September 2021. In a regulatory filing made at the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), India's leading carmaker said its total production stood at 81,278 units, which is a 51 per cent decline against 166,086 units produced in the same month in 2020.

The Indo-Japanese carmaker said its production volume last month was affected due to an electronic components shortage. Compared to 113,937 units produced in August 2021, the carmaker registered a

month-on-month (M-o-M) decline of over 28 per cent.

The total number of passenger vehicles manufactured in September were 77,782 units as compared to 161,668 units in the same month last year, registering a de-growth of 51.8 per cent. Compared to 111,368 PVs manufactured in August 2021, the carmaker saw an MoM decline of 30 per cent in PV production last month.

The mini segment that consists of cars like the Alto and S-Presso saw 17,163 units being made in comparison to 30,492 units made in

September 2020, which a drop of over 43 per cent. Production of the B-segment cars including the Celerio, WagonR, Swift, Ignis, Baleno, and the Dzire, stood at 29,272 units, registering a drop of over 67.8 per cent against 90,924 units made last month.

The carmaker manufactured 67,972 units of B-segment cars in August 2021. In addition to this, Maruti Suzuki was able to produce 1,449 units of the Ciaz compact sedan last month as compared to 2,421 units produced in the same month in 2020, which is a decline of over 40 per cent.

"Biased against facts..."

can't have trust. If you don't have any of these, you don't have a democracy," she said. "Beyond that, if you don't have facts, you don't have a shared reality, so you can't solve the existential problems of climate, coronavirus."

Ressa has been the target of intense social-media hatred campaigns from President Rodrigo Duterte's supporters, which she said were aimed at destroying her and Rappler's credibility.

"These online attacks on social media have a purpose, they are targeted, they are used like a weapon," said the former CNN journalist.

Rappler's reporting has included close scrutiny of Duterte's deadly war on drugs and a series of investigative reports into what it says is his government's strategy to "weaponise" the internet, using bloggers on its payroll to stir up anger among online supporters who threaten and discredit Duterte's critics.

Duterte has not commented on Ressa's award. The presidential palace, Duterte's spokesperson, his chief legal counsel, and communications office

did not respond to Reuters requests for comment.

Facebook in March 2019 removed an online network in the Philippines for "coordinated inauthentic behaviour, and linked it to a businessman who has previously said he helped manage the president's social media election campaign in 2016.

Filipinos top the world in time spent on social media, according to 2021 studies by social media management firms.

Platforms like Facebook have become political battlegrounds and have helped strengthen Duterte's support base, having been instrumental in his election victory in 2016 and a rout by his allies in mid-term polls last year.

The Philippines will hold an election in May to choose a successor to Duterte, who under the constitution is not allowed to seek another term.

That campaign "will be a battle for facts," Ressa said. "We are going to keep making sure our public sees the facts, understands it. We are not going to be harassed or intimidated into silence."

Govt promotes Development...

He further highlighted various developmental works being accomplished under the leadership of the Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang in various sectors.

He threw lights on newly announced "Aama Yojana" dedicated to the non working mother of the state.

He expressed his gratefulness to the banking sector for their consistent support to the farmers under Development through Credit.

He then directed officials and field functionaries to work with renewed vigour and utmost sincerity for the benefit of farmers.

Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Horticulture Department, Yashoda Bhandari, underlined departmental activities being taken up in all districts. Department has been working to promote particular type of vegetable cultivation and fruits as per favourable climatic conditions. She also spoke on financial incentives under Mukhya Mantri Krishi Atmanirbhar Yojana.

Secretary, Animal Husbandry, Dr Sangey D Bhutia also highlighted departmental programmes and schemes and encouraged the unemployed youths to come forward and proudly work in agriculture and horticulture field.

Dr Tilak Gazmer, Director Agriculture also briefed at ongoing programmes and activities of the department. He spoke about various schemes provided by the government for the welfare and development of the farmers.

Lead Bank Manager, SBI, Gopal Lama informed about the role of banking sector in development of a society or a nation. He added that the farming centric scheme of Credit Through Development has become a notable medium to generate income for the farmers and that the bank has released around ten crore rupees under the scheme, till date.

The programme also saw felicitation of departmental official for their outstanding performance and lasting contributions.

The farmers of the constituency received various agricultural tools/equipments and token including Power Tiller, On Farm Collection Unit, Chaff Cutter, Spices Grinder, Power Sprayer, Green House Iron structure, Green House UV film, Genap Tank, Carnation flower, mulching plastic, micro irrigation, pulverizer, grinder, machine, sheep farming etc.

Sharma also handed over cheques of around forty lakh to the farmers under Development Through Credit.

The farmers of the constituency also received the credit loan mainly for KCC, poultry farming, piggyery, and dairy.

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AFFIDAVIT:

I Service No. 5850760P Rank HAV Dan Bahadur Chettri s/o Late Bom Bahadur Chettri, a resident of Pakyong Dugalakha, P.O. & P.S. Pakyong, East District, Sikkim do hereby affirm that Smt. Puspa Devi Dawari is my wife but in some of her relevant documents and in my service records her name/ surname has been recorded as "Puspa Chettri" and that in her Aadhar Card and in her Voter ID Card her name/surname has been mentioned as "Puspa Devi Dawari". That before marriage my wife's surname was "Chettri" and after marriage her surname changed to "Dawari Chettri". That "Smt Puspa Devi Dawari" & "Smt Puspa Chettri" are one and same identical person vide affidavit no A 192982 before LD Oath Commissioner, Gangtok, Sikkim on 30.09.2021.

ANTHEYESTI KRIYA

The Antheyesti Kriya of Late Dhanapati Kharel, who left for his heavenly abode on 30th September, 2021, falls on 12 October, 2021. We invite all friends, family and well-wishers to join us in prayers [13th day rites] for the departed soul at our residence in Rawtey Rumtek. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who stood by us in our time of bereavement.



Dr M P Kharel, H P Kharel, Prakash Kharel (sons)
Kamala Devi Kharel, Tulashi Kharel, Indira Kharel, Sangita Kharel (daughters)
Bimala Kharel, Hima Kharel, Rajani Ratna Pandey (daughter in law)
Dr Hari Krishna Shiwakoti, D N Sharma, D R Thapa (son in law)
Vinod Kharel, Sunny Kharel (grandsons)
And entire Kharel Family.
Contact: 8918237123, 9434241044, 9434164765

CAEPHT hosts on-campus training for value-addition for horticulture produce

SUMMIT REPORT
RANIPPOOL, 09 OCT:

A three-day on-campus, hands-on training on "Value Addition of Horticultural Crops," organized by the Multi Technology Testing Centre and Vocational Training Centre, College of Agricultural Engineering and Post-Harvest Technology and sponsored by the Directorate of Extension Education, Central Agricultural University, Imphal, concluded on Friday at CAEPHT, Ranipool, a press release informs.

Twenty-five members of women-run SHGs from Namthang, South Sikkim, and four RAWE programme students took the training. The participants were nominated and arranged



ments for attending the programme were made by KVK, Namthang, it is informed.

The training was inaugurated by CAEPHT Dean, Prof PP Dabral.

The technical sessions started with a lecture on "Different

Packaging methods for horticultural crops" by Asst Professor (Hort), Dr Karma Diki Bhutia, Sikkim University.

Asst Professor (Agri Extension), Dr M Victoria Devi, MTTC & VTC, spoke on "Potential and promising start-up for the rural

women and youth." Assistant Professor (PFE), Dr Said PP, CAEPHT, delivered a lecture on making potato chips and oversaw a hands-on training.

On the second day, hands-on training on making different types

of pickles was conducted by Sanjay Upadhaya and Kabita Chettri, FCLA, Dept of Processing and Food Engineering, CAEPHT, Ranipool. Asst Professor (PFE), Dr Said PP also took a session on value addition for ginger.

French EU presidency to push for end to death penalty globally: Emmanuel Macron

PARIS, 09 OCT [REUTERS]: France will launch a campaign for the worldwide abolition of the death penalty as part of its upcoming presidency of the European Union, President Emmanuel Macron said on Saturday.

A conference will be held in Paris gathering civil society groups from countries where the death penalty is in use or suspended, Macron said in a speech to mark the 40th anniversary of France's abolition of the punishment.

France, which will hold the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2022, will also work with other member states towards a United Nations resolution requiring countries to report each year the number of death penalty sentences given and executions carried out, he said.

Macron was speaking alongside Robert Badinter, the justice minister of late President Francois Mitterrand who steered the abolition of the death penalty through the French parliament in 1981.

France was the 35th country in the world to outlaw the death sentence. Further abolitions and moratoriums since then mean that most countries no longer use the punishment, although several large nations including China, Iran and the United States maintain it.

In France, the public remains sharply divided on the issue, according to opinion polls, and right-wing commentator Eric Zemmour who has burst into contention for next year's presidential election has said he supports the death penalty in principle.

India's economy expected to grow by 8.3% in 2021-22: World Bank

NEW DELHI, 09 OCT [NDTV]: The World Bank has revised the country's growth forecast to 8.3 per cent for the current financial year 2021-22, compared to the earlier estimate of 10.1 per cent.

The World Bank stated in its latest report that the Indian economy - South Asia's largest will register the growth aided an increase in public investment and incentives to boost manufacturing. (Also Read: World Bank Raises India's Growth Forecast To 10.1% From 5.4% For 2021-22)

Due to the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in India, the economic recovery paused and the high frequency data suggested that the recovery also declined for a brief period, according to Hans Timmer, World Bank Chief Economist for the South Asia Region.

Earlier this year, the World Bank said that India's real gross domestic product (GDP) growth for the current fiscal could range from 7.5 to 12.5 per cent in its South Asia Economic Focus report released ahead of the annual Spring meeting of the World Bank and the Inter-

national Monetary Fund (IMF).

