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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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India records lowest daily incidence in eight months

NEW DELHI, FEB 2 (PTI):

India registered 8,635 new coronavirus infections in a day, the lowest in eight months, while the daily deaths fell below 100 after almost nine months, according to Union health ministry data updated on Tuesday. The country's COVID-19 tally stands at 1,07,66,245 and the death toll increased to 1,54,486 with 94 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,04,48,406 pushing the national recovery rate to 97.05 per cent, while the COVID-19 case fatality rate has dropped to 1.43 per cent.

The COVID-19 active caseload remained below two lakh for the 14th consecutive day.

There are 1,63,353 active coronavirus infections in the country which comprise 1.52 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

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

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research, 19,77,52,057 samples have been tested up to February 1 with 6,59,422 samples being tested on Monday.

The 94 new fatalities include 27 from Maharashtra, 17 from Kerala, seven from Tamil Nadu, six from West Bengal, five from Chhattisgarh, four each from Uttarakhand, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, and three each from Delhi, Karnataka and Puducherry.

CM inaugurates multi-purpose community center at Pani House

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN FIRST WEEK OF APRIL: CM

AARON RAI

GANGTOK, 02 FEB:

Chief Minister PS Tamang inaugurated the multi-purpose community center at Pani House in Gangtok today. The center has been constructed on an area measuring 76,040 square meters at a cost of Rs 2.1 crore. Under construction since 2014, the centre was finally completed on 18 September 2020.

The CM was present as the chief guest at the inauguration ceremony of the multi-purpose community building constructed at Pani house under Upper Tadong area. Urban Development Minister, Arun Upreti was the special guest along with Area MLA, GT Dhungel, Political Secretary to the Chief Minister, Jacob Khaling and heads of various departments.

The CM, in his address, thanked and congratulated the concerned department

and Shiva Gram Seva Samiti. He said that the work done by the committee was exemplary and other societies should learn from it.

He said that participation of the people is essential for the development of society and this community building is for the entire population of Gangtok.

The Chief Minister said that relief materials were distributed to 132,000 families during the pandemic, Rs 30,000 to patients taken for outpatient treatment, Rs 5,000 to students and Rs 5,000 to drivers.

Stating that the present government is making excellent progress in the field of health, he said that now there is no need to go outside the state for treatment of complex diseases related to kidney and heart.

He accused the previous government of distributing cookers and water filters only



in urban areas and said that the current government has done the same in rural areas as well. He added that houses will soon be built for the poor living in urban areas.

Till now only those who have COI were getting basic facilities of the government but now those who have voter card will also be provided cash for treatment and other

facilities, said the CM.

The Chief Minister also informed that the municipal elections will be held in the first week of April this year.

He congratulated Sikkim

Police for being one of the best police departments in the country.

Area MLA, GT Dhungel said that the present government has made a great contribution by constructing community buildings. He claimed that development takes time but development is taking place not only in his constituency but in every constituency of Sikkim.

Shiva Gram Seva Samiti president, CS Rai said that their organization has been contributing to the society since 1985.

The association honored Gangaram Sapkota, Deepa Tamang, Prashant Tamang and Nalini Gupta Pradhan for their contribution in the construction of the building.

The program, organized by Shiva Gram Seva Samiti under the joint auspices of Urban Development Department, was conducted by Bharat Pradhan.

Cylothon and Plog-Run in Namchi



BIKASH CHHETRI

NAMCHI, 02 FEB:

Namchi Municipal Council, as part of its engagements under the Fit India Movement, organized a Cylothon and a Plog-Run at Namchi Central Park Tuesday morning.

The two programmes, which went on for around two hours, had Additional District Collector Satyan Pradhan as chief guest and served the dual purpose of promoting fitness and cleanliness.

The Cylothon had ten participants from in and around Namchi and covered a distance of 4 KMs from Central Park to View Point on Bhanjyang Road and back.

Sabitri Rai, the only female participant in the cylothon, came first and received a strong applause at Central Park when she cycled back. She covered the distance in 20 minutes.

For the Plog, 15 participants, **turn to pg02**

Over 56% in Delhi have antibodies against Coronavirus: 5th Sero Survey

NEW DELHI, 02 FEB

[NDTV]: More than half of the residents in Delhi have been exposed to the coronavirus and developed antibodies for the infection, the fifth serological survey in the capital has found, the government said on Tuesday. The data suggested that the city is inching towards herd immunity but people not let their guard down, Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain said.

"In the fifth sero survey done in the national capital of Delhi, antibodies have been detected in 56.13 per cent of the population. This was the largest survey in any state involving around 28,000 samples.

Delhi has largely won over COVID-19, though we should continue to practice Covid-appropriate behaviour," Mr Jain said.

The city's north district had the lowest seroprevalence - the number of people found with antibodies - at 49 per cent. The southeast district had the highest at 62.18 per cent.

"The last survey found 25-26 per cent seroprevalence. This means Delhi is inching towards herd immunity. Cases are also declining at less than 200 per day and low positivity rates. But I would appeal not let your guard down. Keep your masks on," the minister said.

Daily cases remain in single-digits for Sikkim while 481 more receive CoviShield shots

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 02 FEB:

Five persons were reported positive for COVID-19 in Sikkim in the last 24 hours ending 8 AM Tuesday, taking the state's tally of confirmed cases reported so far to 6,096.

On the other hand, two more persons recovered yesterday to further improve the number of recovered cases in Sikkim to 5,781. There are currently 85 active cases of novel coronavirus in the State.

In his daily health bulletin on Tuesday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia, informed that the five cases were detected from the testing of 250 samples on Monday. All the positive cases were picked up in RT-PCR testing of 208 samples, while all

31 samples put through rapid antigen testing and 11 tested TrueNat returned negative for COVID-19.

The new cases reported from East District include an army personnel from Libing, one from Daragaon, Tadong and one from Upper Dalapchand near Lamphokri, Aritar.

Meanwhile, a 26-year-old male, who had given his address as Dethang during testing, and a 41-year-old male, who had given his address as Club Mahindra, remain untraceable over their phone numbers. They have been requested to immediately contact the concerned authorities.

Mr Bhutia also informed that a total of 481 health workers and private practitioners in the State were vaccinated for COVID-19 on Tuesday.

Today-Zorbas in finals of CM's Gold Cup Archery



SAGAR CHHETRI

GANGTOK, 02 FEB:

Today-Zorbas [Kalimpong] secured a place in the finals of the 19th Chief Minister's Gold Cup Archery Tournament [Compound Bow] out-shooting Pemayangtse Dapen 38 to 25 here at the Archery Shooting Range at Tenzing Namgyal Memorial Ground, Tathangchen.

The second semi-final match of the tournament will be played between TAC [Namchi] and Sichey Mavericks on Wednesday.

The final match of the

tournament is scheduled for 06 February.

The tournament carries a cash prize of Rs 2 lakh for the winners and Rs 1 lakh for runners-up and is organized by the Sikkim Archery Association [SAA].

SAA publicity secretary, Karma Denzongpa, informed today that the 19th edition of this prestigious tournament had begun on 23 February 2020 with 23 teams, including seven from Bhutan, two from West Bengal and 14 from Sikkim, but the association had to stop the tourna-

ment on 07 March due to COVID pandemic and the ensuing lockdown.

He added that after consulting with the concerned authorities and by following all COVID protocols, the association resumed the tournament on 23 January.

He informed the four teams from Bhutan had already reached the next round of the tournament but since they were unable to come for the tournament, the association redrew the fixture to resume the tournament with 14 teams.

Dalai Lama's words of wisdom amid pandemic

NEW DELHI, FEB 2 (PTI): Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama shares quotes and words of wisdom to deal with the new realities of the panic-stricken world along with how to combat rising extremism, polarity and climate change besides his views on Tibet in his new book. "The Little Book of Encouragement", which has 130 quotes, is edited by Renuka Singh and published by Penguin Random House.

The Dalai Lama says as one among the more than seven billion human beings alive today, he has made a commitment to promoting human happiness.

"We tend to think that happiness comes from money and power, without acknowledging the role of the mind or that the key to happiness is inner peace. We all want to live a happy life and to do so is our right.

"What we need to do is to cultivate inner values such as warm-heartedness and compassion. I am very happy to have had this opportunity to share some of my thoughts and experiences with readers," he says about the book. He asks readers to

discuss these thoughts with friends and, if possible, put them into practice in day-to-day life. On the pandemic, the Dalai Lama writes, "In this time of serious crisis, we face threats to our health, and feel sadness for the family and friends we have lost. Economic disruption is posing a major challenge to governments and undermining the ability of so many people to make a living.

"The crisis and its consequences serve as a warning-only by coming together in a coordinated global response, will we meet the unprecedented magnitude of the challenges we face. I pray we all heed the call to unite."

He also terms climate change and global warming as another very serious issue.

"Today, the pandemic is one threat we face. Another very serious issue is that of climate change and global warming. Scientists have predicted that if we don't act to stop it now, in the coming decades, water sources like rivers and lakes, may dry up. An additional problem that needs to be addressed is that of the growing gap between the rich and the poor. Tackling

these difficult circumstances will require that we work together," he says. He praises India's rich civilisational heritage, saying it is "rooted in the long-standing traditions of karuna and ahimsa: compassion and non-violence. I believe India is the only country with the potential to combine its ancient knowledge with its modern education. We must, therefore, endeavour to integrate India's ancient wisdom with contemporary approaches to schooling, with the aim of promoting positive human values".

On Sino-India ties, he writes, "India and China have developed a sense of competition in recent times. Both countries have populations of over a billion. Both of them are powerful nations, yet neither can destroy the other; so, they have to live side-by-side."

On the Tibet issue, he writes, "I always tell Tibetans: it is much better to consider the Chinese as our brothers and sisters than to think of them as our enemy - no use in that. For the time being, there is a problem with our Chinese neighbours, but only

turn to pg02

Kerala's first human milk bank to be opened on Feb 5

KOCHI, FEB 2 (PTI): Kerala's first Human Milk Bank (HMB), a state-of-art facility will be opened at the Ernakulam general hospital here on Friday by Health Minister KK Shailaja.

Set up with the support of the Rotary Club of Cochin Global, the milk bank is to ensure breast milk for new born babies, who are not being breast-fed by their own mothers who may be sick, deceased or due to insufficient production of breast milk, in the hospital.

Although approximately 3600 babies are born in the general hospital a year, 600 to 1,000 sick babies are admitted into the NICU.

"Providing the low birth-weight premature babies, infants whose mothers are unable to provide sufficient milk and babies separated from mothers due to many reasons with the pasteurized breast milk from the bank will reduce the risk of infections and boost their immunity," said Dr Paul PG of Rotary Cochin Global.

Though the concept had come to India 32 years back, Kerala did not have a milk bank till now.

This is where Rotary took the lead to bring the project to the state with two such breast milk banks - one at Ernakulam and the other at Jubilee Medical Mission Hospital at Thrissur.

All safety protocols and procedures for collecting, preserving and providing it to needy children will be ensured as per government guidelines.

The collected milk can be stored up to 6 months safely in the bank, if needed, before it is given to an infant.

In the beginning, the milk will be provided free of cost to only the babies admitted in the neonatal intensive care unit of the hospital.

Later on, a network of hospitals for multiple collection and safe distribution points will be planned.

The donors will be the mothers from the hospital who have delivered babies there and will have all their health statistics available at the hospital.

"The mothers with excess milk will be encouraged to participate in the noble cause to save the life of other new born babies," he said.

The human milk bank, which consists of a pasteurization unit, refrigerators, deep freezers, RO plant, sterilizing equipment and computers, was set up at a cost of Rs 35 lakh.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the state health department and Rotary Club of Cochin Global last year for setting up the bank.

However, the project got delayed following the outbreak of COVID-19.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) together with the Indian Association of Pediatricians (IAP) has provided a trained nursing staff for operating the milk bank at the General Hospital.

