



FROM WONDER WOMAN TO STAR WARS, JENKINS' RISE CONTINUES

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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Tamu Lhochhar comes early to Rongli

AARON RAI
RONGLI, 27 DEC:

December is traditionally a sea of red on the almanac with a string of festivals and 2020 is no different. Festive season continues in Sikkim and today, members of the Gurung community celebrated Tamu-Lhochhar in grand manner at the community hall at Rongli Melatar in East Sikkim.

Organized by Boudha Sanskar Sudhar Samiti (BSSS) of Dalapchan, Rongli, the function had Advisor to the Chief Minister, Rohit Raj Maharaj, as chief guest accompanied by area MLA KB Rai, SKM's constituency in-charge Dambar Kumar Pradhan and others as special guests.

Also today, the chief guest on behalf of the organizers felicitated two familiar faces of the Gurung community, Roshnita Gurung, a social worker and government employee, and cricketer Diksha Gurung, for making the community proud with



their work and success.

Addressing the event, the chief guest delved on the significance of Tamu Lhochhar and congratulated the organizers of putting together the programme. He stressed that all communities should come together to build Sikkim.

He also spoke on the need to move beyond, community, caste, reli-

gion and ethnic divisions even as individual communities conserve their heritage. He said that the present government has given full autonomy to communities to promote their ethnic traditions and culture.

He emphasized that good deeds should be done together.

He shared that since he was a religious leader,

he was above ethnic programs but since he was in a nominated post of the government, he attends ethnic and community specific programs with the message of unity.

He added that Sikkim should build with a positive outlook and that the state will prosper only if all communities were united.

An entertaining performance of Gurung language

songs and dances was the highlight of the day.

The organizers shared that although a state-level, much grander celebration of Tamu Lhochhar was on the anvil, such celebrations at the sub-district level provided an opportunity to the youth here to learn more about their language, culture and costumes.

36 more inmates test positive for Covid at State Central Jail

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 27 DEC:

Sikkim recorded 46 new cases of novel coronavirus in the last 24 hours, taking the State's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 to 5,845 on Sunday. The virus was detected among more inmates at the State Central Jail where 36 more have tested positive, taking the tally there to 217 thus far.

Of the 46 new cases, 44 were reported from East District, one from West District and one from South Sikkim.

Meanwhile, the number of recovered COVID-19 cases has further improved to 5,079.

Sikkim now has 547 active cases of novel coronavirus, of whom four are currently admitted in the ICU facility of the COVID-dedicated STNM Hospital.

In his daily health bulletin on Sunday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia informed that the 46 new cases were detected in the testing of 203 samples on Saturday; of these, 44 samples returned positive in RT-PCR testing of 168 samples and two more persons were

found positive in rapid antigen testing of 23 samples.

The outbreak at the State Central Jail, Rongneck, continues with 36 more inmates testing positive. A day earlier, 100 inmates had tested positive and in the first rush of infections, 81 inmates had tested positive earlier this month.

Among the new cases reported from in and around Gangtok are one person from Burtuk, one from Lower Sichey, one from Lal Bazaar, one from Decheling and one from Development Area.

Mr Bhutia informed that while a 22-year-old lady from Deorali, Gangtok, has tested positive for Covid, she could not be contacted on the phone number provided by her and has appealed that she get in touch with concerned authorities at the earliest to get briefed on what she should do next.

Elsewhere in Sikkim, a person from Chujachen in East District, one person from Rangang-Yangang and one from Dambudara in South District and one person from Barphok Chingthang in West District were also found positive for COVID-19.

COVID-19: Lowest daily cases recorded in India after gap of nearly 6 months

NEW DELHI, DEC 27 (PTI): India registered 18,732 fresh cases of COVID-19, the lowest in nearly six months, while 97,61,538 people have recuperated so far from the disease pushing the national recovery rate to 95.82 per cent, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Sunday.

The death toll climbed to 1,47,622 with the novel coronavirus virus claiming 279 lives in a span of 24 hours in the country, the data updated at 8 am showed.

A total of 18,732 daily new cases were recorded in the past 24 hours. The number of new daily cases last reported a dip on July 1 when 18,653 cases were registered.

The COVID-19 case fatality rate was registered at 1.44 per cent.

There are 2,78,690 active cases of coronavirus infection in the country which comprises 2.73 per cent of the total case-load, the data stated.

According to the ICMR, a cumulative total of 16,81,02,657 samples have been tested up to December 26 with 9,43,368 samples being



tested on Saturday.

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

The 279 new fatalities include 60 from Maharashtra, 23 from Delhi, 33 from West Bengal, 21 from Kerala, 14 from Uttar Pradesh, 13 from Uttarakhand and 12 each from Punjab and Chattisgarh.

A total of 147,622 deaths have been reported so far in the country

including 49,189 from Maharashtra followed by 12,051 from Karnataka, 12,059 from Tamil Nadu, 10,437 from Delhi, 9,569 from West Bengal, 8,293 from Uttar Pradesh, 7,092 from Andhra Pradesh, 5,281 from Punjab and 4,275 from Gujarat.

The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

Four eclipses in 2021, two to be visible in India

INDORE, DEC 27 (PTI): There will be four eclipses in 2021, including one total solar eclipse and one total lunar eclipse, but only two will be visible from India, Ujjain-based Jiwaji Observatory's Superintendent Dr Rajendra Prakash Gupta said on Sunday.

He told PTI that the first of these events will be on May 26, and will be seen in parts of West Bengal, coastal Odisha and in the north-eastern states, except Sikkim, as the moon is visible earlier in these places than other parts of the country.

"The earth will cover the moon by 101.6 per cent during this astronomical event," he said.

A total lunar eclipse occurs when the earth comes between the sun

and the moon.

Gupta said the annular solar eclipse on June 10 will not be visible in India, and in this event, the moon will come between the sun and earth, leading to the sun getting covered 94.3 per cent and being seen as a 'ring of fire'.

He said the partial lunar eclipse, on November 19, can be seen from Arunachal Pradesh and some parts of Assam for a very short period.

"At the peak of this event, 97.9 per cent of the moon will be seen covered by the earth's shadow. The total solar eclipse on December 4, the last of 2021, will, however, not be visible from India," he added.

This year, there were two solar and four lunar eclipses.

COVID-19 vaccine dry-run in Krishna district in AP

AMARAVATI, DEC 27 (PTI): A dry run of the coronavirus vaccination programme will be held in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh on Monday.

Andhra Pradesh is one of the four states chosen by the Centre to carry out end-to-end dry run for COVID-19 vaccination on December 28.

The state government picked up Krishna district for the dry run, where it will be carried out in five locations, according to Health Commissioner Katamaneni Bhaskar.

"The dry run is aimed at testing the planned operations and the laid out mechanisms for COVID-19 vaccination in the state. It will provide insights into any gaps or bottlenecks

so that those could be addressed before the commencement of the actual drive," Bhaskar said on the eve of the programme.

It would be used to test the preparedness for vaccinating pre-identified beneficiaries from specified groups supported by Co-WIN, an electronic application.

The Commissioner said the primary objective of the dry run was to check the operational feasibility of Co-WIN in the field, besides the planning, implementation and reporting mechanism.

Planning and preparations, including prerequisites for the vaccine introduction as per the Operational Guidelines, would also be assessed through the dry run.

Namshi premieres in Namchi



BIKASH CHHETRI
NAMCHI, 27 DEC:

All Sikkim Bhutia Association of South District hosted the premiere of Bhutia language feature film, Namshi: The Soul, here at Imperial Talkies on Sunday. AS-BA-South Sikkim president, Samten Bhutia, informs that the association helped not only in organizing the premiere but also in marketing the show here.

This two-hour long movie is in Bhutia language has English subtitles and features the everyday life of the people in Sikkim, their belief in deities, their ethics and strong belief in karma.

Produced, directed, edited and scripted by Kunzang Raptan Denjongpo, Namshi, was filmed in the rural settings of North Sikkim and elsewhere.

Actor Karma Yongzing Bhutia said, "This project is a small attempt by us to conserve our language. We believe that the film will reach out to a wider audience for Bhutia-speaking people, especially the younger generation."

The film boasts a completely local crew in Karma Yongzing Denjongpo, Dawthi Denjongpo, Sonam Thendup Denjongpo, Pasang Tshering Denjongpo, Karma Chewang Denjong-

po, Pema Chuki Lachungpa, Sonam Tshering Denjongpo, Kunga Wangdak Denjongpo, Sangay Wangchuk Denjongpo, Palzom Denjongpo, Yesum Denjongpo and Gyatso Denjongpo.

The director has also written the lyrics of songs included in the movie and also sung them along with Kesang Lhaden Denjongpo.

The entire crew was present for the premiere, making the event more special and were also felicitated by All Sikkim Bhutia Association, South District.

The music was for the film has been set by Suman Karki and the film's theme flute played by Pritam Chettri.

Yuksam preps for grand Tamu Lhochhar celebrations

PRITAM LAMA
YUKSAM, 27 DEC:

The Gurung community here at Yuksam is preparing to host a grand Tamu Lhochhar celebration on 30 December with the aim to bring in the community's New Year with a celebration of Gurung culture.

The day will mark the end of the year of the Chyu [Mouse] and bring in the Gurung year of the Bull/ Cow.

Yuksam Tamu Lhochhar Celebration Committee president, Laxman Gurung, informs that the celebration is being organized here to bring Gurung youth on a shared platform with the elders of the community and create a congenial environment for them



to learn more about their culture and traditions.

Culture Secretary of the committee, Dichen Gurung, adds that Kauda

and Ghatu performances, the popular forms of Gurung dance, will be highlights of the day, while the Culture Assistant Secretary, Simran Gurung, adds

that Yuksam will also host displays celebrating the community's cultural heritage.

A traditional Gurung Rodhi Ghar and musical instruments will also be displayed on the day.

A 3-day prayer in the lead up to Tamu Lhochhar is being held at Pema Choeling Dharma Centre, a monastery at Gufadara, Yuksam, informs spiritual and dharma head of Pema Choeling Dharma Centre, Yuksam, Chewang La Gurung.

Deputy Speaker Sangay Lepcha, who is also the area MLA, is scheduled to attend the Tamu Lhochhar celebration at Yuksam as chief guest.

Nitish Kumar's party slams BJP over Arunachal Pradesh "Love Jihad"

PATNA, 27 DEC [NDTV]:

The appointment of a new chief in Janata Dal United -- mainly to give Chief Minister Nitish Kumar a chance to opt out of dealing with the BJP brass -- indicates a deep divide within Bihar's ruling alliance. Ramchandra Prasad Singh was named the chief of Janata Dal United today by Mr Kumar, just two weeks after he broached the matter with some partymen.

The Janata Dal United has not shied away from blaming the BJP for covertly backing the rebellion by Chirag Paswan, which chopped off nearly half the party's strength in the assembly and left it as junior partner to the BJP.

Today, the party openly expressed displeasure over several issues, starting with the situation in Arunachal Pradesh, where six MLAs of the party have joined the BJP, leaving it with only one MLA in the state assembly.

In BJP-ruled Arunachal Pradesh, the Janata Dal United was part of the opposition and the crossover of the MLAs has left the party with no heft in the assembly.

"This is no good for the alliance. They should adopt Atal Bihari Vajpayee's dharma," said party spokesman KC Tyagi, voicing displeasure with the ally.

Renu Devi, one of Mr Kumar's Deputies, has claimed that the Arunachal developments would not affect the alliance in Bihar. "We had not poached them (JD(U) MLAs in Arunachal Pradesh). What could our party have done if some legislators voluntarily expressed desire to join us", the former BJP national vice-president had told reporters.

Mr Tyagi today said the JD(U) is "hurt" by the BJP's move.

"Our party's leader had a word with (BJP chief) JP Nadda. He had said the MLAs must be included in the cabinet but the BJP included them in the party. The JD(U) is hurt with this," Mr Tyagi said.

