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SummitTIMES

Vol 06 | Issue 08 | Gangtok | Saturday | 09 January 2021

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | ₹ 5

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FOUNDATION STONE LAID FOR SMART POLICE STATION AT NAMCHI *Outstanding Police Awards soon, CM announces*



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 08 JAN:

Chief Minister, PS Tamang laid the foundation stone of Smart Police Station cum Crises Response Centre under Namchi Smart City at Namchi Police Station, today.

He was accompanied by Urban Development Minister, Arun Kumar Upreti, Transport Minister, Sanjeet Kharel, Director General of Police, A Shanker Rao, other dignitaries and police personnel.

Additional Chief Town Planner, Namchi Smart City Ltd, Navin Rai informed that the existing police station is located at the end of Central Park near Kisan Bazaar complex and currently houses two storeys. The proposed Police Crises Response Centre will be constructed on the open ground adjacent to the existing police station and after the completion of the project, the existing building will be dismantled and converted into an open parole ground.

The new structure will consist of four storied unit with the base level of parking space. The area of the new structure is 4070 sqft per floor and the area of the parole ground is 3800 sqft. He added that the project is expected to be completed in approximately 18 months.

During the function, the Chief Minister announced that the State Government will institute 'Outstanding Police Awards' for commendable service to the state and promotions could also be part of this award. He added that a notification for the same will be issued soon.

The Government will also open recruitment process in the police department and look into the promotion of follow-

ers, constables and other ranks, he added.

In a Facebook post, the Chief Minister informs that he advised the Police department and Urban Development Department to collaborate and work to keep our surroundings clean and raise awareness.

"I urged them to draw inspiration from the Pakyong Police Station which was adjudged as the 7th best-ranked police station in the country and follow their footsteps to set new milestones. Also, I added that as citizens it is our responsibility to come forward for similar social causes and appealed to all to be proactive," the CM wrote.

The CM also said that the Government will follow a Zero-tolerance policy for drug violations, moreover, if any Government employee is found guilty, they will be liable to premature retirement.

This is in context of a recent incident where a police personnel was involved in a drug trafficking case.

Thanking the police personnel for their service towards the State, the CM said that they have been instrumental in maintaining peace in the State. He added that we must adapt to the changing circumstances and use the technical resources available to us to be more efficient.

Our Government has the utmost respect for the police department and will extend every possible support to them. The upcoming smart police station with modern facilities will assist our police force to be more efficient in maintaining the tranquillity in the State.

The CM said that setting up of similar Smart Police Stations will also be recommended for Gyalshing and Nayaba-

zar and at entry points of Melli for which land is being scouted.

Urban Development Minister, Arun Kumar Upreti spoke about the objective of Smart City project and highlighted how smart city functions which is governed by various factors such as population and other demographics.

DGP, A Shanker Rao thanked the State Government for their support in especially during the challenging time of pandemic wherein the government gave additional vehicles to the department for smooth operation.

DIG (Range), Prawin Gurung spoke about SMART police which he said stands for five sets of principles which are Strict and Sensitive, Modern and Mobile, Alert and Accountable, Reliable and Responsive and Techno Savvy and Trained.

Sikkim conducts 2nd dry run for COVID-19 vaccination



AARON RAI GANGTOK, 08 JAN:

Sikkim conducted its second dry run of COVID-19 vaccination at Ayush Hospital, new STNM Hospital in Gangtok today.

The dry run for COVID-19 vaccination was also conducted at 11 other sites in the state which started at 10:00am. There were 25 beneficiaries enrolled in the Cowin app for each site.

While talking to SummitTIMES, Health Minister Dr MK Sharma informed that today's dry run is basically to ensure a systematic vaccination process when the vaccines arrive.

Public of Sikkim seem to be aware as the number of Covid-19 cases have gone down these days, he said. News of the vaccines arriving soon has also boosted the will power of Sikkim's citizens but people should not be careless, he added.

Health Secretary cum DG, Dr Pemba T Bhutia informed that today's dry run was conducted at all District hospitals and in every PHC in all districts.

As of now, there is no confirmed date for the arrival of vaccine, he added.

When the vaccines arrive, health

workers will be given priority followed by other frontline workers, Covid-19 patients and then other patients, informed Dr Bhutia.

As things stand, the vaccine will need to be given twice to a person, he added.

Dr Bhutia said that it is not known yet if there will be another dry run but the state will follow the national guidelines.

Dr Bhutia and the team also visited CRH Tadong where the dry run for Covid-19 vaccination was also being conducted and offered some advice to the hospital.

The dry run was also attended by Medical Superintendent [STNM Hospital], Dr KB Gurung, Additional Medical Superintendent, Dr Yudok Bhutia, State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyalsten Bhutia, State Immunization Officer, Thumzay Denzongpa, Additional Director Immunization, Dr Tshering, Health Education Officer, Noday Lachungpa, Principal Director cum Mission Director NHM, Dr T Yamphel along with the team of urban primary health center and other medical staff.

3 of 14 new Covid cases untraceable; Sikkim's count reaches 5,979

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 08 JAN:

Sikkim's tally of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 reached 5,979 on Friday with the detection of 14 new cases of novel coronavirus in the last 24 hours. Of these, three remain untraced and the health authorities have appealed to them to get in touch at the earliest. Also among the 14 is a Covid-warrior who tested positive after completing Covid duty and is currently in isolation at the Yatri Niwas, STNM Hospital.

In his daily health

bulletin on Friday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyalsten Bhutia, informed that a 45-year-old male, who has given ITBP in address, a 20-year-old female from Tadong and a 26-year-old female from Sichey tested positive but remain untraced on the contact numbers provided by them.

Mr Bhutia has appealed to them of those who know them to get in touch with the concerned authorities at the earliest so that their isolation protocol can be initiated. He also announced

today that in the event that contact with them is not made, the authorities will have to announce their names tomorrow so that they can be informed about their Covid status and briefed about what to do next.

Meanwhile, contact has been made with the Covid-positive person from Daramdin who had remained untraced till yesterday.

Meanwhile, the figure of recovered cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim has further improved to 5,362 with 86 more

turn to pg02

Section 144 around Assembly on 11 Jan

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 08 JAN:

East District Administration today issued prohibitory orders under section 144 CrPc in the area falling within 300 meters radius from the outer boundary of the Assembly Secretariat starting 9 am on 11 Jan, 2021.

This is in view of the Assembly Session called for 11 Jan, 2021. The prohibitory orders shall remain in force till the end of the sitting or unless withdrawn earlier.

In the prohibitory order, the DC states that this order is passed ex-parte "Since the circumstance of the situation do not admit serving of notice in due time upon the persons against whom this order is directed..."

The order is not applicable to law enforcing agencies viz. Magistrates, Police Personnel, Army, CRPF and Para-Military Forces and such other persons who are lawfully engaged in the maintenance of law and order.

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Complicated tumor surgery at Namchi Hospital



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 08 JAN:

A complicated case of Parotid Cancerous Tumor with difficult air-

way was successfully operated upon at Namchi District Hospital on 06 Jan, 2021, a press release from Sikkim Krantikari

Social Media informs.

The release states that this was the first ever successful surgery in a complicated case in Namchi hospital.

The surgery took more than 4 hrs and was conducted by a medical team consisting of Dr Tshering Sherpa (ENT Specialist), Dr Jikmee, Dr Mohan and Dr Ruben.

The patient was suffering from diabetes and high blood pressure, and the team was successful in creating alternative airway as it was difficult to administer anesthesia through mouth.

New Parliament: Need for New India

ARJUN RAM MEGHWAL [PIB]

With the dawn of January, we have entered the 21st year of the 21st century. It marks a significant moment in India's growth prospective to become the 21st-century leader. The nation is witnessing a transformative journey to fulfill the aspiration of the citizenry. The same decade of the previous century marked several historical milestones that have added tremendous value to achieve nationalistic goals. The futuristic planning of this new decade will resonate a long way in the country's development path. The Newly inaugurated Parliament building is a case in point in the broader growth trajectory of the nation.

The Montague-Chelmsford reforms resulted in the participation of Indians in governance through the enactment of the Government of India Act 1919. In 1921, public representatives were elected for the first time through the GoI Act, 1919. The need felt to accommodate them appropriately & the Central Assembly started functioning in the present-day Delhi legislative assembly premises.

A century back, these reforms resulted in the creation of the bicameral legislature. Adwin Lutiyan & Herbert backer designed the present parliament building's architectural plan for accommodating the legislators. Beginning in 1921, it took six-year to build the parliament building entirely. First Lok Sabha had 489 seats & each MP had represented on an average 7 lakh population. The capital's population was merely 13-14 lacs, which is now more than 2.5 crores. As the country's population has been increased from 36.1 crores in 1951 to more than 135 crores presently, so are the people represented by an individual MP. Nowadays, MPs have to manage day-to-day affairs, monitoring developmental projects & schemes from their camp offices. A need felt for an institutional & infrastructural set up for them to facilitate coordination with various departments & to ensure smooth delivery of public services in the National Capital.

The idea of the new structure for parliament is not recently mooted; two former speakers highlighted the need for the same. The Parliamentary staff, security personnel, media visitors, and parliamentary activ-

ities have risen sharply since the present structure was commissioned in 1927. During the parliament's joint session, the central hall remains jam-packed & few Members are bound to sit on additionally arranged chairs. However, there were several limitations to structural repair, alteration & modification, being a heritage grade-I building. The existing parliament building lacks several safety issues, i.e., earthquake-proof, standard fireproofing system & less office space, etc. In 2012, Meera Kumar, The then Lok Sabha Speaker, accorded approval for the New parliament building citing the distress over the over-utilized ages-old building. Similarly, in 2016, former speaker Sumitra Mahajan suggested that the urban development ministry initiate the new parliament's construction. Chairman Rajya Sabha M Venkai Naidu, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla & Union Urban Development Minister Hardeep Singh Puri have solicited suggestions from parliamentarians & other relevant stakeholders for the proposed new parliament & ambitious central vista project.

Article 81 of the Indian constitution provides for the delimitation of parliamentary constituencies. The last delimitation exercise was conducted based on the 1971 census & the state-wise distribution of seats bound to increase in 2026. Subsequently, the number of MPs will undoubtedly increase, which poses an urgent demand for an appropriate accommodative arrangement for the upcoming legislators.

It is the farsighted vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for dedicating the New Parliament Building to the nation by the 75th year of independence, which will nurture the Aatmnirbhar nation's aspiration. Under the Central Vista project, the new parliament building's indigenous architecture will represent the cultural diversity of strengthening Ek Bharat-Shrestha Bharat's spirit. The red Dholpur stone of Rajasthan will provide a great look to this temple. This more spacious, energy-efficient green, accessible & techno-friendly building will have a seating capacity of 1224 MPs. It will expedite the breaking of vertical silos among the parliament & various government departments

and save more than 1000 crore annually from the government exchequer.

India has imbibed democratic values and its rich experience in our cultural ethos. Be it 12th-century Anubhava Mantapa of Bhagwan bishwshera or the 6th century Buddhism, which had taught about the Co-existence of core principles of democracy, i.e., liberty, equality & fraternity to the world. Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar had very lucidly elaborated these facts during the constituent assembly debates. The USA's present parliamentary building was constructed within 25 years of independence; Australia & Brazil have proudly dedicated themselves new post-colonial parliament building. We must undertake a historical exercise to develop our post-colonial & People's parliament of the largest democracy, which will be the most magnificent and attractive monument of the world. This glorious project will depict India's democratic tradition's journey, representing India as the Mother of Democracy in a real sense.

