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SummitTIMES

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RUKUM TAAR ECO VILLAGE TOURISM CUM SHERPA LOSAR

SKM Govt first to give Cabinet berth to Sherpa MLA: CM

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

Chief Minister PS Tamang attended the Rukum Taar Eco-Village Tourism cum Sherpa Losar Festival 2021 at Ganchung, South Sikkim under Temi Namphing constituency today.

On his Facebook page, the CM informed that he told the gathering that his government was the first to give a cabinet berth to the MLA from Sherpa community. None of the previous governments have done this, he said and termed it as historic.

Such festivals will give recognition to this small hamlet, which has all the potential to become a tourist destination, the CM said.

"It was also very en-



couraging to see the participation of local people in the festival and I urged and encouraged them to continue the good work and follow the slogan

"Vocal for local" religiously," he wrote.

The CM assured to fulfil all the demands of placed by the people of Ganchung and do every-

thing possible to develop the area as well as the entire Temi Namphing constituency, and also assured financial assistance for two monaster-

ies of the area.

A football match between the local clubs and a colourful cultural extravaganza was also part of the day's program.

On plea to declare Covishield "unsafe", Madras High Court notice to Centre

CHENNAI/ NEW DELHI, 19 FEB [PTI]: The Madras High Court has issued a notice to the central government over a petition to declare the Serum Institute of India's coronavirus vaccine - Covishield - "unsafe".

The petition was filed by a 41-year-old man from Chennai who was a volunteer for the third phase of the Covid vaccine trial and was administered a dose on October 1. He had alleged adverse effects from the vaccine trials, claiming "loss of creativity and business".

Covishield has been developed by the world's largest vaccine maker - Pune-based Serum Institute of India - in partnership with the Oxford University and the British-Swedish pharma giant AstraZeneca. It was one of the two vaccines cleared by DCGI last month for emergency use; the other one was Bharat Biotech's Covaxin. More than 1 crore doses of vaccines have been administered across the country since January 16, the government data shows.

In his petition, the Chennai man has sought a declaration that Covishield "is not safe". He has also asked for a compensation of ₹ 5 crore.

Last year, as the allegations had surfaced, the Serum Institute had denied the claims by the volunteer. The vaccine maker had also threatened to sue him for ₹ 100 crore.

"The COVISHIELD vaccine is safe and immunogenic. The incident

with the Chennai volunteer though highly unfortunate was in no way induced by the vaccine and Serum Institute of India is sympathetic with the volunteer's medical condition," Serum Institute had said in its statement at the time. It also defended its legal notice to the volunteer, saying it wanted to "safeguard the reputation of the company which is being unfairly maligned."

The wife of the vaccine volunteer, who is a marketing professional, had denied the charge that there was any motive in their legal notice to the vaccine-maker in November. "We could have sold our silence, we could have just sent a notice and gained something... But our hearts wouldn't let us do that," the woman told NDTV on phone from Chennai.

"My husband has lost his creativity and confidence after he was given the vaccine. Our aim is not compensation. Public ought to know about this".

Last month, the DCGI had assured that both the vaccines are "110 per cent" safe. "We'll never approve anything if there is slightest of safety concern. The vaccines are 110 per cent safe. Some side effects like mild fever, pain and allergy are common for every vaccine," Drug Controller General of India VG Somani had said.

"India took 34 days to achieve the landmark feat of 1 crore vaccinations, the second fastest in the world," the Health Ministry said in a statement today.

Army rescues 446 tourists stranded near Nathula



SHRAVAN CHETTRI GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

A group of 446 tourists were rescued by the Indian Army from the higher reaches near the Indo-China border at Nathula on the eve-

ning of 18 Feb.

Due to heavy snowfall, 155 vehicles carrying the tourists had got stranded on the way. Army personnel rescued the tourists and housed them in the bar-

racks of 17 Mile military camp while 26 of the tourists were kept under medical care and required critical medical support.

No injuries or casualties have been reported.

4 Gyalshing College students expelled, SPYF condemns action as "cowardly"

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

A college which has been functioning without even a regular principal for the past few years has now also reduced its student-strength. A press communiqué issued by SPYF (Sikkim Progressive Youth Forum) informs that the four students of Gyalshing Degree College who had recently led a protest demanding early completion of the college campus have been expelled from the college.

The four students are Pravin Upreti from Sociology (3rd semester), Praveen Basnett from Political Science (3rd semester), Nakul Sharma from Physical Education (5th semester) and Loknath Chettri from English Department (3rd semester).

As of now, there is no official information on why these students were expelled from the col-

lege. SummitTimes tried to contact the Principal of the College through phone but the call went unanswered.

The expulsion letters were handed over to the guardians after the students refused to accept them, reports suggest.

The four students, it may be recalled, had come into the crosshairs of the State Government with even an investigation announced to look into their involvement in the Farmers' Protest on the borders of New Delhi.

A police case had also been registered against them for an alleged assault in Additional Chief Secretary, Education Department.

Meanwhile SPYF, of which two of the four students are members, has condemned the expulsion as something achieved by the Sikkim Govt which even the "Tsars and Nazis did not do."

"We are short of

words to express this," SPYF puts on record.

The organisation also adds that no "VIP" has a child enrolled at the college which has been without a campus since 2010.

SPYF has condemned the expulsion as an attempt to "muzzle the voice of conscious students," and writes, "When a group of conscious students started to raise their voice for a proper campus, to suppress the rising consciousness of the students of the deprived class the college administration in corroboration with state Govt did what even the Tsar, Hitler or British imperialist did not do even at peak of their atrocity."

It adds: "We condemn this cowardly, undemocratic, anti-students, anti-education decision of the Geyzing College administration and the state Government."

Vaccinators keep a Frenetic Friday in Sikkim, inoculate 1,537 against Covid

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

Health workers on Covid vaccination duty in Sikkim recorded their busiest day yet on Friday when they administered CoviShield shots to 1,537 health and frontline workers across the State.

Among those who received the vaccine today are 409 healthcare workers and 1,128 frontline workers.

While providing a detailed break-up of vaccinations carried out on Friday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia, informed that in East Sikkim, 117 frontline workers were inoculated at Central Referral Hospital, 106 healthcare workers at Singtam District Hospital, 64 frontline workers at Samdong PHC, 59

frontline workers at Rhe-nock CHC, 32 frontline workers at Rongli PHC, 99 healthcare workers at STNM Hospital and five healthcare workers and 205 frontline workers at the Urban PHC in Gangtok.

In South district, 158 healthcare workers received the shots at Namchi District Hospital, while in West Sikkim, 85 frontline workers at Gyalshing District Hospital, two healthcare workers and 31 frontline workers at Yuxsom PHC and 12 healthcare workers and 92 frontline workers at Rinchenpong PHC were vaccinated.

Likewise, 27 healthcare workers and 208 frontline workers at Mangan District Hospital, 68 frontline workers at Chungthang PHC, 100 frontline workers at Pho-

dong PHC, 26 frontline workers at Hee-Gyathang and 41 frontline workers at Passingdang PHC were vaccinated for COVID-19 in North District.

And while vaccinations touched a new daily record, daily cases continue to drop with only one new case of novel coronavirus has been reported in the last 24 hours in Sikkim.

The sample of a person from Sudunglakha, Rongli in East District returned positive in RT-PCR testing.

Likewise, Sikkim recorded five new recoveries on Thursday to further improve the number of recovered cases of COVID-19 in the State to 5,841. There are currently only 54 active cases of novel coronavirus in Sikkim.

turn to pg02

Mamata Banerjee's Political Heir? Abhishek Banerjee's Rise in Trinamool

SAURABH GUPTA

KOLKATA, 19 FEB [NDTV]: Trinamool Congress's Abhishek Banerjee, who is also West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew, has emerged as the BJP's favourite target as the young politician is groomed as the future leader of the party.

Mamata Banerjee will remain in charge, say Trinamool leaders as they admit in the same breath that Abhishek Banerjee's stature and role in the party has grown in the last few years. The 33-year-old - a second-term MP from South 24 Parganas District's Diamond Harbour - has been the BJP's punching bag amid a high-pitched election campaign.

On his last two trips to Bengal, Home Minister Amit Shah took a dig at the ruling Trinamool with the "Bua-Bhatija (aunt-nephew)" jibe. "Modi Sarkar is for Garib Kalyan (wel-

fare of the poor), Mamata Sarkar is for Bhatija Kalyan (welfare of the nephew). She (Mamata Banerjee) is wondering when she can make her nephew Chief Minister. If Dilip Ghosh had not fought here she would have made the announcement by now," he had earlier said.

On Thursday, Mr Shah sharpened the attack. Speaking at an election rally in Kakdwip city, close to Abhishek Banerjee's Lok Sabha constituency, he said: "The Trinamool Congress has only one slogan. Bhatija Bachao. Bhatija Kalyan (Save the nephew. Nephew's welfare). The TMC has no other welfare in mind. For Bengal's development, (Prime Minister) Modi ji sent money but all this money was sacrificed for Didi's syndicate. Where did the money go? It was sacrificed for the welfare of bhaipo and his goondas (goons). When the BJP comes to pow-

er, we will investigate and put those responsible behind bars after proper legal action. Bengal's money has been used and the BJP will ensure those responsible are put behind bars."

Shortly after, Mamata Banerjee hit back at the BJP. "They only know how to say Didi-Bhatija. First fight the Bhatija... then think of fighting Didi (elder sister). If all you can see is Didi-Bhatija, then I challenge Amit Shah to contest against Abhishek Banerjee. Make your charges clear. And remember, your son is not free of corruption charges."

"You hide your own son and abuse others, this is not acceptable. I maintain courtesy but don't take this as my weakness. Every day you go on and on about Bhaipo-Bhatija. Your son is also my Bhatija. How did he become the Cricket body chief? How did he make so many crores? Should we talk about

these things?" she further said.

Abhishek Banerjee's stock in the Trinamool Congress has risen exponentially in the last few years. From being picked as a parliamentary candidate for the Diamond Harbour Lok Sabha seat which he won convincingly even in 2019, he has become one of the key strategists for the Trinamool Congress in 2021.

Instrumental in bringing in Prashant Kishore, after the BJP's surprise performance in 2019, he now drives the backroom management along with the poll-strategist. And apart from Mamata Banerjee, he is the only one who uses a helicopter to travel.

The BJP has repeatedly taunted Abhishek Banerjee by calling him "tolabaj bhaipo" or the "extortionist nephew". Abhishek Banerjee has taken them on

turn to pg02

Assam Congress collecting 50 lakh traditional scarf with anti-CAA message

GUWAHATI, 19 FEB [PTI]: With the election in Assam two months away, the Congress's anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act or CAA "gamosa collection drive" started today. College students, entrepreneurs, senior citizens and private sector employees, among others, have given support to the party and handed over gamosas - a tradition cloth in Assam - signed by them to Congress leaders and workers.

The Assam Congress said it will collect 50 lakh gamosas from the state to be displayed at a memorial for anti-CAA protests that the party said would be built if it comes to power.

The mother of 17-year-old Sam Stafford who died in police firing during the anti-CAA protest in Assam gave a gamosa to Congress leader Rakibul Hussain.

"My son Sam was neither a terrorist nor a hooligan. Who gave them the right to kill my innocent son? I need justice for my son," said the mother, Mamoni Stafford. The Congress's move to collect 50 lakh gamosas from the state has put the BJP in a cautious move. The BJP appears to be not comfortable with its current stand on the CAA in Assam with election near.

Social activist and poet Prayag Saikia wrote his comments on the CAA on a gamosa and signed it before handing the cloth to the Congress in Guwahati. Mr Saikia called the CAA "anti-Assam" and disrespectful to the Assam Accord. He said that the CAA pushed by the BJP government is against the interests of people in Assam.