The JD(U) also expressed displeasure with the BJP's move in several states -- including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka -- to criminalise inter-faith marriage with new legislation.

"There have been attempts to divide the society, this is not right," Mr Tyagi said.

Centre extends driving licence, vehicle registration validity till March 2021

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC [PTI]:

The Central government has once again extended the validity of all vehicle-related documents in order to avoid crowding and the possible spread of COVID-19. All those driving licences, registration certificates, and permits which were set to expire may now be used till March 31, 2021, according to a directory issued by the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways to various State and Union Territory administrations.

"Taking into consideration the need to prevent the spread of Covid-19, it is further advised that the validity of all of the above referred documents may be treated to be valid till 31st March 2021. This covers all



documents whose validity has expired since 1st Feb, 2020 or would expire by 31st March 2021," the directory says.

"This will help out citizens in availing transport related services, while maintaining social

distancing," it says.

The ministry had earlier issued advisories dated March 30, June 09, and August 24 of this year, in which it extended the validity of documents related to the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, and the Central

Motor Vehicle Rules, 1989. They all said fitness, permit (all types), licence, registration or any other concerned document may be treated to be valid till December 31, 2020.

Referring to its latest directive, the Union

Transport Ministry said all States and Union Territories are requested to implement it in letter and spirit so that citizens, transporters, and various other organisations operating in this pandemic may not get harassed or face difficulties.

Rahul Gandhi leaves for abroad for short personal visit

NEW DELHI, DEC 27 (PTI):

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi left for abroad on Sunday for a short personal visit, the party said.

Though the Congress did not disclose Gandhi's destination, the chief spokesperson of the party, Randeep Surjewala, confirmed that he will be away for a few days.

"Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has left for abroad for a short personal visit and will be away for a few days," he told PTI.

Asked where was the former Congress chief

headed, Surjewala did not disclose the details.

Sources said Gandhi left for Milan in Italy on a Qatar Airways flight in the morning.

His grandmother stays in Italy and he visited her earlier too.

Gandhi's travel abroad comes a day ahead of the Congress's 136th Foundation Day celebrations on Monday. The flag of the party will be hoisted at the All India Congress Committee (AICC) headquarters on the occasion.

Police deployed outside house, alleges UP Congress chief



LUCKNOW, 27 DEC [PTI]:

Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Ajay Kumar Lallu on Sunday alleged the state government has deployed armed police outside his residence to stop him from going to Jhansi, a day after he was detained briefly for taking out a march allegedly without permission.

He accused the BJP-led government of "muzzling" the voice of truth and trying to halt democratic protests.

The police said the force has been deployed outside Mr Lallu's residence as they got a message from the District Magistrate of Jhansi that Ajay Kumar Lallu should not be allowed to come to Jhansi.

Mr Lallu and over 50 party workers were detained in Lalitpur on Saturday after they tried to take out the 'Gai Bachao, Kisan Bachao (save cow, save farmers)' march

without permission, but were released after a few hours, police had said.

Mr Lallu told PTI on Sunday, "Yesterday, I was arrested in Lalitpur, and then released. However, the police took me to Chhatarpur in Madhya Pradesh, and when my not reaching Lucknow started trending on Twitter, I was brought to Lucknow in a hurried manner. I reached my residence in Lucknow at 2.00 AM."

He also said, "Today (Sunday), I was scheduled to go to Jhansi, but there is police outside my house."

"This undemocratic (BJP) government is hell-bent on unleashing atrocities. It wants to muzzle our voices. I have brought the ashes of cows from Lalitpur and will immerse them in Mandakini river in Chitrakoot," he added.

Satlok Ashram established in Rangpo



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 27 DEC:

Satlok Ashram, a facility affiliated to Sant Rampalji of the Kabir Panth, was established at Rangpo IBM on Sunday, a press release informs.

Mr Tuladas, the ser-

vice coordinator of the ashram, informed that the ashram will be open 24 hours and was dedicated to serve those in need.

Siddharth Das, the local coordinator, adds the main objective of the

ashram was to spread the word of Sant Rampalji and that in the coming days, books on the spiritual and social messages by Sant Rampalji will be kept at the ashram to reach out to more people.

Noida: Active COVID-19 cases drop below 500

NOIDA (UP), DEC 27 (PTI):

Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddh Nagar recorded 19 fresh COVID-19 cases that pushed the district's infection tally to 24,818 on Sunday, official data showed.

Active cases in the district came down to 477 from 522 the previous day as the recovery rate rose to 97.71 per cent, according to the data released by the UP Health Department

for a 24-hour period. The district has a population of over 16 lakh as per Census 2011.

The number of active cases in Gautam Buddh Nagar is the seventh highest in the state.

Sixty-four more patients got discharged during the period with the overall recoveries reaching 24,252, the fifth highest in the state.

Gautam Buddh Nagar

has a death toll of 89 and a mortality rate of 0.35 per cent. The recovery rate of patients has reached 97.71 per cent, the statistics showed.

The number of active COVID-19 cases in UP came down to 15,371 from 15,875 on Saturday while the overall recoveries reached 5,58,303 and the death toll climbed to 8,306 on Sunday, the data showed.

Lawyer allegedly dies by suicide at Farmers' Protest, note mentions PM

NEW DELHI, 27 DEC

[NDTV]: A lawyer from Punjab allegedly died by suicide on Sunday a few kilometres from the site of a farmers' protest on the outskirts of Delhi.

Amarjit Singh from Jalalabad in Punjab's Fazilka district was found on the Tikri border after reportedly consuming poison and was taken to a hospital in Rohtak where doctors declared him dead on arrival, the police said.

In a purported suicide note, Amarjit Singh said he was "sacrificing his life" in support of the farmers' agitation against the centre's new farm laws so that the government is compelled to listen to the voice of the people.

He wrote that common people like farmers and labourers are feeling "defrauded" by the three "black" agricultural laws and asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to "listen to the voice of the people".

The police said they are verifying the authenticity of the suicide note, dated December 18.

"We have informed the relatives of the de-



ceased and once they reach here, their statements will be recorded and further proceedings will be conducted," a police officer from Haryana's Jhajjar district told news agency PTI, adding that they were informed about the suicide by the hospital authorities.

Earlier, at least two suicides have been linked to the farmers' stir, underway at various border points of Delhi for over a month now. A 65-year-old Sikh preacher, Sant Ram Singh, allegedly died by suicide near the Singhu border protest site earlier this month claiming that he was "unable to bear the pain of the farmers".

A few days later, a 22-year-old farmer died by suicide in Punjab's

Bathinda after returning from a protest site near the Delhi border.

Thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and some other states have been protesting at various border points of Delhi against the three agricultural laws adopted in September.

Billed as long-awaited reforms in the agriculture sector, the central government has said they will remove the middlemen and allow farmers more options to sell their produce.

The protesting farmers, however, fear that the new laws would eliminate the system of minimum support price and do away with the mandi system, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates.

Ex-Delhi University Professor GN Saibaba denied woolen cap in jail, says lawyer: Report

Nagpur, 27 Dec [PTI]: The lawyer of former Delhi University professor GN Saibaba, who is serving life term in Nagpur Central Prison for Maoist links, on Sunday alleged that the jail authorities refused to accept a woolen cap and

several other items that his family sent for him.

A senior official of the jail, however, said that although they have accepted all the necessary things that Saibaba requires, they cannot allow everything inside.

Saibaba is wheelchair-bound with 90 per cent physical disabilities. In 2017, a court in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli had convicted him and four others for Maoist links and indulging in activities amounting to waging war against the country.

Since his conviction, Saibaba has been lodged in the Nagpur jail.

Saibaba's lawyer Aakash Sarode said that of the 34 different things that Saibaba wanted, the prison authorities accepted only 13 items when he went there three days back to hand them over.

"A month back, Prof Saibaba had consulted with the jail authorities about the essential things that he requires and which can be brought from outside. Subsequently, he made a list of the things and submitted an application to the jail authorities so that his family could send these articles," Mr Sarode said.

"Accordingly, his family sent these things to me. On December 24, I

went to the jail with all the material along with the list of items. I tried to hand over these things to the authorities. However, the jail staff refused to accept several things, which neither pose any security threat nor pose any danger of COVID-19 spread," he said.

Some of the things that the authorities refused to hand over to him were three books, a pack of 200 pages of blank white papers, a note pad, a wrist weight cuff of 1 kg that he needs as part of his physiotherapy, the lawyer said.

"Similarly, a sham-poo bottle, a woollen cap (monkey cap), a napkin, a handkerchief, a towel and a white T-shirt were refused by the jail authorities. In all, there were 34 items, but only 13 were accepted," Mr Sarode added.

He said he has e-mailed a letter to the Superintendent of the jail about refusal to accept these things. "I am yet to receive a reply form him," Mr Sarode said.

When contacted, Superintendent of Nagpur prison Anup Kumre said that all the necessary things required by Saibaba or any other jail inmates were allowed and given to them as per the jail manual.

"We accept all the necessary things as well as things required as he (Saibaba) has health issues," he said.

"We always accept the things which are necessary and are essential for him. However, we cannot allow everything inside," Mr Kumre added.

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An area measuring 1 acre at Sadam South Sikkim near Loretto Convent School at Gupti road. Price negotiable any one interested can contact: 78640-04501, 62970-03235, 98320-48410

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Two and half storeyed (1st to 3rd floor) complex is available for rent in the heart of Ranipool Baazar (Opposite UCO Bank). The building area is 35'x60' appx. in each floor and is fit for offices, shopping complexes, guest houses, banks etc. Contact: 8509755220, 8348007688.

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General land sale at Lower Sichey, suitable for construction, good locality, near the road, Total size: 90x55ft, (30x55ft each plot). genuine person may contact@9734122366.

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A two storey building constructed on plot area 50x40 ft. at Upper Phong near Phong SS ,Namthang South Sikkim is on sale. Cost Rs 60 Lakhs (Negotiable). Interested may contact : 8145829309, 7864937800, 9749897695.

Distric Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission, Kolkata, Unit-III at Alipore
Consumer Case No.: 138/2020

Sri Pushpak Kumar Anand S/o Sri Parmanand Sah, Residing at Sarsapahari, Near Ma Tara Foundry, P.O. Chirkunda, Dhanbad, Jharkhand-828202

Petitioner

Vs

1. Saisha Infrastructure Pvt. Ltd., a Company incorporated under the Companies Act, 1956, having its Registered Office at 2nd Floor, North Side, 111, Rajpur Road, P.S. Netaji Nagar, West Bengal-700047.
2. Ms. Sushma Gurung, Director of M/s Saisha Infrastructure Pvt. Ltd., residing at Antrang, P.S. Gangtok Sadar, Dist-East Sikkim, Pin-737101.

Opposite Party

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Given under the hand and the seal of the Forum on this 24th December, of 2020.

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Versatiler Dance & Fitness Centre inaugurated in Rangpo

GANGTOK, 27 DEC: Versatiler Dance & Fitness Centre was inaugurated in Rangpo on Sunday with a special event which included the release of the centre's logo and a felicitation programme, press release informs. Asha Kharel was present as the chief guest accompanied by a host of special guests including the SKM CLC president Hari Dangal, Sikkim Bihari Jagran Manch president Swaminath Prasad, Aam Bihari

Kalyan Manch president Chhote Lal Prasad and others. The managing director of the institute, Sagar Tamang, explained the objectives and goals of the centre, and between the colourful cultural program presentation, the institute's logo was also officially released and 25 social workers and those who have supported the idea of the Versatiler Dance & Fitness Centre were felicitated.

Sourav Ganguly calls on Bengal governor

KOLKATA, DEC 27 (PTI): BCCI President and former cricket captain of India Sourav Ganguly on Sunday paid a visit to West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar, which was described by sources at Raj Bhavan as "courtesy call" and there is nothing political about it.

With Assembly elections due in the state in April-May next year, there has been specula-

tion that he may join politics.

Ganguly, who reached Raj Bhavan at around 4.40 pm, did not take any question on the reason for his visit.

