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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## Arun Gurung is new president of Sikkim Riders' Club



**SAGAR CHHETRI  
GANGTOK, 14 FEB:**

Arun Gurung was today elected the new president of Sikkim Riders' Club [SRC].

He was elected during the annual general body meeting of the club held here on Sunday. SRC was formed in the year 2014 on the motto, 'Ride to Inspire'.

The new executive body elected today has Bishwendra Pradhan as vice-president, Dr Pushkar Gurung and PT Denzongpa as general secretaries, Samrat Pradhan and Suraj Pradhan as treasurers, Sanju Rai and Sohail Taslim as publicity secretaries, Ruben Gurung as chief ride coordinator, Prashant Pradhan and Lalit Basnett as advisors and Saurav Tamang as legal advisor.

They will be in office for a four-year term.

The meeting also included the felicitation of outgoing president, Prashant Pradhan, for his contributions towards the club and on recently being appointed NHPC Chairman.

In his short address, Mr Pradhan congratulated the newly elected members and encouraged them to work for the welfare of the members.

He also assured to extend all support to take the club to the next level.

Members of the club placed their suggestions during the interaction session of the meeting and resolved to take up more charity rides and get involved in other

social activities for the welfare of the society. The meeting also discussed taking up mental health awareness camps in the State.

Speaking to media persons, the newly elected president, Arun Gurung, thanked members of the club on giving him the responsibility to lead the club.

"I am very happy to be elected as the president of one of the oldest and bigger bikers' clubs of Sikkim. I will work dedicatedly in the interest of the members and to take the club to the next level," he said.

He assured to give continuity to all activities of the club, which were held-up for some time due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and also to start new activities.

He informed that the club will hold a medical camp in April, which will be followed by a charity ride on 15 August and other social activities in different parts of the State.

The club will also participate in national events in different parts of the country.

"Lay people used to believed that bikers just ride for their own interest and cause noise pollution, but this concept has been changing with the growth of riding culture in the State and engagement in social activities by riders' clubs. Bikers have been contributing to the promotion of Sikkim tourism directly and indirectly," Mr Gurung added.

## LPG price hiked by Rs 50



**NEW DELHI, 14 FEB:** The price of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) domestic cylinder (14.2 kg) was hiked by Rs. 50 per cylinder on Sunday and the new prices would be applicable from Monday, it is informed.

A gas cylinder in the national capital for instance will now cost Rs. 769, report news agency ANI.

Indian Oil, the country's largest fuel retailer, supplies LPG under the brand Indane. Usually, the rates of non-subsidised LPG cylinders are reviewed on a monthly basis and

changes effected on the first day of each month.

Cooking gas rates vary in different parts of the country due to local taxes.

Earlier, the non-subsidised liquefied petroleum gas prices were hiked by Rs. 25 on 04 February across the four metro cities.

Presently, the government subsidises 12 cylinders of 14.2 kilograms each per household every year. The customer has to make any additional purchases of LPG cylinders at the market price.

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 14 FEB:**

Schools, all schools and all classes in Sikkim, are to reopen for in-classroom studied from Monday onwards.

While the school managements appear to have been in the know about these plans for a while, the official confirmation came through a circular issued by the Education Department today, 14 Feb, a day before the schools are to reopen after nearly ten months.

As per the circular issued by Director, Elementary Education and Samagra Shiksha, Bhim Thatal, today, the State Government has approved the resumption of classes from Lower Kindergarten to V of all school - government, government-aided and

private - from 15 Feb onwards. The resumption of classes from class VI and above had already been communicated to the schools.

The reopening will be on the condition that the Standard Operating Procedure of the Union Health Ministry, guidelines of the Union Education Ministry and SOPs and instructions of the Education Department will be "strictly" followed.

Students will be allowed "strictly" with the consent of the parents on voluntary basis and schools at the primary level have been directed to operate at 50% capacity, "or alternately on odd-even roll number basis" wherever there are more students and less space.

Classrooms with



"lesser number of students," however, can operate on full basis if sufficient distance as the Covid-19 safety protocol can be maintained.

The circular also directs that schools

operate only till 2PM every working day and restores the second and fourth Saturday holidays at schools.

Hostel facilities have also been allowed to resume following

Covid-19 guidelines.

The Circular directs that after reopening on 15 Feb, two or three weeks be utilized to make up the "losses in learning outcomes and other academic matters

and also to organise events at schools in order to drive and promote admission, create learning environment lost due to prolonged closure and to assess requirements."

## Petrol and diesel prices rise for 6th day

**NEW DELHI, FEB 14 (PTI):** Petrol price crossed the Rs 99 a litre mark in Rajasthan on Sunday while diesel topped Rs 91 after rates were increased for the sixth day in a row.

Petrol price was increased by 29 paise per litre and diesel by 32 paise, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

This pushed retail rates, which differ from state to state depending on incidence of local sales tax or VAT and freight charges, to their highest level.

In the national capital, petrol climbed to Rs 88.73 a litre and diesel soared to Rs 79.06, the notification showed.

Rajasthan, which levies the highest VAT on fuel in the country, had the highest petrol and diesel prices.

In Sriganaganagar town of the state, petrol soared to Rs 99.29 and diesel

jumped to Rs 91.17 per litre.

The Rajasthan government had late last month cut VAT on petrol and diesel by 2 per cent. Despite this, the state has the highest VAT at 36 per cent plus Rs 1,500 per kilolitre road cess on petrol. On diesel, the state levies 26 per cent and Rs 1,750 per kl road cess.

Branded or premium petrol at Sriganaganagar was priced at Rs 102.07 a litre and similar grade diesel at Rs 94.83.

The main difference between regular and premium fuel grades is the octane number. Regular fuel has a lower octane number -- 87, while premium fuel generally gets a 91 octane rating or higher.

Octane number is a measure of the ignition quality of fuel -- higher the number, the less susceptible is the fuel to 'knocking' when burnt in a standard

engine.

Regular petrol in Delhi comes for Rs 88.73 per litre while premium fuel is priced at Rs 91.56. Against Rs 79.06 a litre price of regular diesel, branded fuel comes for Rs 82.35.

In Mumbai, regular petrol price soared to its highest ever level of Rs 95.21 and that of diesel rose to Rs 86.04. Premium or branded petrol in the city comes for Rs 97.99 and same grade diesel for Rs 89.27 a litre.

In six straight days, prices have gone up by Rs 1.80 per litre for petrol and Rs 1.88 for diesel.

The relentless hike in prices has been criticised by the opposition parties including Congress that has demanded an immediate cut in taxes to ease the burden on the common man.

However, Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan last week had told Parliament

that the government is not considering a reduction in excise duty to cool rates from their record highs.

Rates have risen as international oil prices touched USD 61 per barrel for the first time in more than a year on improving demand outlook amid the global rollout of COVID-19 vaccines, he had said.

Central and state taxes make up for over 61 per cent of the retail selling price of petrol and about 56 per cent of diesel.

The union government levies Rs 32.9 per litre of excise duty on petrol and Rs Rs 31.80 a litre on diesel.

Retail petrol rates have risen by Rs 19.16 per litre since mid-March 2020, after the government raised taxes by a record margin to mop up gains arising from fall in international oil prices. Diesel rates have gone up by Rs 16.77.

## Only two new cases in Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 14 FEB:**

Sikkim recorded two new cases of novel coronavirus in the last 24 hours, taking the State's tally of confirmed cases to 6,118.

In the meanwhile, five more patients recovered and were discharged from isolation facilities on Saturday taking the total recovered cases of

COVID-19 in Sikkim to 5,831. This has further improved Sikkim's recovery rate to 95.30%.

The number of active cases of novel coronavirus in the State has gone down further to 56.

In his daily health bulletin on Sunday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia, mentioned that the two new cases were

picked up in the testing of 106 samples on Saturday.

One person was found positive in RT-PCR testing of 94 samples, while the second was reported in rapid antigen testing of eight samples.

While one case is from Soreng and the other is from Upper Yangtey, both in West District.

## India accounts for 10 per cent of global road crash victims: World Bank

**LALIT K JHA**

**WASHINGTON, FEB 13 (PTI):** India, which has one per cent of the world's vehicles, accounts for 10 per cent of all road crash victims, the latest World Bank report on road safety said on Saturday.

Hartwig Schafer, World Bank's Vice President for South Asia, said the Indian government in recent years has taken significant steps to address the issues related to road safety.

For India, it's one per cent of the world's vehicles and 10 per cent of the crash victims. This is something where, in particular in India, we have to pay attention, Schafer told PTI in

an interview on the occasion of the release of the report on road safety in New Delhi on Saturday.

While the attention in the last year has shifted due to COVID-19, there is an interesting link between road safety and pandemic right now, he noted.

Unfortunately, the road crashes have not been going down and any time 10 per cent of the capacity in hospitals is being used for the treatment crash victims, he said.

Schafer said road crashes actually hit the poorest and the most vulnerable segments of the populations.

"The financial impact of the crash is much more on poorer households

than on better-off households. It is much higher on women who have to take care of the burden of caregiving. It is much higher on those who rely on foot and also in the informal sector," he said.

However, according to Schafer, the good thing is that India was doing quite a bit on road safety.

Last year, India amended its Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Act, which is bringing a lot of innovation in terms of financing, protection and enforcement to the fore, he said.

Responding to a question, Schafer said that Tamil Nadu is one of the states which has reduced the number of crash fatalities by 25 per cent.

For us in the bank,

this is a major part of our engagement in the transport sector -- rural transport, urban transport -- the focus on new mobility post-COVID is something that we are doing, he said.

In South Asia, he said, the World Bank is helping in road safety standards and institutional aspects of it as well.

Building a safe infrastructure is one of the key aspects of addressing this major challenge, he said.

We need to make sure that we have adequate roadside barriers. We need to make sure that traffic calming areas are being put in. The roads have to be safe. The vehicles have to be safe too, he said.

If we don't have an appropriate vehicle inspection system then you have unsafe vehicles on the road, and it's clearly documented that unsafe vehicles are actually contributing to crashes, he said.

Emergency health care facilities in the vicinity of highways make a huge difference in addressing the challenge of road safety.

When we plan highways now, we need to make sure that crash victims are getting care within the first hour of the crash. That very often makes the difference between life and death, he said.

Highway corridors in India that have a very coordinated healthcare

and emergency health care of access, in terms of hospitals, trauma centres for emergency treatment, make a huge difference in terms of whether a crash victim recovers or passes away, he added.

Enforcement is another key aspect of road safety.

In the countries having credible enforcement, the number of roads and traffic accidents is going down, he said, adding that data collection and generation related to it is also important.

The Indian government is working on all these aspects, he said, exuding confidence that moving forward there will be a reduction in the crash fatalities in India.



## Calling students antinational “condemnable,” says Chamling while admitting that police action on students in his tenure was also “unfortunate”

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 14 FEB:**

Sikkim Democratic Front president, former Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, today condemned statements attributed to SKM spokesperson Jacob Khaling referring to two Gyalshing college students as anti-nationals.

In his weekly Facebook interaction in which takes a question from the people, Mr Chamling also addressed the events of 2014 when a protest by Govt College students in Gangtok had gone out of hand and was lathicharged by Sikkim Police when he was in office. That incident, he admits, was “unfortunate.” He explains that he was not

in the State at the time and the moment things spiraled, he intervened, not only rolled back the exam fee hike but made college education free in the State and resolved the matter amicably.

