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# Summit **TIMES**

Vol 06 | Issue 45 | Gangtok | Wednesday 17 February 2021

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | ₹ 5



**CM meets Darjeeling MP, wishes him success**

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 16 FEB:**

Chief Minister, PS Tamang met Member of Parliament (MP) from Darjeeling, Raju Bista at Siliguri today. In a Facebook post, the CM wrote, "I wish him best of health and success in his endeavour to serve the people with the same energy and enthusiasm."

## Sikkim begins administering second dose of CoviShield, 157 get the shot

**SAGAR CHHETRI  
GANGTOK, 16 FEB:**

The second dose of CoviShield, the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine for COVID-19 manufactured in India by the Serum Institute, was administered today to 157 health-workers completing the vaccine protocol for them. And even as the follow-up round has begun for the vaccination drive in Sikkim, 445 more frontline workers received their first shot of the vaccine at different parts of the State. With this, a total of 602 persons received the vaccine today - 157 getting their second dose and 445 their first.

In his daily health bulletin on Tuesday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia informed that 157 health workers - doctors, nurses and other staff - posted at



STNM Hospital received the second dose of the vaccine.

Meanwhile, among those receiving their first dose were 76 frontline workers at Rangpo PHC and 139 frontline workers at Urban PHC, Gangtok in East District, 150 frontline workers at Gyalshing District Hospital and 80 ITBP personnel at Chungthang in North District.

In the meanwhile, three persons tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 24 hours in Sikkim taking the State's

tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported so far to 6,121.

On the other hand, the figure of recovered patients in Sikkim has improved to 5,834 with the release of one more person from home isolation on Monday. There are currently 56 active cases of novel coronavirus in the State.

Mr Bhutia informed that the three cases were picked up from the testing of 147 samples on Monday.

All three were detected in RT-PCR

testing of 107 samples.

While providing details of the new cases, he informed that one person from near 2nd Mile Turning, Adampool in Rawtey-Rumtek in East District and one from Dethang, Rabongla in South District were found positive for COVID-19.

He added that a person from Darjeeling, who was in Sikkim for medical treatment, also tested positive for COVID-19 and has already returned to Darjeeling.

## SKM's Jan Samwad Yatra tours East Sikkim



**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 16 FEB:**

In the ongoing state-wide Jan-Samwad Yatra, a team of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha party led by its senior vice-president, Tek Nath Dhakal, who is also Political Advisor to the CM, and general secretary [press & publicity], Boom Tshering Yonzon visited various places of East District on Tuesday.

An SKM press release informs that the ninth day of the tour started from Pakyong Bazaar in East District, where SKM senior vice-president

inspected shops situated in Pakyong Haat Bazaar and its surrounding areas. It is added that he noted down various grievances and issues of businessmen during the interaction and assured to take all these issues to the State government.

The release informs that during the interaction with people of Parakha under G n a t h a n g - M a c h o n g constituency, Mr Dhakal mentioned that the SKM government and the CM have been working to address all issues of the people. Unlike the

previous government, the SKM government is not misleading the people with false promises and assurances, he stated.

The CM has taken the historic step to reaching out to the people to collect their inconveniences, problems and grievances to resolve it in time by taking appropriate steps, he said further claiming that such pro-people initiatives have never been taken by earlier governments.

Mr Dhakal stated that the SKM government has been working to rebuild

Sikkim by correcting all mistakes, carelessness and disorganized works of the earlier government. He further added that the State government took a historic step by adopting a resolution in the State Assembly on 11 January to provide tribal status to 12 left-out communities of Sikkim.

The release informs that the team also inspected the ongoing works at Mangkhim premises in Changey-Senti and also visited the School and BDO office at Parakha.

## SAATHI holds community outreach program in Dikchu



**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 16 FEB:**

In order to educate the community regarding the dangers of addiction, a Community Outreach Program was organized by SAATHI with the support of Titan Company Ltd.

The program was organized at Dikchu, East Sikkim on 16 Feb, 2021 wherein 44 local residents participated.

The goals of our community outreach programs are to

raise awareness and understanding of the dangers of drug and alcohol addiction and provide information regarding locally available support groups, treatment centers and support services for those suffering from addiction, the release mentions.

Robin Rai from Freedom Facility interacted with the participants and mentioned that environment plays an

important factor in the development of a child so community should be vigilant and mindful towards it. They should not send minors to buy alcohol and tobacco, he added.

BDO (Rakdong Tintek), Tshering Norgyal Theang was the chief guest of the program. He addressed the participants on issues related to substance abuse especially in our society. He emphasized that abusing substance is

a disease and we should treat them as a patient and handle them with compassion.

Panchayat President, Tika Maya Pandey spoke about the current scenario of her GPU and emphasized that in today's generation there is a huge communication gap between a child and parent. She requested all the parents to dine together and bridge the gap by sitting down and talking with each other.

## Meghalaya further lowers Petrol, Diesel prices by over ₹ 5 per litre

**SHILLONG, 16 FEB [PTI]:** Meghalaya government on Tuesday slashed retail prices of petrol and diesel by another over ₹ 5 by reducing VAT on them, Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma said.

The decision came amid strike by commercial transporters that entered second day Tuesday. The new retail price of petrol will be ₹ 85.86 from its current price of ₹ 91.26, while the new retail price of diesel will be ₹ 79.13 from its present rate of ₹ 86.23 in the state capital, Mr Sangma said after a review meeting he held with his cabinet colleagues and senior government officials.

He said the total reduction will be ₹ 7.4 for petrol and ₹ 7.1 for diesel after the state government had announced a ₹ 2 rebate on both the items last week.

The lowering of prices of both petrol and diesel was a result of the state governments decision to reduce the VAT from 31.62 per cent on petrol to 20 per cent per litre or ₹ 15 per litre (whichever is higher).

For diesel VAT came down from 22.95 per cent to 12 per cent or ₹ 9 per litre, Conrad said.

The chief minister said the new tariff will also ensure a competitive pricing of both the items with the

neighbouring Assam which had reduced the prices of both petrol and diesel by ₹ 5 last week.

The decision is likely to pacify agitating commercial transporters who had remained off the road in the past two days and also threatened to go on indefinite hunger strike if the government fails to act.

The state government had collected ₹ 326 crore as revenue from taxes on petrol and diesel in the last financial year.

Mr Conrad said the government had already collected ₹ 451 crore by way of taxes on petrol and diesel till January this year. Meanwhile, the

state government has also assured payment of electricity dues to Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd worth over ₹ 74 crore following which the power company has assured to withdraw power regulations to the state with immediate effect.

The power regulation of 70 MW resulting in power cuts of up to 7 hours in a day across the state had begun since Sunday last after the state government failed to pay pending dues of ₹ 74.65 crore to the PGCIL.

"I am happy to inform that load shedding (power cuts) will be completely taken out within 24 hours. We have the approvals

of the PGDCIL," Mr Conrad told journalists in Shillong.

He said the state government had cleared a ₹ 1345 cr Aatmanirbhar loan from the Centre to liquidate all outstanding dues against the purchase of power from various power-generating institutions.

According to the chief minister, the centre has already released ₹ 127 crore to the REC which was paid to another power generating company, NEEPCO.

"About 75 per cent of the amount is left with the REC. Funds are released from the REC and in due course of time, the dues for PGCIL will also be paid by the

REC," Mr Conrad said.

The chief minister informed that the Meghalaya Electric Coportation Ltd has been a victim of non payment of dues by consumers.

The company had in the past two months recovered nearly one crore dues after the company issued reminders and notices to defaulting consumers.

The chief minister appealed to all consumers of MeECL to pay their dues regularly. Officials of the state power company have been asked to follow strict procedures to recover dues from consumers, a senior official of the company said.

## Weeklong meditation workshop for SSB personnel



### SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 FEB:

A weeklong workshop on Meditation & Breath under Art of Living was organized for the personnel of 72 Sashstra Seema Bal Battalion which

concluded today.

A press release informs that the workshop was conducted especially for the SSB personnel with the aim to provide relief from stress and for their general mental health.

During the last six days, various teachings of Sri Sri Ravi Shanker with various asanas and physical exercises was taught to the Officers and Jawans by Gurujit Amit Dhanka and Sandeep Katoch from AoL

Bengaluru (Karnataka).

The workshop was attended by Commanding Officer, SK Awadhya, Dy Commandant, Rajesh Kumar Singh, other Officers and 75 personnel from 72 Bn SSB.

## Lingi Payong School celebrates Saraswati Puja



### SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 FEB:

On the occasion of Vasant Panchami, Saraswati Puja was organised at Lingi Payong Secondary School, South Sikkim premises on Tuesday.

The puja was organised with the support of students, teachers, SMC members, parents and guardians, alumni members

and public, a press release informs.

Pragitishil Yuva Club, a local youth club also contributed to the celebration of the puja.

The ceremonial rituals began at 11:00am wherein a former student as well as advisor to SMC, Raj Kumar Gautam performed the puja and other essential rituals. The whole programme was completed under the guidance of JL Bhattarai

who is also a purohit and Sanskrit teacher of the school supported by another school teacher YK Bhandari.

Students, irrespective of their religion, offered their prayers to the goddess Saraswati who is considered the Goddess of knowledge as per Hindu customs and tradition.

The objective of the celebration was to make students aware of the

culture and tradition as well as to develop competence among them to organise such events in school and elsewhere.

It is to be noted that this is the 3rd celebration of Saraswati Puja in the school premises since 2019. The headmaster of the school thanked everyone for their support in making the programme a grand success.

## Amid Rising Cases, Mumbai Mayor's Lockdown Caution

MUMBAI, 16 FEB [NDTV]:

Mumbai: As Mumbai records a surge in Covid cases, a lockdown is a possibility, a top Mumbai official warned today. But whether the city will go into lockdown mode once again would depend on the people, said Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar.

The Mayor noted that most people travelling on trains did not wear masks.

"It's a matter of concern. Most people travelling in trains don't wear masks. People must take precautions or we will head towards another lockdown," Kishori Pednekar said.

"Whether a lockdown will be implemented again is in the hands of people."

Speaking to NDTV



about the possibility of imposing another lockdown in the city, Additional Commissioner of Mumbai civic body BMC Dr Suresh Kakani said, "There is no possibility of a lockdown as of now. But BMC is taking strict measures to conduct contact tracing, testing and ensuring Covid-appropriate behaviour is being followed."

Earlier, the

Maharashtra government had also termed the situation "alarming" and warned of "harsh decisions" after the recent spike. Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar expressed dismay over people not following Covid precautions.

"Harsh decisions can be taken and people should remain prepared. If certain decisions are not taken in time then we

will have to pay a heavy cost later," he said.

Mr Pawar said he had come across reports that people were being lax about precautions.

"The number (of new cases in the state) is alarming. We have seen that lockdown was imposed in many parts of the world again in view of the second wave of the pandemic," he said.

Mumbai on Monday reported 493 Covid cases while the total caseload reached 3,14,569. The total number of deaths is at 11,420.

On Sunday, the number of new cases was 645, the highest in the last five days.

The time taken for doubling of cases has reduced.

In neighbouring

Thane, which is part of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, the number of Covid cases has gone up to 2,58,030 with 285 fresh cases today. One person died, raising the number of dead to 6,203.

