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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Pakyong Airport returns to business with new route – direct flight to Delhi

FLIGHTS HAD BEEN HALTED DUE TO 'UNPLANNED MANAGEMENT, WE RECTIFIED THE ISSUES,' CM WRITES

SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 23 JAN:

Pakyong Greenfield Airport became operational again after a gap of around 19 months with a Spicejet flight bringing in 57 passengers directly from Delhi thereby registering the first Pakyong to Delhi direct flight. The Spicejet Bombardier Q 400 plane returned "directly" to Delhi with 21 passengers on board shortly after noon on Saturday.

The first direct flight from Delhi received the traditional water cannon salute on its arrival at Pakyong Airport.

Chief Minister PS Tamang also welcomed the development, writing in a Facebook post: "I believe this to be the commencement of a new era



of travel in Sikkim and will help in mitigating issues faced by the state in terms of transport. I also believe that this will be a big boost for the tourism

sector in Sikkim in years to come."

He has also expressed gratitude towards the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Minister in-

charge, Hardeep Singh Puri for their timely intervention.

He also comments that the airport operations were put on halt

due to "unplanned management and other issues."

"As soon as we formed the Government, we have rectified the issues and also installed the all weather landing system which was previously missing," he adds.

Daily flights between Pakyong and Delhi will begin on regular basis from 28 January onwards while the flight service to Kolkata will begin from 01 February onwards.

To make the special occasion today, Health Minister Dr MK Sharma, area MLA, BK Khatiwada, Gangtok MLA, YT Lepcha and officials from Tourism & Civil Aviation Department were at the airport to underline the significance of the moment

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81-yr-old succumbs with Covid; Sikkim's toll stands at 132

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 23 JAN:

An 81-year-old lady from Tadong, Gangtok, passed away on Friday taking the number of COVID-19 related deaths in Sikkim to 132. Her passing away is being registered as a COVID death with comorbidities since she was already suffering from various ailments. The last Covid-related fatality in Sikkim was reported on 18 January.

In his daily health bulletin on Saturday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia mentioned that the patient had tested positive for COVID-19 on 20 January and was admitted in the COVID-dedicated STNM Hospital the next day.

She passed away at around 12:30 on Friday afternoon.

In the meantime, five more people tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 24 hours taking the state's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 to 6,068.

On the other hand, the figure of recovered cases of COVID-19 further improved to 5,707 with the discharge of 10 more patients on Friday.

There are now 134 active cases of novel coronavirus in Sikkim, of whom only one patient is currently admitted in ICU facility of STNM Hospital.

Mr Bhutia informed that the five new cases were reported from the testing of 141 samples on Friday, of which four were found positive in RT-PCR testing of 98 samples and one case was detected in rapid antigen testing of 29 samples.

Of the five new cases, four are from East District and one from West District.

While providing details of the new cases, Mr Bhutia informed that three persons from Upper Shyari and one from Aritar in East District and one person from Upper Pechrek in West District have tested positive for COVID-19.

Petrol, diesel prices touch all-time highs

NEW DELHI, JAN 23 (PTI):

Petrol and diesel prices in the country on Saturday touched new all-time highs after rates were increased for the fourth time this week. Petrol and diesel prices were hiked by 25 paise per litre each, according to a price notification from oil marketing companies.

This took the petrol price in Delhi to Rs 85.70

per litre and in Mumbai to Rs 92.28. Diesel rate climbed to Rs 75.88 a litre in the national capital and to Rs 82.66 per litre in Mumbai, the price data showed.

This is the second consecutive day of rate increase and the fourth this week. In all prices have gone up by Re 1 per litre this week.

Fuel prices, which vary from state to state

depending on local sales tax or VAT, are now at record highs in the country, prompting cries for a cut in excise duty to ease the burden on consumers.

Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan earlier this week blamed Saudi oil output cut for the surge in oil prices but remained non-committal on tax cuts.

turn to pg02

SKM's women's wing help nab drug peddlers in Melli

BIKASH CHETTRI
NAMCHI, 23 JAN:

Members of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's women's wing, Nari Shakti, of Majhigaon, Melli, South Sikkim, intervened and uncovered a drug smuggling racket and reported the same to Melli Police Station leading to the arrest of drug peddlers on 01 January, it is informed.

The women folk had reportedly been keeping an eye on Dipen Chettri and Suraj Basnett, two residents of Majhigaon, on suspicion of being drug peddlers.

On the day these alleged peddlers were taken into custody, two members of SKM's women's wing from Melli, Binita Darjee and Renu Tamang, spotted the one of the duo collect something from the other on the roadside.

They started following them, and then spied Suraj Basnett sell contraband to an awaiting customer.

The two women then

went ahead and made a citizen's arrest of Suraj Basnett even as the person he had handed over the contraband to fled the spot on a motorcycle.

The ladies were able to recover eight sachets of a brown powder substance [suspected to be brown sugar] and a packet of spasmo proxyvon capsules from the possession of Dipen Chettri and Suraj Basnett that day and reported the matter to the police.

A case has been registered against Dipen Chettri, aka Himalaya, and Suraj Basnett, aka Lal, under Section 22/27 NDPS Act 1985, and Section 7/14 SADA 2006, and Section 9(1)(a) SAD (Amendment) Act 2017 by Sikkim Police.

SP-South Thakur Thapa has commended the initiative shown by the Melli branch of SKM's Nari Morcha and called on the civil society to cooperate with the police to end the supply of substances of abuse.

Teacher Educators' confer on new learnings about teacher and school education



INDRAHANG KEEN ON SUPPORTING EFFORTS TO INSTILL READING HABIT IN THE YOUNG

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 23 JAN:

State Council of Educational Research and Training organized the 5th State Teacher Educators' Conference here on 21 to 22 Jan, an official press release from Education Department informs.

The conference, which is an annual event

of the SCERT, provides an opportunity to teacher educators and researchers to deliberate on findings of research conducted on areas of Teacher Education and School Education.

The inaugural session included a presentation by Prof B Barthakur, Principal, NERIE, on Teacher Education in light of the new National Education Policy 2020 and another by Dr Kashyapi Awasthy, NIEPA, New Delhi, on "Leading School Complexes as per the Recommendation of NEP-2020".

Also on the day, research papers were

presented by teacher educators from SCERT, the DIETs, Harkamaya College of Education and Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College, Gangtok. In all, 19 papers covering different areas of teacher education and school education were presented during the four technical sessions of the two-day conference.

Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, Indra Hang Subba, was present as the chief guest for the inaugural session and applauded Education Department's work and expressed his desire to

turn to pg02

Phase-2 of Covid vaccination drive to begin soon: Health Minister 'Govt and Deptt confident of tackling any health crisis'

ARPAN PRADHAN
GANGTOK, 23 JAN:

The Covid-19 vaccination drive for health and frontline workers will be completed in the next week or so and then the government will begin the next phase of the vaccination, Health Minister, Dr MK Sharma, informed on Friday while speaking exclusively to SummitTimes.

The next round will focus on the lay population aged 50 and above and even among those, the first priority will be those with co-morbidities, the Minister added.

This is in line with the vaccination protocol the world over since health workers and other frontline staff are not only the most at risk of contracting the virus, but also the most required workforce in tackling the pandemic.

Since mortality is the highest among those above 50 and already nursing co-morbidities, they will come next

The Minister, while sharing that the vaccination process has rolled out well and without hitches, added that the trial runs had helped iron out wrinkles in the process. He also assured people that both, Covidshield and Covaxin, were safe and the few cases of AEFI [adverse events following immunization] were not abnormal or alarming since these are expected with every vaccine and especially since all AEFIs are being managed well by doctors here.

"Every immunization procedure carries the risk of side effects in some recipients, but we are ready to tackle the situation and provide treatment to such cases," Dr Sharma stated, adding that the one severe case was also stable and contained now.

As for what the vaccines will cost in Sikkim, the Minister reminded that the Chief Minister has already announced that Sikkimese will receive it free of cost.

At present, the Centre is not only controlling the supplies, but also providing it free

for health workers.

There is no clarity at present on whether the Centre will continue monitoring supplies or providing the vaccines free of cost, in any event, even if the free supply is ended, the State Government will purchase the vaccines and provide them free of cost to the people, the Minister added.

As things stand, Sikkim has received two consignments of Covishield – 12,500 in the first lot and 14,000 in the second. Since immunization requires two shots, the present inventory will just about cover the health workers here.

As for whether the State has placed a demand



for more vaccines, the Minister said the need has not arisen yet since the present stock was enough to cover those registered for vaccination on the Cowin app prepared by the Union Government.

turn to pg02

Let's have a duel: Amit Shah slams vaccine critics

GUWAHATI, JAN 23 (PTI): Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday came down heavily on those criticising the efficacies of COVID-19 vaccines, asserting that there should be no politics on public health.

Addressing a function to extend the benefit of the government's healthcare programme to the central armed police forces, he said the vaccines developed by Indian scientists are fully safe.

"There are some people who are spreading misinformation on the vaccines. Come to another platform and let's have a duel. But why are you creating doubt over people's health and doing politics?" he asked.

"I appeal to all of you to go for the vaccine when your turn comes. Do not have any doubt over its efficacy.

We've already launched the world's biggest vaccination drive," he added.

Shah ceremoniously distributed the 'Ayushman CAPF' health cards among some personnel from the seven Central Armed Police Forces here.

He said the CAPFs had three prime concerns -- the existing health coverage was not comprehensive, the satisfaction of housing was not there and long duty hours without leaves due to non-timely recruitment.

"Our government is addressing all the three concerns.

For the health issue, we've launched the 'Ayushman CAPF' today. This will give health insurance benefit to around 50 lakh people," Shah said.

By May 1, the 'Ayushman CAPF' process will be completed by offering health cards to all the personnel of the seven central police forces, he added.

The home minister said the government and the forces are trying to increase the satisfaction ratio to 55 per cent by 2022 from 36 per cent two years ago, and further take it to 65 per cent by 2025.

"We've completed the examination process for 50,000 recruitments. Now, we'll start the process again to hire another 50,000 persons in the CAPFs. Our target is one hiring against one departure in five years. With this, everyone will be able to stay home for 100 days in a year," he added.

An MoU was signed between the National Health Authority (NHA) and Union Home Ministry in presence of Shah, Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai and state Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma at the CRPF Group Centre in Guwahati.

Under the initiative 'Ayushman CAPF', around 28 lakh personnel from Central Armed Police Force (CAPF), Assam Rifles and NSG and their families will be covered by the 'Ayushman Bharat: Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana'.

Inclusiveness of women in sports key to making India sporting superpower: Rijiju

GANGTOK, 23 JAN (PIB): 'Khelega India Toh Khilega India' - Prime Minister Narendra Modi's simple mantra for the youth of the country, has been the driving force behind transforming the perception of sports in India in the last few years. Sport, once perceived only as an extra-curricular activity, by most, is now taking centerstage. Strong schemes adopted by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, be it Khelo India, Target Olympic Podium Scheme or Fit India Movement, have played a significant role in motivating youngsters to pursue a serious career in sports, and the number is on a steady rise.

Specifically for girl athletes, empathy and inclusiveness have been key drivers for game changing reforms. As we celebrate the National Girl Child Day, it is therefore imperative to look at the way our government has worked with the aim of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas" resulting in a paradigm shift in embracing issues in respect to girls and women, including sports.

Over the years, performances of our wom-

en athletes have sealed many places in the Indian sporting folklore. Most importantly, they showed the world that "Bharat ki Mahila" is up for the challenge and can take on the world. These spirited performances coupled with reforms led by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports in recent years have promoted inclusivity, created an ecosystem of awareness towards women in sports and inspired a generation of young girls to actively take part in sports. I can proudly say, 43% of Indian athletes who have qualified for the upcoming Tokyo Olympics are women!