Meanwhile, addressing the query about the Gyalshing College students issue, he writes that calling students anti-nationals and equating them to terrorists was “unprecedented in the history of Sikkim, unheard of and highly condemnable.”

Arresting students seeking an appointment with a Minister “plainly indicates that this government knows nothing about the fundamental rights of citizens in a democratic

country, let alone the dreams and aspirations of students.”

He adds that it was also shocking that the SKM government has not felt it necessary to withdraw the statement when, in fact, it should be apologizing to the students.

He has also congratulated the students for displaying “exemplary courage and determination” in standing for their rights against all odds.

“Our party and I stand with them for their rights, dignity and demand. I appeal to the people of Sikkim to stand in solidarity with them for their rights and dignity as well. I have always said and I will say it again

that when injustice and lies are quietly accepted, they will be justified, thereby suppressing justice and truth,” he conveys.

He has also flagged as a serious worry, what he sees as tactics of intimidation by SKM and its government. Threatening a former student leader outside the Sadar Thana shortly after the Chief Minister himself issued a veiled threat by announcing in public that his “team” was ready for anyone who underestimates him or the SKM Government, should concern people, he conveys.

As for the 2014 episode, while admitting that it was “extremely unfortunate,” he states

that the exam fee hike roll back should have been immediately and amicably dealt with.

He adds that the students felt dissatisfied with the way their demand was dealt with and decided to organize a peaceful protest which was hijacked by some SKM supporters. After the vehicles of a judge and police officers were pelted with stones and the highway blocked, police intervened to “bring the chaos under control.”

“I was not in the state at the time. As soon as the matter was brought to my notice, I intervened and I declared that education would be free right up to the college level,” he writes.

## India records 12,194 new Covid cases; 1.09 crore total cases so far

**NEW DELHI, 14 FEB [PTI]:** India’s tally of COVID-19 cases surpassed 1.09 crore with 12,194 new infections, while fresh fatalities were recorded below 100 for the eighth time this month, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Sunday.

The total coronavirus cases rose to 1,09,04,940 and the number of dead increased to 1,55,642 with 92 daily new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,06,11,731 which translates to a national COVID-19 recovery rate of 97.31 per cent, while the COVID-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.43 per cent.

The COVID-19 active caseload remained below 1.5 lakh.

There are 1,37,567 active cases of coronavirus infections in the country which comprises 1.26 per cent of the total caseload, the

data stated.

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

According to the ICMR, 20,62,30,512 samples have been tested

up to February 13 with 6,97,114 samples being tested on Saturday.

The 92 new fatalities include 38 from Maharashtra, 16 from Kerala and 5 each from Chhattisgarh and Tamil Nadu.

A total of 1,55,642 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 51,489 from Maharashtra followed by 12,413 from Tamil Nadu, 12,263 from Karnataka, 10,889 from Delhi, 10,230

from West Bengal, 8,699 from Uttar Pradesh and 7,162 from Andhra Pradesh.

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

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

## Odisha cop rescues children from car of drunk father, drives them home

**KENDRAPARA, 14 FEB [PTI]:** A policeman of Odisha’s Kendrapara district has earned accolades from his superiors for rescuing three little children from a car driven by their father in an inebriated condition and driving them home himself.

The driver of the car was arrested and his driving license suspended, police said on Sunday.

Havildar Soren stopped the car for rash driving near the crowded old bus stand chowk in Kendrapara town and found that the man behind the steering wheel was

under heavy influence of alcohol, district Superintendent of Police Madhkar Sandeep Sampad said.

He also found two boys and a girl, who were between ages 3 and 7 years, in the back seat and they were frightened because of the negligent driving.

It soon emerged that the driver was their father.

“Showing humanitarian gesture, he himself drove the car and safely dropped the children to their home,” the SP tweeted.

Mr Soren said that when he took the three

to their residence at Balagandi area of the town, their mother profusely thanked him for saving the children’s lives.

Mr Sampad said he has recommended Mr Soren’s name for an award.

The incident occurred on Friday night.

## Messi nets 2 in record-tying 505th Liga match

**BARCELONA, 14 FEB [AFP]:** Barcelona might not be able to catch Atletico Madrid but they may fancy their chances against Paris Saint-Germain after Lionel Messi scored twice in a 5-1 thrashing of Alaves on Saturday. Messi fired in two sensational long-range efforts and would have had a hat-trick at Camp Nou had a dubious VAR decision in the first half not ruled Antoine Griezmann offside. He did tee up a second of the night for the 21-year-old Francisco Trincao and was instrumental in Junior Firpo adding a fifth too, a flamboyant scoop freeing Griezmann to send a pass to Firpo at the back post.

“Leo is focused, he’s happy, he’s ruthless. When we play those passes through the lines to him and he finds those gaps, everything is easier,” said Ronald Koeman.

Victory means Barca trail Atletico by eight points again after the leaders temporarily pulled

11 clear thanks to a hard-fought 2-1 win over Granada earlier on Saturday.

Barcelona and Real Madrid have both played a game more than Atleti, with Zinedine Zidane’s side facing Valencia at home on Sunday.

Atletico’s win was a significant psychological boost on the back of slipping up for the first time in nine games at home to Celta Vigo earlier this week.

Their advantage may prove too big to close but Barcelona’s Champions League tie against PSG, which had the French side as firm favourites when the draw was made in December, now feels harder to call.

The question is whether a free-flowing Barca attack, full of talent and orchestrated by Messi, can hurt PSG enough to make up for what remains a shaky defence, depleted by injuries and vulnerable to the counter-attack.

“We’re in good form,” said Koeman. “We keep creating

chances and improving in all aspects of our game. PSG are a great team but I see the tie as very balanced. We go into it with confidence, knowing we need to be at our best to go through.”

With Gerard Pique and the emerging Ronald Araujo both out injured, Frenkie de Jong filled in again in central defence, although the Dutchman has arguably been Barcelona’s most improved player this year in the midfield three.

Instead there was a start for Ilaix Kourouma in midfield, the 18-year-old academy product who assisted Trincao’s opening goal but whose misplaced pass led to Luis Rioja briefly giving Alaves hope.

After Trincao had swept home, Messi thought he had made it two, pouncing on a rebound after Griezmann missed but the goal was ruled out, even though replays suggested Griezmann was onside.

Messi made

amends soon after, latching onto a Sergio Busquets pass, darting in-field and ripping a shot in off the post.

Late flurry wraps up win

Rioja capitalised on Ilaix’s mistake just before the hour but Barca pulled away with three goals in six minutes.

Pedri’s pass freed Messi but he failed to round Fernando Pacheco and instead the ball spilled out for Trincao to score his second.

Messi slammed a stinging strike into the top corner from 25 yards to make it 4-1 before perhaps the goal of the night came last, Messi scooping over for Griezmann, who volleyed to the back post where Firpo could not miss.

Atletico had earlier swerved a second consecutive slip by squeezing past Granada at Los Carmenes, a victory secured by Angel Correa’s fortuitous winner in the second half.

There was a hint of luck in Granada’s equaliser too, Yangel Herrera’s shot deflecting

off Marcos Llorente, who had himself put Atletico in front only three minutes earlier.

“The most important thing today was the fight and the energy of the team,” said Simeone afterwards.

At the full-time whistle, he shook his fists and sprinted down the tunnel, his relief evident at the end of a game that could easily have seen more points dropped for his side.

Luis Suarez had scored in six of the previous seven games but for once the 34-year-old was not the matchwinner, with Llorente and Correa -- two unsung heroes this season -- instead proving the difference.

Llorente’s goal was his seventh of the season while his lay-off for Correa was his sixth assist.

“As coaches trophies are wonderful because they fill you with excitement and glory,” Simeone said of Llorente. “But when you work with a footballer and see them grow, you feel even more joy and more enthusiasm to keep doing what you’re doing.”

## SKM’s panchayat cell completes meetings in South Sikkim



**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 14 FEB:**

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha’s panchayat cell today completed its meetings with present and former panchayat members of South Sikkim.

The meetings had begun on 31 January

and covered all constituencies of South district – Rangang-Yangyang, Tumling-lingee, Namthang-Rateypani, Melli, Namchi-Singhithang, Poklok-Kamrang and Barfung, a press release informs.

SKM’s Panchayat

Cell team, led by in-charge, Tenzing Lamtha, discussed various public-interest issues with the panchayats with the main objective being to reach the objectives and policies of SKM on the Panchayati Raj across the State, the release informs.

## SKM’s 5-day district level inter-constituency sports meet concludes



**PRITAM LAMA**

**GYALSHING, 14 FEB:**

A five-day district level inter-constituency sports meet organised by the sports wing of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha in collaboration with Sports & Youth Affairs Department concluded today with the finals of the volleyball tournament and athletic events at Sribadam in West Sikkim.

State Bank of Sikkim chairperson DB Gurung was present as the chief guest today accompanied by the party’s Rinchenpong constituency in-charge Phurba Tshering Bhutia, Rinchenpong CLC president Suk Hang

Limboo, sports wing organising secretary Zigmi Ongcho Bhutia, west district sports wing convenor Sanjay Subba, west district sports wing general secretary Sonam Chewang Bhutia, and SKM sports wing executive members.

A total of 328 athletes - 170 boys and 158 girls - participated in the 5-day event.

Similarly, a total of 16 teams participated in the open men’s and women’s volleyball tournament.

In his address said, we must have dream and aims to achieve something in life. He said, Sikkim Chief minister Prem Singh

Tamang (Goley) has a vision to develop Sikkim as a hub for Education and Sports and with this Initiative of SKM Sports Wing it will help us to develop sports potentials. SBS Chairman D. B. Gurung lauded the initiative of sports Wing of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha adding it as ambitious Event in promoting sports at rural areas.

He said, potential rural talents from rural areas of west district has given an opportunity to showcase their talents in fields. Young youths and sports potential has given an opportunity to showcase and has given an exposure.

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# Kamarey forms committee to help become Model Village



**SANJAY AGARWAL**

**RANGPO, 14 FEB:**

A high-level committee was formed today at Kamarey village under Rhenock constituency in East Sikkim with the objective to develop the village into a Model

Village.

The meeting began with a session chaired by area MLA Bishnu Kumar Khatiwada and in the second phase, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's women's wing convenor, Prabha Pradhan, chaired

the session.

LD Dahal made a presentation on the project and detailed works done thus far in the village by various departments.

There are 102 families and everyone

is providing support to make Kamarey a Model Village and now more effort is needed from everyone to put Kamarey on the world tourist map, speakers at the meeting stressed.

The Model Village Development Committee has the area MLA as the Chief Patron, DB Chettri as Patron, CP Bhattarai as president, LD Dahal as general secretary and Kushal Chhetri as legal advisor.

## Boxer Prava Gazmer felicitated by Shantinagar Gaon Sudhar Samiti

**SUMMIT REPORT**

**RANGPO, 14 FEB:**

Prava Gazmer, a boxer from Dochum, Sirwani, was felicitated by Shantinagar Gaon Sudhar Samiti at a program held at Badminton Court, New Shopping Complex, Singtam, today.

Prava was selected under the Khelo India programme and will be leaving for Rohtak, Haryana, in a few days.

She was presented with a letter of appreciation from the hands of Arjuna Awardee Jas Lal Pradhan, who was present as the chief guest, and Krishna Chettri, the SGSS president.

Krishna Chettri, Shital Pradhan, Anita Sewa, Maiya Chettri, Rita Sherpa and Suman Sunar represented the Samiti at the function, a press release informs.