The Indian economy had been slowing prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, said the World Bank in its report released on March 31. After reaching 8.3 per cent in the financial year 2016-17, the economic growth decelerated to four per cent in the financial year 2019-20. The slowdown was caused by a decline in private consumption growth and subsequent shocks to the financial sector, according to World Bank.

Meanwhile, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)-led Monetary Policy Committee in its fourth bi-monthly policy review for the current fiscal yesterday, retained the GDP growth at 9.5 per cent for financial year 2021-22.

The central bank also trimmed the inflation projection to 5.3 per cent as it evaluated the economy at a time when there is a steady pick-up in activity with a calculated progress in the vaccination drive. As of now, a quarter of India's adult population being fully vaccinated and almost 71 per cent partially vaccinated, as per government data.

Burning effigies, rail roko, Mahapanchayat: Farmers' plans to protest lillings

NEW DELHI, 09 OCT [NDTV]: Farmers' groups will hold a 'rail roko' on October 18 and a mahapanchayat in Lucknow on October 26 to protest the death of eight people, including four farmers, in UP's Lakhimpur Kheri on Sunday.

They have also demanded the sacking of junior Union Home Minister Ajay Mishra and the arrest of his son Ashish, who remains a free man despite being named as a murder accused in the FIR.

"Farmers from across the country will reach Lakhimpur Kheri on October 12... what happened there was no less than the Jallianwala Bagh and we request all civic organisations to take out candle marches in their cities at 8 pm (on October 12)," Swaraj India chief Yogendra Yadav said today.

"Farmers will go to every state with the ashes (of those farmers who died in Lakhimpur Kheri) and immersions will be done... Dussehra is on October 15 and all farmers will burn effigies of Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah," he added.

"On October 18 we will hold a 'rail roko'... On 26th there will be a huge mahapanchayat in Lucknow."

Eight people died after a SUV - a Mahindra Thar - owned by Ajay Mishra rammed into a group of farmers holding a peaceful protest (as part of the national agitation against the centre's farm laws).

The farmers have alleged Ashish Mishra was in the SUV.

Earlier today Ashish appeared before UP Police for questioning after skipping yesterday's

summons.

He arrived with a police escort to answer a summons that lists him as a witness in the case.

The summons came after the Supreme Court rapped the UP government and police over their handling of this case; Chief Justice NV Ramana asked the state if it would treat the accused any differently if he were not a union minister's son.

Shortly before the farmers announced their plans, protests also broke out in Delhi, where Youth Congress workers clashed with cops over demands to arrest Ashish Mishra.

Both Ashish and his father have denied all charges. Mr Mishra admitted to NDTV that the car belonged to his family but said neither he nor his son were in it when the incident took place.

India, China to hold 13th round of talks on border stand-off on Sunday: Report



NEW DELHI, 09 OCT: India and China are set to hold their 13th round of talks on Sunday to address the ongoing military stand-off between the two countries, according to Army sources.

The sources also divulged that the talks will be held at Moldo (Chusul) on the Chinese side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Resolution of friction point at Hot Springs will be discussed during the talks, added the source.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Thursday had said that it expected China to work towards early resolution of the remaining issue along the Line of Control (LoC) in Eastern Ladakh by fully abiding by bilateral

agreements and protocols.

Addressing a weekly media briefing, the MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said, "It is our expectation that China will work towards early resolution of the remaining issue along the Line of Control in Eastern Ladakh while fully abiding by bilateral agreements and protocols."

Earlier, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, on the sidelines of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, met Chinese counterpart Wang Yi and the two leaders discussed the border tensions and disengagement along the LAC.

Soldiers of India

and China clashed last year resulting in the loss of several lives on both sides. The clashes erupted after the transgression by Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) in Galwan Valley. More than a year has passed since the incident, but tensions continue to simmer between the two countries.

Twelve rounds of military talks and a series of diplomatic parleys were held between India and China, but tensions remain.

There has been some disengagement, but India says only full disengagement will result in de-escalation. Some disengagement has indeed taken place recently, but it is not complete.

IMF board says needs more time to weigh data-rigging details

MARTIN CRUTSINGER
WASHINGTON, OCT 9 (AP): The executive board of the International Monetary Fund said late Friday that it is seeking more clarifying details in its investigation into allegations that the head of the IMF pressured staff at the World Bank to change business rankings for China in an effort to placate that country.

In her own statement late Friday, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said she had answered all questions that have been put to me and hoped that the investigation could be concluded as soon as possible.

The IMF's 24-member executive board said it had made significant progress in its investigation but it agreed at Friday's meeting to request more clarifying details with a view to very soon concluding its consideration of this matter.

Georgieva appeared before the panel for more than five hours Wednesday.

That appearance followed a presentation by the law firm WilmerHale that alleged Georgieva played a role in data-rigging when she was a top official at the World Bank.

The report contended that she and other World Bank officials had pressured staff to alter data affecting the business climate rankings of China and other nations.

Georgieva has denied any wrongdoing and in a statement she presented to the board said the WilmerHale Report

does not characterise my actions with respect to Doing Business 2018, nor does it accurately portray my character or the way that I have conducted myself over a long professional career.

The law firm's report prompted the World Bank to discontinue the annual Doing Business report, which China and other countries had used to attract foreign business investment.

The incident has prompted critics to contend that China, the world's second largest economy, has too much influence over international finance organizations.

The 190-nation IMF and World Bank annual meetings will be held next week in Washington.

NCB let 3 people go: Maharashtra Minister releases videos



MUMBAI, 09 OCT [NDTV]: A week after a raid at a cruise ship off Mumbai coast led to the arrest of Aryan Khan, superstar Shah Rukh's son, along with eight others, Maharashtra Minister Nawab Malik this afternoon released some videos as he raised questions over the probe by the anti-drugs agency. Mr Malik said the NCB (Narcotics Control Bureau) had released three of 11 people detained initially after talking to BJP leaders, alleging collusion.

"After the raid on the cruise, NCB's Sameer Wankhede had said that 8-10 people were detained. But the truth is that 11 people were detained. Later, three people - Rishabh Sachdeva, Prateek Gaba and Amir Furniturewala - were released," Nawab Malik said today. Their names came up during a court hearing, he added.

"We want to ask the NCB that when they had detained 11 people after the cruise ship raid, then on whose directions did they release the three people? We demand the NCB to reveal the facts. We think there might have been some talk between Sameer Wankhede and the BJP leaders," the NCP leader further added, alleging that the BJP's Mohit Kamboj got his

brother in-law Rishabh Sachdeva freed.

Videos that, Mr Malik said, show Mr Sachdeva, Amir Furniturewala, and Pratik Gaba leaving the NCB office were released today.

He also called for probe by Mumbai Police.

"Mumbai Police's Anti-Narcotics cell should conduct an independent investigation into this. I will write to the Chief Minister (Uddhav Thackeray) also. If required, an enquiry commission should be set up to probe the raids," the 62-year-old leader said.

The NCB, refuting all claims, said their probe is being conducted in a fair and professional manner and that the accused were treated as per law.

"14 people were brought to the NCB office that day. Their statements were recorded. Eight were arrested on the basis of evidence and six were released since there was no evidence against them," said Gyaneshwar Singh, Deputy Director General, NCB.

The NCB's actions, Mr Malik had earlier said, are aimed at defaming the state, where the Congress and the NCP along with the BJP's former ally, Shiv Sena, is in power. "From Rhea Chakraborty to Deepika

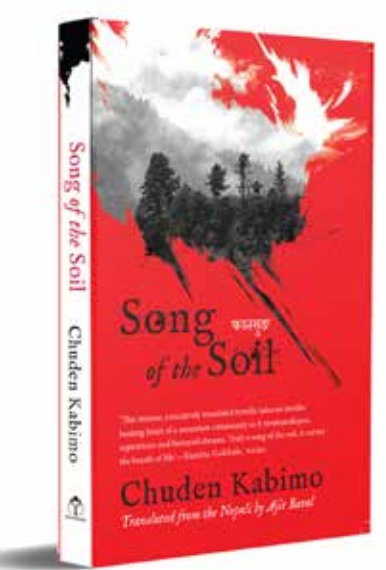
Padukone, other celebrities or Aryan Khan, the NCB will only act wherever there is publicity involved. Many of the cases are fake; no recovery has been made," Mr Malik told NDTV on Thursday.

On Friday, Aryan Khan was denied bail. He will have to stay in jail for the weekend. His lawyer had made the case he cannot be held responsible for the seizures made from others as no drugs were found on him. A Mumbai magistrate's court said Friday that Mr Khan's bail plea was "not maintainable", agreeing with the Narcotics Control Bureau that since drugs were seized a Sessions Court must hear the matter.

Arguing against bail per se, the NCB said releasing Aryan Khan could harm the case. The agency claimed he could tamper with evidence and influence witnesses. It also insisted Aryan Khan and the others were "regular users of contraband".

While the anti-drugs agency has claimed they want to investigate some "incriminating WhatsApp chats", Aryan Khan's lawyer has refuted the claims.

Today, Mr Malik said that three people who were released are also mentioned in the chats.



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Tackle Corruption with Accountability

Corruption should not be categorised, it should be removed

The Second Administrative Reforms Commission had tabled its recommendations to the Central Government a little over a year decade ago. The report covered 15 topics, of which around eleven have been “considered” by a Group of Ministers thus far, and some, like the Right to Information and the idea of Lokpal, have already been implemented with varying degrees of success. There are several aspects that this document delved into, but it did direct special focus on ways and means to tackle corruption.