The crucial point in ensuring India becomes a sporting superpower is to increase participation at the grassroots. A wide participation base will ensure there are a good number of children who continue to play sports professionally. It is important to note that young girls form 50% of this participation base, and at no cost can they be left behind. The Khelo India Scheme with the objective of infusing sporting culture and achieving sporting excellence in

the country has played a vital role in the past three years. An exclusive component of the Khelo India Scheme focuses on barriers faced by girls & women to take part in sporting activities, and creating mechanisms to overcome these and increase participation. We have had a 161% increase in women participation at the Khelo India Games from 2018 to 2020. From 657 identified female athletes being supported under the Khelo India scheme in 2018, the number has now gone up to 1471 (223% increase!). The Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) focuses on high performance sports where we provide international training exposure, world class physical & mental conditioning, scientific research, day to day monitoring & counseling and ample financial assistance to our elite athletes who could potentially win Olympic gold medals. 86 women athletes were a part of the TOPS program in September 2018, it is heartening to note that today we have 190 of them (220% jump!).

Promotion of women

in sports needs to deal heavily with changing social mindsets. Bringing young girls outside, in a safe environment, and allowing them to experience physical activity with good quality coaching and infrastructure has to be a combined effort from both the Govt. and society on the whole. I am happy to note that many women champion athletes have taken proactive steps to establish academies with a focus on sportsing excellence, a number of such initiatives have been supported and fostered by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports under the National Sports Development Fund. Usha School of Athletics, Mary Kom Boxing Foundation, Ashwini Sports Foundation, Sarita Boxing Academy, Karnam Malleshwari Foundation, Anju Bobby George Sports Foundation, etc are all examples of such initiatives. We continue to engage closely with these initiatives and encourage women athletes to come forward with their expertise and experiences to collaborate with the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports to

work towards sporting excellence and overall development.

I have always strongly believed that sport is a potent tool for socioeconomic development. The Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports considers working towards gender equity to be of paramount importance. Young girls & women being exposed to sports will go a long way in improvement of their physical health and building character, this would go on to contribute significantly to societal reform and our human capital. Strategic associations with the Ministry of Women & Child Development are in the pipeline to enhance our efforts towards the cause and take forward India's developmental vision.

The National Girl Child Day celebrated every 24 January has immense relevance to our nations ethos, let us all pledge to collectively work towards ensuring young girls play a LOT more sports, such that we as a country march ever nearer to the great Olympic ideal of 'Citius, Altius, Fortius' meaning Faster, Higher, Stronger!

Not in favour of giving extra chance to UPSC aspirants who missed their last attempt: Centre to SC

NEW DELHI, JAN 22 (PTI): The Centre Friday told the Supreme Court that it was not in favour of granting one extra opportunity to those civil services aspirants who could not appear in their last attempt in the exams conducted by the UPSC last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A bench headed by Justice AM Khanwilkar took note of the submissions of Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing on behalf of the Department

of Personnel and Training (DoPT). "We are not ready to give one more chance. Give me the time to file an affidavit... last night I received instruction that we are not agreeable," Raju told the bench, which also comprised justices BR Gavai and Krishna Murai.

The bench has now posted the plea of a civil services aspirant Rachna Singh for hearing on January 25 and asked the Centre to file an affidavit during the period and serve it to the parties.

Petrol, diesel...

Top oil explorer Saudi Arabia has pledged additional voluntary output cuts of 1 million barrels per day in February and March, which has led to price climbing to most since the pandemic broke out.

State-owned fuel retailers -- Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) -- had on January 6 resumed daily price revision after nearly a month-long hiatus.

Since then, rates have gone up by Rs 1.99 a litre on petrol and Rs 2.01 in case of diesel.

This comes after international oil prices firmed up on hopes of demand returning from the rollout of coronavirus vaccines in different countries, including India.

Prior to the current highs triggered by the price hikes this month, fuel prices had last touched record high on October 4, 2018.

At that time the government had cut excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 1.50 per litre in a bid to ease inflationary pressure and boost consumer confidence.

Alongside, state-owned fuel retailers cut prices by another Re 1 a litre, which they recouped later.

This time, there are no indications of a duty cut so far.

Petrol and diesel prices are revised on a daily basis in line with benchmark international price and foreign exchange rates.

Pakyong Airport...

and extended a warm welcome to passengers from Delhi among whom were also senior officials of the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

The airport operation was suspended in the month of June 2019 due to some technical issues and then the pandemic threw a spanner in the works as well. There was also a PIL in the High Court of Sikkim which had put the ministry and AAI in the spot and now, finally, the crores invested in Pakyong Airport were being put back in use with resumption of flights.

Speaking to media persons, Tourism Department Additional Secretary, Kapil Meena, informed that the flight operations were resumed after improvements were made in various technical aspects at the landing strip.

He explained that there was a navigation issue since earlier there was a minimum visibility requirement of 5 KMs to the runway for landing due to which flight cancellations were very frequent due to the weather in Sikkim. With improved navigation aids, this has improved to a minimum visibility of 2.4 KMs.

He added that the Pakyong Airport was the first in the north-east region to have this improved navigation system and that there would not be any visibility problems for landing now.

Mr Meena mentioned that several meetings were held between the Ministry of Civil Aviation, AAI and Tourism & Civil Aviation Department to discuss such issues to sort out the teething problems related to the airport.

Captain Shrihanshu Sarkar who piloted the maiden flight from Delhi to Gangtok today shared that it was a nice experience to fly this new route and attested that there were no technical difficulties. He thanked the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Airport Authority of India for their efforts to make this happen.

Likewise, passengers in the first flight from Delhi expressed their happiness on getting a warm reception in the State.

Teacher Educators'...

commit himself towards helping improve the reading habit among children in the State.

He appreciated the community participation he witnessed recently in Dzongu where the people have come together to revive Pentong Primary School in Upper Dzongu. The school was facing closure due to low enrolment of students.

The MP also spoke about the book fair and a book donation drive scheduled to be held in Sikkim in February to help excite reading among students.

Phase-2 of Covid...

It may be recalled that the Health Minister is himself a recovered Covid-19 patient, having contracted the virus in the early days of Covid in Sikkim when numbers were spiking and there was very little clarity or consensus on treatment and medical care protocols.

About his experience, having been admitted at STNM Hospital after testing positive, Dr Sharma said that he recovered in time and was satisfied with the kind of treatment he received at the hospital.

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the state government and the health department has been learning new things each day and has made both the government and the health department stronger and also more confident in tackling any health crisis situation, he said.

Governor pays tribute to Netaji

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 23 JAN:

Governor Ganga Prasad paid floral tribute to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose on his 125th birth anniversary. The Governor remembered Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose as one of India's greatest freedom fighters.

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's Birth Anniversary is being observed as "Parakram Divas" to remember his indomitable spirit and selfless service to the nation and to inspire people to act with resilience in the face of adversity.

The Governor re-



marked, "Netaji remains an icon of India's freedom struggle. His patriotism and bravery con-

tinue to remain etched in the Nation's conscience and inspire the future generations".

SKM Sr VP leads constituency tour of Gnathang-Machong



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 23 JAN:

Senior leaders of the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha toured Gnathang-Machong constituency today, the second day of their constituency tour which had begun yesterday with Chujachen, in follow-up directions of the party president, Chief

Minister PS Tamang, for the party seniors to undertake a constituency-wise tour to collect constituency-specific grievances and aspirations of the people and strengthen the party infrastructure.

In the first session today, the team interacted with local public, party workers and panchayat members at Rolep and also visited the constituency-level party at Linkey.

The team clanked its Gnathang-Machong tour at the party's Zonal office at Pakyong Zone-II and held a co-ordination meeting with party workers and general public of Pachey Samsing GPU.

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Customary 'Halwa Ceremony' kickstarts process of compilation Budget documents

NEW DELHI, JAN 23 (PTI): Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Minister of State for Finance Anurag Thakur and senior officials of the finance ministry on Saturday participated in the symbolic 'Halwa Ceremony' that marks the beginning of compilation of budget documents.

Unlike the past, the voluminous budget documents will not be printed this year following the COVID-19 protocol and will instead be distributed electronically to the Members of Parliament (MPs). Previously, the ceremony marked the launch of printing exercise for the budget.

This will be the first time since the presentation of independent India's first budget on November 26, 1947, that the documents containing income and expenditure statement of the Union government along with the finance bill, detailing new taxes and other measures for the new financial year, will not be physically printed.

"In an unprecedented initiative, Union Budget 2021-22 will be delivered in paperless form for the first time. The Union Budget 2021-22 is to be presented on February 1, 2021," the Finance Ministry said in a statement.

On the occasion, the Finance Minister also launched the 'Union Budget Mobile App' for hassle-free access of Budget documents by Members of Parliament (MPs) and the general public using the simplest form of digital convenience.

The mobile App facilitates complete access to 14 Union Budget documents, including the Annual Financial Statement (commonly known as Budget), Demand for Grants (DG), Finance Bill etc. as prescribed by the Constitution, it said.

Finance Secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey,

Economic Affairs Secretary Tarun Bajaj, Financial Services Secretary Debasish Panda, DIPAM Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey, Expenditure Secretary TV Somnathan and Chief Economic Adviser K V Subramanian and other senior officials involved in the Budget preparation and compilation process, were also present in the customary pre-Budget event.

"Later, the finance minister reviewed the status of the compilation of the Union Budget 2021-22 and extended her best wishes to the officials concerned," it said.

The statement further said that the App has a user-friendly interface with embedded features of downloading, printing, search, zoom in and out, bidirectional scrolling, table of contents and external links, etc.

The App can also be downloaded from the Union Budget Web Portal (www.indiabudget.gov.in), it said, adding, the App has been developed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC) under the guidance of the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA).

The Budget documents will be available on the Mobile App after the completion of the Budget Speech by the Finance Minister in Parliament on February 1. As part of the ritual, 'halwa' is prepared in a big 'kadhai' (large frying pot) and served to the entire staff involved in the Budget making exercise of the ministry.

Halwa was served while maintaining COVID protocol with all present in mask and those distributing sweets were wearing gloves. The significance of the event is that after the sweet dish is served, a large number of officials and support staff, who are directly associated with the Budget making are required to stay in the ministry and remain cut off from their families till the presentation of the Budget in the Lok Sabha.

Tourism Deptt felicitates officials, retired and serving, who helped make Pakyong Airport possible and operational

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 23 JAN:

Tourism & Civil Aviation Department felicitated retired and current officials on Saturday for their contributions towards making the Pakyong Greenfield Airport a reality.

The department presented Certificates of Recognition to these former and present officials of Sikkim Police, Sikkim Fire & Emergency Services and Airport Authority of India.

The felicitation programme coincided with the resumption of operations at Pakyong Airport after a gap of around 19 months.

The felicitation was chaired by Health Minister Dr MK Sharma as chief guest accompanied by area MLA, BK Khatiwada and Gangtok MLA, YT Lepcha among other dignitaries.

In his address, the Minister called the resumption of operations at Pakyong Airport with the Delhi-Pakyong flight



as a historic and landmark moment for Sikkim which will help boost tourism in the State.

He stated that this was made possible by the strong political will of the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha government as it went the extra mile to resolve issues which had led to suspension of flights here.

He said that Chief Minister PS Tamang took the initiative to sort out issues related to land acquisition and other challenges to make the airport operational.

On behalf of the State government, Dr Sharma thanked the Ministry of Civil Aviation, Airport Authority of India and SpiceJet for their support

in making the airport operational by overcoming all technical issues.

He also congratulated the Tourism and Civil Aviation Department on the development.

While stating that air connectivity was an alternate lifeline for Sikkim, the Minister called on AAI and the Ministry of Civil Aviation to make

all required augmentations to make Pakyong Airport an all-weather airport in the interest of the people of Sikkim and not only a fair-weather airport.

Area MLA BK Khatiwada expressed gratitude to the CM for his commitment to revive the airport immediately after forming the government.

Thousands of ageing dams in India a growing threat: UN Report

NEW YORK, 23 JAN [PTI]: Over a thousand large dams in India will be roughly 50 years old in 2025 and such aging embankments across the world pose a growing threat, according to a United Nations (UN) report which notes that by 2050, most people on Earth will live downstream of tens of thousands of dams built in the 20th century.