SKM sports wing announces West District Inter-Constituency U-17 athletic meet

**SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 02 FEB:**

The West district sports wing of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha today announced plans to organize the 1st West District Inter-Constituency U-17 boys' and girls' Athletic Meet 2021 from 10 to 14 February at Sreebadam, West District.

The five-day meet will also include the 1st West District Inter-Constituency Men's and Women's Volleyball Tournament. The SKM sports wing is organizing the event in collaboration with the Department of Sports & Youth Affairs, it is informed.

Addressing a press conference here today, SKM sports wing state president, Rinzing Wangyal Chopel stated that the main objective of the event was to spot raw and budding talent from remote corners of West



District and then provide their state and national level exposure by polishing their talents.

He stressed that the West District was full of sporting talent but lacked events to test their mettle and compete among their peers. Reaching sporting activities in rural parts of the State, he said, was another

motivation behind the sports meet.

Mr Chopel said that the SKM sports wing has been working to nurture a sporting environment in the State by engaging youth such activities.

"We have plans to organize such events in other districts as well in the near future and then organize a state-level

event. The competition will also have a selection committee to spot talent and then take them to the national-level by providing them coaching and training," he said.

Speaking on the upcoming event, SKM sports wing convener [west district], Sanjay Subba mentioned that the athletic meet will

have 12 events.

He mentioned that members of the party's sports wing at different constituencies in West District have already been working to ensure the participation of every talented sportsperson from their respective areas.

He added that the registration process will begin 07 February.

BJP-Sikkim welcomes General Budget as 'historic'

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 02 FEB:**

Bharatiya Janata Party's Sikkim president, DB Chauhan, congratulated Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and the Centre for presenting what he held up as a "historic and reformist" General Budget for the year 2021-22.

Mr Chauhan is convinced that the budget

will deliver overall development for every section of the society and lead the country towards self-reliance.

A BJP press release contends that the budget has taken note of the interests of every citizen and strived to uplift the economic condition of the country, which has been severely affected by COVID.

Holi Cup Football Tournament's poster released



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 02 FEB:**

The poster of Holi Cup Football Tournament was released today in a program held at Gangtok. The tournament is being organized by Pintos Bhutia and team from Tumin Lingee, a press release informs.

Pintso Bhutia informed that the tournament shall be organized

at Rangpo Bazaar playground from 01 March and the finals will be held on 28 March.

The winners and runners up of the tournament will be awarded with cash prize of Rs 3 lakh and Rs 2 lakh along with trophies. Registration will be open till 24 Feb, 2021. Only players from India, Bhutan and Nepal are allowed to register.

Over 160 doctors, 107 nurses lost lives due to Covid in India

NEW DELHI, 02 FEB (PTI): COVID-19 has so far claimed the lives of 162 doctors, 107 nurses and 44 ASHA workers in the country, Rajya Sabha was told on Tuesday. The figures are based on the intimations received from the states till January 22.

This was stated by Minister of State for Health Ashwini Kumar Choubey in the House in response to a question on the number of healthcare staff, including doctors, nurses and ASHA workers who have been affected died due to COVID-19.

On whether the data presented by the Indian Medical Association regarding the number of healthcare workers who have died due to COVID-19 has been taken note of by the Ministry and any follow up verification of the

same done, Mr Choubey said the process of insurance disbursement has been de-centralized under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKP: Insurance Scheme).

Accordingly, the verification of a person affected and died to COVID-19 vests with state governments/ Central government authorities concerned. The necessary certification for claims is done by healthcare Institution, organization or office where the person was worked/engaged by the institution.

They submit the documents to the competent authority for state and UT, or the competent authority for Central Government, Central Autonomous /PSU hospitals, AIIMS, INIs and hospitals of other central ministries, as the case may be.

Nails on roads, no internet; "attacks" by govt, allege farmers

NEW DELHI, 02 FEB [NDTV]: Multiple barricades and barbed wire fences have been put up at the protest sites near Delhi's borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh as farmers continue their sit-in against the three contentious agricultural laws. Digging of trenches and nails on roads, and temporary internet suspension are part of "attacks" being organised by the government, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of farmer groups, has said.

Security has been stepped at the three protest epicentres - Singhu, Ghazipur and Tikri - nearly a week after the city saw unprecedented violence as farmers took out a massive tractor rally on Republic Day. "India was saddened by insult to tricolour on Republic Day," Prime Min-

ister Narendra Modi said on Sunday in his monthly radio address.

Protesters at Singhu near Delhi-Haryana border have alleged water shortage amid heightened security, and what they define as "extreme" measures. The agitation-hit area has been divided into five zones where vehicular movement is blocked.

Water tankers are not able to reach the sites of demonstration, farmers have claimed. Protesters, who have been camping on the outskirts of the national capital since late November, say they don't have water to prepare the traditional community meals - Langars - and even for everyday chores like bathing and cleaning. Frequent power cuts have added to the difficulties, they say.

Dalai Lama's words...

with a few individuals in the Communist Party. A number of Chinese leaders now realise that their 70-year-old policy regarding Tibet is unrealistic.

There was too much emphasis on the use of force then, he says, adding "So now they are in a dilemma: how to deal with the Tibetan problem? Things seem to be changing."

The Dalai Lama further writes, "It is my vision to make my home country, Tibet, into the world's largest nature preserve. Following the ancient Tibetan Buddhist tradition, Tibet must and can become a demilitarised sanctuary of peace and nature."

He says he has the karmic relationship to be in the role of the Dalai Lama and is at home with it.

"You may consider that, under the circumstances, I am very lucky. However, behind the word 'luck', there are actual causes or reasons. There is the karmic force of my ability to assume this role as well as the force of my wish to do so. Part of my daily prayer is this: 'As long as space exists, and as long as there are migrators in cyclic existence, may I remain to remove their sufferings'."

He goes on to say that his death may well mark the "end of the great tradition of Dalai Lamas"; the word means 'great leader' in Tibetan.

"It may end with this great Lama. The Himalayan Buddhists of Tibet and Mongolia will decide what happens next. They will determine whether the 14th Dalai Lama has been reincarnated in another tulku.

"What my followers decide is not an issue for me; I have no interest. My only hope is that when my last days come, I will still have my good name and will feel that I have made some contribution to humanity."

According to Singh, though the spread of COVID-19 has given rise to uncertainties, unknown fears, anxieties, loneliness, and depression, nevertheless, it is an opportune moment to explore one's interiority.

"The Dalai Lama rightly points to our 'emotional hygiene' that helps the mind and heart to gain inner strength, peace, clarity, and happiness... His Holiness has always advocated the principle of interdependence and maintained that we are deeply connected by our humanness which unites us all," she says.

Premanka Goswami, editor at Penguin Press, feels these words of the Dalai Lama "wrapped in love, compassion and encouragement have the power to infuse fresh energy in the disease-stricken world".

Cylothon and Plog...

all staff members of Namchi Municipal Council, covered Jorethang Road, moved uphill to Gandhi Park, downhill of Namchi District Hospital, Namchi DAC Road and back to Central Park Namchi.

They carried degradable plastic bags and a pair of degradable plastic gloves and cleared solid and dry garbage found littered along the route.

All the participants, of both the cyclothon and the plog run, were feted with khadas and certificates for their spirit.

AKRS meets to discuss Rodung Khim reconstruction project

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 02 FEB:**

The West district committee of All Kirat Rai Sangh met today at the Rodung Khim at Baiguney and received a briefing on reconstructing the Rodung Khim on traditional Rai model from architect Sachin Dewan.

The meeting, chaired AKRS advisor, PM Chamling, was also attended by central committee members, district committee officer bearers, block chairpersons and Rodung Khim Management and Development Committee chairperson, RK Waling.

Mr Dewan, accompanied by engineers Niraj Rai and Amrit Rai, gave a detailed presentation on the project report and



draft prepared for the proposed reconstructing of Rodung Khim.

Once this project is unanimously approved, the Committee members plan to meet the Chief Minister and submit a petition seeking necessary funds, a press release informs.

The meeting opened with a welcome address by PD Rai, a member of the Central Committee, while Mr RK Waling,

highlighted the main agenda of the meeting.

The meeting also resolved the district and central committee executive members visit all blocks by 01 March for reformation of the block committees.

Meanwhile, all block committees were directed to collect details of enrolment of Rai students in their respective blocks and submit to the district committee.

Swadeshi Jagran Manch Sikkim hails budget 2021 as progressive

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 02 FEB:**

Sikkim State Convenor, Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJMS), Shrish Khare, has hailed budget 2021 as progressive while SJM National Co-Convenor, Dr Ashwani Mahajan has congratulated the Finance Minister for presenting a budget which will help revive the economy.

As per a press release, Mr Khare has said that despite a Fiscal Deficit of 6.8 percent next year, the country will be able to not only have high growth of GDP, but also bring back employment opportunities, hampered during pandemic last year and killed in the last two decades due to onslaught of Chinese imports.

"SJMS has been appreciative of the government for its enhanced and judicious spending for the survival of the people who lost their jobs or faced income losses, by providing free food and other essential steps for their livelihood, to bring the economy back on track, both in rural and urban areas,"

the release adds.

SJM has further said that allocation of more funds for infrastructure, the announcement of new infrastructure projects, the efforts for the revival of industries closed due to Chinese imports, an unprecedented increase of 137% in spending on health, the allocation of additional funds for research and development (R&D) are all welcome measures.

"Despite being a developing country, the way in which India has dealt with pandemic is exemplary. It's hoped that we shall be equally successful in bringing the economy back to growth trajectory soon," the release adds.



Royal Enfield Launches 'Build Your Own Legend' Custom Campaign

PREETAM BORA

NEW DELHI, 02 FEB [NDTV]: Royal Enfield has launched the brand's first ever motorcycle customisation campaign, calling it 'Build Your Own Legend'. Under the initiative, Royal Enfield is inviting motorcycle enthusiasts to submit their designs for a custom motorcycle based on the Meteor 350.

The contest is aimed at providing a platform to encourage the community to express themselves freely, follow their passion for riding and take a step ahead in their journey of self-exploration. Those interested in participating in the contest can register on the Royal Enfield official website.

Speaking about the

Custom Program at Royal Enfield and the Build Your Own Legend initiative, Shubhranshu Singh, Global Head - Marketing at Royal Enfield said, "The Royal Enfield Custom Program is an endeavour to nurture the spirit of self-expression and customisation among consumers and to promote and grow the global custom motorcycle ecosystem. Over the past few years, the Royal Enfield Custom Program has designed and built some noteworthy machines including the Bonneville Racer, SG 411, and the Midas Royal. Not only have these builds demonstrated the capability of Royal Enfield motorcycles and strengthened the custom ecosystem across the globe, but they

have also initiated scores of enthusiasts into the world of customization. With this initiative, the custom program on the newly launched Meteor 350, we will further fuel this spirit and encourage enthusiasts to create a unique custom render of our easy cruiser."

Talking about the Build Your Own Legend initiative, Adrian Sellers Head - Custom Program Royal Enfield said, "Build Your Own Legend' is a unique creative platform that draws inspiration from the customers of the next generation and their growing need for self-exploration. The campaign is aimed at giving the riding community an opportunity to express their love for the machines and we

look forward to enabling motorcycling enthusiasts with a perfect opportunity to bring alive their ideas and dreams in form of self-expression via motorcycle customisation."

Those interested in participating in the Build Your Own Legend contest can register on the Royal Enfield official website, and send their entries in the form of a sketch or design render with a small description of their idea. Three concepts will be shortlisted across three separate jury panels including RE Choice, Pro Judges Choice and Public Choice. All the entries need to be submitted by March 14, 2021.