On Sunday, Maharashtra reported 4,092 cases, the highest single-day Covid tally in more than a month. Though the numbers dipped again on Monday, the tally remained above 3,000 for the sixth straight day.

Mumbai city is reporting the highest single-day cases in the state with a spike of 493 on Monday.

Apart from Mumbai, Nagpur and Amravati reported over 400 new virus cases in a day on Monday.

## Odisha relaxes land holding limit for industry

BHUBANESWAR, FEB

16 (PTI):

The Odisha government has relaxed the land ceiling limit, allowing companies to purchase 100 acres of private land in urban areas for setting up industries.

According to the notification issued by the Revenue and Disaster Management (R&DM) Department on Monday, after negotiation with land owners, private players can now purchase land up to 500 acres against

the earlier cap of 200 acres of dry land or equivalent areas of irrigated land or wetland in rural areas.

Private companies can now buy 100 acres in urban areas which was earlier limited to 50 acres, R&DM secretary B P Sethi said.

"This is being done as a proactive measure for quick and seamless development of industrialisation in the state," Sethi said.

As acquiring land for industries is one

of the problems which investors usually face, the state government has taken this step to help the corporate sector, he said.

Earlier, while addressing a meeting of the Utkal Chamber of Commerce and Industry (UCCI), industries secretary Hemant Sharma had said that the state will modify the IPR to improve ease of doing business in Odisha and make things easier for investors.

## "Attempt to browbeat Disha Ravi into submission": Mount Carmel Alumni

BENGALURU, 16 FEB [PTI]: Over 300 alumni of Mount Carmel College in Bengaluru have written a letter of support and condemned the arrest of fellow alumna Disha Ravi by the Delhi Police.

Ms Ravi faces allegations that she was one of several people who prepared a "toolkit" to create disturbances over the protest by farmers. She was arrested by Delhi Police last week and taken to the national capital. The manner of her arrest and the charges have been condemned by the alumni as frivolous.

Ms Ravi is a

climate activist and her unverified Twitter account - being handled by a friend since her arrest - describes her as a "youth climate activist" and the founder of Fridays For Future India, a group reportedly associated with Greta Thunberg's climate advocacy group Fridays For Future.

"We, the alumni of Mount Carmel College, condemn the arrest of our fellow alum Disha Ravi by the Delhi Police. The blatant targeting of a young woman citizen expressing her support with the nation's protesting

farmers is horrifying and completely unacceptable. We demand that the Delhi Police release her and the Bangalore police and Karnataka governments act to protect the constitutional rights of a woman resident of the state of Karnataka," said the letter of support signed by 330 alumni of Mount Carmel College.

"...As we all know, the terrible impact of climate change cannot be ignored as evidenced by the ongoing disaster at Uttarakhand where hundreds of people are believed to be buried dead. It is these kinds of environmental disasters,

enabled by the weakening of the provisions of the Environment Impact Assessment, that Ms Ravi has worked to bring to public attention," the alumni said in their letter.

"Her sense of history is remarkable as she has drawn not only from her personal, familial history of farmer-grandparents and the difficulties they suffered due to the impact of climate change on agricultural practices. She has also drawn her inspiration to protest and lend her voice to farmers' protests in the country from the greatest of people's movements in India - the Independence struggle.

Letter Of Support And Condemning Arrest Of Disha Ravi By Alumni Of Mount Carmel College by NDTV on Scribd

"Through her work, Disha stands as a model to emulate. Her arrest, we believe, is a way to browbeat young, articulate women - which Mount Carmel College has produced for generations - into silent submission. We unconditionally express support to her and her family in this time of distress and are proud of the work she has undertaken in the field of climate change activism," the alumni said.

## West Bengal Governor prorogues State Assembly

KOLKATA, 16 FEB [PTI]: West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar prorogued the state assembly from Monday, and observed that in the country's parliamentary history, an assembly has never been in session for over a year without being prorogued.

Prorogation is discontinuing a session of the Parliament or a legislative assembly without dissolving it. In a Twitter post, Mr Dhankhar said he prorogued the assembly

from February 15, taking note of a recommendation by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

"Never earlier in parliamentary history of this country an assembly has been in session for over a year without being prorogued," Mr Dhankhar tweeted.

"In the process wholesome practices including Governor address in first session @MamataOfficial could not take place thereby depriving vital discussion," he said in the tweet.



A two-day special session of the West Bengal Assembly was held from January 27 when the state government tabled a resolution against the centre's new farm laws and discuss the issue of agitating

farmers. The governor was not invited to address the session on the first day of the sitting of the assembly this year.

Facing criticism from opposition leaders for this,

Speaker Biman Banerjee had said that no irregularity was committed as there is no provision for the address of the governor if a sitting is a continuation of a previous session even if it is in a new year.

The Speaker had said that the sitting was continuation of a session that was adjourned in September 2020 sine die and was reconvened from January 27 on a request by the government for conduct of important businesses.

## KUTSE SHEGU



The 49th days Kutse Shegu (Anthyesti Kriya) of our beloved father Lt Lerap Shandarpa (Sokay Kaila) of Rabongla Yangyang Road who left for his heavenly abode on 04 Jan, 2021 falls at our residence, Rabongla Yangyang Road near Foodgodown South Sikkim on 21 Feb, 2021. We would like to request all relatives, friends and well-wishers to present their prayers and offering to the departed soul.

**Family members-**  
Dechen Doma Bhutia (Eldest daughter)  
Karma Tseten Bhutia (Eldest son)  
Laki Doma Bhutia (Daughter)  
Ugen Bhutia (Son)  
Sedenla Bhutia (Daughter)  
Contact No: 74329001908, 9775476720.

**What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?**

The Novel Coronavirus (nCoV) is new strain of Coronavirus that originated in Wuhan, China. Notorious for mutating quickly and acquiring new qualities, it is a rising epidemic that was previously not identified in humans.

Symptoms of nCoV	Precautions to Prevent nCoV
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fever</li> <li>● Difficulty in breathing</li> <li>● Dry Cough</li> <li>● Severe acute respiratory syndrome</li> <li>● Pneumonia - like symptoms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Wash your hands often with soap.</li> <li>● Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer</li> <li>● Observe good personal hygiene.</li> <li>● Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.</li> <li>● Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms.</li> <li>● Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats.</li> <li>● Avoid travel to nCoV affected places.</li> <li>● Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome, and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.</li> </ul>
Treatment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition.</li> <li>● No vaccinations available as of now.</li> <li>● Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected.</li> </ul>	

If you seek help, you may call :  
-Toll free no. 104  
District surveillance Officer  
EAST : 7029372100  
WEST : 9593297809  
NORTH : 9641957468  
SOUTH : 7407691463  
New STNM  
AMS : 9434711402

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE  
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM**

# Dr Sukirti Chauhan joins CRH as new neurosurgery head

**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 16 FEB:**

Dr Sukirti Chauhan, MS, MCh, has joined Central Referral Hospital (CRH), Tadong as Consultant Neurosurgeon from February 2021. She will head the Department of Neurosurgery, Super Speciality Wing, CRH.

Dr Sukirti brings with her a vast experience from Neotia Hospital, Remedy Clinics, Mahabir Doctor's Hub and United Day Care. She specializes in Spine Surgery, Traumatic Brain Injury, Stereotactic surgery (Key hole surgery of the brain), Epilepsy Surgery, Endoscopic Surgery, Neuro-Onco-Surgery (brain cancer), Skull base surgery, Aneurysm Surgery.

Dr Sukirti graduated from renowned Madras Medical College and did



her post-graduation from Kasturba Medical College, Mangalore and received her MCh. She was the Assistant Professor in Centre of Advanced Brain and Spinal Surgery (CABSS) in Tamil Nadu Government Multi Super speciality Hospital

(TNGMSSH). She also has a Fellowship in Skull-base Neurosurgery from KIMS, Secunderabad.

Some of her voluntary works include conducting Neurosurgery OP services for the less accessible mountainous areas of Sikkim (Jorethang) and parts

of West Bengal (Dinhata near Bangladesh border, Alipurduar, Cooch Behar), Cancer Screening Camps for Indian Naval families (2011), Chennai, India, Counselling for Tobacco Cessation, Chennai and School children check-up camps (2008-2010), Batak, Karnataka.

Being a daughter of a Naval Officer, she has mostly lived, studied and worked in Chennai and had worked as Honorary Consultant Neurosurgeon with the Armed Forces in Chennai. She has a flair for language and speaks English, Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Bengali and understands Nepali fairly.

She has conducted various camps in Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Sikkim. It was this

close association with her patients in Sikkim (Jorethang) that drove her to do further service in Central Referral Hospital over a high-profile corporate job.

She is the member of NSI (Neurological Society of India), ASNO (Association of Asian Society of Neuro-Oncology), Skull Base Surgical Society of India (SBSSI), WSSFN (World Society of Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery), NTSI (Neurotrauma Society of India), WINS (Women in NeuroSurgery), ASI (Association of Surgeons of India), EANS (European Association of Neurosurgical Societies), TANS (Tamil Nadu Neurosurgical Society), AO Spine, WINSI (Women Neurosurgery Association of India).



Students celebrate Saraswati Puja at Singtam, East Sikkim. [Yogen Thatal]

## Sedition law can't be used to "quieten the disquiet": Delhi Court

**NEW DELHI, 16 FEB [PTI]:** The law of sedition cannot be invoked to "quieten the disquiet under the pretence of muzzling miscreants", a Delhi court said today while hearing the case against two persons arrested earlier this month for allegedly spreading rumours on social media.

Additional Sessions Judge Dharmender Rana made the observation while

granting bail to two persons - Devi Lal Burdak and Swaroop Ram - arrested by Delhi police earlier this month for allegedly committing sedition and spreading rumours by posting an alleged fake video on Facebook during ongoing farmers' protest.

The court said that the law of sedition was a powerful tool in the hands of the state

to maintain peace and order in the society.

"However, it cannot be invoked to quieten the disquiet under the pretence of muzzling the miscreants. Evidently, law proscribes any act which has a tendency to create disorder or disturbance of public peace by resort to violence," the judge said in an order passed on February 15.

## Siddharth Chatterjee takes over as top UN diplomat in China

Beijing, 16 Feb [PTI]: Senior UN official Siddharth Chatterjee has formally taken over as the United Nations Resident Coordinator in China, a key posting of overseeing the work of 27 agencies, funds and programmes of the global organisation in the world's most populous country.

He will be UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's senior-most UN Representative in China as the UN Resident Coordinator.

Mr Chatterjee, whose early career was in the Indian Army, was decorated for gallantry by the President of India in 1995.

He holds a master's degree in public policy from Princeton University in the United States, and a bachelor's degree from the National

Defence Academy in India.

Commenting on his new assignment, Mr Chatterjee told news agency PTI: "Over the past four decades, the world has witnessed the profound economic and social transformations that have taken place in China, lifting hundreds of millions out of poverty."

"As the UN Resident Coordinator to China, I look forward to leading the UN Country Team to work with the government to preserve this hard-won progress China has made as well as share China's vast experience to solve global development challenges and accelerate the drive to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)".

Mr Chatterjee has spent over 24 years in the United Nations serving in a wide range of positions

and organisations.