The report, titled "Ageing water infrastructure: An emerging global risk" and compiled by United Nations University's Canadian-based Institute for Water, Environment and Health, says most of the 58,700 large dams worldwide were constructed between 1930 and 1970 with a design life of 50 to 100 years. It said at 50 years, a large concrete dam "would most probably begin to express signs of ageing."

Ageing signs include increasing cases of dam failures, progressively increasing costs of dam repair and maintenance, increasing reservoir sedimentation, and loss of a dam's functionality and effectiveness, "strongly interconnected" manifestations, the report said.

"By 2050, most people on Earth will live downstream of tens of thousands of large dams built in the 20th century, many of them already operating at or beyond their design life," according to the UN University analysis.

The analysis includes dam decommissioning or ageing case studies from the USA, France, Canada, India, Japan, and Zambia and Zimbabwe. According to the report, the world is unlikely to witness another large dam-building revolution as in the mid-20th century, but dams constructed then will inevitably be showing their age.

The report said that 32,716 large dams (55 per cent of the world's total) are found in just four Asian countries: China, India, Japan, and South Korea - a majority of which will reach the 50-year threshold relatively soon.

The same is true of many large dams in Africa, South America, and Eastern Europe, it said. In India, there

are over 1,115 large dams that will be roughly 50 years old in 2025, more than 4,250 large dams in the country will be over 50 years old in 2050 and 64 large dams will be more than 150 years old in 2050, it said.

The report said that approximately 3.5 million people are at risk if India's Mullaperiyar dam in Kerala, built over 100 years ago, "were to fail".

"The dam, in a seismically active area, shows significant structural flaws and its management is a contentious issue between Kerala and Tamil Nadu States," it said.

The report added that dams that are well designed, constructed and maintained can "easily" reach 100 years of service but predicts an increase in "decommissioning" - a phenomenon gaining pace in the USA and Europe - as economic and practical limitations prevent ageing dams from being upgraded or if their original use is now obsolete.

In the US, the average age of 90,580 dams is 56 years. More than 85 per cent of US dams in 2020 were operating at or beyond their life expectancy and 75 per cent of US dam failures occurred after 50 years of age. The estimated cost to refurbish US dams is about \$64 billion. Nearly 1,275 dams were removed in 21 US states in the last 30 years; 80 removed in 2017 alone, it said.

Worldwide, the huge volume of water stored behind large dams is estimated at 7,000 to 8,300 cubic kilometres - enough to cover about 80 per cent of Canada's landmass under a meter of water. The report's co-author Vladimir Smakhtin, Director of UNU-INWEH, said the report aims to attract global attention to the creeping issue of ageing water storage infrastructure and stimulate international efforts to deal with this emerging, rising water risk.

"Underlined is the fact that the rising frequency and severity of flooding and other extreme environmental events can overwhelm a dam's design limits and accelerate a dam's ageing process.

With 14,256 fresh cases, India's COVID-19 tally climbs to 1,06,39,684

NEW DELHI, JAN 23 (PTI): With 14,256 fresh cases, India's COVID-19 tally climbed to 1,06,39,684 on Saturday, while 1,03,00,838 patients have recuperated so far, pushing the national recovery rate to 96.81 per cent, according to the health ministry.

There are 1,85,662 active cases of the coronavirus infection in the country currently, which accounts for only 1.78 per cent of the total case-load, according to data released by the ministry.

The COVID-19 case-load has mounted to 1,06,39,684 and the death toll due to the disease has climbed to 1,53,184, with the novel coronavirus claiming 152 more lives in the country in a span of 24 hours, the data updated at 8 am showed.

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

According to the ICMR, a total of 19,09,85,119 samples have so far been tested for the viral disease in the country, including 8,37,095 on Friday.

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

5. It went past 50 lakh on September 16 last year, 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and one crore on December 19.

The 152 COVID-19 fatalities reported in the last 24 hours include 50 from Maharashtra, 19 from Kerala, eight each from West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu and seven each from Delhi and Chhattisgarh.

Maharashtra has so far reported the highest number of 50,684 deaths caused by the viral disease in the country, followed by Tamil Nadu (12,307), Karnataka (12,190), Delhi (10,789), West Bengal (10,097), Uttar Pradesh (8,605), Andhra Pradesh (7,146), Punjab (5,543) and Gujarat (4,374).

The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the COVID-19 deaths in the country occurred due to comorbidities.

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

Declare Netaji birth anniversary national holiday: Mamata urges Centre

KOLKATA, JAN 23 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday paid homage to freedom fighter Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose on his birth anniversary and urged the Centre to declare January 23 as a national holiday.

She also said a monument, named after Azad Hind Fauj, will be built in Rajarhat area and a state-funded university, which is also being set up, will be dedicated to Netaji. "....This year's Republic Day parade in Kolkata will be dedicated to Netaji. A siren will be sounded today at 12.15 PM. We urge everyone to blow shankh (conch) at home. Centre must also declare January 23 as a National Holiday. "We are celebrating this day

GoWB has also set up a committee to conduct year-long celebrations till January 23, 2022," Banerjee said on Twitter.

A grand 'padayatra' will be held here during the day to commemorate Netaji's 125th birth anniversary.

"A monument, named after Azad Hind Fauj, will be built at Rajarhat. A university named after Netaji is also being set up which shall be funded entirely by the state, and will have tie-ups with foreign universities," she said on the microblogging site.

The Centre has decided to observe January 23 as "Parakram Diwas" to commemorate the birth anniversary of Bose, who was born on this day in 1897.

R-Day T20 tourney reaches semifinal stage



RUDRA KAUSHIK
GYALSHING, 23 JAN:

Two quarterfinal matches of the open T20 tournament organized by the Cricket Association of Darap at Darap Senior Secondary Ground were played on Sunday. This is the third edition of the tournament and the final match is scheduled for 26 Jan as part of the Republic Day celebrations at Darap.

In the first quarterfinal match, Sopakha Sunrise outplayed Red Army-Darap by 14 runs.

Electing to bat first after winning the toss, SS managed to put up 111 runs on the board losing 7 wickets. Replying to a decent total of 111 runs, RA could manage only 97 runs for 3 wickets losing the match by 14 runs. Despite having wickets in hand, RA was humbled by the disciplined bowling department of SS. Singhang Limboo of Red Army was adjudged the man of the match for his score of 68 off 48 balls.

In the second quarterfinal match, Darap

Senior Secondary School emerged victorious against WBCC (west) and advanced to the semifinals.

Following a dismal total of 96 runs posted by WBCC, Darap Senior Secondary School chased down the score losing 8 wickets. Cheda Bhutia of Darap Senior Secondary School was adjudged man of the match for his all round performance.

Government contractor Kesang Bhutia was present as the chief guest today.

Farmers plan 100-km Republic Day Tractor Parade, claim Delhi Police nod

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN [NDTV]: Farmers protesting the central government's new agricultural laws said on Saturday that they will hold a 100-km tractor rally in the national capital on Republic Day after getting a go-ahead from the Delhi Police that set aside the initial resistance from authorities for the demonstration.

The announcement came a day after farmers rejected an offer by the government to defer the three reforms for one-and-a-half years, warning they would step up protests as they seek a repeal of the laws and a guarantee on minimum crop prices.

Farm leaders had said hundreds of thousands of farmers from neighbouring states including Haryana, Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh plan to drive tractors through New Delhi on

January 26, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi will join a parade of the armed forces.

While some former government officials had expressed concern that the protests could turn violent, the leaders said they would remain peaceful and urged the police to grant permission for the convoy to enter the capital.

The 11th round of talks between government officials led by Agricultural minister Narendra Singh Tomar and forty farm leaders earlier on Friday was inconclusive. Farmers stuck to their demands while the government urged them to consider its offer to hold discussions to address their concerns after deferring the laws.

"There is a sort of deadlock as the government repeated the offer of deferring the laws, which is not acceptable,"

Darshan Pal, one of the farm leaders told reporters after the meeting.

PM Modi's government has said that the laws introduced in September will unshackle farmers from the obligation of selling produce only at regulated wholesale markets. But the farmers say the bills are designed to benefit private buyers.

Hundreds of thousands of farmers have been camping on the outskirts of national capital for nearly two months, blocking some of the roads connecting New Delhi with neighbouring states.

Supporting the farmers, the main opposition Congress party said on Friday that the government had shown "shocking insensitivity and arrogance" towards farmers and urged it to accept their demands.

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV

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

Treatment

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

Precautions to Prevent nCoV

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

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

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

Prioritise Primary Education

An entire academic year has been lost to the pandemic for all practical purposes. For whatever anyone might say about online learning, it is not even a fig leaf to cover the unfortunate setback suffered by the young. Eventually, hopefully, classrooms will take in students of all grades, and while we await that moment, here's to hoping that "radical reforms" promised in the education being offered at the primary school level arrives as a welcome back-to-school gift. Here's also to hoping that teachers return inspired to deliver even better and excite students about the prospect of finally returning to school. This prioritization is required because Sikkim has focused so extensively on higher education for the past several years that the health of its primary schools has remained largely unattended. The quality of education might not have fallen, but the only noticeable policy interventions to deliver improvement have been almost exclusively limited to the quality of mid-day meals being served in schools and occasionally also to civil engineering projects.

Hopefully, this is now going to change.

While there can be no complaints against increasing the number of options available for higher education or improvements in MDM, these are at best add-ons to the foundations that are laid at the primary school level. Where every year in school should be reinforcing learning and making students more erudite, official surveys have reported falling levels of math skills among Sikkim students as they progress through school. This statistic alone should be enough to undertake some radical reforms, and this why any initiative towards improvement should not only be welcomed, but also assisted.

Primary education begins with class-1, a grade with which most children should ideally begin formal education. It is Kindergarten till then which is more of the play & learn model. It is when a child enters class-1 as a five or six year old that she enters the world of structured and direct learning. This is also the grade when classrooms become more formal and the learning more regimented. It is thus important that they enter an environment which is the most conducive to learning, and this is where real reforms will have to begin from. If children are provided well-appointed and comfortable classrooms, the hours they spend in it will not feel like the tedium which too many government school classrooms radiate. The first task should be to make the children comfortable and welcome. Apart from classrooms, this should also include proper toilets, hygienic meals and a playground.

Then arrives the challenge of learning itself. Too much emphasis is laid on degrees, so much so that even gifted teachers have had to quit the profession even as too many with degrees from mediocre institutes are handed over children when they are the most excited about learning. It is in such uninspired hands that even young become jaded about learning. So, when it comes to primary school teachers, more focus should be on in-job training. Again, not the kind of token copy-paste training that is dispensed too often, but proper refresher courses customised for Sikkim and its students. Access to books, music, games, art, again not of the superficial "free period" kind should be developed in earnest as well. Agreed, most of this is very basic stuff, but given the compromises that have been imposed on education, delivering well on these would also be a radical new beginning.

WRITE US:

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

What We've Learned About Bereavement During the Pandemic

KAREN WEST & HANNAH RUMBLE
theconversation.com

The coronavirus pandemic has been extremely distressing for those who are bereaved and grieving, regardless of whether COVID-19 was the actual cause of death of their loved one. We know anecdotally and from emerging research that people who have lost someone during the pandemic were less likely to have visited them before they died or able to attend the funeral.

Our Bereavement Diaries project, which gathered pandemic diaries of people supporting the bereaved in assisted living and retirement villages, or who trained as Cruse bereavement volunteers, adds nuance to this narrative. The 43 diary entries we received between May and September 2020 offer some important, real-time insights into how grief and bereavement have been experienced during the pandemic, and the everyday ways in which people have given and continue to give one another support.

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

In the early days of the pandemic, there seemed to be a familiar demographic pattern in terms of deaths, but as we now know, increasingly younger people are dying too.

One of our diarists told us about her friend Eunice, whose grandson was gravely ill in hospital with COVID-19. Lockdown restrictions meant that she wasn't able to see his mother (her daughter), which was so distressing for her that she became ill and staff had to call an ambulance. In a later entry, our diarist tells us that while Eunice did not end up in hospital, her grandson died, saying:

I did go round and see her. I didn't break the rules. She was in the bedroom and I was in the passage just talking to her. I spent quite a few hours with her, because she was absolutely down, absolutely, absolutely devastated.