The top 3 unique designs will be shortlisted and winners will

get a chance to visit the Royal Enfield India Tech Centre. During this period, winners will work closely with the Industrial Design Team at the Royal Enfield India Tech Centre, Chennai, who will help them refine the motorcycle design to make it buildable. After refining the designs, each winner will be teamed up with a custom motorcycle builder based in India and the design will be then brought to life in a span of a few months.

To judge the concept and design of the motorcycle, will be Wes Reyneke, Senior Editor at Bike Exif, Roland Sands from Roland Sands Design, Vijay Singh of Rajputana Customs and Pablo Chatterji, Executive Editor, Motoring World.

Sanskar Bharati Sikkim unveils calendar of events for 2021



SAGAR CHHETRI GANGTOK, 02 FEB:

Sanskar Bharati, Sikkim Chapter has prepared the annual calendar of events for the year 2021. The series of events is scheduled to start with Basanta Panchami and Saraswati Puja on 16 February here at Thakurbari.

Sanskar Bharati is an organization founded in 1981 at Lucknow mainly to promote indigenous arts, culture and literature of different communities of the country. The Sikkim chapter of the organization was started on 20 August 2005 at Gangtok.

While giving details of the annual calendar, Sanskar Bharati, Sikkim president, Kiran Rasaily mentioned that the organization was unable to organize any events last year due to COVID-19 pandemic. However, he added that the organization has come forward with various

events in arts, culture and literature.

Mr Rasaily mentioned that another important event of Sikkim chapter would be the celebration of Baisakhi Festival from 14 to 17 April with exhibition of photographs and the event will also have a slide show by Kirit Rindani on 'Himalayas' and on 'Cities' by RK Gupta from Delhi at Gangtok.

This will be followed by another event, 'Ramayan Mahabharat Poorvottar Sambandh' with workshop, seminar and a talk by Dr Swarna Anil on 'Dwaapar Yug Aur Poorvottar' from 15 to 19 May at Gangtok, he added.

On the occasion of World Music Day and International Yoga Day, Sanskar Bharati Sikkim chapter is organising an open event, 'Sugam Sangeet Utsav and Pratiyogira' on modern songs from films based on Indian Classical Ragas from 21 to 24 June at Gangtok and towns in other districts.

Mr Rasaily mentioned that the organisation would also organise workshop and exhibitions on painting under the event 'Mahan Bharat Ko Sundar Sikkim' Part-II from 27 to 31 December.

Sanskar Bharati Sikkim chapter working president, Mitralal Sharma mentioned that Sanskar Bharati has been working to preserve culture and identity of communities of the country.

Likewise, Sikkim chapter general secretary, Rudra Nepal mentioned that apart from conducting activities in the State, the organization was also sending state teams to participate in activities of Sanskar Bharati in different parts of the country. He added that the organization has been working to provide a wider platform to talented children and youth of the state mainly to preserve culture and identity of different communities.

IHCAE to organize State Level Sport Climbing Competition

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 02 FEB:

Indian Himalayan Centre for Adventure and Ecotourism [IHCAE], Chemchey, South Sikkim is organizing a State Level Sport Climbing Competition for both boys and girls on 21 and 22 Feb 2021. The competition is being organized to encourage youngster in adven-

ture sports, a press release informs.

The competition will be for Lead and Speed in the categories of Sub-Junior [upto 13 years], Junior [14-16 years] and Open [17 years and above].

Interested can download the form from the website www.ihcaesikkim.org and register before 4 pm of 15 Feb 2021.

Sports Deptt meets to prep for Feb events



SUMMIT REPORT NAMCHI, 02 FEB:

A coordination meeting to discuss upcoming events of the Sports & Youth Affairs Department, South District, was convened in the office of the Deputy Director here Tuesday afternoon.

The first event of the Department is coming up on 09 Feb - a Sports Talent Hunt to be organized in all eight blocks of South Sikkim pegged on the theme, "Peace & Development." Five boys and five girls in the 7 to 12 age-group who dis-

play promising sporting talent will be selected to then participate in the district-level sports talent hunt to be held at Namchi Indoor Stadium on 15 Feb.

The next event will be under the Khelo India initiative the 1st Inter-School Olympic Games 2020-21, which too will be organized in all eight blocks of the district later this month over three days from 18-22 February in eight disciplines.

Competition will be held in team and combative sports for the young

aged between 14 to 17 years. This too will then progress to district, state and national level competitions.

The documentation of all the sports events to be organized at the blocks will be judiciously collected, Deputy Director Tshering Ongmu Bhutia informed the block level sports administration heads present at the meeting.

The meeting was also attended by Additional Director Basant Pradhan, and department heads from all eight divisional blocks of the district.

No blood banks in 63 districts of country

NEW DELHI, FEB 2 (PTI): Sixty-three districts in the country are without blood banks as per reports received till September, 2020, Rajya Sabha was informed on Tuesday.

Responding to a question on whether the government has taken any steps or will take steps to ensure that all districts in the country have at least one blood bank, Minister of State for Health Ashwini Choubey said public health, being a state subject, it is the primary responsibility of state governments to ensure the establishment of blood banks as per their need.

However, support is provided to states and UTs to strengthen their healthcare system including strengthening existing blood banks/establishing new blood banks based on proposals submitted by the states through the National Health Mission, Choubey said in a written reply.

The 63 districts include 14 from Arunachal Pradesh, 5 each from Assam and Bihar, 12 from Manipur, 7 from Meghalaya, and 9 from Nagaland.

The National Blood Transfusion Council, MOHFW has formulated the blood bank policy



according to which there should be at least one blood bank per district, Choubey said.

Adequate infrastructure required for establishing a blood bank is laid down in the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Rules there under, compliance to which is mandatory to obtain a license to run a blood bank.

There are 3321 licensed blood banks in the country which collected 1.27 crore blood units in 2019-20.

On whether there has been reports of shortage of blood in those banks currently functional in the country, Choubey said, "No such instances have been reported regarding shortage of blood supply."

Some of the measures to ensure 24x7 availability of blood in blood centres include promoting

voluntary blood donation through state Blood Transfusion Councils set up in each state and union territory in coordination with non-governmental organizations, Indian Red Cross, Rotary Lions Club and other Civil Society Organization.

The blood banks are mandated to update the daily stock position of blood and blood products according to blood groups in eRaktKosh portal.

They are permitted to transfer blood and blood components between licensed blood bank and blood storage centers to ensure timely supply of blood to patients.

To ensure equitable availability of blood units in the country, the states have been supported with the blood collection and transportation vans with dedicated human resources, Choubey said.

Gold declines Rs 480; silver tumbles Rs 3,097

NEW DELHI, FEB 2 (PTI): Gold in the national capital declined by Rs 480 to Rs 47,702 per 10 gram on Tuesday in-line with fall in global precious metal prices, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the metal had closed at Rs 48,182 per 10 gram.

Silver also tumbled Rs 3,097 to Rs 70,122 per kilogram from Rs 73,219 per kilogram in the previous trade.

In the international market, gold traded lower at USD 1,847 per ounce and silver also dipped to USD 27.50

per ounce.

"Gold prices declined on lack of progress over the US stimulus package and in absence of fresh triggers. Traders and investors also rushed to book some profits," according to HDFC Securities, Senior Analyst (Commodities), Tapan Patel.

Navneet Damani, VP - Commodities Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services said, investors are witnessing some profit-booking from the highs, after yesterday's Union Budget's duty cut announcement.

Keyshawn Davis skips Olympics, sets pro boxing debut Feb. 27



WASHINGTON, FEB 2 (AP): Former US Olympic hopeful Keyshawn Davis will make his professional debut on the undercard of Saul "Canelo" Alvarez's next bout Feb. 27 in Florida Matchroom Boxing announced Davis' debut date Monday night. His opponent hasn't been selected.

Davis is turning pro instead of waiting for the chance to fight for an Olympic medal later this year in Tokyo, where the lightweight likely would have been the most likely candidate to end a 17-year gold medal drought for the US men's team.

Davis initially vowed to wait at the start of the coronavirus pandemic, but changed his mind in recent months as the Olympics' future grew more tenuous.

Olympic organizers have vowed the games

will go on despite mounting concerns about safety. Davis who will turn 22 the day after his pro debut, is a former Golden Gloves champion and a World Championships silver medalist. He will fight at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens before Alvarez's mandatory title defense against Avni Yildirim.

"Keyshawn is one of the hottest young fighters in the States and is bound to be a big hit in the pro ranks," Matchroom promoter Eddie Hearn said.

USA Boxing formally removed Davis from the Olympic qualification team last week, saying he had violated selection procedures. Bay Area fighter Charlie Sheehy will take Davis' place at 63 kg (139 pounds) in an attempt to qualify for Tokyo later this year.

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Focus Will Not be Wasted on the Youth

Sikkim has a very young population – inform them better so that they care

Over fifty per cent of Sikkim's population is in the most productive age-group of 10 to 35 years. Despite more than half of Sikkim made up of the young, there does not appear to be much youthful exuberance in the State. Disenchantment, pessimism and opportunism are behavioural traits that one normally associates with those who have been around for slightly more time than the under-35 that we are speaking of here.

Agreed, 10 to 35 is a very wide spectrum for an age-group, but we take it here because this is the span during which people are learning or have begun putting their learning to use. After this, they start stagnating if the younger years have not instilled them with a passion to get excited. Take a look around, at the community level, there is very little that this age-group is doing to get noticed and make a difference. Even the rebellious streak that is so marked in these years is sorely missing. This age-group needs to get stimulated. They have to start getting involved in the workings of the State that they will inherit soon. It would not be a bad idea to force them to get involved. The elder generation is too out of sync with the needs and aspirations of the young and the connection has to be restored. What the present generation in control prioritizes is lost on the young. Sample this – nearly 70 per cent of the current population of Sikkim is what can be called the post-Merger/ Annexation generation, having been born or settled in Sikkim after 1975. While this data cannot be interpreted to mean that this segment does not care as much for the political issues of 1975 vintage as the political noise would have one believe, what is does suggest is that a huge majority of Sikkim might not know what is being discussed. Accept it, no one – no leader and surely no academics thus far – have made any genuine efforts to explain the history or socio-political developments of Sikkim to its young. What they peddle in is a colored to suit their position narrative of Sikkim's issues, and that is cannot end too well. But the young, it needs to also be recognised, are showing an interest to 'know'. It would serve Sikkim well to inform them better and let them do their own interpretations and work out their own solutions.

It also makes political sense to get a grip on the priorities that the young hold dear. The under-40 year old age-group constitutes more than 35% of the electorate. It would also be safe to surmise that a good number of them either already live in the urban/ municipal areas or aspire to. Since they constitute a substantial vote-bank, it is important that they start understanding and caring for Sikkim. It is equally important that they start getting understood first. This is an age-group, which, as much as it is interested in history and Sikkim past – both remote and recent – also wants a future. This is also an age-group that has received better education and seen more of the world and can hence be trusted to intelligently weigh options, sift the rhetoric from real commitments, hopefully grow away from caste and community divides, and also want a stake in things. They would be interested in the upcoming municipal elections, perhaps even more than assembly contests since this will be in their immediate neighbourhood, carrying potential to turn things around when it comes to quality of life much quicker and more intimately.

They can also influence their elders and infect them with their hopes and aspirations. Which-ever idea touches a chord with them is assured to do well.

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Why Farmers Are So Angry About the Modi Govt's Agricultural Reforms

BHAVANI SHANKAR
theconversation.com

India's farmers have been protesting since the autumn, with a growing intensity that culminated in a violent breaching of barriers in the Red Fort in Delhi during India's Republic Day celebrations on January 26.

The protests were spurred by the passing of a set of agricultural reform bills in parliament in September 2020 that aimed to fundamentally transform the way in which farm produce is marketed in the country. India's farming population of more than 100 million is comprised largely of small farmers who fear that the reforms will add considerable uncertainty to their already meagre livelihoods.

India has historically had a strongly regulated marketing system for agricultural produce, originally devised to enable farmers to sell to the market but at the same time to protect the small, often poor farmers from the vagaries of the open market.