The meeting between Ganguly and Dhankhar was on till 5.40 pm.

Raj Bhavan sources said that Ganguly's visit has nothing to do with political developments in the state.

Sikkim athletes in Guwahati for East Zone Junior Athletics C'ship



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 27 DEC:**

A nine-member team of the Sikkim Amateur Athletic Association [SAMA] has reached Guwahati to represent Sikkim in the 32nd East Zone Junior Athletics

Championship 2020 scheduled to be held on 28 and 29 December.

The State contingent comprises of six boys and three girls and is led by RB Subba as team coach.

Darpan Bhattarai, Sa-

meer Pandey, Ayush Tamang, Kunga Nima Kazi, Yabesh Rhosam Subba and Rinchen Lepcha will represent the State in boys' event, while the girls' team has Sapna Khanal, Ranjana Tamang and Sabina Rai.

Trump continues to block pandemic relief package as shutdown looms

MIRANDA BRYANT

WASHINGTON, 27 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: As unemployment benefits were due to expire for millions of Americans on Saturday, Donald Trump, who spent Christmas playing golf in Florida, continued to block a \$900bn pandemic relief bill that would extend them.

The package, which Congress passed with bipartisan support on Monday after months of negotiations, would keep unemployment benefits in place until March and expand state benefits by \$300 a week – as well as extending an evictions moratorium, providing federal loans to small businesses and \$600 direct payments to many Americans.

But without Trump's signature, the entire package – set to be the second biggest in US history – is stalled and the US government now faces a shutdown on Tuesday.

"I simply want to get our great people \$2,000, rather than the measly \$600 that is now in the bill. Also, stop the billions of dollars in 'pork'", he tweeted on Saturday morning.

It comes after he indicated on Tuesday that he might veto the bill, describing it as a "disgrace".

Larry Sabato, director of the Centre for Politics at the University of Virginia, said Trump's motivation for increasing the payments to \$2,000 is "so he looks good".

"And maybe he sees this as the crowning achievement as he leaves office, where he is defeating Congress and his own party," he added. "He's probably more resentful toward members of his own party than he is the Democrats ... He's a hurt creature and he's going to make all the other creatures hurt."

With the support of senator Lindsey Graham, he said Republicans could yet be swayed to vote for a bill including \$2,000 payments, at which point Trump will "claim a great victory".

He added: "I think he actually now believes his own lies about the election. It was stolen because he has said it so many times."

But with the eviction moratorium due to expire on 31 December he said

any deal will have to be done this week.

"Hundreds of thousands of people who could lose the roof over their head if they don't get this eviction prohibition. There are just so many pieces to this that are damaging. But of course, Trump will blame it all on Congress and his followers will then attack Congress, not realising it all comes down to Donald Trump."

The 5,000-page bill was reportedly flown to Mar-a-Lago, his Palm Beach club, on Christmas Eve.

On Christmas Day he was pictured playing golf – his 309th visit to one of his golf courses of his presidency – despite having vowed to be "working tirelessly" over the festive period. On Saturday morning the bill remained unsigned.

As the country continued to reel from the surging pandemic, and amid an explosion in Nashville, he also took time to enter a debate over the first lady's legacy, responding to a Christmas Day tweet by Breitbart News accusing "elitist snobs in the fashion press" of not featuring Melania Trump on their covers for four years.

"The greatest of all time. Fake News!" he tweeted. Around 24 hours after Congress passed the bill, Trump released a surprise video in which he criticised the bill and called for direct payments to be raised to \$2,000 per adult – despite his own party opposing it – and denounced spending on foreign aid and arts venues.

"Made many calls and had meetings at Trump International in Palm Beach, Florida," he tweeted on Friday. "Why would politicians not want to give people \$2,000, rather than only \$600? It wasn't their fault, it was China. Give our people the money!"

Following his loss to president-elect Joe Biden in November, an election in which he has still not conceded, Trump appears even more willing to oppose his own party and its leadership.

After Republican Senator Mitch McConnell acknowledged Biden's win after the Electoral College vote, Trump had an email sent to Republicans hitting out at the Senate majority leader.

Protesting farmers stay put at Delhi borders amid harsh winter



NEW DELHI, DEC 27 (PTI): Thousands of farmers agitating against the three new Central agriculture laws stayed put at their agitations venues near Delhi, which is going through a harsh spell of winter, unrelenting in their demand of withdrawal of the legislations.

The farmers had reached Singhu border over a month ago.

The protesting farmer unions had on Saturday decided to resume their dialogue with the Centre, and proposed December 29 for the next round of talks.

They had also decided that a tractor march will be held on Kundli-Manesar-Palwal highway on December 30.

Security remained tight at the Delhi borders with hundreds of personnel deployed at Singhu, Ghazipur and Tikri

where the farmers have been camping.

The protests have also led to traffic congestion forcing police to divert vehicular movement.

Taking to Twitter on Sunday, the Delhi Traffic Police alerted commuters about the routes that remained closed owing to the agitation and suggested them to take alternative roads.

The Chilla & Gazipur borders are closed for traffic coming from Noida & Gaziabad to Delhi because of farmer protests. People are advised to take alternate route for coming to Delhi via Anad Vihar, DND, Apsara, Bhopra & Loni borders.

Singhu, Auchandi, Piau Maniyari, Saboli & Mangesh borders closed. Please take alternate route via Lampur Safiab, Palla & Singhu school toll tax borders.

Traffic has been diverted from Mukarba & GTK road. Please avoid Outer Ring Rd, GTK road & NH 44, it tweeted.

Enacted in September, the three farm laws have been projected by the Central government as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove the middleman and allow farmers to sell their produce anywhere in the country.

However, the protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that the new laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of MSP and do away with the mandi system, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates.

The government has repeatedly asserted that the MSP and mandi systems will stay and has accused the Opposition of misleading the farmers.

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Watling hails 'New Zealand great' Williamson

WELLINGTON, 27 DEC (REUTERS): Kane Williamson is all business when he takes the crease but playing alongside one of New Zealand's all-time greats is still a lot of fun, said wicketkeeper BJ Watling after the hosts took control on day two of the first test against Pakistan on Sunday.

Williamson completed his 23rd test century at Mount Maunganui, showing why he is considered one of the premier batsmen of his era along with India's Virat Kohli, Australian Steve Smith and Joe Root of England.

"He has just become a father, and it was a special innings for Boxing

Day. He just set us up for a big total," Watling said after the hosts posted 431 in their first innings and reduced Pakistan to 30-1 in the series opener.

Williamson hit 12 boundaries and a six in his 129 before Watling (73) added 66 runs for the seventh wicket with Kyle Jamieson to stretch their tally.

"You can look at some his shots, and he's pure class," Watling said of his captain.

"Twenty-three centuries is pretty special, and he'll hate me for saying it, but he's right up there among New Zealand's greats, isn't he?"

"There's not a lot of chat when batting with him but playing with him is obviously a lot of fun."

What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV

- Fever
- Difficulty in breathing
- Dry Cough
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome
- Pneumonia-like symptoms

Treatment

- Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition.
- No vaccinations available as of now.
- Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected.

Precautions to Prevent nCoV

- Wash your hands often with soap.
- Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer
- Observe good personal hygiene.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms.
- Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats.
- Avoid travel to nCoV affected places.
- Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome.
- Cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.

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

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

Smells Like a Young Spirit

Allow the young their dreams and pursuits

A promising Sikkim Entrepreneurship & Economic Development Cell has been instituted. If seen to its logical end, this Cell, following up on several previous attempts to skill the youth of Sikkim and the launch of the Skilled Youth Startup Scheme, could deliver a lot for the State, because when it comes to the young of Sikkim, they are clearly made of much more resilient and creative stuff than the generation before them. The young hold up hope for Sikkim. And that is always a nice feeling to have. Hope floats here on the shoulders of youngsters who dream to aspire and remain resolute in their resolve to seek a future for themselves beyond the limits of the traditional, the routine or within quotas and reservations. It is with people such as these that the Sikkimese can afford some optimism in the decades to come. Yes, the number of youngsters confident and inspired enough to strike out on their own in little charted terrains is still relatively low in Sikkim, but it is still a start, the foundation on which much grander futures can be built. What the “elders” need to ensure is to support ambition in the young through commitments like SEED, and allow them their pursuit of excellence and, if possible, stay out of their way and not make things any more difficult for them than the red tape already hamstrings. The courage in the young to make professions out of what used earlier be dismissed as “hobbies”, and their respect for merit in an environment which has celebrated mediocrity for far too long are all signs that the graph could still swing upwards for Sikkim... if we allowed it.

The go-getting attitude noticeable among more in the younger generation is in stark contrast to the previous one which has time and again proven itself to be self-defeatingly parochial and shortsighted. Maybe it’s the young’s form of rebellion, but whatever it is, it is a welcome paradigm shift as it is also necessary.

Let us look first at what the previous generation bequeathed the young here. Very little, save a horde of controversies, unresolved issues and almost passionate insularity. They have made corruption a norm and forever shirked accountability – something that is as evident in the lethargy that grips the bureaucracy as it does the society at large in the social problems that plague the families and still remain unaddressed. It is a miracle then that the State still has a generation in the making that is more pragmatic and responsible and hopeful. One only hopes now that the spirit this generation imbibes does not dull under the influence of the seniors who have still not stepped out of the scene.

That corruption of youthful ideals would be an unpardonable disservice to the State and to the future.

The generation next, given half a chance would prefer to carve independent futures for themselves which will undoubtedly combine to give the Sikkimese society a more healthy glow. This, provided we allow them to find their own niche, pursuits and levels. Whether an insecure generation allows such self realization or not remains to be seen. It would surprise few if the generation on the wane tries and makes the coming generation as dependent as it itself is. Just look around, everyone seems to be clamoring for handouts and largesse and even demanding them as a right. The rush for freebies is so energetic that it pushes the deserving category to the end of the line even as the so-called cream of the society continues to masquerade in its various guises appropriating something that should have trickled down. The gene which triggered the spirit of adventure and hard work which emboldened those who made Sikkim their home at a time when survival itself demanded a daily battle with the elements seems to have skipped a generation or two in this Hidden Land. Thankfully it is expressing itself again. One only hopes that this return of the Spirit sustains itself and takes Sikkim to another level - a very doable possibility. And this is why the 35 young entrepreneurs felicitated by SEED invite not only our thanks, but also support, the best expression of which will be to stay out of their way and offer advice and support only when they seek it.

WRITE US:

Readers are invited to comment on, criticise, run down, even appreciate if they like something in this paper. Letters carrying abusive/indecorous language and personal attacks, except when against people responsible in this newspaper (who are fair game), will have to be ignored. Letters which carry forward a conversation or initiate a dialogue will command immediate attention and receive prominence. Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

Magnetic Induction Cooking Can Cut Your Kitchen’s Carbon Footprint

KENNETH MCLEOD
theconversation.com

To curb climate change, many experts have called for a massive shift from fossil fuels to electricity. The goal is to electrify processes like heating homes and powering cars, and then generate the increased electrical power needs using low- or zero-carbon sources like wind, solar and hydropower.

More than 30 cities in California, including Berkeley and San Francisco, have moved in this direction by banning natural gas service in most new buildings. Currently energy use in buildings generates over 40% of San Francisco’s greenhouse gas emissions.

There are straightforward electric options for heating buildings and hot water and drying clothes, but going electric could be more controversial in the kitchen. Traditional electric stoves are notoriously slow to heat up and cool down. They also pose safety issues because their heating coils can stay hot for tens of minutes after they are shut off.

What is a serious cook to do? One high-tech alternative is magnetic induction. This technology was first proposed over 100 years ago and demonstrated at the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair. Today magnetic induction stoves and cooktops are common in Europe and Asia, but remain a niche technology in the U.S. As more cities and states move toward electrification, here’s a look at how magnetic induction works and its pros and cons for cooking.

HEATING WITHOUT A FLAME

I am an electrical engineer specializing in electromagnetic field research. Much of my work focuses on medical therapy applications – but whether you are exposing human tissue or a pan on a cooktop to electromagnetic fields, the principles are the same.