As mentioned, the Lokpal initiative was mooted in it, and although that recommendation obviously has an uphill journey to negotiate to be able to deliver with any real consequence, the recommendations had made it obvious that the administration required reforms because it has been too compromised by bureaucratic extortion. The realization was welcome, even if it had come late, because the planners are normally satisfied by the fact that India ranks lower than Pakistan in the list of most corrupt nations. The Panel on Ethics in Governance had suggested that corruption in the administration be split into two categories – coercive and collusive. The former kind covers the corruption that lay people are made to suffer on a daily basis – the need to grease palms to get even routine jobs like processing a request done. Collusive corruption, the Panel had defined as corruption that sees governance join hands with the briber and assist in the subversion of laws, dodging rules and avoiding dues which should accrue to the State exchequer. Interestingly enough, it was the latter kind of “corruption” that the Panel recommends for stricter action. Why, because it bleeds the State exchequer of its dues. But what about the internal hemorrhage that democratic principles bleed when the public is made to dance circles unless they pay up the public servants to do their jobs?

The irony cannot be missed. Penalize shortchanging of revenue returns more strongly than the denial of rights! The revenue of course, some will defend, gets pumped back to the people in the form of populist measures. This can be countered with the argument that more populist measures mean even more powerful babus and even more invasive governance which will automatically lead to even more corruption. The nexus of the corrupt figures out loopholes in every new rule even ahead of its implementation since they are invariably drafting these in consultation with the sections they are in collusion with. The suggestion to approach corruption in two categories – coercive and collusive, is flawed because there cannot be kinds or grades of corruption; there is either corruption or honesty. At least in this case, there are blacks and whites. The categories and grades can be used for the purpose of understanding corruption, but not to deal with it.

The rot of corruption has set in too deep and if corruption is to be tackled, amputations are required. Since governments cannot be expected to prune their staff strength, the least they can do is prune powers and then make the powerful more accountable. There are too many desks that every request has to move through before it is decided for there to be accountability clearly defined. These can be reduced and the accountability established by setting a time limit on every process and requiring officials to provide specific explanations every time a deadline is missed or request denied. This gets everyone on record, and because it is the bureaucracy one is dealing with here, taking away anonymity from the process will ensure everyone becomes judicious. Even this experiment might fail, but given the nation’s seventy years of continuing failure in containing corruption, it is worth giving a shot.

At a time when the Enforcement Directorate, the convenient bouncer for the party in office in the Centre, is opening an office in Sikkim as well, it is important that corruption returns to conversations with more than just allegations and slogans.

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Maria Ressa: Nobel prize-winner risks life and liberty to hold Philippines government to account

TOM SMITH
theconversation.com

The importance of journalists who take considerable risks to bring people the truth in countries where this involves going up against authoritarian governments has been recognised by the Nobel committee’s decision to award the 2021 peace prize to Maria Ressa of the Philippines and Dmitry Muratov of Russia.

In announcing the award, the Nobel committee called the pair “representatives of all journalists who stand up for this ideal”. They said Ressa had used her online news organisation, Rappler, to “expose abuse of power, use of violence and growing authoritarianism in her native country, the Philippines”.

Rappler, which grew out of a Facebook page launched in 2012 and has become one of the Philippines’ most credible independent news services, has been targeted by President Rodrigo Duterte since his election in 2016. His 2017 state of the union speech alleged that Rappler was in foreign ownership, which would be contrary to the constitution. He also said it peddled “fake news”.

Government investigations followed and, by 2018, Ressa and Rappler were inundated with charges of cybercrime, tax evasion and as much intimidation as the Duterte government could muster.

This harassment took place against a backdrop of presidentially sanctioned murder in the form of Duterte’s “war on drugs” (which the International Criminal Court is now investigating) which led to the deaths of over 20,000 people, including journalists around the country. Ressa was not cowed by intimidation and threats. Time magazine named

her one of its Person of the Year winners in 2018 alongside other journalists facing oppression around the world.

When she was arrested for the first time, in 2019 at the age of 56, the country’s most prominent journalist was made to spend a night behind bars, a low point for civil society in the Philippines. Ressa and her Rappler colleagues continue to work under the threat of imprisonment.

It remains to be seen if the award of the Nobel peace prize will shield Ressa and Rappler from further targeting, and whether the election, scheduled for May 2022, will bring any relief from government harassment and threats.

THORN IN DUTERTE’S SIDE

Long before Duterte was elected, Ressa was an established figure in Filipino public life. She had been the face of CNN in the Philippines as its bureau chief from 1987-1995 and then as an investigative reporter for CNN, where she focused on terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11 across southeast Asia.

In 2004, she joined major Philippines-based media company ABS-CBN and for six years helped grow it into the major news network in the country (its broadcast operations were shut down by Duterte in 2020). It is with great credit to Ressa that her influence is so strong across the news media landscape in the Philippines where younger journalists continue to follow her advice and example.

This is not the first time Maria Ressa has won a major international award. She received the 2017 Democracy Award, the 2018 Knight International Journalism Award and, also in 2018, the World Association of Newspapers’s Golden Pen of Freedom Award and the Committee to Protect Journalists’

Gwen Ifill Press Freedom Award. Her trials over recent years have regularly garnered public attention and condemnation from across the world from leading figures and organisations.

PEACE PRIZE PREMIUM?

Despite this, the Duterte government has continued to stifle dissent and attack less prominent journalists in the more remote provinces of the Philippines who continue to investigate corruption and violence under the direct threat of violence and intimidation. Hopefully the Nobel prize will put pressure on presidential candidates in the 2022 election to speak on the issue of press freedom and make it a campaign issue. The award also means that foreign governments calibrating new relations with the next administration have a symbol to rally around.

In 2019, I was a delegate at the UK and Canadian governments’ Global Conference for Media Freedom in London. I had the opportunity to briefly meet Maria and her lawyer Amal Clooney. There were a lot of strong sentiments and good words expressed that day from government officials as they listened to stories like those from the Philippines.

The whole event rung hollow when, toward the end of the day, news broke of the murder of radio news anchor Eduardo Dizon, a journalist with Brigada News FM in Kidapawan City in the southern Philippines. But by handing this award to brave journalists like Ressa and Muratov, the Nobel committee is proclaiming the value, not only of their work, but of all journalists who take risks to hold power to account.

[the writer is Principal Lecturer in International Relations & Academic Director of the Royal Air Force College Cranwell, University of Portsmouth]

Nobel peace prize: how Dmitry Muratov built Russia’s ‘bravest’ newspaper, Novaya Gazeta

ILYA YABLOKOV
theconversation.com

In 1993, Soviet Union president Mikhail Gorbachev used part of his Nobel peace prize money to help set up the newspaper Novaya Gazeta, buying the publication its first computers.

Nearly 30 years later, the paper has another Nobel peace prize in its history. Dmitry Muratov, editor-in-chief of Novaya Gazeta, was jointly awarded the prize with Filipina journalist Maria Ressa, “for their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace”.

The prize is a surprising and welcome show of support to Russia’s independent press, which has been under constant pressure during the 21 years of Vladimir Putin’s rule.

Thanks to Gorbachev’s perestroika political reforms and liberation of the press during the 1980s, investigative journalists became national heroes in the late Soviet Union. They revealed the regime’s crimes of the past, tracing them in newly-opened archives, and uncovered corruption among bureaucrats who abused their power to enrich themselves.

It was in this context that Muratov’s career skyrocketed. In 1987, he left his hometown to join Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper in Moscow. This newspaper of the young Communists took a critical stance towards the Soviet regime in its final years, and was considered a leading voice of perestroika.

Komsomolskaya Pravda was among the newspapers that stood

against the 1991 military coup, led by a conservative bloc of the Communist government, to overthrow Gorbachev. The August coup marked the end of the Soviet Union, which collapsed in December that year, and led to a new era for the press.

In 1992, Muratov left Komsomolskaya Pravda over a dispute about the paper’s future. Muratov was among those who defended the newspaper as an investigative media outlet, while his competitor Valery Sungorkin sought to turn it into a tabloid to make money. The tabloid view succeeded.

Muratov and a team of colleagues began publishing New Daily Newspaper (Novaya Ezhednevnyaya Gazeta), reporting on politics, corruption and war crimes in Chechnya. In 1995, Muratov was appointed editor-in-chief and the newspaper received its current name: Novaya Gazeta (literally New Newspaper).

DARK DAYS

In an interview for my forthcoming book, Muratov told me that the editorial team hardly managed to make ends meet in the 1990s. There was no money to pay salaries, everything that the cooperative members received outside of their newspaper duties was invested back into the paper.

In the 2000s, a lifeline of financial support came from Gorbachev and Aleksandr Lebedev, the Russian banker and entrepreneur who bought London’s Evening Standard newspaper in 2009. The two backed Muratov’s wishes to maintain Novaya Gazeta’s leadership as an investigative outlet.

They also became Muratov’s

friends, sharing his happiness in times of success, and his grief over the paper’s many losses. Novaya Gazeta has often been called Russia’s “bravest” newspaper, and has one of the highest rates of murdered journalists among Russian media. Between 2000 and 2021, six of Novaya Gazeta’s journalists were killed on duty, notably including Anna Politkovskaya on 7 October 2006 – almost 15 years to the day before Muratov was awarded the Nobel.

In 2009, after a lawyer and journalist working for Novaya Gazeta were murdered by far-right activists, Muratov created a security protocol to protect journalists who were running dangerous investigations.

It couldn’t have come too soon: as the Russian regime grew more authoritarian, it became more dangerous to report on corruption, human rights violations and murders of Putin’s critics.

Yet Novaya’s reporters revealed the extent of the state involvement into the murder of Boris Nemtsov in February 2015. Nemtsov, Putin’s fiercest critic at the time, was shot dead in front of the Kremlin and no high-profile person was found guilty in assisting the crime.

Elena Milashina, Novaya’s top reporter on Chechnya, has documented the murders of LGBT people and reported on the cold-blooded murders of Chechnya’s leader Ramzan Kadyrov’s opponents. She has faced physical attacks and death threats..

A BRIGHTER FUTURE?