Such regulation is a state-level responsibility in India's federal governance structure. Accordingly, each state devised a system wherein the initial purchase and sale of agricultural products had to be conducted at state-regulated wholesale markets called mandis. These mandis had licensed middlemen and traders who could be regulated by the government to ensure that farmers were not exploited.

The broader legislative framework also acted to limit private sector storage of key food products (to prevent hoarding) and discourage direct contracting between private agribusiness and farmers. There were important variations in regulations across states, and legislation has changed over time, but the broad intention was to protect farmers by limiting the power of agribusiness.

However, the regulatory system did not always work as intended in practice, and deficiencies became apparent over time. Despite the idea of monitoring, traders and middlemen in wholesale markets were found to often collude to the disadvan-

tage of the farmer. Pricing practices were opaque and farmers too often received a very low share of the price.

Variations in regulations across states also hindered interstate trade opportunities. As the Indian economy was liberalised, private enterprise and agribusiness was growing, but found itself shackled by the regulatory framework. Many commentators agreed that reform was needed.

THE THREE BILLS

A set of three complementary bills was rushed through parliament by the Modi government in September 2020. The first seeks to erode the role of the regulated mandis in marketing farm produce by allowing parallel trade, including electronic trading, outside the mandi system within and across states.

The second loosens the restrictions on private sector storage and stocking of produce, allowing restrictions only in case of strong price spikes when hoarding becomes a strong concern.

The third bill sets up a framework for direct formal contracting between farmers and the agribusinesses that buy from them.

Taken together, these bills are a radical departure from the tightly regulated system for marketing agricultural produce that existed before. The bills would curb the regulatory power of states, allowing the central government to set the agenda more firmly.

The reforms provide a significant fillip to the operation of private enterprise, especially large agribusiness in India. The expectation of the government is that the strengthening of these parallel market channels will create competition for the farmers' produce from both within and across states, leading to improved remuneration for farmers.

WHAT ARE THE FARMERS UNHAPPY ABOUT?

Although the reforms are ostensibly about empowering farmers, there is deep concern that they will largely boost private agribusiness to the detriment of the livelihoods of small farmers. The bills

propose new market channels that are largely unregulated, potentially leaving farmers at the mercy of powerful private sector players.

A related concern is that the emergence of these parallel channels will undermine the long-standing regulated mandi system that farmers understand and are used to operating in, despite its numerous flaws.

Contract farming, which would become more commonplace if the bills become law, theoretically offers farmers the option of cutting out middlemen and their fees to deal directly with a downstream buyer. But experience from India and around the world shows that large buyers often prefer to deal with larger farmers located in well-developed regions who can supply assured large volumes with minimal friction. Thus small farmers from less developed areas with poor infrastructure may find themselves frozen out of such channels.

These serious concerns have led protesting farmers to demand not just alterations to the new bills, but their complete repeal. The direction of travel of the bills – towards private sector entry and government withdrawal – has also left farmers worrying about the future of other government policies that have long supported their livelihoods, such as Minimum Support Prices (MSPs).

MSPs are minimum prices announced periodically by the government for certain essential farm products, and used when the government buys these crops from the farmers for distribution to poor consumers. The MSPs help provide a measure of stability and certainty to prices received by farmers, and the protesting farmers want MSPs to be legally guaranteed in the future. This and a set of other demands, ranging from the cancellation of penalties for crop residue burning that contributes to air pollution, to enhancements to energy subsidies, have now also been added to the farmers' core demand to cancel reforms.

[the writer is Professorial Research Fellow in Food Systems and Health, University of Sheffield]

Will Coronavirus Really Evolve to Become Less Deadly?

ED FEIL & CHRISTIAN YATES
theconversation.com

A recent modelling study painted a reassuring picture of a post-pandemic future in which SARS-CoV-2 transitions, over "a few years to a few decades", from dangerous pathogen to just another common-cold coronavirus. This predicted loss of virulence, the authors stress, is based on a specific idiosyncrasy of the virus, namely that it rarely causes serious disease in children.

Still, many experts agreed that we should not be in the least surprised by the authors' conclusion, as all viruses "become more transmissible and less pathogenic over time". After all, the seductive logic goes, from an evolutionary perspective it makes no sense for a pathogen to harm the host on which it depends for its survival. According to this reasoning, virulence is little more than a temporary evolutionary imbalance.

This comfortable chain of reasoning was rudely broken by the announcement of "a realistic possibility" that the new highly transmissible B117 variant "is associated with an increased risk of death".

Although the evidence is still accruing, early estimates from NERVTAG, the UK's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group, suggest that B117 may be around 30% more deadly.

But perhaps this is a single exception to an otherwise well-observed rule, and we can still be confident that SARS-CoV-2 will slowly fade away to obscurity. So what is the evidence for this view? And how confident can we be in predicting how evolution will shape the relationship between a pathogen and its host?

LAW OF DECLINING VIRULENCE

It was the bacteriologist and comparative pathologist Theobald Smith (1859-1934) who began the narrative of the "law of declining virulence" in the late 19th century.

Studying tick-borne disease of cattle during the 1880s, Smith realised that the severity of the disease was determined by the degree of prior infection. Cattle that had been repeatedly exposed to the pathogen suffered from much more moderate disease than cattle encountering it for the first time. Smith reasoned that this was because host and pathogen conspired over time towards a mutually benign relationship.

The story then takes a distinctly antipodean turn. In 1859, the year Charles Darwin published his Big Idea, European rabbits were introduced to Australia for sport, with devastating consequences for the indigenous flora and fauna. Having turned down Louis Pasteur's offer of mass délapinsation using fowl cholera as a biological control agent, the Department of Agriculture turned to the myxoma virus that causes the lethal, but highly species-specific disease, myxomatosis in rabbits.

By the 1950s, the myxoma virus was spreading rapidly among the rabbit population. Recognising the opportunities provided by this unique experiment, the virologist Frank Fenner documented how the virulence of the disease decreased over a few years from 99.5% mortality to about 90%. This was taken as strong empirical evidence in support of Smith's law of declining virulence – and occasionally still is.

A CHALLENGE TO THE LAW OF DECLINING VIRULENCE

At around the same time, a talent-

ed young Australian mathematician named Robert May came across the work of his compatriot Charles Birch, an eminent ecologist working on the regulation of animal populations. Together with epidemiologist Roy Anderson, May went on to pioneer the application of mathematical modelling to the ecology and evolution of infectious disease. By the late 1970s, May and Anderson had developed the "trade-off" model for the evolution of virulence – the first conceptual framework in 100 years to challenge the Smith's general law of declining virulence.

The trade-off model recognises that pathogen virulence will not necessarily limit the ease by which a pathogen can transmit from one host to another. It might even enhance it. Without the assumed evolutionary cost to virulence, there is no reason to believe that disease severity will decrease over time. Instead, May and Anderson proposed that the optimal level of virulence for any given pathogen will be determined by a range of factors, such as the availability of susceptible hosts, and the length of time between infection and symptom onset.

This last factor is a key aspect of the epidemiology of SARS-CoV-2. The long time period between infection and death (if it occurs) means that SARS-CoV-2 has a significant window in which to replicate and spread, long before it kills its current host.

The trade-off model is now widely accepted. It emphasises that each host-pathogen combination must be considered individually. There is no general evolutionary law for predicting how these relationships will pan out, and certainly no justification for evoking the inevitability of

decreased virulence.

There is little or no direct evidence that virulence decreases over time. While newly emerged pathogens, such as HIV and Mers, are often highly virulent, the converse is not true. There are plenty of ancient diseases, such as tuberculosis and gonorrhoea, that are probably just as virulent today as they ever were.

A change in conditions can also drive the trend in the other direction. Dengue fever has afflicted humans since at least the 18th century, but an increasingly large and mobile human population is thought to have driven a marked increase in virulence over the last 50 years or so. Even the seminal case of the rabbit-killing myxoma virus is uncertain. There was little subsequent decline in virulence after Fenner's early reports, and it may even have risen slightly.

PLAUSIBLE BUT NOT INEVITABLE

Of course, these counter-examples do not in themselves present evidence that the virulence of SARS-CoV-2 will not decline. Declining virulence is certainly plausible as one of many potential outcomes under the trade-off model.

Conversely, mutations might simultaneously heighten both virulence and transmissibility by increasing viral replication rate. Although we will have to wait for more evidence to be certain – and the precise mechanisms may be difficult to pin down – the emerging evidence around the B117 variant currently points more towards increased mortality.

[Ed Feil is Professor of Microbial Evolution at The Milner Centre for Evolution, University of Bath; Christian Yates is Senior Lecturer in Mathematical Biology, University of Bath]

How Aung San Suu Kyi went from Nobel Peace Prize to pariah

ADAM TAYLOR

NEW YORK, 02 FEB [WASHINGTON-POST]: When Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, the Norwegian Nobel Committee dubbed her struggle against the country's military junta "one of the most extraordinary examples of civil courage in Asia in recent decades."

Even now, after her reputation has been tarnished by allegations that as Myanmar's leader she turned a blind eye to ethnic cleansing and genocide, there are few who doubt Suu Kyi's bravery. Many, however, would question her wisdom.

The daughter of a revered independence figure, Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest shortly after returning to Myanmar in 1988. Rather than relent or retreat, she stood her ground. She suffered 15 years of house arrest, becoming a global symbol for democracy.

Suu Kyi, who had since 2016 been Myanmar's top civilian leader, was arrested Monday as part of a military coup. But almost three decades after her Nobel Peace Prize win, there is little global support for her after her journey from political prisoner to pariah politician. Some former allies suggested that Suu Kyi, now 75 years old, bore some responsibility for Myanmar's failed democratic experience and recent violence against the Rohingya, a largely Muslim ethnic minority that lives in western Myanmar.

In a statement calling for her release, former governor Bill Richardson of New Mexico said Suu Kyi was "complicit in the atrocities conducted by the Myanmar mili-



tary against the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities" and should step aside from politics if released.

"Suu Kyi was an icon before and after her release," said Laetitia van den Assum, a retired Dutch diplomat, but her reputation had been damaged since 2016 "largely because she chose to ignore the plight of the Rohingya."

Suu Kyi was born on June 19, 1945, at the tail end of World War II. Her father, Aung San, was a political leader who helped Myanmar, also known as Burma, chart its independence from Britain. Aung San was assassinated in 1947, less than a year before the country's independence.

Myanmar's powerful military, known as Tatmadaw, dominated the initial attempts at democracy in the country and, after a coup

in 1962, a military junta was installed that would last for decades.

Suu Kyi's mother was a diplomat, and the family spent much of her childhood outside the country. Suu Kyi was educated in India and in England, where she studied at Oxford University and met her future husband, British historian Michael Aris. In 1988, when she was 43 years old, she returned to Myanmar to care for her ailing mother and became a political force in the country, which was in the midst of the bloody pro-democracy 8888 Uprising.

"Our purpose is to show that the entire people entertain the keenest desire for a multiparty democratic system of government," she said in one speech.

Suu Kyi formed the National League for Democracy and won a

landslide election in 1990, but the military refused to cede power. Instead, she was kept under house arrest at huge personal cost.

She last saw her husband in 1995. He was subsequently refused permission to visit, and died of cancer in 1999. The couple's two sons were only able to resume regular visits after she was released.

As Myanmar finally moved toward democracy in 2010, Suu Kyi was released from house arrest. Her international fame had not diminished: A year after her release, a laudatory biopic from French director Luc Besson appeared in theaters.

In the United States, her cause attracted bipartisan support, with Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky, a key champion. She was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 2012, and when President Barack

Obama visited Yangon that year, he said she was "an icon of democracy who has inspired so many people, not just in this country but all around the world."