To understand what electromagnetic fields are, the key principle is that an electric charge creates a field around it – essentially, a force that extends in all directions. Think of static electricity, which is an electric charge often produced by friction. If you rub a balloon on your hair, the friction will charge the balloon with static electric charge; then when you lift the balloon away from your head your hair will rise, even if the balloon isn’t touching it. The balloon is pulling on your hair with an attractive electric force.

Moving electric charges, like electricity flowing through wire, produce magnetic fields – zones of magnetic force around the current’s path. The Earth has a magnetic field because electric cur-

rents are flowing in its molten core.

Magnetic fields can also produce electric fields and this is why we use the term electromagnetic fields. This concept was discovered in the 1830s by English scientist Michael Faraday, who showed that if an electrically conductive material, such as a wire, is placed in a moving magnetic field, an electric field is created in the conductor. We call this magnetic induction. If the conductor is formed into a loop, an electric current will flow around the loop.

Faraday’s discovery formed the basis for the development of electric motors. His work also demonstrated a way to heat materials without using a traditional heat source such as fire.

WHERE DOES THE HEAT COME FROM?

All materials have resistance, which means that when electric current flows through them, the flow will be hindered at least somewhat. This resistance causes some of the electric energy to be lost: The energy turns into heat, and as a result the conductor warms up. In my biomedical research we investigate using radio frequency magnetic fields to heat up tissues in the body to help the tissue heal.

Instead of conventional burners, the cooking spots on induction cooktops are called hobs, and consist of wire coils embedded in the cooktop’s surface. For maximum efficiency, engineers want as much as possible of the magnetic field energy produced by each hob to be absorbed by the cookware sitting on it. The magnetic field will create an electric field in the bottom of the cookware, and because of resistance the pan will heat up, even though the hob does not.

For the best performance, magnetic induction stoves and cooktops need to operate at a high magnetic field frequency – typically, 24KHz. They also require pots made from materials that magnetic fields do not readily pass through. Metals with high iron or nickel content absorb magnetic fields, so they are the most efficient options for induction cooking. Iron absorbs magnetic fields more readily than nickel and is far less expensive, so iron-based materials are most commonly used for magnetic induction cookware.

MORE RESPONSIVE AND SAFER, BUT MORE EXPENSIVE

Since induction cooktops require something to absorb magnetic fields in order to produce heat, they are intrinsically safer than a traditional electric cooktop. Placing your hand on the hob will not heat up your hand to any noticeable extent. And since these systems heat cookware without directly

heating the hob, the hobs cool quickly after the cookware is removed, which reduces the risk of burns.

The cookware itself tends to warm up and cool down quickly, and temperature control is very accurate – one of the key properties that cooks value in gas stoves. Another plus is that induction cooktops commonly have smooth surfaces – often glass or ceramic – so they are easy to clean.

Modern induction cooktops are as energy-efficient as traditional electric stoves and about twice as efficient as gas stoves. But this does not necessarily mean they are less expensive to operate. In many parts of the U.S. natural gas is far cheaper than electricity, sometimes by a factor of three or four. This partly explains broader acceptance of induction cooktops in Europe, where until recently natural gas was much more expensive than electricity.

Another factor that has influenced adoption is that induction stoves and cooktops typically cost more than traditional gas or electric stoves, although not substantially so. And cooks will have to replace aluminum, copper, nonmagnetic stainless steel and ceramic pots, none of which work effectively on induction cooktops. One quick check is that if a magnet sticks to the bottom of a pot, the pot will work on an induction cooktop.

Despite these factors, I expect that natural gas use reduction ordinances will lead to greatly expanded use of magnetic induction stoves and cooktops. These measures typically focus on newly constructed buildings, so they will not require expensive conversions of existing homes.

Young singles and families who move into these new residences may not yet have acquired a lot of cookware, and are likely to appreciate the safety associated with magnetic induction, especially if they have children. And early adopters who are willing to pay more for electricity from green sources, or for a hybrid or electric car, may not be upset about paying a few hundred dollars more for a magnetic induction cooktop and pans that work with it.

At the national level, the U.S. may adopt some form of carbon pricing in the near future, which would raise the cost of natural gas. And there is also growing concern about indoor air pollution from gas appliances. More than a century after it was first proposed, magnetic induction cooking’s day in the sun may have arrived.

[The writer is Professor of Systems Science, and Director, Clinical Science and Engineering Research Laboratory, Binghamton University, State University of New York]

The Icy Backstory to That ‘Clink Clunk’ You’ll Hear When Raising a Toast to the End of 2020

TULASI SRINIVAS
theconversation.com

If ever there was a year to toast drawing to an end, it’s 2020. Over the festive period, people around the world will be raising a glass to better times ahead.

Accompanying sighs of relief will likely be the subtle tinkling of ice.

In researching a book on the social, medical and moral history of gin and tonic, I have imbibed – moderately – in bars from the Raffles Hotel in Singapore to the Morse Bar in Oxford. At each venue, my G&T was always served over ice.

The history of chilled drinks goes back to antiquity. But it was the innovative “frozen water” trade from New England to India in the mid-19th century that popularized ice.

FRIGID LUXURY

By that time, ice had been used to chill the drinks for millennia – but only ever for the elite.

Chilled wine was all the rage in first-century Rome. Ice chunks were brought down from the summits of Mount Vesuvius and Etna to chill the food and drink of the wealthy. Roman author Pliny the Younger ascribes to Emperor Nero both the invention of the ice bucket and the chilling of water.

The Mughal emperor Humayun chilled summer fruit juice into a frozen sherbet in the mid-1500s. He used ice shavings from huge blocks of ice he transported on muleback from Kashmir to the capital city of Delhi. To keep it from melting, the ice was treated with potassium nitrate, otherwise known as saltpetre. By the 18th century the Mughals were so dependent upon ice for chilling both food and palaces that they built large “baraf khana,” or ice houses, to store the product.

Across the world in 17th-century Florence, the ruling Medici family would host elaborate feasts featuring tabletop mountain ranges sculpted from ice made by chilling water in winter. They also acted as patrons of Bernardo Buontalenti, the pioneer of

modern-day ice cream.

But until the early 1800s, only emperors and the fabulously wealthy enjoyed the cooling effects of ice.

COOL CUSTOMERS

That changed with a young man from Boston. Frederic Tudor was born in 1783 to a wealthy Boston family who summered on a pond in Rockwood, just north of the city. There, they enjoyed ice cream and chilled drinks thanks to ice harvested in winter and stored in an ice house.

When his brother, William, quipped that they should harvest ice from the estate’s pond and sell it in the tropics, Frederic took the notion seriously. He begged and borrowed from his social network, which included Revolutionary War heroes and merchant elite, to fund his ice enterprise.

According to Tudor’s diary, held at the Harvard Business School, he started shipping ice to the Caribbean island of Martinique in 1806. But islanders remained unconvinced of the benefits of chilling. The ice melted on the dock, and Tudor landed in debtors prison, owing over US\$5,000 to his patrons.

Despite this setback, Tudor’s entrepreneurial spirit was said to be undimmed. By 1826 he had garnered enough business to hire noted inventor Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth as foreman for his company – The Tudor Ice Co. Wyeth created new types of saws, pulleys, iron grids and hoisters needed for efficient ice harvesting. He cut huge blocks of ice from Fresh Pond in Cambridge using horse-drawn ice cutters, and moved them via rail to ships in the Boston and Salem harbors.

From there, the world awaited.

ICE HOUSES OF INDIA

In 1833 Tudor was approached by Samuel Austin, a merchant of silks and spices, to ship ice to Calcutta, modern-day Kolkata, 16,000 miles away, as ballast to add weight to his empty ships. Austin knew that the colonial British in India were frightened of the tropical heat, believing it to be deadly, and they often escaped to the

hills during the endless summer.

So on May 12, 1833, the ship Tuscan sailed from Boston for Calcutta, its hold filled with 180 tons of ice cut during the previous winter. When it arrived in Calcutta four months later, the ship still held 100 tons of ice. It meant Tudor could sell his superior ice at just 3 pence for a pound, undercutting his rivals who sold dirtier ice for much higher.

When news of the ice in Calcutta circulated, British merchants in Bombay, modern-day Mumbai, excitedly raised money to build an ice house in the city’s docks. Initially, demand was limited to the British and Parsis – Persians settled in India – but Tudor’s low prices and superior commodity soon ensured that most elite Indians had access to cold beverages through their homes, clubs and restaurants. Bombay’s ice trade with the U.S. was robust and continued through much of the 19th century, when, during the American Civil War, Indian cotton was used to fill the empty ice ships returning home.

By 1853 India became Tudor’s most lucrative destination, with Calcutta alone yielding an estimated \$220,000 in profits.

A few of the structures built to accommodate the trade still exist today. A decade ago, I visited an ice house in Madras, modern-day Chennai – now known as Vivekananda House – an engineering marvel. British military engineer Col. J.J. Collingwood borrowed a Syrian roofing technique for the ice tower – a domed structure built using clay cylinders. This roof kept the ice very cool, as it was doubly insulated.

ON WALDEN POND

The American naturalist Henry David Thoreau noted the trade in the winter of 1846. After observing a crew of 100 ice cutters at the Tudor Ice Co. at work on Walden Pond, he wrote, “The sweltering inhabitants of Charleston and New Orleans, of Madras and Bombay and Calcutta, drink at my well.”

It wasn’t just India. Ice cut in New

England was transported to Singapore, Jamaica, Havana, New Orleans and Hong Kong.

As well as being able to deliver in bulk, Tudor also marketed the quality of his ice. His claim that the ice of Wenham Lake – 10 miles North of Boston – was the “purest” in the world spawned many imitators. In 1844, a competitor, The Wenham Lake Ice Co., opened an ice store in The Strand, London, where it displayed a large block of ice with a newspaper placed behind it so that passersby could read the print through the frozen water.

ICE KING ON THE ROCKS

The Tudor Ice Co. flourished despite competition. In December 1847, The Sunbury American newspaper reported that 22,591 tons of ice were shipped to foreign ports.

In the space of 40 years, Tudor had built an ice empire, block by block, earning him the moniker the “Ice King.”

But the icy winds of change were blowing. In 1844, the American inventor John Gorrie, a doctor who specialized in treating malaria – also related to the birth of the G&T – had produced a prototype of the modern air conditioner.

In 1851, Gorrie received a U.S. patent for one of the world’s first ice-making machines, and by 1860 he was successful in making ice through artificial refrigeration. Meantime, the New England lakes grew dirty with pollution from coal-fired railroads.

The Tudor Ice Co.’s market declined precipitously; the company closed in 1887.

Tudor had died earlier in Boston, in the middle of winter, 1864. By that time, he had created what the ice industry now defines as “the clink effect” – the ability of ice cubes to recall a host of positive associations – around the world.

[The writer is Professor of Anthropology, Religion and Transnational Studies, Institute for Liberal Arts and Interdisciplinary Studies, Emerson College]

Lukha river turns blue, dead fishes found afloat

JOWAI, DEC 26 [SHILLONGTIMES]: Just days after the infamous Lukha River in East Jaintia Hills turned blue anew, hundreds of dead fishes were seen afloat on Saturday morning.

Villagers inhabiting the river bank beomanded that hundreds of fishes were found dead on Saturday morning and were seen floating upon the surface of the contaminated river.

The incident took place in between Khadum Village and Sonapur Bridge along the catchment area of the Narpuh eco-sensitive zone.

KSU leader, K Suchiang, informed that his organisation has demanded of the East Jaintia Hills Deputy Commissioner to initiate a scientific probe into the cause of the colour-changing phenomenon of the river. Suchiang said a three-week deadline has also been served for conducting the study.

The Lukha River has been turning blue during the winters since 2007. This year, however, the quality water has further gone to the dogs and has turned deep blue.