Vaccinators keep...

Mr Bhutia informed that the only new case of novel coronavirus was reported from the testing of 147 samples on Thursday, of which 120 samples were tested by RT-PCR, 12 via TrueNat and 15 through rapid antigen testing.

Mamata Banerjee's...

head on, especially rebel leader Suvendu Adhikari who blamed him and strategist Prashant Kishor for his exit from the Trinamool.

"Some turncoats from the Trinamool Congress who have sold their spine are attacking me from Midnapore. In the Narada tapes, you have been seen accepting money wrapped in newspaper. You are the tolabaaz (extortionist). And you say tolabaaz bhaipo (extortionist nephew) hatao. Your name is in the Sarada scam. You are the tolabaaz. And you say tolabaaz bhaipo hatao? I am not there in Narada or Sarada. And the ED or the CBI can do nothing to me."

Mamata Banerjee has made no announcements on what her plans for Abhishek Banerjee are but his speeches are reminiscent of a younger self. His rallies are drawing huge crowds and he is a star campaigner for the party. He runs the Trinamool's youth organisation, which often runs parallel to the party unit.

The 33-year-old, political observers say, brings to the table what the Trinamool was missing all this while.

Maidul Islam, Assistant Professor of Political Science at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences says, "He is good with managing funds and he understands corporate capital.

NIT Sikkim team wins Innovative and Futuristic Product Prototype 'International' Challenge

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

NIT Sikkim team, The Watchman, have stood first in the "Innovative and Futuristic Product Prototype 'International' Challenge" organized by Institution's Innovation Council - SMIT in association with AIC-SMUTBI.

A press release informs that GAIT Watchers [MU], Jaipur and

team] came second while Feel the Spark [Easwari Engineering College, Chennai] stood third.

The prototypes developed were from varied sectors with many having the potential to be graduated as promising start-ups of which few have been offered incubation opportunity at SMIT.

A total of 107 teams participated in the challenge wherein 15 teams

made it to the finals. The teams had to go through multiple rounds of screening at the preliminary stage to make it to the finals.

The finalists presented and demonstrated their prototypes after four months of rigorous evaluation, mentoring and development on 19 Feb to a panel of experts from industry and academics.

The event was

launched by Prof. (Dr) Ashis Sharma, Director, Sikkim Manipal Institute of Technology on 12th Oct 2020 as SMIT's effort to support the "Make in India" and "Atma-Nirbhar Bharat" initiatives with prizes worth Rs. 2 lakh.

IFPPC was organized to commemorate SMU's 25 years of existence and its contribution towards advancement in learning and innovation.

Man United, Spurs win big in relocated Europa League games

BERLIN, FEB 19 (AP):

Bruno Fernandes scored twice as Manchester United took a big step toward the last 16 of the Europa League with a 4-0 "away" win over Spanish team Real Sociedad in Italy. The first leg was played on Thursday in Turin, one of a number of games relocated away from their original venues due to coronavirus-related travel restrictions from certain countries affecting teams from Britain.

Portugal's Benfica had to host Arsenal in Rome, where Bukayo Saka's away goal put the Premier League side in a good position with a 1-1 draw.

Tottenham defeated Austrian team Wolfsberg 4-1 in Budapest, Hungary. Germany's Hoffenheim was also affected by pandemic-related travel restrictions. Hoffenheim's game with Norwegian side Molde was played at Villarreal's stadium in Spain, while Villarreal beat Salzburg 2-0 in Austria.

Hoffenheim forward Munas Dabbur scored two goals, set up another, and then missed a penalty before Molde came back from two goals down to draw 3-3.

UNITED FLYING

Fernandes had Sociedad's defense to thank for his first goal in the 27th, when two defenders collided with their own goalkeeper, leaving him free to score into an empty net. He then finished off a quick counter-attack to make it 2-0 in

the 57th. Fernandes let Marcus Rashford's pass go behind him to Daniel James, then received the ball back and fired inside the right post. Rashford added the third in the 64th and James completed the scoring in the last minute.

United is playing in the Europa League for the third time in five seasons, a drop for a club once regarded as a continental heavyweight.

BALE'S BOW

Gareth Bale reminded his detractors of his qualities as he scored one goal and set up another for Tottenham.

The Wales forward, back at Tottenham on loan from Real Madrid to the end of the season, cut the ball back for Son Heung-min to open the scoring in the 13th, before he illustrated why Madrid paid Tottenham a record transfer fee for his services in 2013.

Bale showed Matt Doherty exactly where he wanted the ball, outpaced Jonathan Scherzer to reach it, then stopped to leave the Wolfsberg defender sprawling, before curling a powerful shot past goalkeeper Alexander Kofler with his left boot.

Bale has been struggling in his second spell at Tottenham, making just seven Premier League appearances. He recently irked Jos Mourinho for posting "Good session today" on Instagram with the Tottenham coach saying there was "a contradiction between the post and the reality."

757 more vaccine shots administered in Sikkim; Infection stays low with only 5 new cases

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 18 FEB:

Five new cases of novel coronavirus were reported in the last 24 hours in Sikkim, taking the state's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 here to 6,126.

On the other hand, the number of Covid patients who have recovered stands at 5,836 with the recovery of one more patient on Wednesday.

There are currently 58 active cases of novel coronavirus in the State.

In his daily health bulletin on Thursday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia informed that the five cases were detected from the testing of 166 samples on Wednesday;

four from RT-PCR testing of 131 samples and one more in TrueNat testing of 19 samples.

Among the new cases are two persons from Rawtey-Rumtek, one from Dethang-Rabongla and one from Upper Rang-gang-Yangyang.

The State IEC Officer also informed today that a 67-year-old lady from Pakyong, who tested positive yesterday, could not be contacted over phone and has urged her or those around her to immediately contact the concerned authorities.

Also today, 757 more health and frontline workers received the Covid vaccine in Sikkim - 145 health workers and 612 frontline workers.

While giving the break-up of today's vaccination, Mr Bhutia informed that 56 frontline workers at Rongli PHC, 20 health workers [first dose] at Sang PHC, 129 frontline workers at Central Referral Hospital, 120 health workers [18 first dose and 102 second dose] at STNM hospital and five health workers [one first dose and four second dose] and 147 frontline workers at Urban PHC, Gangtok were vaccinated for COVID-19 today.

He added that 191 frontline workers in South District and 89 frontline workers in West District were also vaccinated for COVID-19 on Thursday.

Jagriti Sangh organizes blood donation camp

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

Jagriti Sangh Lower Maneydanda Namthang, South Sikkim, in association with Voluntary Blood Donors Association of Sikkim organised a Blood Donation Camp at District Hospital Singtam Blood Bank today to celebrate its 12th Foundation Day.

A press release informs that 25 units of blood were collected



during the camp.

Sangh president, Har-ka Bahadur Mangar and secretary, Sanchaman Rai informed that the organization's foundation day will be formal-

ly celebrated on 22 Feb at Lower Maneydanda. Area MLA and Transport Minister, Sanjeet Kharel is scheduled to attend the celebration as chief guest.

Radhu JHS bids farewell to teacher

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

Radhu Junior High School bid farewell to its faculty member Hemantha Kumar Chawan who had worked as a teacher for 37 years until his retirement on 31 December 2020.

As per a press release, Mr Chawan joined Radhu JHS in the year 1996 and retired from the same School. He also served as the Headmaster-In-charge in Radhu JHS for a certain period of time in the late 90s.

The farewell programme was organized by the School family to-

day. The programme had the presence of Tshering Panjo Sherpa [Deputy Director Education Department from Dentam BAC], retired Joint Director, J.K Basnett, Panchayat Member, SMCs, guardians, alumni and students.

Mr Chawan was felicitated by the School Family and SMCs for his immense contribution towards the upliftment of the institution in academics and other areas. Different speakers talked about the success achieved by Radhu JHS in different fields in the past as well as in present

and the contribution of Mr Chawan.

All present extended their best wishes to H.K Chawan for a happy, healthy and a joyous retired life.

The programme also had different cultural activities presented by students and the faculty members. The programme was also followed by the award ceremony where the students from different levels securing top marks in Lepcha Language were felicitated with the Late Pemkit Lepcha Memorial Award.

Petrol crosses Rs 90 mark in Delhi, diesel at Rs 80.60

NEW DELHI, FEB 19

(PTI): Petrol price on Friday crossed the Rs 90-per-litre mark in the national capital, and diesel soared to Rs 80.60 after rates were increased for the 11th consecutive day in a row. Petrol price on Friday was hiked by 31 paise per litre and diesel by 33 paise, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

This pushed the petrol price to Rs 90.19 a litre in Delhi and to Rs 96.62 in Mumbai.

Diesel now comes for Rs 80.60 a litre in the national capital and for Rs 87.62 in Mumbai.

The increase follows a spurt in prices of oil in the international mar-



ket, on which India is 85 per cent dependent to meet its needs. Brent oil crossed USD 65 a barrel on Thursday as a worsening US energy crisis took out almost 40 per cent of the nation's crude production.

In 11 days, retail petrol prices have risen by Rs 3.24 a litre, a record since the pricing was de-

regulated in 2010, and diesel rates have gone up by Rs 3.47. Petrol price has already surged past the Rs 100-mark in some places in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, which levy the highest VAT on the fuel. Retail pump prices defer from state to state depending on the local taxes (VAT) and freight.

KUTSE SHEGU



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

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

Govt appoints Guardian Inspectors and Officers to resolve pension delays

Around 350 pensions held up due to clerical errors: Social Welfare Secy



**SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 18 FEB:**

Social Justice & Welfare Department convened a day-long coordination meeting with bankers, postmasters and district level officials of the department to resolve various public complaints and grievances for delay and non-receipt of Old Age Pension and other social pensions benefits here at Samaj Kalyan Bhavan, Lumsey on Thursday.

After thorough discussion and delibera-

tions, the meeting appointed Guardian Inspector and Guardian Officer at every gram panchayat level to reach out to every beneficiary at the grassroot level to resolve issues at the earliest.

Addressing a press conference after the meeting, Secretary to Social Justice & Welfare Department, Tshewang Gyachho mentioned that the State government was providing around Rs 5.60 crore every month to around 31,000 beneficiaries as old age pension

and other social pension benefits.

He added that although the government has been giving these pensions at the right time every month, still there are some grievances regarding delay and non-receipt of these pensions. He informed that around 350 beneficiaries are either not receiving their pensions or pension amounts have bounced back to the banks.

"The state government has taken the matter very seriously and

directed the department to look into the matter and resolve it at the earliest. So, this coordination meeting has been called with banks, post office and district officials to discuss and deliberate on the matter," he said.

Mr Gyachho mentioned that after discussion with banks and post office the meeting has learnt that the delay has been caused due to some inactive and dormant accounts of beneficiaries and other issues related to IFCS codes and varia-

tion in the account numbers of the beneficiaries.

On the same, he informed that after discussions, the meeting has appointed Guardian Inspectors and Guardian Officer in every gram panchayat level to resolve the matter by working in coordination with panchayats and other concerned district officials. He added that these appointed officials would make necessary corrections by reaching out to beneficiaries to resolve such matters.

The Secretary has urged concerned BDO, SDM, ADC and DC for proactive steps to understand the problem of such special sections of the society. He further urged panchayats to take the matter seriously by bringing such matters to the department.

Mr Gyachho expressed hope that the department will achieve the target of error-free distribution of social pensions within a period of 90 days.