The 21st-century challenges are constrained by the 20th or 19th-century governance formula, which requires a pragmatic course correction through all due diligent procedures. The nation is decisively sailing to become a knowledge & economic superpower with the sincere approach of reform, perform & transform towards strengthening democratic ethos. The Supreme Court verdict has provided a green signal to the government for moving ahead with Central Vista Project is a welcome move. The government has clarified that it will continue to adhere to the highest standards & sensitive to environmental concerns during construction.

Today, all stakeholders' roles demand continuous recalibration over their rights and duties. Convergence is required among the individualistic, collective & nationalistic goals for strengthening our democratic institutions' credibility. The new parliament building's commissioning, a symbol of Aatam Nirbharta, will mark a fitting tribute to the Indian democracy on the 75th year of independence. It will inspire us all to bring the national interest on the top. Everyone must engage actively for India's prosperity under the spirit radiating from the temple of democracy.

Livestock for Budang Kamerey farmers through Development through Credit scheme



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 08 JAN:

Five beneficiaries from Budang Kamerey GPU were provided with two Murrah-crossed milch-ing buffaloes along with calves and three Holstein Friesian-crossed milch cows with calves through

credit linkage facilitated by the Animal Husbandry department on 07 Jan, an official press release informs.

This was part of the "Development through Credit" scheme launched by the Chief Minister on 24 December at Golitar, Rangpo.

The animals were handed over to the beneficiaries by Additional Director (East), Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services, Dr TB Ghatani, who is also the nodal officer for Krishi Avam Pashudhan Mela, East District.

Rakdong-Tintek GPU discusses garbage disposal problem

WANGCHUK BHUTIA MANGAN, 08 JAN:

The Gram Panchayat of Rakdong Tintek GPU held a meeting cum interaction session at Dikchu Bazaar today to sort out the problem of garbage disposal.

The meeting was chaired by BDO Tintek, Tshering Norgyal Theng, in the presence of Panchayat President, Tika Maya Pandey and other members including sanitation committee and the general public.



The meeting discussed the removal of containers from the market and initiating fortnightly collection of garbage by the waste collection truck.

The BDO along with the Panchayat members inspected trade licenses

in every shop and urged all the shop vendors to renew their licenses.

The team also visited the under construction pay-and-use toilet and the landslide at the entrance of Dikchu Bazaar which needs protection work.

COVID-19: India reports 18,139 new cases, 234 more fatalities

NEW DELHI, JAN 8 (PTI): India's daily new COVID-19 cases fell below 19,000 for the fifth time this month, taking the country's caseload to 1,04,13,417, while the recoveries have surged to 1,00,37,398, according to data updated by the Union health ministry on Friday.

A total of 18,139 new infections were reported in a day, while the death toll increased to 1,50,570 as 234 more people succumbed to the disease during the same period, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,00,37,398, pushing the national recovery rate to 96.39 per cent, while the COVID-19 case fatality rate stood at 1.45



per cent.

The active COVID-19 caseload remained below three lakh for the 18th consecutive day.

There are 2,25,449 active coronavirus infections in the country, which account for 2.16 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

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

50 lakh on September 16.

It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and the one-crore mark on December 19.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), 17,93,36,364 samples have been tested for COVID-19 till January 7, including 9,35,369 on Thursday.

Two Ayodhya residents move HC challenging acquittals of Babri mosque demolition accused

LUCKNOW, JAN 8 (PTI): Two Ayodhya residents on Friday moved the Allahabad High Court challenging a special CBI court's ruling that acquitted all 32 accused including BJP veterans L K Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi the 1992 demolition of Babri mosque.

Ayodhya residents Haji Mahboob and Haji Sayyad Akhlaq Ahmad filed the petition in the Lucknow bench of the high court on behalf of

All India Muslim Personal Law Board.

The two decided to challenge the special court's judgement after the CBI did not move the high court against the acquittal of the accused by the special court, said a counsel for Ayodhya residents.

Twenty-eight years after the Babri Masjid was razed, the special court last year had acquitted all 32 people including BJP veterans L K Advani, M M Joshi and

Uma Bharti, accused of inciting a mob of kar sevaks to demolish the Babri mosque.

The mosque was believed to have been built after razing a temple existing at the exact birthplace of Lord Ram.

In a judgment that ran to 2,300 pages, the special CBI court said there was no conclusive evidence against the 32 accused of being involved in any conspiracy to bring down the disputed structure in Ayodhya.

3 of 14 new Covid cases untraceable...

patients getting discharged from isolation facilities. 83 of these are from the prisons at Namchi and Gangtok where major outbreaks had been reported a fortnight back.

Active cases of novel coronavirus in Sikkim now stand at 393, of whom four are currently admitted in the ICU facility of the COVID-dedicated STNM Hospital.

Of the 14 new cases, 13 were reported from East District and one from South Sikkim. These cases were picked up from the testing of 235 samples on Thursday, 12 in RT-PCR testing of 176 samples and two in rapid antigen testing of 54 samples.

Of the new cases, four are from near the taxi stand at Cooperative, Sichey, one from Chota Singtam, one from Barapathing, one from Ranipool, one from Upper Mamring in South District and another from Bhareng, Sombaria in West District, who had given their samples for testing at STNM Hospital. He added one person from Middle Debrung in South District has also tested positive for Covid-19.

MUSS NE In-charge visits Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 08 JAN:

In-charge of Manav Utthan Seva Samiti North-Eastern Region, Mahatma Akhilesh Baiji's visit of Dooars, Hills and Sikkim ended with the visit of newly constructed Satsang hall at Jorethang today, a press release informs.

The visit started from Kumargram of Dooars on 05 Dec, 2020 wherein Mahatma Akhilesh Baiji visited Mangpo, Kalimpong, Bijaynagar, Siliguri, Jholang, Banarhat, Birpara, Bagrakot, Malbazar, Mal-Mateli, Jalpaiguri and all four districts of Sikkim including Daramdin, Rangpo, Mangan, Gangtok, Ravangla, Namchi, Sumbuk and Gyalshing.

The two-day Sadbhavana Sammelan held every year at Salugara in



Siliguri was not organised this year due to the pandemic therefore the program only had lighting of the ceremonial lamp this time.

In today's concluding program, the first Sikkim Mandal level training camp of the year was also organized for the human service personnel.

Covid vaccination dry run at Jang PHC



MANGAN, 08 JAN: A dry run for the rollout of the still awaited COVID-19 vaccine was carried out today at Jang PHC, Dikchu, North Sikkim, today in presence of CMO North, MO IC, BDO Tintek, panchayat members

and other officials. The dry run, officials inform, was held with the objective to prepare the medical team tasked to step in for possible adverse reactions to the vaccine in worst case scenarios after vaccination.

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ANTHYESTI KRIYA

The Anthyesti Kriya of late Mrs. Karna Kumari Baraily who left her heavenly abode on 30th of December, 2020 falls on 11 January, 2021 (Monday). All relatives, friends and well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at DEORALI, HOTEL CHOWTARA BESIDES BUTTERFLY FLY OVER.



We would also like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all those who stood by us during our time of bereavement and to thank you all for your kind support and concern.

**Ujjal Baraily (Son)
Pradeep Baraily (Son)
Mamta Thapa (Daughter)
Parina Baraily (Daughter)
Marena Baraily (Daughter)
Susil Thapa (Son-in-law)
Kalpa Baraily (Daughter-in-law)
Sumitra Baraily (Daughter-in-law)
And all other Baraily Family members.**

Contact: 9775996049 Ujjal Baraily (Son)
9563068906 Marena Baraily (Daughter)
9749683189 Susil Thapa (Son-in-law)

3 from Sikkim to represent country in Int'l Quiz League 2021



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 08 JAN:

Three Sikkimese students studying in different schools of Siliguri have been selected as the "Official Country Representatives" for a forthcoming International Quiz Competition, a press release informs.

The three students are: Rishal Pandey Chettri from Delhi Public School, Siliguri; Dewakar Karki and Siddharth Subedi from GD Goenka Public School, Siliguri.

The competition titled "International Quiz League 2021" is being organised by Eventonation, a social youth organisation of Dhaka, Bangladesh, on 22-24 Jan, 2021.

Rishal Pandey Chettri is a resident of Gangtok, East Sikkim; Siddharth Subedi hails from Gyalshing, West Sikkim and Dewakar Karki is a resident of Pelling, West Sikkim.

The said quiz competition has a prize pool of 10,000Bdt for the winners, 7000Bdt for 1st runners up and 5000Bdt for the 2nd runners up.

The CEO of Eventonation, Hasan Al Mamum said, "India is as usual, excellent in quizzing events. Hopefully this year, we will again see their participation."

Students who wish to join the quiz competition can contact Rishal Pandey Chettri at his Whatsapp Number- +918509472998 or email him at rishal50@gmail.com.

International Quiz League, 2021 will see participants compete from various countries including Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Afghanistan, Ghana, Azerbaijan etc. Due to the ongoing Corona pandemic, the quiz competition will be held online.

Students who wish to join the quiz competition can contact Rishal Pandey Chettri at his Whatsapp Number- +918509472998 or email him at rishal50@gmail.com.

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Sikkim team prepares for National Fitness C'ship

SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 08 JAN:

A three-member team of World Fitness Federation, Sikkim, is preparing to participate in the upcoming National Body Building and Fitness Championship for Men & Women to be held on 23 and 24 January at Chennai.

The team comprising of Chandra Rai, Palsang Tamang and Santa Lal Rai is participating in the fitness category of the championship. The team, which will be accompanied by World Fitness Federation, Sikkim president Sanjay Chettri as



coach-cum-manager, is scheduled to leave on 21 January for the championship.

Addressing a press conference here today, WFF Sikkim president mentioned that the selection trial was held on

27 December at Rangpo which was attended by eight participants under his guidance and three were shortlisted in the State team. He added that the selected participants are undergoing rigorous training sessions at their

respective places for the championship.

It is informed that WFF India appointed Sanjay Chettri as the president of WFF Sikkim state in June last year and the state unit of the federation was sending its

team in a national championship for the first time.

Chandra Rai is from Namchi, South District and representing the State in women's fitness. She is preparing for the championship at Namchi and expressed her confidence on winning a medal for the State.

Palsang Tamang hails from Rangpo and is undergoing rigorous training under Mr Chettri at Body Vibes Fitness, Rangpo. He is also participating in the men's fitness category. He said that he will give his best to win medals for the State.

Bharat Biotech applies for permission for phase-I trial of nasal Coronavirus vaccine

NEW DELHI, 08 JAN [NDTV]:

Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech, whose coronavirus vaccine Covaxin is one of two approved by the government for emergency use, has applied to the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) for permission to conduct Phase I trials of a second vaccine - which is administered via the nostrils.

The DCGI has yet to review the application. Phase I trials are the first of three sets of clinical studies that are mandatory for any vaccine to be recognised as safe and efficient.

The new variant is significant because it is a single-dose drug; both Covaxin and AstraZeneca's Covishield (the other vaccine to be used in



India) require two intramuscular injections each.

A nasal vaccine (requiring a drop in each nostril) could save on medical equipment, such as syringes, and cut down on time taken for each vaccination, allowing more people to be protected.

Phase III trials for Covaxin, meanwhile, are ongoing.

On Thursday Bharat Biotech said it had en-

rolled 25,800 volunteers to meet its target for that study. Phase I and II trials are over and have yielded "a tremendous amount of immunogenicity and safety data". Phase III data - which tests vaccine efficacy - has yet to be released.

The firm is also setting up four facilities to produce a combined 700 million doses per year.