The locals are of the



opinion that the cement waste discharge by cement plants is the reason why the water changes its colour. "If not cement plants, then what should we believe in? We don't trust the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board report, which had blamed coal mining. If that was the case, why, even after the NGT's ban, the river water continues to change its colour annually," Suchiang said.

The initiation of the rejuvenation process of Lukha River was recently announced, and an expert consultant, the Trinity Impex International, will use algae to clean the river.

An urgent meeting of the District Mineral Foundation (DMF) Trust was held on December 23 last year with an agenda to decide on rejuvenation of Lukha River.

After the discussion, the DMF Trust committee

decided to earmark Rs 1 crore for the project on rejuvenation of the river by an expert consultant, Trinity Impex International.

In November 30, 2020, the Water Resources department invited bids to be submitted in the e-procurement portal for procurement of equipment and chemicals for "study of water quality of rivers in East Jaintia Hills District with specified study on

change of colour of Lunar-Lukha River at certain periods of the year".

The expression of interest (EOI) was also floated on January 8, 2020, by the DMF Trust, East Jaintia Hills, for the pilot project. The EOI was for the treatment of polluted Lunar rivers from Ummutha-Lunar confluence to Lunar-Lukha confluence, which is 2.5 km approximately, in Khliehriat.

Andamans reports no fresh COVID-19 case, tally at 4,912

PORT BLAIR, DEC 27 (PTI): Andaman and Nicobar Islands did not report a single case of COVID-19 in the last 24-hours, a health department official said on Sunday.

The Union Territory's COVID-19 tally remained at 4,912, the official said. Eight more people

were cured of the disease in the last 24-hours, taking the total number of recoveries in the archipelago to 4,789, he said.

The Union Territory now has 61 active COVID-19 cases, while 62 people have died so far due to the disease, the official said.

Arunachal Pradesh reports 9 new COVID-19 cases

ITANAGAR, DEC 27 (PTI): Nine more persons, including a policeman, tested positive for COVID-19 in Arunachal Pradesh, pushing the tally to 16,687, an official said on Sunday.

Of the fresh cases, four were reported from East Siang, two each from West Kameng and Tawang and one from Changlang district, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Dr Lobsang Jampa said.

Barring two, all the new patients were asymptomatic, he said.

Twenty-three more patients recovered from COVID-19, taking the total number of recoveries in the state to 16,477.

The SSO said the

COVID-19 recovery rate of Arunachal Pradesh at present is 98.74 per cent.

Arunachal Pradesh now has 154 active coronavirus cases, while 56 people have died so far of the disease.

The fatality ratio is at 0.33 per cent, he said.

The Capital Complex region, comprising Itanagar, Naharlagun, Nirjuli and Banderdewa areas, has the highest number of active cases at 53, followed by Tawang (37), East Siang (16) and West Kameng (11).

The state has so far tested 3,75,766 samples for COVID-19, including 361 on Saturday, and the positivity rate is at 1.26 per cent, Dr Jampa added.

39 new COVID-19 cases in Ladakh



Leh, Dec 27 (PTI): Thirty-nine more people tested positive for the coronavirus in Ladakh, taking the infection count in the Union Territory to 9,394, officials said on Sunday.

Ladakh has so far recorded 126 COVID-related deaths -- 83 in Leh and 43 in Kargil -- while 9,050 patients or 96 per cent of the total cases have recovered from the infection in the UT.

The officials said 31 of the fresh cases were detected in Leh and eight others in Kargil during the past 24 hours.

Thirty-one patients were discharged after successful treatment in Leh during the same period, they said. According to the officials, the number of active COVID-19 cases in Ladakh stands at 218 -- 192 in Leh and 26 in Kargil.

Oli is pushing Nepal back toward regression: Ex-PM Bhattarai

KATHMANDU, DEC 27 [MYREPUBLICA]: Former Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai has accused Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli of pushing the country back toward regression by dissolving the House of Representatives (HoR).

Bhattarai, who is also the chairperson of the Federal Council of Janata Samajbadi Party (JSP), made the remarks on Sunday while addressing a demonstration organized by his party against the government's decision to dissolve the lower house of parliament.

"Prime Minister Oli

is pushing the country back toward regression by capturing various state organs in a gradual manner and parliament dissolution was a part of that exercise. In fact, regression does not come at one go, it comes in various forms," Bhattarai said.

He also criticized the prime minister's act of inducting new ministers into the Cabinet. "On the one hand, the prime minister dissolved parliament and announced the dates for midterm elections, on the other, he inducted new ministers into his Cabinet.

This is unacceptable," Bhattarai said.

Recalling that he did not appoint new ministers into his Cabinet after the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly cum parliament back in 2012, Bhattarai questioned Prime Minister Oli's decision to appoint new ministers.

"There were 12 ministries lying vacant when I was serving as the prime minister. But, I did not appoint new ministers on moral grounds. Instead, I oversaw five-six ministries myself," Bhattarai said.

COVID-19 is still spreading far and wide in Nepal, only two districts report zero cases



KATHMANDU, DEC 27 [MYREPUBLICA]: Though the number of daily counts of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has been declining in recent days, a report shows that the disease is still spreading far and wide across the country. Of the 77 districts in the country, only Mugu and Rukum (West) have reported zero cases of the flu-like disease, according to the daily COVID-19 bulletin released by the Ministry of Health and Popula-

tion (MoHP). There are 6,493 active cases of the disease across the country of which 2,891 are in Kathmandu district alone. The district has so far reported 96,254 infections. The remaining two districts in the Kathmandu Valley also have more than 300 cases each along with Kailali, Rupandehi and Kaski districts.

The Valley has topped the tally in terms of COVID-19 related deaths too. As of Sunday afternoon, Nepal's most populous city has witnessed

707 fatalities --- 464 in Kathmandu, 145 in Lalitpur and 98 in Bhaktapur --- which accounts for 38.73 percent of the total deaths (1825) confirmed so far in the country.

Meanwhile, Nepal's COVID-19 tally has climbed to 249,863 as the health ministry confirmed 731 recoveries in the past 24 hours. The country on Sunday diagnosed 481 new cases of the disease whose first infection was detected on January 23 earlier this year.

Odisha logs 303 new COVID-19 cases, 4 more fatalities

BHUBANESWAR, DEC 27 (PTI): Odisha's COVID-19 tally on Sunday mounted to 3,28,504 after 303 more people tested positive for the infection, while four more fatalities pushed the toll to 1,861, a senior health department official said.

Of the 303 cases, 172 were reported from various quarantine centres, and 131 detected during contact tracing.

Khurda and Kendrapara reported the maximum number of new

cases at 31 each, followed by Sundergarh at 30. Five districts -- Boudh, Gajapati, Koraput, Puri and Subarnapur -- recorded just one case each.

Since Saturday, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Malkangiri and Rayagada did not register any new patient.

Taking to Twitter, the health and family welfare department said, "Regret to inform about the demise of four Covid positive patients while under treatment in hospitals."

One fatality each was registered in Khurda, Kalahandi, Nuapada and Sundergarh, the official said.

Odisha currently has 2,841 active cases, while as many as 3,23,749 people have recovered from the infectious disease.

Fifty-three patients died due to comorbidities.

Over 68 lakh samples have been examined for COVID-19 in the coastal state so far, the official added.

Reliance on Bruno Fernandes causes problems for Manchester United

JONATHAN WILSON

LONDON, 27 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: At some level, this game happened. In a sense it was perfect fare for a bleary Boxing Day lunchtime. It was engaging enough without ever being especially demanding, and if you did happen to doze off for quarter of an hour or so you wouldn't have missed anything overly consequential. It certainly didn't answer any questions. We still don't know how good Leicester or Manchester United are or whether either is remotely capable of sustaining a title challenge.

Both sides have had good patches this season, but neither has entirely convinced, a pattern this game distilled perfectly. No sooner had one narrative begun to take control than another rose up to deflect it off course. Both sides have been inconsistent. Both have been better away from home. Both like to play on the break. United had gone behind in all six previous Premier League away games this season but won them all; here they took the lead twice and ended up drawing.

Given the way both sides prefer to play on the counter this could have been one of those non-games that has started to crop up with increasing frequency in the Premier League, when teams are so determined not to get caught by passes played in behind them they may as well just leave the ball in the centre and sit in their own halves.

United had been involved in games like that against Chelsea and Manchester City and there were stretches of this one, particularly just after half-time, that threatened to subside into that sort of paralysis.

That it did not was largely down to Leicester's willingness to take the game to United. That kept the game bubbling,

but it also exposed them. Counterattacking excellence aside, the defining trait of United this season has been their reliance on Bruno Fernandes for creativity.

He caused major problems early on, probing the inside-left channel and linking with Marcus Rashford. He scored United's second, it was his cross that a weirdly unmarked Rashford headed over in the second minute and then his toe-end that created the opening for the first goal.

That Fernandes has been directly involved in more than half of United's 60 goals since he arrived at the end of January, either scoring or registering the assist, is one of those double-edged statistics. On the one hand it is hugely impressive, a mark of his great quality, but on the other it does indicate the extent to which United play through him and how dependent they are on him playing well.

It was notable that as James Justin tucked in, closing off the space he had been exploiting, Fernandes's influence waned and United faded until the arrival of Edinson Cavani gave them a fresh jolt of life. At 33, Cavani remains fit and sharp, but his great strength is his game intelligence. Anthony Martial is quicker and so suits the gameplan of playing on the break more naturally, but Cavani's movement, his capacity to sniff out space, adds a level of menace United often lack.

When Cavani dropped off to receive Eric Bailly's pass after 79 minutes, no Leicester player went with him, giving him time to turn and feed Fernandes. Jonny Evans, once again, was left looking lonely and confused, from a Leicester point of view the leitmotif of the game.

4 new COVID-19 cases push Mizoram's tally to 4,182

AIZAWL, DEC 27 (PTI): Mizoram on Sunday reported four new COVID-19 cases, taking the state's tally to 4,182, an official said.

Two cases were reported from Lawngtlai district, while one case each was reported from Aizawl and Lunglei districts, the official said.

One Border Security

Force (BSF) jawan and two females were among the newly infected people, he said.

One patient has developed symptoms of COVID-19 while the others were asymptomatic.

According to the state health department, the state now has 128 active COVID-19 cases, while 4,046 people have recovered from the virus.

Mizoram has also reported eight COVID-19 deaths so far, it said.

Altogether, 1,76,131 samples have been tested for COVID-19 so far, including 375 on Saturday.

The COVID-19 recovery rate in the state is 96.75 per cent, while the infection rate is 2.40 per cent.

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Premier League: Arsenal stop rot by beating Chelsea, Everton move second

MANCHESTER, 27 DEC (REUTERS): Arsenal ended their seven match winless run in the Premier League with a surprise 3-1 London derby victory over Chelsea at the Emirates Stadium on Saturday while Manchester United were held to a 2-2 draw at Leicester City.

Everton moved into second spot with a late winner in a 1-0 defeat of bottom club Sheffield United while Manchester City moved fifth thanks to a 2-0 win over Newcastle United.

Manchester United, who had won their last 10 away games in the Premier League, dropped to fourth on 27 points, with third-placed Leicester on 28 and a resurgent Everton on 29.

Leaders Liverpool (31) can extend their lead when they face West Bromwich Albion on Sunday.

Chelsea's third defeat in four games drops them to seventh, behind Aston Villa on goal difference after Dean Smith's side beat Crystal Palace 3-0.

Under pressure Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta's troubles looked to have increased with several regulars ruled out for the visit of a Chelsea side that could have gone second with a win.

But the Gunners took the lead in the 35th minute through an Alexandre Lacazette penalty after Kieran Tierney was adjudged to have been clipped in the box by Reece James.

Nine minutes later, Granit Xhaka's unstoppable freekick past Edouard Mendy made it 2-0.

Visibly frustrated Chelsea coach Frank Lampard replaced out-of-form Germany striker Timo Werner with winger Callum Hudson-Odoi and Mateo Kovacic with Jorginho at halftime but Arsenal sealed a timely win in the 56th minute when Bukayo Saka's cross floated over Mendy and the ball went in off the post.