CM inaugurates SISCO ATM at Tashiling



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 18 FEB:**

Chief Minister, PS Tamang inaugurated the new SISCO Bank ATM at Tashiling Secretariat, this morning.

"The bank has been doing a commendable job especially keeping the interest of our rural pop-

ulace, therefore to encourage and support the bank, I appeal to our people to use the services of SISCO bank," the CM wrote on his Facebook page.

He congratulated the Chairperson, Managing Director, officials and the staff of SISCO bank for this achievement.

Man rescues trapped Indian Cormorant bird at Rani Khola



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 18 FEB:**

Anupam Pradhan, amateur biodiversity photographer and Youth Coordinator of Shantinagar Gaon Sudhar Samiti, Singtam, rescued an Indian Cormorant at Rani Khola near Badminton Court, Shantinagar on 17 Feb.

A press release informs that Mr Pradhan was returning home from the market when he saw two Indian Cormorants locally called Pani Haas taking a dip in the Rani Khola. Indian Cormorant is a winter migratory bird that visits the Teesta at Singtam every year.

He started to film the moment on his phone and when he got clos-

er one of the birds flew away, while the other remained where it was. He soon found out that the bird was trapped in a fishing net.

Since he could not reach the bird, which was at the far end of the river, he asked a man walking on the other side to help the bird. However, the man was unable to free the bird. Mr Pradhan then jumped into the river and freed it from the net. The other man also got injured by the bird during the rescue. The bird too had some injuries but was able to fly away.

Mr Pradhan said he was excited and happy to help the bird.

Sherpa Gyalpo Losar celebrated at Uttarey

**RUDRA KAUSHIK
GYALSHING, 18 FEB:**

The Sherpa community celebrated the state level Sherpa Gyalpo Losar here at Uttarey under Maneybung Dentam constituency in West Sikkim. The celebration was organized by Denzong Sherpa Association (DSA).

The event was attended by MLA Soreng Chakhung constituency, Aditya Golay as the chief guest. Lok Sabha MP, Indra Hang Subba was present as a special guest along with other dignitaries.

Aditya Golay, in his brief address, said that community based cultural festivals play a significant role in promotion and preservation of the distinct identity and the cultural heritage of such communities. He added that it was good to see the Sherpa community coming forward for protection of their distinct cultural identity and added that the new generation must be informed and encouraged to work for propagation of culture and traditions related to various communities.



He maintained that the SKM government would patronize all the communities of the state in their effort to promote culture and traditions. The SKM government will do its best to look into the issues and demands of the Sherpa community, he added.

The MLA also said that the government is committed to developing West Sikkim and many developmental initiatives have been sanctioned for the same.

President of DSA, Pema Wangchuk Sherpa informed that Sherpa Gyalpo Losar marks the new year for the community has is celebrated to keep alive the culture and traditions of the community. It also aims to spread the message of brotherhood, unity and

communal harmony.

On some of the issues pertaining to the Sherpa community, Pema Wangchuk Sherpa said that the Sherpas are hopeful that the state government would consider and work to resolve such issues.

Passang Sherpa informed that the state level Sherpa Gyalpo Losar was celebrated this year at Uttarey considering the concentration of the Sherpa population in the area and added that next year the festival would be held at another location.

The organizing committee also felicitated journalists K.N Sharma and Pappu Malik along with other personalities for their contribution in various fields of society.

Cultural presentation and other activities were also part of the event.

SAATHI community outreach campaign at Rateypani



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 FEB:**

SAATHI held its community outreach campaign at Lower & Upper Passi ward under Rateypani GPU, South Sikkim, today which was attended by 45 local residents, a press release informs. The campaign is supported by Titan Company Ltd.

SAATHI teacher coordinator of Namthang Senior Secondary School, Sudeep Sharma, interacted with the participants and explained the various consequences of substance abuse. The participants were also informed about treatment facilities and various support services available in a state.

Lingmoo wins T20 Knockout Cricket Tournery



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 FEB:**

T20 Knockout Cricket Tournament organised by Lower Bardang Youth Club under the banner of Divya Jyoti Sammittee at Bardang, East Sikkim, concluded today, a press release informs.

Karma Tashi Bhutia (Sikkim Krantikari Morcha Chief Convener cum chairman Sikkim Housing Board) was the

chief guest of the final match and Jagdish Cintury (President All Sikkim Scheduled Caste Morcha) was the guest of honour of the match.

After winning the toss, team Striker XI elected to bat first and managed to score 109 runs in 20 overs.

Chasing the target of 110 runs, team Lingmoo won the match by 1 wicket in 20 overs.

For excellent batting performance taking his team towards victory, Durga Chettri from team Lingmoo was awarded with man of the match trophy. Sarun Majhi from Majhitar Sporting Club was awarded man of the series.

Gorkhay was awarded with emerging player of the tournament and Betan Sharma was awarded for maximum sixes.

Daniil Medvedev blasts past Tsitsipas to reach Australian Open final

JONATHAN HOWCROFT

MELBOURNE, 19 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]:

Daniil Medvedev is the irresistible force of tennis, and he will meet Novak Djokovic, the immovable object of Melbourne Park, in Sunday's Australian Open decider following a clinical semi-final victory over Stefanos Tsitsipas. The fourth-seeded Russian was on another level to the fifth-seeded Greek as he cruised to his 20th straight victory – 12 of which have come against top 10 rivals, and include titles at the ATP Cup, ATP Finals, and Paris Masters.

The 25-year-old struck more than double the number of winners and committed almost half the number of unforced errors in winning 6-4, 6-2, 7-5. He was patient and precise against an opponent that looked out of puff following his marathon quarter-final against Rafael Nadal.

With his lean frame, long tousled hair, and headband, Tsitsipas looks like Björn Borg rendered for an ultra-modern video game. But the similarities do not extend to the backhand. Borg famously used two hands, Tsitsipas only one, and coming into the match it was responsible for the three fastest backhands of the tournament so far. Here it let him down with 16 unforced errors on that side compared to just three winners.

Melbourne claims to have the largest Greek population of any city outside Greece, so it was little surprise that Tsitsipas had the crowd on his side. Chants of "Tsitsipas, Hellas!" rang out in a stadium studded with blue football shirts and flags. They did their best to rouse their hero, especially during a third set revival, but their cries drifted into the ombre blue sky.

To borrow a football cliché, Medvedev moves well for a big man. He's six feet, six inches but light on his feet, and operates with an economy of move-

ment. He's unhurried, efficient, crisp. His mental coach, Francisca Dauzet, has previously explained that "his mind is very big. It is very complex, like a computer. It has many things and he can join all the points in one second."

This real-time point decryption was applied almost immediately. "During today's match I saw that as soon as I was moving him around the court it was not easy for him," Medvedev explained on court afterwards. "As soon as I saw it in the first set that became my go-to straightaway."

"He is a player who has unlocked pretty much everything in the game," a downbeat Tsitsipas conceded. "He tricks you. He plays the game really smart." This manifested in superb courtcraft to earn a break-point in the fifth game, and again when unpicking Tsitsipas's serve to love to move up 5-2 in the second set. That humiliation caused Tsitsipas to hurl a bottle of water that exploded on contact with the floor, much to Medvedev's amusement.

That was as close to conflict as this contest came, despite it featuring one of the more acrimonious rivalries on tour. This pair first came to verbal blows in Miami 2018 when Medvedev unloaded after victory. "He's a small kid who doesn't know how to fight," he chided Tsitsipas under the chair umpire's nose. "Our chemistry definitely isn't the best that you can find on the tour, Tsitsipas remarked recently. "It just happens with people, it's not that you can just like everyone."

Medvedev wasn't broken until midway through the third set, and for a glimmer the crowd sprang to life. Uncharacteristic errors energised Tsitsipas and a second improbable comeback seemed possible. Medvedev extinguished it with three consecutive games to close out the match.

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The Right is Not Always Fair

Politics hence should make space for more voices

The rise and rise of the Right in India is not a phenomenon unique to the country. The Right, Far Right and the Alt-Right are increasingly recording gains in politics where such successes would have been unthinkable till even a few years ago. But that is the situation where electoral politics has delivered too many governments to. In all fairness, the Far Right, which is what every Right-wing faction aspires to be if allowed, has not stolen power and influence and has been voted to a stronger sitting by a democratic process. That, however, does not mean that there is no reason to worry. There is plenty that demands concern. But first, let's try and understand what allowed Radical parties to become so "mainstream".

It is obvious that frustration with status quo drove people to vote so far Right. Around the world, as also in India, the electorate has traditionally fought shy of Radical parties and limited their presence to the fringe or as part of coalitions. While this kept such parties in check, it also, over the years allowed the more liberal and left-of-centre parties to grow somnolent, increasingly compromised and easily distracted. When the economy was doing fine and the lay citizenry could go about their lives partaking in politics only during election cycles, when the economic meltdown happened, the disparity that had settled in became stark and the blame was shouldered on dispensations that had been in office for too long. People lost faith in their leaders and their politics and leveraged the vote to effect radical change. Populist and majoritarian rhetoric presented options that the then leaders were unable to offer. This space could have been filled by the Left as well, but the timing was against them because their ideology had by then collapsed under the persistent stress a world that had changed faster than they could adapt. Further, the current rage of change has been powered by a middleclass which finds itself unmoored from its sense of security and they, while they may lean socialist, are not conditioned to lean far enough left. The Right and its other extremities thus found their favour.

While this may, to some extent, explain what is happening in the political space around us and even though most such elevations have been democratically endorsed, there is an inherent problem with such a situation which militates against the basic premise of democracy – diversity. The Right has traditionally been disinterested in the rights or even protection of the minorities and so seeped in insularity that authoritarianism is its natural position. We already see enough evidence of this everywhere, but will continue to flag some worries. Even as they peddle populist spiel with one hand, they reinforce control and authoritarianism with the other, foisting nationalism and majoritarian paranoia to destroy free media, undermine independent institutions and muzzle the opposition. None of this is desirable or safe, and yet, because they ride a wave, they pull it off. It goes without saying that for a democracy to be stable and healthy, all political actors need to believe in its basic precepts of free will, fair competition and checks & balances. None of these find resonance with the Far Right and efforts, overt and subversive, are always underway to undermine the executive, judiciary, free expression and free press. Take a look around. Such political actors, convinced of their right to rule and claiming righteousness, also lose the ability to sift fair criticism from spite. More dangerously, they see their adversaries as enemies. Here, one needs to quote Michael Ignatieff, a political theorist and former leader of the Liberal party of Canada, who wrote this a few years ago: "For democracies to work, politicians need to respect the difference between an enemy and an adversary. An adversary is someone you want to defeat. An enemy is someone you have to destroy."

And when democracy allows adversaries to be "destroyed," democracy itself is dealt a fatal blow. Do we want that to happen?

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Myanmar: Trial of Aung San Just the Latest in a Long Line of Unlawful Prosecutions by Illegal Regimes

JAMES SWEENEY
theconversation.com

Myanmar's military coup leaders have reportedly put the country's lawfully elected leaders on trial. It is understood that the proceedings, apparently held in secret and without giving the defendants the benefit of legal representation, could last for up to six months.

Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's state counsellor and de facto leader, faces charges of illegally importing two walkie talkies and of contravening a natural disaster management law by interacting with a crowd during the coronavirus pandemic. These carry a maximum penalty of six years in jail. Win Myint, the country's deposed president, has been charged with breaching the natural disaster restrictions, which – if he is found guilty – could mean up to three years imprisonment.

The worrying developments in Myanmar echo political or show trials of the past, raising fundamental questions about what "law" actually is. How does an unlawfully established government legitimately use the law against its opponents? Indeed, can any rules adopted or imposed by a dictatorship be said to be "laws" at all?