Muratov is a one-of-a-kind character. He is never afraid to speak out and defend journalists and dissenting

voices, knowing that he or his editorial team may be attacked. He is the leader of a network of media that helps Russian journalists in dangerous regions to continue their work under Muratov’s symbolic protection.

He has certainly made hundreds of powerful enemies who would be happy to get rid of him but, at the same time, he has made thousands of friends across all sectors of Russian society, including top politicians, law enforcement officers and the super rich. His friendships with power brokers help him navigate the murky waters of Russian politics without major losses to reputation. This has irritated hardcore members of the Russian opposition and some western observers of Russia, who think he has sold his soul to the Kremlin.

This portrait of Muratov does not fully capture the scope of his important role in Russian media. Muratov uses his influence and connections not to enrich himself, but to sustain the powerhouse last shelter of investigative journalism inside Russia.

The Nobel prize will make Muratov more influential domestically and will earn him more enemies among the elite, who may later claim that he betrayed Russia for foreign funding and awards. Symbolically, this prize will empower all Russian investigative journalists who fight for their lives and profession amid unprecedented attacks from the state.

[the writer is Lecturer in Journalism and Digital Media, Department of Journalism Studies, University of Sheffield]

Kashmiri Panditsleave camps after panic over spate of targeted killings



SRINAGAR: A spate of targeted civilian killings in Kashmir has led to the exodus of several Kashmiri Pandits living in transit camps.

Dozens of families - many government employees who returned to the Valley after being given jobs under the Prime Minister's special employment scheme for Kashmiri migrants - have quietly left accommodations.

A scared VinodBhat, a schoolteacher, did not go to work today. He says his school told him to stay away for a week because of the recent attacks. Yesterday, a principal and a teacher at a government-run Srinagar school were shot dead.

The Sheikhpora-neighbourhood - home to the minority Kashmiri Pandit community, to which MrBhat belongs - now wears a near-abandoned look. It is guarded by CRPF forces but that doesn't inspire MrBhat or other Pandit families with confidence.

"I'm scared. I have small children, my mother and wife. For them I have to leave," he said.

VinodBhat, 39, returned to the Valley 10 years ago after getting a job under the PM's special scheme. In all that time, he said he had never felt unsafe. Now, after the attacks, around a third of the neighbourhood have left.

"Thirty per cent must

have left... they are leaving quietly. Who will stay here in such an atmosphere?" he asked.

Around 400 Pandit families had been living in Sheikhpora but, since yesterday, the area resembles a ghost town.

The story is the same in other Pandit settlements, where families have left for Jammu.

"Our entire family is going to Jammu because of the worsening situation here. Two-three Pandits have been killed... we can't take the risk anymore," Khushi said.

Over the last five days seven civilians have been killed in Kashmir.

One was a Sikh school principal, SupunderKour. Today hundreds of

Sikhs joined her funeral procession and took out a protest march, shouting slogans against the TRF (The Resistance Front, a terror outfit J&K Police say is to blame for her killing) and demanding justice.

Sikh leaders will decide on what to do after meeting other gurdwara committees.

"It is not that we will leave Kashmir... we feel like staying here (but) there is uncertainty. We all will sit and discuss," Jagdish Singh Azad, a Sikh leader, said.

Both Sikhs and Pandits have found support in local Muslim communities, many of whom joined the mourners and urged them to stay.

Some of those targeted over the recent days were Muslims.

"Please don't leave. We will fight it together. We have been fighting this war together for last 30 years, and we have fought it again. My appeal is don't come under pressure or give in to propaganda," NasirSogami, a National Conference leader, said.

Police have said that of the 28 civilians killed since January, seven are non-Muslims.

While Muslims have usually been the targets of such attacks, the fact that a Kashmiri Pandit, a Sikh and two non-local Hindus have now been killed has led to outrage

The killings have also alarmed the authorities - enough for Home Minister Amit Shah to hold a high-level meet yesterday and reportedly pull up local officials.

Sources say the police are clueless and have launched a massive crackdown to see if they can uncover something. Dozens of youth have been rounded up for questioning, but that approach has its own problems.

The biggest challenge now is to prevent further attacks and stop the exodus of Pandits, who are leaving the Valley out of fear.

ITBP climbers summit twin peaks in eastern Ladakh



NEW DELHI, Oct 9 (PTI): Mountaineers of the border guarding force ITBP have summited twin peaks located in the eastern Ladakh region, a senior officer said on Saturday.

The mountains are located at the heights of 6,250 metres and 6,099 metres and they were conquered on October 6 by a team of 20 mountaineers led by ITBP Inspector General (IG) of the north-west sector, Lhari DorjeeLhatoo. The climbers also included

four women from the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and Ladakh Police personnel.

The expedition was flagged off from Leh on September 28.

"The force has named the 6,250-metre tall mountain as 'Nurbu-Wangdus' peak in the memory of a mountaineer soldier. Late Head Constable NurbuWangdus who hailed from Ladakh died during the expedition to Mount Gangotri-1 in Uttarakhand

after the team was hit by an avalanche in October, 2019," an ITBP spokesperson said.

The ITBP was raised in the aftermath of the 1962 Chinese aggression and the force has recorded more than 223 successful mountaineering expeditions till date.

It is primarily tasked to guard the 3,488 kms long Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China apart from being deployed for a variety of internal security duties.

Triangular contest for bypoll in Andhra Pradesh

The YSR Congress chose DasariSudha as its candidate while the Congress fielded former MLA P M Kalamamma, who represented the constituency from 2009-14.

Thirty-one sets of nominations were filed for the October 30 bye-election to the Assembly constituency in Kadapa district of Andhra Pradesh as the nomination process ended on Friday.

The ruling YSR Congress, the BJP and the Congress fielded their candidates for the by-

election caused by the death of sitting legislator G VenkataSubbaiah in March this year.

The main opposition Telugu Desam Party opted out of the contest "honouring tradition" as the YSR Congress has fielded the widow of the legislator for the by-poll.

The YSR Congress chose DasariSudha as its candidate while the Congress fielded former MLA P M Kalamamma, who represented the constituency from 2009-14.

The BJP fielded youth leader Panathala Suresh

for the contest. Suresh unsuccessfully contested the 2019 election from Railway Koduru constituency in Kadapa district.

BJP's ally Jana Sena Party said it was not interested in the by-poll as the widow of the MLA was in the fray. Thus, the BJP would be on its own in the fight.

Scrutiny of nominations would take place on October 11 and the last date for withdrawal is October 13.

Results of the by-poll would be declared on November 2.

Encounter between militants, security forces in Srinagar

SRINAGAR, Oct 9 (PTI): An encounter broke out between militants and security forces during a cordoning operation in Chanapora area of the city on Saturday, police said.

The encounter began in the early hours of the day after security forces launched the cordon and search operation in Me-

than locality, the police said.

There were no reports of any casualties so far in the gun battle, it said.

The operation was launched after a militant managed to escape from an encounter in nearby Natipora area. One ultra was killed in firing on Friday.

Mother, daughter die after being stung by wasps in Himachal



Vidya Devi and her daughter AnjanaKumari (20) had gone to their fields to cut the grass when a group of black wasps attacked and bit them badly, he added.

Hamirpur Pradesh: A 47-year-old woman and her daughter died after they were bitten by black wasps in Himachal Pradesh's Hamirpur district, an official said on Friday.

The two women died at Chandigarh's PGI hos-

pital on Friday, the official said.

Vidya Devi and her daughter AnjanaKumari (20) had gone to their fields to cut the grass when a group of black wasps attacked and bit them badly, he added.

On hearing their screams, locals rushed to the spot and took them to Hamirpur Medical College for treatment.

Subsequently, they were shifted to Tanda

Medical College. Later they were sent to PGI, Chandigarh where they died on Friday, the spokesman said.

Hailing from a Below Poverty Line family, Madan-Lal, the husband of the woman, works in a private institution. The woman left two sons behind her.

Panchayat chief Lata-Kumari said the family is very poor. She demanded immediate relief to the family.

Odisha logs 526 new COVID-19 cases, 4 fresh fatalities

BHUBANESWAR, Oct 9 (PTI):Odisha on Saturday registered 526 new COVID-19 cases, just two more than the previous day, which pushed the state's tally to 10,31,044, a health department official said.

The new cases which were detected in 25 of the state's 30 districts, included 68 children. The rate of infection among the children and adolescents in the age group of 0 to 18 years was recorded at 12.92 per cent against Friday's 14.31 per cent.

Of the 526 new cases, 303 were reported from different quarantine centres while the remaining 223 were local contact cases. Khurda district

of which state capital Bhubaneswar is a part, recorded the highest of 233 new cases followed by Cuttack (63). Both the districts accounted for 56.27 per cent of the single day new cases, he said.

Five districts - Boudh, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar, Nabarangpur and Nuapada, did not register any new cases in the last 24 hours.

The test positivity rate (TPR) of Odisha on Saturday stands at 0.77 per cent against Friday's 0.78 per cent.

The Health and Family Welfare department informed that the state during the last 24 hours has reported four fresh deaths which pushed

Odisha's COVID-19 fatalities to 8,242. The latest COVID deaths have been reported from Nabarangpur (2), Jagatsinghpur (1) and Bolangir (1).

This apart, 53 other COVID-19 patients have died due to comorbidities, he said.

The state currently has 5,035 active COVID-19 cases while as many as 10,17,714 patients including 598 on Friday, have recovered from the highly infectious disease.

The state has thus far conducted over 2.05 crore sample tests including 68,264 on Friday for COVID-19. Odisha's positivity rate stands at 5.01 per cent.

Young woman gang-raped by two men in UP's Muzaffarnagar

MUZAFFARNAGAR (UP), Oct 9 (PTI): A 22-year-old woman was gang-raped by two youths and the ordeal was also recorded on a mobile phone in a village under Bhopa police station here, police said on Saturday.