Tammy Abraham grabbed a late consolation from a Hudson-Odoi cross and Chelsea could have scared Arsenal further if Jorginho had not had a 90th-minute penalty saved by Bernd Leno.

"That shows you we're able to do it when we're at our best. Can we do it every three days? That's the question mark we need to respond in the next weeks or so," Arteta, whose side are in 14th spot, told reporters.

Marcus Rashford put United ahead in the 23rd minute with a cool finish after being slipped in by Bruno Fernandes but Harvey Barnes equalised eight minutes later from the edge of the box.

Fernandes restored United's lead in the 79th minute, drilling into the bottom corner after being found inside the area by substitute Edinson Cavani.

Again though, the lead was short-lived as Vardy's first time shot on the half-turn from a low cross from Ayoze Perez, deflected off United defender Axel Tuanzebe. "One point is not the worst result but we're disappointed to not get the three points against a tough side," United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said.

Ajinkya Rahane century gives India big lead over Australia in second Test

MELBOURNE, 27 DEC [AAP]: Stand-in India captain Ajinkya Rahane has filled Virat Kohli's imposing shoes in impeccable style with his 12th Test century lifting the tourists to an 82-run first-innings lead over Australia in the second Test.

Leading his country for the second time in Tests, Rahane's unbeaten 104 – the first century of the series – allowed India to move past Australia's total of 195 at stumps on the second day of the Boxing Day Test at the MCG.

Rahane was put down twice, first on 73 and on the final ball of the day as rain stopped play after Travis Head dropped a simple chance.

India will resume on day three at 277-5, with Rahane and allrounder Ravindra Jadeja (40 not out) to go about further punishing Australia while trying to level the series at one-all.

Rahane's patient innings was not without luck, surviving multiple scares en route to his second best Test score against Australia.

The 32-year-old has a liking for the MCG, with his only previous triple-figure score against the hosts coming at



the famous venue in 2014.

Australia captain Tim Paine was left ruing his decision not to have a first slip after lunch as Rahane edged a ball right between the wicketkeeper and second slip that flew away to the boundary.

Mitchell Starc, who earlier became the ninth Australian to take 250 Test wickets, should have had his third scalp of the match when he steamed in with the second new ball.

But with Rahane on 73, Steve Smith inexplicably

dropped a regulation catch in the slips to continue a miserable match for the world's No 1 Test batsman.

Smith's surprising missed opportunity summed up Australia's end to the day, with the hosts putting in a flat final

session after a 15-minute rain delay.

It is a remarkable turnaround in eight days after India's bid to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy was seemingly doomed following their record-low of 36 all-out

at Adelaide Oval.

Combined with the fact Kohli, one of the game's greatest batsmen, will take no further part in the series, India were barely given a hope heading to Melbourne.

India's four inclusions have all played major roles in the revival.

Jadeja's assured batting at No 7 has allowed stability down the order, while wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant (29 off 40 balls) played an entertaining cameo as he combined with Rahane for a vital 57-run fifth-wicket stand.

Debutant Shubman Gill survived two dropped catches, including one in the second over of the day off Josh Hazlewood's bowling, but captain Tim Paine did make up for the blunder behind the stumps.

Paine's catch to send Gill (45) packing was regulation, but his brilliant effort to dismiss Cheteshwar Pujara two overs later will be replayed for the rest of the summer.

Australia's fast-bowling brigade of Cummins, Starc and Hazlewood toiled hard but poor fielding cost them dearly.

Granit Xhaka strikes a telling blow but it is the Age of Saka Arsenal must embrace

BARNEY RONAY LONDON, 27 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: With 44 minutes gone, Arsenal 1-0 up and producing a performance of rare verve and energy, Granit Xhaka took a step back and stood completely still, staring at the top right-hand corner of the Chelsea goal.

Bukayo Saka had been fouled 10 yards from the intersection of penalty box and penalty arc. A free-kick for Arsenal was reward for Saka's fine, driving performance. Above all it looked as if it would be a chance to run down the clock on the half.

Chelsea set up a dutiful four-man wall. Xhaka paced back, lining his left foot up with the right-hand corner. There was no disguise. The ball was only ever heading towards that spot in front of the empty Clock End, with its branded tarpaulins, its inspirational messages and the rather hopeful club motto.

Victory through harmony: meet Granit. What a strange player Xhaka has been for Arsenal. For an unexceptional, largely pedestrian midfielder, the some-time captain has induced a startlingly extreme range of emotional responses.

Does anybody even know his best position yet? Six and half years ago in São Paulo Xhaka produced a masterful display against Lionel Messi's Argentina as a holding midfielder. In the Premier League he has looked like a poorly programmed robot trying to master the role.

Something more creative perhaps? Xhaka may enjoy standing there looking solemn and potent over free-kicks, but this is a triumph of hope over the cold reality of one league goal since March 2019. He averages three assists a year.

So, leadership qualities then? Hmm. We remember the dust-ups, the funks and fall-

ings-out, the match-turning goofs. Xhaka had only just returned to the team at the Emirates after a red-card against Burnley so witless (strangling Ashley Westwood: where can this really lead, Granit?) it left some supporters demanding a public apology.

Hair-tearing frustration leavened by odd bumps of hope: this has been the tone of Xhaka's Arsenal career. And yet, it has been four and a half years now, almost 200 games and a couple of FA Cups.

In many ways this has been the Age of Xhaka at Arsenal, with its trapped rage, its bursts of stalled progress, from the dog days of late Wenger, to Mikel Arteta's attempts to inject his own untried urgency into a group of left-over players.

And now here was Xhaka redux, walking forward at an angle and striking the ball with a startling purity, watching it rise over the end of the wall in a flat arc, curling away from the left hand of Édouard Mendy and into the corner of the net.

Xhaka ran away not looking that surprised or even that pleased, perhaps wishing, for the first time since lockdown, for the catharsis of home crowd communion.

But let's not pretend here. It seems unlikely this will mark the dawning of a glorious second age of Granit. But it will perhaps stand as one of the great moments of Xhaka's time at the club, given the pressure of the occasion. Who knows, with a timely, roll-the-dice appearance of good Granit, he may just have done his manager and this team the greatest favour of his Arsenal career.

There were green shoots here, and some hope in this performance. But it needed victory to seal the moment, albeit one that arrived via a roundabout route with

a wonder-goal from the embattled non-scoring midfielder, a saved penalty late on, an outrageous third goal from Saka and a slightly soft first-half penalty won cleverly by Kieran Tierney.

And yet Arteta's team did thoroughly deserve their 3-1 win, a victory for the energy and unscarred verve of the younger players in the starting XI.

When Arsenal beat these opponents in the FA Cup final in late summer there was a sense of something taking shape, the outline of a hard-working, fast-breaking, happy-looking team. Fast-forward five months and five key players from that day were either dropped, ill or unavailable – among them the record signing and the lavishly rewarded skipper. A feeling of progress has become slash and burn disaster management.

The result was an opportunity for Emile Smith Rowe and Gabriel Martinelli, talented young players who started alongside Saka. All three set the tone, working feverishly hard in the opening half hour.

Smith Rowe looked ready for a scrap in the centre of the pitch, a scurrying figure, socks drooping around his shins, always feeding the flanks. Saka, the most experienced of the three, was the key player in the game.

He is in his own way a kind of anti-Xhaka. Saka's greatest gift is his calm eye, his decision-making, his ability to pick the right pass, the right moment. If Arteta has a future at Arsenal it is these young, talented players who offer the most coherent vision of progress right now.

Their energy won this game. Xhaka, the man of this Arsenal age – for better or worse – gave it a gloss that may yet prove significant.

Jürgen Klopp says he will 'never, ever take a full stadium for granted' again



SACHIN NAKRANI LONDON, 27 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: Jürgen Klopp has said he will never again take managing a team inside a full stadium for granted and that he is braced for Liverpool to lose the ability to welcome even 2,000 spectators, something only they and Everton in the Premier League are allowed to do under the new Covid-19 tier restrictions in England.

The spread of a new coronavirus variant has brought to a halt the widespread return of fans to grounds, with a number of regions previously in tier 2, which allows crowds of up to 2,000, moved into the stricter tiers 3 and 4. The mass testing programme initiated in Liverpool last month has played a part in the city's two Premier League clubs being able to keep some of their turnstiles open. While Klopp said that has not provided his players with a significant competitive advantage and will not do so, he did recognise the positive feeling they get from being able to perform in front of some supporters.

Liverpool have played in front of 2,000 of their own fans on two occasions this season, against

Wolves and Tottenham, and will do so again when West Brom visit Anfield on Sunday. The fixture is the only top-flight match with spectators this weekend, with Everton playing away at Sheffield United on Boxing Day.

"It's a massive benefit from an emotional point of view [to play in front of fans]. It's nice, much more enjoyable," said Klopp. "Results-wise it has not made the biggest difference – we played in an empty stadium and with 2,000 fans and won most games, so it's not an advantage.

"Long may it continue that we can keep people in the stadium but with the new tier system it doesn't look likely. There are still bigger problems out there and the moment they say it's not possible [to have spectators] then we have to wait for the next moment it's possible again.

"What this year has shown us is to enjoy the good things for as long as they are there, and I will never, ever in my life take a full stadium for granted. Working at Mainz, Dortmund and Liverpool, I don't think I played a home game for a long time in a not sold-out stadium.

I enjoyed it but I didn't think how special it is. I will much more in the future."

Liverpool welcome West Brom with their sights set on a third consecutive league victory. The task seems a relatively straightforward one given the sides' contrasting form, with the visitors arriving on Merseyside having lost six and drawn one of their past eight fixtures. However, they are now led by Sam Allardyce – the last manager to guide an opposition team to a league win at Anfield, having done so with Crystal Palace in April 2017.

"What I expect is a tough opponent," said Klopp. "It's always tough against Sam Allardyce teams. Well-organised, don't make a big fuss of possession, and the situation West Brom are in, there will be a proper fight."

James Milner and Xherdan Shaqiri could feature for Liverpool having been sidelined for some time with hamstring and muscle injuries respectively. Thiago Alcântara is back in training having been out for more than two months with a knee injury but the midfielder will not be ready to feature on Sunday.

Messi says 'lucky' to have worked under Guardiola

BARCELONA, 27 DEC (REUTERS): Lionel Messi counts himself "lucky" to have worked under Pep Guardiola at Barcelona between 2008-12 and says the Spaniard brings "something special" to coaching, comments that are likely to fuel speculation the pair could reunite at Manchester City.

Messi was a mainstay of Guardiola's Barca side that won 14 major titles and has been linked with a switch to City since the manager signed a new deal that will keep him at the Premier League club until the end of the 2022-23 season.

The Argentine player is into the final few months of his current contract in Spain having unsuccessfully tried to leave Barca during the

close season. "Pep has something special," Messi told Spanish television channel La Sexta.

"He makes you see things in one way: how he prepares for matches, defensively, how to attack ... he told you exactly how the match was going to be, how you had to attack to win.

"I was lucky ... to train under Guardiola and Luis

Enrique, the two best. Having them made me grow a lot physically and mentally, and also the tactical wisdom they've taught me."

Guardiola said last month that he is unsure what the future holds for Messi but hopes that, as a Barcelona fan, he will remain at the La Liga club until the end of his career.

COVID in besieged Gaza: ‘A blockade inside a blockade’

MARAM HUMAID

GAZA, 27 DEC [ALJAZEERA]: Eight years ago, the United Nations warned that the Gaza Strip would not be a “liveable place” by 2020, urging Israel to lift its years-long blockade against the Palestinian coastal enclave and calling for a “herculean effort” to improve basic services there.

But Israel and Egypt have continued the crippling air, land and sea blockade imposed in 2007, mostly isolating the territory’s nearly two million residents from the rest of the world.

When 2020 arrived, the conditions in Gaza were marked by water and medicine shortages as well as a severe power crisis, with residents of the enclave receiving only up to six hours of electricity per day, a situation some called “no longer tolerable.”