NUREMBERG TRIALS

This question has bothered legal theorists and human rights lawyers for a very long time. For example the German theorist Gustav Radbruch argued that actions authorised by abhorrent Nazi "law" were not, in fact, lawful and so the post-war prosecution of people for their actions in Nazi Germany would not be unfair.

Similar issues arose at the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal in 1945 because the trial of senior Nazis there was the first time anyone had ever been put on trial for "crimes against humanity" and "waging aggressive war". The defence argued that those crimes were not clearly estab-

lished in international criminal law when they were said to have been committed.

The judgment at Nuremberg made the not entirely convincing claim that it should have been obvious that these categories of international crime already existed, but it also stated that the rule against retrospective prosecution might not apply in the face of the scale of Nazi atrocities in any event.

ARGUMENTS AND AMNESTIES

More recently, the communist regimes of central and eastern Europe toppled and the newly democratic states joined the Council of Europe and signed the European Convention on Human Rights. Many of these states were, for the first time, now able to embark on the prosecution of people for their actions under communism, such as suppressing the failed 1956 uprising in Hungary, or killing people seeking to cross the Berlin Wall to flee communist East Germany.

Defendants have argued not just that their prosecution was unfair because a prosecution was unforeseeable when they carried out the alleged crimes – but also that it violates the European Convention, which confirms that people can only be convicted of offences that existed at the time they were allegedly committed. The European Court of Human Rights has tended to take the position that where the actions were clearly contrary to international law, it does not matter if they were permitted by a state's national legislation under communism.

This does not mean, however, that globally we are free of the notion of show trials and political trials that, like those in Myanmar, claim to be lawful but are anything but. Even in Europe, the hastily convened and poorly organised military "trial" and resulting execution of Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife on Christmas Day 1989 is a clear example.

The trial of Saddam Hussein at the Supreme

Iraqi Criminal Tribunal, an Iraqi national court, came close: it has been alleged that there was political interference and that the potentially very strong case against him was inadequately set out. Moreover, defence witnesses and lawyers were intimidated – and several were murdered. But even a weak trial was probably at least a step up from extrajudicial targeted killing, for example by drone strikes, that we have seen ordered by presidents and prime ministers of all political persuasions throughout the "war on terror".

At the other extreme, there are examples of crumbling regimes attempting to provide themselves with an amnesty against prosecution – such as when military dictatorships established in Argentina and Chile in the 1970s came to an end in 1983 and 1990, respectively. Indeed, the Argentine Supreme Court only struck down their amnesty law in 2005. That ruling took inspiration from the case law of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which has ruled that such amnesties violate the human rights of surviving victims and dead victims' next of kin.

There are, however, more democratic conditional amnesties, such as those granted in South Africa during the process of "Truth and Reconciliation" after the fall of apartheid: the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, accepted over 1,000 applications for amnesty – in return for the applicant agreeing to testify to the Commission.

Back to the issue of Myanmar, it can only be hoped that the military government shows some restraint in its use and abuse of "the law". But, given the country's track record of violence, and the growing protests against its coup, it is questionable for how long even the pretence of acting according to the law will last.

[the writer is Professor, Lancaster Law School, Lancaster University]

Facebook versus Australia: the government hands Facebook a free pass

JOSHUA GANS
theconversation.com

The Conversation is a great news site. But, for the most part, people don't read it like a newspaper. Instead, articles on specialised topics are shared with other people. One way is via Facebook.

Yesterday, almost none of that was possible worldwide for the Conversation's Australian content because Facebook opted to ban all news (even seeming news) from Australian sources to avoid being designated for compulsory negotiations under legislation before the Australian parliament.

The government's new media bargaining code was a response to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's digital platforms inquiry that found it was hard for content providers, including but not limited to news organisations – to deal with platforms whose rules were always changing.

Parts of these grievances are legitimate, and relate to editorial and algorithmic issues. Others relate to the platform's stranglehold on online advertising.

But rather than tackle these issues head on, Australia's government sliced out a sliver of the sites affected – news sites – and attempted to fix things for it, saying it's concerned about competition.

COMPETITION POLICY WITHOUT MORE COMPETITION

To any economist, the point of competition policy is to encourage competition. In this case, either more digital platform options for consumers, or more news content options.

But the government's legislation seems to be uniquely designed to deliver neither.

The code allows news organisations to negotiate with large digital platforms about things such as how their algorithms work to prioritise content, and money.

And money is what it is really all about. The news organisations want more of it, large digital platforms have it. It's that simple.

The code empowers news organisations to get money from digital platforms by

- making it unlawful for digital platforms that do not pay up to provide links to Australian news, giving big news outlets quasi-monopoly bargaining power
- allowing deals to be made without the need for authorisation by a regulator concerned about the public interest
- providing a regulatory stop-gap should that not happen, whose design is tilted in interest of one of the parties

This last step requires a little explanation.

It is not unknown, especially in Australia, for competition policy to work by first allowing parties to negotiate, and then imposing a regulated settlement only if they fail.

And it's normally about empowering the little guy, in the belief that's what leads to socially desirable outcomes.

LITTLE GUYS LOCKED OUT

But not in this case. It is only the large news organisations that would be allowed to negotiate over money.

It's quite different to the system adopted in France, whose government is able to collect money from digital platforms via a tax, which can, should the government wish, be distributed to content providers

on a criteria other than naked private interest. The French system isn't clearly pro-competition either, but it at least provides a mechanism that could enable good outcomes to occur.

The Australian process fails to deliver competition in two ways.

First, it allows the treasurer, rather than a judge, to designate the platforms the process will apply to. He is unlikely to designate a platform that large media organisations have no problem working with, as that will entail work.

Second, the treasurer is unable to designate a platform that doesn't carry any Australian news. So if a digital platform wants out, it can get out.

Both of these things have begun to come to pass in the last day — even before the code has been legislated.

FACEBOOK GAINS A BARGAINING TOOL

Google has done deals with some large news outlets and thereby signalled it will do deals with others to ensure it is not designated. It means Google won't have to deal with all of the other smaller voices that also have a problem with it.

Facebook has opted out of the news content business altogether, as the law allows it to. It decided Australian news wasn't worth it, at least for now. Australians can still share news from around the world, which in some ways is more valuable to them than local news they are already aware of.

Facebook might be doing it to get a better deal when negotiations take place.

Bizarrely, before the government's proposed legislation, if Facebook had excluded content from suppliers in order to get a better deal, Australia's Competition and Consumer Commission could

have prosecuted it for exclusionary conduct.

The new code gives Facebook a licence to do what it has just done, and argue that it could not have been exercising market power because it was merely using the steps identified in the code as necessary for it to avoid compulsory arbitration.

Never mind that this really means Facebook

- has been able to demonstrate to news outlets how much they need it
- is now able to get news organisations to agree to better conditions than if it had not been given this licence.

In other words, the entire process has had the (I hope) unintended consequence of enhancing the very market power that it claimed to intend to contain.

NO MORE PLATFORMS, NO MORE COMPETITION

Those games aside: where will this end up? It will end up with the large digital platforms doing deals with the largest news outlets. Those deals will be multi-year lump-sum payments which enable everyone to go about their business. There will be no new digital platforms, no new content providers, no more competition.

The shareholders of the large digital platforms will be a few million dollars poorer and the shareholders of large Australian news outlets a few million dollars richer.

There will be no improvement in any competitive outcome whatsoever. As often happens in Australia, oligarchies will consolidate, and consumers will get nothing.

[the writer is Professor of Strategic Management, University of Toronto]

Agitations part of any democracy, says JNU chancellor

NEW DELHI, FEB 19 (PTI): Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) is a very good institution and whatever happens there is part of its democratic process which it follows, its Chancellor V K Saraswat said on Friday, asserting that in any democracy, there will always be issues.

Saraswat, who is also a member of Niti Aayog, further said in the country also, wherever the government makes changes, people resort to agitation, and this is the part of democracy.

"JNU is a very good institution. Whatever happens there is part of their democratic process which they follow. And in any democracy, there will always be issues," he told PTI.

Saraswat pointed out that despite protests and agitations in the university, the academic performance of JNU has been outstanding.

"Among the ratings today JNU is still the number 1 university. So to that extent, I would say that JNU is a good university and the way we have handled those issues (violence in the campus) also, I would say good work was done," he said.

Jawaharlal Nehru University has long been considered a citadel of the Left and student unions affiliated to it have mostly won student elections in the campus.

The BJP and Hindutva groups, including RSS' student wing ABVP, have often claimed that groups with "anti-national" sentiments have found support from the Left-affiliated groups in the campus. There have been violent clashes between them at times in the past.

Tablighi Jamaat case: UP court acquits 17 including 7 foreign nationals

LUCKNOW, FEB 18 (PTI): A court here discharged 17 alleged Tablighi Jamat members, booked early last year for various offences during the COVID-19 lockdown, of all charges, saying there was no prima facie evidence on record to make them stand trial. Out of the 17, seven are Indonesian nationals.

In the order passed on Wednesday, the chief judicial magistrate (CJM) court observed that there was no prima facie evidence on record to make the accused persons stand trial in the case.

The Indonesian nationals had told the court that they had come to India on a valid visa and passport on January 20, 2020 and the first case of COVID-19 in Indonesia was detected on March 2, 2020.

The FIR against them was lodged at Shahganj police station in Allahabad on April 1, 2020.

The police had booked them under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, the Foreigners Act and the Epidemic Diseases Act. They were out on bail in the case.

The court also acquitted 10 Indians – Ashraf PK, Shahajahn Ali, Khwaja Sabihuddin, Mohd Shakil, Mohd Ahmad, Dr Masiullah Khan, Mohd Tariq, Wasim Ahmad, Mohd Mustafa and Rizwanulhaq.

India, China complete disengagement in Pangong lake area; To hold military talks on Saturday on further withdrawal

NEW DELHI, FEB 19 (PTI): After completing the withdrawal of troops and weapons from the north and south banks of Pangong lake, India and China will hold a fresh round of high-level military talks on Saturday to take forward the disengagement process in Hot Springs, Gogra and Depsang in eastern Ladakh, official sources said on Friday.

The tenth round of Corps Commander-level talks are scheduled to start at 10 am at the Moldo border point on the Chinese side of the Line of Actual Control, and will be the first engagement between the two sides at a senior level after conclusion of the disengagement process in Pangong lake areas, they said.

Sources said pulling back of troops, weapons and other military hardware as well as dismantling of bunkers, tents and temporary structures in north and south banks of Pangong lake were completed on Thursday and both sides have carried out a verification of the same. "Both sides will also carry out a comprehensive review of the disengagement process in Pangong lake areas," said a source.

Also on Friday, China for the first time officially acknowledged that four of its soldiers were killed in the fierce clash with the Indian Army in the Galwan Valley in eastern Ladakh in June last year. India had lost 20 soldiers in the fierce hand-to-hand combat. Sources indicated that during Saturday's talks,



India will insist on a faster disengagement process in remaining areas to bring down tension in the region, which has witnessed a tense standoff between the two militaries for over nine months.

On February 11, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh told Parliament about an agreement between India and China on disengagement in the north and south banks of Pangong lake that mandated both sides to "cease" forward deployment of troops in a "phased, coordinated and verifiable" manner.

Under the agreement, he said China will pull back its troops to east of Finger 8 areas in the northern bank of

Pangong lake while the Indian personnel will be based at Dhan Singh Thapa Post near Finger 3 in the region. Similar action would take place on the south bank of the lake, he said.

The sources said troops of both sides have retreated to positions that were agreed to by both sides.

The disengagement process began on February 10.

