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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## ASI among 5 arrested in Sikkim's biggest drug bust

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 18 DEC:**

An Assistant Sub-Inspector of Sikkim Police is among five people arrested thus far in the State's biggest drug bust yet, one that has led to police raids at different places and allegedly led to confiscation of "drugs" worth Rs 14 lakh.

Addressing a press conference here today, Sikkim Police spokesperson, DIG [Range] Pravin Gurung, informed that the operation led by SP-East Dr Siva Prasad Yellarsi has blown the lid off what the police believe to be an elaborate organized drug supply nexus in the State.

He added that investigation was still underway and there is suspicion that more people are involved in the racket.

Thus far, five people have

been taken into custody in two raids.

The DIG informed that the nexus unraveled after a known drug peddler who was already under police surveillance travelled to Siliguri a few days back and returned on Thursday morning.

Sikkim Police was already tipped off about the vehicle he was travelling in and was lying in wait. It was suspected that this person had gone to procure a fresh consignment of substances of abuse and this was confirmed when the vehicle was stopped near Topakhani, Singtam, and searched.

The vehicle yielded a haul of 23,260 loose capsules of Spasmo-Proxyvon, 2,000 tablets of N-10, 52 grams of brown sugar and 457 bottles of contraband cough syrups. Police

believe the market value of the seized contraband to be around Rs 10 lakh.

When intercepted, the vehicle in question was reportedly being driven by a Sikkim Police ASI in uniform. He is suspected to be part of the nexus and was taken into custody at the spot along with the two other occupants at the time.

Following the interrogation of the trio, a follow-up raid led by the SP-East was carried out at Samdong, East Sikkim, and some other locations.

The raid in Samdong led to the recovery of 3,684 capsules of Spasmo-Proxyvon, 380 tablets of N-10, 21.24 grams of brown sugar and Rs 1.20 lakh in cash. The street value of the seized contraband is

estimated to be around Rs 4 lakh.

The DIG underlined that this was the biggest drug racket busted by Sikkim Police thus far and that cases have been registered under various sections of NDPS and SADA and thorough investigation initiated.

While responding to media query, he informed that there would also be an official enquiry against the involved police officer along with the legal action.

The DIG also added that the Police Department will initiate both disciplinary and legal proceedings against the ASI.

He credited the SP-East and his team for demolishing what appears to be a substantial drug supply nexus operating in the State.

## Sikkim records 123rd Covid fatality, 33 new cases

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 18 DEC:**

Novel Coronavirus claimed one more life in Sikkim on Friday morning with the death of a 60-year-old lady from Baluwakhani, Gangtok, who was declared brought dead at the Central Referral Hospital, Tadong. With this, Sikkim's Covid-related death-toll now stands at 123.

In the daily health bulletin on Friday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia, informed that the patient was rushed to the hospital after developing medical complications at home but passed away on the way.

A rapid antigen test carried out at CRH confirmed her to positive for COVID-19. She had apparently developed COVID pneumonia and also had the co-morbid condition of diabetes.

Meanwhile, 33 new cases of novel coronavirus were reported in the last 24 hours in Sikkim taking the state's tally of confirmed cases to 5,439.

Of these 33 cases, 12 were reported from East District and 21 from South District and were picked up from the testing of 301 samples on Thursday. While 28 cases were detected from the testing of 258 samples by RT-PCR, five others were found in rapid antigen testing of 32

samples. All eleven samples screened by TruNat returned negative.

New cases reported from South District include 10 from Namchi Jail, four from Namchi, three from Jorethang, one from Rateypani and one from Boomtar. Likewise, one person from Daramdin and one from Sreebadam in West District also tested positive in tests conducted in South District.

While providing details of the new cases reported from in and around the capital, Mr Bhutia informed that these include two persons from Tadong [one from Tadong Bazaar and another from the PG hostel above CRH], two from Deorali, two from Zero Point, one from the police quarters and one from Baluwakhani.