On the pretext of securing her a house under the PradhanMantiriAwasYojana, the victim

was induced into going with -- Yogesh Kumar and Bablu -- to an agricultural field where they took turns to rape her.

One of the accused filmed the act on their phone.

Later, she was called by Yogesh with the promise of deleting the video but was raped again by him near a jaggery unit in

the same area on Thursday.

Yogesh did not delete the video and also threatened her of dire consequences.

According to SHO RajkumarRana, police registered a case based on the woman's complaint against the two men under Sections 376 and 506 of the Indian Penal Code.

Ladakh reports 5 new Covid cases

LEH, Oct 9 (PTI): Five fresh COVID-19 cases have been reported from Ladakh, taking the virus tally to 20,848 while the active cases in the union territory stands at 60, officials said on Saturday.

Ladakh has registered 208 Covid-related deaths -- 150 in Leh and 58 in Kargil -- since the outbreak of the pandemic last year.

Assam reports 318 new COVID cases, 5 more fatalities

GUWAHATI, Oct 9 (PTI): Assam on Friday reported 318 new COVID-19 cases, which was 23 more than that of the previous day, while the recovery rate from the infection was 98.34 per cent, the National Health Mission bulletin said.

The 318 new cases pushed the tally to 6,04,536, it said.

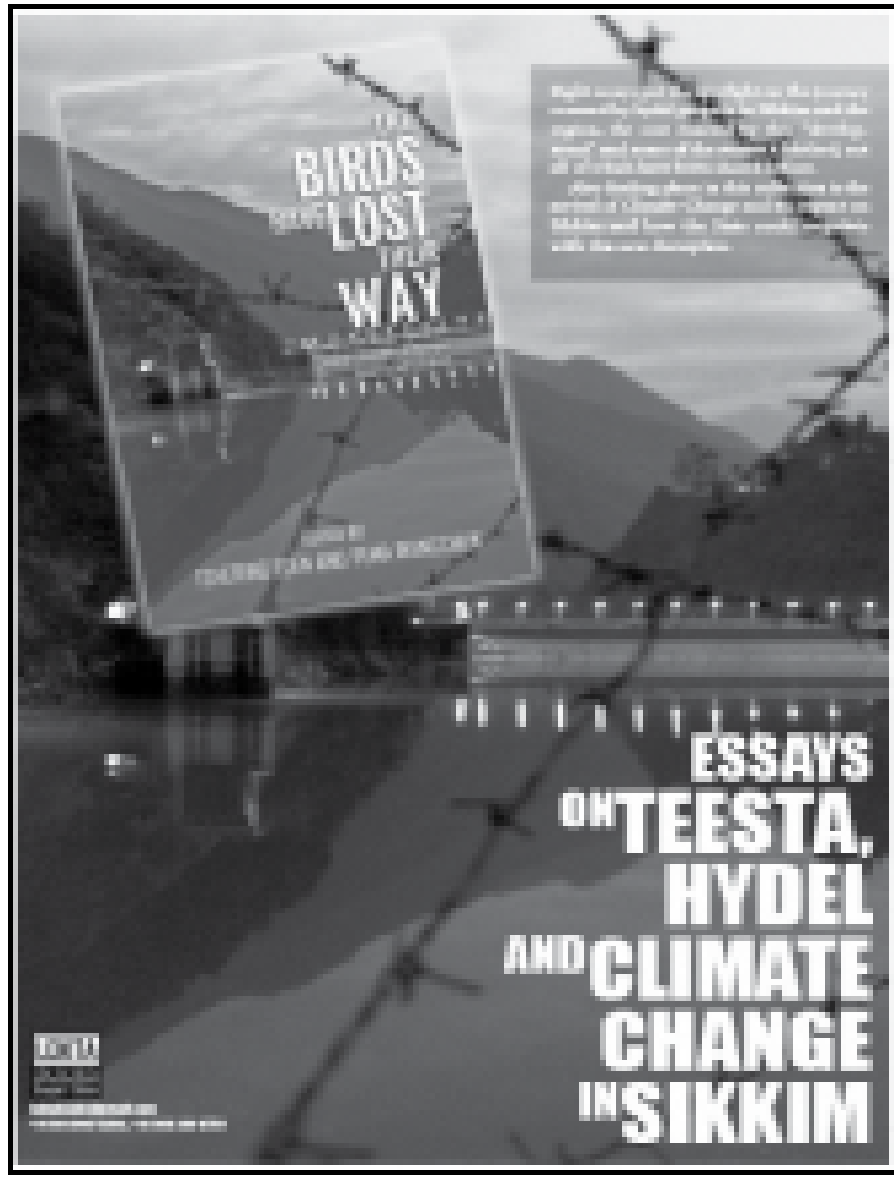
Kamrup Metropolitan accounted for the highest number of new cases with 137 detected during the day, followed by Jorhat (42), Barpeta (19), and Kamrup Rural (18). Five more fatalities

ties due to the infection raised the toll to 5,916.

The fresh COVID-19 deaths were reported from Golaghat, Jorhat, Kamrup Metropolitan, KarbiAnglong, and Nalbari districts.

The current death rate is 0.98 per cent and 1,347 COVID-19 patients have died of other ailments. Assam now has 2,767 active cases, down from 2,797 on Thursday, it said.

At least 243 people were cured of the disease during the day, taking the total number of recoveries to 5,94,506.



Had asked Maxwell if he wanted strike but he said 'you can finish it off': Bharat

DUBAI, OCT 9 (PTI): Royal Challengers Bangalore's latest star Kona Bharat said that his senior partner Glenn Maxwell had complete faith that the Andhra wicket-keeper-batter could finish off the last IPL league game against Delhi Capitals, which he did with a last-ball six.

Bharat, who has had a good IPL with the bat, smashed 78 not out off 52 balls as he kept calm under pressure and lofted Avesh for a straight six with five needed off the last delivery to chase down DC's target of 165.

The result of the match didn't have a bearing on points table though as DC finished on top with 20 points and RCB on 18 but in third place due to inferior net run-rate (-0.140) compared to Chennai Super Kings (+0.455).

Asked what was the talk before the final over, Bharat spoke how Maxwell boosted his confidence.

"The last over... me and Maxi were talking about what are the areas we can access. He said, watch the ball and get bat on the ball... The last 3 balls, you know I asked him whether to run, he said 'no, you can finish it off'. It gave me a lot of confidence,' Bharat, who has had couple of good scores of 32 against Mumbai Indians and 44 against Rajasthan Royals.

Bharat said he didn't want to think too much ahead during the last over.

"I was just focused on one ball which is coming next. rather than thinking of too many things. I kept it very simple and as a team we did very well and we pulled it off," he added.

What has worked for Bharat in the UAEEleg is the fact that he loves facing fast bowlers and DC has three genuine quicks in KagisoRabada, AnrichNortje and Avesh.

"I love fast bowling, to be honest. I have played for India A and am also a part of the Indian team, you get to play with the best bowlers in the country. It wasn't a surprise element for me to play pace.

"I would love someone who is giving pace so that you can work the ball instead of hitting the ball hard. I found it really interesting and I was enjoying the challenge," he added.

Bharat has been regularly batting at No 3 in this phase of IPL but the management has told him that order will remain flexible.

"We are flexible to go at any order. It was communicated fair enough. Everyone is up for their challenge. I don't think there is any miscommunication. When the chances are given to you, you want to do well and finish it off well," the 28-year old keeper-batter said at the virtual post-match media interaction.

May be Hardik will start bowling from next week, have confidence in his abilities: Rohit

ABU DHABI, OCT 9 (PTI): India's senior chairman of selectors Chetan Sharma had said that HardikPandya would be bowling in IPL but Indian vice-captain and MI skipper Rohit Sharma is expecting the all-rounder to start bowling from "next week" even though he won't like to put a timeline on the subject.

Pandya played five games in the UAE leg of IPL without a lot of success save one game against Punjab Kings which he won with his batting and didn't bowl a single over as anticipated when selection committee chairman had announced publicly about the status of Baroda's man's bowling fitness.

"In terms of his (Hardik) bowling, the physios, trainers are working on his bowling. He hasn't bowled a single ball yet. We wanted to take one match at a time and see where he stands," Rohit said after Mumbai Indians' last IPL game.

"He is getting better day by day. In the next week or so, he might be able to bowl, who knows? Only the doctors and physios will be able to give an update on that," the MI skipper added.

Pandya also disappointed with the bat, scoring just 127 runs at an average of 14.11 and a strike rate of 113.39.

"As far as his batting is concerned, yes, he will be a



little disappointed but he is a quality player. He has come back from tough situations before as well," Rohit was frank in his assessment.

"Personally for him, he will not be happy with his batting but the team has confidence on his ability. I personally have confidence on his ability.

"He is getting better and a player like him is probably just one game away from getting his natural way and we have seen it in the past. If

I have to put everything together, I am confident of his ability and there is no doubt he will be a valuable asset," the Indian vice-captain had words of praise for his key player.

Rohit isn't overly worried about the form of the India players in the Mumbai Indians squad as T20 World Cup will be a "different ball game" where one can get back into rhythm even during the practice games.

"I personally don't like to

count too much into what has happened in the IPL and what is going to happen in T20 World Cup," the India vice-captain said during a post-match virtual press conference after MI's last IPL game here.

"T20 World Cup is a different ball game, franchise cricket is different. So you cannot really look too much into those aspects. Yes the form matters, but it's a different squad there and it's a different squad here. So you

cannot really look too much into that."

Apart from Rohit, the other five players are Hardik Pandya, SuryakumarYadav, IshanKishan, Rahul Chahar, JaspritBumrah.