The Indian delegation at Saturday's talks will be led by Lt Gen PGK Menon, the Commander of the Leh-based 14 Corps while the Chinese side is expected to be headed by Maj Gen Liu Lin, the commander of the South Xinjiang military district of the Peo-

ple's Liberation Army (PLA).

In his statement in Parliament, the defence minister also said that it was agreed to convene the next meeting of senior commanders of both sides within 48 hours of completion of the disengagement in the Pangong lake areas so as to resolve all other remaining issues. Days later, the defence ministry said other outstanding "problems" including in Depsang, Hot Springs and Gogra will be taken up at the upcoming talks between military commanders of the two countries.

The border standoff between the Indian and Chinese militaries erupted on May 5 following a violent clash

in the Pangong lake areas and both sides gradually enhanced their deployment by rushing in tens of thousands of soldiers as well as heavy weaponry even as the two sides continued military and diplomatic talks.

Last year, the Chinese military built several bunkers and other structures in the areas between Finger 4 and 8 and had blocked all Indian patrols beyond Finger 4, triggering strong reaction from the Indian Army.

In the nine rounds of military talks, India had specifically insisted on withdrawal of Chinese troops from Finger 4 to Finger 8 on the north bank of Pangong Lake. The

mountain spurs in the area are referred to as Fingers. On its part, the Chinese side was insisting on withdrawal of Indian troops from several strategic peaks on the southern bank of the lake.

Around five months back, Indian troops occupied a number of strategic heights in the Mukhpari, Rechin La and Magar hill areas around the southern bank after the Chinese PLA attempted to intimidate them in the area.

Both sides had rushed a large number of battle tanks, armoured vehicles and heavy equipment to the treacherous and high-altitude areas of eastern Ladakh region after tension escalated following a deadly clash in the Galwan Valley in June last.

On Tuesday, the Indian Army released short videos and photographs showing thinning down of troops and dismantling of bunkers, camps and other facilities by the Chinese military in the areas around the Pangong lake.

The visuals also showed Chinese military using a bulldozer to flatten some structures, and vehicles with troops and equipment preparing to retreat to rear bases as part of the infantry disengagement.

The photos and videos largely depicted fast-paced disengagement process in both north and south banks of Pangong lake that included withdrawal of troops, removal of machinery and dismantling of temporary structures like bunkers, posts and tents.

Nepal's tourism and hospitality industry slams restrictions while political rallies flourish

SANGAM PRASAIN

KATHMANDU, 19 FEB [KATHMANDUPOST]: On February 5, in what has been termed a political showing-off, the Nepal Communist Party faction led by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli held a gathering of its supporters in the capital and claimed 200,000 people were there. The actual number was estimated to be around 50,000.

On February 10, the rival faction led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Madhav Kumar Nepal held its own counter rally, and bragged that 500,000 people took part, two and a half times more than Oli's crowd. Observers said not more than 50,000 attended the Dahal-Nepal meet.

Health experts said Oli's February 13 rally in Butwal made a mockery of government health protocols with tens of thousands of people swarming the venue in a display of the ruling party's strength.

The Oli-led faction is scheduled to host more gatherings in Janakpur, Biratnagar, Surkhet and Pokhara in the days ahead. The Dahal-Nepal faction may follow suit.

Demonstrations and counter-demonstrations have been erupting across Nepal with the two factions of the Nepal Communist Party engaging in shouting matches following the premature dissolution of Parliament by Prime Minister Oli on December 20.

The country is still fighting the Covid-19 pandemic, and officials have been tirelessly issuing guidelines to maintain social distancing and wear a mask. But these safety precautions were thrown to the winds by the marchers at the political rallies in the Kathmandu Valley. Tourism entrepreneurs have been asking what the point is in restricting tourists when mass gatherings are being held across the country—most of them by the ruling party.

"The irony is that the government has been controlling the entry of foreign tourists into the country, even if they follow the safety protocols, as it believes that they may spread the virus," said tourism entrepreneur Biswesh Shrestha, managing director of

Shuang Qi Tour, which mostly handles Chinese tour groups. "When tens of thousands of people can freely march through the streets, why is the government imposing quarantine for foreign tourists? There is no logic in it," he said, speaking at an interaction here on Thursday.

Currently, all visitors to Nepal above age five must have a negative PCR test obtained not more than 72 hours before departure, according to the Department of Immigration.

A mandatory seven-day hotel quarantine, with a second negative PCR test on the fifth day after arrival, is required. Trekkers and mountaineers must also have insurance coverage worth \$5,000.

"These are old health protocols and need to be changed as the situation is different now," said Shrestha, adding that none of the tourists coming to Nepal abides by the rules. "No one is monitoring them."

The coronavirus crisis resulted in an 80.78 percent drop in tourist arrivals in 2020, making it the worst year-on-year fall since Nepal opened to the outside world in the 1950s. According to the statistics of the Department of Immigration, only 230,085 foreign tourists visited Nepal last year, about the same number that came in 1986. Most of them arrived before the country slapped entry restrictions on March 20.

The year 2021 started on a disappointing note. Nepal received less than 9,000 foreign visitors in January.

According to a Nepal Tourism Board survey, nearly 300,000 people directly employed in the tourism industry lost their jobs during the pandemic. Among them, more than 88,000 were in restaurants, followed by 67,000 in hotels and 51,000 in the trekking and mountaineering sectors.

On March 12, 2020, the government decided to stop issuing on-arrival tourist visas to nationals of all countries besides cancelling spring mountaineering expeditions including those to Everest. The decision came a day after the World Health Organisation declared the Covid-19 outbreak a

pandemic, and urged countries to take precautionary measures. Nepal announced a completed lockdown on March 24, 2020.

Prabin Bahadur Pandey, vice-president of Hotel Association Nepal, said that tourism entrepreneurs had explained the problems facing the tourism industry and recommended appropriate solutions too. "But the government hasn't bothered to implement even a single suggestion," Pandey said, "The political changes that automatically change authority have made things worse now. We have been pleading with the government to open the doors wide, but many restrictions are in place."

Three weeks ago, Tourism Minister Bhanu Bhakta Dhakal had said that Nepal was considering allowing unrestricted entry to vaccinated tourists in a bid to boost the morale of the moribund tourism industry ahead of the upcoming spring peak season.

There would be no quarantine and coronavirus insurance requirements, and all visitors would need to produce is proof of having had the shots. Many countries have started issuing vaccine certificates or vaccine passports to international travellers.

Dhakal said the ministry had also recommended resuming issuing on-arrival visas to all tourists at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport.

"But all that has remained on paper only," said tourism entrepreneurs. Dhananjay Regmi, chief executive officer of the Nepal Tourism Board, too believes that the government has not helped the industry to recover. "We demand and suggest one thing, but the government instead creates complications."

According to Regmi, the private sector has been demanding to set up a PCR centre at Kathmandu's airport since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, but all plans fail in the end as the government becomes least bothered.

Last October, Nepal opened the door a crack for trekkers and mountaineers, nearly seven months after the country imposed a complete lockdown.

SC expunges remarks made against 3 sitting members of NCLAT



NEW DELHI, FEB 19 (PTI): The Supreme Court on Friday expunged remarks made against three sitting members of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) by a bench headed by acting chairperson Justice Bansi Lal Bhat.

A bench headed by Justice R F Nariman granted the relief to the petitioners Justices (retd) Jarat Kumar Jain, Bavinder Singh and Vijay Pratap Singh who were part of the bench, which had referred the matter to a five-member bench

headed by acting chairperson of the appellate tribunal.

"We are with you," the bench said.

The issue which was referred to the five-member bench was related to the entry of book of accounts of a company and acknowledgement of the debt by the company.

The proceedings before the 5-member bench had arisen after a reference made by the 3-member bench comprising the three petitioners on September 25, 2020. The three petitioners before the top court

had prayed for expunging of remarks made by the five-member bench, saying they have just acknowledged the position in law that the larger bench was competent enough to consider the earlier verdict on the issue.

They said it is well-settled law that the larger bench must not venture into making personal comments against members of the referral bench only because it finds the reference order was not maintainable or not in accordance with the law.

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VIDEO NEWS SECTION

Making a superhero: how Pelé became more myth than man

JONATHAN LIEW
LONDON, 19 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: Casa Pelé, the small two-room house in Três Corações where Pelé was born in 1940, is now a popular tourist attraction. As no photographs or descriptions of the original house have survived, it was rebuilt entirely from the memories of Pelé’s mother, Dona Celeste, and his uncle Jorge, with period furniture and fixings sourced from antique shops. And so what greets visitors today is really only a vague approximation of the house where one of the world’s most famous footballers spent his earliest years: a heavily curated blend of hazy memories and selective detail. As you walk in, a wireless radio plays classic songs from the early 1940s on an endless loop.

As it turns out, this is also pretty much how Pelé himself is remembered these days. It’s 50 years since he played his last game for Brazil. Only a fraction of his rich and prolific playing career has survived on video. The vast majority of us never saw him play live. And so for the most part, the genius of Pelé exists largely in the abstract: something you heard or read about rather than something you saw, a bequeathed fact rather than a lived experience, a processed product rather than an organic document.

And so naturally the most stirring and vivid passages in Pelé, the new biopic of the legendary Brazilian footballer, are of football itself: the pure speed, the elegant nutmegs, the emphatic finishes, the footwork as precise as music. The legacy of Pelé has become a fractured and contested thing over the decades, but the football itself: this, at least, is pure. And in these passages, when gliding past defenders as if operating on some higher plane of intelligence, or being hacked and crunched to pieces by cynical opposition tactics, or defining the world’s biggest games with pieces of euphoric skill, Pelé lives as he deserves to live: with the ball at his feet. And at Pelé’s feet, the ball was whatever you wanted it to be.

There is a natural cinematic arc to Pelé’s career, one you could barely have scripted more perfectly: the spectacular entrance as a 17-year-old at the 1958 World Cup in Sweden, followed by a sea of trials and crises in the 1960s, and neatly appended with the protagonist’s triumphant return at the 1970 World Cup in Mexico. This is the arc that Pelé follows to the letter: artistically speaking, the last half-century of Pelé’s life – New York Cosmos Pelé, world peace Pelé, erectile dysfunction Pelé, Mastercard Pelé – may as well never have happened. What we get is Peak Pelé, the force of light and heat and joy who ultimately just wants to make the Brazilian people happy.

And yet by the same token, this is no hagiography. Pelé’s extramarital affairs and uncomfortably close relationship with Brazil’s murderous military dictatorship are interrogated in some detail, pieced together from archive footage, interviews with teammates,



politicians and journalists, and substantial access to Pelé himself. By accident or by design, Pelé does not emerge as some virtuous conquering hero, but as a flawed and credulous star: a man who could do everything on a football pitch, but away from it was often the product of forces he could neither harness nor fully understand. Perhaps the rawest and most moving footage is of Pelé himself, now 80 and in declining health: wheeling himself into the sparse interview room on a Zimmer frame, winching himself heavily into a chair, sighing deeply.

Pelé himself has never been the most reliable of narrators. Many of the stories he likes to tell about himself – like the time he supposedly stopped a civil war in Nigeria in 1969 – have been comprehensively debunked. His record-breaking goal tally is the subject of fierce dispute. At one point in the film, he tells us that he never dreamed of becoming a footballer. Later, he tells us that after Brazil lost the 1950 World Cup final to Uruguay, he consoled his distraught father by telling him he would win it for him one day. One of these is clearly bullshit. Both are included.