In December last year, UN Secretary-General Guterres appointed Mr Chatterjee as the Resident Coordinator in China with the host government's approval. Resident Coordinators are the UN Secretary-General's representatives for development at the country level. They lead UN teams supporting countries to recover better from the COVID-19 pandemic through the SDGs.

A TEDx speaker, he is a regular opinion contributor on humanitarian and development issues for a range of local, regional and international media outlets and journals, the UN said in a statement at the time of his appointment.

Before coming to China, Mr Chatterjee was the UN Resident

Coordinator in Kenya where Kenya's Minister for Sports Culture and Heritage Amina Mohammed said that "Chatterjee's exemplary leadership leaves a lasting footprint in the execution of Government/UN collaboration impacting millions of lives in Kenya and the region."

"We presented the gift of a giant footprint as a reminder of the unforgettable journey that he has walked with the people of Kenya," she said in a farewell tweet.

A staunch advocate of gender equality and youth empowerment, Mr Chatterjee has also served in Switzerland, Denmark, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan (Darfur), Indonesia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Iraqi Kurdistan.

He has served in UN Peacekeeping, United

Nations Development Programme, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the UN Population Fund, the Red Cross movement, United Nations Office for Project Services and UN Security.

The highlight of his career was the demobilisation of 3,551 child soldiers in South Sudan when he served with UNICEF during the height of a conflict in 2000.

Observers say by confirming Mr Chatterjee's appointment, particularly at a time of border tensions with India as well as commencement of India's two-year term as a non-permanent member in the UN Security Council, Beijing may be indicating its intent to dial down friction with New Delhi and strengthen multilateral cooperation.

## Indian High Commission's open letter after UK MP Claudia Webbe's farmer protest tweets

**LONDON, 16 FEB:** As United Kingdom Member of Parliament (MP) for Leicester East Claudia Webbe extended support to the farmers' protest, the Indian High Commission in London wrote an open letter on Tuesday saying that the MP was welcome to convey any apprehensions of the community that she represented to the High Commission.

"We would have been able to comprehensively and in detail provide clarifications to assuage the concerns of your constituents with regard to the recent path-breaking Indian Farm Laws against which a small section of India's farming community has been protesting," the High Commission said.

Taking to Twitter Claudia Webbe had earlier said, "I stand with Indian Farmers. #StandWithFarmers #FarmersProtest".

She also extended support to climate activist Disha Ravi, who has been arrested in connection with the "toolkit" case,



related to the farmers' agitations.

"Disha Ravi is 21; a student and climate activist Nodeep Kaur is 24; a labourer and Union activist Both women were targeted, arrested and imprisoned for peacefully supporting the #FarmersProtest This suppression is driven by authoritarianism and free-market capitalism. Don't Be Silent," Claudia Webbe tweeted.

The High Commission's letter emphasised that the reforms, intended to protect and empower farmers in India are based on inputs from experts and recommendations by committees that have

analysed the specific challenges of the agricultural sector in India over the last 20 years.

The Farm Acts were duly discussed and debated in the Parliament of India and their benefits have started reaching more than 100 million small farmers instantly. Since the enactment of these reforms, the discussions have been held with farmers and other stakeholders on their efficient implementation, it further said.

With a section of farmers having reservations, 11 rounds of talks have been held. Though the government has suggested numerous

ways to address their apprehensions - including postponing implementation of the Acts or amendment of the same, these options have been summarily rejected by them, it added.

The letter also said that the information was being shared with Webbe to dispel any misgivings with regard to the objectives of the reforms, the ability of those having reservations to protest peacefully and the willingness of the Government of India to address all concerns in a manner most acceptable to the protesting farmers' unions.

The efforts continue - but Government of India is more than aware

of efforts by vested interests abroad to fuel the protests through misinformation and incendiary assertions that are not helpful in progressing the dialogue between the protesters and Government or addressing the issues through the democratic processes that our people have traditionally relied on, the letter added.

It further said that the farmers participating in the protests rallies have been treated with utmost respect and restraint by the Government and security forces - more than may have been the case in similar situations elsewhere in the world.

Farmers have been protesting on the different borders of the national capital since November 26 last year against the three newly enacted farm laws: Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; the Farmers Empowerment and Protection Agreement on Price Assurance and farm Services Act 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.



**MANGAN NAGAR PANCHAYAT**  
R.N MARG, MANGAN NORTH SIKKIM  
email@mnpnorthsikkim@gmail.com

### NOTICE TENDER

The Tender are invited from individual having COI/ SSC and registered organization for the award of following contract under Mangan Nagar Panchayat for the year 2021-22 under Mangan Nagar Panchayat.

The details of the contract and the tender documents can be obtained from the office of the Municipal Executive Officer, Mangan Nagar Panchayat, Mangan, North Sikkim on payment by depositing the amount at Canara Bank, Mangan on all working days between 11.00 AM TO 3.00 PM.

The costs of tender forms are as follows: Rs 1500/-

SL. NO	NAME OF THE CONTRACT
1	CAR PARKING ( PLAZA & R.N,MARG )
2	PAY & USE TOILET AT BUS DARA
3	BAZAR CONTRACT
4	UTILITY CUM CAR PARKING AT SHOPPING COMPLEX LALL BAZAR
5	PAY & USE TOILET AT DZONGU TAXI STAND
6	CANTEEN CUM TOILET PAY & USE AT SHOPPING COMPLEX
7	TOILET PAY & USE AT PLAZA
8	CLOTH SHREEDING MACHINE

#### DATES

1. First Date for issuance of Tender Documents : 22.02.2021
2. Last Date for issuance of Tender Documents : 25.02.2021
3. Last Date for submission of Sealed Tender : 26.02.2021 By 12.00 p.m
4. Date and Time of Opening of Tender : 26.02.2021 1.00 p.m. Onwards
5. The rate quoted below the offset price will be out rightly rejected.
6. The detail terms and conditions can be seen in the Tender Documents.

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DR. ONGDEN GYATSO, MS (AIIMS)

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

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

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

**VACCINATION CLINIC**

## Global Weekly COVID Cases are Falling, WHO says — but ‘if we stop fighting it on any front, it will come roaring back’

ADAM KAMRADT-SCOTT  
THECONVERSATION.COM

The number of reported global weekly COVID cases is falling and has dropped nearly 50% this year, the World Health Organization (WHO) said overnight. This incredibly encouraging news shows the power of public health measures — but we must remain vigilant. Letting our guard down now, when new variants are emerging, could easily reverse the trend.

According to a WHO press release: “Last week saw the lowest number of reported weekly cases since October”, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) told journalists at a regular press briefing in Geneva.

Noting a nearly 50% drop this year, he stressed that “how we respond to this trend” is what matters now.

While acknowledging that there is more reason for hope of bringing the pandemic under control, the WHO chief warned, “the fire is not out, but we have reduced its size”.

“If we stop fighting it on any front, it will come roaring back”.

This welcome news shows that when governments respond rapidly by putting in place public health measures, we reap the benefits even before widespread vaccine rollouts. That’s a really important message now, and for when the next pandemic hits (and another one eventually will).

As good as this news is, though, we are still seeing infections in fairly large numbers worldwide. And, as we have regrettably seen in the past, subsequent waves of infection can easily emerge.

We also now have a series of variants to contend with. Even as begin to understand how the variants now circulating will affect the effectiveness of current vaccines, it’s possible we could see yet another new variant emerge that would reverse the downward trend. This remains a real risk when there are still so many new infections worldwide and when so few countries have been able to start vaccinating.

IT’S TOO EARLY TO SEE VACCINE EFFECT

Some countries, such as Israel and



the United Kingdom, have already vaccinated huge swathes of their population. That’s a tremendous achievement and we will start to see the benefits in the coming months. But fundamentally, it’s too early to see the effect of the vaccine rollout in widespread reduction of infection.

On the other hand, we have recently seen a much greater focus on public health measures in places such as Europe, the Middle East and the United States. These places have been significantly affected by COVID outbreaks and are dealing with third waves, as some are preparing for their fourth.

It’s likely these public health measures — such as lockdowns, physical distancing, mask-wearing and increased hygiene measures — are what’s driving the global downward trend. That shows the benefit when leaders do engage and bring their populations with them.

To keep that trend going in the right direction, we need high levels of public compliance with those public health measures and more equitable access to vaccines globally.

UNEQUAL GLOBAL ACCESS TO VACCINES IS A MAJOR RISK

Very few low-income countries have started a widespread vaccine rollout, and many are struggling to secure doses. Having unequal access globally to vaccines is obviously morally wrong and dangerous — but it also represents a great economic

risk to high income countries like Australia.

Having high-income countries buying up all the stock of vaccines and leaving poorer nations with little recourse will prolong the pandemic. And that’s bad news for the global economy, with estimates suggesting the pandemic will cost US\$16 trillion dollars.

Even if Australia were able to maintain its success so far, having the pandemic run out of control in other countries means no travel, will continue to make it hard for Australians to return home, and could lead to shortages of products and materials from other countries. As the global financial crisis showed, economic strife in other parts of the world can have profound impact locally, even when Australia is doing relatively OK.

The risk this poses to lives and to the global economy is one reason the WHO has called for vaccine rollouts to begin in all countries in the first 100 days of 2021, and for health-care workers in lower- and middle-income countries to be protected first.

The WHO has issued a vaccine equity declaration calling for, among other things, world leaders to increase contributions to the UN-led vaccine equity initiative, COVAX, and to share doses with COVAX even as they roll out their

own national campaigns.

We also clearly need to upscale vaccine research and manufacturing capacity around the world, which would also help us respond to the next pandemic, too.

There’s still a lot of work to be done.

RELAXING TOO SOON CAN UNDO OUR PROGRESS

As the WHO’s Director-General said overnight, the fire is not out and “if we stop fighting it on any front, it will come roaring back”.

That’s why sticking to the fundamentals of infection control is so important. That means keeping up with the hand-washing and physical distancing. It means wearing a mask if you can’t physically distance and complying with lockdowns and other public health orders. Yes, it’s hard to maintain a high level of commitment, but the alternative is far worse.

When people start to hear that global case numbers are improving, there’s a tendency to relax — and that’s risky. Now is the time we need to work together to see this contained, and ideally suppressed.

We may never completely eradicate this virus. But if we stick with the public health measures, and vaccinate as many people as possible worldwide, we can keep the trend going in the right direction.

[the writer is Associate professor, University of Sydney]

## It’s Time Australia Gave Visas to the Biloea Tamil Family

ALEX REILLY  
THECONVERSATION.COM

Priya and Nades Murugappan and their two children Kopika and Tharunicaa have been seeking protection visas in Australia since 2012. Nearly a decade later, they are still waiting.

The family was removed from their home in the Queensland town of Biloea and put in detention in Melbourne more than 1,000 days ago. In August 2019, they were moved to Christmas Island while their case was proceeding slowly through the courts. Keeping them in detention on the island has cost the government \$1.4 million in the past year alone.

The federal court today upheld a ruling that the government had denied the youngest member of the family, Australian-born Tharunicaa, procedural fairness in the handling of her visa application.

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However, the court also ruled that the minister for immigration did not, in fact, have an obligation to allow Tharunicaa to make an application for protection at all.

The court action prevents the family’s removal from Australia — for now. But it changes little for their immediate situation.

They will remain in detention unless the government heeds calls from their lawyers and supporters to let them return to their community while the long court process plays out, or simply grants them a visa to stay in Australia, cutting through the interminable legal process.