Suu Kyi was elected to Myanmar's parliament in 2012. In 2015, her party won a majority. Though barred from holding the presidency under a junta-drafted 2008 constitution, Suu Kyi was given the formal title of state counselor.

International criticism during this period was limited, though there were rumbles at home. Her former deputy and fellow political prisoner Win Tin told The Washington Post in 2013 that Suu Kyi had been too accommodating of the Tatmadaw.

"She thinks she can persuade all the military leaders to become her friends and come to her side,"

Win Tin said. It was Suu Kyi's defense of Myanmar's military during a campaign that saw more than a million Rohingya driven from their homes in 2017 that changed the perception of her. U.N. investigators later said Myanmar's military operation against the Rohingya had "genocidal intent."

Suu Kyi did not just seem to condone the military actions: She publicly defended them. In 2019, she became the first head of state to answer questions at the International Court of Justice, where she refused to even say the word "Rohingya," repeating military claims of terrorist interlopers.

The actions against the Rohingya led many people to drop their support for Suu Kyi. Richardson resigned from an international panel set up by Myanmar to resolve the Rohingya conflict, warning of a "whitewash." Her former biographer said she should resign.

"What happened to Aung San Suu Kyi?" former Obama foreign policy official Ben Rhodes wrote in an essay for The Atlantic in 2019.

The international outrage did little to dent her domestic appeal, however, and her party won 396 of 476 seats in Myanmar's parliament in November. Her popularity appears to have caused the military to arrest her and accuse her party of electoral fraud. Van den Assum said there was little doubt that Suu Kyi had won the election and that any international response would need to consider that, despite her damaged reputation. "Her landslide victory reflects the will of Myanmar's people."

"Ignoring that would make the situation worse," she added.

No new COVID-19 case in Arunachal Pradesh for 2 days

ITANAGAR, FEB 2 (PTI):

Arunachal Pradesh did not report any fresh COVID-19 case in the last two days, a senior health department official said on Tuesday.

The total coronavirus caseload in the north-eastern state is 16,828, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Lobsang Jampa said. A total of 16,762 people have recovered from the disease so far, he said. Arunachal Pradesh currently has only 10 active COVID-19 cases, while 56 people have succumbed to the infection so far.

The recovery rate in the state has touched 99.60 per cent, while the positivity stands at 0.05 per cent and the fatality rate at 0.33 per cent, the official said.

Altogether, 3,92,762 samples have been tested for COVID-19, including 551 on Monday, the official said.

State Immunisation Officer (SIO) Dimong Padung said 16,876 health workers have received COVID-19 vaccine shots so far including, 140 on Monday. The health department has been carrying out the inoculation drive four days a week Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Seven persons reportedly developed after effects following immunisation, the SIO said.

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

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West Bengal allows full occupancy in cinema halls

KOLKATA, FEB 1 (PTI):

The West Bengal government on Monday allowed 100 per cent occupancy in cinema halls and multiplexes, as per a notification. Cinema halls, multiplexes and theatres can allow 100 per cent occupancy without any

restrictive seating arrangement, it said.

The government had earlier restricted sitting to every alternative seat.

The Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting had allowed 100 per cent occupancy in theatres on January 30.

The state government said that all standard COVID protocols stipulated by the Centre must be adhered to.

Welcoming the order, Eastern India Motion Pictures' Association office-bearer Ratan Saha told PTI, "We have instructed

our hall staff to rearrange the seats in compliance with the directive."

Saha, who also owns a single-screen hall and a multiplex chain, said that without any big-budget release, it would be difficult to draw the audience to the cinema halls.

La Liga: Barcelona presidential rivals insist Lionel Messi is worth it



Barcelona, 02 Feb [AFP]: Two of the candidates in Barcelona's presidential election, Joan Laporta and Victor Font, insisted on Monday that Lionel Messi "generates more" than he earns, after his "colossal" club contract was published in a Spanish newspaper.

The leak created waves everywhere with many questions about the huge amount of money involved in the contract. Messi tried to leave Barcelona after last season, but decided to stay as the club's board refused to allow his exit. "Leo

generates much more income than the money he costs," Joan Laporta, who is seeking to regain the presidency, told Rac1 radio.

"We have done a study and he generates a third of Barca's total income."

"It's not only the economic return," Laporta said. "But also the emotional and sporting return, and the vivid moments he gives us."

Messi is in the last year of his contract.

On Sunday, under the headline "the colossal contract that ruins Bar-

celona", El Mundo published details of the current deal, signed in 2017. It said Messi could have earned 555 million euros (674 million dollars) by the time the deal expires.

Barcelona responded by saying it was not the source of the leak and it planned to sue El Mundo. The club did not, however, contradict the details.

Laporta is one of three candidates for the election on March 7. One of his rivals, Font, spoke on Onda Cero radio.

"To imply that Barca is ruined because of Messi is an absolutely

erroneous conclusion," he said. Both candidates condemned the "leak" to the Madrid newspaper and both promised they would do everything to keep Messi at Barca.

"We have to do everything possible to keep Messi, in 2017 and today too," said Font.

Laporta, the president when Messi first broke into the Barcelona team, agreed.

"I will do everything possible to keep Messi at Barca. I have had signals that he is happy in Barcelona, that he wants to stay."

Artists, writers and cultural activists announce protest against Nepal House dissolution



KATHMANDU, 02 FEB [KATH-

MANDUPOST]: Litterateurs, theatre and movie artists and cultural activists have announced street protests against the KP Sharma Oli government's move of dissolving the House of Representatives, which they have termed "regressive."

Individuals from various creative fields, issuing a statement on Tuesday, announced 'Srandolan-2077' with the formation of coordination and secretariat teams to prepare programmes

of protests. In the statement, they have said that by taking a 'regressive move' Oli tried to undermine the achievements of the 2006 people's movement and push the nation towards authoritarianism.

"The government attitude of curtailing the citizen's freedom to express, protest and gather, instead of searching for a progressive solution for the crisis prompted by the current social structure, political process and power-exercise, is objectionable,"

reads the statement. The statement has also condemned the use of force during a peaceful march organised by civil society members in Baluwatar on January 25.

Litterateur Rajan Mukarung, following the issuance of the statement, said that the movement will soon finalise various street protest programmes.

"We will always actively be part of any movement that is in favour of progressive values," said Mukarung.

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Hitzlsperger backs down as Stuttgart's young guns stand up on the pitch



ANDY BRASSELL
LONDON, 02 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: It was a weekend for calm and reflection, a weekend in which, as the end of Holocaust Memorial week, Bundesliga clubs paid tribute to those persecuted for their sexuality and gender identity by the Nazis, with captains wearing rainbow-coloured armbands. VfB Stuttgart wore a specially produced shirt, the normally red central hoop on white replaced with a rainbow one.

In the bare stands at Cannstadt the club's chief executive, Thomas Hitzlsperger, stood with the short and a rainbow club scarf on, the face of the club's stance, posing for a photo he later published on his Twitter account. It might not always be the case on the platform but the replies were largely supportive of the cause. They also, politely in most cases, pleaded with Hitzlsperger to climb down from his recent role in a club conflict which has threatened to torpedo a good first season back in the top flight for a traditional giant which has become a yo-yo club of late.

The fans here loved Hitzlsperger. When VfB last won the Bundesliga in 2007, he was a key component – it was he who stopped the final-day coronation against Energie Cottbus turning into a nightmare, smashing in a typical left-footer from the edge of the area to bring Stuttgart level, paving the way for Sami Khedira's second-half winner that sealed the deal and began the celebrations.

Yet at the end of this weekend there were two big results for Stuttgart. First, the 2-0 win against Mainz on Friday which was, remarkably, the promoted club's first at home in the Bundesliga all season (and which was desperately needed after two losses on the road put a dent in their hitherto impeccable away record); and then, the video statement from Hitzlsperger on Sunday night. In it, the Stuttgart chief executive withdrew his candidacy for the club's presidency.

Hitzlsperger's dispute with the incumbent Claus Vogt has overshadowed everything about VfB in recent weeks, with the CEO publicly chiding Vogt for his inaction on a number of issues – not least investment – and aiming to take the matter in hand by succeeding him. The intention was to take this without abdicating his current post, leading to concerns from the support about a conflict of interest between the sporting wing of the club, headed by Vogt, and the commercial arm.

"I'm doing this out of responsibility to our club and to my employees," Hitzlsperger said in his Sunday statement. "We need calm again in the club." They certainly do. VfB are also dealing with a data leak controversy regarding members' personal details. Even if the presidential battle is off, one suspects this is not the end of disagreements between Hitzlsperger and Vogt.

On the sporting side, things couldn't be much better. The team sit comfortably in mid-table and the sporting director, Sven Mislintat, has the post and the influence he dreamed of but never got at Arsenal and has helped to cultivate a fresh, exciting young side with room to get better. Mislintat has made sure not to hitch his wagon too tightly to Hitzlsperger in recent weeks, saying he wants to continue his work. One of his recruits, the 21-year-old Silas Wamangituka, sealed the deal against Mainz with a sensational solo strike after running from the edge of his own area, faithful to the head coach Pellegrino Matarazzo's counter-heavy style even on home turf. It was the his 11th Bundesliga goal this season.

A refocus on the on-pitch action would be welcome. On Wednesday Stuttgart will attempt to turn breaking the duck into a home run, as Borussia Mönchengladbach arrive with a place in the DFB-Pokal quarter-finals at stake. "This is a top game," said Mislintat, "live in front of the people, not on pay TV. This is our Champions League." The real thing might yet be a way off, despite the club's progress, but a move away from boom or bust, into calmer waters, would be long overdue.

ATP Cup: Fired-up Novak Djokovic makes perfect start but Dominic Thiem slumps

SYDNEY, 02 FEB [AFP]: Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic got his season off to a perfect start with a battling win over hot-shot Denis Shapovalov in the ATP Cup Tuesday, but world number three Dominic Thiem crashed to defeat. The Serbian world number one, who will be chasing a ninth Australian Open crown when the first Grand Slam of the year begins on Monday, was pushed hard before coming through 7-5, 7-5 against the Canadian on Rod Laver Arena. Djokovic showed no signs of being hindered by a nasty blister on his racquet hand that troubled him at an Adelaide exhibition last week and returned 30 minutes later alongside Filip Fraynovic to play the decisive doubles rubber.

The pair beat Shapovalov and Milos Raonic 7-5, 7-6 (7/4) as defending champions Serbia took the tie against Canada 2-1 in Group A.

"It was a great opening of the season. Playing Shapo is always a great challenge on hardcourts, he is such a dynamic, explosive player," said Djokovic, who was fired up by playing in front of a smattering of noisy Serbian fans. "I thought we both played on a pretty high level, so I'm really pleased with the way I started the season."



"This is a great competition," added Djokovic, who won all eight matches he contested en route to the trophy last year.

"We need more competitions where we represent a team, represent our country." Serbia beat Rafael Nadal's Spain in the final of the inaugural and hugely popular tournament last year in Sydney -- launched as a rival to the Davis Cup.

It has been slimmed down from 24 teams to 12 this year due to the coronavirus with all matches at Melbourne Park over five days with US\$7.5 million at stake, rather than the multi-city format employed in 2020. Spain face a tough opening tie later Tuesday against hosts Australia, with Nadal up against fast-improving Alex de Minaur.

On a cool day, big-serving Raonic got Canada off to a blistering start, crushing Dusan Lajovic 6-3, 6-4 in just 79 minutes to give his team a 1-0 lead, with the former world number three, now ranked 15, dropping just eight points on serve while sending down 11 aces.

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It was left to Djokovic to level the tie before clinching the doubles rubber. The Alexander Zverev-led Germany are also in Group A and play Wednesday.

Thiem tumbles
While Djokovic tasted victory, US Open champion Thiem, who lost to the Serb in a gripping Australian Open final last year, got his season off to a disappointing start.

He slumped 6-2, 6-4 to Italian world number 10 Matteo Berrettini who never allowed the Austrian to get going with his big-swinging game.