But then, when you have lived as eventful and celebrated a life as Pelé has, memory becomes a vague and splintered thing. Pelé didn’t simply create his own lore out of thin air, even if for the most part he happily went along with it. He’s not sitting there on Wikipedia diligently amending his own goal record. Pelé buys wholeheartedly into his own myth because over 60 years the course of his life led him inexorably in that direction. And so, ultimately, perhaps what you remember is more often what you remember remembering, or what someone else remembered, a well-cut anecdote that you have spent more than half your life polishing before a succession of simpering interviewers. Perhaps over time the fact and the legend blend into each other, to the point where it is no longer meaningful to tell them apart. This isn’t about greats and frauds, truth and lies. It’s about the

pressing urge of Pelé’s generation to exalt this one man above all others in what is essentially the history of a team game.

“Pelé rose to fame at the moment of Brazil’s birth as a modern country,” the former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso says in the film. “He became the symbol of Brazilian emancipation,” says the musician Gilberto Gil. “He made Brazilians love themselves again,” says Juca Kfour, a journalist and friend of Pelé’s. All this is told to us as if it’s simply the gospel truth, rather than scrutinised as what it is: a story, a persuasive theory in which the young Pelé is imagined as the emblem of Brazil’s booming economy and growing national confidence in the 1950s.

A similar shorthand applies to Pelé’s growing fame, which is narrated with the credulity of a biblical miracle. The teenage star who returns from the 1958 World Cup is handsome and charismatic and young and athletic and brilliant. Virtue generates fame, and with the growth of television beaming his face and feats to a mass global audience, the reverse also turns out to be true. To what extent is Pelé worthy of all this? To what extent does it place an intolerable burden on him? To what extent is his twinkle, inoffensive public persona – Brand Pelé – a means of coping with the ridiculous levels of fame and expectation invested in him while he was still basically a child?

It’s interesting to see what doesn’t make the finished cut. The women in Pelé’s life – his family, his first wife, an unspecified number of children – are barely mentioned. Money is barely mentioned: for more than a decade Pelé entrusted his financial affairs to his agent, Pepe Gordo, who invested a significant part of Pelé’s fortune in a number of failed businesses. By the late 1960s, Pelé was broke and forced to ask his club, Santos, to bail him out on unfavourable terms. This traumatic episode had a defining impact on Pelé, who in some respect has spent the rest of his life chasing down the riches he believes are his due.

Instead, the film takes a sharp, dark and gripping turn into politics. In 1964, an army coup – backed by the United States – overthrew the democratically elected government of João Goulart and established a brutal authoritarian regime, characterised by the torture and murder of political dissidents. The interviewer asks Pelé if the dictatorship changed anything for him. “No, football went on in the same way,” Pelé replies evenly, as footage of him scoring goals is intercut with newsreel of violent street protests.

Of course, he admits, he had an inkling of what was going on, even as he posed for photographs with General Médici at official functions, beaming and shaking hands in pictures he must have known would be distributed around the world as pro-regime propaganda. But even now there is no real contrition, no twinge of moral anguish, much less genuine remorse at a course of action he insists was the only realistic choice. “What were you doing during the dictatorship? Which side were you on? You get lost in these things,” he says in a tone that evokes not so much discomfort as a vague indifference.

In the age of the athlete-activist, Pelé’s immaculate neutrality comes across as both a little jarring and entirely understandable: the weariness of an octogenarian non-combatant who is simply wired in a certain way. “You could tell me Muhammad Ali was different,” his friend Kfour says. “Indeed he was, and I applaud him for it. Ali knew that he would be arrested for refusing the draft, but he ran no risk of being mistreated or tortured. Pelé had no assurance of that.”

Really, how else did we expect



Pelé – a sportsman with no political ambition or credo – to act in the face of a frightening, omnipotent military junta? Rebel, resist, lose everything? Flash a defiant eye in those official photographs, just to show the world what he really thought? Perhaps, in measuring Pelé up to the athlete-activist ideal, we are simply guilty of doing what the world has been doing to Pelé ever since he emerged: moulding and forcing and chiselling him into our own preconceived expectations of what a hero should look and sound like.

The character of Pelé was created to fulfil multiple needs. For the Brazilian people he was the outsized superhero, a source of joy and exuberance in a sad, suppressed country. For the politicians who effectively kept him captive, preventing him from moving to Europe in the 1960s and coercing him into coming out of international retirement to play in the 1970 World Cup, he was a resource: a handy propaganda tool and icon of nationalistic devotion. For sponsors and commercial interests, he was an inexhaustible catalyst of ticket sales and product endorsements. For coaches and teammates, he was their quick-

est route to glory. For broadcasters and journalists, writers and film-makers, he was (and continues to be) content. For autograph and memorabilia hunters, he was the motherlode. For a generation of football fans, he would be the eternal Greatest: lifelong and irrefutable proof that their own happy memories were objectively better than those of any subsequent generation.

Of course Pelé went along for the ride. He was 17. What else was he going to do? What else did he know? As he matured into adulthood, he would discover that his life had already been built around him: a ceaseless treadmill of football and football and things around the football and more football. He would learn that he and he alone was the show (when he was injured for a while in 1962, Santos attendances dropped by 50%). And once the show moved on, he was essentially pensioned off and left to fend for himself.

Last year, Pelé’s son Edinho claimed in an interview that his father’s health struggles had left him depressed and reclusive, embarrassed to leave the house. Within days the man himself had issued an official statement rejecting the claims and insisting that he had “several upcoming events scheduled”. And in a sense, Pelé’s later years have increasingly felt like an attempt to keep breathing life into the character that once so transfixed the world, even as its physical feats recede ever further into the distance.

There’s a particularly poignant moment about halfway through the film that seems to encapsulate this eternal struggle. In November 1969, a capacity crowd gathered at the Maracanã in a state of feverish rapture, hoping to see Pelé score his 1,000th career goal against Vasco da Gama. The game was level until the 78th minute, when Pelé wriggled into the area and won a penalty. As he stepped up to take the kick, Pelé looked round to see that his teammates were not camped on the edge of the penalty area but all the way back on the halfway line, willing him on from a distance. Not for the first time, Pelé was alone with just the ball at his feet.

It’s not a great penalty. He places it to his right. Edgardo Andrada, the goalkeeper, flings himself to his left but can’t quite grasp it. The ball hits the net and in that same moment Pelé is bounding after it, scooping it up into his arms. And in that same moment he’s mobbed by a crowd of hundreds of photographers and radio reporters and jubilant fans. Strong hands try to grab the ball from him and so Pelé hoists it aloft, partly in triumph, partly because he’s just trying to keep hold of the ball. Then all of a sudden in the melee he drops it and the ball disappears into the throng, and the crowd are still going crazy, and Pelé is still frantically looking around, trying to glimpse the ball. But it’s gone. Forty-seven years later in London, the ball will sell for £81,250 at auction to a private bidder.

Chess: Wesley So uses repertoire to extend Magnus Carlsen's barren streak

LEONARD BARDEN
LONDON, 19 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: Wesley So, the US champion, who won the online Skilling Open in November to spoil Magnus Carlsen’s 30th birthday, achieved a double against the out of form world champion in last weekend’s Opera Euro Rapid. The 27-year-old from Minnetonka, Minnesota, was helped by his publicly available Lifetime Repertoire when defeating the Norwegian 2-2, 2.5-1.5 in the two-set final, and the score understate the ex-Filipino’s superiority. So also won their individual game in the 16-player preliminaries and agreed a draw in a winning position in the fourth game of the second set in order to clinch the match.

The encounter was not straightforward for either player. In game two of the first set, So obtained a winning position but forgot his own analysis, exchanged queens at the wrong moment and lost. Carlsen could have tied the match in the

second set, but failed to visualise a simple winning tactic shown in this week’s puzzle. Carlsen’s initial approach was surprisingly casual, despite an obvious warning in their all-play-all game in which So began 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 Bb5+, then used his repertoire until move 18 before Carlsen varied.

The No 1 failed to prepare for So’s repertoire before the final, and was lucky to escape with 1-1 scoreline in his two black games, and 2-2 overall. Only that evening was his chief aide, GM Peter Heine Nielsen, put to work.

So’s course, published by Chessable, is too advanced for novices, requires hard work from its readers, and is aimed at strong amateurs, experts and ambitious talents, who play at a level where detailed preparation is most effective. It doesn’t come cheap, with a basic price of £30 for Part 1, covering 1 e4 e5 plus some half-open defences. Part 2, analysing the Sicilian, French and Caro-Kann

defences, will appear later this year. It incorporates advanced learning tech-



niques, with detailed videos an optional extra. Whether it takes off in a competitive market remains to be seen, but few

if any rival chess instructional materials can boast that they helped their author defeat the world champion.

This weekend features the first online Fide World Corporate Championship, an event which has attracted a huge entry of 284 teams, many of them famous names, from 78 countries. Considering that less than three years ago Fide was widely regarded as a pariah due to its eccentric president, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, this impressive response counts as a major achievement by the current president, Arkady Dvorkovich.

Carlsen himself is taking part in the team of Kindred, the Norwegian betting company. Although leading UK companies are mainly absent, there is English interest. Alex Holowczak is chief arbiter, another step forward for the Birming-

ham 31-year-old who is the rising star of chess referees and is well on course to officiate at the over-the-board Olympiad and the individual world championship some time in future.

Considering the online events of recent months, So clearly ranks ahead of Carlsen, but the individual world championship is decided across the board, not on the internet. The US grandmaster is not among the eight players who will resume the Covid-interrupted candidates tournament at Yekaterinburg, Russia, on 19 April after it was halted in spring 2020.

Fabiano Caruana, Carlsen’s US challenger in 2018, is on 3.5/7, a 50% score, in the candidates but his chances will jump if he wins in round eight against the leader, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, whose online performances have been mixed and include a huge negative moment when he lost a rook endgame like a novice.

Brazil health workers accused of giving Covid vaccinations with empty syringes

FLAVIA MILHORANCE
RIO DE JANEIRO, 19 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: Police in Brazil are investigating allegations that health-care workers are giving fake Covid-19 inoculations, amid reports of nurses injecting people with empty syringes.

Cases of what local media are calling “wind vaccination” have been reported in four states, adding to the woes of the country’s halting and un-coordinated immunisation programme.

Police announced a criminal investigation on Wednesday, amid speculation that the nurses were either anti-vaxxer conspiracy theorists, or were pocketing vaccine shots to be sold on the black market.

“This initially seemed an isolated case, but, although they are still exceptions, it is very concerning that we are seeing this in several places,” said Carla Domingues, an epidemiologist who coordinated Brazil’s national immunisation programme between 2011 and 2019. “Either these health professionals were poorly trained or they did it in bad faith. In both cases it is inadmissible,” she added.

Rio state police said that if the vaccines had been misappropriated, those involved could be charged with embezzlement, which carries a sentence of up to 12



years in prison. One video recorded by a relative and published in local media shows a nurse injecting an empty syringe in the arm of a 94-year-old woman at a drive-through vaccination site in the city of Petrópolis.

After the video went viral, the nurse was dismissed and investigations were launched by the municipality, the regional nursing council, and the local police.

“We have to wait for the conclusion of the investigation, but I don’t believe it was intentional,” said Aloísio Barbosa Filho, the secretary of health in Petrópolis.

The nurse had over 10 years’ experience in the practice and was trained following immunisation protocols, according to the secretary.

“As it was the first days of vaccination, she might have felt some pressure and was more prone to error,” Barbosa Filho said. “It is unacceptable anyway.”

The secretary said that it was the only incident reported among more than 7,000 vaccines administered in Petrópolis, which has successfully immunised 2.7% of its population.

Brazil once boasted a world-renowned immunisation programme for diseases such as measles, polio, smallpox and tetanus, but it has faced a string of setbacks in the delivery of coronavirus vaccines.