BACKGROUND OF THE CASE

Nadesalingam (Nades) sought asylum in Australia in 2012 and made an application for a permanent protection visa on the basis he was associated with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam, which had fought a long war against the Sri Lankan government.

An officer in the Department of Immigration refused the claim in September of that year, noting that Nades had travelled to and from Sri Lanka between 2004 to 2010 on several occasions without incident, and there was no evidence his family had been targeted for persecution.

Challenges to this decision were refused in numerous tribunals and courts from 2013–15, as well as through direct ministerial intervention.

The Labor government’s refugee and asylum seeker policy was in disarray at the time. When

the Christmas Island detention centre had filled beyond capacity in 2010, people were moved to detention on the mainland. And when those centres began to reach capacity, the government released most asylum seekers into the community on bridging visas.

This group of asylum seekers was dubbed by the Coalition as Labor’s “legacy caseload”.

Nades’s wife, Priya, arrived in Australia separately in 2013, one of among 25,000 people who came by boat that financial year.

Her claim was finally processed under a different legal regime introduced by the Abbott government in December 2014. Under this system, people arriving by boat and seeking asylum could apply only for temporary protection, and review rights were limited to a new “fast track” process.

Priya was not interviewed by an officer in the Department of Home Affairs until February 2017 (when she was eight months pregnant with Kopika). Her application was refused months later.

While all these legal proceedings were working their way through tribunals and courts, Priya and Nades got on with their lives. They were married and settled in Biloea in 2014, and had two children.

MAKING SENSE OF AUSTRALIA’S PROTECTION OBLIGATIONS

From the government’s point of view, the family has exhausted their legal claims for asylum in Australia.

But the situation is complicated because of the length of time it has taken to exhaust their legal rights. There are now the legal rights of the children to consider.

It is incumbent on Australia to ensure the children of asylum seekers are not at risk of serious harm if the family is returned to Sri Lanka.

Kopika was included in Priya’s claim for protection, but Tharunicaa was not, so a separate application was made to the minister on her behalf. The basis for the claim is that the family’s circumstances have changed since they arrived in Australia, making it more likely they would face persecution if they were returned to Sri Lanka.

In particular, the intense media attention of their situation has made them more prominent in Sri Lanka and highlighted their purported

connections to the LTTE.

On the other hand, the political situation in Sri Lanka has changed since Priya and Nades first came to Australia, raising questions of whether they are still at risk of serious harm on return.

Now that the federal court’s ruling that Tharunicaa was denied “procedural fairness” has been upheld, new submissions can be made on whether the minister should lift the bar and allow her to make an application for a protection visa.

The minister may decide, however, not to raise the bar, thus blocking a path to applying for a protection visa. Their future in Australia remains very uncertain.

THE POLITICS AND ETHICS OF REFUGEE PROTECTION

The whole saga raises difficult questions of law and policy.

There is a paradox at play. On the one hand, Australia’s highly evolved review rights for asylum seekers has allowed the Murugappan family to hold government decision-making to the highest standards. On the other hand, it has left them languishing in a state of limbo for years.

There is also an underlying ethical question that plagues our response to asylum seekers. Even if asylum seekers ultimately fail to convince the government they deserves protection, does the length and condition of their stay in Australia (or in offshore detention) create new obligations on the part of the government?

For example, should asylum seekers be granted protection on the basis their rights have been violated in Australia while they have waited for years for their claims to be processed, or simply because they have become part of the Australian community?

There comes a point where our hardline response to asylum seekers is not appropriate anymore.

Arguably this point was reached long ago in relation to the Murugappan family — it is not longer morally, practically or financially appropriate to continue denying them a visa. We need to stop the cycle of appeals and cross-appeals on technical legal questions — and let them build a life.

[the writer is Adjunct professor, University of Adelaide]

## Towards a Knowledge-Based Society

Get informed... then demand better

The talk about developing Sikkim into a “knowledge-based” society has been doing the rounds for a while. What it is being said in polite terms is that effort is required to draw Sikkim away from the mediocrity of its human resource that infiltrates just about every field of activity here.

Take journalism for instance. No one will praise the media in Sikkim as outstanding. Promising maybe, maybe even prolific, but not outstanding just yet. At best, we can be accepted as average. Of course, we in the media will never admit even to ourselves that we compete in mediocrity, but that is for another debate. But why is the fourth estate so mediocre in Sikkim? Not because there is a dearth of committed media-persons in the region, but simply because no demands are made of them for excellence by the readers. Mediocrity flourishes in the absence of pressure and this holds true for every other aspect of life here. Take governance for example. The bureaucracy remains somnambulant because the public representatives don’t shake them up often enough. Around election time, they come in for some tongue-lashing, but the behavioral and procedural reforms so necessary are never initiated. Take a look around, administrative basics remain ignored until too late and then something like a pandemic comes calling and exposes the casual disconnectedness that infects offices. There are too many delays, too many lapses and way too many excuses, but never any real accountability. Warnings of preparatory shortcomings arrive with enough advance warning, but remain unaddressed until only excuses and shifting of blame can be offered where simple outreach and consultations would have worked.

That said, even public representatives are not the most pro-active lot. They prefer to talk down and occasionally condescendingly hand-hold, but never consult or listen. These responses primarily because the people don’t demand better delivery or even performance from them and appear satisfied with securing favours and indulgence instead of claiming their rights.

It’s a vicious cycle, but not one that is impossible to break. All it requires is involvement.

No one will strive for excellence if it is not demanded of them. Also, no one will strive for excellence if it is not recognized either. And recognition is possible only if the people differentiate between what is downright puerile, what is average and what sets the bar of performance higher. And that brings us back to the need of having a “knowledge-based” society. Simply put, only a society that is “knowledgeable” will be able to demand that its intelligence is respected. This knowledge should not be confused with literacy [Sikkim already does quite well on that front]. Knowledge is about being informed. People who are aware of what is happening around them can take intelligent decisions and once the people think intelligently, then those who serve them [from the media, to the public servant, to the public representative] will have to improve their performance too. The pressure for survival [as professionals] will itself pull Sikkim out of the mediocrity it wallows in at present.

But how does one go about it? It is not really as complicated as it sounds. For people to become more aware, all they have to do is get more involved, ask more questions and demand better answers. The government can contribute towards this transition by making information accessible. It is only after the people have been provided with information that they can mull over it and debate. Although the debates might be immature initially, they will get better eventually. Once that happens, the people themselves will shape the knowledge-based society that Sikkim needs to grow into now.

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## Nepal takes Tripura chief minister's statement up with India's Ministry of External Affairs

**KATHMANDU, 16 FEB [KATHMANDUPOST]:** Nepal has taken exception to a recent statement by Biplab Kumar Deb, chief minister of Tripura state of India, in which Deb quoted India's Home Minister Amit Shah as saying that the Bharatiya Janata Party would soon form its government in Nepal.

A Nepali diplomat in the Nepali embassy in New Delhi told the Post over the phone that Ambassador Nilamber Acharya telephoned Arindam Bagchi, joint secretary in-charge of Nepal and Bhutan at India's Ministry of External Affairs, and expressed his reservations about Deb's statement.

Deb on February 13 said that Shah during his visit to Tripura had during a tea party with the state leadership had said that he had plans to establish the party in neighbouring countries after winning in most of the states in India, according to The East Mojo.

"We were talking in the state guest house when Ajay Jamwal (North-East Zonal Secretary of BJP) said that BJP has formed its government in several states of India, in reply

Shah said, Now Sri Lanka and Nepal is left," Deb said quoting Shah, the East Mojo reported. "We have to expand the party in Sri Lanka, Nepal and win there to form a government."

According to the Nepali diplomat in Delhi, Ambassador Acharya expressed displeasure at the statement and has sought a clarification.

The Indian side has assured that they will clarify the matter during a regular presser on Thursday by India's Ministry of External Affairs.

The Nepali diplomat added that Bagchi told Ambassador Acharya that the ministry has taken note of Deb's statement, saying that they have also noticed some reports circulating in various Indian newspapers, which is unfortunate.

"Do you think people like Home Minister Shah might have made such unfounded and baseless claims," the official quoted India's external affairs ministry official as telling Acharya. "We don't believe in such statements, but we will make our position public soon."

Deb's statement was widely condemned by various political leaders of India.

According to The Wire, CPI (M) leader and former Member of Parliament Jitendra Chaudhary said that the chief minister does not have any understanding of the constitution and democracy. He added that Amit Shah's statements, as claimed by Deb, amounted to India's interference in internal affairs of a foreign country.

The CPI (M) leader alleged that the home minister of India was engaged in a "state conspiracy against Nepal" and the evidence was given by no less than by a person holding a constitutional post in the state of Tripura.

Chaudhary said that Deb's statement cannot be taken casually and demanded a response from the BJP top leadership, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, according to The Wire.

Meanwhile, the Indian National Congress, the primary opposition of India, also protested the statement of Tripura chief minister.

"Such foolish claims by people like these," the party said in a tweet with the image of Deb, "Our country's relations with neighbouring countries have reached a new low."

## Average assets of re-elected Assam MLAs increased by 95 per cent



**GUWAHATI, FEB 16 (PTI):** Assam Tourism Minister Chandan Brahma registered the highest growth rate of assets while Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and former chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta also figure among the top five re-elected MLAs whose assets increased significantly, according to a report.

Brahma, who belongs to Bodoland People's Front (BFP) heads the list of the highest growth of assets and is followed by AIUDF's Abdur Rahim Ajmal, Nazrul Islam of Congress, BJP's Sarma and AGP's Mahanta, according to an analysis of assets of 34 re-elected MLAs in the

2016 assembly elections by the Assam Election Watch.

The average growth of assets of re-elected MLAs in 2016 was Rs 1.48 crore, registering an increase by 95 per cent, the report said.

Brahma's assets increased from Rs two crore in 2011 to Rs nine crore in 2016, registering an increase of 268 per cent while Ajmal's increased from Rs six crore to Rs 13 crore.

Sarma, who joined the BJP from Congress before the 2016 assembly polls, has an increase in assets from Rs three crore to six crore, registering a growth of 108 per cent.

The two-time former

AGP chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta's assets increased from Rs four crore to seven crore, registering an increase of 63 per cent.

Islams assets increased from Rs two crore to Rs five crore, registering an increase of 129 per cent.

BFP as a party registered the highest average increase of 200.97 per cent in assets followed by the AIUDF with 93.26 per cent, Congress by 85.75 per cent, BJP by 75.82 per cent and AGP by 95 per cent.

Among the 34 re-elected MLAs whose assets were analysed, 10 are from the Congress, eight each from ruling

alliance partners BJP and BFP and four each from AGP, also an alliance partner of the government, and AIUDF.

The MLAs include eight ministers - three from the BFP, two each from the BJP and besides Sarma and Brahma, they include BJPs Naba Kumar Doley and Pijush Hazarika, BFPs Pramila Rani Brahma and Rihon Daimary and AGPs Keshab Mahanta and Phani Bhushan Choudhury.

The other MLAs whose assets have increased between the two assembly polls include BJP state unit President Ranjeet Kumar Dass, Padma Hazarika, Binanda Kumar Saikia, Prasanta Phukan and

Bolin Chetia, BFPs Emmaneul Mosahary, Maneswar Brahma, Majendra Narzary, Kamal Singh Narzary and Kamali Basumatari and AGP's Utpal Dutta.