## FASTag mandatory, Gadkari says no extension in deadline

**NEW DELHI, 14 FEB**

**[NDTV]:** The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) today issued a notification stating that FASTag will be mandatory from tomorrow midnight. Moreover, all lanes in the fee plazas on National Highways shall be declared as 'FASTag lane of the fee plaza' effective from midnight of 15th/16th February 2021. As per National Highway Fee Rules 2008, any vehicle not fitted

with FASTag or vehicle without valid, functional FASTag entering into the FASTag lane of the fee plaza shall pay a fee equivalent to two times the fee applicable to that particular category.

According to a PTI report, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said the deadline for the implementation wouldn't be extended further, and vehicle owners should immediately adopt this e-payment facility. Previously, the

government of India had extended FASTag deadline for the vehicles till February 15, 2021.

He said to PTI that, "The government had extended FASTag registration date limit two-three times before; and now, it would not be extended further. Now, everybody should immediately buy FASTag."

He further continued by saying, "The FASTag registration has increased by 90 per cent on some routes

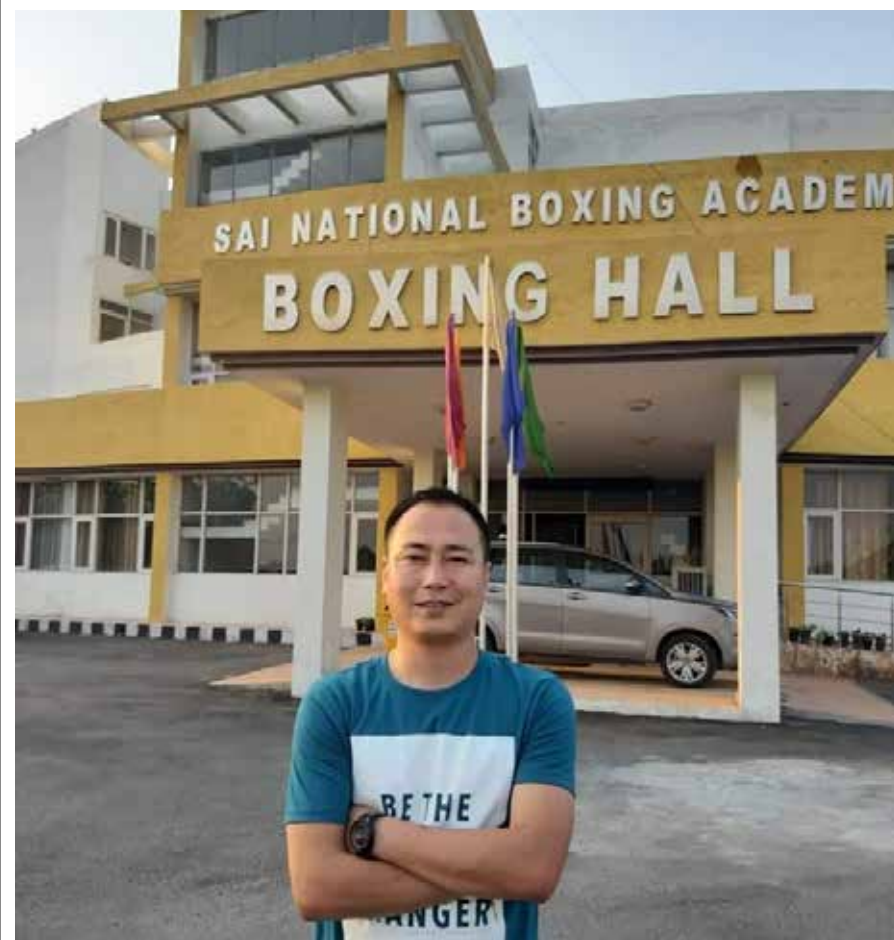
and only 10 per cent people are left. FASTag is also available on toll nakas and people should purchase and use it for seamless traffic, he said.

The government clarified by stating, "This has been done to further promote fee payment through digital mode, reduce waiting time and fuel consumption, and provide for a seamless passage through the fee plazas. The Ministry had mandated

fitment of FASTag in M&N categories of motor vehicles with effect from 1st January 2021."

Notably, the Category 'M' stands for a motor vehicle with at least four wheels used for carrying passengers whereas Category 'N' denotes a motor vehicle with at least four wheels used for carrying goods, which may also carry persons in addition to goods.

*Boxer from Singithang appointed Asst. Boxing Coach at SAI National Center of Excellence*



**BIKAS RAI**

**NAMCHI, 14 FEB:**

Mukesh Rai from Singithang, Namchi, continues to impress in the world of boxing, a passion he discovered at the age of 12 in the year 2000 when he was selected for the SAI-SAG Centre at Namchi to train as a boxer.

After several years in the ring at several levels, he was recently appointed Assistant Boxing Coach at Sport Authority of India's National Center of Excellence at Rothak in Haryana and picked to coach the National under-17 Junior Men's squad.

Guiding aspiring boxers is rich homage to Shiv Kumar Pal under whom Mukesh began his boxing journey and

represented the State at tournaments till 2007.

Interestingly, while pursuing his graduation in BPED from Maharashtra Amravati University, he also represented the university at the All India University Boxing Championship and boxed his way to a medal there.

In the year 2013, he completed his diploma in boxing from National Institute of Sports, Kolkata, after which he returned to Sikkim and started working at New Light Academy, Namchi, as a Physical Education Teacher.

In the year 2015, he started serving as Asst Boxing Coach at Sports & Youth Affairs Department.

Meanwhile he completed his AIBA

Star-1 Coaching course in September 2018 and completed higher level courses as well and now the appointment at the SAI National Centre of Excellence.

"I am extremely grateful towards Sports & Youth Affairs Dept and all the various Sports Secretaries till date, Additional Director, Mrs Tshering Dolma Bhutia, Deputy Director, South, Asst Director, South, Senior Coaches, family and friends for the support system they have been throughout my career which has been from an athlete to a Coach. Without them, I would not have been able to dream big and work hard towards achieving them," Mukesh shares.

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## Water Commission conducts simulation studies on lake formed after Uttarakhand floods



**NEW DELHI, 14 FEB**

**[PTI]:** The Central Water Commission (CWC) is conducting simulation studies on the artificial lake formed in the upper stretches of the Rishiganga river after the catastrophic Uttarakhand flood early this week, and also examining the possibility of carrying out a controlled blast to drain out the water. CWC chairman Saumitra Haldar on

Saturday said studies are being conducted keeping in mind the forecast of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) that the area could receive a rainfall of 1 cm and snowfall of 10 cm on February 15 and 16.

The CWC is also examining possibilities of what can be done if the water rises to "critical" level.

"We are assessing what could be the

impact if the water level rises following rains and snowfall as predicted by the IMD. We are also studying what volume of water would be released if the lake bursts and how much time it would take to reach downstream," Mr Haldar said.

He said the lake is 400 metres in length, 25 metres wide and 60 metres deep.

"We don't want

the size of the lake to increase any further. We are examining all possibilities that also include controlled blast at the lake," Mr Haldar said.

He, however, pointed out that the site is not accessible and it has not been decided which agency will execute the controlled blast.

"So in case if the controlled blast is not possible, we are also exploring other ways to tackle the situation," he added.

Mr Haldar said several agencies/institutes like the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO), ISRO's Indian Institute of Remote Sensing and Uttarakhand State Disaster Management Authority have conducted studies on the lake.

The temporary water body was formed after sediments that the Sunday's flash floods brought down, blocking the mouth of a stream that joins the Rishiganga river.

The CWC chairman said as of now there is no increase in the water level from Joshimath to Haridwar. "We are continuously monitoring the water levels downstream," he said.

In a tweet on Friday, the CWC said: "An artificial Lake has formed on river Rishiganga in Chamoli district, Uttarakhand, with a length of 350 m height of 60 m with slope of 10 deg."

The Himalayas has more than 2,000 glacial lakes of 10 hectares or more. The CWC monitors 477 glacial lakes of a size more than 50 hectares. These lakes also feed the Himalayan rivers.

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# SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

## Ambition in Women

*Don't support that, and everything else is just tokenism*

Funds permitting, expect some awareness programmes, messages, maybe even some seminars or workshops and some more tokenism at the national and state level to mark the days leading up to International Women's Day on 08 March. Yes, that is still nearly a month away, but when funds arrive, the build-up ratchets up as well. Do not, however, expect the larger issues to be addressed or even "noticed" in the drum-roll of unbridled male chauvinism which continues to drown out all matters of significance. Expect promises of protection and care, those traditional umbrellas offered to keep women in their place and hobble them from, for want of a better term, reaching their potential. And that is how this will remain because unless the society accepts ambition in women as a normal progression of initiatives like the "beti padhao" undertaking, everything will remain superficial lip-service. The relegation of women as second-class citizens with limited access to identity, ownership, and, yes, even ambition, is unfortunate because that is not how things began and there is no reason why they should be allowed to remain so.

Women have had an eventful march through history. At the start of humankind, women were edified and almost all prehistoric legends refer to a Mother Goddess as the Creator, as their God. We find this in Sikkim too with the Lepcha legend of genesis which speaks of Itbu-Debu Rum, the Mother, the great Creator and sustainer who created everything on earth including 'Mu-tanchi-Rong kup,' [the Mother's Loved Ones] - the Lepchas. Power was first worshiped as a Female Force - Shakti - even before the Hindu pantheon was fleshed out, and women, because they were blessed with the power to give birth, were loved and respected, even feared. But man remained a hunter-gatherer at heart and as civilization grew, he started embodying the idea of god with traits of himself. Soon, everything that could not be understood was given a female form, perhaps because most aspects of womanhood remained inscrutable to men. It followed soon after that whatever mankind could not understand, it applied a negative female force to. Soon, the woman started getting seen as the corruptor.

This image sustained itself through centuries and at a subconscious level, continues to influence many minds, especially when even the slightest hint of ambition or even self-preservation creeps in. If we were to look at even the modern Sikkimese history, women have been painted in very poor light. Take for example, Pende Ongmu, the half-sister of the third Chogyal of Sikkim, Chagdor Namgyal, who, history tells us, schemed his assassination. While aspirations for the throne would have been more acceptable in a man, in Pende Ongmu's case, she was reviled as the reincarnation of a wicked queen of Tibet because she desired power. More recently, two important figures, Hope Cooke and Elisa-Maria Langford [wife of the first Chief Minister of Sikkim, LD Kazi], have been portrayed in less than favourable light by successive writers. Few have even bothered to give credit where it was due. Hope Cooke for example tried to modernise education in Sikkim and reinforce Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal's plans to give the Sikkimese a stronger sense of Sikkimeseness. It was her conviction to motivate Sikkim to celebrate its uniqueness that made India suspicious and her growing prominence must have made some in Sikkim insecure as well. Similarly, Kazini was an important support to LD Kazi's fight for democracy. Neither story ended too well, and both have been victims of male prejudice.

It is this prejudice that occasions like the International Women's Day should strive to eradicate. It has had but limited success and more often than not, ended up celebrating stereotypes instead. This, despite the fact that women are not demanding much. They do not want to be returned to their original position of reverence. All they ask for is an equal standing, but even that is proving difficult. The problem is not with the people at the work-place alone or men at large, it is the manner in which the role of women has been stereotyped even at home that holds women back when so many of them have also internalized the stereotype. It is this stereotype that needs to be broken. Ambition should not be seen as an unwomanly trait. Then, we would be looking at real change and begin the process real empowerment.