"Yes all the six guys, who we have here, would have liked to have a good run, but it didn't happen," Rohit admitted although IshanKishan after being promoted to open scored two attacking half-centuries and SuryakumarYadav was also back among runs in

the final game.

"You saw a couple of fine performances today from Surya and Ishan, but again, when you talk about the World Cup, there will be couple of practice games I believe guys can get back into their rhythm and see what we can do there."

Apart from Bumrah, who claimed 15 wickets in the UAE leg, rest of the players either struggled or have been inconsistent.

Rohit said the break in the tournament due to COVID-19 effected their momentum and they lacked consistency in the UAE leg.

"We had won the trophy here (in the UAE) last year, so the conditions were not alien for us," he said.

"The thing was the momentum we had created with two back-to-back wins in Delhi, we wanted to continue that but unfortunately because of what was happening in the country (COVID-19 outbreak), there was a break."

"When we came here, some of our first XI players had a few injuries and missed a couple of games initially. Despite that, we should have done better, but we just didn't play as a team to start with, and then collectively as a group, we didn't come together. That was the main reason for not qualifying this year," he concluded.

India ends junior worlds with 30 medals, tops table



LIMA, OCT 9 (PTI): Indian shooters AnishBhanwala, AdarshSingh and VijayveerSidhu combined to win the gold medal in the men's 25m rapid fire pistol team event as the country ended the ISSF Junior World Championship on top of the standings here.

The Indian trio shot a total of 10 to finish ahead of their German counterparts Fabian Otto, Felix Luca Hollfoth and Tobias Gsoell (2) in the gold medal contest on Friday.

India's ManviSoni (105) bagged the junior double trap gold medal ahead of compatriot Yeshaya Hafiz Contractor (90). The bronze was won by Hitasha (76) in an event that only featured Indians.

VinayPratap Singh Chandrawat claimed the gold medal men's double trap event with a score of 120, while the silver went to Sehajpreet Singh

(114) and the bronze to MayankShokeen (/111).

Earlier on Friday, AyushiPodder and AishwaryPratap Singh Tomar won the silver in the 50m rifle 3 positions mixed team event to continue India's dominance in the tournament.

Ayushi and Aishwary shot 17 in the gold medal match to finish second to the 31 shot by the German pair of Max Braun and Anna Janssen. The Indian duo had topped the qualification round with a world record-equaling score of 590, with the eventual gold medallists finishing in second spot.

The other Indian team of Nischal and Sartaj Singh Tiwana finished eighth in the qualification round with a score of 574.

This was after the Indian pair of Rhythm Sangwan and Vijayveer-Sidhu clinched the 25m rapid fire pistol mixed

team gold medal.

Sangwan and Sidhu defeated Thailand's Kan-yakornHirunphoem and SchwakonTriniphakorn 9-1 to fetch India's 10th gold of the ongoing event.

The country also claimed the bronze medal in this event with Tejaswani and Anish triumphing 10-8 against another Thai team in ChawisaPaduka and Ram Khamhaeng.

In the junior women's 50m Rifle 3 Positions, PrasiddhiMahant, Nishcal and AyushiPodder clinched the silver medal after going down to the American trio of Elizabeth McGhin, Lorraine Zaun, and Carolyne Tucker. The Indians were beaten 43-47.

Table-toppers India ended the tournament with 30 medals including 13 gold, 11 silver and six bronze. USA finished second with 6 gold, 8 silver and 6 bronze.

US Open champ Raducanu loses in 2 sets at Indian Wells

INDIAN WELLS, OCT 9 (AP): Emma Raducanu came down to earth in her first tournament since her surprising US Open victory, losing in straight sets to AliaksandraSasnovich at the BNP Paribas Open.

Raducanu lost 6-2, 6-4 in the second round, ending her 10-match winning streak that began in New York. She received a wild-card into the combined ATP and WTA tournament in the Southern California desert.

Sasnovich, a 27-year-old from Belarus ranked 100th in the world, reached the doubles semifinals last month at the U.S. Open while Raducanu was completing a stunning run from qualifier to champion at age 18.

Sasnovich got service breaks to take leads of 3-1 and 5-2 and close out the set in 30 minutes without ever losing her serve.

Raducanu rallied in the second set, taking a 4-2 lead. But Sasnovich



broke for a fifth time and led 5-4 before serving out the match. Sasnovich won 53% of her second serves to just 29% for Raducanu.

Former men's No. 1 Andy Murray and U.S. Open runner-up Leyla Fernandez played night matches. IgaSwiatek needed just 71 minutes to dispatch Petra Martic 6-1, 6-3.

The last time the tournament was played in 2019, Swiatek lost in qualifying. Now, she's the No. 2 seed and the 2020 French Open champion.

Swiatek won nine of

the first 10 games against Martic before the Polish star got broken twice and fell behind 0-3 in the second set. Swiatek rallied to win the next six games and close out the match.

"In 2019, I wasn't playing that confident, but I'm really happy that times have changed now," Swiatek said.

"In the second set, I lost focus for one game and she broke me pretty fast, so I knew I just had to keep going and not stop for a second time."

No. 4 seed ElinaSvitolina beat TerezaMartineova 6-2, 7-5. Ninth-

seeded AnastasiaPavlyuchenkova topped Madison Keys 6-3, 6-1.

No. 11 seed SimonaHalep beat Marta Kostyuk 7-6 (2), 6-1.

Victoria Azarenka advanced via walkover when Magda Linette quit trailing 7-5, 3-0. Shelby Rogers routed Kristina Kucova 6-2, 6-2.

On the men's side, Americans Jensen Brooksby and Ernesto Escobedo won their first-round matches. Brooksby beat CemIlkel 7-6 (5), 6-4, and Escobedo defeated Holger Rune 6-4, 6-1.

ViratKohli has said that I will open in T20 World Cup, says IshanKishan

ABU DHABI, OCT 9 (PTI): Back in form with two successive fifties in the IPL, young wicketkeeper batsman IshanKishan said skipper ViratKohli has told him that he will be seen as an opener in the Indian squad for the T20 World Cup.

The 23-year-old Kishan scored 84 off 32 balls and 50 not out off 25 balls at the top of the order in final two games for Mumbai Indians but it went in vain as the defending champions were knocked out of play-offs due to inferior net run-rate compared to Kolkata Knight Riders.

Rohit Sharma is a constant as

India's all-format opener and in T20, KL Rahul and skipper ViratKohli had opened with him but in the upcoming T20 World Cup, Kishan might be seen alongside him.

"I would love to open, and that is what Viratbhai said. But at the bigger level, you need to be prepared for everything," said Kishan, who was recently distraught by his loss of form.

Kishan is happy that he is back in form which would be good for Team India ahead of the mega event.

"A very good thing for me as well as for the team.Getting in

good touch before the World Cup."

MI needed to win their last game by a minimum of 170 runs but it was nearly impossible even though the five-time champions scored 235 in the end.

"A good state of mind is very important. I knew we are in a do-or-die situation. It was just the intent and the positive mindset.

"You have to be prepared for every circumstance. It's important to be in that mindset. I had a chat with Viratbhai, HP [HardikPandya], KP [Pollard] - they were all there,' the Patna dasher said.

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Brazilians seek pre-pandemic normalcy as deaths top 600,000

SAO PAULO, OCT 9 (AP): Bars in Sao Paulo are full again for evening happy hours, lawmakers in the capital of Brasilia have nearly done away with video sessions via Zoom, and Rio de Janeiro's beaches are packed. Calls for strict social distancing seem but a memory.

Brazil appears intent on returning to pre-pandemic normalcy, even as its death toll tops 600,000, according to official data on Friday from the health ministry. Relief in both COVID-19 cases and deaths have been particularly welcome given experts' warnings that the delta variant would produce another wave of destruction in the country with the second-most victims. So far, that hasn't materialized.

The country's average daily death toll has hovered around 500 for a month, down sharply from more than 3,000 in April. Almost 45% of the population is fully vaccinated, and a booster shot is being administered to the elderly. A greater percentage of Brazilians are at least partially vaccinated compared to Americans or Germans, according to Our World in Data, an online research site.

Improvement has encouraged mayors and governors to admit fans into soccer matches, and let bars and restaurants stay open until the wee hours. Some are even contemplating the end of mask mandates, which people often ignore already.

Marcelo Queiroga, Brazil's fourth health minister since the pandemic hit, suggested in a press conference on Friday that masks should not be mandatory. Why would I pass a law to force people to use condoms? Don't even think of it, he said.

Rio's mayor has announced plans to bring back the city's massive New Year's Eve party on Copacabana beach.

Gonzalo Vecina, a professor



of public health at the University of Sao Paulo, told The Associated Press in July that delta, which is more contagious, would cause a new explosion of cases within weeks. He was hardly alone among experts sounding the alarm.

Now, Vecina believes the high number of Brazilians infected earlier this year with the gamma variant -- first identified in the Amazonian city Manaus -- may have slowed delta's advance.

That isn't a conclusion from a study; it is a possibility we are raising in the face of what we are seeing, Vecina said. We are seeing delta rise in countries that reopened just as much as Brazil, and our number of cases is still going down, with few very particular exceptions.

Some analysts remain worried about delta's potential to spread. Among them is Miguel Lago, executive director of Brazil's Institute for Health Policy Studies, which advises public health officials. He believes authorities are taking considerable risk by reopening too

much and announcing celebrations, and that Brazil may soon see more hospital admissions.

The pandemic has waned, but 500 deaths per day is far from good. And we don't even have half the population fully vaccinated, Lago said. We just don't know enough and we have this horrific milestone to contemplate now.

Friday morning, on Copacabana where Rio's New Year's party will take place in less than three months, activist group Rio da Paz held a memorial on its sands to mourn the 600,000 dead, with hundreds of white kerchiefs strung on lines.

Across town, at a support group for family members of the virus' victims, Bruna Chaves mourned the loss of her mother and step-father.