Both Covaxin and Covishield are expected to be rolled out within the

next few weeks. The government today conducted its second national dry run to proof the vaccine delivery system.

The government has also listed priority groups - people who will get the vaccine first. These groups include doctors and other healthcare workers, as well as frontline staff like police community health workers and sanitation staff, who are directly involved

in fighting the pandemic.

The total number of people expected to be vaccinated in the first phase is around 30 crore.

Late Thursday night the first shipment of Covid vaccines (Covishield - manufactured by Pune's Serum Institute) landed at Delhi's Indira Gandhi airport. As well as Delhi, vaccine shipments will reach other major Indian cities over the next 72 hours.

Serum Institute CEO Adar Poonawalla earlier said that a majority of the 50 million Covishield doses produced so far are for India. Dr Ella said 20 million doses of Covaxin are currently ready.

India has around 2.25 active Covid cases, government data showed this morning.

Air India's all-women team to fly over North Pole on world's longest air route

NEW DELHI, 08 JAN: An all-women pilot team of Air India will fly over North Pole on the world's longest air route and the flight from San Francisco (SFO) will reach Bengaluru on January 9 covering a distance of about 16,000 kilometres.

"Flying through the North Pole is very challenging and airline companies send their best and experienced pilots on this route. This time Air India has given responsibilities to a woman captain for the journey from San Francisco to Bengaluru via polar route," an Air India official said.

AI Captain Zoya Agarwal, who will be commanding the flight, and her team is very eagerly waiting to create history on January 9.

"Most people in the world will not see the North Pole or even its

map in their lifetime. I feel truly feel privileged and humbled by the trust posed in me by the civil aviation ministry and our flag carrier. It is a golden opportunity to command a Boeing 777 inaugural SFO-BLR, one of the world's longest flight over the North Pole," Captain Zoya Agarwal told ANI.

"I am extremely proud to have with me experienced women team comprising Captains Thanmai Papagari, Akanksha Sonawane and Shivani Manhas. This is the first time an all-women pilots team will fly over the North Pole and create a history of sorts. It's indeed a dream come true for any professional pilot," she added.

According to aviation experts, flying over the North Pole is extremely technical and requires skill and experience.

"The thrill of actually realising that you will be passing the North pole where the compass will flip 180 degrees...something which is fascinating indeed," Captain Zoya said.

The longest flight over the North Pole will be another feather in her cap as she was the youngest woman pilot to fly a Boeing-777 in 2013.

"I am the youngest woman commander in the world on Boeing 777. Women should have self-belief even if they face societal pressure not consider any task impossible," she said.

She will become the first woman commander of Air India to command flight over the North Pole.

Though Air India pilots have flown over polar route earlier also, it is for the first time a team women pilots will fly over the North Pole.

Central agency finds fraudulent transactions worth ₹ 498.5 Cr in Maharashtra

NAGPUR, 08 JAN [PTI]: The Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI) has busted fraudulent transactions of ₹ 498.50 crore by 26 entities across Maharashtra, an official release said.

These include fake Input Tax Credit (ITC) of ₹ 12.78 crore which was recovered in cash on the spot and one person was arrested, the DGGI release said.

The release informed that as part of the ongoing drive against fake invoices, multiple searches were conducted by officers of DGGI, Nagpur Zonal Unit at a number of places covering diverse industrial sectors across Maharashtra during the last fortnight.

During the investigations, it was observed that the entities covered were trading in a wide variety of taxable goods



ranging from supari and coal to textile articles and iron and steel products.

A large number of entities were found to be non-existent or non-business residential properties. These entities had uploaded fake and forged documents like electricity bills and rental agreements on the GST portal as proof of business addresses, the release said.

"Regarding the entities which were found to be functioning, the interrogation of the authorised persons confirmed

the fraudulent practices adopted by these entities in availing input tax credit without receipt of any goods," the DGGI said.

Out of the total fake Input Tax Credit of ₹ 89.73 crore availed on fictitious paper transactions of ₹ 498.50 crore, an amount of ₹ 12.78 Crore has already been recovered on the spot.

"One person has been arrested yesterday whose interrogation is expected to give further leads in the fake invoice rackets," it said.

Amid Avian flu fears, doctors probe crow deaths at Delhi park

NEW DELHI: A team of government veterinarians today began a probe into the unexplained deaths of several crows in a park in Delhi Mayur Vihar locality. The investigation comes at a time when some states like Haryana and Kerala have reported avian flu and culled hundreds of chicken and ducks to control the disease's spread.

Over the past 3-4 days, around 100 crows have died, including one today, according to Tinku Chowdhary, the caretaker of the Central Park at Mayur Vihar, Phase 3. A video showing dozens of crows dying in the park had gone viral a few days ago.

Two team of doctors from the Delhi government today visited the park to investigate the problem, according to Mr Chowdhary. A third such team will now carry some specimen of the dead crows to a laboratory to test them for the cause of their death.

One of the doctors who visited the spot said there are two possible reasons for such deaths:

excessive cold or bird flu.

The doctor, however, added that bird flu mostly breaks out in wet areas. The real reason for these deaths, hence, will be confirmed only after examination.

Across India, lakhs of birds have been found dead in the last 10 days. At least five states - Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala and Rajasthan - have confirmed bird flu, sounding an alert as the authorities step up efforts to contain the spread.

The Kerala government has declared it a state-specific disaster and issued a high alert. To contain its spread, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have blocked any entry of poultry from Kerala.

Bird flu or avian flu viruses can infect domestic poultry and other bird and animal species. The disease is "zoonotic" but infection in humans has not been reported in India, according to the government. A control room has already been set up in Delhi to monitor the situation.

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N-1302/6/2020-NI
Government of India
Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment
Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan)

Appointment of Director, Swami Vivekanand National Institute for Rehabilitation Training and Research (SVNIRTAR), Cuttack

Applications are invited for the post of Director, Swami Vivekanand National Institute for Rehabilitation Training and Research (SVNIRTAR), Cuttack, an autonomous body under the administrative control of Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (MSJ&E), Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan), Government of India. Post carries pay as per Level 13 (Rs. 123100-215900) of Pay Matrix with admissible allowances and is to be filled up on Deputation/Short Term Contract initially for a period of 2 years which may be extended on yearly basis, after review of the performance, up to 5 years.

2. Detailed advertisement, application format etc. are available on the website of the Department www.disabilityaffairs.gov.in and on the website of the Institute i.e. www.svnirtar.nic.in. The last date for receipt of applications would be 45 days from the date of publishing of advertisement in employment news.

(Navin Kumar)
Under Secretary to the Government of India

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Politics of Acrimony *Why prepare for debate when name-calling is also enough*

When was the last time that Sikkim was treated to a genuine political debate? Never. All that plays out in that space are allegations and counter insinuations. And now, the country also appears to be catching on. The Farmers' Protest offers a good example of how there is always a lot of noise, but substance remains a rare commodity. Opponents have problems with how the rules were changed, of how disingenuous the intent appears to be, of how obviously disinterested the government was in consultation or consensus building and of how adamantly it defends its position by claiming the righteousness of the decision. Neither side is addressing each other, but are, like always, performing exclusively for their respective galleries. Meanwhile, the farmers remain restive, dug into their siege and unwavering in their demand. Had the affected parties engaged in ideological debates on the issue, they would have known exactly what to run with beyond their prescribed-by-party positions. But when it comes to ideology, this position is either in very short supply or everyone has settled for jingoistic-jingles, because politics continues to remain obsessed with pot-shots and allegations, not plans or differing approaches. It should worry every citizen that most of the times, in most of the political contests, they are expected to choose not which plan/ proposal is better but who do they trust more with the same, near identical set of promises. When citizens don't demand better homework from leaders and political parties, and vote on superficialities like which group makes a more convincing argument to deliver the same results, they open the doors for noise where there should have been debates, and sops where there should have been vision-plans grounded in ideology.

It is because we refuse to demand explanations and remain comfortable in the absence of nuance that vicious rhetoric, which should be allowed no space in the public domain, has become the only flavor around. Politics has come to such a pass that there is no other tone in which political debate is engaged in anymore. While distasteful remarks and exaggerated conspiracy theories might provide some vicarious thrills and entertainment for the otherwise disinterested, these are pronouncements which betray only a graceless lack of confidence and contribute nothing to either the delivery of governance or the responsibilities of the Opposition. Politics in a democracy might allow, even enjoy, for some theatrics, but should not denigrate to a level where puerile arguments, obvious play-acting and/or unnecessary name-calling are stitched together to fill in for sane deliberations.

In Sikkim, as in the country, every segment, whether the ruling or the Opposition, has presented itself in rather poor light in how they have engaged important issues facing not just the State, but even arguments which have a resonance with the entire country. Significant issues, which could have inspired meaningful debate, have instead been reduced to acrimonious allegations and counters fuelling an environment in which political and ideological opponents are painted as enemies.

When debates focus only on vilifying, political dialogue becomes impossible. And what is democracy, if it cannot create the environment for political dialogue...

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QAnon and the Storm of the U.S. Capitol: The Offline Effect of Online Conspiracy Theories

MARC-ANDRÉ ARGENTINO
THECONVERSATION.COM

What is the cost of propaganda, misinformation and conspiracy theories? Democracy and public safety, to name just two things. The United States has received a stark lesson on how online propaganda and misinformation have an offline impact.

For months, Donald Trump has falsely claimed the November presidential election was rigged and that's why he wasn't re-elected. The president's words have mirrored and fed conspiracy theories spread by followers of the QAnon movement.

While conspiracy theorists are often dismissed as "crazy people on social media," QAnon adherents were among the individuals at the front line of the storming of Capitol Hill.

QAnon is a decentralized, ideologically motivated and violent extremist movement rooted in an unfounded conspiracy theory that a global "Deep State" cabal of satanic pedophile elites is responsible for all the evil in the world. Adherents of QAnon also believe that this same cabal is seeking to bring down Trump, whom they see as the world's only hope in defeating it.

THE EVOLUTION OF QANON

Though it started as a series of conspiracy theories and false predictions, over the past three years QAnon has evolved into an extremist religio-political ideology.

I've been studying the movement for more than two years. QAnon is what I call a hyper-real religion. QAnon takes popular cultural artifacts and integrates them into an ideological framework.

QAnon has been a security threat in the making for the past three years.

The COVID-19 pandemic has played a significant role in popularizing the QAnon movement. Facebook



data since the start of 2020 shows QAnon membership grew by 581 per cent — most of which occurred after the United States closed its borders last March as part of its coronavirus containment strategy.

As social media researcher Alex Kaplan noted, 2020 was the year "QAnon became all of our problem" as the movement initially gained traction by spreading COVID-related conspiracy theories and disinformation and was then further mainstreamed by 97 U.S. congressional candidates who publicly showed support for QAnon.

CROWDSOURCED ANSWERS

The essence of QAnon lies in its attempts to delineate and explain evil. It's about theodicy, not secular evidence. QAnon offers its adherents comfort in an uncertain — and unprecedented — age as the movement crowdsources answers to the inexplicable.

QAnon becomes the master narrative capable of simply explaining various complex events. The result is a worldview characterized by a sharp distinction between the realms of good and evil that is non-falsifiable.

No matter how much evidence journalists, academics and civil society offer as a counter to the claims promoted by the movement, belief in QAnon as the source of truth is a matter of faith — specifically in their faith in Trump and "Q," the anonymous person who began the movement in 2017 by posting a series of wild theories about the Deep State.