The other Congress MLAs include Sherman Ali Ahmed, Rakibul Hussain, Rekiuddin Ahmed, Sukur Ali, Md Ilias Ali, Rupjyoti Kurmi and Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha and AIUDF's Hafiz Bashir Ahmed and Aminul Islam.

Congress Legislature Party Chief Debabrata Saikia and AIUDF's Abul Kalam Azad had shown a decrease in their assets with the former's declining by 17 per cent and the latter's by two per cent.

## More turbulence for Nepal's aviation sector as its audit unlikely even in 2022

**SANGAM PRASAIN**

**KATHMANDU, 16 FEB [KATHMANDUPOST]:** The decennial International Civil Aviation Organisation's full safety audit of Nepal's aviation sector was supposed to have been conducted in 2019 but the government had asked it to defer it by a year.

The reason for the request was to give the government time to complete the institutional reform of the sector: splitting of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal into two different entities—one of the regulator and the other of the service provider.

As per international norms, the same authority cannot be the service provider as well as the regulator, like the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal is fulfilling at the present by providing airport services and also overseeing compliance of aviation regulations.

Such dual functions lead to a conflict of interest, the European Commission, for example, has maintained.

The International Civil Aviation Organisation, the United Nations global aviation watchdog, had agreed to the request for the year-long deferment and had planned to conduct a full safety audit of Nepal from May 10-20 last year under its universal safety oversight audit programme.

"We then decided to postpone the planned audit to March 2021 as we were in the process of organisational reform," said Rajan Pokhrel, director general of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal. "The Covid-19

further deferred the audit plan."

According to an official aware of the development, the ICAO team was then expected to arrive for an audit on March 21, 2021, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation and border closures, the plan was stalled once again.

"The UN agency will soon publish an audit schedule or bulletin for six nations in South Asia, including Nepal. They will then send official letters to the respective countries," the official said.

But now the audit programme looks unlikely even in 2022, raising serious questions about Nepal's ability to make its aviation sector norms match internationally recognised standards.

With the long-awaited plan to split the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal continuing to be delayed and uncertainty over when the split will be possible given the deepening political instability, the authority has now urged the Civil Aviation Ministry to bring an ordinance to pass the two long-awaited aviation bills.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal Bill and the Air Service Authority of Nepal Bill were stranded after President Bidya Devi Bhandari prorogued the seventh session of the National Assembly at the recommendation of the KP Sharma Oli government on January 10.

Nepali carriers are banned from Europe over safety issues, and a prerequisite to getting Nepal back in

Europe's good books is the splitting the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal into two entities to facilitate stringent enforcement of safety regulations.

With the lower house of Parliament dissolved and mid-term elections announced, political uncertainty looms in the country, which means the proposed laws could be shelved further until either the House is reinstated or a new one is elected. Meanwhile, Nepali carriers could be left waiting forever to fly to Europe, insiders say.

Without the splitting, the authority does not want the audit.

The International Civil Aviation Organisation's universal safety oversight audit programme was launched in January 1999, in response to widespread concerns about the adequacy of aviation safety oversight around the world.

The audit focuses on eight key areas: primary aviation legislation; civil aviation organisational structure; personnel licencing activities; aircraft operations; airworthiness of civil aircraft; aerodrome (meaning airfields or airports); air navigation services; and accident and serious incident investigations.

The last full audit of Nepal's aviation sector was conducted in 2009 in which the aviation watchdog gave Nepal a score of 46 per cent in effective implementation of critical elements of the safety oversight system, way below the global average of 60 per cent.

In July 2013, a mission visited Nepal to

validate the corrective measures the UN body had recommended to address the deficiencies pointed out in 2009. It detected several lapses during an on-site audit and gave a "significant safety concern" tag to Nepal's aviation sector in its audit report submitted in August 2013.

In particular, of the eight critical elements it raised a "red flag" over "aircraft operations". There had been a sharp rise in the number of air accidents and incidents with at least two aircraft crashing every year between 2009 and 2012.

Based on significant safety concerns, the European Commission blacklisted all Nepali carriers in December 2013.

The 2013 audit report pointed out that Nepal's score for effective implementation of critical elements of the safety oversight system, recommended in the 2009 full audit, was 54.97 per cent, still far below the global average.

An official at the civil aviation body said that despite the postponement of the audit, they have been under a constant screening of the UN global aviation watchdog through the International Civil Aviation Organisation's Universal Security Audit Programme - Continuous Monitoring Approach.

The continuous monitoring approach promotes global aviation security through continuous auditing and monitoring of member states' aviation security performance to enhance their

aviation security compliance and oversight capabilities.

In July 2017, the Montréal-based agency-coordinated validation mission gave Nepal a score of 66 per cent for effective implementation of safety standards—and that was above the global standard of 60 per cent. It also withdrew the significant safety concern tag given to Nepal's aviation sector in the same year.

Following a ban by the European Union on all Nepal-based airlines in 2013, Nepal had introduced stringent measures to improve safety standards in all commercial and private airlines.

"Based on our internal assessment, the effective implementation of safety standards currently is 66.7 per cent," said Pokhrel. "We have targeted 70 per cent through the ICAO audit."

The global average is 64 per cent.

Despite the gradual improvement of air safety measures, Nepal's score for effective implementation of accident investigation is a lowly 18.68 per cent, far below the global average of 56.15 per cent.

"This is because the Civil Aviation Ministry has an aircraft accident and incident investigation section which is not an independent body," said an official at the civil aviation regulator on condition of anonymity. "An investigation commission is set up on an ad hoc basis whenever there is an accident or an incident but these investigators have no training to conduct investigations. The toothless commissions hide the deficiencies."

## Book to tell story of goddess Saraswati

**NEW DELHI, FEB 16 (PTI):** As people welcome Basant Panchami with an ode to Goddess Saraswati, publishers Penguin India on Tuesday acquisition of a new book that will tell the story of the goddess of knowledge and wisdom in the voices of nameless celestials, powerful gods and lesser mortals.

"Sarasvati's Gift" by writer and former journalist Kavita Kane will be released under Penguin's Ebury Press imprint by mid-2021.

Commenting on her book, Kane says, "What better day than today, Basant Panchami, to announce my book on Saraswati, a book dedicated to her. Saraswati as a woman is completely fascinating - sharp, tough and uncompromising. As a goddess, there is

none like her: stubborn, cerebral, eloquent, the original rebel who fights her battles without weapons but with her wit and quick tongue."

The author says the story idea originated from her own ignorance: "for a very long time, I did not know she was the consort of Brahma. You see her serene and stately, in sheer ivory with her book and veena, rarely with her husband by her side like Shiva-Parvati or Lakshmi-Narayan."

"She is like a whimsical loner, who prefers her own company and values her own



opinions over those of others; this picture of her kept strongly building in my mind till I knew I had to write on her," Kane, who has authored books like "Karna's Wife", "Sita's Sister", "Menaka's Choice" and "Ahalya's Awakening", says.

Milee Ashwarya, publisher, Ebury Publishing and Vintage, Penguin Random House India, says she is pleased that Kane, known for her sensitive and engaging portrayal of female characters from mythology, has chosen to write about the goddess of knowledge and wisdom.



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# India protests highlight uncomfortable links between cricket and establishment

**JONATHAN LIEW**  
LONDON, 16 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: As seasoned followers of the genre will doubtless be aware, the recent online feud between Rihanna and Pragnan Ojha is by no means the first example of a global pop superstar and a former Surrey left-arm spinner clashing over issues of domestic policy. There was the regrettable and very public spat between Zafar Ansari and Bruno Mars a few years back over civil service pensions. And who could forget the classic early-1990s episode of Newsnight when Keith Medlycott and Aretha Franklin angrily weighed in on opposite sides of the privatised utilities debate?

In box-office terms, however, the Rihanna/Ojha dispute could end up topping them all, largely because it's the only one that actually happened. What actually happened was that Rihanna shared a CNN article about the protests by Indian farmers, which have mobilised hundreds of millions around the country. "Why aren't we talking about this?!" Rihanna tweeted.

At which point, India's 24-cap Test veteran sprang into action. "My country is proud of our farmers and knows how important they are," Ojha retorted. "I trust it will be addressed soon. We don't need an outsider poking her nose in our internal matters!"

Naturally, a great many of you will probably have missed all this amid England's inevitable slide to defeat in the second Test, as well as the ensuing and wildly boring debate over whether it is morally acceptable for an Indian venue and an Indian groundstaff to produce an Indian-style pitch for an India home game.

And yet as we lose ourselves in the lush colourscapes of Chennai, as we soak in the sweeping aerial panoramas of the MA Chidambaram Stadium, the city around it, and the glittering ocean beyond, perhaps it is possible to strike just the faintest note of dissonance. While we gaze at the cricket, the biggest mass protests in human history are currently unfolding, just out of shot. Seriously: are we not going to talk about this, not even a little bit?

Of course, until recently very few people outside India have been talking about it. This, in itself, is not that surprising. It was last summer that the Modi government abolished socialist-era protections that guaranteed farmers a minimum price for their produce, a move that farmers say will leave them at the mercy of big corporations who will be able to drive down prices. The government, for its part, has responded to the protests with arrests, electricity and internet blackouts, and



an increasing erosion of civil liberties. Yet all this remained by and large a domestic issue until earlier this month, when tweets from Rihanna and Greta Thunberg beamed the issue to a huge global audience.

From a cricketing perspective, it was what happened next that was most interesting of all. One by one, some of the country's best-known cricketers - Ravi Shastri, Anil Kumble, Hardik Pandya, Suresh Raina, Shikhar Dhawan, Rohit Sharma, Ojha - issued stern, rallying tweets urging the country to unite and condemning foreign interference in Indian affairs.

"External forces can be spectators but not participants," wrote

Sachin Tendulkar, proving that old Yorkshire habits die hard. "Indians know India and should decide for India." Really, though, the relevance of all this goes beyond a few well-choreographed, government-friendly tweets (many of them ironically appended by the hashtag #IndiaAgainstPropaganda). To a greater or lesser extent cricket has always felt like an arm of the Indian establishment and this has been true since long before the emergence of Modi's right-wing BJP government and its increasingly sinister ethno-nationalist tendencies.

Only last week, to

take just one example, the former India Test opener Wasim Jaffer was forced from his position as Uttarakhand's head coach amid baseless, malicious rumours that he had favoured Muslim players and invited Islamic scholars to address the team. And if the sight of the immaculately discreet Tendulkar taking sides on a contentious political issue was surprising enough, then perhaps the content of his intervention was less so.

Perhaps you will read all this and wonder what it's doing in the sport section. But then cricket has always been a window into other worlds, other cultures, a sport that has never been immune to the forces

shaping our history and our politics. And there can be little doubt that this India seems so much more remote than it would have done in freer times, when touring parties would doubtless have been accompanied by a media contingent of dozens, a travelling fanbase of thousands, all watching and documenting.

In their absence, what we get is the postcard from paradise: lingering shots of Marina Beach emblazoned with the BCCI logo in the top corner of the screen, an officially approved vision of India where politics doesn't exist, where the very existence of a world beyond the branded boundary rope is scarcely acknowledged.