## India Protests: Farmers Could Switch to More Climate-Resilient Crops – But There is No Incentive



**SHRUTI BHOGAL & SHREYA SINHA**  
**THECONVERSATION.COM**

India is witnessing a historic mass mobilisation of farmers against three new farm laws. The country's government maintains that these laws are the cure for a longstanding agrarian crisis. While this claim has been analysed from several angles, the environmental angle has often been overlooked. This is no small oversight since the agrarian crisis in India is underpinned by strong environmental vulnerabilities, including those associated with climate change.

The three laws at the centre of the current storm are focused primarily on prices of agricultural produce, marketing channels, and the role of middlemen. Unfortunately, environmental aspects – cropping patterns, irrigation and other agricultural practices – that are fundamental to the sustainability of agricultural systems are not being addressed. Agriculture is highly susceptible to fluctuations in temperature, excessive and untimely rains, floods, droughts, pests, diseases and so on. In recent years, such extreme weather events have been aggravated by climate change.

All this is exacerbating water security. Much of India's agriculture continues to be fed by rainfall rather than canals, wells and tube

wells, which means a short growing season of only 2.5 to 6 months. Even the well-irrigated regions in the north west and south east where the 1960s green revolution massively increased yields, are now experiencing groundwater depletion. For example, Punjab's vast fields of wheat and rice are rapidly developing desert-like conditions.

On top of this, agro-biodiversity is in decline as only a handful of strains of a few crops have come to dominate. And the country's soil is becoming less and less healthy. India now loses 15 tonnes of soil per hectare each year, eroded away by wind or water.

As a result, crop yields are largely either stagnating or declining. To improve yields, farmers have been intensifying the use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and fuel, adding yet another dimension to the environmental challenge before us and making cultivation more expensive. Meanwhile prices of inputs such as seeds, fertilisers and labour have been rising steadily and prices at which farmers can sell the crops are either stagnant or increasingly unstable.

Together, these issues have pushed farmers into debt and distress. Many have abandoned their farms, moved to cities or even been driven to suicide. This is particularly

true of small-scale landholders who, alongside the landless labourers, have been the worst affected.

In the northwest breadbasket states of Punjab and Haryana, this stagnation is exemplified by the continuous cultivation of wheat and rice as the winter and summer crop respectively, for many decades now. The practice is widely recognised as environmentally unsustainable, but farmers have persisted because these are the only crops where they receive an assured minimum support price (MSP) through public procurement systems. So even though crop diversification has long been recommended as a response to the environmental challenges, farmers are still sticking with wheat and rice.

There are more climate-resilient and less water-intensive crops that would be better suited to particular regions, but farmers won't start growing them until they get the kind of state support currently extended to wheat and rice in northwest India. Far from doing this, the new farm laws are in fact likely to undermine the procurement systems and regulated market yards through which such a change could be achieved. In the absence of an assured minimum support price that covers actual farm costs, farmers have no incentive or means to shift to relatively more

desirable agricultural crops and practices.

Many farmers are also concerned that the new laws will leave them vulnerable to exploitation by corporate agribusiness and at risk of losing their land. Only time can tell how these concerns play out if the laws are implemented. However, if the spectre of corporate-led industrial farming – envisaged in the new laws – becomes a reality, it could further amplify the environmental crisis in India's countryside. Empirical evidence shows that widespread monocultures and intensive cultivation practices, which are promoted by industrial farming, have intensified ecological fragilities in various regions of the world.

There is no denying that India must respond to the agricultural crisis by moving towards a more inclusive, equitable and sustainable system. The protesting farmers are demanding that at the very least the status quo be maintained. Even this is not without its environmental and social contradictions, but the new laws, if anything, might make conditions worse.

*[Shruti Bhogal is Researcher, TIGR2ESS Programme, University of Cambridge; Shreya Sinha is Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge]*

## How to make COVID vaccines more effective: give people vitamin and mineral supplements

**MARGARET RAYMAN & PHILIP C CALDER**  
**THECONVERSATION.COM**

If we're going to rely on COVID-19 vaccines to bring an end to the pandemic, we need to maximise their effects. But one thing that risks undermining their protectiveness is nutritional deficiency, particularly in the elderly.

Older people have weaker immune responses and are known to respond less well than younger adults to many vaccines, including the seasonal influenza vaccine. This is partly down to frailty, which cannot be easily remedied, but can also be due to deficiencies in vitamins and minerals – known as micronutrients.

For the immune system to fight off infection or generate good protection against a disease following vaccination, it needs a variety of micronutrients. This is likely to be just as true for COVID-19 as for other diseases. Given that malnutrition is common among elderly people, raising their vitamin and mineral levels before they get vaccinated could be a way of boosting the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines.

### POWERING UP THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

As the European Food Safety Authority notes, the vitamins A, B6, B9, B12, C and D and the minerals zinc, selenium, iron and copper are all needed for the immune system to function as it should.

Each of these micronutrients – as well as vitamin E – has been shown to play multiple roles in supporting immune function and reducing the risk of infection. Research has found a link between having an impaired immune system and having low amounts of many vitamins and minerals.

When the immune system isn't properly fuelled and is impaired, this can then lead to poor vaccine responses. For example, a review of nine studies – together involving 2,367 people – found that individuals deficient in vitamin D were less well protected against two strains of flu after having been vaccinated compared to those who had adequate vitamin D levels.

By contrast, randomised controlled trials of micronutrient supplements (such as vitamin B6, vitamin E, zinc and selenium) in older people have been shown to increase the ability of the immune system to respond to challenges. Furthermore, it appears that to work at its best the immune



system needs vitamins C, D and E together with zinc and selenium in excess of amounts that can usually be achieved through diet alone. For example, selenium levels above those typically regarded as optimal have been associated with a better cure rate for COVID-19.

Trials in older people have also shown that responses to vaccination are better after actions are taken to improve nutrition. For example, one study found that people aged 65 to 85 who ate five or more servings of fruit and vegetables per day showed a significantly stronger response to a pneumococcal vaccine than people of the same age who ate only two servings of fruit and vegetables or fewer.

In another study, giving daily vitamin E supplements to people over 65 was found to increase the amount of antibodies they produced following vaccination against hepatitis B and tetanus. And in people deficient in selenium, daily supplements were found to improve some aspects of their immune response to a live poliovirus vaccine and also reduce the emergence of mutant viral strains.

This latter result illustrates the fact that new viral variants are more likely to emerge in people whose bodies are "oxidatively stressed". Oxidative

stress can be caused by taking in inadequate levels of antioxidant nutrients – for example selenium and vitamin E.

### TIME FOR BOOSTER SUPPLEMENTS

This all becomes problematic when knowing how common nutritional deficiency is. In a review of nutrition spanning seven western countries, people over 60 were found to be consistently deficient in selenium, zinc, iodine and copper.

And, while this issue disproportionately affects the elderly, it is not limited to older age groups. The 2019 UK National Diet and Nutrition Survey showed "a sustained worsening of the dietary intakes and chronic shortages of several of the nutrients involved in supporting the normal immune functions" across age groups. The micronutrients people lacked

included vitamins A, B12, C and D and the trace minerals zinc, selenium and copper.

Such micronutrient deficiencies may limit the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccines. Given this, we propose that all those at risk of nutritional insufficiency should take a supplement containing the recommended daily allowance of nutrients important to immune function for a period of weeks before and after they receive the vaccine. People who could benefit from this include the underweight elderly, those on restricted diets, and certain BAME communities who may be at risk of vitamin D deficiency.

It's possible to buy a three-month supply of multivitamin and mineral supplements for no more than £3.00. Ideally, such a supplement would be provided free of charge by governments or health authorities to all those aged over 70. When set against the average cost of vaccination per person, this would provide a great potential gain for only a modest investment.

*[Margaret Rayman is Professor of Nutritional Medicine, University of Surrey; Philip C Calder is Head of Human Development and Health and Professor of Nutritional Immunology, University of Southampton]*

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# Doctor opens “One Rupee Clinic” in Odisha

**SAMBALPUR, 14 FEB [PTI]:** A doctor in Odisha's Sambalpur district has opened a “One Rupee” clinic to provide treatment to the poor and underprivileged people.

Shankar Ramchandani, an assistant professor in the department of medicine at Veer Surendra Sai Institute of Medical Sciences and Research (VIMSAR), Burla, has opened the clinic in Burla town where patients have to pay just one Rupee for treatment.

Mr Ramchandani said that the one Rupee fee clinic is part of his long standing desire to provide free treatment to the poor and underprivileged beyond duty hour.

“I joined VIMSAR as a senior resident and senior residents are not allowed to do private practice. Hence, I could not start the “One-Rupee” clinic. But I was promoted as assistant professor recently and as an assistant professor, I am allowed to do private practice after my duty



hours and hence, I have started the clinic in a rented house now”, said the 38-year-old doctor.

Asked why he charges one Rupee, Mr Ramchandani said “I charge one Rupee from the poor and underprivileged people as I don't want them to feel that they are availing the service free of cost. They should also think that they have paid some money for their treatment.”

The clinic, which

has been set up at the Kachha Market area in Burla town remain open from 7 AM to 8 AM in the morning and 6 PM to 7 PM in the evening. The “One-Rupee” clinic has provided him with an opportunity to serve the poor, destitute, unprivileged, elderly persons, physically challenged people and the people who do not have access to proper medical care.

“I am a doctor of the masses and not the

classes”, he said.

Mr Ramchandani said hundreds of people regularly come to the OPD of VIMSAR and one can find a long queue of patients to consult doctors. “I have seen elderly people and people with disabilities waiting for hours for consultation with doctors in OPD. They don't need to wait for hours and suffer at the hospital. They can come to my clinic and get consultation at Rupee 1

only,” he added.

Mr Ramchandani's wife, Sikha Ramchandani, a dental surgeon, is also helping him. The clinic was inaugurated on Friday and 33 patients came to the clinic on the first day, he said.

Mr Ramchandani, who had also hit the headlines when he took a leprosy patient carrying him in his arms and dropped him in his house in 2019, said, “my late father, Brahmanand Ramchandani had told me to set up a nursing home. But a nursing home requires huge investment and it is not possible to provide treatment to poor people at Rupee 1 in a nursing home. Hence, I decided to open this “One-Rupee” clinic.”

Mr Ramchandani had also drawn the attention of all and received widespread appreciation when he attended a COVID-19 patient beyond his duty hour and also carried the patient to VIMSAR in his car amid the scourge of novel coronavirus in October last year.

## Assam withdraws ‘COVID cess’ on petrol, diesel, liquor

**GUWAHATI, 14 FEB [SHILLONGTIMES]:** The Assam government has decided to withdraw from midnight Friday the additional cess on petrol and diesel that was levied during the peak of COVID-19 last year to revive the economy.

This was announced by Assam finance minister Himanta Biswa Sarma who presented the vote on account Budget on the second day of the three-day state Assembly session on Friday.

The announcement comes as a relief to commuters and public transporters as fuel rates had skyrocketed of late in the state.

On Friday, the price of petrol in the city stood at a high of Rs 90.94 per litre while that of diesel at Rs 84.82 per litre.

The state government had in April last year, hiked the price of petrol from Rs 71.61 to Rs 77.46 per litre and diesel from Rs 65.07 to Rs 70.50 per litre to generate additional revenue to meet the unexpected financial burden and expenditure arising out of the coronavirus lockdown.