TRUMP VALIDATED THEORIES

The year 2020 was also Trump finally gave QAnon what it always wanted: respect. As Travis View, a conspiracy theory researcher and host of the QAnon Anonymous podcast recently wrote: "Over the past few months ... Trump has recognized the QAnon community in a way its followers could have only fantasized about when I began tracking the movement's growth over two years ago."

Trump, lawyers Sidney Powell and Lin Wood, and QAnon "rising star" Ron Watkins have all been actively inflaming QAnon apocalyptic and anti-establishment desires by promoting voter fraud conspiracy theories.

Doubts about the validity of the

election have been circulating in far-right as well as QAnon circles. Last October, I wrote that if there were delays or other complications in the final result of the presidential contest, it would likely feed into a pre-existing belief in the invalidity of the election — and foster a chaotic environment that could lead to violence.

HOPE FOR MIRACLES

The storming of U.S. Capitol saw the culmination of what has been building up for weeks: the "hopeium" in QAnon circles that some miracle via Vice-President Mike Pence and other constitutional witchcraft would overturn the election results.

Instead, QAnon followers are now faced with the end of a Trump presidency — where they had free rein — and the fear of what a Biden presidency will bring.

We have now long passed the point of simply asking: how can people believe in QAnon when so many of its claims fly in the face of facts? The attack on the Capitol showed the real dangers of QAnon adherents.

Their militant and anti-establishment ideology — rooted in a quasi-apocalyptic desire to destroy the existing, corrupt world and usher in a promised golden age — was on full display for the whole world to see. Who could miss the shirtless man wearing a fur hat, known as the QAnon Shaman, leading the charge into the Capitol rotunda?

What will happen now? QAnon, along with other far-right actors, will likely continue to come together to achieve their insurrection goals. This could lead to a continuation of QAnon-inspired violence as the movement's ideology continues to grow in American culture.

[the writer is PhD candidate Individualized Program, 2020-2021 Public Scholar, Concordia University]

Social media giants have finally confronted Trump's lies. But why wait until there was a riot in the Capitol?

TIMOTHY GRAHAM
THECONVERSATION.COM

Amid the chaos in the US Capitol, stoked largely by rhetoric from President Donald Trump, Twitter has locked his account, with 88.7 million followers, for 12 hours.

Facebook and Instagram quickly followed suit, locking Trump's accounts — with 35.2 million followers and 24.5 million, respectively — for at least two weeks, the remainder of his presidency. This ban was extended from 24 hours.

The locks are the latest effort by social media platforms to clamp down on Trump's misinformation and baseless claims of election fraud.

They came after Twitter labelled a video posted by Trump and said it posed a "risk of violence". Twitter removed users' ability to retweet, like or comment on the post — the first time this has been done.

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In the video, Trump told the agitators at the Capitol to go home, but at the same time called them "very special" and said he loved them for disrupting the Congressional certification of President-elect Joe Biden's win.

That tweet has since been taken down for "repeated and severe violations" of Twitter's civic integrity policy. YouTube and Facebook have also removed copies of the video.

But as people across the world scramble to make sense of what's going on, one thing stands out: the events that transpired today were not unexpected.

Given the lack of regulation and responsibility shown by platforms over the past few years, it's fair to say the writing was on the wall.

THE REAL, VIOLENT CONSEQUENCES OF MISINFORMATION

While Trump is no stranger to contentious and even racist remarks on social media, Twitter's action to lock the president's account is a first.

The line was arguably crossed by Trump's implicit incitement of violence and disorder within the halls of the US Capitol itself.

Nevertheless, it would have been a difficult decision for Twitter (and Facebook and Instagram), with several factors at play. Some of these are short-term, such as the immediate potential for further violence.

Then there's the question of whether tighter regulation could further incite rioting Trump supporters by feeding into their theories claiming the existence of a large-scale "deep state" plot against the president. It's possible.

But a longer-term consideration — and perhaps one at the forefront of the platforms' priorities — is how these actions will affect their value as commercial assets.



I believe the platforms' biggest concern is their own bottom line. They are commercial companies legally obliged to pursue profits for shareholders. Commercial imperatives and user engagement are at the forefront of their decisions.

What happens when you censor a Republican president? You can lose a huge chunk of your conservative user base, or upset your shareholders.

Despite what we think of them, or how we might use them, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube aren't set up in the public interest.

For them, it's risky to censor a head of state when they know that content is profitable. Doing it involves a complex risk calculus — with priorities being shareholders, the companies' market value and their reputation.

WALKING A TIGHTROPE

The platforms' decisions to not only force the removal of several of Trump's posts but also to lock his accounts carries enormous potential loss of revenue. It's a major and irreversible step.

And they are now forced to keep a close eye on one another. If one appears too "strict" in its censorship, it may attract criticism and lose user engagement and ultimately profit. At the same time, if platforms are too loose with their content regulation, they must weather the storm of public critique.

You don't want to be the last organisation to make the tough decision, but you don't necessarily want to be the first, either — because then you're the "trial balloon" who volunteered to potentially harm the bottom line.

For all major platforms, the past few years have presented high stakes. Yet there have been plenty of opportunities to stop the situation snowballing to where it is now.

From Trump's baseless election fraud claims to his false ideas about the coronavirus, time and again platforms have turned a blind eye to serious

cases of mis- and disinformation.

The storming of the Capitol is a logical consequence of what has arguably been a long time coming.

The coronavirus pandemic illustrated this. While Trump was partially censored by Twitter and Facebook for misinformation, the platforms failed to take lasting action to deal with the issue at its core.

In the past, platforms have cited constitutional reasons to justify not censoring politicians. They have claimed a civic duty to give elected officials an unfiltered voice.

This line of argument should have ended with the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville in August 2017, when Trump responded to the killing of an anti-fascism protester by claiming there were "very fine people on both sides".

AN AGE OF QANON, PROUD BOYS AND NEO-NAZIS

While there's no silver bullet for online misinformation and extremist content, there's also no doubt platforms could have done more in the past that may have prevented the scenes witnessed in Washington DC.

In a crisis, there's a rush to make sense of everything. But we need only look at what led us to this point. Experts on disinformation have been crying out for platforms to do more to combat disinformation and its growing domestic roots.

Now, in 2021, extremists such as neo-Nazis and QAnon believers no longer have to lurk in the depths of online forums or commit lone acts of violence. Instead, they can violently storm the Capitol.

It would be a cardinal error to not appraise the severity and importance of the neglect that led us here. In some ways, perhaps that's the biggest lesson we can learn.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer, Queensland University of Technology]

Binoy writes to PM, raises separate state demand for Gorkhas

DARJEELING, 08 JAN: Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (Binoy) faction chief Binoy Tamang on Thursday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, demanding a separate state for the people of the Darjeeling hills, Terai and Dooars areas of West Bengal.

Mr Tamang in his letter to the PM said, "You are aware that before independence, India had 36 partially excluded areas and after independence, 35 of those areas were granted constitutional justice. Unfortunately, Darjeeling hills, Siliguri, Terai and Dooars were left out from receiving constitutional justice. It remained as a partially excluded area.

Mr Tamang further pointed out that these areas were absorbed in West Bengal in 1954 through Absorbed Area Act, 1954.

"These areas are not included, legally and constitutionally in India till now. This is a matter of great concern for the country's security, integrity and sovereignty," he wrote.

Mr Tamang further requested PM Modi to review and scrap the coun-



try's treaties with Nepal and Bhutan that have caused trouble for the community in the region.

"India-Bhutan treaty of 1949 and India-Nepal treaty of 1950 are the basis of issues of the general public and Gorkhas of this area. We appeal to the government of India to review these treaties and repeal/scrap these treaties for the security of the Gorkhas and other people of the area. These treaties are products of bipartite talks between nations which have created a negative influence on our nationality and our identity," he wrote.

He further wrote: "You are aware that Gorkhas have been de-

manding a separate state which is very much justifiable because Darjeeling hills, Siliguri Terai and Dooars region are the only areas in the region which are separate from North East region but a part of eastern Himalaya."

"It is necessary to include Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Terai Dooars region into North East Region (DONER) under the North-East Council act 1971, article 2,3,4. All the states of North East fall under DONER but Gorkhaland Territorial Area, Terai and Dooars region are left out. The people of Darjeeling, Terai and Dooars region are economically backward. So on the basis of the lack

of basic amenities in the area, I urge you to share the benefits of DONER (Ministry of Development of North-Eastern Region) with the region too," he added.

Mr Tamang said that a copy of the letter has been sent to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee too.

"We have expectation from the centre and state that they will look into our issues very seriously for the better cause of the people of Darjeeling, Kalimpong hills, Terai and Dooars. The people living in these areas are also Indians. To grant them Constitutional justice is the responsibility of the government," he said.

Congress, Left parties hold seat-sharing meeting for Bengal assembly polls



KOLKATA, 08 JAN [PTI]: The Congress and the CPI(M)-led Left Front on Thursday held a meeting on seat-sharing for the Assembly elections in West Bengal due in April-May, sources in the parties said.

Left Front chairman Biman Bose, Leader of the Opposition in the outgoing Assembly Abdul Mannan of the Congress, and other leaders participated in the discussions. Leaders of the Congress and the Left Front have

been holding parleys on seats that would be fought by each of the parties, sources said.

The Congress High Command and the central leadership of constituent parties of the Left Front have given a

go-ahead to their state units for a seat-sharing arrangement.

The Congress and Left parties jointly contested the state Assembly polls in 2016 but fought separately in 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Odisha logs 245 new COVID-19 cases, two more deaths

BHUBANESWAR, JAN 8 (PTI): Odisha's COVID-19 tally on Friday mounted to 3,31,396 as 245 more people tested positive for the disease, while two fresh fatalities pushed the death toll to 1,890, a health department official said.

Of the new cases, 141 were reported from various quarantine centres and 104 detected during contact tracing.

Bolangir district recorded the highest number of fresh cases at 40, followed by Sundargarh at 29 and Khurda at 25.

Seven districts - Ganjam, Gajapati, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Koraput, Nabarangpur and Jagatsinghpur - did not report any new case since Thursday.

Taking to Twitter, the Health and Family Welfare Department said, "Regret to inform the de-

mise of two COVID positive patients while under treatment in hospitals."

The two fresh fatalities were reported from Khurda and Nayagarh districts, the official said.

Fifty-three COVID-19 patients have died due to comorbidities.

Khurda district, of which state capital Bhubaneswar is a part, accounted for 328 fatalities, followed by Ganjam

(247), Sundargarh (169), Cuttack (140) and Puri (117).

Odisha now has 2,163 active cases, while 3,27,290 patients have so far recovered from the disease.

The state has conducted over 71.11 lakh sample tests for COVID-19, including 24,482 on Thursday, and the positivity rate stands at 4.66 per cent.

Schools reopen in Odisha for students of classes 10, 12

BHUBANESWAR, JAN 8 (PTI): After a gap of about nine months, schools across Odisha on Friday reopened their classrooms to students who would shortly be appearing for their board examination, amid strict adherence to COVID-19 guidelines, a senior of-

ficial said.

Seats were arranged in a way to ensure all social distancing norms are followed, as faculty members, with an eye on meeting the 100-day teaching target, imparted lessons to students of classes 10 and 12.

All those who en-

ter school premises will have to wear face masks and use sanitiser, the official said.

School and Mass Education Minister S R Dash stated that classes, with not more than 20-25 students, will also be held on Saturdays and Sundays.

Syllabus has been

reduced by 30 per cent, and no further deduction would be allowed, he said.

According to the official, the government has asked the Health and Family Welfare Department to make arrangements to conduct regular health check-up in schools.