Similarly, one person from Sang Khola, one from Khamdong, one from RDD complex, Pakyong, and one from near the Junior High School at Pangthang in East District also tested positive for COVID-19.

The number of the discharged COVID-19 patients has meanwhile further improved to 4,918. The State has now 304 active cases of novel coronavirus, of whom three are currently in the ICU facility of the COVID-dedicated STNM Hospital.

## SMIMS welcomes students back to campus

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 18 DEC:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has made a lot of things uncertain, complex, and fragile and the education sector is perhaps one that has had the hardest time coming to terms with the new normal.

After months of virtual learning, Sikkim Manipal Institute of Medical Sciences (SMIMS) under Sikkim Manipal University (SMU) is welcoming back the medical students to its campus.

Currently, 100 students are already back at their hostel accommodation from the 2019 and 2016 batches, and the process of getting all the students back shall continue throughout December &



January 2021.

Dean SMIMS, Dr VK Mehta and the dedicated faculty team members of SMIMS said that a 'home away from home' is the standard set at the accommodation sites. "The top priority of SMIMS is the health and safety of our students, and that we are closely monitoring the health

of every student in the campus and adhering to all Public Health regulations set by the State and the Government of India. As part of this initiative SMIMS has set up NABL accredited COVID-19 antigen testing molecular labs recently making it the second lab in the state of Sikkim apart from

the Government COVID testing labs. The newly inaugurated molecular labs at SMIMS also the capacity to test for HIV virus and other such grave illness," he said.

Apart from the molecular testing labs, different signage boards are posted at the entrance of all common rooms, student spaces,

elevators to ensure safe social distancing. Students are also requested to

[turn to pg 02](#)

## Partially charred body recovered near Gyalshing

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 18 DEC:**

Police recovered a semi-burnt body of an initially unidentified woman from Langang Kholcha in Gyalshing, West District, on Thursday.

It is informed that the upper portion of the body has been completely burnt, making

identification difficult. The police are treating this as a case of murder and a case has been registered.

During the investigation, police identified the deceased as 45-year-old Kamala Limboo, wife of Mangal Singh Limboo, a resident of Toyang Basti in Gyalshing. She had reportedly

been missing for the past few days.

As per the information received, Gyalshing Police received telephonic information about the body from a resident of Toyang on Thursday morning. The body has been forwarded to STNM Hospital for autopsy and the case is under investigation.

## Covid shot voluntary, says Government, lists SOPs for vaccination

**NEW DELHI, 18 DEC [PTI]:** Getting vaccinated for COVID-19 will be voluntary, the Union Health Ministry has said while underlining that the vaccine introduced in India will be as effective as any vaccine developed by other countries.

The ministry further stated that it was advisable to receive a complete schedule of the anti-coronavirus vaccine irrespective of past history of infection with COVID-19 as this will help in developing a strong immune response against the disease.

It also said that protective level of antibodies generally develop two weeks after receiving the second dose.

The ministry listed a series of frequently asked questions (FAQs) on COVID-19 vaccine on Thursday night and responded to questions like if taking a vaccine was mandatory, how long does it take for the antibodies to develop and if it was necessary for a COVID-19 recovered person to take the vaccine.

"Vaccination for COVID-19 is voluntary. However,

it is advisable to receive the complete schedule of the vaccine for protecting one-self against this disease and also to limit the spread of this disease to the close contacts including family members, friends, relatives and co-workers," the ministry said in response to a question on if it is mandatory to take the shot.

The ministry said that vaccine trials are under different stages of finalisation. The government is geared to launch a vaccine for COVID-19 soon, it said.

Six vaccines - one developed by Bharat Biotech in collaboration with ICMR, second one developed by Zydus Cadila, third one by Gennova, Oxford vaccine, trial of which is conducted by Serum Institute of India, Sputnik V vaccine which is being manufactured by Dr Reddy's Lab, Hyderabad, in collaboration with Russia's Gamaleya National Centre and the sixth one manufactured by Biological E Ltd, Hyderabad, in collaboration with MIT, USA are undergoing clinical trials in India.