"I'm very happy obviously for myself, but in this competition we're playing for a team, so it's really nice," Berrettini said. "I'm really happy with my performance."

"Playing for your country is something special." Berrettini was under pressure after Austria took the lead in their Group C clash when 100th-ranked Dennis Novak earned one of the biggest wins of his career, upsetting world number 17 Fabio Fognini 6-3, 6-2.

It sent the tie to a deciding doubles with Thiem returning alongside Novak only to crash again, losing 6-1, 6-4 to Berrettini and Fognini.

Rashford leads way in fight to tackle pernicious effects of racism

PAUL MacINNES
LONDON, 02 Feb [theGuardian]: Once again it falls on Marcus Rashford to lead. The Manchester United forward used his voice this weekend to bring clarity and focus to a problem that should not exist. This time it was not child food poverty that he wanted to talk about, but racism. Racism and the pernicious effect it has, not only on its victims, but on the society that allows it to fester.

Rashford was one of several Premier League footballers to have abuse directed at their social media accounts this past week. He wasn't even the only one in his team. No one knows how many players have been targeted in total, however, how many messages sent. There is nobody both able and willing to count.

In a thread of three tweets, Rashford did acknowledge obliquely that he had been abused (his club confirmed that fact), but he wanted to make a broader point.

"Yes I'm a black man and I live every day proud that I am," he wrote. "No one, or no one comment, is going to make me feel any different. So sorry if you were looking for a strong reaction, you're just simply not going to get it here."

"I'm not sharing screenshots. It would be irresponsible to do so and as you can imagine there's nothing original in them. I have beautiful children of all colours following me and they don't need to read it. Beautiful colours that should only be celebrated."

That football is facing a challenge in dealing

with racism is acknowledged by all. The Premier League and the FA were among those to condemn the abuse directed at players in the past week. Both called on social media companies to do more to uproot it from their platforms, something that is surely possible when you consider that Facebook, owner of Instagram, has a market capitalisation of \$735bn, higher than the annual GDP of Saudi Arabia.

There are complicated challenges embedded in this technical point which are perhaps worth going into briefly. They are the challenges that will face the government – which invited leading black voices within football to discuss their experience of racism online just a week ago – as it considers its Online Harms Bill which is expected to be put before parliament this year.

The first is identifying the extent of the problem and point at which something crosses from nasty to hateful. There are certain words, phrases, images that break the law and the rules of social media companies. There are others which, currently, do not and still more which could be adapted for use by those determined to cause offence. Where do you draw the line?

Once you have drawn the line, how do you treat those who cross it? Greater Manchester Police is investigating the messages sent not only to Rashford but to his teammates Anthony Martial and Axel Tuanzebe. It is not guaranteed it will be able to find the people responsible as the necessary "identifi-

cation verification" is not always forthcoming from social media companies. Changing this outcome is a key demand currently being made by the anti-racist organisation Kick it Out.

If perpetrators can be identified, they might still not be charged, so then there are questions of appropriate sanctions from social media companies. Ban the account, sure, but what if they just pop up with another? Ban the device they are using? Ban the IP address they are on (and perhaps lock out the rest of a family on that address too)? These are the kind of actions social media companies are reluctant to take, although government might yet make them.

After that there are responses from football clubs, either individually or collectively. They could ban the perpetrators from grounds, but perhaps also from club membership, from digital accounts, maybe even from watching (legally) on TV. And then there's the question of how long – five years, 10 years, for life? A joined-up, consistent approach towards sanctions has yet to materialise, though perhaps the five-year ban on all football (and a lifetime ban from Manchester City matches) imposed last year on a racist who abused Raheem Sterling might set the tone.

Those are the technicalities. For the people fighting every day against racism in football there remains hope that solutions can be applied to them. But there is a broader issue, one that can't be fixed by law or

even with money. That issue is of a culture where racist views are held and tolerated. That culture currently exists in the UK and beyond. To its credit, football is clear on this one. The Premier League has a succinct motto: 'No room for racism'. The EFL's is: 'Not today or any day', but makes the same point. Each competition has stood behind their players and endorsed their taking the knee (an act of protest against racism) in the face of "legitimate questions" from outside the game.

Does "systemic racism" exist? Is protesting against it the work of "cultural Marxism"? Were Black Lives Matter protesters of the same order as those who believe Covid lockdowns to be a conspiracy? These are the kind of questions that have been asked by our media and our politicians in this past year, instead of asking why black men are more likely to be stopped by police, more likely to be in prison and, alongside men of south Asian origin, as likely to be refused a job as they were some 50 years ago. Footballers are icons whose appeal breaks through boundaries. They are unlike the rest of us in that regard. But in every other way they are the same. When they are abused, online, in person, they will hurt.

Thanks to the workings of history, in this moment footballers are also the lightning rods for a debate we are yet to resolve as a country. It is heartening to hear, therefore, in those "beautiful colours that need only be celebrated", the articulation of a way forward.

England set to play in front of 25,000 in second Test against India

SIMON BURNTON
LONDON, 02 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: England's second Test in India is likely to be their first game in front of spectators for more than a year, with new guidelines covering sporting events in India opening the possibility of the 50,000-capacity MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai being half full. Only a shortage of time to arrange ticketing has prevented doors being open when the teams' first meeting gets under way on Friday.

Though the outcome of discussions between the Board of Control for Cricket in India and the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association have not yet been made public, a TNCA official told the Press Trust of India agency on Monday that the public would be permitted.

"It has been decided by the BCCI and TNCA to allow 50% spectators for the second Test by following all safety protocols," the official said. "There is little time to make arrangements for spectators' entry for the first Test so crowds cannot be allowed. Though the gap between the first two Tests is only three days, we are confident that arrangements can be made for fans in the second Test."

TNCA members and journalists may be allowed at the first Test, while clearance has already been given for spectators to attend the third and fourth matches, which will be played at the 110,000-capacity Motera Stadium in Ahmedabad. Though they can expect a hostile atmosphere, the development was immediately welcomed by England's players.

"If it's safe then great, obviously we'd love to play in front of crowds as soon as possible," said Jack Leach. "Definitely we want to play in front of crowds, but obviously we don't want to be adding to a

problem which is affecting the whole world."

Following illness and injury, Leach returned after a 14-month absence from Test cricket to contribute a stream of second-innings wickets to England's series victory in Sri Lanka last month, but he has admitted that further improvement will be required if he is to flourish in India against the team he considers "probably on paper the best in the world".

Having returned no positive Covid tests on Sunday, the team will be released from quarantine to train on Tuesday for the first time since their arrival in India. The six days spent in his hotel room – "I've done some reflecting, I've bowled a few in the mirror" – has been a relatively brief pause in what has been a stop-start couple of years for Leach, who at the age of 29 is preparing for his 13th Test.

"It's been a long time not playing, and in that time I did a lot of work to try to become, I guess, the bowler that I want to be. I feel like it's all in there, I just need to bring it out now. I feel I'm going in the right direction. India are obviously a great side and they've got all bases covered. I wouldn't want to have too many assumptions, but I know if I get myself right and in the right headspace and bowling how I can then I can be effective."

Leach's confidence has been freshly boosted by his impact in Sri Lanka, even if he was not completely satisfied with his performances there. "I'm somebody who's never happy, and I think there's more improvement from me to come. I feel like the way the ball came out wasn't exactly how I'd like it, but I have to accept that I haven't had much cricket in recent times. The boys played some great cricket, it was nice to be part of that and make a contribution, but I feel like I've got more to offer."

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Kremlin foe Navalny faces court that may jail him for years

MOSCOW (AP): Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny faced a court hearing Tuesday that could end with him being sent to prison for years and fuel more protests against the Kremlin.

The 44-year-old Navalny, an anti-corruption investigator who is the most prominent critic of President Vladimir Putin, was arrested Jan. 17 upon returning from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from a nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. Russian authorities deny the charge and claim, despite tests by several European labs, that they have no proof he was poisoned.

Russia's penitentiary service alleges that Navalny violated the probation conditions of his suspended sentence from a 2014 money-laundering conviction that he has rejected as politically motivated. It has asked the Simonovsky District Court in Moscow to turn his 3 1/2-year suspended sentence into one that he must serve in prison.

Navalny and his lawyers have argued that while he was recovering in Germany from the poisoning he could not register with Russian authorities in person as required by his probation. Navalny also insisted that his due process rights were crudely violated during his arrest and described his jailing as a travesty of justice.

Navalny's jailing has triggered massive protests across Russia over the past two weekends, in which tens of thousands took to the streets



to demand his release, chanting slogans against Putin. Police detained over 5,750 people during Sunday's rallies, including more than 1,900 in Moscow, the biggest number the nation has seen since Soviet times. Most were released after being handed court summons and face fines or jail terms of 7-15 days. Several people faced criminal charges over alleged violence against police.

Navalny's team called for another demonstration Tuesday outside the Moscow court building but police were out in force there, cordoning off the nearby streets and making random arrests. More than 120 people were detained, according to the OVD-Info group that monitors arrests.

Some Navalny supporters still managed to approach the court building. A young woman climbed a large pile of snow across the street

from the courthouse and held up a poster saying "Freedom to Navalny." Less than a minute later, a police officer took her away.

After his arrest, Navalny's team released a two-hour YouTube video featuring an opulent Black Sea residence allegedly built for Putin. The video has been viewed over 100 million times, fueling discontent as ordinary Russians struggle with an economic downturn, the coronavirus pandemic and widespread corruption during Putin's years in office.

Putin insisted last week that neither he nor his relatives own any of the properties mentioned in the video, and his long time confidant, construction magnate Arkady Rotenberg, claimed that he owns it.

As part of efforts to squelch the protests, the authorities have targeted Navalny's associates and

activists across the country. His brother Oleg, top ally Lyubov Sobol and several others were put under house arrest for two months and face criminal charges of violating coronavirus restrictions.

The jailing of Navalny and the crackdown on protests have stoked international outrage, with Western officials calling for his release and condemning the arrests of demonstrators.

"Sweden and the EU are concerned about the situation with democracy, civil society and human rights in Russia," Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde, the current chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, said during talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Moscow.

The diplomat said Navalny's poisoning and the response by Russian authorities to the street protests will be part of

the discussion. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, who will visit Moscow later this week, has criticized the detentions and the disproportionate use of force against protesters, emphasizing that Russia must comply with its international commitments on human rights.

Russia has dismissed U.S. and EU officials' criticism as meddling in its domestic affairs and said that Navalny's current situation is a procedural matter for the court, not an issue for the government. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Tuesday that Russia is ready for dialogue about Navalny, but sternly warned that it wouldn't take Western criticism into account.

"We are ready to patiently explain everything but we aren't going to react to mentor-style statements or take them into account," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters.

China arrests suspects in fake COVID-19 vaccine ring

TAIPEI, TAIWAN (AP): Chinese police have arrested more than 80 suspected members of a criminal group that was manufacturing and selling fake COVID-19 vaccines, including to other countries.

Police in Beijing and in Jiangsu and Shandong provinces broke up the group led by a suspect surnamed Kong that was producing the fake vaccines, which consisted of a simple saline solution, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

The vaccines were sold in China and to other countries, although it was unclear which ones. The group had been active since last September, according to state media.

"China has already reported the situation to the relevant countries," Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a daily briefing Tuesday.

"The Chinese government highly values vaccine safety and will continue to take efforts to strictly prosecute any counterfeits, fake sales and illegal business, and

other related actions that involve vaccines," Wang said. "At the same time, China will strengthen our law enforcement cooperation with the relevant countries, to earnestly prevent the spread of this type of illegal and criminal action." He did not offer further details.

China has a long history of vaccine scandals resulting from manufacturing issues as well as business practices. In 2016, police arrested two people who were in charge of a ring that sold millions of improperly stored vaccines across the country. In response to recent scandals, China reformed vaccine safety regulations and increased criminal penalties for those caught making counterfeits.