The coronavirus – which swept across the world this year, infecting tens of millions and upending life in nearly every country – has only exacerbated Gaza’s woes.

“People in Gaza had enough in their lives, moving from a crisis to another without a break,” said Mahmoud Abu Samaan, 34, an employee at the Hamas-run Ministry of Communication.

“You can’t force the people to sit at their homes, without electricity, food or money. This is a blockade within a blockade.”

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Gaza has recorded more than 36,000 cases and 310 deaths. The virus has spread rapidly in the congested enclave, where 70 percent of the population are refugees who live in overcrowded camps.

Hamas, which controls the territory, has suspended Friday



prayers at mosques, shut down restaurants, wedding halls and receptions. The lockdown has left thousands without work, worsening the unemployment rate, which stood at more than 50 percent even before the pandemic.

Abu Samaan said he and his family of four all tested positive for the virus, but their symptoms were light.

“I was very afraid,” he said. “Not of the virus, but of the dire health system here.”

“It’s not the coronavirus, but the ongoing blockade that has destroyed our lives.”

‘DISASTROUS’

Wafaa Abu Kwaik, an English teacher, also contracted the virus, along with her husband and five children.

The 40-year-old said a total of 19 people in her extended family fell ill. But Abu Kwaik said she and her relatives did not receive ade-

quate care.

“My 62-year-old mother’s condition deteriorated due to her hypertension and diabetes,” Abu Kwaik said.

Her mother’s condition was serious, but she recovered after spending 15 days in the intensive care unit.

“The situation was very difficult. There were hundreds of cases a day and not enough beds. The medical staff could not deal with these numbers, and most people were deteriorating not because of the virus, but because of the lack of equipment and medical facilities to treat them.”

The Israeli-Egyptian blockade has left Gaza’s healthcare system in a dire state.

Abd al-Latif al-Hajj, director of international cooperation at the Hamas-run Ministry of Health, said Gaza’s healthcare system has been overstretched for years amid

the blockade and from three significant Israeli military assaults on the enclave.

“This year, there is a shortage of 47 percent in medications, 32 percent deficit in medical consumables and a 62 percent deficit in medical laboratory supplies,” he said.

“There is also a lack of medical staff who work at a limited capacity as they do not receive regular salaries.”

With the COVID-19 outbreak, the situation in Gaza hospitals was “disastrous,” al-Hajj said, adding that people with other chronic illnesses, such as heart disease and cancer, were now unable to leave Gaza for medical treatment because of the pandemic.

Al-Hajj also noted that Israel has already begun vaccinating its citizens, ignoring its responsibility towards the occupied Gaza Strip.

“Unfortunately, no one can

force Israel to fulfil its obligations towards the Palestinians,” he said.

POURING ‘OIL ON THE FIRE’
Israel imposed the blockade on Gaza in June 2007, restricting the flow of goods and people in and out of Gaza after Hamas took control of the territory.

The UN has called for an end to the Israeli siege, saying the blockade amounts to “collective punishment of the two million residents of Gaza” – an act prohibited by the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Egyptian limits on the movement of Gaza Palestinians through the Rafah border crossing and Hamas’s disputes with the Palestinian Authority, which governs the West Bank, has worsened the situation. The PA has limited financial transfers to Gaza and even asked Israel to cut back electricity supplies.

“We have to find new terms to describe the situation in Gaza,”

said Omar Shaban, a Gaza-based political analyst.

“The UN said in 2012 that Gaza will not be liveable in 2020. Then came the 2014 war, which lasted for 51 days and destroyed the infrastructure in the Gaza, followed by several military escalations and a suffocating economic blockade.”

He added: “In 2020, the coronavirus came to pour oil on the fire, and the situation here became catastrophic at all levels.”

In April, 19 human rights groups urged Israel to lift its siege on Gaza so that the territory could equip itself with the necessary medical supplies to deal with the pandemic.

‘GAZA CANNOT CONTINUE LIKE THIS’

Azzam Shaath, a legal researcher at the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, said Israel also had a responsibility as an occupying power to care for the Palestinians living in Gaza.

“It should respond to the emergency needs, provide equipment and medical care aid, and implement detective measures to prevent contamination and infections,” he said. “Israel should immediately remove restrictions to movement of goods and any other barriers on trade exchange and economic activities that threaten the public health.”

He called on the international community to pressure Israel to end the Gaza blockade.

“The international community needs to understand that Gaza cannot continue like this,” he said.

“What the world has witnessed this year is what the people of Gaza have lived through during the 14 years of the Israeli blockade.”

Syrian refugee camp in Lebanon set ablaze after fight



LEBANON, 27 DEC [ALJAZEERA]: A Syrian refugee camp in northern Lebanon was set on fire Saturday night following a fight between members of the camp and a local Lebanese family, state media reported.

The United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) confirmed a large fire had broken out in a camp in the Miniyeh region and said some injured had been taken to hospital, but did not provide an exact number.

“The fire has spread to all the tented shelters” – made of plastic sheeting and wood – UNHCR spokesman Khaled Kabbara told AFP news agency. The camp housed about 75 families, he said.

The National News Agency (NNA) reported that the fire followed an “altercation” between a member of a Lebanese family and “Syrian workers”.

Other youths from the Lebanese family then “set fire to some of the refugees’ tents”, the NNA added.

The Lebanese Civil Defence worked to control the blaze while the army and police were deployed to restore calm,

according to the report.

A security source told AFP shots were heard, saying the fight in the Bhanine area was set off when Syrian workers demanded a wage which their employers refused to pay.

However, the same source said later that initial inquiries found the dispute could have been sparked by the harassment of a Syrian woman.

“Some families have fled the area out of fear because there were also sounds of explosions caused by household gas canisters blowing up,” Kabbara said.

Lebanon says it hosts some 1.5 million Syrians, including about one million registered as refugees with the United Nations.

Authorities have called on refugees to return to Syria even though rights groups warn that the war-torn country is not yet safe.

In November, approximately 270 Syrian refugee families fled the northern Lebanese town of Bsharre after a Syrian national was accused of shooting dead a Lebanese resident, sparking widespread tension and hostility.

EU launches vaccine rollout, historic day in virus fight

VANESSA GERA WARSAW (POLAND), DEC 27 (AP): Medical workers, nursing home residents and politicians are set to be vaccinated against the coronavirus across the European Union on Sunday, part of an effort by the bloc’s 27 nations to roll out shots in a coordinated and equitable fashion.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen released a video celebrating the vaccine rollout, calling it a touching moment of unity in the battle to protect the bloc’s nearly 450 million people from the worst public health crisis in a century.

As it turned out, some EU immunisations began a day early in Germany, Hungary and Slovakia.

The operator of a German nursing home where dozens of people were vaccinated on Saturday, including a 101-year-old woman, said every day that we wait is one day too many.

The rollout marks a moment of hope for a region that includes some of the world’s earliest and worst-hit virus hot spots Italy and Spain and others like the Czech Republic, which were spared earlier in the year only to see their health care systems near collapse in the fall.

It also should ease frustrations that were building up, especially in Germany, as Britain, Canada and the United States kicked off their inoculation programs with the same vaccine weeks earlier.

Altogether, the EU’s 27 nations have recorded at least 16 million coronavirus infections and more than 336,000 deaths huge numbers that experts still agree



understate the true toll of the pandemic due to missed cases and limited testing.

The first shipments of the vaccine developed by Germany’s BioNTech and American drugmaker Pfizer were limited to just under 10,000 doses in most EU countries, with its mass vaccination programs expected to begin only in January.

Each country is deciding on its own who will get the first shots. Spain, France and Germany, among others, are vowing to put the elderly and residents in nursing homes first.

In Italy, which has Europe’s worst virus toll at over 71,000 dead, a nurse in Rome’s Spallanzani Hospital, the main infectious diseases facility in the capital, will be the first in the country to receive the vaccine, followed by other health personnel.

Poland is also prioritising doctors, nurses and others on the front lines of fighting the virus. The central European nation was largely spared the surge that badly hit Western Europe in the spring, but has been hit by high daily infections and deaths this fall.

EU leaders are counting on the vaccine rollout to help the bloc project a sense of unity in a complex lifesaving mission after it faced a year of difficulties in negotiating

a post-Brexit trade deal with Britain.

It’s here, the good news at Christmas, said German Health Minister Jens Spahn. This vaccine is the decisive key to end this pandemic ... it is the key to getting our lives back.

Among politicians who plan to get virus shots on Sunday, as a way of promoting a wider acceptance of vaccinations, are Slovakian President Zuzana Caputova and Bulgarian Health Minister Kostadin Angelov.

Meanwhile, the first cases of a new virus variant that has been spreading rapidly around London and southern England have now been detected in France and Spain. The new variant, which British authorities said is much more easily transmitted, has caused European countries, the United States and China to put new restrictions on travel for people from Britain.

The German pharmaceutical company BioNTech is confident that its coronavirus vaccine works against the new UK variant, but said further studies are needed to be completely certain.

The European Medicines Agency on January 6 will be considering approving a second coronavirus vaccine, this one by Moderna, which has already been approved for use in the United States.

Beijing tightens COVID-19 curbs as cases detected across capital

BEIJING, 27 DEC (REUTERS): Beijing has tightened COVID-19 curbs over concerns that China’s mass travel during the holiday period could cause cases to spike in the capital, as it reported locally transmitted cases for a fourth straight day on Sunday.

A meeting led by the Communist party boss, Cai Qi, urged all districts in Beijing to enter an “emergency” mode, sealing off residential compounds and villages where infections are found.

China’s southern technology hub of Shenzhen reported one asymptomatic case on Sunday, a patient who made two business trips to Beijing this month.

Shunyi district, where all Beijing’s recent coronavirus cases have been reported, has declared a

wartime mode and testing for all its 800,000 people. All the cases reported on Saturday were close contacts of previous cases.

Two villages in Shunyi have been sealed off as a result. Chaoyang district, which neighbours Shunyi, has finished testing 234,413 people in three neighbourhoods, with none testing positive. People who have not received their test results are not allowed to go out, the district government said.

Some residential compounds in Tongzhou have reimposed temperature checks upon entry and the number of entrances have been reduced, according to local media reports.

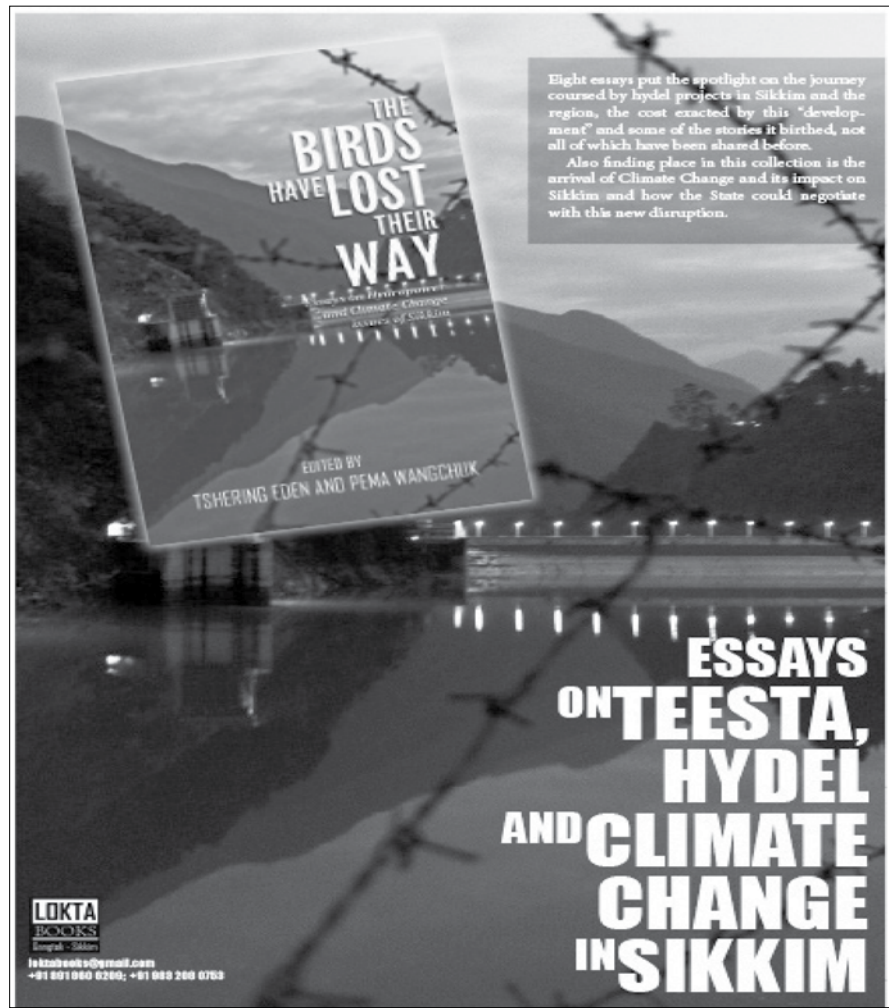
China has largely brought the coronavirus under control but sporadic cases are resurfacing

in a small number of cities. Authorities plan to vaccinate 50 million people in high-risk groups before the week-long Lunar New Year holidays from Feb. 11, said state media Global Times.