It's not just 600,000 people who are gone; it's a lot of people who die with them, emotionally, Chaves said in an interview. It's absurd that people treat it like it's a small number. It's a big number.

Many in Brazil continue to

downplay the pandemic's severity, chief among them President Jair Bolsonaro, whose popularity has sagged largely due to his government's chaotic pandemic response. But he hasn't veered from his positions, including staunch support for drugs proven ineffective against the virus, like hydroxychloroquine.

He also continues to criticize restrictions on activity adopted by mayors and governors, saying Brazil needed to keep the economy humming to avoid inflicting worse hardship on the poor. On Thursday night, during a live broadcast on Facebook, he showed a series of newspaper articles reporting economic turmoil in Europe and the U.S. last year in an attempt to prove he was right all along.

Months after its New Year's bash, Rio will also host Carnival, according to Mayor Eduardo Paes. And he said social distancing is out of the question.

That would be ridiculous, asking people to keep one meter away. If that were the

case, I would be the first to disrespect that, he told residents in a middle-class neighborhood on Monday. Science has advanced, it won, it is allowing us to open.

Brazil's long history with vaccination campaigns has played a significant role in slowing the virus' spread, with broad uptake. Nearly three-quarters of Brazilians have received at least one dose so far -- despite the fact Bolsonaro spent months sowing doubt about their efficacy and remains unvaccinated himself. Even most of his supporters rolled up their sleeves.

Queiroga said all Brazilians between ages 18 and 60 will be able to get vaccinated again next year. He added more than 354 million shots will be available. Brazil's population is of approximately 210 million.

The scenario looks positive and I promise that Brazilians will have an efficient immunization campaign in 2022 and that will be the year the COVID-19 pandemic ends, the minister said.

China-US reps hold meeting on bilateral trade issues

BEIJING, OCT 9 (AP): China and the US held a virtual meeting regarding the two countries' fraught trade relationship Saturday after a lengthy break in negotiations.

China's top trade negotiator Liu He called US Trade Representative Katherine Tai to discuss the Phase 1 trade deal, negotiated under the Trump administration, along with the sides' other major economic concerns, according to a statement from China's Commerce Ministry.

Both sides conducted pragmatic, candid and constructive exchanges according to the statement.

Tai had said this week that she plans frank conversations with officials in Beijing about an interim trade deal aimed at resolving a tariff war.

Liu, a vice premier and member of the ruling Communist Party's Politburo, also pushed for the cancelation of additional tariffs and sanctions levied by the US on Chinese goods. The Phase 1 trade

deal put on pause a trade war enacted by former president Donald Trump, who raised tariffs on Chinese imports over complaints about Beijing's industrial policy and trade surplus.

China retaliated by suspending purchases of US soybeans and raising tariffs on other goods.

Under President Joe Biden, the administration has maintained the higher tariffs and other policies that have elicited complaints from Beijing, but has sought a more cordial tone in discussions between the sides.

Liu also explained the country's position on its current economic development model and industrial policies.

China's economy has bounced back relatively quickly following the global COVID-19 outbreak, but has run into headwinds from large amounts of corporate and local government debt and restrictions on high-tech exports, particularly those enacted by the US.

Former Israeli soldier assaulted outside station in Berlin



BERLIN (AP): A former Israeli soldier was assaulted in Germany's capital in what police described Saturday as an antisemitic incident.

The assault took place Friday evening outside the Noeldnerplatz commuter train station in an eastern district of Berlin. The 29-year-old former soldier, a Berlin resident, was wearing a pullover with the emblem of the Israel Defense Forces and turned toward someone who

"addressed him about his faith," police said in a statement.

He told investigators that when he turned toward the person he got an irritant gas sprayed in his face and knocked to the ground. The assailant or assailants fled.

The assaulted man alerted police and emergency personnel treated him at the scene. Berlin's criminal police opened an investigation on suspicion of politically motivated bodily harm.

Russians flock to Serbia for Western-made COVID-19 vaccines

Belgrade, Oct 9 (AP): When Russian regulators approved the country's own coronavirus vaccine, it was a moment of national pride, and the Pavlov family was among those who rushed to take the injection. But international health authorities have not yet given their blessing to the Sputnik V shot.

So when the family from Rostov-on-Don wanted to visit the West, they looked for a vaccine that would allow them to travel freely a quest that brought them to Serbia, where hundreds of Russian citizens have flocked in recent weeks to receive Western-approved COVID-19 shots.

Serbia, which is not a member of the European Union, is a convenient choice for vaccine-seeking Russians because they can enter the allied Balkan nation without visas and because it offers a wide choice of Western-made shots. Organized tours for Russians have soared, and they can be spotted in the capital, Belgrade, at hotels, restaurants, bars and vaccination clinics.

We took the Pfizer vaccine because we want to travel around the world, Nadezhda Pavlova, 54, said af-

ter receiving the vaccine last weekend at a sprawling Belgrade vaccination center.

Her husband, Vitaly Pavlov, 55, said he wanted the whole world to be open to us rather than just a few countries.

Vaccination tour packages for Russians seeking shots endorsed by the World Health Organization appeared on the market in mid-September, according to Russia's Association of Tour Operators.

Maya Lomidze, the group's executive director, said prices start at 300 to 700, depending on what's included.

Lauded by Russian President Vladimir Putin as world's first registered COVID-19 vaccine, Sputnik V emerged in August 2020 and has been approved in some 70 countries, including Serbia. But the WHO has said global approval is still under review after citing issues at a production plant a few months ago.

On Friday, a top World Health Organization official said legal issues holding up the review of Sputnik V were about to be sorted out, a step that could relaunch the process toward

emergency use authorization.

Other hurdles remain for the Russian application, including a lack of full scientific information and inspections of manufacturing sites, said Dr. Mariangela Simao, a WHO assistant director-general.

Apart from the WHO, Sputnik V is also still awaiting approval from the European Medicines Agency before all travel limitations can be lifted for people vaccinated with the Russian formula.

The long wait has frustrated many Russians, so when the WHO announced yet another delay in September, they started looking for solutions elsewhere.

People don't want to wait; people need to be able to get into Europe for various personal reasons, explained Anna Filatovskaya, Russky Express tour agency spokeswoman in Moscow. Some have relatives. Some have business, some study, some work. Some simply want to go to Europe because they miss it.

Serbia, a fellow-Orthodox Christian and Slavic nation, offers the Pfizer, AstraZeneca and Chinese Sinopharm shots. By popular demand, Russian tourist agencies are now also

offering tours to Croatia, where tourists can receive the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine, without the need to return for a second dose.

For Serbia, the demand has been growing like an avalanche," Filatovskaya said. "It's as if all our company is doing these days is selling tours for Serbia."

The Balkan nation introduced vaccination for foreigners in August, when the vaccination drive inside the country slowed after reaching around 50% of the adult population. Official Serbian government data shows that nearly 160,000 foreign citizens so far have been vaccinated in the country, but it is unclear how many are Russians.

In Russia, the country's vaccination rate has been low. By this week, almost 33% of Russia's 146 million people have received at least one shot of a coronavirus vaccine, and 29% were fully vaccinated. Apart from Sputnik V and a one-dose version known as Sputnik Light, Russia has also used two other domestically designed vaccines that have not been internationally approved.

Russian Health Minister Mikhail Murashko

recently said administrative issues were among the main hold-ups in the WHO's review process.

Judy Twigg, a political science professor specializing in global health at Virginia Commonwealth University, expects Sputnik V to be approved eventually but not this year.

The WHO has said that it needs more data, and it needs to go back and inspect some production lines where it saw issues early on. Those re-inspections are a multiweek process, with good reason. It's not something that they just gloss over lightly."

Amid low vaccination rates and reluctance by the authorities to reimpose restrictive measures, both Russia and Serbia have seen COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations reach record levels in the past weeks.

The daily coronavirus death toll in Russia topped 900 for a second straight day on Thursday a day after reaching a record 929. In Serbia, the daily death toll of 50 people is the highest in months in the country of 7 million that so far has confirmed nearly 1 million cases of infection.

Pavlova said the dou-

ble protection offered by the Pfizer booster shots would allow the family "to not only travel around the world, but also to see our loved ones without fear.

Since the vaccine tours exploded in popularity about a month ago, they have provided welcome business for Serbian tour operators devastated by the pandemic in an already weak economy. The owner of BTS Kompas travel agency in Belgrade, Predrag Tesic, said they are booked well in advance.

It started modestly at first, but day by day numbers have grown nicely, Tesic said.

He explained that his agency organizes everything, from airport transport to accommodations and translation and other help at vaccination points. When they return for another dose in three weeks, the Russian guests also are offered brief tours to some of popular sites in Serbia.

Back in Russia, some Moscow residents said they understood why many of their fellow Russians travel abroad for vaccines. But Tatiana Novikova said homegrown vaccines remain her choice.

"I trust ours more, to be honest, she said.



AyushmannKhurrana teams up with Aanand L Rai for an action film

MUMBAI, OCT 9 (PTI): Actor AyushmannKhurrana has been roped in by filmmaker Aanand L Rai for his next home production film titled "Action Hero".

The film, also produced by Bhushan Kumar's T-Series, focuses on an artist's journey both in front and behind the lens.

The movie, to be directed by Anirudhlyer, is billed as a slick actioner with an offbeat satirical sense of humour.

Khurrana, who will be seen in an action film for the first time, said he fell in love with the script.

"I absolutely loved the script of 'Action Hero' instantly. It's zany, it's fresh, it's disruptive and it has all the trappings of cinema that I have come to be known for," he said in a statement.