[turn to pg 02](#)

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Ministry of Finance  
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15502/13/0004/2021

# Ratna Jyoti Club celebrates foundation day



**BIKAS CHETTRI**  
**NAMCHI, 18 DEC:**

An inter-village volleyball tournament to commemorate Ratna Jyoti Club's foundation day was organized by the Club along with a badminton tournament, literary competitions, rural games and cultural performances at Samatar playground, South

Sikkim today.

The inter-village volleyball tournament had begun on 12 December and played its final match today.

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha party in-charge for Poklok-Kamrang, KB Rai, was present as the chief guest accompanied by SKM general secretary Puspa Manav, advisor-Land Use

and Environment Board, Bhagirat Rai, and the proprietor of Graphics-Jorethang Hemant Rai.

Ratna Jyoti Club was established on 18 Dec, 1982, when the villagers came together for a picnic and decided to use the leftover money to establish the club.

Recently, the club got itself affiliated to Nehru Yuva Kendra and

has been working with NYK on various social welfare activities. Ratna Jyoti Club president, GP Adhikari, informed that the club intends to keep moving forward with its social engagements in a steady pace.

The chief guest congratulated the Club for its interventions in the area and stressed that the most important

duty of any community organization is to solve problems of the community it represents. He has also promised to help with the construction of a pavilion at the playground in the name of Ratna Jyoti Club.

The final match of the volleyball tournament was played between Denchong Volleyball Club and Ratna Jyoti Club.

## Affordable treatment a fundamental right: Supreme Court on Covid "world war"

**NEW DELHI, 18 DEC**

**[NDTV]:** Affordable healthcare is a fundamental right, the Supreme Court said on Friday, in a significant observation that also held the state responsible for ensuring the right and noted that the fight against COVID-19 was a "world war".

"Right to health is a fundamental right guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. Right to Health includes affordable treatment. Therefore, it is the duty upon the State to make provisions for affordable treatment," the court said.

A three-judge bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan, R Subhash Reddy and MR Shah had taken up the issue of healthcare during the time of the pandemic on its own and also looked at instances where bodies of coronavirus casualties were not handled with dignity.

"Due to unprecedented pandemic, everybody in the world is suffering, one way or the other. It is a world war against COVID-19. Therefore, there shall be Government Public Partnership to avoid world war against COVID-19," the judges

said.

"Either more and more provisions are to be made by the state government and the local administration or there shall be cap on the fees charged by the private hospitals which can be in exercise of the powers under the Disaster Management Act," they added.

"It cannot be disputed that for whatever reasons the treatment has become costlier and costlier and it is not affordable to the common people at all. Even if one survives from COVID-19, many times financially and economically he is finished," they said.

## Covid shot voluntary, says Government,...

On whether a vaccine will be safe as it is being tested and introduced in a short span of time and what can be the possible side-effects, the ministry said vaccines will be introduced in the country only after the regulatory bodies clear it based on its safety and efficacy.

"COVID-19 vaccine will be introduced only when the safety is proven. As is true for other vaccines, the common side effects in some individuals could be mild fever, pain, etc. at the site of injection," the ministry said in the FAQs.

It said states have been asked to start making arrangements to deal with any vaccine-related side-effects as one of the measures towards safe vaccine delivery.

Two doses of vaccine, 28 days apart, need to be taken by an individual to complete the vaccination schedule, it stated.

The ministry said anyone taking medicines for illnesses like cancer, diabetes, hypertension etc, can take the COVID-19 vaccine as persons with one or more of these comorbid conditions are considered high-risk category and they need to get vaccination.

In response to a question on whether the vaccine will be given to everyone simultaneously, the ministry said that based on the potential availability of vaccines, the government has selected priority groups to be vaccinated as they are at higher risk.

In the initial phase, COVID-19 vaccine will be provided to the priority group-health care and front-line workers. The 50 plus age group may also begin early based on vaccine availability.

The eligible beneficiaries will be informed through their registered mobile number regarding the health facility where the vaccination will be provided and the scheduled time. This will be done to avoid any inconvenience in registration and vaccination of beneficiaries, the ministry said in the FAQs.