12 fresh virus cases in Ladakh; total count 9,589

LEH, JAN 7 (PTI): The union territory of Ladakh reported 12 new cases of coronavirus, pushing the infection count to 9,589, officials said on Thursday.

All fresh cases were detected in Leh, they said.

So far, the UT has recorded 127 deaths with Leh alone accounting for 84.

With the recovery of 28 more patients, the number of active cases came down to 219, they said.

A total of 9,243 patients have recovered after successful treatment so far, according to the officials.

With 12 new cases, Leh's tally has risen to 7,490. Kargil's infection count stands at 2,099, they said.

Mamata thanks 'Swasthya Sathi' scheme beneficiaries

KOLKATA, JAN 8 (PTI): The West Bengal government has decided to send letters written by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to every person who enrolled for a health scheme during the ongoing 'Duare Sarkar' drive, a senior official said.

In the thank-you message for 'Swasthya Sathi' scheme beneficiaries addressed as 'priyo sathi'

(dear friend), Banerjee also shared details about the campaign that began from December 1 last year.

She said through the drive, the state government is extending at least 12 schemes to people.

Till January 7, close to 1,88,99,552 people have visited at least 665 'Duare Sarkar' camps, the official said.

Nagaland reports 4 new COVID-19 cases, 1 fresh fatality

KOHIMA, JAN 8 (PTI): Nagaland's COVID-19 tally rose to 11,964 on Friday as four more people tested positive for the infection, Health Minister S Pangnyu Phom said.

Four more people have also recovered from the disease, he said.

One more patient has succumbed to the infection, taking the state's coronavirus death toll to 85, a health bulletin said.

Nagaland now has

127 active coronavirus cases, while 11,614 people have recovered from the disease and 138 patients have migrated to other states so far, it said.

Dimapur has the highest number of active cases at 64, followed by Kohima (44) and Mokochung (11), it said.

Nagaland has so far conducted over 1.21 lakh COVID-19 tests, including 72,597 RT-PCR, 36,812 TrueNat and 12,177 rapid antigen tests, the bulletin said.

Shah's 2-day visit to Mizoram cancelled, no reason cited

AIZAWL, JAN 8 (PTI): The two-day proposed visit of Union Home Minister Amit Shah to Mizoram beginning Saturday has been cancelled, state government sources said on Friday.

No reason has been cited for cancellation of the trip, they said.

During the visit, Shah was to inspect a land customs station at Zokhawthar village in Champhai district on the Indo-Myanmar border.

Gangetic Dolphin beaten to death in UP, 3 arrested as video goes viral



LUCKNOW, 08 JAN [PTI]: A dolphin is beaten to death with sticks and rods by a group of men in a disturbing video that has emerged from Uttar Pradesh. Three men have been arrested after the video went viral on social media.

In a tweet, the police in Pratapgarh said the incident took place on December 31 and three of the attackers are in jail. The gangetic dolphin is a protected species.

In a display of extreme cruelty, the men are seen on the video raining blows on the dolphin as blood gushes from its body. Some men can be seen holding down the dolphin. "Faaltu mein maar rahe ho yaar (you are assaulting it for no reason)," someone is heard saying but the men do not stop.

As the dolphin bleeds, a man can be seen attacking it with an axe and driving the weapon into its body. Towards the end of the video, the dolphin appears to be nearly lifeless from the vicious attack.

An official of the forest department, who responded to a call on the dolphin, reportedly found it lying lifeless by the side of a canal. He says in an FIR (First Information Report) that there was a crowd of villagers surrounding it but when asked, no one was willing to reveal how it died. A closer inspection of the body revealed multiple injuries, including axe wounds, the FIR said.

As the video surfaced online, the men were identified from a nearby village and caught, according to the police.

Israel appoints Honorary Consul in North-East India

NEW DELHI, JAN 8 (PTI): As part of efforts to increase its presence and collaborations in India's North-East, Israel has appointed an honorary consul in the region who will be based in Assam.

The Embassy of Israel in India has appointed Joyshree Das Verma as honorary consul in the region with jurisdiction over the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and Sikkim, an Embassy statement said.

Announcing the appointment, Ambassador of Israel in India, Ron Malka, said, The relations between our two countries are growing and expanding rapidly. We are now going to take it forward and increase our presence in North-East India".

"I am proud to present the credentials of Is-



raeli honorary consul to Mrs. Joyshree Das Verma, who will work with us to further strengthen our growing partnership in this region," he said.

Verma said she is immensely honoured and humbled to represent Israel as Honorary Consul for the North-Eastern states.

"This all-encompassing role excites me greatly as there are vast possibilities & opportunities to leverage Israel's

technology and expertise in various areas. I have pledged to work in the best interests of Assam and all the North Eastern States," she was quoted as saying by a statement.

The Embassy aims to identify all possible areas of cooperation in the North-East, where Israel can bring in expertise and its advanced technologies to benefit people in the region, the Embassy said.

In November 2020,

Malka visited Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura.

He held official meetings with the Chief Ministers of the states, in which the sides discussed collaboration on a range of subjects including agriculture, water management, tourism, horticulture, fisheries and dairy.

During the visit, the Ambassador had laid the foundation stone of a Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Vegetables in Khetri, Assam.

The region's first Indo-Israeli Centre of Excellence was inaugurated in Mizoram in 2018.

It has become a strong, sustainable platform for addressing challenges via applicable research and introduction of relevant, innovative Israeli agro-technologies tailored to the needs of local farmers, the statement said.

Jharkhand reports 195 new COVID-19 cases, one more death

RANCHI, JAN 8 (PTI): Jharkhand's COVID-19 tally mounted to 1,16,229 as 195 more people tested positive for the infection, a health department official said on Friday.

The death toll rose to 1,041 as one person from Gumla succumbed to the infection in the last 24 hours, he said.

Ranchi district registered the maximum number of fresh cases at 102, followed by Dhanbad at 22 and East Singhbhum at 16.

Jharkhand now has 1,448 active cases, while 1,13,740 people have been cured of the disease so far, the official said.

The state conducted 14,621 sample tests for COVID-19 in the last 24 hours, he added.

VIDEO NEWS SECTION

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NBA players weren't surprised by DC. We live with white supremacy every day

ETAN THOMAS
LOS ANGELES, 08 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: The silence has been deafening on the right. From the right-wing evangelicals who had prayed for Donald Trump to be re-elected, to the All Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter crowds, to the Kaepernick haters and those who denigrated Black Lives Matter as violent thugs. In the wake of a mob of Trump supporters invading the US Capitol in an attempted coup on Wednesday, the same people who rushed to condemn peaceful protests against racism are either silent or ludicrously blame the scenes on antifa.

The events in Washington DC really should have come as no surprise to anyone. Trump had been promoting the 'Stop the Steal' rally which led to the Capitol invasion non-stop on Twitter as if it were an upcoming pay-per-view fight, promising his supporters: "I will be there. Historic day!" He marketed it. He encouraged it.

And yet the reaction of large parts of middle America was shock that white supremacists could invade the heart of US democracy largely undisturbed, strolling through the Capitol like it was their own private kingdom.

But none of this came as a surprise to NBA players, 80% of whom are Black and see the effects of white supremacy



every day. Not the violence at the Capitol, nor the election of Trump in the first place, nor his describing large parts of Africa with an obscenity, nor the police killings of George Floyd or Breonna Taylor, nor the acquittal of the officers who shot Jacob Blake. In fact, one of the few white people who wasn't shocked was Golden State Warriors coach Steve Kerr, who has spent most of his career around Black people. "A legitimate election is suddenly questioned by millions of people, including many of the people who are leading our country in government, because we've decided to – over the last few years – allow lies to be told," he said on Wednesday night. "So, this is who we are. You reap what you sow."

Later, Boston Celt-

ics guard Jaylen Brown explained – as if it still needs explaining – how Black people live with white supremacy every day.

"It reminds me of what Dr Martin Luther King has said, that there's two split different Americas. In one America, you get killed by sleeping in your car, selling cigarettes or playing in your backyard," he said. "And then in another America, you get to storm the Capitol and no tear gas, no massive arrests, none of that. So, I think it's obvious: It's 2021 – I don't think anything has changed. We want to still acknowledge that. We want to still push for the change that we're looking for. But as of yet, we have not seen it. We want to continue to keep conversations alive and do

our part."

Jaylen is absolutely right. We have watched over and over mainstream America justify police shooting after police shooting. Terence Crutcher in Oklahoma; 12-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland; Eric Garner in New York; Philando Castile and George Floyd in Minnesota; Breonna Taylor in Kentucky; Jacob Blake in Wisconsin. The long, heartbreaking list goes on and on.

As we discussed on my show, The Collision, police choose to use restraint and deescalation techniques with white people – as we saw at the Capitol on Wednesday – as opposed to the shoot-first-ask-questions-later approach when dealing with Black men, women or children. We all watched as they allowed

the white domestic terrorists who had just stormed the Capitol to simply walk out like they were on a school field trip. There was an image of a white lady literally being helped down the stairs by a police officer. They were handled with such care, unlike the tear gas and rubber bullets that greeted Black Lives Matter protesters this summer. As Deadspin journalist Chuck Modiano, who was on the ground at the Capitol, told me: "I was like OK, when's the tear gas coming because I've been covering protests in DC for seven months pretty religiously, and the amount of provocation to get tear gas is as little as a water bottle. This is what I am accustomed to, this is what

Black people in DC have been dealing with. My mind was so blown at the inaction by the police because this was so easily preventable".

Anyone who is still having trouble recognizing white privilege after what we saw this week is simply in denial. Black American NBA players know this, they have witnessed it their entire lives. And they are using their fame to get the message into homes across America and the world, hoping something will change. That's why Milwaukee Bucks and Detroit Pistons players knelt at the start of their game on Wednesday night. It's why Colin Kaepernick knelt in the first place.

After Golden State's game on Wednesday, Draymond Green addressed the media.

"Stop describing [the Capitol invaders] the same way you describe someone who just stands there and makes a chant saying 'we want justice, we want peace'", he said. "Stop using that same word, it's disrespectful and it's shameful to keep calling them protestors ... they're terrorists"

Draymond is absolutely right. Nobody is demanding that the police shoot white Trump supporters like they shoot us. We're demanding that the police not shoot us like they don't shoot them. That's not too much to ask. Just ask our next president.

Aston Villa set to field youth players in Liverpool FA Cup tie due to Covid cases

PAUL DOYLE
LONDON, 08 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Aston Villa plan to use youth-team players to fulfil their FA Cup tie against Liverpool on Friday following a Covid outbreak that forced Villa's entire first-team squad and staff into isolation.

Villa will not know until Friday whether the match can go ahead, as they must await the findings of Covid tests that the youth players had to undergo on Thursday. No one in the first team's bubble – including players, coaches and medical staff – can attend the game, with all isolating after a "large number" of positive tests



among the club's senior staff on Monday and another batch of confirmed cases on Thursday. Villa have shut their Bodymoor Heath training ground.

"A large number of first team players and staff returned positive tests after being routinely tested on Monday and immediately went into isolation," explained Villa

in a statement. "A second round of testing was carried out immediately and produced more positive results today."

If the youth players test negative and Friday's

match can take place, Villa will be led by the U23s manager, Mark Delaney. Coincidentally, Liverpool had to field a squad of youth-team players in a Carabao Cup tie against Villa in December 2019 owing to the senior's team participation in the World Club Championship. Villa won that match 5-0.

Villa's predicament casts doubt on their ability to fulfil the upcoming Premier League matches against Tottenham (13 January) and Everton (16 January). The team have not trained since Tuesday, when the results of Monday's tests emerged. Dean Smith did not

attend a scheduled online press conference on Thursday to preview the match against Liverpool.