“The [current] programme is totally uncoordinated,” Domingues said. “The plan should be organized at the fed-

eral level, but the health ministry delegated it to regional authorities.”

One month after Brazil kicked off its nationwide immunisation campaign, state capitals including Rio de Janeiro and Salvador had to put vaccinations on hold on Wednesday after imports of the doses were delayed.

A group representing mayors from Brazil’s municipalities has asked the health minister, Eduardo Pazuello, to “urgently” resign. “His leadership did not believe in vaccination as a way out of the crisis and did not carry out the necessary planning for the acquisition of vaccines,” the group wrote on Tuesday.

Pazuello, who also faces an inquiry for his handling of an acute

shortage of oxygen in the Amazon city of Manaus, did not comment.

More than 241,000 Brazilians have died from Covid-19, but the president, Jair Bolsonaro, has repeatedly questioned the efficacy of vaccinations against the disease, dragged negotiations to import doses and essential ingredients, and said he will refuse to be vaccinated.

Fraud and misinformation have added to the problems facing local authorities. In recent days thousands of reports have emerged of people jumping the queue to receive vaccinations before priority groups while anti-vaccine disinformation campaigns have also gained traction, reaching even remote indigenous villages in the Amazon.

Taiwan deploys missiles after Chinese jets ‘enter its air zone’

TAIPEI, 19 FEB [ALJAZEERA]: Taiwan’s air force has activated its missile system after eight Chinese fighter jets flew into the southwestern part of its air defence identification zone, in an uptick in tensions as Taipei announced a new defence minister and intelligence chief.

Taiwan’s Defence Ministry said on Friday four Chinese J-16s and four JH-7s, as well as an electronic warfare aircraft, flew near the Taiwan-controlled Pratas Islands in the top part of the South China Sea, into the southwestern area of its air defence identification zone.

The ministry said Taiwan’s air force was scrambled, with “radio warnings issued and air defence missile systems deployed to monitor the activity”.

In recent months China has increased its military activity around the democratic island it claims as Chinese territory. Beijing says it is responding to what it

calls “collusion” between Taipei and Washington, Taiwan’s most important international backer and weapons supplier.

Chinese aircraft fly in the southwestern corner of the zone on an almost daily basis, though the last such large-scale incursion was on January 24 when 12 Chinese fighter jets were involved.

There was no immediate comment from China.

Shortly before the ministry’s announcement, Taiwan announced a reshuffle of senior security officials – including a new, US-trained defence minister – to help bolster military modernisation and intelligence efforts.

President Tsai Ingwen has promised to defend the island and has made modernising its armed forces a priority, including developing a fleet of new submarines, buying new F-16 fighters from the United States and upgrading its warships.

Presidential Office

spokesman Xavier Chang told reporters that National Security Bureau Director-General Chiu Kuo-cheng, who graduated from the US Army War College in 1999, would replace Yen De-fa as defence minister.

Chang said the president expected Chiu to complete the next stage of military reforms, including planning for “asymmetric warfare”, focusing on high-tech, mobile weapons designed to make any Chinese attack as difficult as possible.

Chiu’s old job as intelligence chief will be taken by Taiwan’s top China policymaker, Chen Ming-tong, now head of the Mainland Affairs Council.

Chang said Chen was ideally placed for this due to his deep knowledge of China.

“The most important task of the National Security Bureau is to understand and have a grasp on China,” Chang said, adding the newly-appointed officials will formally take up their posts next week.

Ted Cruz flies to Cancún as millions of Texans freeze in the dark

ADAM GABBATT
NEW YORK, 19 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: Ted Cruz has sparked outcry after the Republican senator from Texas left the state for a trip to the sunny Mexican tourist resort of Cancún, as millions of his constituents endure deadly power outages and freezing temperatures.

Cruz was spotted waiting for, then later boarding, a flight to Cancún on Wednesday night. After photos of Cruz on the plane went viral on Twitter, prompting fierce criticism, the senator returned to Texas on Thursday, saying the trip was “obviously a mistake”.

The senator moved quickly on Thursday to try to contain the self-inflicted damage. In a statement issued earlier in the afternoon, more than 12 hours after he was sighted, Cruz claimed he had taken the nearly 1,000-mile flight to Cancún merely to accompany his

daughters on the plane.

Cruz’s statement contradicted reports that the senator, who appeared to be accompanied by his wife, had originally been booked to return on Saturday, before hastily changing his flight on Thursday morning. He also called the deadly emergency that has affected millions “an infuriating week for Texans”.

Meanwhile, text messages obtained by the New York Times appeared to show the trip had been planned at short notice. Messages repeatedly sent by Cruz’s wife, Heidi, described their house as “FREEZING” and invited others on a group message thread to join them at the Ritz-Carlton in Cancún.

The morality of Cruz’s Mexican sojourn, came under further scrutiny when it was reported that Cruz directed police to help him travel through Houston airport.

A photo shared on Twitter on Wednesday

sparked sustained outrage at Cruz, seemingly traveling with his wife, Heidi Cruz, waiting to board a flight to Cancún. Others purportedly showed Cruz sitting on the plane.

As news of the vacation broke Cruz, normally a prolific tweeter, remained silent, but behind the scenes the senator changed his plans and scrambled to return to his besieged state, the New York Times reported. Cruz’s statement, issued from Mexico, contradicted the reporting of the Times, and multiple other outlets.

“With school cancelled for the week, our girls asked to take a trip with friends,” Cruz said.

“Wanting to be a good dad, I flew down with them last night and am flying back this afternoon.” Cruz said he and his staff were in “constant communication with state and local leaders” about the crisis in Texas.

Somalia: Heavy gunfire erupts at opposition march in Mogadishu



MOGADISHU, 19 FEB [ALJAZEERA]: Gunfire and blasts have erupted in Somalia’s capital of Mogadishu, according to witnesses, Somali government and opposition leaders, as security forces clashed with protesters angered by delayed elections.

It was unclear who opened fire first, but one witness Yusuf Mohamed reported a “heavy exchange of gunfire” between security forces and armed guards protecting opposition supporters who began their march along the main airport road.

“There can be casualties but we are taking cover now I don’t know exactly what happened,” he told the AFP news agency. Another witness Fadumo Moalim told AFP: “We were peacefully walking along the airport road together with former Prime Minister Hassan Ali Kheire, when the security forces opened fire on us, creating mayhem.”

A video seen by Al Jazeera from an anti-government demonstration showed civilians in face masks waving Somali flags scattering as gunfire erupted.

The violence comes after weeks of tensions over the holding of de-

layed elections in the Horn of Africa nation.

Al Jazeera’s Catherine Soi, reporting from Nairobi, said that the gunfire erupted in an area close to the airport and that government and opposition sources had reported incidents.

“We have been told that the whole area where the incident happened has been cordoned off by the police and military,” she said.

She added that huge blasts have been heard in several buildings in the area but the situation had calmed down.

“We are being told people in Mogadishu are going to the mosques for prayers, but there is still a lot fear,” she said. “Many people we have spoken are saying that they want to stay home, or they want to stay in the mosques and see how this plays out.”

Somalia’s prime minister condemned clashes on Friday, underlining that the presence of armed demonstrators was “unacceptable”.

“Every person in this country has a constitutional right to protest peacefully but my government will not tolerate any armed protesters and it is unacceptable,” Mohamed Hussein Roble said in a televised speech.

Myanmar protester shot in head during police crackdown dies

YANGON, 19 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: A woman who was shot in the head by police during protests in Myanmar last week has died – the first protest fatality since the military took control in a coup more than two weeks ago. Mya Thwate Khaing, 20, had been on life support since being taken to hospital on 9 February after she was hit by what doctors said was a live bullet at a protest in the capital, Naypyitaw.

“I feel really sad and have nothing to say,” said her brother, Ye Htut Aung, told Reuters.

A hospital official confirmed her death at 11am, and said her body would be examined later on Friday because “this is a case of injustice”. “We will keep the [cause of death on] record and send a copy to the respective authorities. We will look for justice and move forward,” said the official. The shooting of the grocery store worker happened while police were clearing crowds and roused anger across the nation and rallied support for the movement, many of whose members say they refuse to allow another generation to experience military rule.

Thousands of protesters gathered again in Yangon on Friday, with police making

their biggest effort yet to block protests downtown, sealing off of the main focal points, near Sule Pagoda, after a huge rally at the major intersection the previous day stopped traffic in the area. Protesters gathered on all four sides of the blocked-off area; with some crowds growing to more than 2,000 strong by 11am. Barricades remain outside City Hall, where Buddhists are chanting at the police, and nearby, a protest began outside Myanma Economic Bank. Opposite the bank, three truckloads of Tatmadaw soldiers were parked down a narrow road.

“The police are afraid of us,” said a protest organiser draped in a rainbow flag near Sule Pagoda. “They don’t want us to gather and chant, but we will continue peacefully.”

Myanmar’s army seized power on 1 February and detained elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi, ending a long transition towards democracy

and bringing tens of thousands of demonstrators onto the streets. Earlier, Mya Thwate Khaing’s brother Ye Htut Aung told Reuters the family – though supportive of the protests – had urged her against going to the demonstration for fear of violence. She insisted. “It was her spirit,” he said by phone. “She wanted to and I couldn’t stop her.”

The last time he spoke to her, he said, was on a voice call over a poor connection. Neither could get the video to work – the new ruling junta has been stifling internet access.

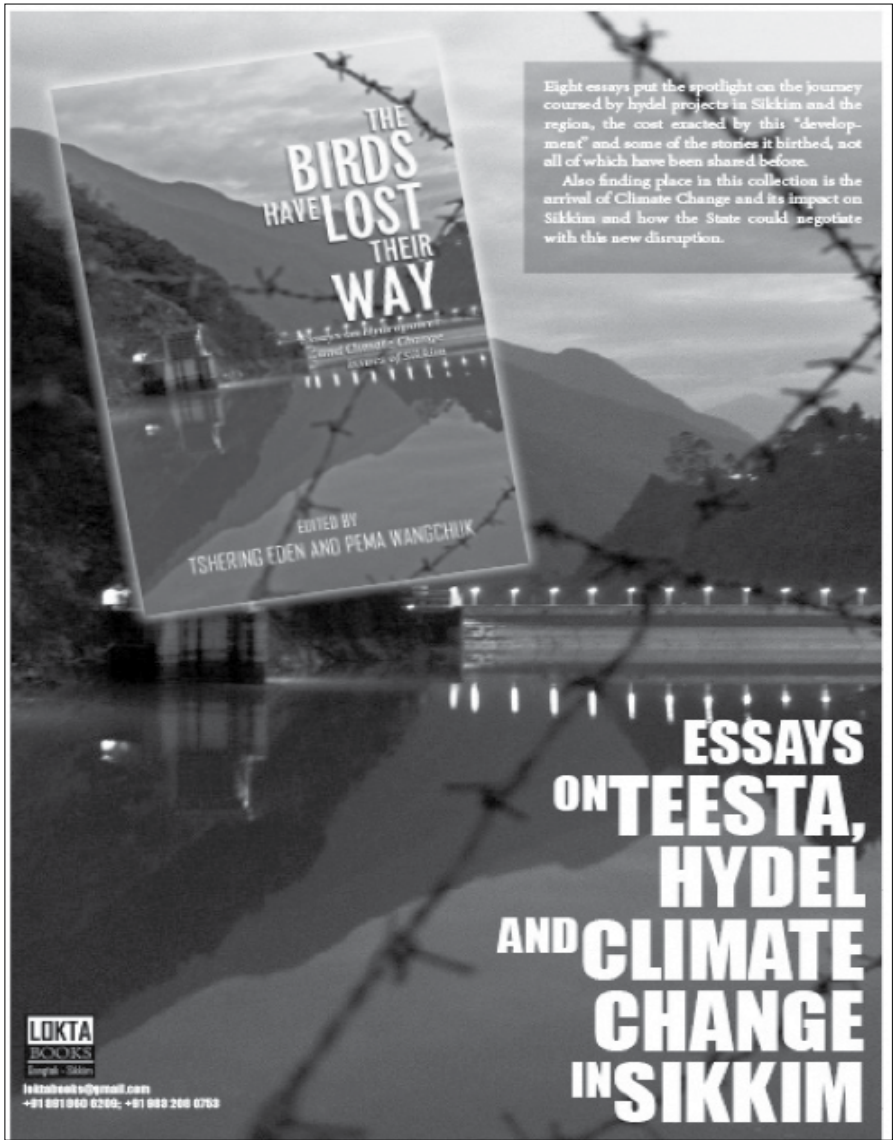
Ye Htut Aung warned her to stay at the back of the protest and that the police were not to be trusted. “What are you going to do if they shoot?” he asked. “No, they wouldn’t,” she replied. “It’s OK. Even if they fire, it should be fine.” At the time of the shooting, the army’s True News Information Unit said security forces used only non-lethal weapons and that the police were investigating.