Domestically, many Chinese citizens did not trust homegrown vaccines and surveys previously showed that trust in vaccines fell after scandals like the one in 2016. However, since the pandemic has struck, confidence has been

high. A total of 74% of respondents in a recent survey published in Chinese business magazine Caixin said they would take a COVID-19 vaccine if it was available.

China has at least seven COVID-19 vaccines in the last stage of clinical trials, and has one that has been approved for domestic use, made by state-owned Sinopharm.

Chinese vaccine makers have seized the opportunity provided by the pandemic to go global, with Sinopharm and other Chinese companies making deals or donating their vaccines in at least 27 countries around the world.

Domestically, China has given more than 24 million doses of its homegrown vaccine candidates, as part of a mass vaccination campaign. It has so far refrained from giving the vaccine to the most elderly, instead targeting key groups such as medical workers and workers who work in food-related industries, as well as adults between the ages of 18 and 59.

Euro economy shrank at end of 2020 under pandemic's weight

FRANKFURT, GERMANY (AP): The European economy shrank by a smaller than expected 0.7% in the last three months of 2020 as businesses in France and Germany weathered a renewed round of anti-COVID-19 lockdowns somewhat better than expected.

That consolation in official figures released Tuesday couldn't erase a gloomier outlook for this year, as the 19 countries that use the euro are expected to lag China and the U.S. in bouncing back from the worst of the pandemic.

For the year, the eurozone shrank 6.8%, according to the EU statistics agency. The figure underscores a rollercoaster year of freakish economic data, with a plunge of 11.7% in the second quarter, the biggest since statistics started in 1995, followed by a rebound of 12.4% in the third quarter in late summer.

The winter wave has meant new restrictions on travel, business and activity, but companies



in some sectors such as manufacturing have been better able to adjust than services businesses such as hotels and restaurants.

The German economy, Europe's biggest, grew by a scant 0.1% in the fourth quarter while France saw a smaller than expected drop of 1.3%. Overall, economists had expected a drop in the eurozone of as much as 2.5%.

The eurozone is expected to reach 2019 levels of economic output only in 2022, say officials from the European Central Bank. That contrasts with China, the only major economy to grow in 2020 with a 2.3% increase in output, and with the U.S., where Congressional budget experts foresee a rebound to 2019 levels by the

middle of this year. The International Monetary Fund last month cut its forecast for eurozone growth this year to 4.2% from 5.2% The figures arrive amid disenchantment and finger-pointing over the slow pace of vaccine rollouts in the European Union, while the U.K., which has left the EU, started earlier and has vaccinated people at a faster pace.

"While the eurozone GDP data were better than what we were expecting only a week ago, the short-term prospects for the European economy remain clouded by a challenging health situation in several countries and an underwhelming start of the vaccination roll-out," said Nicola Nobile, lead eurozone economist at Oxford Economics.

Pakistan orders man acquitted in Pearl murder off death row

ISLAMABAD (AP): Pakistan's Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered the Pakistani-British man acquitted of the 2002 gruesome beheading of American journalist Daniel Pearl off death row and moved to a so-called government "safe house."

Ahmad Saeed Omar Sheikh, who has been on death row for 18 years, will be under guard and will not be allowed to leave the safe house, but he will be able to have his wife and children visit him.

"It is not complete freedom. It is a step toward freedom," said Sheikh's father, Ahmad Saeed Sheikh, who attended the hearing.

The Pakistan government has been scrambling to keep Sheikh in jail since a Supreme Court order last Thursday upheld his acquittal in the death of Pearl, triggering outrage by Pearl's family and the U.S. administration. In a final effort to overturn the acquittal, Pakistan's government as well as the Pearl family filed an appeal to the Supreme Court, asking it to review the decision to exonerate Sheikh of Pearl's murder. The family's lawyer, Faisal Siddiqi, however, said such a review had a slim chance of success because the same Supreme Court judges who ordered Sheikh's acquittal sit on the review panel.

The U.S. government has said that it would seek Sheikh's extradition if his acquittal is upheld. Sheikh has been indicted in the United States on Pearl's murder as well as in a 1994 kidnapping of an American citizen in Indian-ruled sector of the divided region of Kashmir. The American was eventually freed. Sheikh was arrested by India after the 1994 kidnappings, but was among four terror suspects freed by India on Dec. 31, 1999, in exchange for the hostages on an Indian Airlines aircraft that was hijacked and taken from Nepal to then Taliban-controlled Afghan city of Kandahar.

The order sending Sheikh to a safe house would seem to be a concession to the federal government, as well as the government of southern Sindh province where Karachi is the capital. The Sindh government has refused successive orders to release Sheikh, even courting contempt charges from lower courts.

Sheikh's lawyer, Mehmood A. Sheikh, told The Associated Press that the order to send his client to the safe house was given to allow the Sindh government time to argue against his release under Pakistan's anti-terrorism law, in connection to Sheikh's affiliation with terrorist organizations. "They have never argued or charged them with belonging to a terrorist organization," said the lawyer. He said the next court hearing about his client's continued detention would not be for another two weeks. The lawyer and Sheikh are not related.

Myanmar lawmakers say they're under house arrest after coup

YANGON, MYANMAR (AP): Hundreds of members of Myanmar's Parliament remained confined inside their government housing in the country's capital on Tuesday, a day after the military staged a coup and detained senior politicians including Nobel laureate and de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party, meanwhile, released a statement calling for the military to honor the results of last November's election and release all of those detained.

"The commander-in-chief seizing the power of the nation is against the constitution and it also neglects the sovereign power of people," the party said in a statement on one of its Facebook pages.

One of the detained lawmakers said he and about 400 other parliament members were able to speak with one another inside the compound and communicate with their constituencies by phone, but were not allowed to leave the housing complex in Naypyitaw. He said Suu Kyi was not being held with them.

The lawmaker said police were inside the complex and soldiers were outside it. He said the politicians, comprised of members of Suu Kyi's party and various smaller parties, spent a sleepless night worried that they might be taken away but were otherwise OK.

"We had to stay awake and be alert," the lawmaker told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity out of concern for his safety.

The takeover came the morning lawmakers from all of the country had gathered in the capital for the opening of the new parliamentary session and follows days of worry that a coup was coming. The military said the seizure was necessary because the government had not acted on the military's claims of fraud in November's elections — in

which Suu Kyi's ruling party won a majority of the parliamentary seats up for grabs — and because it did not delay the opening of Parliament.

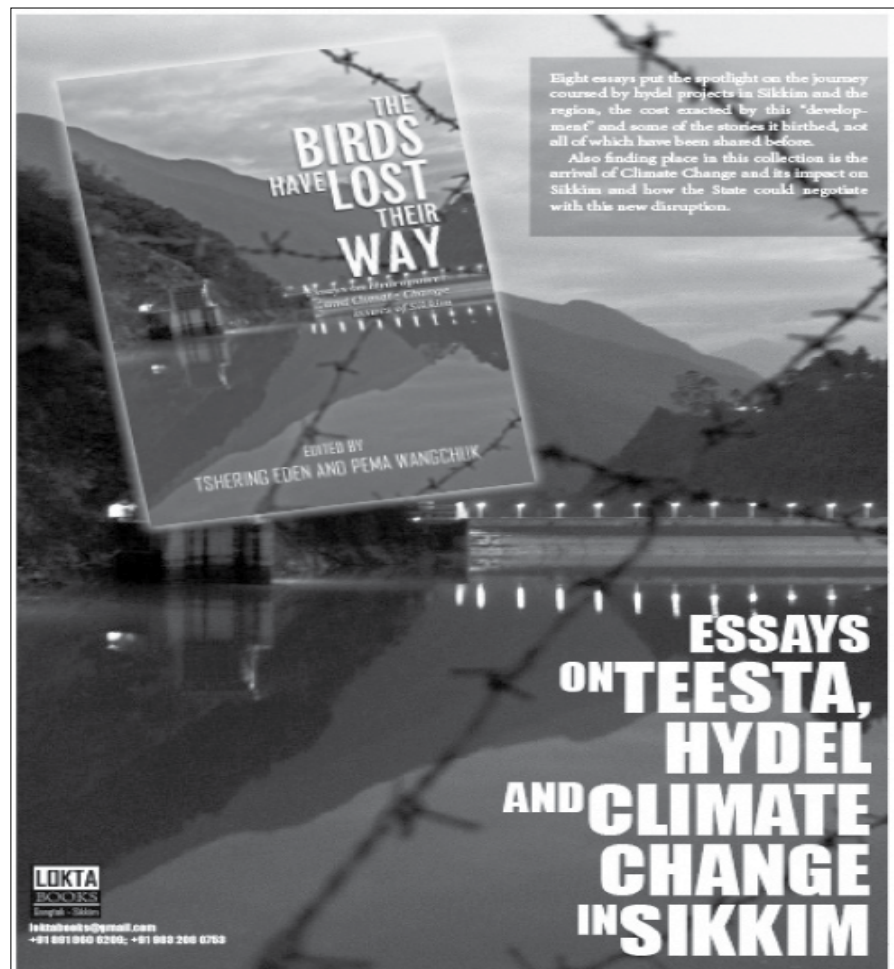
An announcement read on military-owned Myawaddy TV on Monday said Commander-in-Chief Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing would be in charge of the country for one year. Late Monday, the office of the commander-in-chief announced the names of new Cabinet ministers. The 11-member Cabinet is composed of military generals, former military generals and former advisers to a previous government headed by former general Thein Sein.

The coup is a dramatic backslide for Myanmar, which was emerging from decades of strict military rule and international isolation that began in 1962. It now presents a test for the international community, which had ostracized Myanmar while it was under military rule and then enthusiastically embraced Suu Kyi's government as a sign the country was finally on the path to democracy. U.S. President Joe Biden threatened new sanctions, which the country had previously faced.

On Tuesday in Yangon, the country's biggest city, the streets were quieter than usual but markets were open, street vendors were still cooking food and taxis and buses were still running.

There were no outward signs of heavy security, but the unease that set in after Monday's events still lingered. People were removing the once ubiquitous red flags of Suu Kyi's party from their homes and businesses.

The English-language Myanmar Times headlined the state of emergency, while other state-owned newspapers showed front-page photographs of Monday's National Defense and Security Council meeting, which the newly appointed Acting President Myint Swe and Min Aung Hlaing attended with other military officials.





WORKOUT STYLE! The model, Kendall Jenner leaves a workout in red tie-dye sweatshirt with red leggings.

Nick Jonas Says He Hopes to Have "Many" Kids With Priyanka Chopra

If it were up to him, Nick Jonas would be ready to raise his own rock band-sized amount of children someday. In an exclusive interview with E! News, the 28-year-old "Jealous" singer explains that he would love to start a family someday with wife Priyanka Chopra, although her happiness remains his top concern.

"She is the most important piece of the puzzle, and it's obviously something we hope happens, and god willing, it comes together," he says. "You know, whatever is right. We're blessed to have each other and have a full heart for the future, I say, and things are out of your control. And the foundation of a couple is strong, and you're excited about the possibility of that." While he knows it's not entirely up to him, he is definitely open to raising as many little ones as he can.

"It's going to be a beautiful journey, and I hope for many, or whatever that is," Nick continues. "We'll go figure that out when they get there, but for now it's just about making sure we're good."

It sounds like he and Priyanka are on the same page. During an exclusive interview with E!'s Daily Pop last month, the 38-year-old Quantico alum shared, "Family is a big part of my life. It's always been a part of my

dreams." Nick was a coach on The Voice season 18 last year, and he is returning in the role for the new season that debuts on March 1. He explains that he still has a score to settle, given that he was bested by Blake Shelton's



team the last time around.