Southampton, meanwhile, could be awarded a walkover against Shrewsbury Town as a result of a high number of cases at the Shropshire club which means the tie will not take place on Saturday.

Two West Brom players tested positive on Sunday but Sam Allardyce, their manager, said: "We're comfortable with where we are at the moment and looking forward to playing in the FA Cup at Blackpool." Sean Dyche reported "a couple of cases" at Burnley, who are at home to MK Dons.

Olympics official says he is not certain Tokyo Games will go ahead

JUSTIN MCCURRY
TOKYO, 08 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Dick Pound, a senior member of the International Olympic Committee, has said he "can't be certain" that the delayed Tokyo 2020 Games will go ahead this summer, as a coronavirus state of emergency was declared in the host city.

Asked about the prospects that the Games will open on 23 July, the Canadian told the BBC: "I can't be certain because the ongoing elephant in the room would be the surges in the virus."

Organisers and the IOC president, Thomas Bach, have insisted the Olympics, which were postponed by a year due to the pandemic, will go ahead, and have agreed it will not be possible to delay them a second time. Tokyo, however, is at



the centre of a third wave of infections that has struck Japan in recent weeks, prompting the prime minister, Yoshihide Suga, to declare a month-long state of emergency in the capital and three neighbouring prefectures.

The measures, which are not enforceable by law, went into effect on Friday but experts have warned they may have to stay in place beyond February to have any effect.

Tokyo reported a record 2,447 cases on Thursday, a 50% increase from the previous day – while the number

of infections across Japan rose above 7,500, also an all-time high.

Although Japan has fared better than many other countries – with 3,900 Covid-19 deaths in a country of 126 million – it is not expected to begin vaccinating frontline health workers until the end of February at the earliest, with older and other vulnerable people following in March.

A requirement to conduct domestic clinical trials and a history of vaccine hesitancy among the public mean authorities will have very little time to immunise a significant

number of people by the time the Games open in just over six months' time.

Concern that visiting athletes, fans and officials could spark a fresh outbreak and rising costs attributed to the delay have combined to turn public opinion against the Games. A recent poll by the public broadcaster NHK found 63% of Japanese people supported another postponement or cancellation.

"I think it's difficult ... it's impossible to hold the Olympics," said 75-year-old Tatsuhiko Akamasu, who was visiting Tokyo

on Friday from nearby Saitama. "It's only two and a half months until the torch relay. I don't think we can get the virus under control during this period."

Yuki Furusho, a 23-year-old student, was similarly sceptical. "I think the interaction between people will cause the coronavirus to spread, and it is more likely that the virus may mutate if the infection numbers are increasing. That's a bit scary."

The Tokyo 2020 organising committee is not due to reveal its plans for a "Covid-safe" Olympics until March, when 10,000 runners are due to begin a 121-day torch relay around the country.

When asked if he had any concerns about the Games' viability given the worldwide spread of the virus, the organising

committee's president, Yoshirō Mori, said "none at all, according to the Sports Hochi newspaper. "It will happen in July. Almost all of the Olympic preparations are in place."

In an interview with Sky News, Pound, the longest-serving member of the IOC, suggested vaccinations should be a condition for competing at the Olympics, putting him at odds with Bach, who has said only that athletes should be "encouraged" to receive the vaccine.

Pound said: "Athletes are important role models, and by taking the vaccine they can send a powerful message that vaccination is not only about personal health, but also about solidarity and consideration for the wellbeing of others in their communities."

Taylor Townsend: 'Women have kids, but it doesn't stop you. Tennis has evolved'

TUMAINI CARAYOL
NEW YORK, 08 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: As tennis players around the world make their slow return to competition this week after months away, there is one who will not be joining them for a while. In the final months of last season, Taylor Townsend announced she is pregnant and will give birth in March.

Some female players who are mothers would rather their tennis was front and centre in their profession and so her case is to be noted simply because it is a clear reflection of a recent cultural change in women's tennis. In short, motherhood is becoming a normal career option in the sport for those who wish to take it.

"I think that 15 years ago if you were pregnant and you had a kid, it was over," says Townsend. "The whole dynamic has just changed and I think the sport has evolved and realised that this is part of a woman's life. This is part of what comes with being a woman. Women get pregnant, they have kids, but it doesn't stop what you're doing. And it doesn't stop the path that you want to be on."

When Townsend announced the news in October, she did so in style. In a social media video the American described in chronological order some of the many instances where people have doubted her with their toxic words and insisted she will not be perturbed by her next challenge. Her first example was most shocking: at only four years old she was told to quit tennis. "I was told 'you're too fat', 'you can't move', 'you need to stop', 'she's not going to make it', 'she's too big'. I got all of that kind of dumb shit. That's what I've heard since I started playing."

This has been a constant theme in Townsend's career, particularly since 2012 when, despite being junior world No 1, the United States Tennis Association asked her to withdraw from the junior US Open claiming her fitness was insufficient. Even at the US Open last year, while she was pregnant, the comments endured. "I stopped listening to that and was like: 'I need to be happy with who I am. I have to

be OK with me,'" she says. "You're never gonna look like them, that's fine. But that's not stopping me from going out and whooping ass. Whatever the thing that you say is holding me back, I can use that as a way to propel me to move forward."

The obstacles Townsend has faced have only toughened her skin and fuelled her drive. "I'm in a cool space because the things I went through as a kid, starting out, I will never allow that to happen to my child. It has given me an opportunity to learn from the things I went through and to be able to shape and change the path for my child. Because I'll fight someone if they try to tell my four-year-old that they can't do something. It's just insane. Those types of people won't be around."

Townsend recently revealed she is in a financial dispute with her mother over endorsement funds and says this has had a significant effect on how she carries herself. Her circle is smaller. She is not prepared to trust without being certain it will be reciprocated with trustworthiness. "I've gone through a sifting-out process and really got rid of all the garbage. Now I'm in the place that I'm pregnant, I'm having a kid, I'm not playing right now. When I go through that process, I will know and it's very clear what I expect."

In one of her last prominent appearances before the pandemic, Townsend reached the fourth round of the 2019 US Open, beating Simona Halep 2-6, 6-3, 7-6 (4) in round two. At a time when most players spend their time running away from the net, it was perhaps the greatest net-rushing performance of this generation. She approached the net more than 100 times; in the final set she essentially attempted to serve and volley on every first and second serve.

She describes the moment as a "pivotal point" in her career that gave her the confidence to know she really can beat top players. Those ambitions are not over and Townsend is already planning to return between March and May of 2022 after taking some time to learn the ropes of motherhood. There is more to come.

Qatar unveils fourth 2022 World Cup stadium

QATAR, 08 JAN (REUTERS): Qatar inaugurated the fourth of eight 2022 World Cup venues, the Al Rayyan Stadium, when the country hosted the Amir Cup final between Al-Sadd and Al-Arabi on Friday.

Al-Sadd, coached by former Barcelona and Spain midfielder Xavi Hernandez, beat Al-Arabi 2-1 to lift their 17th Amir Cup title after Algeria forward Baghdad Bounedjah scored twice.

"It is a wonderful football stadium," FIFA President Gianni Infantino said in a statement.

"The atmosphere is incredible, with the

seats extremely close to the pitch... I am sure this will be a perfect football arena in 2022 when it hosts matches during the World Cup.

"The country is very well prepared for the next FIFA World Cup and on track to host a memorable instalment of the tournament – the first in the Middle East and the Arab World."

The Amir Cup final's date coincided with Qatar National Day and the country is scheduled to host the 2022 World Cup final in exactly two years' time.

The 40,000-capacity venue will host seven World Cup matches up to the round of 16.

France's hopes lift as US freezes tariffs over tech tax

PARIS (AP): France's government breathed a sigh of relief Friday after the U.S. indefinitely delayed tariffs on French wine, cosmetics and other goods designed as retaliation for a French tax on technology giants.

The U.S. Trade Representative's office said in a statement Thursday that it suspended the tariffs targeting France, which had been scheduled to enter in force this week, because it is investigating similar tech taxes from a growing number of other countries, too.

French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said his government "takes note" of the U.S.



decision and called for a global agreement on taxing online behemoths like Google and Amazon.

It's among multiple trade disputes that have damaged trans-Atlantic ties in recent years. In a statement Friday to The Associated Press, Le Maire urged "a glob-

al settlement of trade disagreements between the United States and Europe, which make everyone lose, especially in this time of crisis."

The U.S. government argues that the French tax unfairly targets American companies. France says that its tax targets any company

with huge revenues, and is aimed at making the tech giants pay taxes in the countries where they do business instead of tax havens.

While France has led the charge on tech taxes, several other countries have introduced similar measures that worry the U.S., including Britain, India, Turkey and Brazil.

Negotiations on a global tech tax deal at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development stalled after the Trump Administration pulled out last summer. France and others hope that the Biden Administration will be more amenable to reaching a deal.

Police officer's death intensifies Capitol siege questions

WASHINGTON (AP): A police officer has died from injuries sustained as President Donald Trump's supporters stormed the Capitol, a violent siege that is forcing hard questions about the defeated president's remaining days in office and the ability of the Capitol Police to secure the area.

The U.S. Capitol Police said in a statement that Officer Brian D. Sicknick was injured "while physically engaging with protesters" during the Wednesday riot. He is the fifth person to die because of the melee.

The rampage that has shocked the world and left the country on edge forced the resignations of three top Capitol security officials over the failure to stop the breach. It led lawmakers to demand a review of operations and an FBI briefing over what they called a "terrorist attack." And it is prompting a broader reckoning over Trump's tenure in office and what comes next for a torn nation.

Protesters were urged by Trump during a rally near the White House earlier Wednesday to head to Capitol Hill, where lawmakers were scheduled to confirm Biden's presidential victory. The mob swiftly broke through police barriers, smashed windows and paraded through the halls, sending lawmakers into hiding.

One protester, a white woman, was shot to death by Capitol Police, and there were dozens of arrests. Three other people died after "medical emergencies" related to the breach.

Despite Trump's repeated claims of voter fraud, election officials and his own former attorney general have said there were no problems on a scale that would change the outcome. All

the states have certified their results as fair and accurate, by Republican and Democratic officials alike.

Sen. Ben Sasse, R-Neb., said news of the police officer's death was "gut-wrenching."

"None of this should have happened," Sasse said in a statement. "Lord, have mercy."

Sicknick had returned to his division office after the incident and collapsed, the statement said. He was taken to a local hospital where he died on Thursday.

Two House Democrats on committees overseeing the Capitol police budgets said those responsible need to be held to answer for the "senseless" death.

"We must ensure that the mob who attacked the People's House and those who instigated them are held fully accountable," said Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Ct., and Rep. Tim Ryan, D-Ohio. in a statement.

Earlier Thursday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said any remaining day with the president in power could be "a horror show for America." Likewise, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said the attack on the Capitol was "an insurrection against the United States, incited by the president," and Trump must not stay in office "one day" longer.

Pelosi and Schumer called for invoking the 25th Amendment to the Constitution to force Trump from office before President-elect Joe Biden is inaugurated on Jan. 20. Schumer said he and Pelosi tried to call Vice President Mike Pence early Thursday to discuss that option but were unable to connect with him. At least one Republican lawmaker joined the effort. The

procedure allows for the vice president and a majority of the Cabinet to declare the president unfit for office. The vice president then becomes acting president.

Pelosi said if the president's Cabinet does not swiftly act, the House may proceed to impeach Trump.