From our distant vantage point, this isn't so much about driving tangible change as what we choose to see and care about. The giant corporation against the little guy, the inexorable hand of Big Power, the vice-like grip on public narrative: these are the same forces defining the fight for cricket's soul. Maybe this seems like an issue for a different place, a different time. But if you want to know why the game's wealth is distributed so unequally, why fans feel so powerless and adrift, why Australia think like they can refuse to play whoever they want, then you might just get a few of the same answers.

## It's time for CSK to replace Watson in squad: Gambhir



**NEW DELHI, FEB 16 (PTI):** Former India opener Gautam Gambhir believes that Chennai Super Kings now need to find a replacement of ageing stars Shane Watson and Dwayne Bravo in the upcoming IPL auction for the 2021 season.

Australian all-rounder Watson, 39, had an average performance during the 2020 IPL edition, where CSK did not qualify for the play-offs for the first time in the history of the lucrative league.

"They need to have a replacement straightaway for Shane Watson because obviously, that is one area. Plus, they didn't have Suresh Raina last time around. So, Suresh Raina will be available," Gambhir said while speaking on Star Sports' show 'Cricket Connected'.

The IPL auction is scheduled for Thursday in Chennai.

Since the IPL will be back in India in familiar conditions, Gambhir felt skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni may ring in a few more changes.

".....that's Chepauk where it's going to start spinning and gripping. That's how MS plays his cricket over such a long period of time whenever he has captained CSK. So he might look at an off-spinner because Harbhajan has been released, Shane Watson

and probably another all-rounder or a backup for someone like Dwayne Bravo, because probably age is catching up on him as well.

"He's (Dwayne) not the same what he used to be. So, probably there could be an all-rounder and plus an overseas batter, because there are two overseas batters normally who open for CSK. There's not going to be too many changes to be honest."

Gambhir also said that CSK should have a smaller squad because "this is only an auction for one season".

"After this season, there's going to be a bigger auction. So, I don't think CSK will have an overall revamp."

Gambhir said the return of Raina, who pulled out of the tournament last season, will add strength to CSK squad.

"This time around, Suresh Raina coming back will be a huge boost for CSK because he plays T20 cricket really well and he's done a lot of good things for CSK. At the same time, they will have new players coming in, whether it's a replacement for Shane Watson or probably an off-spinner or an all-rounder.

"So, when new players come in, obviously they will bring new ideas, they bring new energy as well. I am sure those are the areas CSK will be looking for.

## Bayern Munich held at home by strugglers Arminia Bielefeld in six-goal thriller

**MUNICH, 16 FEB [AFP]:** Robert Lewandowski claimed his 25th Bundesliga goal this season with a brilliant volley as Bayern Munich needed three second-half goals to salvage a 3-3 draw at home to strugglers Arminia Bielefeld in heavy snow on Monday.

"It was a tough game, regardless of the weather, but we showed a fighting spirit, so a 3-3 draw is okay," said Bayern forward Eric Choupo-Moting. Despite the draw, Bayern are still five points clear at the top of the Bundesliga. However, four days after winning the Club World Cup final in Qatar, Bayern struggled on their Bundesliga return in Munich as Bielefeld raced into a 2-0 lead.

Bayern needed second-half goals by Lewandowski, Corentin Tolisso and a thunderbolt of a volley from Alphonso Davies to rescue a point.

"A lot of things came



together in the first half," said Bayern coach Hansi Flick.

"We didn't defend well, Bielefeld scored two goals from two chances and conditions weren't the best.

"But the team still showed their mentality again and we have to be satisfied with the point."

A wintry shower just before kick-off covered the Allianz Arena turf with thick snow and Bielefeld coped far better with the icy conditions.

Bielefeld are third

from bottom, yet they dominated the world champions in the first-half.

Bayern looked tired, especially with Thomas Mueller in quarantine after testing positive for Covid-19 last week in Qatar.

The hosts fell behind when Dutch striker Michel Vlap scored just nine minutes into his Bundesliga debut as his brilliant turn wrong-footed the defence before he calmly slotted past Manuel Neuer.

The 23-year-old scored with his first shot in the Bundesliga.

Vlap struck again when he floated in a corner which centre-back Amos Pieper headed past Neuer on 37 minutes.

Bayern pulled a goal back three minutes after the break when Lewandowski chested the ball down and volleyed home with a brilliant finish -- it was his 25th goal in his 20th league game.

Bielefeld went 3-1 up when left-wing Andreas Voglsammer beat Bayern right-back Bouna Sarr for pace and Christian Gebauer tapped home.

Tolisso struck with a header to pull it back to 3-2 with 57 minutes played before Davies equalised with a thunderbolt shot with 20 minutes left.

Bielefeld's Venezuelan forward Sergio Cordova had the ball in Bayern's net for the fourth time, but the goal was ruled offside 16 minutes from time.

## Osaka advances to Australian Open semis by beating Hsieh

**MELBOURNE, FEB 16 (AP):** Naomi Osaka advanced Tuesday to a potential semifinal showdown against Serena Williams at the Australian Open.

Osaka earned her 19th victory in a row by overpowering Hsieh Su-wei 6-2, 6-2, and will next meet the winner of the quarterfinal match Tuesday night between Williams

and No. 2-seeded Simona Halep. "Normally I never look at my draw, Osaka said. "But everyone has told me about my draw here, so I kind of had no choice but to know who my next opponent is. It's definitely going to be really fun."

Seeded third, Osaka reached 122 mph (196 kph) on her serve against Hsieh. She hit seven aces, lost only two points on her

first serve and was never broken. Osaka also played excellent defense, such as in the final game, when she raced forward to chase down a drop shot, flicking a backhand cross-court for a winner.

At 35, Hsieh was the oldest woman to make her Grand Slam quarterfinal debut in the professional era. But Osaka wasn't fazed by Hsieh's flat, deceptive

two-handed strokes from both sides, pounding forehand winners into both corners. Osaka's winning streak includes a U.S. Open title in September for her third Grand Slam championship. The streak also includes her fourth-round win last week, when she saved two match points and swept the final four games to overtake Garbi Muguruza.

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## India skittle England out for crushing 317-run victory in second Test

**ALI MARTIN**  
CHENNAI, 16 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: The series scoreline reads 1-1 at the halfway stage but the moods of the two teams will differ greatly. India did a number on England in the second Test, dominating from the outset such that only an incendiary 18-ball 43 from Moeen Ali during the last rites prevented it being their record victory by way of runs.

When Moeen was last man out, stumped by Rishabh Pant to see England 164 all out just after lunch on the fourth day, the margin of victory for India was still an imposing 317. Kuldeep Yadav was the final bowler to strike but it was Axar Patel who shone brightest during the denouement, figures of five for 60 capping an excellent Test debut for the left-arm spinner.

Joe Root's side now fly on to Ahmedabad with wounds to lick but must not lose heart. Next up is a pink-ball Test so as much as they will want to learn from two gory innings in Chennai - chiefly the 134 all out first time around - conditions are likely to once again lurch in a new direction; any inquest held by Joe Root

and Chris Silverwood should not become all-consuming.

Their handsome victory in the first Test came with the knowledge that India would likely come back hard and sure enough it materialised. Virat Kohli rediscovered his snarl, was given the spinning pitch that he asked for and his players outclassed their opponents in every facet of the game (bar, perhaps, an entertaining score draw between the wicketkeepers Pant and Ben Foakes).

It was pretty much one-way traffic once Rohit Sharma had morphed into Virender Sehwag on the first day with a sublime 161, while Ravichandran Ashwin was named player of the match following a stunning all-round performance in his home city that produced figures of eight for 96 across the two innings and a punishing 106 batting at No 8 on the third day.

That knock should have doused much of the swirling talk about the pitch although England still faced a task as futile as Sisyphus and his boulder when they woke up on Tuesday morning. Resuming on 53 for three

with a target of 482, the capricious surface meant even showing the "fight" that supporters demand in such situations was going to require a healthy splash of luck.

Once more, however, they collapsed, stumbling into lunch on 117 for seven with Ashwin once again the bowler to trigger England's descent. Kohli had held him back first thing, opting for Patel and seamer Mohammed Siraj first up, but when introduced in the seventh over of the morning he struck first ball when Dan Lawrence danced down the pitch, was nutmegged by Ashwin and stumped superbly by Pant.

Ashwin has 17 wickets in the series already but of the 10 different batsmen dismissed, Ben Stokes is the greatest cause for concern right now and not least as a keystone at No 5. Few bowlers can claim to have a stranglehold over Stokes but Ashwin had his number in both innings to make it 10 times in 10 Test matches, four more than the next-best Nathan Lyon.

Both are off-spinners who love to probe away at left-handers and here it felt just a matter of time. Ashwin was using both sides of the wicket, mixing up his speeds and

angles to toy with Stokes like a cat with a mouse until finally, off the 38th ball of this one-sided duel, England's vice-captain played for turn that didn't materialise and popped a catch to slip off the inside edge via a pad.

From there it was over to the two left-armers Patel and Kuldeep to polish off the innings, the former picking up three wickets either side of lunch including Root for 33 to one that spat out of the rough and was gloved to slip. The England captain had enjoyed two strokes of fortune up to this point too, surviving a strong lbw shout the previous evening and a drop by Siraj on 32.

Both Ollie Pope and Foakes fell to sweeps - a shot fraught with danger on the surface - before Ollie Stone was pinned lbw, for a duck, to give Patel his fifth. Moeen then briefly crackled, swatting five booming sixes and three fours to finish as both the leading run-scorer and wicket-taker for England in the match, but his demise to Kuldeep meant Kohli - and the returning crowd he had harnessed across the four days - could start celebrating a convincing victory.

# As the virus crisis drags on, hard-hit French youth struggle

**PARIS (AP):** On a recent evening, Leila Ideddaim waited to receive a bag of food, along with hundreds of other French young people who are unable to make ends meet. She saw the chitchat that accompanied the handout as a welcome byproduct, given her intense isolation during the pandemic.

The 21-year-old student in hotel and restaurant management has seen her plans turned upside down by the virus crisis. With restaurants and tourist sites shuttered and France under a 6 p.m. curfew, her career prospects are uncertain. Odd jobs that were supposed to keep her going during her studies are hard to come by.

"I'm in a fog," said Ideddaim, who moved to Paris last year and is now struggling to meet both her basic needs and her emotional ones.

She is not alone. The long lines of young people waiting for food aid that stretch through Paris neighborhoods several times a week are a dramatic symbol of the toll the coronavirus has taken on France's youth.

The pandemic has devastated economies the world over, pushing vulnerable people deeper into poverty or tipping some into it for the first time. In France, the economic fallout has weighed particularly heavily on young people — and their woes have only



been compounded by disruptions to their studies and social interactions.

Nearly a quarter of French young people can't find work — two-and-a-half times the national unemployment rate and one of the highest in the European Union's 27 nations. Many university students now rely on food aid and several organizations have rallied to meet the need.

The pandemic has led to a surge in mental health complaints that authorities say are most acute in people without work, those in financial hardship and young adults. A hotline devoted to students has seen a surge in calls, and young people have streamed into psychiatric wards.

As French President Emmanuel Macron acknowledged, "it's hard

to be 20" in coronavirus times.