This diarist continues to give Eunice neighbourly love, support and comfort. We have learned that

this sort of compassionate listening and support have been vital for many during lockdown, often involving telephone calls to support those who are lonely or grieving.

As another participant in the project put it:

We don't have the answers, but we can stand or sit alongside others ... The fallout [from COVID-19] is immense throughout the village ... Being able to talk things through and share stories with others has been helpful.

Diarists also told us that, when there was no opportunity to collectively grieve and acknowledge someone's death, then the grieving process was put "on hold". Lockdown measures have greatly restricted funeral gatherings and the chance to remember loved ones who have died.

We heard from one diarist that people were responding to this by organising alternative memorial events, perhaps taking more active control over their collective grieving than they normally would:

We had a funeral on Wednesday ... That girl not only lost not only her mum, she lost her father and she lost her grandfather. So Mavis and Heather printed out some songs ... The staff came out to stand outside and I told some of the residents, ringing round saying to quite a few people that if they wanted to go down or stand on their balconies. They had a prayer and some songs and they talked about her for about 15 minutes and then the hearse came round and stopped a bit. It was very very moving and personal.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF LOSS

We heard a great deal from our Cruse volunteer diarists about how people had very mixed feelings about bereavement during lockdown. For some, the absence of normal grieving rituals has been very challenging, taking away what one diarist described as vital "restoration after loss activities".

For others though, we heard how the curtailment of normal social activities and not being at work enabled people to grieve according to their

own schedule and rhythm, without the pressure to appear happy when they didn't feel like that inside. We also heard how not being confronted with things like Mother's Day and Father's Day celebrations was a welcome relief for some who find such celebrations simply amplify the sense of loss.

Finally, our diarists told us that there was a lot of grieving going on with residents, not necessarily about a recent death, but rather over other losses:

Grieving about not seeing family, not seeing friends. Grieving for the losses that aren't about death. All those little things make a lot of difference.

The impact of COVID-19 on assisted living residents was made clear in a collective feeling of uncertainty, losing confidence and missing opportunities that, for some, may never come again.

Diarists' accounts echo the emerging consensus that there are additional layers of complexity to the experiences of loss, grief and bereavement during this pandemic. But they also bring into question how we memorialise death in so-called normal times. Some bereaved people have reported experiencing solace in the way neighbours have pitched in with alternative memorials that don't involve a great deal of expense but bring people together as a compassionate community.

These accounts have also demonstrated the value of listening and neighbourliness, and the role of volunteers in supporting those who are bereaved without requiring expensive talking therapies or clinical support.

Importantly, they have highlighted how having the opportunity to get off life's "normal" social merry-go-round is actually helpful and welcomed by some of those grieving right now. They also serve as a reminder that the pandemic involves a great deal of other kinds of losses that still need to be mourned.

[Karen West is Professor of Social Policy and Ageing, University of Bristol; Hannah Rumble is Senior Research Associate in Death, Dying and Funerals, University of Bristol]



How COVID, Lockdown and Isolation Has Fuelled Our Interest in the Lives of Others

ANNE CHAPPELL & JULIE PARSONS
theconversation.com

As we approach the one-year anniversary of the coronavirus outbreak, with the UK in its third national lockdown, it's evident how profound the worldwide social impact of the pandemic has been. Reports have looked beyond the science to the effects the pandemic has had on individuals, accounts of the impact on everyday life and the ways in which ordinary people have responded to these extraordinary times.

Some of these narratives have become sensations, read and shared and heard across the globe, revealing the lives of people coping in remarkable situations. The story of Tom Moore is one example: the former army captain who at the age of 99 walked 100 laps of his garden to raise money for the NHS.

This simple act ignited an international response that connected his modest private aim of raising £1,000 with those of the wider public, who sought some alternative focus and a beacon of hope during a time of crisis. The result was more than £32 million being raised for the NHS, and Tom Moore being given a knighthood.

In such times we should consider the link between what the American sociologist Charles Wright Mills called "private troubles" and "public issues". Wright Mills challenged us to explore the aspects of social life that are considered to be individual in relation to the broader structure and organisation of society. We are social creatures, our individual and social lives inextricably interconnected, and Wright Mills encouraged us to

consider these links. Today's focus on individual lives is perhaps even more pertinent given that our social lives under lockdown have become constrained for so long.

Historically, biographies and autobiographies are how lives are recorded. These tended to be only of famous or infamous individuals, although diaries such as those of Samuel Pepys and Anne Frank capture the experience of ordinary people living through significant events.

But there is now greater interest in lives hidden from view, such as those who overcome adverse childhood experiences and eventually triumph: growing up in poverty (Kerry Hudson's *Lowborn*), or in care (Lemn Sissay's *My Name is Why*), life in a criminal gang (Allan Weaver's *So you Think You Know Me?*), or a life sentence in prison (Erwin James' *Redeemable*), explorations of race and class (Akala's *Natives*), autism (Donna Williams's *Nobody Nowhere*) or alcoholism and homelessness (John Healy's *The Grass Arena*). These autobiographies recount the individuals' lives while highlighting the social, cultural and historical context in which they are lived.

Today, diaries are often kept not in the traditional sense but through social media posts and profiles. Our fascination with other lives has grown exponentially with new media that provides greater access to and insights into people's lives (or versions of them). It's also seen through the proliferation of celebrity and pseudo-reality programmes such as *Made in Chelsea*, competitive social experiments such as *Love Island*, and

fly-on-the-wall television documentaries such as *Hospital* and the *Educating...* series.

LIVING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

Once the initial shock of the pandemic settled into a "new normal", attention shifted to the lives of everyday people. This mirrored what happened after 9/11 where, once the enormity of the situation and its implications had sunk in, the experiences of those affected became the focus. Television programmes such as *Isolation Stories* explored life during lockdown, and documentaries such as *Panorama* have explored how it has changed us. The rise of mutual help groups is one example of how people have contributed to their local communities.

The circumstances presented us with unexpected heroes, illustrated in the July version of *British Vogue* that featured a community midwife, a supermarket worker and a train driver on the cover. Editor Edward Enninful said: "I can think of no more appropriate trio of women to represent the millions of people in the UK who in the face of dangers large and small, put on their uniforms and went to help people".

The isolating nature of lockdown and social distancing and uncertainty over how long it may continue has prompted consideration of how to better understand ourselves as individuals and as a society. There has been growing concern for those surviving the pandemic through poverty, domestic abuse and other combinations of inequalities. We cannot assume we know other people's experiences of the pandemic, and while

we have been constantly reminded that "we are all in this together", we know in reality that experiences can be very different depending on circumstances.

The government's requests for us to take responsibility in order to keep others safe, for example through staying at home or wearing masks, has highlighted those who behave appropriately. Outrage has been directed at the irresponsible behaviour of others, from stockpiling toilet rolls and medicines, or spending the day at the beach – or, as with the prime minister's former chief advisor Dominic Cummings, driving across the country at the height of lockdown.

One significant record of individual lives during this time is the online book of remembrance hosted by St Paul's Cathedral, where families and friends can post photographs and a short text about those they have loved and lost to COVID-19. It provides a public space to share their private loss and very brief accounts of those they have lost.

By collecting and analysing the stories of individuals we can challenge assumptions, and give visibility to those who are marginalised. We can explore their differences and similarities, their experiences, and the impact of these experiences on them. These are the records that in the future will allow us to look back and reflect on the present, and the significance of the events of this pandemic for history.

[Anne Chappell is Senior Lecturer in Education, Brunel University London; Julie Parsons is Associate Professor in Sociology, Plymouth University]

A scrambling Oli government produces gazette before court, but it's backdated

TIKA R PRADHAN

KATHMANDU, 23 JAN [KATHMANDUPOST]: Hide information, distort it, and confuse and mislead all. That's how the KP Sharma Oli administration seems to have been functioning.

After questions were raised during Thursday's hearing about why the government had not published the notice regarding the government's December 20 decision to dissolve the House, Attorney General Agni Kharel on Friday presented before the court the copy of the gazette with the notice.

The Department of Printing, which until Thursday night had not uploaded the Nepal Gazette with the notice, had it up on its website on Friday morning.

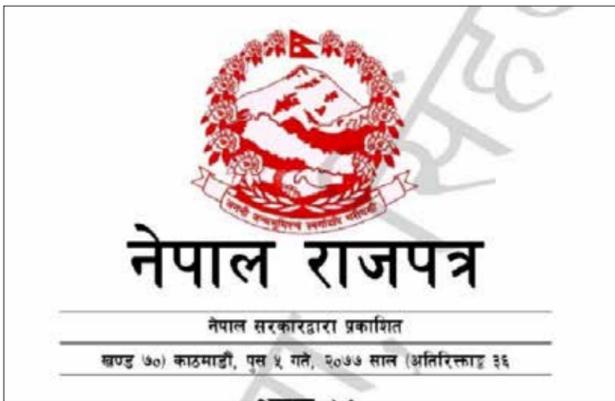
December 20, however, has been mentioned as the publication date of the notice in the Nepal Gazette.

At least two officials at the Department of Printing confirmed that the gazette was printed on Thursday evening and was uploaded on its website on Friday morning.

"The gazette was printed yesterday at around 7:30pm," said Bimala Koirala, assistant spokesperson for the Department of Printing. "That was uploaded on our website on Friday morning."

Many were quick to point that the Oli government had committed a forgery, by publishing a backdated notice after it was caught on the backfoot.

"The government has been involved in such activities and what has happened now is tantamount to forging documents," said Shaligram Sapkota, an advocate who is pleading on behalf of the petitioners challenging Oli's House dissolution move. "The govern-



ment took the decision to dissolve the House on December 20, but a notice in this regard has been published in Nepal Gazette almost a month later with a backdate. This is out and out a wrong practice."

Nepal Gazette—called Nepal Rajpatra in Nepali—is the authentic publication of the Nepal government.

According to the website of the Department of Printing, which is under the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, the gazette, published regularly since 1951, carries all important government decisions to give them legal status and inform the people about the decisions.

Constitution or declarations at par with constitution; Acts, ordinances stamped by the President after parliamentary endorsement; regulations endorsed by the Cabinet and orders issued by the government; appointments and notices issued as per the constitution; notices as per the Acts, rules and orders or the decision of government which are decided to be published in the gazette and treaties and agreements of which Nepal is party must be published in the Ne-

pal Gazette. Former chief secretary Bimal Koirala said government decisions do not get the legal status until they are published in the gazette. "Decisions must be published in the gazette, it's a mandatory process," Koirala told the Post. "But sometimes governments tend not to do so."

As many as 13 writ petitions have been filed against Oli's House dissolution move at the Supreme Court. Chief Justice Cholendra Shumsher Rana-led Constitutional Bench has been hearing the writ petitions to test the constitutionality of Oli's move.

Lawyers have been arguing that Nepal's 2015 constitution has made a departure, not allowing a majority prime minister to dissolve the House, and such provisions were deliberate attempts at ensuring political stability.

According to the drafters of the constitution, it was made difficult for a prime minister to dissolve the House because in the past a prime minister was given an inherent power to dissolve the Parliament and call snap polls.

At least four prime ministers who worked under the 1990 con-

stitution had attempted House dissolution.

Despite the current constitution not allowing Oli, a majority prime minister, to dissolve the House, he did so on December 20.

The Oli government had run into controversy a few days ago after taking a document back from the Supreme Court and not returning it on time despite committing to doing so. Many believe the original document that the government had furnished to the court had not cited articles based on which it had recommended the House dissolution.

However, the copy of the letter, signed by Prime Minister Oli, that later surfaced in the media did have articles cited. The controversy had arisen because another letter, a copy of which also had made it to public domain, signed by Chief Secretary Shankar Das Bairagi had not cited constitutional articles to recommend House dissolution.

Since the Oli government's intent has come into question, legal experts say there are ample grounds to suspect foul play when it comes to not publishing the notice regarding House dissolution in Nepal Gazette.