“At the peak of COVID-19, we had levied additional cess on petrol, diesel and liquor. Now, the pandemic has declined to a reasonable extent, the number of patients has reduced and the need for COVID-19

screening centres has also gone down. As such, the expenditure on healthcare sector has substantially come down. Hence, the state Cabinet has decided to withdraw the additional cess and taxes imposed during the COVID-19 period,” Sarma said.

“Hence, petrol and diesel will become cheaper by Rs 5 per litre with effect from midnight tonight benefitting lakhs of consumers across Assam,” he said.

The finance minister also said that the additional cess imposed on various liquor categories during last year, averaging around 25 per cent, has also been withdrawn.

In May last year, Assam had raised the excise duty on IMFL (Indian Made Foreign Liquor) by 25 per cent in a bid to generate additional revenue for the state to meet the unforeseen financial burden and expenditure arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The finance minister presented the vote-on-account for an aggregate expenditure of Rs 60,784.03 crore for the first six months of the current fiscal.

“I present the interim annual financial statements and demand for grants for the year 2021-22 where the expenditure has been

detailed up to the minor head level. To fulfill the obligatory and other necessary expenditure commitments, I seek a vote on account for an aggregate expenditure of Rs 60,784.03 crore for a period of six months from April 1, 2021 to September 30, 2021, well before which, the detailed General Budget is expected to be presented,” Sarma said.

The Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) rose from Rs 2, 02,080.85 crore to Rs 2, 48,796.15 crore between 2016-17 and 2019-20 at constant prices.

“I would like to emphasise that our state has seen a steady rate of growth which has been consistently higher than the national average,” he said.

The annual growth rate stood at 7.71 percent against the national annual growth rate of 6.11 percent in the same period.

“At current prices, the GSDP rose from Rs 2,54,382.36 crore in 2016-17 to Rs 3,51,317.77 crore in 2019-20 at an annual growth rate of 12.7 percent against an all India growth rate of 10.72 percent. During the same period, the per capita income of Assam rose from Rs 66,330 in 2016-17 to Rs 90,692 in 2019-20,” the finance minister said.

## AJP condemns Amit Shah's statement on CAA during poll rally

**GUWAHATI, 14 FEB [SHILLONGTIMES]:** Regional political party Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) has strongly condemned Union home minister Amit Shah's statement that the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) would be notified once the vaccination drive against COVID-19 was over in the country.

Shah had made the statement while addressing a poll rally in West Bengal on Thursday to drum up support for the saffron party in the poll-bound state.

Addressing reporters here on Friday, AJP vice-president Adip Kumar Phukan condemned the statement by Shah, alleging that it once again brought to the fore the “anti-Assam” stance of the BJP government.

Phukan warned



of a massive agitation across Assam if the BJP government took steps to implement CAA in the state.

“If the BJP government applies its political might forcefully to implement the Act, which is not only anti-Constitution but harmful to the secular fabric of the country and goes against equal rights, then the people of Assam

will have to oppose the move,” he said.

It may be mentioned that the AJP, floated as a regional political party in September last year, was an outcome of the anti-CAA agitation that gained momentum by the end of the year 2019.

“Our party has already begun preparations to take the fight against CAA to the political arena and to the

streets. By such a stance, the BJP government has once again instilled fear and concern among the people of Assam. But we are prepared against any challenge and consequence of any move of the BJP government,” the AJP vice president said.

The regional party also condemned the government's failure to revive two non-

functional mills – Nagaon and Cachar Paper Mills.

“We condemn the central government's move to favour liquidation over revival of the mills. The BJP, as a party and government has insulted the Assamese people by not keeping its commitments,” Phukan said.

“Besides, the fact that the Assam government could not compel the central government to revive the mills clearly indicates how weak the state government is. The Assam government has shown that it is not with the people,” he said, demanding revival of the mills.

## Congress will never implement CAA if voted to power in Assam: Rahul Gandhi

**SIVASAGAR, 14 FEB [PTI]:** Accusing the BJP and RSS of dividing Assam, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday said that his party will protect every principle of the Assam Accord and will never implement the Citizenship (Amendment) Act if voted to power in the state.

Addressing his first public rally in Assam ahead of the assembly elections due in March-April, Mr Gandhi said that the state needs its “own chief minister” who will listen to the voice of the people and not one who listens only to Nagpur and Delhi.

“The Assam Accord has brought peace and it is the protector of the state. I and my party workers will protect each principle of the Accord. There will not be a single deviation from it,” he said.

Mr Gandhi said



illegal immigration is an issue in Assam and exuded confidence that the people of the state have the capability to resolve the issue through dialogue.

Alleging that BJP and RSS are trying to divide the state on the issue of Assam Accord, he said, “If Assam is divided, then Prime Minister Narendra Modi or Union Home Minister Amit Shah will not be affected, but the people of Assam and the rest of India will be affected.”

Talking about the controversial CAA, the senior Congress leader said that if his party comes to power in the

state, the law will not be implemented under any circumstance.

All party leaders, including Gandhi, were seen wearing “Gamocha” (Assamese scarf), where symbolically the CAA word was crossed, giving a message against the controversial law.

Mr Gandhi said Assam needs a chief minister from their “own people” who will listen to their issues and try to resolve them.

“Remote control can operate a TV but not a CM. The current CM listens to Nagpur and Delhi. If Assam gets a CM like this again, it will not benefit the people. The

youths need a CM who will give jobs to them,” he said.

Taking a dig at the prime minister, the Union home minister and “businessmen close to them,” Mr Gandhi said, “I have devised a new slogan for Assam -- Hum do, humare do; Assam ke liye humare aur do, aur sab kuch loot lo.”

He alleged that natural resources and PSUs in the state are being “sold off” to two leading businessmen of the country.

Mr Gandhi also accused the Modi government of “looting” public money during the COVID-19 pandemic and waiving huge amounts of loans of his “two businessmen friends”.

He said that the Congress government under the leadership of former chief minister Tarun Gogoi had brought peace to Assam by ending the era of violence.

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# ‘The pain is immense’: Neymar to miss reunion with Barcelona and Messi

SID LOWE

**LONDON, 14 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]:** ‘The sadness is huge, the pain is immense, and the weeping is constant.’ Neymar had already been hit once and Mauricio Pochettino was about to take him off to protect him when he got hit again. As he left the field on Wednesday in Caen, the Paris Saint-Germain manager put an arm around the Brazilian but there was no consolation. He departed head bowed, broken. Those dark, dramatic words followed on his Instagram the day after. It was happening again and it hurt.

Scans on Thursday showed Neymar had suffered a groin injury and is likely to be out for a month, missing Tuesday’s meeting with his former club Barcelona in the Champions League and, in all probability, the second leg in Paris.

There was something crushingly familiar about it. More than two dozen injuries have interrupted his career, Neymar has missed a quarter of PSG’s Champions League games and this will be the third time he will not play at the last 16 stage. What should be the best moments of his career have been denied him.

In 2018, he missed the second leg against Real Madrid; in 2019, both games against Manchester United; and now against Barcelona. Each time, PSG were knocked out. Last year, available in the knockout phase for the first since moving to France, they reached the final.

In December, Neymar’s father had complained about the “violence” suffered by his son, asking “when will this stop?” and warning: “If we continue like this football will lose.”

This week, it was Neymar. “For a while, I will once again have to stop doing the thing I most love in life, which is playing football,” he wrote.

“I dribble and I get hit constantly. It makes me very sad. It makes

me very sad to have to listen to a player, a coach, a commentator or whoever the hell it is say ‘they have to kick him’, ‘he dives’, ‘cry-baby’ ‘spoilt kid’, etc.

“It saddens me and I don’t know how much longer I can take it. I just want to be happy playing football. NOTHING ELSE.”

That response revealed layers of disappointment, different perceived injustices coming together: the treatment he receives and the accusation he invites it; snide suggestions he does not care, keener to get back to Brazil for carnival or his sister’s birthday parties; and the accumulation of moments missed, the denial of another opportunity. It stings to be shorn of the chance to prove something surprisingly large numbers of people still resist: that he could be the best player in the world.

Apart, maybe, from Lionel Messi? Which is another reason. It was striking that when Pochettino was asked if Neymar was badly affected by the injury, he said: “He’s very sad. He was really looking forward to going to Barcelona. He loves Barcelona. He’s a player who loves to play these games, he’s made for them.”

Instead, the reunion with his former club will have to wait. The reunion with Messi, especially.

Until when and where? That’s the question everyone has wondered for a while – beyond this game, which has been dominated more by what comes next rather than what comes now.

When Ronald Koeman and Pochettino face the media on Monday expect them to be asked as much about Messi than a match that, with Barcelona improving and Neymar out, looks more even vital than it did when the draw put these two teams together.



At their previous meeting, in March 2017, Neymar was on the other side; next time, perhaps Messi will be. That night, the Brazilian led the most extraordinary comeback in the competition’s history, scoring twice and providing the pass as Barcelona scored three goals in seven minutes to win 6-1 at the Camp Nou, overturning a 4-0 first-leg defeat.

It had been his grandest night for Barcelona, but the image that immortalised it was Messi and that summer Neymar left for PSG, who paid his €222m buyout clause, sparking a crisis at the Camp Nou.

Neymar walked out and it sometimes feels like he has been trying to walk back in again ever since. Until now. Barcelona repeatedly tried and failed to replace him, up to the point where they tried to bring him home. The players missed him, Messi and Luis Suárez especially. The squad offered to postpone their wages to facilitate his return but it still didn’t happen. “Neymar did everything he could to come back,” Suárez said.

Messi questioned whether Barcelona had done the same, their repeated, public pursuit and failure damaging the club and his faith in them. Together, Messi, Suárez and Neymar won the 2015 Champions

League. Apart, none of them have. Rather than be put back together again, that tridente broke up entirely.

Soon there may be nothing left, at least not at Barcelona. Neymar did not come, Suárez was forced out and left for Atlético Madrid, and Messi tried to leave. He was forced to stay; at the end of the season, it is a different matter. This could be his last Champions League tie for Barcelona.

After PSG defeated United at the start of December, Neymar said: “What I most want is to play with Messi again, to be able to enjoy being on the pitch with him again. We’ve got to do that next year, for sure.”

Once that would have been read as another attempt to return to the Camp Nou, but this time it was turned on its head: this was Messi to PSG, not Neymar to Barcelona. All the more so when a week later Neymar – who, like Messi, knows they cannot be reunited in Catalonia this year – said he was happy in Paris and that leaving was no longer on his mind.

Was that Messi remark a hint or just hope? Perhaps it was a tactic? Something to help with the transfer and maybe with the tie. Not long after, the PSG midfielder Leandro Paredes said: “Let’s hope Messi comes. We all want

him to come to PSG.”

Asked recently if Messi would join him in Paris, Ángel Di María said: “I hope so. There’s a big chance.”

France Football then ran a front page as a football sticker of Messi in a PSG shirt.

Koeman was furious, complaining of a lack of respect. The Catalan daily Sport talked of provocation, of an attempt to play dirty, destabilising Barcelona, which was rich from the paper that had dedicated 50 front pages to the pursuit of Neymar.

Rich from Barcelona too, noted Rudi Garcia, the Lyon coach whose striker Memphis Depay had been so publicly courted by the Catalans. “It seems he likes talking to the press,” Koeman shot back, even angrier now.

Pochettino was calmer, noting that France Football is “a magazine that has nothing to do with PSG” and repeatedly insisting there had been no lack of respect. “He gets asked. What’s [Di María] going to say?”