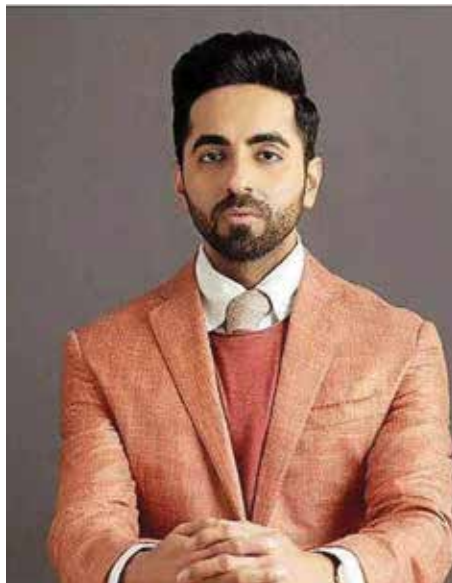
The 37-year-old actor said he is thrilled to be collaborating with Rai for the third time.

"We hope our track record to entertain audiences worldwide with disruptive scripts continues with 'Action Hero'. I'm also very excited to work with Bhushanji again. Colour Yellow and T-

Series are like a second home to me," he added.

Rai said he too is equally excited about teaming up with Khurrana.

the eponymous 'Action Hero' in this film. This also marks the fourth collaboration between T-Series and Ayushmann, making this even more special for everyone



"While this is the first time that we are exploring this genre, it is the third time we will be collaborating with Ayushmann on a film. It's always a pleasure working with him and I'm quite excited to have the film go on floors," he said.

Kumar said "Action Hero" is a special film. "Ayushmann perfectly fits the bill of

involved. We can't wait for it to go on floors and see him live the character," said the producer.

The film will be shot in India and the UK.

"Action Hero" is a T-Series and a Colour Yellow Production and is produced by Rai, Kumar and Krishan Kumar.

Christopher Nolan casts Cillian Murphy in 'Oppenheimer', announces 2023 release

Los Angeles, Oct 9 (PTI): Celebrated filmmaker Christopher Nolan has roped in actor Cillian Murphy to play the lead role of American physicist J Robert Oppenheimer in his upcoming historical epic.

Titled "Oppenheimer", the film will focus on the life of the physicist whose role in running the Los Alamos Laboratory and involvement in the Manhattan Project has led him to be dubbed as the father of the atomic bomb.

Universal Pictures is producing the project, which marks Murphy and Nolan's fourth collaboration after "Batman Begins", "Inception" and "Dunkirk".

"Oppenheimer" is based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning book "American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J Robert Oppenheimer" by Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin.

The film is written by Nolan and he also produces along with Emma Thomas and Atlas Entertainment's Charles Roven.

Christopher Nolan and Emma Thomas' films have shattered the lim-

its of what cinematic storytelling can achieve. We are thrilled to be working alongside them on this exceptional and extraordinary project and are grateful for their shared passion and



commitment to the theatrical experience," said Universal Filmed Entertainment Group Chairman, Donna Langley.

Like Nolan's previous films "Dunkirk" and "The Dark Knight", the upcoming movie will also be shot with IMAX cameras.

Production will begin in early 2022.

Universal Pictures will distribute "Oppenheimer" theatrically worldwide and will release the film in North American theatres on July 21, 2023.

Saif Ali Khan finishes filming for 'Adipurush'

MUMBAI, OCT 9 (PTI): Bollywood star Saif Ali Khan on Saturday completed shooting for his upcoming film "Adipurush".

The multilingual period saga, also starring Prabhas, is described as a film celebrating "the victory of good over evil".

Featuring extensive visual effects, "Adipurush" is an on-screen adaptation of Ramayana and features Prabhas as Lord Ram and Khan in the role

of Lankesh.

It is directed by Om Raut of "Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior" fame and produced by Bhushan Kumar-led T-Series.

The official Instagram account of T-Series shared the news of Khan's shoot wrap alongside a picture of the 51-year-old star cutting a cake.

"@omrautIt's a film wrap for Lankesh! Had so much fun shooting with you SAK," the post read.



PRINCESS KSTEW! Actress Kristen Stewart turned heads at the Spencer premiere in London.

Akshay Kumar wraps shoot of his next film with Ranjit M Tewari



MUMBAI, OCT 9 (PTI): Superstar Akshay Kumar on Saturday said he has finished filming for his next movie directed by Ranjit M Tewari.

The movie, backed by Pooja Entertainment, is currently being called Production No. 41.

The 54-year-old superstar shared the news in a post on social media and said he had a memorable time working on the film.

"Can't believe it's a wrap on #Production41! Grateful to have shot and completed a memorable journey with the loveliest team! Thank you for all the love, smiles and fun!"

he wrote, alongside a photograph of cast and crew. The movie, which was shot in London, also stars RakulPreet Singh and Sargun Mehra, among others.

The project marks the second collaboration between Kumar, Tewari and production banner Pooja Entertainment after "Bellbottom", which released in theatres in August this year.

Kumar has a slew of films that are set to release in the coming months, including "Sooryavanshi", "Prithiviraj", "Bachchan-Pandey", "Atrangi Re", "Ram Setu" and "RakshaBandhan".

Aries:

The more you contemplate on the given situation from the place of the ego, the more reasons you will find to blame yourself and others. Word for the wise: bring a certain degree of detachment into the equation. Remember your role as the catalyst in this story. The truth that you are not the 'doer' simply the medium through which certain things are being set into motion. Let karma play out the way it is meant to as you remember that all the world is but a play, Aries!

Tip: You are merely the catalyst in this story.

Taurus:

The Universe speaks to us in mysterious ways, Taurus, and those of us who find a way to silence the mind are able to tune into this voice of wisdom within. So, what is this voice bringing you attention to today? What are you being asked to adopt and what are you being guided to let go of? Remember, if it was meant for you, it would have worked out in your favour a long time ago.

Tip: Follow the path of least resistance.

Gemini:

It's all or nothing, Gemini! It's all or nothing. You're feeling the love more than ever before, and are being reminded of why you started walking a certain path. It's now time to risk everything for it. To lean into that feeling of freefalling, knowing the Universe has always got your back. Things

may not work exactly in accordance with the plan, and that's okay. Something tells us the outcome is going to be better than you could have expected.

Tip: Get ready to risk everything for the chosen path.

Cancer:

Know how and where to draw a line. The weekend sees you revisiting your budget, making certain adjustments and allocating funds in a way that both your needs and wants are taken care of. Some of you may be thinking about savings and investments too. If you're not too well-versed with money matters, consider consulting an expert in the field.

Tip: It's all about savings and investments.

Leo:

People are always showing us who they are through both their actions and words. It all comes down to how actively you're willing to tune in. The signs are getting louder, Leo. The signs are getting louder. So, pay attention to what is being revealed to you in moments of silence. Something tells us that one of your closest accomplices could be the cause of the turmoil you are experiencing at the moment.

Tip: The truth will be revealed to you in moments of silence.

Virgo:

Manifestation is not a ritual, honey! It's a lifestyle. Manifestation is not a ritual but a lifestyle. The real question is:

what are the miracles that you want to call into your reality today? How do you feel inspired to co-create with the divine forces? It's time for you to take action in the right direction with the inner knowing that you are fully supported. Remembering the mantra 'As above, so below' will instill you with the faith that you need at this moment. Tip: Co-create.

Libra:

Remember when doubting yourself was a lifestyle? Remember when you constantly needed external validation to know that you were offering something worthwhile? Look at where you are now, beautiful. Libra season is offering you the opportunity to marvel at all the ways in which you have evolved over the years. That glorious, crystal-studded crown you're wearing is proof of the long way you have come. So, as and when the demons of doubt rear their ugly heads today, walk them to the exit door, and let them know that they have been banished forever from your Universe.

Tip: Take a moment to marvel at all the ways in which you have grown.

Scorpio:

It's time to pause, sip on your tulsi tea, looking forward but also look backwards. What a long way you have come, beautiful! What a long way you have come! This chapter of your life requires you to integrate all the soul lessons

you have been taught so you can move forward with grace and poise. Yes, there are certain things that have been taken away from you on this path. Observing your circumstances from a higher perspective, however, will help you realise that there were no wrong turns.

Tip: It's time to integrate the learnings of the past.

Sagittarius:

The wheel of fortune is turning in your favour. The wheel of fortune is turning in your favour, Sagittarius. So, pay attention to the opportunities that are showing up. They're aligning you with your path and purpose. For some of you, this opening could come through a close friend or accomplice. Word for the wise: if you're feeling inspired to reconnect with somebody from your past and seek their assistance, do so without delay.

Tip: Pay attention to the opportunities that are showing up in your world.

Capricorn:

An affirmation you want to repeat now and for the rest of the weekend: "I am living in the quantum field of infinite possibilities." This is a time of magic and synchronicities, Capricorn. A time of witnessing miracles unfold in your reality. The only thing you need to do is stay open and "allow". Allow what has always been yours to find its way into your Universe. A sudden change in your finances is also indicated for some of you. If and when the opportu-

nity to level up shows up, say yes with utmost faith in the mysterious forces above.

Tip: If only you could see what's taking place behind the scenes for you.

Aquarius:

While we're all gifted with the power of free will, not all of us exercise it in the way that we are meant to. Could this be true in your case, Aquarius? Do you sometimes feel like things are simply not in your control? While the external circumstances cannot be fixed, your response to stimuli certainly can. So, reclaim the reins, honey, and repeat the affirmation, "I am the char-acter of my life."

Tip: Tap into the power of free will.

Pisces:

Dream a little dream, Pisces, and compose a love song for us as you astral travel through the subtle realms. Boarding the flight of fantasy is a big mood around here. Escapism is the sweet elixir that helps you deal with the trials and tribulations of the physical world. Those who have been working themselves to the bone are being encouraged to take the day off as well (some part of it at least!). Could there be a better way to heal and recuperate than to stay in bed with a warm cup of tea and your furry friend curled into a ball somewhere near your feet? Tip: Dream a little dream.