The shooting prompted protesters to drape a massive a portrait of her from a bridge in downtown Yangon, the commercial capital, with the words: “Lets together oppose the dictator who kills the people.”

Video footage posted to Facebook and verified by Reuters shows the moment of the shooting. In the footage, Mya Thwate Khaing stands at the front of a crowd of protesters facing riot police.

Wearing a red T-shirt and helmet, she is first struck by a stream fired by a water cannon. A woman beside her takes her hand and tries to lead her away. While their backs are turned, there is a crack and she crumples to the ground. Police continue to soak the crowd with water cannon as they try to tend to her. Ye Htut Aung said the military had tried to have his sister transferred to an army hospital but the family had refused.

The family were all National League for Democracy (NLD) supporters who voted for the party in the November election that it won by a landslide. The military has said, without evidence, that the election was fraudulent, to justify their seizure of power.



Ella Emhoff makes runway debut - and yes, she's in a coat

They already knew she looked good in a coat. So the designers at Proenza Schouler decided to dress Ella Emhoff art student, knitwear designer, fledgling model and stepdaughter of Vice President Kamala Harris in a couple of coats (plus a pantsuit) for her modeling debut in their new collection, unveiled Thursday for New York Fashion Week.

Designers Lazaro Hernandez and Jack McCollough said the fashion world took quick notice when 21-year-old Emhoff appeared at the inauguration in January, dressed in a quirky Miu Miu coat with bejeweled shoulders along with a starchy white collar. Social media took notice, too.

Soon after, the designers were planning their February show actually a digital short, for pandemic reasons and the casting director mentioned Emhoff. And we said,

We were just talking about Ella.' Seemed like everyone was kind of talking about her, McCollough said in an interview.

As it turns out, Emhoff, a senior and art major at Parsons School of Design (where Hernandez and McCollough met and began their partnership), had just signed with IMG Models, joining an even bigger breakout star of the inauguration: poet Amanda Gorman.

The outdoor shoot took place recently on a blustery weekend at the Parrish Museum in Water Mill, New York. It was the first time Emhoff had walked a runway.

I have to say I was a little nervous, Emhoff, daughter of Harris's husband

Doug Emhoff, said later in a streamed talk with the designers, also released Thursday. I definitely lost a little sleep the night before. I'm walking for the first time, I'm in this professional environment for the first time ... the anticipation

some of the label's typically unique footwear -- leather socks topped by a strappy sandal.

We very much believe this moment is about the elimination of anything superfluous, the elimination of excess,



FAME AND FORTUNE! The Bling Empire star, Christine Chieu, is spotted arriving for dinner at hotspot Craig's in West Hollywood.

Seema Biswas joins cast of series 'Human'

Veteran actor Seema Biswas is the latest addition to the cast of filmmaker Vipul Amrutlal Shah's web series "Human".

Featuring "Delhi Crime" star Shefali Shah, who is also Shah's wife, and actor Kirti Kulhari, the show is a medical thriller revolving around the underbelly of the human drug testing and the world of medical scam.

Biswas, known for delivering critically-acclaimed performances in movies such as "Bandit Queen", "Khamoshi: The Musical" and "Water", will have a pivotal part in the series.

Shah said the whole team is excited to have an amazing actor like Biswas aboard the show.

"From 'Bandit Queen' till now, she has done some of the most amazing performances. It's a great joy, pleasure and honour to work with these three artistes in one show. It's very rare for a director to get a combination of actors like this, so both me and Mozez are blessed, excited and happy. "The first day of shoot was

quite electrifying and I'm sure audiences will enjoy the performances of all three and many more in fact but these three female actors in particular for sure," the filmmaker said in a statement. "Human" will also feature actors



Ram Kapoor, Mohan Agashe, Aditya Shrivastava and Sandeep Kulkarni.

The show, which is being co-directed by Vipul Shah and Mozez Singh, went on floors last month.

Whoopi Goldberg joins Amazon series 'Harlem'

LOS ANGELES, FEB 19 (PTI): Oscar winner Whoopi Goldberg has boarded the cast of Amazon's upcoming comedy series "Harlem". The show, created by Tracy Oliver of "Girls Trip" fame, also features actor Jasmine Guy, known for appearing in series such as "A Different World" and "The Vampire Diaries".

According to Deadline, the two actors will recur in the series.

The single-camera comedy show follows the lives of four black women, friends from their college days at NYU, as they navigate sex, relationships and chasing their dreams.

Goldberg, 65, will essay the role of Dr Elise Pruitt, the brilliant, intense new department head at Columbia University with

a warmth that has a fragile on/off switch.

Guy, 58, will star as Patricia, Quinn's wealthy mom who wants her daughter to give up her seemingly failing career as a designer and just settle down.



"Harlem" is backed by Amazon Studios and Universal Television, a division of Universal Studio Group, in association with Amy Poehler's Paper Kite Productions.

Uzo Aduba inks deal with CBS Studios, to star in Robert and Michelle King drama

LOS ANGELES, FEB 19 (PTI): Three-time Emmy winner Uzo Aduba has signed a multi-year producing deal with CBS Studios under which her first project will be drama "Low Country". According to Deadline, Aduba will star in and executive produce the show.

"The Good Wife and Evil" creators Robert King and Michelle King will also serve as executive producers. Penned by Dwayne Jones, "Low Country" features Aduba as Shirley Johnson, a deputy sheriff in South Carolina's low country. "Black and openly

gay in a white southern stronghold, Shirley has been underestimated her whole life until now, when she takes on the wealthy white crime family that has kept everyone in the grip of fear," the logline reads.

Aduba is best known for her role as Suzanne Crazy Eyes Warren on the Netflix series Orange Is the New Black. The role earned her three Emmy nominations, of which she won two. She most recently won the Emmy for best supporting actress in a limited series for her work on the FX drama "Mrs America".

Netflix to adapt Lupita Nyong'o children's book 'Sulwe' as animated musical

LOS ANGELES, FEB 19 (PTI): Hollywood star Lupita Nyong'o's 2019 children's book about colorism and self-love, 'Sulwe', will be adapted as an animated musical on Netflix.

Written by Nyong'o with illustrations by Vashti Harrison, the book follows Sulwe, a child who has skin darker than anyone she knows and all she wants is to be beautiful and bright. The book focuses on colorism, self-esteem and learning that true beauty comes from within.

The story of Sulwe is one that is very close to my heart. Growing up, I was uncomfortable in my dark skin. I rarely saw anyone who looked like me in the aspirational pages of books and magazines, or even on TV. It was a long journey for me to arrive at self-love," Nyong'o said in a statement to Variety. The 37-year-old Oscar-winning actor will serve as a producer on the film.

Published by Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers in October 2019, "Sulwe" was a New York Times bestseller.

ARIES:

This is a beautiful time for single Aries. A new and exciting adventure is on the cards, one that promises to make you feel so, so alive. The old fears will come up time and again. Observe them without giving them any more power than they deserve. The secret to making space for this magical connection? Giving yourself the permission to let your guard down.

TAURUS:

Some of you could be struggling with your finances at the moment. There's a sense of not being remunerated in proportion to your efforts. You have two options at this point: to keep talking about how unfair the whole scenario is or to actively do something about. An open and honest conversation with your clients (or your boss) is a good way forward.

GEMINI:

Yes, it all seems topsy-turvy at the moment. Yes, it feels like you might never make it to the desired destination. But you're not looking at the bigger picture here, Gemini,

which is that you're *this* close to the final point. So replace the pessimism with some hope as you vow to go after your dreams with a newfound fervour. PS: The Universe has got your back!

CANCER:

There are periods of doing and periods of being and that's just how this life of ours works, Cancer. Where are you in your journey and what are you being called to pay attention to? Slow down and breathe. Listen to what your body and soul are telling you. Giving yourself the permission to refuel could be the best way to get your productivity game back on.

LEO:

Here's the thing, Leo. We all have an idea of how the people in our lives should and shouldn't behave. As a result, we end up weighing them down with the weight of our expectations. Expectations they may not be in a position to meet. What if you rethink your approach a little bit? What if you choose to bring a little more love and a little more acceptance into the equation? Something tells us

you're about to bring about a positive change in your closest relationships.

VIRGO:

This is a time of joy and celebration in the Virgo HQ. You or somebody close to you may be getting engaged soon, in which case bridesmaids duties may be on the cards. Alternatively, you could be planning a baby shower for somebody close to your heart. Remember, it's best to keep low-key at a time like this. This way, you'll end up spending quality time with the people you truly care about.

LIBRA:

There's no way out of this, Libra. This is your responsibility and yours alone—and you have committed to it for a reason. So, instead of pulling out one excuse after another, set some time aside to get the job done. Sure, it all seems intimidating from where you are standing. However, once you get into the flow of it, it won't seem like too much effort.

SCORPIO:

There will always be things to do and deadlines to meet. But how many of these things

are truly important, Scorpio? Be mindful of the distractions—of all the things that are disrupting your flow. Keeping things simple, for now, will sure as hell help you get more stuff done.

SAGITTARIUS:

Staying guarded is easy. It's what you know best. Letting somebody in, on the other hand, can be a terrifying thought. Challenge yourself to remain open nonetheless. Resist the urge to shut down at the first sign of intimacy and be your most authentic self in every moment. PS: Something tells us you're about to break past a barrier that's been holding you back.

CAPRICORN:

'Health and wellness' is a big theme in the Capricorn HQ—and you're in the mood to adopt slow living practices. Consider growing your own vegetables this season, or giving your kitchen garden an update. Nothing spells paradise like waking up to the scents of herbs or rustling up a salad with fresh produce. If you've been slacking off on your yoga practice, it's time to get back to

the mat too. Consider working with a coach online if you're looking for some inspiration.

AQUARIUS:

There's always two ways to get what you want. The first involves the usage of brute force. The other? A heady mix of compassion and willpower. You'll find your way around the maze either way. Choosing the path of least resistance, however, will make the passageway much simpler. So, look beyond the fluctuations. Fix your gaze on the given destination. Know that the mysterious forces are helping you achieve what you have set out to.

PISCES:

Healing is a beautiful and mysterious process. There are days you feel like you've left all the baggage behind, and then there are days when the demons appear unannounced once again. Accept the ebb like you would the flow, Pisces, and know that it's all a part of the letting go process. Despite what you are experiencing right now, there is hope. Trust what this highest self is showing you. You are being led to a better place.