On why healthcare providers and frontline workers are being chosen for receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, the ministry said the government has prioritised the most at risk/high risk groups which will get the vaccine first.

Healthcare providers have led the battle against COVID-19 from the front. The government wants them to be able to continue your work, without the fear of risk associated with the virus.

"Therefore, healthcare and frontline workers are among the first group of people to be vaccinated," it said.

The ministry said registration of a beneficiary is mandatory for vaccination for COVID-19. Only after registration the information on the session site to visit and time will be shared.

Following online registration, beneficiary will receive SMS on their registered mobile number on the due date, place and time of vaccination.

ID with Photo such as driving license, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) job card, PAN Card, passbooks issued by Bank/Post Office, passport Pension Document, service identity card issued to employees by Central/ State Govt./ Public Limited Companies and voter ID may be produced at the time of registration.

On getting due dose of vaccine, the beneficiary will receive SMS on their registered mobile number. After all doses of vaccine are administered, a QR code based certificate will also be sent to the registered mobile number of the beneficiary, the ministry said.

On preventive measures and precautions, the ministry said, "We request you to rest at the vaccination centre for at least half an hour after taking the COVID-19 vaccine.

"Inform the nearest health authorities/ANM/ASHA in case you feel any discomfort or uneasiness subsequently. Remember to continue following key COVID Appropriate Behaviours like wearing of mask, maintaining hand sanitization and physical distance," it added.

## With 22,890 fresh cases, India's COVID-19 tally rises to 99.79 lakh

**NEW DELHI, DEC 18**

**(PTI):** India's COVID-19 caseload rose to 99.79 lakh with 22,890 new infections being reported in a day, while total recoveries crossed the 95 lakh-mark, according to the Union Health Ministry's data updated on Friday.

With 338 more fatalities, the death toll reached 1,44,789, while the total COVID-19 cases mounted to 99,79,447, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 95,20,827, pushing the national recovery rate to 95.40 per cent. The COVID-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent.

The COVID-19 active caseload remained below four lakh for the 12th consecutive day.

There are 3,13,831 active cases in the country which comprise 3.14 per cent of the total



caseload, the data stated.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20 lakh-mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23 and 40 lakh on September 5.

It went past 50 lakh on September 16, 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, and surpassed 90 lakh on November 20.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), 15,89,18,646 samples have been tested so far with 11,13,406 samples being tested on Thursday. The 338 new fatalities include 65 from Maharashtra, 44 from West Bengal, 35 from Delhi and 27 from Kerala. Total 1,44,789 deaths

## PPFA welcomes petition demanding Sanskrit be made national language

**SUMMIT REPORT**

**RANGPO, 18 DEC:**

Patriotic People's Front Assam (PPFA) has welcomed the recent petition filed in the Supreme Court of India demanding that Sanskrit be declared India's national language.

The forum believes that this will help promote national integration more effectively.

The petitioner, KC Vanzara, a former bureaucrat turned advocate, urged the apex court to direct the Union

government in New Delhi to notify Sanskrit as the national language of India while keeping Hindi as its official language.

PPFA has also argued that Sanskrit has historical roots in Assam.

"Sanskrit as a national language in India is a very much logical expectation. Only a few people may know that the Devabhasa was the official language in the region since the days of majestic Kamrup kingdom till the Ahom era," a PPFA statement claims.

## SMIMS welcomes students back...

screen with RT-PCR test 72 hours prior to their arrival to Sikkim. Further, the students are also required to compulsorily stay in their rooms for 14 days after they reach the campus, and all the students are being monitored daily by designated faculty members. If any students experience any symptoms during the 14 days of quarantine period, then the samples are sent for RT-PCR test in the new molecular labs and any student turning out to be positive will be treated with care, caution, and full dedication. Healthy food is also being served to the rooms of the individual students, and clean linen sheets are being supplied, along with regular cleaning or rooms and garbage disposal facilities, the dean informed.