Trump, who had repeatedly refused to concede the election, did so in a late Thursday video from the White House vowing a "seamless transition of power."

Two Republicans who led efforts to challenge the election results, Ted Cruz of Texas and Josh Hawley of Missouri, faced angry peers in the Senate. Cruz defended his objection to the election results as "the right thing to do" as he tried unsuccessfully to have Congress launch an investigation. In the House, Republican leaders Rep. Kevin McCarthy of California and Rep. Steve Scalise of Louisiana joined in the failed effort to overturn Biden's win by objecting to the Electoral College results.

With tensions high, the Capitol shuttered and lawmakers not scheduled to return until the inauguration, an uneasy feeling of stalemate settled over a main seat of national power as Trump remained holed up at the White House.

The social media giant Facebook banned the president from its platform and Instagram for the duration of Trump's final days in office, if not indefinitely, citing his intent to stoke unrest. Twitter had silenced him the day before.

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg said "the shocking events" make it clear Trump "intends to use his remaining time in office to undermine the peaceful

shield it from lawsuits in South Korea.

The court said the women were the victims of "harsh sexual activities" by Japanese soldiers who caused them bodily harm, venereal diseases and unwanted pregnancies and left "big mental scars" in the women's lives.

The proceedings in the case had been delayed as Japan refused to receive legal documents. Seven of the 12 women died while waiting for the ruling.

Another 20 women,

and lawful transition of power."

U.S. Capitol Police Chief Steven Sund, under pressure from Schumer, Pelosi and other congressional leaders, was forced to resign. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell asked for and received the resignation of the Sergeant at Arms of the Senate, Michael Stenger, effective immediately. Paul Irving, the longtime Sergeant at Arms of the House, also resigned.

Sund had defended his department's response to the storming of the Capitol, saying officers had "acted valiantly when faced with thousands of individuals involved in violent riotous actions."

Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser called the police response "a failure."

Lawmakers from both parties pledged to investigate and questioned whether a lack of preparedness allowed a mob to occupy and vandalize the building. The Pentagon and Justice Department had been rebuffed when they offered assistance.

Black lawmakers, in particular, noted the way the mostly white Trump supporters were treated.

Newly elected Rep. Cori Bush, D-Mo., said if "we, as Black people did the same things that happened ... the reaction would have been different, we would have been laid out on the ground."

The protesters ransacked the place, taking over the House area and Senate chamber and waving Trump, American and Confederate flags. Outside, they scaled the walls and balconies.

Rep. Val Demings, D-Fla., a former police chief, said it was "painfully obvious" that Capitol police "were not prepared."

some already diseased and represented by their surviving relatives, filed a separate suit against Japan, and that ruling is expected next week.

The women were among tens of thousands across occupied Asia and the Pacific who were sent to front-line Japanese military brothels. About 240 South Korean women came forward and registered with the government as victims of sexual slavery, but only 16 of them, all in their 80s and 90s, are still alive.

Biggest Czech crematorium overwhelmed by pandemic deaths

OSTRAVA, CZECH REPUBLIC (AP): All three cremation chambers are working round the clock, while storage capacity for caskets has been repeatedly boosted. Despite all the efforts, the Czech Republic's biggest crematorium, in the northeastern city of Ostrava, has been overwhelmed by mounting numbers of pandemic victims.

On Thursday, cars from funeral companies delivered caskets every few minutes, some with "COVID" written on them. These days, the crematorium receives more than 100 coffins daily, about double its maximum cremation capacity.

With new confirmed COVID-19 infections around record highs, the situation looks set to worsen.

Authorities in Ostrava have been speeding up plans to build a fourth furnace but, in the meantime, have sought help from the government's central crisis committee for pandemic coordination.

"It's an extraordinary situation," said Katerina Sebestova, a deputy mayor in Ostrava. "Nobody here remembers anything like that." The facility belongs to Ostrava City Hall.



"It's simply because we have 60% more deceased than we had a year ago. So, we have to deal with storage capacity and the capacity to cremate," she said.

Up to 1,000 bodies a month were cremated in Ostrava before the pandemic struck. The number rose to 1,550 in November and 1,570 in December after a surge at the end of October, crematorium director Ivo Furmancik said.

The Czech Republic was spared the worst of the pandemic in the spring only to see its health care system approach collapse in the fall, about the time the spike began. It has been hard-hit again with new infections reaching a record high of 17,668 on Wednesday, a record set for the second straight day.

The surge in infec-

tions is likely again to be followed by a surge in deaths.

"To tell the truth, I expect that the situation won't get any better but unfortunately will likely get worse," Furmancik said.

The crematorium has built an overflow cold storage container to double its storage capacity by 60 coffins, and further boosted it by adding a couple of movable freezers for another 100. But the cremation chambers can't take any more.

"For two-and-a-half months we have been working nonstop with no pause for maintenance," Furmancik said. "So, this really is not an optimal situation. How long can this last? I am worried that because of this intensive use the crematories could get seriously damaged at any

moment."

The country of 10.7 million has registered 794,740 confirmed cases and 12,621 deaths. November was the deadliest month with 4,937 deceased.

Ostrava is the capital of the Moravian-Silesian Region, which, together with another region, tops the country's virus death toll with some 1,500 deaths.

Interior Minister Jan Hamacek, who heads the central crisis committee, has promised to create a system to distribute bodies to other crematoriums across the country but some have already indicated they are reaching their own limits.

"Another, tougher option, is that we'll take only the number of the deceased we are capable of cremating," Furmancik said.

Indonesian cleric who inspired extremists freed from prison

JAKARTA, INDONESIA (AP): A convicted firebrand cleric who inspired the Bali bombers and other violent extremists walked free from an Indonesian prison Friday after completing his sentence for funding the training of Islamic militants.

Police said they would continue to monitor the activities of Abu Bakar Bashir, who is now 82 and ailing, and his son said Bashir for now would be avoiding activities outside his family due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Bashir was imprisoned in 2011 for his links to a militant training camp in the religiously conservative Aceh province. He was convicted of funding the military-style camp to train Islamic militants and sentenced to 15 years in jail.

Bashir has accumulated 55 months of sentence reductions, which are often granted to prisoners on major holidays, such as Independence Day, religious holiday exemptions and illness, said Rika Aprianti, the spokesperson for the corrections department at the Justice Ministry.

"He is released as his sentence ends and expires," Aprianti said, adding that her ministry had close cooperation with the National Police's counterterrorism squad and the National Counterterrorism Agency to provide security during the cleric's release.

Bashir, wearing a white robe and mask, was escorted by members of the police anti-terrorism squad known as Densus 88 and left in a car waiting at dawn outside the Gunung Sindur prison in

West Java's Bogor town, Bashir's son, Abdul Rohim, told The Associated Press.

He said the family, lawyers and a medical team accompanied Bashir, who returned to his home in Central Java's Solo city, about 538 kilometers (334 miles) east of the capital, Jakarta. An ambulance also followed the entourage.

National Police spokesperson Ahmad Ramadhan said the police would continue to monitor Bashir's activities.

"I just want to keep my father from crowds during the coronavirus pandemic," Rohim said. "He will only rest and gather with his family until the outbreak ends, there will be no other activities of him for sure."

The slender, white-bearded Bashir,

an Indonesian of Yemeni descent, was the spiritual leader of the al-Qaida-linked Jemaah Islamiyah network behind the 2002 bombings on the tourist island of Bali that killed 202 people, mostly foreign tourists, including 88 Australians, leaving a deep scar on that country.

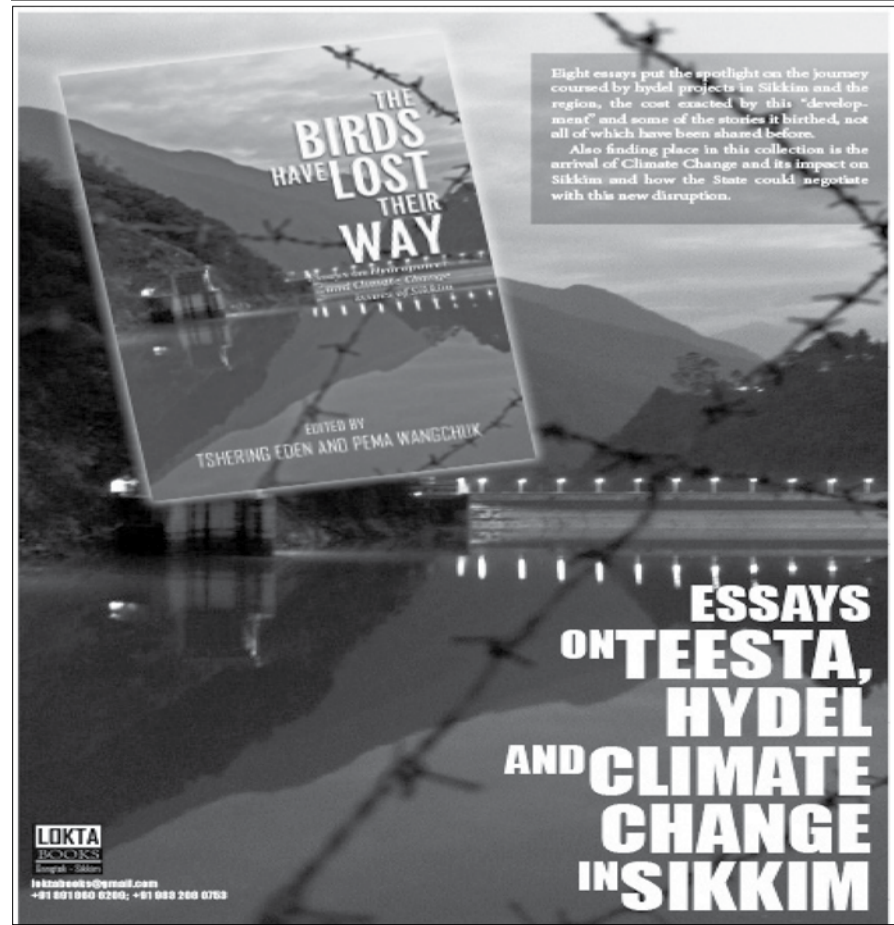
Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison described Bashir's release as "gut wrenching," and said the government had long called for tougher sentences against those behind the bombings and raised concerns with Jakarta that individuals must be prevented from inciting such behavior.

"Decisions on sentencing... as we know, are matters for the Indonesian justice system and we have to respect the decisions that they take,"

Morrison told reporters Friday.

He said that while Bashir's release was consistent with the Indonesian justice system, "That doesn't make it any easier for any Australian to accept that... ultimately, those who are responsible for the murder of Australians would now be free. It's sometimes not a fair world. And that's one of the hardest things to deal with."

Indonesian authorities had struggled to prove Bashir's involvement in the Bali bombings and fought multiple battles to uphold convictions on other charges. Prosecutors were unable to prove a string of terrorism-related allegations, a treason conviction was overturned, and a sentence for a document forgery conviction was considered light.





READY TO TALK! Television personality, Amanda Kloots made her way to work at her new hosting gig on *The Talk* in a bathrobe and slippers, and carrying her cup of coffee and iPhone in Los Angeles.

George Clooney says Capitol attack put Trump family 'into the dustbin of history'

LOS ANGELES, JAN 8 (PTI):

Hollywood star George Clooney has condemned the attack on the Capitol Hill in the US by thousands of supporters of Donald Trump saying that the president's name will now forever be associated with "insurrection".

According to The Hollywood Reporter, during an appearance on the *The Business* weekly podcast, "The Midnight Sky" star said it was "devastating" to watch the people's house being "desecrated".