Advocates Tikaram Bhattarai and Om Prakash Aryal, during Thursday's hearing, had questioned the bench that the House dissolution decision was not published in Nepal Gazette.

Anil Kumar Sinha, one of the justices on the five-member Constitutional Bench, then asked the defendants if it was true that the December 20 House dissolution decision was not published in Nepal Gazette.

According to Aryal, unless the decision was published in the gazette, it cannot come into force and

implementing a decision without publishing it in the gazette is unlawful.

"And since this decision of the government, which has dissolved the lawmaking body, is quite important, it should have been published in Nepal Gazette without fail," Aryal told the Post.

The House dissolution move has courted so much controversy that legal experts have been demanding that the bench look to legislative intent while deciphering the constitutional provisions that have been cited by Oli and the President. Lawyers have also demanded that the bench seek transcripts, records and committee notes of the constitution drafting process.

Subas Nembang, who chaired the Constituent Assembly that gave the constitution in 2015, has been heard saying in video clips that the current constitution does not allow a prime minister to dissolve the House.

Oli and his lawyers, however, argue that in a parliamentary system, it's the prime minister's prerogative to dissolve the House.

Even Chief Justice Rana during the ongoing hearing has asked the petitioners and those arguing on their behalf multiple times why a majority prime minister cannot say he does not want to govern and he wants to go for a fresh mandate.

Harihar Dahal, a senior advocate, said that not publishing such an important decision in Nepal Gazette is a serious matter, as the practice in democracies worldwide is that government decisions get the legal status through their publication in respective gazettes.

"It's now up to the court how it views the issue," Dahal told the Post. Advocate Aryal, who first

inquired the bench on the whereabouts of the gazette, said the goings on show how Oli has been treating all the state organs and agencies as subservient to him.

"Oli has been displaying his totalitarian impulses for long and he is in a bid to have control over the state," said Aryal. "He has no regard for the rule of law; he treats law as a means to fulfil his interest."

Advocate Tikaram Bhattarai, who is pleading on behalf of the petitioners, said the Oli government has made one mistake after another and is now involved in all kinds of shenanigans to cover them up.

"Publishing the notice about House dissolution in the gazette after an uproar does not make sense," said Bhattarai. "By publishing it with a backdate, the government has forged the gazette. But what can one expect from Oli who does not believe in process and procedures?"

While addressing the upper house on January 10, Oli had said people have nothing to do with processes and procedures as they can neither be worn nor eaten.

Koirala, the former chief secretary, said there was a clear procedural lapse as such a major decision like dissolving the House was not published in Nepal Gazette.

"Publishing the notice with the backdate after questions were asked is nothing but the executive's high-handedness; it's like those in power are trying to show they can do anything," said Koirala. "It's up to the court how it takes up this major lapse." Attorney General Kharel said he is not the authority to print the gazette.

"I just produced the necessary document before the court," Kharel told the Post.

3,205 more beneficiaries get COVID vaccine jabs in Assam

Guwahati, Jan 22 (PTI): Altogether 3,205 health workers received the shots of COVID-19 vaccine in Assam on Friday, taking the total number of inoculated people in the state to 13,881, the National Health Mission (NHM) said here.

Four minor cases of Adverse Event Following Immunisation (AEFI) - two from Karimganj and one each from Sivasagar and Tinsukia districts - were reported during the day.

Overall, 19 AEFI cases have been reported in the state.

'Covishield' vaccine was administered to 3,033 beneficiaries at 60 session sites, while 172 received 'Covaxin' shots at six centres.

Twenty boxes of 'Covaxin' arrived here at the Lokopriyo Gopinath Bordoloi Airport from Bharat Biotech, Hyderabad.

Assam on Friday re-

ported 17 new COVID-19 cases, the lowest since May 18, taking the tally to 2,16,957, the NHM said in a bulletin.

The death toll remained at 1,077 as no new fatality due to the infection was reported.

The current fatality rate stands at 0.50 per cent, while 1,347 COVID patients have died for other reasons, it said.

The new cases were detected out of 17,642 tests with a positivity rate of 0.10 per cent.

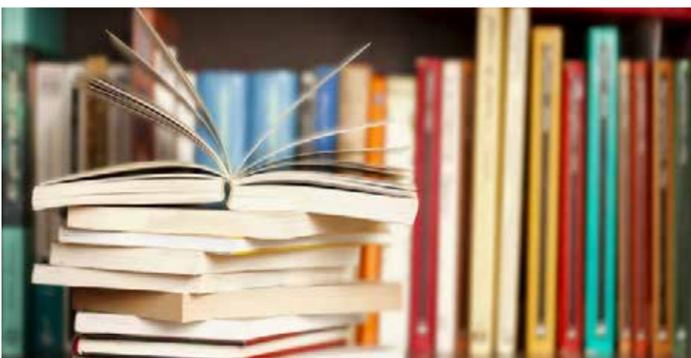
Assam now has 1,135 active cases and three migrated to other states.

At least 103 people were cured of the disease during the day, taking the total number of recoveries to 2,13,398.

The recovery rate is currently at 98.36 per cent.

The state has conducted 63,48,913 sample tests so far, including both RT-PCR and rapid antigen test.

Book tells what rise of India in the 2020s looks like



NEW DELHI, JAN 23 (PTI):

A new book captures the many aspects of a future that will culminate in India becoming the world's third-largest economy and a regional power before the decade gets over.

"India 2030: The Rise of a Rajasic Nation" is a collection of essays by the likes of Bibek Debroy, Vikram Sood, Raghunath Anant Mashelkar, Ram Madhav and David Frawley, among others.

These are 20 forecasts by 20 thought leaders on 20 themes ranging from education to health-care, science, energy, politics and foreign policy, that will impact and influence India through the 2020s, says Observer Research Foundation vice president Gautam Chikermane, who has edited the collection published by Penguin Random House.

He describes the book, which carries an advanced praise from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as not prescriptive but predictive.

"From two aggressive neighbours - authoritarian China and Islamist

Pakistan - that refuse to embrace peace, to new formations and alignments such as the Quad of the US, Japan, Australia and India to counter Beijing, the 2020s will shape a new regional order," Chikermane writes.

Jobs and prosperity cannot come without the accompanying reforms; the recent labour and farm reforms are a positive-disruptive start, he says.

"The new education policy, again, will disrupt the sector, make it more flexible, student-focused and in tune with India's 21st century knowledge aspirations. The disruption in defence procurement and production will make weaponry more effective," he argues.

He is also of the view that it is not merely the Union governments that will drive reforms, state governments will add their bits.

tribute to the flowering of India," he writes.

According to Chikermane, technology, for instance, is changing and will continue to inform the way underlying conversations of India will happen, from identity and financial technologies to vaccines and ventilators.

"The size and scale of firms will increase: there will be more companies employing 500-plus workers than the 3 per cent that do today. The scale and size of individual transactions will rise exponentially: India's per capita digital transactions that increased from 2.4 per annum in 2014 to 22 in 2019, are expected to grow to 220 by 2021, a ten-fold increase in just three years," he says.

"The positive disruption from urbanisation will ensure that the share of labour engaged in agriculture falls from 48 per cent to 30 per cent by 2030 and the overall country productivity rises through new market alignments and greater flexibility given to farmers recently," he adds.

Arunachal Pradesh reports one new COVID-19 case

ITANAGAR, JAN 23 (PTI): One more person tested positive for COVID-19 in Arunachal Pradesh, taking the tally in the northeastern state to 16,817, a senior health department official said on Saturday.

The single case was detected from Lepa Rada district through rapid antigen test and the patient was asymptomatic, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Dr Lobsang Jampa said.

Two more people recuperated from COVID-19, taking the total number of recoveries in the state to 16,724, he said.

The recovery rate among coronavirus patients in the state now is

99.44 per cent while the fatality ratio is 0.33 per cent, the official said, adding that the positivity rate in the state currently stands at 0.22 per cent. Arunachal Pradesh now has 37 active COVID-19 cases while 56 people have succumbed to the infection so far.

The state has so far conducted 3,89,149 sample tests, including 453 on Friday, he said.

Meanwhile, a total of 5,736 health workers have received shots of COVID-19 vaccine so far in the state, including 1,272 during the vaccination sessions carried out on Friday, State Immunization Officer (SIO) Dr Dimong Pa-

dung said. Padung said that the state health department has been carrying out inoculation drive four days a week - Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

He said that so far seven persons have developed after effect from immunization in the state.

The highest numbers of vaccines were administered in Papumpare district so far with a total of 734 persons receiving jabs, followed by Namsai (571) and West Kameng (490), Padung added.

The state has received a total of 32,000 doses of Covishield vaccine from the Centre till now.

One new COVID-19 case in Andamans, tally rises to 4,992

PORT BLAIR, JAN 23 (PTI): Andaman and Nicobar Islands reported only one fresh COVID-19 case in the last 24 hours, pushing the tally in the union territory to 4,992, a health department official said on Saturday.

Three more persons were cured of the disease in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of recoveries in the archipelago to 4,907, the official said.

The union territo-

ry now has 23 active COVID-19 cases, while 62 people have so far succumbed to the virus.

The Andaman and Nicobar administration has conducted 2,10,762 sample tests for COVID-19 so far, and the positivity rate stands at 2.37 per cent, he added.

Another Health official said that a total of 1,466 people have received jabs of the COVID-19 vaccine in the union territory till Friday.

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Mbappe brace as PSG routs Montpellier 4-0, Pochettino back

PARIS, JAN 23 (AP) — Paris Saint-Germain coach Mauricio Pochettino made a surprising return to watch Kylian Mbappe snap a four-game scoreless run with two goals as the league leaders crushed 10-man Montpellier 4-0.

PSG moved three points clear of second-place Lille, which can move level on points by winning at fifth-place Rennes on Sunday but has a vastly inferior goal difference.

In an unexpected sight at Parc des Princes stadium, Pochettino returned to coach PSG just one week after testing positive for the coronavirus.

I feel better, Pochettino told broadcaster Telefoot before kickoff. I'm allowed to be here tonight as long as I keep my distance. Forwards Neymar and Mauro Icardi also netted for defending champion PSG.

The game became one-sided after Montpellier goalkeeper Jonas Omlin was sent off in the 19th minute for clattering into Mbappe just outside the penalty area. Omlin was replaced by Dimitry Bertaud.

Mbappe put PSG ahead in the 34th when he collected a pass from Angel Di Maria and lifted the ball over Bertaud. But the goal came with Montpellier midfielder Florent Mollet out of action after limping off with an ankle injury.

A flurry of action saw Mbappe set up Neymar in the 59th, before Icardi turned in right back Alessandro Florenzi's cross one minute later. Icardi then unselfishly set up Mbappe for an easy goal in the 62nd.

Mbappe's brace took him to the top of the scoring charts with 14, two more than Reims striker Boulaye Dia.

Pochettino had been expected to be replaced by assistant coach Jesus Perez, who stood in for him in last Saturday's away win at Angers.

Unlike in previous PSG matches, however, Pochettino wore a face mask throughout.

In Saturday's games, fourth-place Monaco will look to make it six games unbeaten when it hosts sixth-place Marseille.

Imposing Poland striker Arkadiusz Milik could make his Marseille debut after joining on loan from Italian club Napoli.

Does Frank Lampard genuinely deserve to be fired right now?

BARNEY RONAY

LONDON, 23 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Why do people want Frank Lampard to fail so much? This seems like a reasonable question at the end of a week tickled and teased by rumours that Lampard is about to be sacked at Chelsea, that "elements" within the dressing room are already jimmying away at his fixings – all wrapped up in a gleeful surge of postmortems, pile-ons, and a tangible hunger for the great Roman to whirl his terrible scythe.

And yet he still stands! No doubt to the anguish of many watching from the sidelines. Because people really do want Lampard to fall short, and in a way that feels personal. Not to mention – on the balance of the facts – a little premature.

The main charge is clear enough. It isn't hard to make the case Lampard has been overpromoted, coddled into a top job based on his name and connections. This is because it's demonstrably true.