The preclinical "in-person" classes are set to commence on the 24 of December and to ensure optimal social distancing, the students will be grouped in three batches. The routine classes will be held from 9.00am till 7.00pm. "This entire process of bringing back our students to the campus and at the same time ensuring that all COVID-19 safety protocols are followed could not have been possible without the never-ending support from the pre, para and clinical staff of SMIMS and our teaching hospital, Central Referral Hospital (CRH)," the Dean added.

## Bombs kill 3 security forces in Sinai

**EL-ARISH, EGYPT (AP):**

Two roadside bombs exploded in restive northern Sinai Peninsula killing three members of Egypt's security forces and wounding 10 others, officials said Friday.

The bombs went off near separate checkpoints in the town of Sheikh Zuweid late Thursday, said two security officials and a medical official, who asked to remain anonymous because they were not authorized to brief the media.

The officials didn't say who was responsible for the attacks and no

one immediately claimed responsibility. But Egypt has been battling an Islamic State-led insurgency in the Sinai that intensified after the military overthrew an Islamist president in 2013. The militants have carried out scores of attacks, mainly targeting security forces and minority Christians.

The first explosion Thursday night left one dead and seven wounded, while the second killed two and wounded three, the officials said. The casualties were transferred to El-Arish military hospital.

## AFFIDAVIT

This is to state that Mr. B.Pradhan and Smt S. Mukhia were legally bound in marriage in the year 2011. This is also to state that Mr. B. Pradhan has been living separately from Smt. S. Mukhia since march 2020 i.e. 9 months.

This is also to state that Mr. B.Pradhan & Smt S.Mukhia are not socially and martially obligated to each other

Sd/-  
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A land measuring an area for 50x32 1/2 at Road-side just below housing colony is for sale. It is just a one minute walking distance from Namchi bazaar taxi stand. Interested party may contact 9593373387 and 9434406761

### LAND FOR SALE

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

### FOR RENT

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

### GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

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

### BUILDING FOR SALE

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

## KUTSHE SHEGU



The 49 day Kutshe Shegu of Late Norbu Tshering Bhutia of Tumin East Sikkim falls on 21/12/2020.

All friends, relatives and well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence at Tumin, East Sikkim.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those who sood by us in our time of bereavement and regret our inability to thank them individually.

Karma Tshering, Karma Yezore and Sherap Palden Bhutia (sons)  
& all family members

7872961204/ 7908416300/ 9883510232

## KUTSE SHERGU



We would like to inform all our friends, family and wellwishers that the 49th day Kutse Shergu of our beloved Mother, Mother in law, Grandmother, Great Grandmother, Lt Chedem Bhutia W/o Lt Pem Dorjee Bhutia R/o Rabong, South Sikkim who left for heavenly abode on 06/11/2020 falls on 24th December 2020.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank for your kind help and support in our time of grief and bereavement.

Diki Bhutia (Daughter)

Hon'ble Advisor, Commerce & Industries, GoS  
Chumzey Bhutia(Daughter)

Kado Tshering Namka, Yap Tshering Namka  
Fuchung Tshering Namka, Sonam Namka (Son)

Dechen Phigu Bhutia (Son-in-law)

Honble Advisor SMPB, GoS

Karma Rinchen Bhutia (Daughter-in-law)

Lhaki Bhutia (Daughter-in-law)

Sonam Topgay Bhutia (Son-in-law)

Pem Kicho Bhutia (Daughter-in-law)

Doma Tshering Bhutia (Daughter-in-law)

Susangla Diki Bhutia (Grand Daughter)

Kesangla D Lhasungpa (Grandson)

# Quest Triangle from Mountains & Men ready for Jan release

## SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 18 DEC:

Mountains and Men Production is all set to release its first feature film, 'Quest Triangle,' in the first week of January 2021.

It is informed that Quest Triangle is a movie about choices and their consequences chronicled through the life of its main protagonist as the movie moves forward.

The movie is directed and written by Shravan Chettri and shot and edited by Adarsh Bhattarai and features Chitish Chettri, Aadarsh Pradhan and Pema Lhamu Pradhan.