Besides, the PSG coach pointed out, Messi is in the last six months of his contract and can talk to who he likes. That includes PSG. “All clubs try to improve their team,” Pochettino told Onda Cero. “And it’s normal for there to be calls or talks, which are within the rules.

“What can you say about Leo? He is a machine, built to compete. He is an animal. He loves competing. It’s not playing football, it’s competing, which is totally different.”

That analysis helps explain much, particularly the pain. The Champions League has become an obsession for PSG, Pochettino said, and it is an obsession for Messi too, so much so that he was ready to walk away to pursue it, conscious time was running out and fearful that he could not at the Camp Nou.

“That beautiful and longed-for trophy,” Messi called it, but it can be a cruel one too, a competition in which he and his team have been hurt and humiliated in Rome, Liverpool and Lisbon; a competition in which the only season when Neymar did not sit it out and was able to play, his side were defeated in the final, and in which he now faces the same fate.

Messi has not won this competition since 2015, when he had Neymar at his side. One day maybe they will get together and try again; for now, though, there’s a match to play. Well, for Messi there is. For Neymar, there is sadness and pain, just when he was ready to take centre stage.

## England facing heavy defeat against India after succumbing to Ashwin



**CHENNAI, 14 FEB [REUTERS]:** India seized control of the second Test in Chennai after their spinners wreaked havoc on a dustbowl and skittled England for 134.

The hosts finished day two on 54 for one, which gave them a huge lead of 249 runs on a deteriorating track. Rohit Sharma, who smashed 161 in the first innings, was still there on 25 with Cheteshwar Pujara on seven at the other end.

Earlier, Moeen Ali and Olly Stone split the last four Indian wickets as the hosts added 29 runs to their overnight score off 300 for six. Rishabh Pant was left stranded on 58 not out, having hit three sixes in his 77-ball blitz.

India then unleashed their three-pronged spin attack. On a pitch where the ball was kicking up dust, England’s reply got off to a woeful start as they lost four wickets before lunch. Ishant Sharma trapped Rory Burns lbw for a duck and Dom Sibley fell for 16 after India successfully

reviewed a not-out decision.

The debutant Axar Patel dealt the biggest blow by dismissing Joe Root for six to claim his maiden Test wicket. The England captain fluffed his sweep shot, offering a top-edge to Ravichandran Ashwin at short fine-leg.

The touring side’s middle-order caved in after the interval. Ashwin claimed the important wicket of Ben Stokes, bowled for 18. India did not feel the need to use second seamer Mohammed Siraj until the 39th over. Finally pressed into the attack, he ended Ollie Pope’s promising knock of 22 with his first delivery.

Ben Foakes, playing his first Test since 2019, top-scored with a calm, unbeaten 42 and helped England avoided the follow-on, but they still conceded a first-innings lead of 195 runs. The brilliant Ashwin returned figures of five for 43 while Ishant and Patel claimed two wickets apiece.

## Guardiola’s free spirits expose Tottenham’s predictability

**JONATHAN LIEW LONDON, 14 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]:** There was a moment around six minutes in, when the score was still 0-0 and the promise of this game was still fresh and Tottenham still harboured fanciful ambitions of a credible 2-1 defeat rather than a 3-0 trouncing, and Harry Kane got the ball in the centre circle.

There wasn’t much on, but with a single, magical dip of the shoulder, he wriggled past Bernardo Silva and Rodri and bore down on the Manchester City penalty area. Alas, this was the point at which reality bit. Despite having just shrugged off two blue shirts, Kane was now confronted by four more. With no player in his vicinity, all Kane could do was keep dribbling until he lost the ball. Which, with a dulling inevitability, he did.

And ultimately, Kane’s doomed attempt to score by beating an entire team on his own felt like a pretty good representation of everything else Tottenham did here. If City were a gourmet chef with a reliable menu of recipes, Tottenham’s approach felt more like simply throwing random foods into a blender and then blaming the customers for complaining.

Naturally, this was José Mourinho’s recourse after their 3-0 defeat: “a fresh team against a very

tired team,” as he put it. It was about as predictable as anything else his team had managed to serve up on a chilly night at the Etihad Stadium.

This, perhaps, is the major issue with a Tottenham side whose fall from the peak of the Mauricio Pochettino years feels ever more inexorable with every passing game. Right now, they aren’t just a bad team, they’re a boring, plodding, joyless team. And in many ways, that’s worse.

By way of illustration, let’s take the second and third City goals, both scored by Ilkay Gündogan but in wildly different settings. Four minutes after half-time, Gündogan advanced from midfield to smash home at the near post after a bewitching run by Raheem Sterling, cutting in from the right rather than his usual left flank. Then, more than an hour into the game, Gündogan tucked the ball past Hugo Lloris after a simple route-one clearance from Ederson: finally, Tottenham’s counterattacking strategy had resulted in a goal, albeit one into their own net.

Virtually nothing City did during those periods of play was predictable. By contrast, virtually everything Tottenham did over these entire 90 minutes could essentially have been scripted in advance.

# Josh Warrington suffers shock knockout defeat to Mauricio Lara

DONALD MCRAE

**LONDON, 14 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]:** Even before calamity struck, Josh Warrington had arrived at Wembley Arena in a sombre mood. In the build-up to his battle with Mauricio Lara, Warrington had said: “I’m not happy. This isn’t the fight I want.”

The grim truth of that statement came to haunt Warrington as the former world champion lost the first fight of his career when he was knocked out brutally by the lightly-regarded and widely-dismissed Mexican featherweight in the ninth round.

Warrington had suffered a heavy knockdown in the fourth but the end was devastating when he was nailed by a left hand which sent him crashing to the floor. He lay stretched out on the canvas for a few worrying minutes while the paramedics attended to him. When he was finally helped to his feet Warrington walked slowly to his corner with an oxygen mask covering his face.



It was stark proof that boxing remains an unforgiving arena when an apparently superior fighter underestimates a determined opponent and looks ahead to more lucrative bouts in the future.

At 22, Lara is the younger man by eight years, but he refused to be intimidated by Warrington. He established his intent at the outset and looked ready to trade from the opening bell. Lara was often crude and even wild but Warrington looked rusty and tentative in comparison. Despite a small cut weeping near his right eye Lara gained confidence and stalked Warrington relentlessly.

Warrington landed a few decent punches but by round

four he was in deep trouble. He was rocked and then hurt by a big left which sent Warrington tumbling to the canvas. His senses looked scrambled but, somehow, he rose to his feet. Lara swarmed all over him and Warrington was in such distress that the referee came close to rescuing him.

Warrington was brave as he came out for the fifth. He was fortunate that Lara’s relative lack of experience meant the Mexican allowed Warrington some respite. The former champion landed enough punches to mark up Lara around both eyes. But Warrington always looked uncomfortable, shaking his head forlornly on occasions.

Lara was clearly winning the fight but he made victory certain in round nine with traumatic impact.

The 30-year-old from Leeds had given up his IBF world title last month because he was not willing to fight his mandatory challenger, Kid Galahad, whom he had been lucky to defeat in June 2019. Warrington had hoped to defend his world title against Xu Can, the WBA champion, in a unification contest which would have generated far greater interest and much more money than an apparently routine bout against Lara. But the IBF insisted he fight Galahad instead. Warrington must now wish he had obeyed their directive.

Instead, he made a grim mistake in assuming that Lara was merely a journeyman he needed to fight under duress before moving on to enticing opportunities against Xu and Gary Russell Jr, the WBC title-holder. Those fights he craved have disappeared after this shock defeat.

Lara had a decent record,

having won 21 of his 23 fights. But all those bouts, apart from one in Argentina, had been at home in Mexico. Lara had also been knocked out by another unheralded Mexican, Eliot Chavez, in May 2018. It could have seemed a daunting task for him to travel all the way to London, in the midst of a cold and biting winter, to face the undefeated Warrington whom many regarded as being as the best featherweight in the world until Saturday night. But the strange and eerie setting of an empty Wembley Arena proved to be far more disturbing for Warrington rather than Lara.

Warrington, to everyone’s relief, was able to congratulate Lara and walk on his own back to his dressing room. While Lara will dream of a crack at the WBO belt, held by his countryman Emanuel Navarrete, Warrington returns home to Leeds to wonder how it all went so wrong. It was a miserable night for him – and a salutary reminder never to discount the dangerous power of even an obscure Mexican warrior.



# Rwanda: The Dove's music united a nation torn by genocide. Why did he die in a cell?

MICHELA WRONG

LONDON, 14 FEB

[THEGUARDIAN]: Masses will be held across at least four continents this week to mark the anniversary of the death of Rwanda's most famous gospel singer. But there will be a key difference in the ceremonies staged in Kizito Mihigo's country of birth and those abroad. In Rwanda, no one will dare publicly to question how – or why – the baby-faced singer met his end. In the rest of the world, fans will be clamouring for justice.

The 38-year-old star's death in police custody last February sits near the top of a list of cases cited by human rights and civil society groups calling for a fundamental reappraisal of western governments' relationship with president Paul Kagame and his central African nation. Guilt over the international community's failure to stop the 1994 genocide, they say, has for too long encouraged donors to ignore the sinister realities of his Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) regime.

In the US, campaigners' attention is focused on the forthcoming trial in Kigali of Paul Rusesabagina, the former hotel manager whose efforts to save his Tutsi guests from being slaughtered by Hutu extremists won him Hollywood fame. Rusesabagina, who became a vocal critic of the RPF, was renditioned to Rwanda last August and is facing charges of financing terrorism.

But Kizito's case perhaps reveals more about the twisted nature of Kagame's presidency. For in theory, he represented exactly the kind of citizen the Tutsi-dominated RPF took power to protect. A Tutsi, he fled his home in 1994 after president Juvénal Habyarimana was killed and his Hutu army and extremist militias began taking revenge on a minority Tutsi community blamed for the assassination. His father was killed, making Kizito a rescapé – a survivor – a group theoretically allotted special status in Rwanda's post-genocide society.

Deeply religious, exceptionally talented, Kizito went to study music at the Paris Conservatoire. There, he set off on a lacerating spiritual journey. At one point he had wanted to join the RPF to avenge his father's death. Then he forced himself to mix with Hutus and confront the visceral hatred he felt towards that community. The traumatised youngster was determined to learn forgiveness.

He returned to Kigali hoping to put his commitment to ethnic reconciliation into practice. One of the incoming government's first acts had been to do away with the classifications dividing the former Belgian colony's citizens into Tutsi, Hutu and Twa,



and he gave Kagame his enthusiastic backing. He set up a peace foundation, which spread the reconciliation message across Rwanda's schools and prisons, winning generous state funding.

For a few years, Kizito could do no wrong. His songs played incessantly on Rwandan radio and he was the performer of choice whenever the national anthem was sung at genocide commemorations. He was on friendly terms with first lady Jeannette Kagame, and rumours circulated he was dating the Kagames' daughter. A weekly television show made him a household name.

But he began to suspect the regime, which controversially called the 1994 massacres "the genocide of the Tutsi" – thereby consigning to oblivion Hutus also killed in 1994 for supporting democratic reform – was exploiting his community's victim status to keep Rwanda's Hutu majority cowed and subservient. He was repelled by the notion of collective Hutu guilt, shocked when the government urged Hutus too young to have taken part in the genocide to publicly apologise for their supposed crimes. In March 2014, he brought out a song that broke every official taboo. While the UN and human rights investigators agree the RPF slaughtered tens of thousands of Hutus in Rwanda and neighbouring DRC before and after the genocide, Kagame has always insisted these killings were limited in number and carried out in the heat of emotion. Kizito's song The Meaning of Death challenged that narrative, calling on Rwandans to show empathy to both victims of the genocide and "revenge killings", as these deaths are termed. Eyes shut, clutching a rosary, the famous rescapé sings that death is equally terrible for all.