As recently as 2015-17, the manager of the current highest-spending club in European football was working as a team captain on the uproarious TV quizshow *Play to the Whistle*.

Presumably Lampard's on-screen manner was more genial than recent post-match appearances, which are most notable for his ability to maintain the hunted glower of a man being questioned on the hard shoulder of the A33 during a Police Stop TV show, moments before a voice says "at this point things took an alarming turn" over shots of



Lampard leaping a gate and being chased across moorland by sweating men in hi-vis jackets.

Still, though. As the world wrestles with notions of merit and barriers to entry, Lampard has been a professional football manager for slightly longer than he was a humorous TV quizshow captain.

Does any of this actually matter? Football is full of her-itage appointments and punts on status. This is how the game works. It is, at bottom, a star factory. Andrea Pirlo at Juventus, Phil Neville with England Women, the man in charge of the current Premier League leaders. All of these got their jobs based on something other than hard-won CV points. Some of them have done pretty well. In the end the only real qualification for the job is success when you

get here. But it is still hard to think of any other manager to have attracted this sustained white noise of jeering ill will. At times that whole energy – the anti-Lampard "vibe" – feels oddly old-fashioned, like a cartoon of the brattish and overly self-assured Premier League footballer.

Where does this come from? More than anyone else who was there, some part of Lampard still seems to carry shades of the Golden Generation waffle, the assumed debaucheries of that first generation of peak Premier League players: a place where Peter Crouch is forever doing the robot dance in front of a guffawing Prince William, where envy, Wag-rage and sporting disappointment are just starting to curdle and become something else – alienation, disillusionment, the demon-

while being seen in England – with all due apologies – as a man paying his dues in some gritty backwater. Nobody else from that generation really carries that stain now. We're fine these days. The boys of 2006 were never quite as great as we assumed: England took 10 outfield players to that tournament who had not scored an international goal. But that World Cup squad is a welcome blanket presence in the football media, providing an endless stream of really good pundits, analysts, podcasters and Jermaine Jenas.

So we have Rio Ferdinand as an impossibly wise and principled Abraham Lincoln of the lighted coffee table. We get Gary Neville and Jamie Carragher, and the weird, sweaty chemistry of those relentless man-to-man punditry sessions. Steven Gerrard has also taken the manager path and is doing well at Rangers,

best player and were banned from buying replacements. They finished fourth and lost against imperial-phase Bayern Munich. Eleven games into the current season, as recently as 5 December, they were top of the table and had eased into the Champions League knockout phase.

All of Lampard's failure, his entire sacking-evidence is contained in the past six weeks. Chelsea have looked tired and muddled. And Lampard has failed completely to manage this, falling straight away into publicly blaming his players – a terrible mistake that could well do for him.

The simple take on Lampard at Chelsea is that having all those new signings was a curse not a blessing. When the job was small it was manageable. It turns out wrestling with £200m of new talent in the hardest possible league, all demanding different systems and different forms of care, is pretty difficult.

An instinctive genius with total command of detail and the capacity for ruthless self-reflection might have been able to skate through this. But there really aren't many of those around.

And hey, three years on when Lampard sits down opposite Neville on a Monday night and says, "Being honest, Gary, it came too early", there will perhaps be a legacy in the bedding-in of some fine young players.

In the meantime Lampard remains a more nuanced figure than some would allow. It isn't a case of yet more blue privilege to stay the axe for now.

Andy Murray 'devastated' as he shelves Australian Open plans

TUMAINI CARAYOL

THECONVERSATION.COM

LONDON, 23 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: A "devastated" Andy Murray has been forced to withdraw from the Australian Open as he is unable to travel to Melbourne with a "workable quarantine" that would allow him to be ready to compete in the tournament, which begins on 8 February.

"Gutted to share that I won't be flying out to Australia to compete at the Australian Open," he said in a statement. "We've been in constant dialogue with Tennis Australia to try and find a solution which would allow some form of workable quarantine, but we couldn't make it work."

"I want to thank everyone there for their efforts, I'm devastated not to be playing out in Australia – it's a country and tournament that I love."

Shortly before he was due to fly to Melbourne on one of the 17 charter flights transporting 1,200 tennis players, their staff and officials to Australia, Murray tested positive for coronavirus. Players were required to provide a negative coronavirus test taken within 72 hours of their departure to Australia; a handful of other players and coaches, including American former US Open finalist Madison Keys, also tested positive. Murray, who was asymptomatic, has since completed his period of isolation and he is able to resume training. While some other players briskly signified their intention to withdraw from the tournament, Murray retained hope of competing in Melbourne Park, where he is a five-times finalist. He and his team held discussions with the Tennis Australia chief executive, Craig Tiley, and were hopeful they would be able to arrange a modified 14-day quarantine. They were unable to come to an acceptable arrangement.

Some other figures, such as Portugal's João Sousa, also expressed their hope of travelling to Melbourne but it may not have been advisable for any player. Considering the prickly welcome players have already received in Australia, the optics of acquiring a seat on a commercial flight at a time when

Australians remained stranded and the perception that top players are receiving preferential treatment, Murray's presence in Australia may not have gone down well with residents or colleagues.

This marks yet another slice of bad luck for Murray after a bitter 18 months. After returning from hip resurfacing surgery in 2019, Murray's run to victory at the European Open in Antwerp in October 2019 seemed to signify that he would be able to consolidate and move back towards the top of the game.

He struggled with complications with his hip at the end of that season and by the time he was ready to compete in March 2020, the season was suspended due to Covid-19. His return to competition in the Western & Southern Open yielded an early encouraging victory against Alexander Zverev, but any progress was beset by the frustration of sobering straight sets defeats at the US Open and Roland Garros.

He has been unable to string tournaments together and build any rhythm for two years. Every start has quickly led to another stop. Since returning to competition in August 2019, he has competed in only 12 tournaments, losing nearly as many matches as he has won with a 16-12 record. In his last full season, Murray's win-loss record was 78-9. The past four years have seemed like a test of just how many complications one player can endure.

Returning to Australia would have been a symbolic moment. After all, it was two years ago that he admitted in a tearful pre-tournament press conference that his career was possibly coming to an end. When he fell in a rousing five-set first-round loss to Roberto Bautista Agut, the tournament organisers essentially retired him in an awkward ceremony.

Still, this is not the worst scenario. It is a reflection of the risks of working, travelling and leaving the house during a pandemic. There remain questions about his movement, his ability to effectively recover after playing a series of matches and also figuring out how to optimise his current weapons.

Joe Biden's gender discrimination order offers hope for young trans athletes

BRYAN ARMEN GRAHAM

WASHINGTON, 23 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Joe Biden's first day in office delivered an incremental victory for transgender athletes seeking to participate as their identified gender in high school and college sports.

Among the flurry of executive orders signed on Wednesday, Biden called on all federal agencies to enforce a US supreme court decision from last year that expanded the definition of sex discrimination to include discrimination based on sexual orientation as well as gender identity – with language that explicitly referenced the arena of high school and college sports.

"Children should be able to learn without worrying about whether they will be denied access to the restroom, the locker room, or school sports," the directive states, adding that the incoming administration is committed to "prevent and combat discrimination on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation."

The order, which calls for a broader application of Donald Trump-appointed justice Neil Gorsuch's majority opinion in last year's *Bostock v Clayton County* ruling, mandates that every agency must act to ensure the enforcement of this new rule within 100 days of 20 January.

Crucially, it states the Bostock decision should also apply to Title IX, the federal law that prohibits discrimination in federally funded schools, in keeping with Biden campaign promise that his Department of Education would investigate and address any violations of transgender students' rights. States that fail to comply would risk legal action or the loss of federal education funding. Last year, bills to restrict transgender athletes' participation to their sex recorded at birth were introduced in 17 different US statehouses.

In Idaho, a law signed in March by the Republican governor, Brad



Little, became the nation's first to prohibit transgender students who identify as female from playing on female teams sponsored by public schools, colleges and universities. The legislation was overwhelmingly supported by the state's Republican-dominated house and the Trump administration but blocked from implementation by a federal judge while a legal challenge by the American Civil Liberties Union and Legal Voice proceeds. Backers said the law, called the Fairness in Women's Sports Act, is necessary because transgender female athletes have physical advantages.

Opponents, which include healthcare groups and human rights advocates, claim the restrictions harm the emotional and physical wellbeing of transgender youth. Similar laws in other states have been funded by advocacy groups like Alliance Defending Freedom, a Southern Poverty Law Center-designated hate group whose other legal work revolves around attacking reproductive rights, gay marriage and other LGBTQ+ rights.

In Connecticut, the Trump administration intervened in support of a lawsuit filed by several non-transgender girls in Connecticut who were seeking to block a state policy that allows transgen-

der athletes to compete in line with their identity. The plaintiffs argued transgender female runners had an unfair physical advantage.

But the two transgender runners at the center of that case said in court filings that being able to run against girls was central to their wellbeing. "Running has been so important for my identity, my growth as a person, and my ability to survive in a world that discriminates against me," Andraya Yearwood wrote to the court. "I am thankful that I live in Connecticut where I can be treated as a girl in all aspects of life and not face discrimination at school."

An early test case of Biden's order may come in Montana, where on Thursday the state's house judiciary commission voted by a 11-8 margin to advance a bill to the house floor that would prohibit transgender students from participating on school sports teams of the gender with which they identify.

State representative Robert Farris-Olsen, who joined all committee Democrats in opposition, said that passing the bill would violate the right to privacy enshrined in the state constitution and could mean Montana would lose federal education funding, which amounted to \$484m in the last fiscal year.

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Bus heading to Grand Canyon rolls over; 1 dead, 2 critical

PHOENIX (AP): A Las Vegas-based tour bus heading to the Grand Canyon rolled over in northwestern Arizona on Friday, killing one person and critically injuring two others, authorities said.

A spokeswoman for the Mohave County Sheriff's Office said the cause of the Friday afternoon wreck was not yet known, but a fire official who responded said speed appeared to be a factor. No other vehicles were involved.

"It was a heavily damaged bus. He slid down the road quite a ways, so there was a lot of wreckage," said Lake Mohave Ranchos Fire District Chief Tim Bonney. "Just to put it in perspective, on a scale of zero to 10, an eight."

None of the passengers were ejected from the vehicle but they were all in shock, Bonney said.

"A lot of them were saying the bus driver was driving at a high rate of speed," he said.

A photo from the sheriff's office showed the bus on its side on a road that curves through Joshua trees with no snow or rain in the remote area.

There were 48 people on the bus, including the driver, authorities said. After the crash, 44 peo-



ple were sent to Kingman Regional Medical Center, including two flown by medical helicopter, spokeswoman Teri Williams said. All the others were treated for minor injuries, she said. Two people were critically injured, said Mohave County sheriff's spokeswoman Anita Mortensen.

The bus was heading to Grand Canyon West, about 2 1/2 hours from Las Vegas and outside the boundaries of Grand Canyon National Park. The tourist destination sits on the Hualapai reservation and is best known for the Skywalk, a glass bridge that juts out 70 feet (21 meters) from the canyon walls and gives visitors a view

of the Colorado River 4,000 feet (1,219 meters) below. Before the pandemic, about 1 million people a year visited Grand Canyon West, mostly through tours booked out of Las Vegas. The Hualapai reservation includes 108 miles (174 kilometers) of the Grand Canyon's western rim.

In addition to the Skywalk, the tribe has helicopter tours on its land, horseback rides, a historic guano mine and a one-day whitewater rafting trip on the Colorado River. Rafters who are on trips through the Grand Canyon also can get on and off the river on the reservation.

In a statement issued late Friday, the Hualapai

Tribe and its businesses said they were saddened by the rollover and that safety is the highest priority for guests, employees and vendors.

"As a people, our hearts go out to those so deeply affected," the statement read. "We wish speedy recoveries to those requiring medical attention."

National Transportation Safety Board spokesman Keith Holloway said he didn't immediately have more details about the crash. The agency doesn't send investigators to all bus crashes.