"This puts Donald Trump, Donald Trump Jr. Ivanka, all of them, into the dustbin of history. That name will now forever be associated with insurrection," Clooney said.

The Trump supporters on Wednesday clashed with police at the Capitol, where members of the Congress were going through the process of counting and certifying

the Electoral College votes.

The violent attack resulted in at least four deaths and interrupting a constitutional process to affirm President-elect Joe Biden's victory in the election.

Clooney said the incident was "the straw that broke the camel's back".

"It is also a tremendous overreach in a way -- everybody kept waiting for, what's the one thing, the straw that breaks the camel's back and it just seemed like that line just kept getting moved and moved and moved and outrage didn't even matter anymore, even to the point of calling the Secretary of State in Georgia and pressuring him. None of that seemed to matter. This mattered."

The 59-year-old actor believes something hopeful will come out of this "disaster".

"If this is what it takes to set us on the right path, I think that, not that it's worth

it, it's not worth it in any shape or form, but at least we should find something hopeful to come out of some of this disaster," he said.

Prior to Clooney, Hollywood stars Chris Evans, Mark Ruffalo, James Mangold, Sacha Baron Cohen, Josh Gad, James Gunn, veteran singer Stevie Wonder, Selena Gomez and rapper Cardi B among others criticised the attack.

On Friday, Trump also condemned the violent supporters who stormed the US Capitol, saying they do not represent America, as he vowed to ensure a peaceful and smooth transition of power to President-elect Joe Biden.

"Now, Congress has certified the results a new administration will be inaugurated on January 20th. My focus now turns to ensuring a smooth, orderly and seamless transition of power, he said.

Amber Heard Responds to Claim She Failed to Donate \$7 Million Johnny Depp Divorce Settlement

Amber Heard's attorney released a statement in response to Johnny Depp's legal team's claim that the actress didn't donate the \$7 million she received as part of their divorce settlement.

Amber Heard is speaking out about Johnny Depp's legal team's claim that she hasn't donated the money from their divorce settlement to charities, as she promised she would in 2016.

According to a new report by The Daily Mail published Thursday, Jan. 7, the Pirates of the Caribbean actor's lawyers say they intend to use the allegation as part of their efforts to appeal British High Court judge Andrew Nichol's decision in Depp's defamation case against The Sun. In that case, Nichol sided with The Sun, arguing in his decision, "Her donation of the \$7 million to charity is hardly the act one would expect of a gold-digger."

In a statement to E! News, the Aquaman actress' attorney Elaine Bredehoft confirms her client has yet to fulfill the \$7 million pledge she made to Children's Hospital Los Angeles and the American Civil Liberties Union, citing financial reasons.

"Amber has already been responsible for seven figures in donations to charitable causes and intends to continue to contribute and eventually fulfill her pledge," Bredehoft explains. "However, Amber has been delayed in that goal because Mr. Depp filed a lawsuit against her, and consequently, she has been forced to spend millions of dollars defending Mr. Depp's false accusations against her."

In a statement to E! News, a Children's Hospital Los Angeles spokesperson says, "Due to circumstances of the litigation, CHLA is legally precluded from sharing details about the case publicly."

The ACLU did not return requests for comment.

Bredehoft also alleges that Depp's legal representatives are purposefully speculating about the status of Heard's donation to draw focus away from the actor's ongoing legal woes.

She claims, "Mr. Depp's effort to plant stories in the media criticizing Amber for not yet fulfilling all the donations she pledged to charity is yet another desperate attempt to divert attention from the UK Court's findings relating to allegations of Mr. Depp committing domestic abuse and violence."



Following Judge Nichol's decision, Depp was asked to exit his role as Grindelwald in the film *Fantastic Beasts*. While he's no longer starring in the Warner Bros. film, The Hollywood Reporter wrote at the time that Depp will still receive the full salary for the project.

Mads Mikkelsen is now set to apprise the role in the third installment of the movie, which is based on J.K. Rowling's books.

Meanwhile, Depp is currently suing Heard for defamation in the British High Court, arguing that the actress' allegations of domestic abuse in The Washington Post were all part of an "elaborate hoax." Because of the alleged damage her accusations caused his career, Depp is suing Heard for defamation and asking for damages in excess of \$50,000,000. Amber denied the allegations, with her attorney claiming to E! News that Depp was trying to "silence" her.

E! News reached out to Depp's rep and legal team for comment. We did not hear back.

DaBaby Arrested on Rodeo Drive for Alleged Firearm Possession

DaBaby was taken into custody for alleged firearm possession by the Beverly Hills Police Department, two months after the rapper's brother was killed.

DaBaby has found himself in hot water after being arrested on Thursday, Jan. 7.

A spokesperson with the Beverly Hills Police Department tells E! News that a security guard from the Gucci store on Rodeo Drive called authorities at around 5 p.m. after allegedly witnessing a group of men, one of which was described as having a "handgun in his waistband," walking on the famous street.

The spokesperson further shares, "Police made contact with the group after they entered a vehicle and were pre-



paring to leave the area. An investigation followed and a 9MM handgun was found in the vehicle."

DaBaby, née Jonathan Kirk, was subsequently taken into custody for alleged possession of a firearm. According to authorities, he is currently

being booked at the Beverly Hills Police Department and has not yet been charged.

The rapper was previously arrested in January 2020 for alleged battery. At the time of the incident, E! News reported the artist allegedly got into an altercation with

a club promoter after he was given \$20,000, instead of the \$30,000 promised.

According to Pitchfork, the Miami-Dade Attorney's Office dropped the battery charge in March.

At the tail end of 2020, DaBaby mourned the loss of his older brother, Glenn Johnson, who died from a gunshot wound on Nov. 3.

Following the news of Johnson's death, the musician took to social media to mourn the 34-year-old. He shared the lyrics from his song "Intro," writing on his Instagram Story, "My brother be thinkin' that we don't love him and let him struggle like we ain't family / Like I won't give up all I got to see you, n----a."

Sacha Baron Cohen says he won't return as Borat: He's locked away in cupboard

LOS ANGELES, JAN 8 (PTI): Actor Sacha Baron Cohen has said that he won't be returning to play his fan-favourite role of Borat in future movies.

Cohen first portrayed Borat Sagdiyev, a gangly, gray-suited journalist working for Kazakhstan's state-run TV network, in the 2006 movie "Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan".

He recently came out with its sequel "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm", which was released on streamer Amazon Prime Video ahead of the US presidential election in November.

During a profile interview with Variety, Cohen said he made "Borat 2" be-



cause he "felt democracy was in peril" due to Donald Trump's presidency.

"I felt democracy was in peril, I felt people's lives were in peril and I felt compelled to finish the movie. The movie was originally about the danger of Trump and Trumpism.

"What coronavirus demonstrated was that there's a lethal effect to his spreading of lies and conspiracy theories. I don't want to egotistically imply that people would watch Borat and not vote for Trump, but that was the aim," Cohen said.

With Joe Biden set to become the next US President after he won 306 Electoral College votes against Trump, who only managed 232, Cohen said it is time for him to say goodbye to Borat.

"I brought Borat out because of Trump. There was a purpose to this movie, and I don't really see the purpose to doing it again. So yeah, he's locked away in the cupboard," the actor said.

ARIES:

Aries, you're the wise one of the tribe. The one who's been there, done that, and seen it all. When those around you act from a space of limitations, it has nothing to do with you. So, forgive, forget, and let go. As you do, release the expectation that they will meet you where you are. Only direct experience can teach them what they need to know.

TAURUS:

Statutory warning, Taurus: you're going to be uncomfortable. Very, very uncomfortable. Overwhelmed by the feeling that the rug has been pulled out from underneath your feet. Here's the thing, though: the Universe is benevolent in many ways. There is a higher reason why you are being pushed out of your comfort zone. Accept this challenge for what it is, and trust that you will experience immense spiritual growth.

GEMINI:

How do you feel about giving, versus receiving? Do you maintain a mental balance sheet to see if others are looking out for you in the same way you are looking out for them? The truth is, they're in a different place in their lives. Fending for themselves could be a challenge at this point. So, don't hesitate to extend yourself a little bit and provide for them from your surplus. They may or may not

be able to return the favour when you're in need. But the Universe certainly will.

CANCER:

There was a time when minor disturbances in your path would throw you off and make you question your choices. But, you're in a different place in your life now. A place where you are understanding the true meaning of the word 'surrender'. You know that nothing is inherently good or bad. It simply is. Accepting the soul lesson and remembering that Spirit has a plan will help you get through this.

LEO:

The same mind which is known to come up with the most brilliant ideas is also known to worry incessantly and become the source of stress and anxiety. You know what they say, Leo! It all comes down to whether you want to use your energy creatively or destructively. What are the choices you will make today? Will you stay in your centre or let the trials and tribulations of the outside world throw you off? PS: Something tells us a breakthrough is on the cards for you today.

VIRGO:

You are where you are for a reason, Virgo. It's not just you who has chosen the path. The path has chosen you too. So, respect and honour

what you have in this moment and consciously build towards the life you envision for yourself. Both your wants and your needs will be taken care of. We repeat: both your wants and your needs will be taken care of. The Universe is abundant in every way. Remember this now and for the rest of your life.

LIBRA:

There was a time when you allowed others to make decisions for you, or influence how you felt about yourself, or the path that you were walking on. But, the truth is, you were always being guided by your higher self. Even the so-called deviations were a part of your sacred purpose. Friday sees you taking ownership for where you are, and all of the past experiences that helped you get to this point in your existence. From now on, the only compass you will be relying on is the one that exists within yourself.

SCORPIO:

The truth isn't always easy to tell. You know what's harder, though? To continue living a lie. The new year sees you breaking past your own inhibitions, seeing the world as it is, and standing in your truth unapologetically. Is there a conversation you have been avoiding for a

while now? You know what you need to set time aside for today. Remember, the other party may or may not be in agreement with you. They may not even want to look at things from your perspective. Free yourself from worrying about the outcome of the situation.

SAGITTARIUS:

You've been doing things in a certain way and that's been working for you. But, does that mean that's the only way to do things around here? Truth bomb alert: You are limiting yourself, Sagittarius. There is a wealth of knowledge within you, along with gifts that you haven't discovered yet. Today, set some time aside for soul-searching. Take a moment to remember the things that captivated your interest as a child. It's never too late to retreat into wonderland. PS: There are hidden treasures that are waiting to catch your attention.

CAPRICORN:

You're in the strange and beautiful place where an old cycle has completed itself, but the new hasn't begun yet. There's a voice in your head that's urging you to take a breather. Then there's another that's telling you that time is running out, and that you ought to act soon. Take a moment. Centre yourself. As you do, let go of unrealistic expectations. This will help you realise you are

where you need to be, and that refueling your reserves is what will ultimately help you fulfill the goals you have set for yourself.

AQUARIUS:

There comes a point in every journey where you can continue to do what you have been for so long, or you can take a great risk, invest in something close to your heart, and find a way to manage it alongside your day job. There's a pet project that's vying for your attention, Aquarius. So, organise your day in a way that you have enough time for both. Decluttering your schedule and eliminating that which is unnecessary will help you with this goal. PS: The time to set the ball rolling is now.

PISCES:

There comes a point in every relationship where you have the option to dive deeper, or continue to swim closer to the surface. Which way will you go, Pisces? Will you let your fears and insecurities get in the way of the life you deserve, or choose unconditional love over everything else? If the cosmic cues are anything to go by, you will finally find the courage to cross an emotional threshold within yourself. Remember, no experience that's truly worth living comes without a risk.