The song transformed Kizito's standing in the Hutu community, which had seen him as a regime puppet, but triggered a dizzying fall from grace. Detained without access to a lawyer, he was told that the president had not appreciated his latest composition and that if he didn't apologise, he was a dead man. Panicking, he obeyed. The next glimpse television viewers got of the golden boy, his wrists were handcuffed and he was being presented by police to a gaggle of journalists, charged with treason.

Admitting to having been in telephone contact with Rwanda's exiled opposition, he was sentenced to 10 years in jail for conspiring against the government. Kizito swapped the designer suits of the Rwandan socialite for the pink uniform convicts are allotted in Rwanda. But prison only radicalised him.

Rubbing shoulders with the kind of men who had killed his father, he began to understand Hutu grievances. Grateful inmates dubbed him "the Dove" in tribute to his message of peace and the doves that mysteriously came to perch on the window sill of his cell. Hungry for debate, he used a phone smuggled into prison to reach out to Rwandan activists and western human rights groups abroad. He was haunted by a sense he was running out of time and tapped out an autobiography, sending chapters to those he trusted. "I think they may kill me," he told a friend in the US. "I'm not sure I'm going to make it." But in confinement, he achieved a kind of transcendence. "I had never enjoyed happiness and joy like the ones I found inside the prison," he wrote in the book, published posthumously.

"Hotel Rwanda" hero Paul Rusesabagina, in the pink inmate's uniform, arriving at Nyarugenge court in Kigali. Photograph: Simon Wohlfahrt/AFP/Getty Images

Released in 2018 under presidential pardon, Kizito discovered his freedom came at a price. His passport had been confiscated and he was obliged to regularly report to authorities. When survivors' groups invited him to perform, the government would ensure the offers were cancelled. State media blacklisted his songs. He was forced to move repeatedly, after intruders tried to force their way into his house at night. "He realised he was still in jail," says Lewis Mudge of Human Rights Watch (HRW), who was in regular contact. "He went from being someone who was very much part of the elite, to struggling financially. It was made clear to him that people wouldn't touch him with a barge pole." He began collecting information on Rwanda's disappearances and illegal detentions, using his prison contacts to become a de facto human rights researcher.

He was coming under

pressure from Rwanda's inspector-general of police, Dan Munyuza, who wanted Kizito to spy on human rights and opposition activists who trusted him. Munyuza, who previously ran Rwanda's dreaded Directorate of Military Information, has been repeatedly identified by political dissidents as a key figure in various government plots to hunt down members of the Rwanda National Congress, an opposition group set up by high-profile former RPF insiders.

"The threats were very direct," recalls Mudge. "You need to start working with us" Munyuza was telling him, "The chef has shown you this generosity, now you need to show gratitude." The stress was intense. "He kept saying 'I need to get out.' But it was about making plans, being proactive. There was never a sense of desperation."

A final straw seems to have been a conversation in which Munyuza told the singer he'd deposited money in his bank account in return for services yet-to-be rendered. On 14 February 2020, Kizito and two collaborators headed south, intent on fleeing the country. Kizito's famous face appears to have been his undoing. He was recognised in villages he passed through, and police caught the three near the frontier with Burundi. A few days later Rwandan police announced Kizito had been found dead in his cell, having allegedly used bedsheets to hang himself. Within hours, a gruesome photo, impossible to authenticate, began circulating on social media. It shows someone who looks very much like Kizito lying in a pool of blood, bruises to his head and neck. The man's arms are tied firmly behind his back.

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and HRW, along with British and US government officials, called for an independent inquiry, but their requests have gone ignored by Rwanda's justice ministry. No inquest was ever staged. Yet those who spoke to Kizito after his rearrest insist he was full of plans for the future, and gave no hint of feeling suicidal. Every Rwandan in the diaspora I interviewed for this article rejects the notion he died by his own hand.

Why kill Kizito, a devout entertainer popular with Hutus and Tutsis? Friends and family – too petrified to be named – believe he died because his songs highlighted the hypocrisy of the post-genocide narrative the RPF promotes abroad. "He was trying to unite Hutu and Tutsi, while the government depends on divide and rule," says a friend based in the US. "He was preaching that we should forgive, make one nation, and they don't want that." Rather than protecting him, his celebrity may well have

been a contributory cause. By targeting someone so high profile, the RPF signalled that no one is off limits.

Linking up via social media, youngsters in a diaspora scattered across Africa, Europe, North America and Australasia have already started marking the anniversary with 10 days of vigils and masses. His photograph graces the Twitter accounts of many of these supporters – some of whom are calling for his canonisation. His defiance is inspiring Rwandans to break their usual frightened silence, says Noel Twagiramungu of the Washington-based Africa Center for Strategic Progress. "Kizito has become an emblem, a reference point, a symbol." A former Rwandan prime minister is calling on the fractious opposition to unite in Kizito's name.

The anniversary comes at a politically sensitive time. For decades, Rwanda, Ethiopia and Uganda enjoyed the status of "donor darlings" in the west, their budgets boosted by aid injections from the US and UK in particular. Accusations of rigging in Uganda's recent elections, war in Ethiopia's northern Tigray, and a stream of revelations about Rwanda's thuggish treatment of its critics abroad – the topic of my book Do Not Disturb – are creating disquiet over western support. Now that the UK's Department for International Development has been brought into the Foreign Office fold and Covid is putting government budgets under pressure, there is diminishing official appetite for Britain being seen as an unquestioning supporter of authoritarian rule in Africa.

Earlier this month Freedom House, a US pro-democracy

group, published a chilling account of how Rwanda uses rendition, kidnappings and assassination to silence dissent abroad, physically targeting Rwandans in at least seven countries since 2014, including Germany, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, the DRC and the UAE. "The Rwandan government is among the most prolific transnational repression actors worldwide," the thinktank stated, ranking it alongside China, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia and Turkey for the "extent and violence" of its campaign.

During the UN's periodic review of Rwanda's human rights record in Geneva last month, UK and US delegates surprised many onlookers by voicing deep concern at Kigali's record. Both key donors called on Rwanda to conduct credible investigations into allegations of extrajudicial killings, deaths in custody and enforced disappearances, and to bring perpetrators to justice. The Rwandan government rejected the statements as having "no basis in reality", but appeared taken by surprise by the sharpness of the criticism.

It will be interesting to see whether such concerns resurface in June in Kigali, where the Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting is due to be held. The choice of venue sparked angry protests when announced, and delegates standing for Rwanda's national anthem in Kigali's state-of-the-art convention centre, will be grimly aware that the singer who would have once belted out its patriotic words lies buried on the capital's outskirts, a haunting illustration of all that is awry in modern Rwanda.

## Dem retreat on witnesses brings messy end to Trump trial

WASHINGTON, FEB 14 (AP): The Democrats who prosecuted Donald Trump's impeachment trial faced puzzlement and criticism from senators as they surprised most everyone Trump's lawyers and Senate Democrats included with an attempt to call witnesses, only to abandon it as lawmakers balked at the possibility of an extended trial.

The House impeachment managers opened the final day of the trial by announcing they would seek to depose Rep Jaime Herrera Beutler, R-Wash., who had shared her account of a call between Trump and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy as rioters stormed the US Capitol on Jan 6.

The House Democrats charged that Trump incited the violent insurrection, which left five dead, and the former president appeared to side with the rioters on the call.

Senators in both parties reacted with shock and frustration to the gambit, with many arguing that witnesses wouldn't change any votes and could extend the trial for weeks. Still, 55 senators voted to allow the testimony, with Senate Democrats saying they would support whatever the impeachment managers thought would be best.

But Trump's lawyers quickly threatened to seek votes on at least 100 witnesses on their own side, making clear the process would be both protracted and partisan. The standoff lasted more than two hours, with frustrated senators milling about on the Senate floor and questioning what they had even just voted to do.

After negotiations, Democrats agreed to read Herrera Beutler's statement into the record and forego witnesses completely moving the Senate to a final vote.

A few hours later, the Senate voted to acquit Trump, 57-43, the majority falling short of the two-thirds needed for conviction.

The momentary chaos, and the House Democrats' eventual retreat on witnesses, was emblematic of the prosecutors' challenge throughout the trial. Most minds were made up before it even began, and the facts of the case were unlikely to sway Republicans who were defending Trump's actions. Still, the Democrats faced pressure from within their own party to present the fullest case possible for incitement of insurrection, with at least one Senate Democrat tweeting on Friday night that they should call witnesses.

What did Trump know, and when did he know it? tweeted Rhode Island Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, encouraging Democrats to suspend the trial and seek answers to questions that had come up.

But once the managers did say they wanted to call testimony and once the Senate endorsed the move the realization set in among all parties that calling witnesses would prolong the trial for weeks, open up the Republican defense to try to call dozens of their own and put off lawmakers' work on COVID-19 relief and other legislation that is a priority for President Joe Biden. And, most importantly, Democrats were unlikely to win the two-thirds of the Senate they needed to convict under any scenario.

Senators endorsed the eventual deal.

The House managers proved their case, said Sen. Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii. And when lawyers prove their case, you sit down. Sen Raphael Warnock, D-Ga., said he didn't think anything would have made a difference with the folks on the other side.

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# When Amrita Pritam handled finances during a film shoot!



**EMPIRE STATE EXCITEMENT!** Tayshia Adams and Zac Clark make a cute couple as they are seen posing on top of the Empire State Building in New York City.

## Salman Khan has a cameo in Shah Rukh Khan's Pathan

Salman Khan and Shah Rukh Khan featured on the trends' list all of Sunday, courtesy a Weekend Ka Vaar episode on Saturday. Speaking on the Bigg Boss 14 stage, Salman Khan appeared to confirm that he indeed features in a cameo in Shah Rukh Khan's upcoming action thriller Pathan, reported news agency PTI. Earlier, there were unconfirmed reports that Salman Khan will have an extended cameo in Pathan. Talking about his busy work schedule, the 55-year-old superstar said: "Life goes on, show goes on. When this show ends, we will move to Pathan, then Tiger and later to Kabhi Eid Kabhi Diwali," reported PTI. Salman referred to the third instalment in the Tiger series of films. Meanwhile, Salman will co-star with Pooja Hegde in Kabhi Eid Kabhi Diwali. The shooting of Pathan began in November and is expected to hit screens sometime in 2021. Salman Khan and Shah Rukh Khan have actively promoted each other's films in the past. Shah Rukh featured in a cameo in Salman's 2017 film Tubelight after which, Salman returned the favour with a cameo in Shah Rukh's Zero. In the nineties, Salman had a guest appearance in Shah Rukh's 1998 superhit film Kuch Kuch Hota Hai. Shah Rukh too

made a special appearance in Salman's Har Dil Jo Pyar Karega. Shah Rukh and Salman are co-stars of 1995's iconic film Karan Arjun and also featured together in 2002's Hum Tumhare Hain Sanam. Directed by Siddharth Anand, Pathan will be produced by Aditya Chopra's Yash Raj Films. While Shah Rukh will play the titular role, actress Deepika Padukone and John Abraham have reportedly been roped in as his co-stars. Emraan Hashmi will reportedly play the role of the antagonist. Siddharth Anand and Shah Rukh Khan have reportedly zeroed in on Dubai as the epicenter of major fight scenes in Pathan.