Other, deadly crashes have happened before in the area. Four Chinese nationals died in 2016 when their van collided

with a Dallas Cowboys staff bus headed to a preseason promotional stop in Las Vegas. In 2009, a tour bus carrying Chinese nationals overturned on U.S. 93 near the Hoover Dam, killing several people and injuring others. The group was returning from a Grand Canyon trip.

Federal investigators cited driver inattention as the probable cause of that crash. The bus driver was attempting to fix a problem with airflow through his door before the crash and became distracted, then veered off the road and overcorrected before crossing a median and overturning. Most of the passengers were ejected.

Diplomats contact Canadian held for over 2 years in China

BEIJING (AP): Canada said its officials have met online with former diplomat Michael Kovrig, who has been held in China for more than two years in a case related to an executive of Chinese telecoms giant Huawei.

Canada's Foreign Ministry said officials led by Ambassador Dominic Barton were given "on-site virtual consular access" to Kovrig on Thursday. The ministry said it was unable to release further details.

Kovrig and businessman Michael Spavor have been confined since Dec. 10, 2018, just days after Canada detained Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou, who is also the daughter of the founder of the Chinese telecommunications equipment giant.

"The Canadian government remains deeply concerned by the arbi-

trary detention by Chinese authorities of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor since December 2018 and continues to call for their immediate release," the ministry said.

China says the pair are being held on suspicion of endangering national security, but has also drawn clear links between their detention and the case against Meng, who is fighting deportation to the U.S. where she faces fraud charges.

Beijing says the detention of Meng, who is under house arrest at a luxury mansion she owns in Vancouver, is politically motivated and has demanded her immediate and unconditional release.

Chinese prosecutors announced last year that Kovrig had been charged on suspicion of spying

for state secrets and intelligence, and Spavor on suspicion of spying for a foreign entity and illegally providing state secrets. It's not publicly known where they are being held or under what conditions.

Canadian diplomats had been denied all access to the two men from January to October because of coronavirus precautions cited by the Chinese side.

Meng's arrest severely damaged relations between Canada and China, which has sentenced two other Canadians to death and suspended imports of Canadian canola.

The U.S. accuses Meng, the chief financial officer of Huawei Technologies, of using a Hong Kong shell company to deceive banks and do business with Iran in violation of U.S. sanctions.

Thousands of Hong Kongers locked down to contain coronavirus



HONG KONG (AP): Thousands of Hong Kong residents were locked down Saturday in an unprecedented move to contain a worsening outbreak in the city, authorities said.

Hong Kong has been grappling to contain a fresh wave of the coronavirus since November. Over 4,300 cases have been recorded in the last two months, making up nearly 40% of the city's total.

Coronavirus cases in Hong Kong's Yau Tsim Mong district — a working-class neighborhood with old buildings and subdivided flats — represented about half of infections in the past week.

Sewage testing in the area picked up more concentrated traces of the vi-

rus, prompting concerns that poorly built plumbing systems and a lack of ventilation in subdivided units may present a possible path for the virus to spread.

Authorities said in a statement Saturday that an area comprising 16 buildings in Yau Tsim Mong will be locked down until all residents have been tested. Residents will not be allowed to leave their homes until they have received their test results to prevent cross-infection.

"Persons subject to compulsory testing are required to stay in their premises until all such persons identified in the area have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained," the government

said in a statement. Hong Kong has previously avoided lockdowns in the city during the pandemic, with leader Carrie Lam stating in July last year that authorities will avoid taking such "extreme measures" unless it had no other choice.

The restrictions, which were announced at 4 a.m. in Hong Kong, are expected to end within 48 hours, the government said.

It appealed to employers to exercise discretion and avoid docking the salary of employees who have been affected by the restrictions and may not be able to go to work. Hong Kong has seen a total of 9,929 infections in the city, with 168 deaths recorded as of Friday.

Russia arrests protesters demanding Alexei Navalny's release

MOSCOW (AP): Russian police are arresting protesters demanding the release of top Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny at demonstrations in the country's east and larger unsanctioned rallies are expected later Saturday in Moscow and other major cities.

Navalny, who is President Vladimir Putin's most prominent and durable foe, was arrested on Jan. 17 when he returned to Moscow from Germany, where he had spent five months recovering from a severe nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin.

Authorities say his stay in Germany violated terms of a suspended sentence in a criminal conviction in a case that Navalny says was illegitimate. He is to appear in court in early February to determine if he will serve the 3 1/2-year sentence in prison.

The OVD-Info organization that monitors political detentions said at least 48 people were detained in cities including Vladivostok and Khabarovsk. Organizers in Vladivostok said about 3,000 people turned out for the protest there.

Turnout is likely to be much larger for the afternoon protest planned in Moscow, which the city's mayor and other authorities have warned people against attending.

Moscow police on Thursday arrested three top Navalny associates, two of whom were later jailed for periods of nine and 10 days.

Top Lebanese hospitals fight exhausting battle against virus

BEIRUT (AP): Death stalks the corridors of Beirut's Rafik Hariri University Hospital, where losing multiple patients in one day to COVID-19 has become the new normal. On Friday, the mood among the staff was even more solemn as a young woman lost the battle with the virus.

There was silence as the woman, barely in her 30s, drew her last breath. Then a brief commotion. The nurses frantically tried to resuscitate her. Finally, exhausted, they silently removed the oxygen mask and the tubes — and covered the body with a brown blanket.

The woman, whose name is being withheld for privacy reasons, is one of 57 victims who died on Friday and more than 2,150 lost to the virus so far in Lebanon, a small country with a population of nearly 6 million that since last year has grappled with the worst economic and financial crisis in its modern history.

In recent weeks, Lebanon has seen a dramatic increase in virus cases, following the holiday season when restrictions were eased and thousand of expatriates flew home for a visit. Now, hospitals across the country are almost completely out of beds. Oxygen tanks, ventilators and most critically, medical staff, are in extremely short supply. Doctors and nurses say they are exhausted. Facing burnout, many of their colleagues left.

Many others have caught the virus, forcing them to take sick leave and leaving fewer

and fewer colleagues to work overtime to carry the burden. To every bed that frees up after a death, three or four patients are waiting in the emergency room waiting to take their place.

Mohammed Darwish, a nurse at the hospital, said he has been working six days a week to help with surging hospitalizations and barely sees his family.

"It is tiring. It is a health sector that is not good at all nowadays," Darwish said.

More than 2,300 Lebanese health care workers have been infected since February, and around 500 of Lebanon's 14,000 doctors have left the crisis-ridden country in recent months, according to the Order of Physicians. The virus is putting an additional burden on a public health system that was already on the brink because of the country's currency crash and inflation, as well as the consequences of the massive Beirut port explosion last summer that killed almost 200 people, injured thousands, and devastated entire sectors of the city.

"Our sense is that the country is falling apart," World Bank Regional Director, Saroj Kumar Jha, told reporters in a virtual news conference Friday.

At the Rafik Hariri University Hospital, the main government coronavirus facility, there are currently 40 beds in the ICU — all full. According to the World Health Organization, Beirut hospitals are at 98% capacity.

Across town, at the private American Uni-

versity Medical Center — one of Lebanon's largest and most prestigious hospitals — space is being cleared to accommodate more patients.

But that's not enough, according to Dr. Pierre Boukhalil, head of the Pulmonary and Critical Care department. His staff were clearly overwhelmed during a recent visit by The Associated Press, leaping from one patient to another amid the constant beep-beep of life-monitoring machines.

The situation "can only be described as a near disaster or a tsunami in the making," he said, speaking to the AP in between checking on his patients. "We have been consistently increasing capacity over the past week or so, and we are not even keeping up with demands. This is not letting up."

Boukhalil's hospital raised the alarm last week, coming out with a statement saying its health care workers were overwhelmed and unable to find beds for "even the most critical patients."

Since the start of the holiday season, daily infections have hovered around 5,000 in Lebanon, up from nearly 1,000 in November. The daily death toll hit record-breaking more than 60 fatalities in the past few days.

Doctors say that with increased testing, the number of cases has also increased — a common trend. Lebanon's vaccination program is set to begin next month.

The World Bank said Thursday it approved \$34 million to help pay

for vaccines for Lebanon that will inoculate over 2 million people. Jha, the World Bank's regional director, said Lebanon will import 1.5 million doses of Pfizer vaccines for 750,000 people that "we are financing in full." He added that the World Bank also plans to help finance vaccines other than Pfizer in the Mediterranean nation.

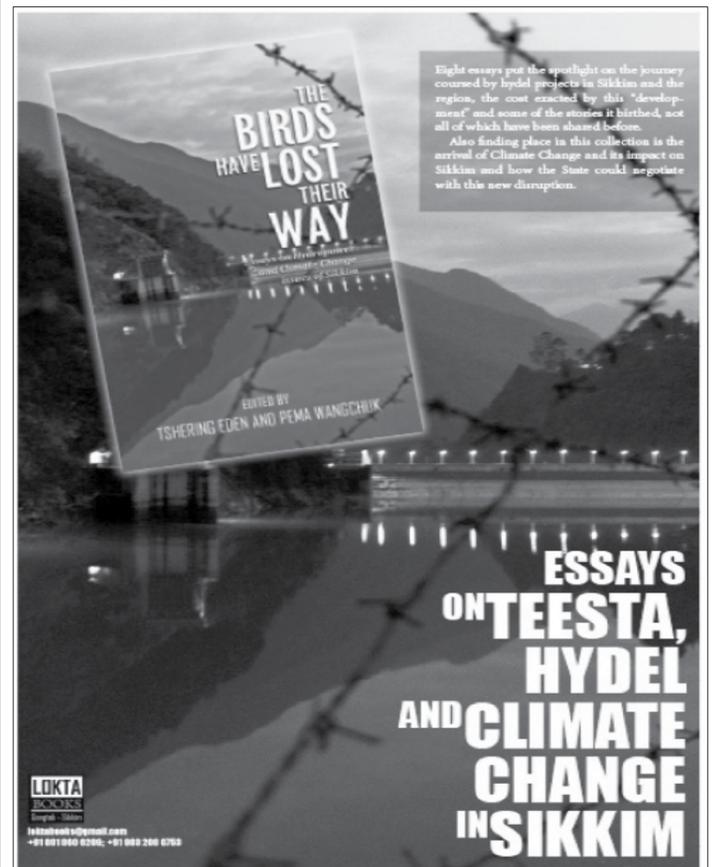
Darwish, the nurse, said many COVID-19 patients admitted to Rafik Hariri and especially in the ICU, are young, with no underlying conditions or chronic diseases.

"They catch corona and they think everything is fine and then suddenly you find the patient deteriorated and it hits them suddenly and unfortunately they die,"

On Thursday night, 65-year-old Sabah Miree was admitted to the hospital with breathing problems. She was put on oxygen to help her breathe. Her two sisters had also caught the virus but their case was mild. Miree, who suffers from a heart problem, had to be hospitalized. "This disease is not a game," she said, describing what a struggle it is for her to keep breathing. "I would say to everyone to pay attention and not to take this lightly."

A nationwide round-the-clock curfew imposed on Jan. 14 was extended on Thursday until Feb. 8 to help the health sector deal with the virus surge.

"I still have nightmares when I see a 30-year-old who passed away," said Dr. Boukhalil. "The disease could have been prevented."





POOCH IN A POUCH! Scout Willis carried her dog in her bag while running errands in Los Angeles.

Anthony Hopkins initially thought 'Silence of the Lambs' was children's story



LOS ANGELES, JAN 23 (PTI): Veteran actor Anthony Hopkins says when he was offered the script of "The Silence of the Lambs", the movie which earned him an Oscar for Best Actor, he thought it was a children's story.

Hopkins famously played serial killer Hannibal Lecter opposite Jodie Foster's Clarice Starling in Jonathan Demme's 1991 classic, which had swept the top five Academy Awards a year later.

Both Hopkins and Foster took home Oscars for best actor and actress, respectively, for their performances in the movie, which is till date considered one of the greatest and influential films of all time.

The two actors reunited for Variety's Actors on Actors series and reminisced about their time working on the movie.