Other European countries have also noted a particularly heavy toll on young people. In Belgium, some areas are giving aid to students to help them pay for food, rent, transport and psychological help. In Germany, a study by the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf found about one in three children are suffering from pandemic-related anxiety, depression or are exhibiting psychosomatic symptoms like headaches or stomach aches.

For Ideddaim, who has to support herself, the pandemic means a spreadsheet that doesn't always add up. Each month, she needs over 800 euros (\$970) for housing, transport and utility bills. She could not get a well-paid apprenticeship because

restaurants are closed and hotels are in a precarious situation.

Instead, an internship at a campground 45 kilometers (28 miles) east of Paris brings in 300 euros a month — and alleviates her isolation. She also earns some money from occasional temp work in shopping centers. Still, she has almost spent all her savings.

"I draw up a Google sheet, and I put down my expenses and my fixed costs every month. So I look at how much comes in, and I calculate what I'm left with and where I can tighten my belt — on food for instance," she said.

Ideddaim is just one of many needy students being served by Linkee, an organization that has long collected and distributed unused food to fight waste but only recently turned its attention to students.

Farid Khelef, 28, came from Algeria to study in France. He would not have imagined he would one day be waiting for food aid.

"Before, I was working as an electrician in parallel with my studies. Because of the health crisis, it's been almost four months that I have no job," he said while waiting for a bag from Linkee.

The organization began offering meals and fresh food to students in October — and their twice-weekly handouts now serve about 500 people, up from 200.

"We are a safety net for all these students ... who don't have enough money to buy some food and have no other solution than coming to get some quality food and at the same time find a friendly atmosphere," said Julien Meimon, the organization's president.

With a smile, Ideddaim showed her bag filled with salad, cauliflower, apples, smoked salmon, yogurts and chocolate. But she comes to the food distribution site for more than just basic sustenance.

"It's a great morale boost — to know that I'm going to eat well and to come to a place with plenty of people and everyone is in a good mood," she said.

With only three weeks of in-person classes since September and being new to the city, she has struggled to create the social connections that are essential to building an adult life.

"It has not been easy to integrate, to meet with people," she said. In the meantime, she enjoys chatting on the phone with her grandmother, who also lives alone, and is looking forward to working this summer in the Atlantic seaside resort of Biscarrosse — as long as restaurants reopen.

Many young people are similarly struggling. Nightline in Paris, a hotline for students, has

seen a 40% jump in calls since the country entered its first lockdown in March.

Depression among people aged 18 to 24 has jumped from 16.5% at the beginning of April to 31.5% in November, during the country's second lockdown, according to France's national health agency, Sante Publique France.

Authorities have noticed the problem and, starting this month, they have asked universities to allow students to go back to classes one day per week to help them regain some sense of normalcy. The institutions have also started providing 1-euro meals.

There are concerns the pandemic could have long-term effects on youth. In the U.K., the Institute for Fiscal Studies think tank estimated that young people will have missed out on more than half a year of face-to-face learning, or more than 5% of their total time in school, by the end of the country's latest national lockdown. The lost education could cut average lifetime earnings by 40,000 pounds (\$55,325) per student, it estimated.

Ideddaim, who prefers to look on the bright side, said she feels privileged to get food aid at all.

"That kind of aid does not exist in many countries, and we're lucky enough in France to have that," she said.

## South Africa's health care workers eager for first vaccines

**ELANDSDOORN, SOUTH AFRICA (AP):** After testing thousands of people for coronavirus, South African nurse Asnath Masango says she can't wait to get vaccinated.

"So many people, I test them and within days they have passed away," said Masango. "I want protection."

C.J. Umunnakwe, a virologist running a lab that has performed more than 40,000 virus tests, says he "wholeheartedly believes in vaccinations. Vaccines save lives." He plans to talk to those who may be skeptical.

Health care workers at the Ndlovu Care Group in rural northeastern South Africa are eagerly awaiting the first jabs of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which will be given out to medical staff starting this week.

That's despite the fact that the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine — unlike the two-shot Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines — has not been approved for general use anywhere in the world.

No matter, say many South African health workers who are enthusiastic about getting the J&J jab, which comes amid a huge shift in the government's vaccination strategy.

South Africa, with nearly

1.5 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 including more than 47,000 deaths, has had 41% of Africa's reported cases.

Last week South Africa controversially decided to drop the AstraZeneca vaccine — which had been already purchased, delivered and approved in the country -- from the first phase in which 1.25 million health care workers will be vaccinated.

The last-minute decision was made after a small test showed the AstraZeneca vaccine offered minimal protection against mild to moderate cases of the variant dominant in South Africa. Although preliminary and not peer-reviewed, the results raised serious questions about how effective the AstraZeneca vaccine would be specifically in South Africa, even though the vaccine has been approved in over 50 other countries around the world.

Health officials decided to change to the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which tests show is safe and effective against the variant here. A one-shot vaccine is also easier for many countries to implement.

"The switch has emboldened the skeptics, who say the vaccines have problems," Umunnakwe said of those who alleged that big



pharmaceutical firms are using Africans as guinea pigs.

"I am telling people that the change shows that decisions are being made transparently, that it was driven by science," he said. "It is proof that we are putting the public as first priority."

South Africa has purchased 9 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and 80,000 will be delivered this week to kick off the inoculation campaign, the president says. South Africa's regulatory body has approved the J&J shot for testing purposes. Until that vaccine receives full approval, it will be given as part of an "implemented study," officials say.

is when I must tell someone that they are positive," she said. "They are so frightened ... Grandparents die. Breadwinners die. How will their children get food?"

The prospect of getting vaccinated excites her.

"Yo!" she says, eyes widening. "I want that vaccine!"

The Ndlovu Care Group has done more than 40,000 tests in the rural community, including workers at large mines and commercial farms. More than 20,000 of those tests were in January alone, when South Africa was hit by a dramatic resurgence of the disease, driven by the more contagious variant that is now dominant.

The Ndlovu laboratory can carry out the PCR virus tests and get the results within hours. In the January resurgence, it was averaging about 1,600 tests per day.

"We were busy, very busy," said Umunnakwe, a 35-year-old virologist who came to the center to study HIV and is now studying coronavirus too. He is keenly watching the genomic sequencing in South Africa that identified the new variant.

"By doing sequencing, we don't just see what is present in the

virus today, we can detect what may happen in the future," said Umunnakwe, adding that he hoped Ndlovu will get the equipment to do sequencing, rare for a rural health center.

Most South Africans are looking forward to getting vaccinated. An impressive 67% of adults said they would definitely or probably take a vaccine, according to a survey by the University of Johannesburg and the Human Sciences Research Council.

Dr. Rebene Maboja, who is running a study of the J&J vaccine at the Ndlovu center, was excited to hear that it will be used in South Africa.

"I'm actually ecstatic!" said Maboja. "I think it's actually a better vaccine for us here in South Africa, looking at our variant."

The 42-year-old doctor said 602 people in the community are participating in the test and half were injected with the J&J vaccine in November. She also said her recent recovery from COVID-19 makes her a stronger advocate for getting vaccinated.

"Lack of knowledge makes people much, much more anxious," said Maboja. "Those who get the vaccine will be role models, vaccine ambassadors who will encourage others."

## No new virus cases raise hopes New Zealand will end lockdown

**WELLINGTON, FEB 16 (AP):** For a second consecutive day, New Zealand reported no new community cases of the coronavirus on Tuesday, raising hopes that a lockdown in Auckland will be lifted Wednesday.

Just how three family members contracted the disease remains a mystery. After the cases were found, top lawmakers hurriedly placed New Zealand's largest city into a three-day lockdown, the nation's first in six months.

C O V I D - 1 9 Response Minister Chris Hipkins said the final decision by lawmakers on whether to lift the restrictions will depend on any new information or cases that crop up over the next 24 hours.

A day when we get zero positive test results

is always a good day, Hipkins said.

Health officials have been ramping up testing since the outbreak. On Monday, they administered more than 15,000 tests and processed the results of nearly 6,000.

The outbreak began when an Auckland mother, father and daughter caught the disease. The mother works at a catering company that does laundry for airlines, and officials have been investigating whether there is any link to infected passengers.

Genome testing showed the family caught the more contagious variant first found in Britain. The testing wasn't able to link the cases to any previous known cases in New Zealand. The family's close

contacts, including people at the mother's workplace and the daughter's high school, have so far all returned negative tests, officials said.

Director-General of Health Ashley Bloomfield said they hadn't yet come to any conclusions about the outbreak's origin.

Our intensive investigation around the potential source of transmission of all three cases continues, Bloomfield said. We have a number of scenarios we are pursuing.

New Zealand's first batch of vaccine also arrived this week, a shipment of about 60,000 doses of the vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech. Border workers will initially be prioritized, with inoculations due to begin Saturday.

## Want to produce films to have some control, says Gerard Butler

**LONDON, FEB 16 (PTI):** Hollywood star Gerard Butler says he enjoyed serving as a producer on the disaster action film "Greenland" as the stint allowed him to have control in shaping the film. Butler also starred in the Ric Roman Waugh directorial alongside "Deadpool" star Morena Baccarin.

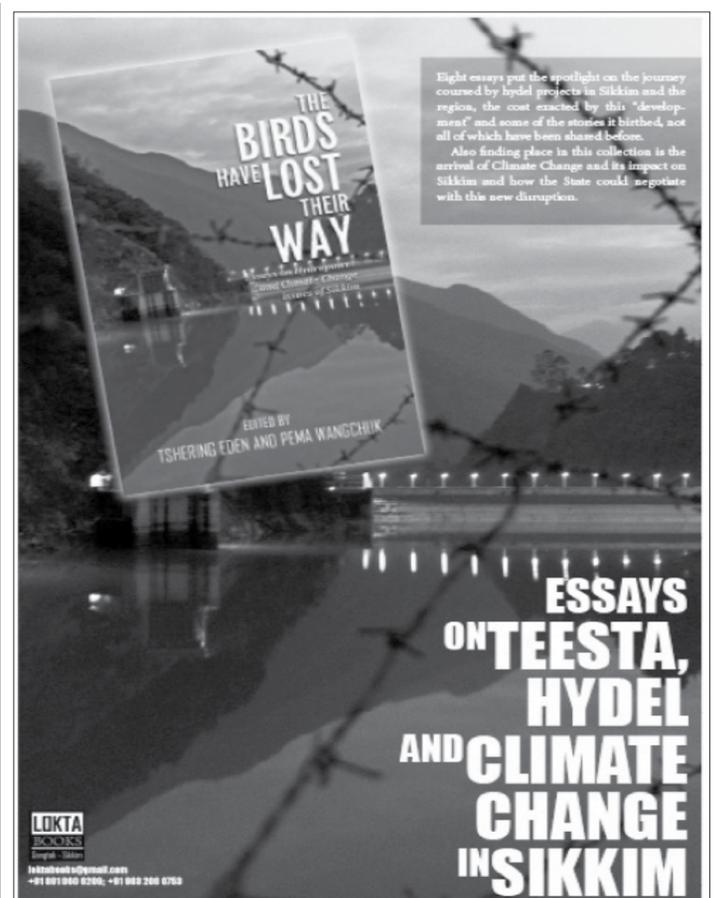
"Greenland", which released last year, follows a family's fight for survival in the face of a cataclysmic natural disaster. As the countdown to global apocalypse approaches zero, the family's trek culminates in a desperate and last-minute flight to a possible safe haven.