Beijing has asked its civil servants to stay in the city from Jan. 1 until the holiday and asked the public to avoid unnecessary travel during the period.

Public venues such as theme parks and churches have scaled back operating hours. Some Catholic churches in Beijing, including Wangfujing’s Catholic Church, have stopped admitting churchgoers and halted group activities, the archdiocese of Beijing said on its website.

Commercial performances have been banned from Jan. 1 until the holiday.





'TIS THE SEASON! The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills star, Kyle Richards, does some last minute shopping in Aspen, Colorado.

Archaeologists uncover ancient street food shop in Pompeii

Archaeologists in Pompeii, the city buried in a volcanic eruption in 79 AD, have made the extraordinary find of a frescoed hot food and drinks shop that served up the ancient equivalent of street food to Roman passersby.

Known as a thermopolium, Latin for hot drinks counter, the shop was discovered in the archaeological park's Regio V site, which is not yet open the public, and unveiled on Saturday.

Traces of nearly 2,000-year-old food were found in some of the deep terra cotta jars containing hot food which the shop keeper lowered into a counter with circular holes.

The front of the counter was decorated with brightly coloured frescoes, some depicting animals that were part of the ingredients in the food sold, such as a chicken and two ducks hanging upside down.

Pompeii, 23 km (14 miles) southeast of Naples, was home to about 13,000 people when it was buried under ash, pumice pebbles and dust as it endured the force of an

eruption equivalent to many atomic bombs.

"Our preliminary analyses shows that the figures drawn on the front of the counter, represent, at least in part, the food and drink that were sold there," said Valeria Amoretti, a site



anthropologist.

Amoretti said traces of pork, fish, snails and beef had been found in the containers, a discovery she called a "testimony to the great variety of animal products used to prepare dishes".

would be, but you know you are on your way there. The destination requires a few sacrifices from you, and that's okay. You're putting your big expenses on hold at the moment and focusing on saving those coins. There's a big dream that will require financial investment on your part. It's better to start working towards it sooner than later.

CANCER: There's fantastic news for Cancerians who are a part of the literary world. A brand new beginning is indicated for you, one that will take your career to the next level. The key: working hard and dedicating your energy to the realisation of this goal. So, keep the distractions to a minimum and find a way to remain creatively charged. Getting out of your head and into your body is a good way to reconnect with that stream of creative consciousness.

LEO: It's a 'work hard and play harder' kind of day in the Leo HQ. You're more focused on your goals than you've ever been, and you know you have the potential to make it big despite your history. You're on the right track. Keep moving forward and onwards without an ounce of doubt in your mind. Remember, what makes you different is what makes you, you. So, take

a great risk knowing that the pay off will be more magnificent than you can even imagine.

VIRGO: Less-than-perfect has never been your style—not with your presentations, not with your sartorial choices, and certainly not with your relationships. The weekend finds you re-examining your choices and looking at them through the lens of wisdom. You understand that you attracted certain experiences in your life so you could grow on a soul level and blossom into the person you are today. So, let go of the old and let go with love. You are now moving into a space where your authenticity will help you attract a relationship that is in alignment with who you are.

LIBRA: Chaos and conflict could be a constant in your world, Libra, and your inner peacemaker will not be able to understand why those around you cannot find a way to get along. Resist the urge to get caught up in the drama. Be the Venusian that you are and act from a space of diplomacy. Yes, that means refusing to take sides. Sooner or later, this storm will pass. Remembering that all the world is but a stage will help you make it to the other side with your sanity intact.

From Wonder Woman to Star Wars, Jenkins' rise continues

Years ago, Chris Pine turned "Wonder Woman" down. Then Patty Jenkins came on board and suddenly without even much of a script he found himself under a kind of spell listening to her vision for the film over a hamburger in Los Angeles' Silverlake neighborhood. His no turned into a yes on the spot.

Jenkins, the 49-year-old "Wonder Woman 1984" writer-director has in the past few years turned more than one "no" into a "yes." Along the way, she has not only cemented herself in the top echelon of big-budget filmmaking but has also forged new paths for her peers along the way with glass-ceiling shattering budgets, paydays and opportunities. Soon, she'll be the first woman to direct a "Star Wars" film too.

It's no surprise to her cast, who are resoundingly in awe of their director.

"She is the embodiment of exactly what I think one needs to be a good director, which is you have to on one hand be General Patton, you have to be decisive, clear, you have to be a leader. You have to be a multitasker par excellence," Pine said.

Pedro Pascal, who has also worked with Jenkins twice now, marveled at her un-ironic sincerity. It's something that fuels and distinguishes her "Wonder Woman" films from other superhero fare.

Pascal said, "She doesn't waste any time insisting on being ironic or too cool...it's a kind of visceral honesty that, frankly, is underrated. As highly rated as she is, it's not enough."

But even with box-office receipts and praise, Jenkins still had to fight to prove her worth. In 2017, "Wonder Woman" became the highest-grossing film ever from a solo female director with over \$821 million in worldwide ticket sales,

She didn't just help herself: She also helped clear a path for other women to get more opportunities to direct tent-pole movies and has become a de facto mentor to her contemporaries. Gina Prince-Bythewood met with Jenkins a



proving to skeptics the worth of not just female-fronted superhero films but female-directed ones as well.

Although Jenkins was already brainstorming the inevitable sequel, she held out on officially committing to direct until she secured an equitable raise, reportedly in the \$7 to \$9 million range. It wasn't an uncommon sum for a man in her position, but it was unheard of for a woman. And the ask and public nature of the negotiation didn't come easily.

"I found myself saying, if not me, who is going to do this? And so it felt like both a personal thing, but also kind of a duty," Jenkins said.

few times in the leadup to shooting her big action film "The Old Guard."

And 2020 was going to be a banner year for female-directed tentpoles including "Wonder Woman 1984," "The Old Guard," Cathy Yan's "Birds of Prey," Niki Caro's "Mulan," Cate Shortland's "Black Widow" and Chloé Zhao's "Eternals." Only one ended up with a traditional theatrical release, "Birds of Prey," which came out before the pandemic shutdown. Others went to streaming or video on demand, or, in the case of "Wonder Woman," a hybrid. And both "Black Widow" and "Eternals" were pushed to 2021.

Comedy is all about rhythm: Aahana Kumra

Actor Aahana Kumra, known for her performances in drama features like "Lipstick Under My Burkha" and "Khuda Haafiz," says her latest comedy series "Sandwiched Forever" gave her the opportunity to try a new genre.

Directed by Rohan Sippy, the show revolves around a newlywed couple - Naina (Kumra) and Sameer, played by Kunaal Roy Kapur, who struggles to manage their folks and in-laws who live next door.

The 35-year-old actor, who starred this year in thriller web series "Marzi" and zombie horror show "Betaal," said "Sandwiched Together" marks her maiden comic project.

"Comedy is all about rhythm... This is the first time I was offered a comedy. On OTT, there is a huge space for humour because there isn't any. The digital platform mostly tends to offer content in the dark, crime and thriller space," Kumra, who plays a badminton player in the show, told PTL.

The actor has also recently completed shooting for another comedy series, titled "Call My Agent", and said

2020 turned out to be a "brilliant" year for her work wise.

"2020 has been a difficult year for everybody. For me it has been brilliant, I had back-to-back releases. I am grateful for the appreciation I have got for all the work. I hope I have an exciting lineup next year."

"Call My Agent", directed by Shaad Ali, is a Hindi remake of the French workplace comedy "Dix Pour Cent".

Narrated through the eyes of four high-profile agents of Bollywood celebrities, the show narrates the behind-the-scenes stories of the magic and the madness which keeps the star system running.

"There are so many things that agents do to make sure you have a good and happy career. There is a huge system that works behind to streamline your life. I now have a lot more respect and empathy for my agents and managers. Now I understood the way it is," she said.

"Call My Agent" also stars Soni Razdan, Rajat Kapoor and Ayush Mehra.

The French original was created by Fanny Herrero and shown by Cedric Klapisch.



Demi Lovato highlights her stretch marks with Glitter

If you're Demi Lovato, you don't hide your stretch marks, you let them shine. Or rather, sparkle.

The 28-year-old pop star, a longtime advocate of body positivity and acceptance, who battled bulimia for years and sought treatment for it, shared photos of her stretch marks highlighted with gold glitter on Instagram over the Christmas holiday.

"I used to genuinely believe recovery from an eating disorder wasn't real," she wrote. "That everyone was faking or secretly relapsing behind closed doors. 'Surely she throws up here and there,' 'she can't POSSIBLY accept her cellulite'... those we're just a few of the things that I used to tell myself growing up."

Lovato said she started wearing glitter paint on her stretch marks to "celebrate my body and all of it's features (whether society views them as good OR bad)."

"My stretch marks aren't going away so might as well throw a lil glitter on em' amiright?" she wrote. "Also let this be a reminder to anyone who doesn't think it's possible: IT ACTUALLY IS...YOU CAN DO IT. I BELIEVE IN YOU."

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ARIES: Medium Darryl Anka reveals, "Everything is energy and that's all there is to it. Match the frequency of the reality you want, and you cannot help but get that reality." You're resonating with his words one hundred per cent because this is where you are in your experience, Aries. The law of attraction is no secret to you. But it wasn't up until now that you realised your own role as a master manifestor. So, continue to dedicate yourself to the inner work, and to bring about a shift in your own vibrations. Before you know it, your physical reality will have transformed with you.

TAURUS: Self-help author Stephen Richards writes, "No matter how small you start, always dream big." Just the words of wisdom you need to get up and show up, Taurus. Each day is a new day, and you are more aware of this today than you have ever been. You know that your failures don't define you. Your dreams do. So, continue to move forward and onwards knowing that you have the power to manifest your dreams in your physical reality.

GEMINI: This is a strange and beautiful time in the Gemini HQ. You are not where you envisioned you

why you are here. There is a way to bring peace and harmony into the equation. Trust this and keep moving forward.

AQUARIUS: There are times in our lives when everything looks good on paper, yet the nagging feeling in our head prevents us from moving forward. Maybe you are not operating from a space of paranoia. Maybe you are being guided by something higher than yourself. Just for today, let go of the self-doubt *and* the burden of other people's expectations as you pay attention to what your inner voice is telling you. Remembering the cliché 'all that glitters is not gold' will help you make the right decision.

PISCES: There was a time when you acted from a space of anxiety. There was a time that you worried yourself sick about the outcome of things. But you are experiencing a huge shift in your consciousness, one that is helping you lay your trust in the mysterious forces. You understand that everything works in accordance with the law of divine timing, and that the rewards of this endeavour will be granted to you when the stars align. In the meantime, you're going to continue to put in your best, and pour your love into these creations.