"We didn't get to speak too much before the actual read-through. We just sort of kind of waved from across the room and then sat

down at the table," Foster, 58, said. "And as you launched into Hannibal Lecter, I felt a chill come over the room. In a way, it was like we were almost too scared to talk to each other after that," she added. Hopkins, 83, recalled that when he got the script for "The Silence of the Lambs" in 1989, he was in the London production of the play "M. Butterfly".

"My agent sent a script. He said, 'Why don't you read this? It's called 'Silence of the Lambs'.' I said, 'Is it a children's story?' It was a hot summer afternoon, and the script came over and I started reading it.

"After 10 pages, I phoned my agent. I said, 'Is this a real offer? I want to know. This is the best part I've ever read'. I read the rest of the script, and Jonathan came over on a Saturday afternoon and we had dinner. And I said, 'Is this for real?' And he said, 'Yeah'. I said, 'OK'. He was such a wonderful guy to work with. I couldn't believe my luck," Hopkins said.

"Irrfan's finish line came too soon. But he played well. We are proud of you Irrfan," an emotional Sikdar said, as

Ekta Kapoor, Guneet Monga and Tahira Kashyap launch cinema collective Indian Women Rising

MUMBAI, JAN 23 (PTI): Film producers Ekta Kapoor, Guneet Monga and author-director Tahira Kashyap have joined hands to launch Indian Women Rising (IWR), a cinema collective to support and empower Indian female talent in the film industry.

Spearheaded by Kapoor, Monga and Kashyap, the initiative is aimed at discovering, nurturing and bringing spotlight on Indian women in cinema across the world.

IWR has been launched with the sole purpose of disrupting the status quo and amplifying the voice of Indian female filmmakers.

Kapoor said when Guneet and Tahira told her about the idea of launching this collective, she instantly agreed to it.

"It is always exciting to collaborate with likeminded individuals. I have always believed that women create wonders when given the right opportunity and the support.

"Through IWR, our vision is to do that and empower independent women filmmakers and creators and give them a platform to showcase their talent. We are hopeful that our collective will encourage more female directors to come

forward with their work and lead the way in our industry," Kapoor said in a statement. Monga noted that less than five per cent of the directors in India are

en and their stories has been traditionally limited in cinema and Indian Women Rising aims to bridge this disparity.

"Either we have revolutionaries



females and she believes it is about time to bring a change in the industry.

"I strongly believe that India is a gold mine of talent and with this collective we wish to shine the spotlight on many amazing women that can benefit from our humble support. The intent is to use our collective resources to amplify independent women creators," the producer added. Kashyap said representation of wom-

en on one end of the spectrum or tragedy stricken damsels on the other extreme end. I mean we can be all of that but there is so much more to us. "Our bandwidth is broader than the general assumption which perhaps will surface if we have more women working not just in front of the camera but behind as well. This collective intends to disrupt the boxed notions about women," she added.

Irrfan's finish line came too soon, but he played well: wife Sutapa Sikdar

PANAJI, JAN 23 (PTI): Actor Irrfan Khan's wife, Sutapa Sikdar, on Friday walked down the memory lane as she emotionally remembered the times spent with the late star and said, though he passed away too soon, he lived a fulfilling life.

Khan, one of India's finest and most versatile actors with acclaimed performances in films such as "Maqbool", "The Namesake", "Paan Singh Tomar" and "Hindi Medium", died in Mumbai in April 2020 at the age of 54.

The actor was diagnosed with neuroendocrine tumour in 2018, a rare form of cancer that attacks various parts of the body.

To pay tribute to his legacy, the 51st edition of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) screened Khan's "Paan Singh Tomar" here.

The screening was attended by Sikdar and son Babil.

Sikdar said the 2012 film, about an award-winning athlete who is forced to rebel against the system, is an apt homage to Khan.

"IFFI couldn't have chosen a better film. It talks about a race, an athlete. To quote Irrfan's dialogue from the film, 'you have to finish the race. Whether you lose or win. You have to touch the finish line.'

"Irrfan's finish line came too soon. But he played well. We are proud of you Irrfan," an emotional Sikdar said, as

Babil hugged his mother.

Directed by Tigman-shu Dhulia, "Paan Singh Tomar" bagged two National Awards, one for best film and the other for best actor, which went to Khan.

At the screening, Sikdar recalled attending the movie gala with Khan when both were students in New Delhi.

Sikdar said the duo would have 'cutting chai' and "drown in conversations about cinema" after every film screening.

"That was the beginning. I remember Irrfan having dreams in his eyes. It's a special moment. It's an honour and privilege to be appreciated, given a tribute by the same institute- IFFI."

Sikdar said it was a "brave decision" for her to step out her first public appearance since Khan's demise but one that provided her a closure.

"This is the first time I've come out of home. I had to, because one needs closures also to walk ahead. IFFI is the closure for me. It's like being there for what we have done 30 years ago as students. "I am happy people are here even in today's exceptional times. It feels nice that we are here together to celebrate a person," she added.

On January 7, Khan's family, along with a host of Bollywood celebrities remembered the late star on his 55th birth anniversary.

Dave Chappelle tests positive for COVID-19; shows canceled

AUSTIN, TEXAS (AP): Dave Chappelle tested positive for the coronavirus just before his comedy show scheduled for Thursday, forcing his upcoming appearances to be canceled, a spokeswoman said.

Chappelle was expected to perform Thursday through Sunday at Stubb's Waller Creek Amphitheater in Austin, Texas. Those shows have been canceled and Chappelle is quarantining, his representative Carla Sims said in a statement. The comedian is asymptomatic.

Chappelle had been performing socially-distanced shows in Ohio since June,

and moved his shows to Austin during the winter, Sims said. Rapid testing for the audience and daily tests for Chappelle and his team were implemented.

Comedian Joe Rogan was scheduled to perform at the shows Friday and Saturday. He apologized on Instagram to followers for the canceled shows, saying they'd be rescheduled. A post earlier this week showed Rogan at Stubb's with Chappelle and other stars including Donnell Rawlings, Ron White and Elon Musk.

Refunds will be available for ticketholders at their point of purchase.

Bond film 'No Time to Die' delayed again because of virus

LONDON (AP): It's still not time for "No Time to Die."

Producers of the forthcoming James Bond thriller say the film's release has been delayed again, until the fall of 2021, because of the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

The official 007 Twitter account said late Thursday that the 25th installment in the franchise will now open on Oct. 8.

"No Time To Die" was originally slated to open in April 2020 but was pushed back to November of that year as the virus swept around the world. It was then delayed again to April

2, 2021. The film from direc-

tor Cary Joji Fukunaga stars Daniel Craig as 007, Rami Malek, Lashana Lynch and Ana de Armas. It's one of a slew of major releases to be pushed back or moved to streaming services as Hollywood studios grapple with coronavirus-related restrictions that have shuttered cinemas in markets around the world.

While mass-vaccination programs in many countries give hope that theaters can reopen, progress on immunization is slow.

After the latest Bond delay was announced, Sony said it was pushing back several of its scheduled spring releases.

THE DAY AHEAD

Aries: Aries, you are one with the divine forces, an extension of Source energy... a truth you seem to forget every once in a while. Today, the cards are urging you to remember your origin. To remember that you have a direct hotline with the divine and that you merely have to look within to find it. Some of you may be at a turning point in your story, one that requires you to make an important decision. As always, remember to look forward, not backwards. You don't want to go back to where you started.
Tip: You have a direct hotline with the divine.
Taurus: Anger, sadness, melancholy and loneliness. The weather in the Taurus HQ is rather gloomy. Can you choose to find a silver lining nonetheless? This is a challenge you are being encouraged to take on today. When it comes to your interpersonal relationships, remember that everybody is different and that everybody is operating on a different wavelength. Letting go of your expectation of how things should be will help you see the love and light in them.
Tip: In the words of mystic Baba Ram Dass, "Every-one you meet is God in drag."
Gemini: Love doesn't clip your wings, honey, and if it does, it isn't love at all. Pay attention to what you're being asked to give up here. Sacrificing your own dreams to bring happiness into the lives of others will only bring

you misery in the long run. Alternatively, you could be enforcing your rules onto somebody you love. Be conscious of your manipulative ways, if that is the case. Respecting their individuality "and" giving them the freedom to be who they are will bring love and harmony in the equation.
Tip: It's time to let go of your controlling and manipulative ways.
Cancer: Here's the thing, Cancer: this physical reality of ours is always in flux. Summer gives way to autumn gives way to winter and so on, making change the only constant. Remember this as you move forward and onwards. The dark clouds of sadness will pass soon, bringing in the light again. Until then, focus on finding the silver linings. Happiness is truly an inside job, beloved.
Tip: Accept the ebb like you would the flow.
Leo: Every time your heart says 'yes' to something, your mind offers you an alternate explanation. A logical reason why you shouldn't follow your instinct. But you're choosing to move past your fears every single day. You're choosing to live on the edge and take the kind of risks you never have before. So confront the demons of self-doubt as and when they appear as you remember you have the power to change your reality in the now.
Tip: Face your fears.

Virgo: What if we said you're only living a percentage of your potential? What if we said that you're settling for mediocre because you are subconsciously afraid of success, which in turn would attract a whole lot of attention? It's time to address the complexes within, Virgo. To carefully eliminate the self-negating patterns that are standing between you and the life you want to create for yourself. The mysterious forces are with you, helping you take a giant leap in the right direction.
Tip: Don't dim your light to fit in.
Libra: Not everything is meant to last forever. That's just the way things work in the earthly realm. Should that stop you from embracing the love, joy, and tranquility this moment is offering you? Anything but. So open your heart just a little more. Allow into your experience what has always been yours. Life as you know it will transform forever. In the realm of your career, you're being encouraged to execute that larger-than-life idea. Let go of the fears that are standing in your way and trust that the money you need for it will come in soon.
Tip: Open your heart just a little more.
Scorpio: Scorpio, you're spending too much time thinking about how others will feel about a given situation or action. This isn't about them, though. It's about your

life and what you want to make of it. So, release the guilt and shame narrative as you act in accordance with your highest good. Remember, when you're in alignment, everything within and without transforms for you. PS: It's time to attract what you need in order to grow, and effortlessly so.
Tip: Act in accordance with your highest good.
Sagittarius: You can find all the excuses in the world if you really want to. But you understand the importance of caring for your physical body, now more than ever before. So put on your joggers and get down and dirty with your yoga mat. Trust that the exhilaration you feel as a result will alleviate most of your troubles. As such, slowing down is an important theme for you right now. Try not to take on too much so you can focus on the most important person in your life: you.
Tip: Slow down.
Capricorn: You can pull out another list of sorry excuses, or you can stand by the commitments you have made towards yourself. It's time to give your physical body the love and attention it deserves. There's nothing like a good workout to get in shape and enjoy that endorphin rush. If you're more of the stop-and-smell-the-roses kind of person, consider engaging in a vinyasa flow sequence on your mat. PS: Capricorn season has been all kinds of crazy, so give yourself some time to integrate.

Tip: It's a downward dog kind of day.
Aquarius: We can tell ourselves the story that love eludes us, or we can choose to stay open despite what transpired in the past. The choice is, and has ways been, yours. That said, we hope that you will allow the lethal combination of love, kindness, and compassion into your Universe. Your soul family is showing up for you more than ever before, Aquarius. Know that you're deserving of every bit of the blessings you are attracting into your Universe.
Tip: Choose to stay open no matter what.
Pisces: You can call your space a 'beautiful mess' all you want, but you know fully well that it's hindering your creative process. So are the mementos from a time long gone. Today, without making any excuses, address the clutter that's sitting around you. Carefully eliminate the things that no longer spark joy by giving them to somebody who may be able to put them to better use. As for the things that are precious to you, find a way to arrange them in a way that makes them easy to access. It's also a good idea to smudge the house with incense or sage after your cleaning spree. In the wise words of Marie Kondo, who wrote the bestseller The Life-changing Magic of Tidying Up, "Life truly begins after you've put your house in order."
Tip: Declutter like a boss.