Amrita Pritam is famous for her over 100 books of poetry, fiction and essays besides an autobiography but few may know that she also handled finances during the shoot of Sai Paranjpye's film "Sparsh" in Delhi. It all happened when Paranjpye was looking for a producer for "Sparsh", an intense love story unfolding in a school for the blind, and filmmaker Basu Bhattacharya of "Teesri Kasam" fame agreed to do it.

However, she started getting veiled warnings as soon as the news spread. People told her that Bhattacharya never pays anyone but Paranjpye paid no heed.

Bhattacharya was also an expert in making arrangements.

After the unit of "Sparsh" reached Delhi for the shoot, Paranjpye fixed up a place for her own stay during the brief visit.

A close friend of hers, Sushilkumar Chakravarty was a successful industrialist and had a large house in the posh Golf Links area, which he put at her disposal for the length of the filming stint in Delhi.

Bhattacharya was quick to take advantage of this offer, and also delegated Om Puri, sound recordist Sudhanshu and whoever the cameraman would be to be Paranjpye's flatmates. He fixed up lead actors Naseeruddin Shah and Shabana Azmi at Suresh Jindal's house in Sunder Nagar, another high-

end locality in Delhi.

Bhattacharya, in fact, did not have to spend a farthing towards anybody's stay in Delhi.

These snippets find mention in Paranjpye's memoir "A Patchwork Quilt: A Collage of My Creative Life", published by HarperCollins India.

"Buying or hiring anything was taboo in Basu's book. 'All actors will bring their own costumes,' he proclaimed. Apparently, this was the modus operandi in all his films. I felt no end embarrassed. It was perhaps excusable in amateur theatre, but for a full-fledged feature film to practise this kind of economy was ridiculous and unheard of," she writes.

Pritam was a good friend of Bhattacharya and he persuaded her to handle the finances during the shoot.

"This arrangement worked quite well, as Sudesh Syal (who was managing the venture) would hand over accounts for monies spent and get the next instalment," recalls Padma Bhushan awardee Paranjpye.

"You have turned one of the nation's major poets into an accountant," Bhattacharya would laughingly say to Paranjpye.

Born to noted author and social worker Shakuntala Paranjpye and Russian artist Youra Sleptzoff, and granddaughter of acclaimed mathematician Sir R.P. Paranjpye, Sai

started her career at All India Radio, Pune. She also launched a children's theatre in the city.

She graduated from the National School of Drama, training under Ebrahim Alkazi, going on to direct many popular and critically acclaimed plays. Later, she joined Doordarshan, where she produced the inaugural programme of Bombay Doordarshan. Apart from "Sparsh", she also made films like "Katha", "Disha", "Papeeha", "Saaz" and "Chashme Buddoor".

On why is her memoir titled "A Patchwork Quilt", she says she had a huge and random collection of bits and pieces culled over the years.

"It had to be pieced together to make a cohesive whole. I set to work, gathering and lovingly stitching the colourful tatters to make my special patchwork quilt," she writes and hopes this quilt can provide some warmth and comfort to those it reaches.

For her, a gloomy situation can be salvaged by peppering it with a dash of humour.

"The films where I have handled grim subjects, such as the degeneration of the environment (the children's film 'Chakachak', 2004), or an intense love story unfolding in a school for the blind ('Sparsh', 1980) or the subhuman plight of able-bodied youth forced to flock to cities in search of livelihood ('Disha', 1990), have all been livened up with a dollop of quirky fun," she writes.

## Carrie Preston joins Peacock series 'Dr Death'

Emmy-winner Carrie Preston, best known for her work on "Claws" and "The Good Fight", is set to star in the Peacock series "Dr Death".

Based on the Wondery podcast of the same name, the show stars "Dawson's Creek" alum Joshua Jackson in the titular role.

"Dr Death" follows the true story of Dr Christopher Duntch (Jackson), a neurosurgeon, whose malpractice resulted in the death and maiming of multiple patients in Dallas.

As victims piled up, two fellow physicians, neurosurgeon Robert Henderson (Alec Baldwin) and vascular surgeon Randall Kirby (Christian Slater), set out to stop him.

Duntch was accused of maiming four patients and killing two more, and was found guilty of maiming one and sentenced to life in prison in 2017.

According to Deadline, Preston will play defense attorney Robbie McClung to Jackson's Duntch.



The show comes from Universal Content Productions.

Patrick Macmanus will executive produce alongside Todd Black, Jason Blumenthal and Steve Tisch as well as Hernan Lopez and Marshall Lewy.

Maggie Kiley will direct and executive

produce the first two episodes. Jennifer Morrison and So Yong Kim will also direct episodes of "Dr Death".

Preston will also direct an upcoming episode of "The Good Fight", the CBS All Access legal drama which is the streaming spin-off of "The Good Wife".

## Dhanush's 'Karnan' to have theatrical release on April 9

South star Dhanush on Sunday announced that his upcoming Tamil film "Karnan" will have a worldwide theatrical release on April 9.

The film, reportedly billed as an action-drama, is helmed by Mari Selvaraj of "Pariyerum Perumal" fame.

Dhanush took to Twitter and shared the first look poster of "Karnan" along with the release date.

"'Karnan' first look and theatrical release date," the 37-year-old actor wrote.

The poster features the "Asuran" star

standing handcuffed, bleeding from the forehead and hands.

"The soul of justice never dies," the tagline on the poster read.

Last month, Dhanush had thanked the producer of the film, Kalaippuli S Thanu, for opting for a theatrical release despite other available options to screen the movie.

"Karnan" releases April 2021 in theatres. A much needed encouraging news at the right time. Thank you Thanu sir for thinking of the theatre owners, distributors, exhibitors and everybody

who's livelihood is dependant on films and theatres, even though you had other options.

"A big thank you on behalf of my fans as this means a lot to them. Love you all. Spread Love," the actor had tweeted.

Dhanush is currently awaiting the release of director Karthik Subbaraj's action-thriller "Jagame Thanthiram".

He will also reunite with Aanand L Rai's "Atrangi Re", following his Hindi film debut "Raanjhanaa" in 2013 with the filmmaker.

Dhanush's last Hindi title was "Shamitabh", which released in 2015.

### ARIES:

This year is all about you, you, you! Transformation is going to be a big theme, Aries, and you plan to dedicate yourself to the inner work required to be the most magnificent version of yourself. Just keep in mind that all work and no play will make Jane a dull girl. So, be present to what each moment is offering you—not just the joy, but the sadness, the loneliness, and the melancholy too. It is by embracing the human experience in its entirety that you will be able to create heaven on earth.

### TAURUS:

Do you remember what happened the last time you decided to ignore your intuition? The cards are warning you against repeating old mistakes, Taurus. Trust your connection with the Divine. Trust the messages that are being brought to your attention by your higher self. Taking the steps that you are being guided towards will help prevent colossal damage. You're also being encouraged to play the role of secret keeper. There are some things that are not meant to be revealed yet, and you are in awareness of what these things are.

### GEMINI:

It is said, when you feel good, you look good. Your mood exactly, Gemini. Sunday sees you prioritising health and wellness. Punishing workouts, however, are so 2000-and-late. You want to put on your Aladdin pants and choreograph your own belly dance routine. A bhangra session in your living room—preferably with your soul crew—is another idea you could be flirting with. PS: Let those feel good hormones remind you that movement meditation is the best way to get out of a funk.

### CANCER:

What if we're all just living in a simulation? What if the things we

give so much importance to are not the things that will matter in the end? Pay attention to what you are giving all your time and attention to, Cancer. By looking at the flaws of others through a microscope, you could be magnifying them beyond measure. Today, the cards are urging you to adopt 'acceptance' as your magic word and hold space for the people in your life to be exactly who they are. In doing so, you will watch the negative emotions associated with this situation transmute into something higher.

### LEO:

Have you walked into an unfamiliar room and felt as if you've been here before, or met somebody for the first time and been overwhelmed with a sense of familiarity? Leo, you are a multidimensional being who is becoming aware of their multidimensional nature. So, pay attention to the tasks that are beginning to feel familiar despite their unfamiliarity. There's a good chance you may have excelled at the same in another lifetime, or another time and space dimension. PS: It's time to uncover your hidden gifts and consciously integrate them into your existing repertoire.

### VIRGO:

Maybe you're not exhausted because you're doing too much. Maybe you're exhausted because you're doing too little of what sets your soul on fire. Today, the cards are urging you to be mindful of what you are saying yes to. Every time you say yes to something that doesn't feel right, you end up saying no to something that is right for you. Word for the wise: let go of the need to please everybody, and focus on what you have come here to do. Some of you could be struggling with the unrealistic demands of your family too. In such a case, it's best to communicate your boundaries in a firm, but gentle manner.

### LIBRA:

It's time to bring your A-game when it comes to social media. No, we're not talking about taking your VSCO cam skills up a notch. We're talking about truth, authenticity and vulnerability—about telling your story as it is meant to be told. You are who you are, Libra, and you have nothing to apologise for. Some of you could be thinking about taking the publishing world by storm, working on a script or starting your own podcast. Consider this as a green flag from the Universe, wild one!

### SCORPIO:

You're spending too much time worrying about 'the how' and 'the why'. You're spending too much time thinking about the ways in which the given project is unlikely to work out. The truth is, you are where you are because you are meant to be here. Giving this idea a concrete form is a part of your soul's mission. So, don't waste time going back and forth on your decision. Simply take a giant leap towards the future you have envisioned for yourself and know that you are held and supported.

### SAGITTARIUS:

Sometimes life feels like an uphill trek. No matter what we do, the fruits of our labour seem to evade us. At other times, life shows us the true meaning of benevolence by opening significant doors, as if magically, for our evolution and growth. The latter holds true for you, Sagittarius. So, open your eyes to all the ways in which you are being loved and supported. When things work out seamlessly for you, take it as a sign that you are on the right path and that the Universe wants you to claim what's truly yours.

### CAPRICORN:

Matters of the heart are taking centre stage, Capricorn. Your

tribe is showing up for you in a whole new way. Allow yourself to receive the love you have been giving others, and know that you deserve every bit of the goodness you have attracted into your experience. Life may not be perfect, but it is flawsome in every way and you know that you'll get through this. PS: your angels and guides are also offering you the health and support you need at this moment.

### AQUARIUS:

Sometimes, you've just got to put binaural beats on and surround yourself with those amethyst rocks as you put your phone on flight mode. It's a 'World, hold on!' kind of day, and you're learning to prioritise the most important person in your life, aka yourself! Remember, the world works inside out and that the microcosm affects the macrocosm. Therefore, being in a space of fullness allows us to hold space for others in the best possible way. Meditation and mindfulness are also going to be on your agenda today. You don't have to be a yogi to experience transcendence. Close your eyes and allow the mysterious forces above to guide you. Oh, the things you will see and hear when you tune out the chatter of your monkey mind!

### PISCES:

Just because your ancestors suffered the consequences of being a certain way, does not mean you have to. Free yourself from the old story, Pisces, as you write a brand new one for yourself. You are deserving of love, you are deserving of material wealth, and you are deserving of success. You are worthy of living a life that's full of abundance and grace. So, allow yourself to receive what the Universe is offering you and know that you are loved and protected in every way.