Though he is known for big-budget studio tentpoles like "Gods of Egypt" and "Geostorm", Butler said he would like to further lend support to

independent films.

"I'm a control freak! As an actor, when you're coming up, you beg for roles, and you're lucky to get one and then you suddenly find yourself in a position where movies are being made, because you're involved. "So if that's the case, you say, 'I want to produce it, I want to have some control, I want to help shape this film.' Not the studio movies, like 'Gods of Egypt' or 'Geostorm'. But all the other ones, in the independent world," Butler told Total Film magazine. Chris Sparling has penned the script for "Greenland", produced by Thunder Road Films.

"I get a chance to develop, be involved with script, choose the director. It's more responsibility, but you're more involved in the process. And I love that," Butler added.



# 'Harry Potter' actor Evanna Lynch announces memoir

**LONDON, FEB 16 (PTI):** Actor Evanna Lynch, best known for portraying the role of Luna Lovegood in the "Harry Potter" film series, is coming out with a memoir on September 14.

The 29-year-old actor-activist took to Instagram to share the announcement on Sunday.

Lynch said she had been meaning to write a book for quite some time and the year gone by allowed her the "silence and stillness to unravel the story" she wanted to tell.

Published by Headline Books, the memoir chronicles her struggle with an eating disorder, recovery and commitment to her dreams.

"In one way, this book is a memoir



about my struggle with an eating disorder. However, it's not really a book about thinness and eating; it's about rebuilding yourself after, literally recovering yourself.

"At its essence, it's about the ongoing negotiation between the voices of our fears and our creativity and all the crazy, interesting, wild things that happen when you keep committing to your dreams," Lynch wrote in the caption.

The Irish actor also said she is grateful to her team who empowered her to share "my light and darkness alike in this story".

The cover and title of the book are still in development, she added.

## Siddharth-Garima's directorial venture 'Dukaan' to release in 2022

**MUMBAI, FEB 16 (PTI):** "Dukaan", a film on surrogacy directed by writer duo Siddharth Singh and Garima Wahal, is slated to be released next year, the makers announced on Monday.

The writers, popular as Siddharth-Garima, are best known for their work on "Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela" and Toilet: Ek Prem Katha".

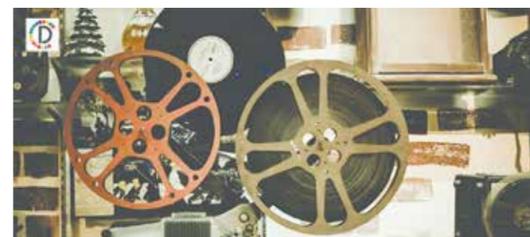
The duo, who is also set to direct the youth drama "Saale Aashiq", backed by Sony Pictures Films India, took to Instagram to share the first-look poster of "Dukaan".

"Main tumhare bacche ki maa banne wali hun (I'm pregnant with your child)," they captioned the poster with the release year of the film.

"Dukaan" stars actor Monika Panwar, who featured on the Netflix crime drama series "Jamtara - Sabka Number Ayega", in the lead role.

The poster shows Panwar as a heavily pregnant Gujarati village belle with a barcode attached to her belly.

The actor, a National School of Drama graduate, also shared the poster on her profile.



"My next precious project 'DUKAAN' with my favourite writer and director duo @siddharthgarima. Dukaan khuli gayi che (The shop is open)," she wrote.

In a 2019 interview, Garima told PTI that the duo are working on movies based on surrogacy and honour killing.

"We are working on a film that revolves around surrogacy, it was earlier called 'Jasmine' and another one is on honour killing. Both the films are ready and we shall go for whichever is ready casting wise first," she had said.

"Dukaan" is backed by Kalamkaar Picture Productions.

## Siddhant Chaturvedi, Malavika Mohanan to star in 'Yudhra'

**MUMBAI, FEB 16 (PTI):** Actors Siddhant Chaturvedi and Malavika Mohanan are set to feature in the romantic-action-thriller "Yudhra" and the film is slated for a summer 2022 release, the makers announced on Monday.

Backed by Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani's Excel Entertainment, the film is directed by Ravi Udyawar, best known for Srivevi's swansong "Mom" (2017).

Chaturvedi, who was the breakout star of Zoya Akhtar's 2019 drama "Gully Boy" as MC Sher, took to Instagram and shared an action-packed teaser, along with posters of the film.

"The one who can make death its friend, he is 'Yudhra'," the 27-year-old actor wrote.

"Yudhra" marks Mohanan's second Hindi project, after the 2017 drama "Beyond the Clouds" helmed by acclaimed



Iranian filmmaker Majid Majidi.

"Ah! Have waited so long to share this news with you guys. Presenting to you 'Yudhra', releasing summer 2022," Mohanan, 27, wrote on Instagram.

The film, co-produced by Kassim Jagmagia, has its story and screenplay written by Farhan Akhtar and Shridhar Raghavan.

Farhan Akhtar is also credited with its dialogues, along with writer Akshat Ghildial.

Apart from "Yudhra", Chaturvedi will also be seen in the "Bunty Aur Babli" sequel and the untitled Shakun Batra film, co-starring Deepika Padukone and Ananya Panday.

Mohanan's most recent big screen outing was the Tamil hit "Master" and she will next be seen in Karthick Naren's next, tentatively titled "D43", with Dhanush.

## Vanessa Hudgens confirms relationship with Cole Tucker

**LOS ANGELES, FEB 16 (PTI):** Actor Vanessa Hudgens has confirmed she is in a relationship with Major League Baseball player Cole Tucker on Valentine's Day, nearly three months after the couple sparked dating rumours.

On Instagram, the "High School Musical star" shared a photo of herself kissing the sportsperson on Sunday.

"It's you, it's me, it's us. @cotuck," Hudgens, 32, wrote.

Tucker, 24, also shared a photo with the actor, captioning the picture "Happy V Day @vanessahudgens."

Hudgens was previously in a relationship with actor Austin Butler and the couple broke up last January after dating for nearly nine years.



**PILATES PALS!** The model friends, Cara Delevingne & Kaia Gerber step outside after their workout class.

## Johnny Pacheco, an idol in world of salsa, dies at age 85

**NEW YORK (AP):** Salsa idol Johnny Pacheco, who was a co-founder of Fania Records, Eddie Palmieri's bandmate and backer of music stars such as Rubén Bladés, Willie Colón and Celia Cruz, died Monday. He was 85. He had been hospitalized in New York a few days earlier for pneumonia, his wife, Maria Elena "Cuqui" Pacheco, said on the artist's Facebook account.

Fania Records tweeted that the musician was "the man most responsible for the genre of salsa music. He was a visionary and his music will live on eternally."

In a post on his social media, Bladés said that "Pacheco leaves us with an important musical legacy, represented by all the

collaborations he made during his distinguished career."

Singer Marc Anthony lamented the loss of Pacheco, calling him "maestro of maestros" and a good friend.

"Your sense of humor was contagious and I am forever grateful for your support, for the opportunity to be in your presence and for your amazing legacy," Anthony wrote.

Pacheco was born March 25, 1935, in the Dominican Republic into a family of musicians. In the 1940s the family moved to New York, where he taught himself to play accordion, violin, saxophone and clarinet and studied percussion at Juilliard.

In 1954 he formed The Chuchulecos Boys with

Palmieri on piano, Barry Rogers on trombone and other musicians who would gain renown in the salsa scene, such as Al Santiago, Mike Collazo and Ray Santos.

But the life-changing moment came in 1963, when Pacheco partnered with attorney Jerry Masucci to found Fania Records. Pacheco was the music director, composer, arranger and producer, overseeing the label's genre of music that came to be known as salsa — a mixture of Cuban mambo, guaracha and chachachá, Puerto Rican rhythms and Dominican meringue. He received the Latin Recording Academy Music Excellence Award in 2005 and was nominated for multiple Grammys and Latin Grammys.

they are and giving yourself the permission to bring the gift of authenticity to the table. Your connection is growing deeper with each passing day, Gemini.

**CANCER:** There are many challenges the hero is likely to face on his journey. The fear of failure, for instance. Or the fear of losing to an opponent. No matter what your fear, observe it. Make friends with it. Know that the strength, courage, and resilience you have been blessed with are far greater than the sum of all of your fears. So take the next step confidently and know that victory will ultimately be yours. PS: The Universe has your back!

**LEO:** Today, you're being asked to embody the qualities of the divine mother. The one who loves from a space of unconditionality. The one who loves with all her heart. The one who chooses compassion over judgements. The one who holds space for everybody to be the most magnificent versions of themselves. The world needs you to step into your power, wild one.

**VIRGO:** Virgo, you may find yourself falling for somebody who possesses the gift of the

gab. A certain somebody who doesn't shy away from telling you exactly how they feel in your presence. This connection is going to be all kinds of inspiring—of this you can be sure! Some of you may be inspired to tap into your inner storyteller as well and weave magic with the help of words. Thinking about sharing your piece on a digital platform? The time is now.

**LIBRA:** The trouble is, we see ourselves as the doer of things. As a result, we weigh ourselves down with unrealistic expectations. Expectations that we are incapable of meeting in the first place. Today, you're being asked to go easy on yourself. To call in the divine help you need at every step along the way. Trust that the mysterious forces are looking out for you and will help you move closer to the given destination.

**SCORPIO:** The mission you've undertaken is anything but easy, Scorpio. Yet it must be done. Today, you're being asked to stand in your power as a warrior of light and show the way to those who are walking on this path. Yes, this means

dispelling—nay, banishing—the clouds of darkness within and without. Remember, creation is always preceded by destruction. Let that which must fall apart, fall apart, so you can hit the reset button.

**SAGITTARIUS:** You are at a turning point, Sagittarius, one that could redefine the course of your life. So take a moment to be grateful for the soul lessons as you set an intention for what you want to create in the future. Something tells us you're in the mood to go back to your books or work closely with a mentor or guide. Remember, you don't know everything, even though you like to believe you do. A certain degree of humility will help you imbibe the great wisdom the Universe is sharing with you.

**CAPRICORN:** Take the idealism down a notch, Capricorn. We all do what we have to do in order to survive and there's no shame in that. Make peace with your choices as long as they don't harm others. When in doubt, remember that laughter is indeed the best medicine. The more you choose to focus on the lighter side of

life, the easier it will be for you to get through the so-called turbulence.

**AQUARIUS:** "I hope you will go out and let stories, that is life, happen to you, and that you will work with these stories... water them with your blood and tears and your laughter till they bloom, till you yourself burst into bloom." Wise words by Clarissa Pinkola Estés to inspire you to let go of the inhibitions one by one and say yes to life in a way you never have. What's that one adventure you've always wanted to set off on? Now is the time to follow your instinct and step into the Unknown without letting your mind get in the way. Let Great Spirit be your guide on this journey to freedom.

**PISCES:** Here's the thing, Pisces: nobody has access to a crystal ball that will give them a definitive picture of what's coming in the future. How boring would life be if we did! Today, you're being asked to trust the divine plan and keep moving forward. Many surprises await you on this journey. In order to make space for these miracles, you are being called to let go of your false sense of control.