"I just had so much fun last year, and Blake won [that] season," Nick tells E! News. "It was down to he and I, and I just had a grudge for too long, and finally I said, 'You know what? I got to come back and make this right.' So far, I feel pretty good and have an amazing guest mentor, my longtime friend Darren Criss, which is very exciting and going to give the other coaches a run for their money."

something is meant for you, the door that leads you there will open seamlessly. If it isn't, roadblocks will manifest themselves continuously.

Tip: Recognise what isn't in alignment with your purpose.

Cancer: You may not have gotten it right the first time around, but you're learning to perfect the recipe of a long-lasting relationship. The cards are talking about unconditional love and commitment with a capital 'C'. What a blessing it is to be with somebody who sees you—the real you—the one very few people have had access to! PS: If you haven't spoken about your future together, now is a good time to approach the topic.

Tip: The cards are talking about unconditional love and commitment with a capital 'C'.

Leo: February 2021 sees you adopting livin' la vida loca lifestyle with a newfound fervour. You are tired of doing things in an ordinary fashion and are seeking the thrill of a brand new adventure. So, take life by the horns, Leo. Do that one thing you know will liberate your soul. Society may or may not understand your need to pursue your passion, and that's okay. Most geniuses "and" revolutionaries were misunderstood by their generation.

Tip: It's time to livin' la vida loca, baby!

Virgo:

Some may refer to what's taking place right now as a coincidence. But you're not one of those people. You know that Kismet has orchestrated this encounter for a reason, and you plan to honour that. Whether or not this connection will last a lifetime is not something you want to bother yourself with at this moment. Coupled Virgos will find a new rhythm despite retrograde throwing them off balance. You are each other's safe space in this chaotic world, and you will get through this.

Tip: Honour the love you are being bestowed with in this moment.

Libra: Libra, you're looking back at the trajectory of your life and assessing all the things that have and haven't worked for you. You certainly cannot say that you've only made good decisions. You can, however, take ownership of the choices you've made and acknowledge the fact that they've helped you blossom. Today, you're being asked to wear each of these experiences as feathers in your cap as you move onto the next phase of your life. Only good things can happen now! The Universe wants you to remember that you are so, so blessed!

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Scorpio:

You can continue to do what you have been for

Marilyn Manson denies Evan Rachel Wood's abuse allegations

LOS ANGELES (AP): Rocker Marilyn Manson was dropped by his record label on Monday after actor Evan Rachel Wood accused her ex-fiancé of sexual and other physical abuse, alleging she was "manipulated into submission" during their relationship.

Manson called the allegations "horrible distortions of reality."

Wood, who stars on HBO's "Westworld," had spoken frequently in recent years about being abused in a relationship but did not name the person until she posted Monday on Instagram.

"The name of my abuser is Brian Warner, also known to the world as Marilyn Manson," Wood said. "He started grooming me when I was a teenager and horrifically abused me for years."

Manson's label, Loma Vista Recordings, said in a statement that after the "disturbing allegations," it will "cease to further promote his current album" and has "also decided not to work with Marilyn Manson on any future projects."

Wood and Manson's relationship became public in 2007 when he was 38 and she was 19, and they were briefly engaged in 2010 before breaking up. Wood, now 33, said in her post that Manson left her "brainwashed and manipulated into submission."

"I am done living in fear of retaliation, slander, or blackmail. I am here to expose this dangerous man and call

out the many industries that have enabled him, before he ruins any more lives," the post added. She concluded, "I stand with the many victims who will no longer be silent."

Manson responded with his own Instagram post Monday night.

"Obviously my art and life have long been magnets for controversy, but these recent claims about me are horrible distortions of reality," his post said. "My intimate relationships have always been

2018, Los Angeles County prosecutors declined to file charges against Manson over allegations of assault, battery and sexual assault dating to 2011, saying they were limited by statutes of limitations and a lack of corroboration. The accuser in that case was identified only as a social acquaintance of Manson.

He denied the allegations through his attorney at the time. In 2017, Wood was one of thousands of women who



entirely consensual with like-minded partners. Regardless of how — and why — others are now choosing to misrepresent the past, that is the truth."

It was not immediately clear whether Wood has gone to authorities with any of her allegations, and a representative did not immediately respond when asked via email whether she had. In

identified themselves as victims of sexual harassment or assault amid the #MeToo movement.

"Being raped once made it easier to be raped again. I instinctually shut down. My body remembered, so it protected me. I disappeared. #metoo," Wood wrote at the time as part of a series of tweets on her experience.

Justine Skye Catches Kendall Jenner in the Bathtub While Doing TikTok FaceTime Challenge

Kendall Jenner was minding her own business while enjoying a carefree soak when pal Justine Skye interrupted her for a TikTok prank. Check out the footage.

This was not what Kendall Jenner was expecting when she answered her phone in the middle of a little "me time."

Singer and model Justine Skye shared footage to social media on Monday, Feb. 1 of herself calling some of her famous pals via FaceTime for the "I'm Busy Right Now" challenge that's currently popular on TikTok. The prank involves the caller immediately telling the other person that they don't have time to talk and need to call them right back, typically leading to a baffled response. Such was the case when Justine hit up Kendall, who happened to be taking a bath at the moment that she answered the ill-fated call.

"Hey, I'm really busy, can I call you right back?" Justine asked the 25-year-old Keeping Up With the Kardashians star in the clip that was shared to TikTok

in its full version and to Instagram in a shortened version. Kendall clearly didn't know what to make of this and replied, "What! You just called me." The famed reality TV personality proved she's a good sport by chuckling at the strange situation, and then we can only hope she went back to enjoying that leisurely soak.

Also getting pranked was Hailey Bieber, who immediately seemed to get wise to the fact that something was afoot.

"You called me," Hailey told Justine before adding, "Is this, like, a thing?"

Luckily, we have a feeling that the "Collide" singer's bond with her friends is strong enough to sustain a little FaceTime confusion. After all, Justine joined Hailey and Kendall for a Jamaican getaway in August 2019 to celebrate Justine's 24th birthday. If Justine wants to similarly have a great time on her next birthday, we might suggest that she make it a point not to randomly interrupt more baths anytime soon.

Kingdom of Wakanda destined for Disney + streaming service

LOS ANGELES (AP): The Kingdom of Wakanda is staking out turf on the Disney + streaming service.

A TV series set in the "Black Panther" kingdom will be developed as part of a five-year, exclusive television deal the Walt Disney Co. announced Monday with filmmaker Ryan Coogler's Proximity Media company.

Coogler wrote and directed 2018's "Black Panther," a box-office hit that turned Chadwick Boseman into a superstar. The actor died in August of cancer.

Coogler "brought a groundbreaking

story and iconic characters to life in a real, meaningful and memorable way, creating a watershed cultural moment," Disney Executive Chairman Bob Iger said in a statement. The company looks forward "to telling more great stories with Ryan and his team."

A time frame for the series wasn't immediately announced.

The Black Panther character was created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby for Marvel Comics, which became part of Disney in 2009 when the media giant acquired Marvel Entertainment.

Music helping Tony Bennett battle Alzheimer's disease

NEW YORK (AP): Tony Bennett has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease but it hasn't quieted his legendary voice. The singer's wife and son reveal in the latest edition of AARP The Magazine that Bennett was first diagnosed with the irreversible neurological disorder in 2016. The magazine says he endures "increasingly rarer moments of clarity and awareness."

Still, he continues to rehearse and twice a week goes through his 90-minute set with his longtime pianist, Lee Musiker. The magazine says he sings with perfect pitch and apparent ease.

A beloved interpreter of American standards, Bennett's chart-topping career spans seven decades. "He's not the old Tony anymore," his wife, Susan, told the magazine. "But when he sings, he's the old Tony."

Bennett, 94, gained his first pop success in the early 1950s and enjoyed a career revival in the 1990s and became popular with younger audiences in part because of an appearance on "MTV Unplugged." He continued recording and touring constantly, and his 2014 collaboration with Lady Gaga, "Tony Bennett & Lady Gaga: Cheek to Cheek," debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard charts.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, more than 5 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's dementia and one in 10 people age 65 and older has Alzheimer's dementia.

Aries:

There are days when the Universe is in sync with you and everything is working out better than you imagine. And then, there are days the Universe is in the mood to play mischief, causing your best-laid plans to fall apart. It's all a part and parcel of life, Aries, the constant and continuous dance of shadow and light. So replace your resistance with acceptance, and know that it's all happening for a reason. You will get through this. Give yourself the permission to lean on your soul tribe.

Tip: You'll get through this.

Taurus:

Not every story ends in a happily-ever-after. But that doesn't mean the final chapter has to be a tragic one. Be grateful for the moments you have shared —joy and laughter that made you feel a sense of oneness with the Universe. However, steer clear from making this connection any more than what it is. One day, you'll know why everything worked out the way it did. Until then, you have hope and faith.

Tip: Steer clear from making this connection any more than what it is.

Gemini:

The Universe always has a way of telling us what is and isn't good for us. The real question is: Are we willing to listen? Pay attention to the signs, Gemini. They are unfolding all around you and helping you move closer to your sacred purpose. Remember, if

something is meant for you, the door that leads you there will open seamlessly. If it isn't, roadblocks will manifest themselves continuously.

Tip: Recognise what isn't in alignment with your purpose.

Cancer:

You may not have gotten it right the first time around, but you're learning to perfect the recipe of a long-lasting relationship. The cards are talking about unconditional love and commitment with a capital 'C'. What a blessing it is to be with somebody who sees you—the real you—the one very few people have had access to! PS: If you haven't spoken about your future together, now is a good time to approach the topic.

Tip: The cards are talking about unconditional love and commitment with a capital 'C'.

Leo:

February 2021 sees you adopting livin' la vida loca lifestyle with a newfound fervour. You are tired of doing things in an ordinary fashion and are seeking the thrill of a brand new adventure. So, take life by the horns, Leo. Do that one thing you know will liberate your soul. Society may or may not understand your need to pursue your passion, and that's okay. Most geniuses "and" revolutionaries were misunderstood by their generation.

Tip: It's time to livin' la vida loca, baby!

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Scorpio:

You can continue to do what you have been for

so long, and your life will be perfectly fine—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. The choice is and has always been yours. The real question is: Are you comfortable with where you are, or do you feel inspired to move a few things around? Remember, nothing worth pursuing comes without its fair share of risks.

Tip: The magic lies outside of your comfort zone.

Sagittarius:

There are friends you talk to everyday and share all kinds of updates with. Then there are friends you're able to connect with on a deep level despite meeting with them after a long interval. Something tells us you're going to pick up where you left off with somebody you consider rather special. As such, reconnecting to your soul family is going to be a big theme this week. Make it a point to let them know how much you value their presence in your own unique way.

Tip: It's time to pick up where you left off.

Capricorn:

There are times you try every trick in the book, however the chariot refuses to move forward and onwards. Then there are times when minimal effort leads to magnificent rewards. Where are you vibrating at, Capricorn? Food for thought: When something is taking place seamlessly and in sync

with the flow, it is a sign from the Universe that you are on the right track. So, move forward and onwards knowing that the help and resources you require at each step will be made available to you.

Tip: You are where you need to be. Keep moving forward.

Aquarius:

You have that big goals energy about you, which is making the impossible seem possible. Go after your dreams like never before and have the courage to see them through. Magnificent results await you on the other side of this journey—we promise! Remember, you can't do everything alone, even if you wanted to. It's a good idea to recruit a team that can help you with the execution process.

Tip: Aquarius, you are unstoppable!

Pisces:

Things are coming to fruition this month. But it's not about the coins you're putting in your bank. It's about the joy of creating and watching your labour of love reach that point of completion. Trust that you will only go up from here, as long as you vow to create from a space of authenticity. Those in a leadership position could be actively thinking about adopting a more inclusive approach. Create a work environment where everybody feels supported, which in turn will inspire them to put their best foot forward.

Cosmic tip: Things are coming to fruition in the Pisces HQ!