Apart from Quest Triangle, the production house has a line-up of short film projects ranging in theme from thrillers, to crime and drama, it is informed.

Shooting for Quest Triangle began on 10 October and wrapped in a week after covering locations in and around Gangtok. The plot covers themes of love, friendship and, as mentioned earlier, choices.

Director Shravan Chettri is a resident of Dikchu, East Sikkim, and a graduate from Jain University, Bangalore Centre, in Management



Studies.

He has worked previously with advertisement

companies.

"I feel really nice to work with like-minded people and put my heart

and soul into this film and hope that this film be appreciated by the people," Mr Chettri said.

# New Heaven dance workshop continues



## SUMMIT REPORT

RANGPO, 18 DEC:

The 10-day dance workshop organized by New Heaven Dance Institute, Rangpo, at

Majhigaon completed six days today with Hema Dewan of Siliguri taking classes.

Sikkim Bihari Jagran Manch state president,

Swaminath Prasad, was present as the chief guest today and feted by the dance institute's Director, Bishnu Suman and other members.

## Two scholars receive PhD degrees from SMU

### SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 18 DEC:

Assistant Professor, Dr Dhruba Ningombam, Department of Computer Science & Engineering, at Sikkim Manipal Institute of Technology (SMIT), under Sikkim Manipal University (SMU) successfully defended his PhD thesis entitled, "A cloud Computing Architecture for Robots".

The thesis was carried out under the supervision of Chief Executive Officer, Atal Incubation Centre, Prof (Dr) Chingtham Tejbanta Singh - Sikkim Manipal University



Dr. Dhruba Ningombam

Technology Business Incubation Foundation and co-supervision of Prof (Dr) Mrinal Kanti Ghose (Distinguished Professor, GLA University, Mathura) from Computer



Dr. Biswaraj Sen

Science & Engineering Department of Sikkim Manipal University on 24 Nov, 2020.

Similarly, Dr Biswaraj Sen also successfully defended his PhD

thesis entitled "Effect of Security Breaches in the Behaviour of Reactive Routing Protocols for MANETs" under the supervision of HOD, Prof (Dr) Kalpana Sharma,

Computer Science & Engineering, SMIT and co-supervision of Distinguished Professor, Prof (Dr) Mrinal Kanti Ghose, GLA University, Mathura on 26 Nov, 2020.

Dr Biswaraj Sen is an Associate Professor in Computer Science & Engineering in SMIT and also the Head of Training & Placement Cell of the Institute. His research interest includes Wired/Wireless/Ad Hoc/Sensor Networks, Network Security and related areas.

The Doctor of Philosophy will be awarded to the two scholars during the next Convocation of SMU.

## NIT-Sikkim congratulates Dr Kuila for figuring in top-2% AI researchers in India

### SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 18 DEC:

Assistant Professor and the Head of the Department of Computer Science and Engineering at National Institute of Technology, Sikkim, Dr Pratyay Kuila, is listed among the top-2% Indian Researchers in 2019 in a study conducted by Stanford University, USA for his research contributions in the field of Artificial Intelligence.

Some of his research works include Deep Learning, Quantum Computing, Evolutionary Computation, Wireless Sensor Networks based applications.

In a statement issued today, the NIT-Sikkim family has congratulated him on his recognition and wished him success for his future endeavours.



## Not afraid: Youths ink protest tattoos at Singhu border

### GAURAV SAINI

NEW DELHI, DEC 18

(PTI): The whizzing of machines is almost inconspicuous amid the cacophony of slogans, speeches, claps and chatter, but the crowd at the stall attracts eyeballs.

Chetan Sood is busy giving a final touch to a tattoo on the arm of a Sikh youth, who has come from Hoshiarpur, Punjab, to the Singhu border to protest against the Centre's three contentious farm laws.

Sood and his five assistants wanted to contribute whichever way possible. Therefore, the group decided to do what they know best. The six men reached the Delhi-Haryana border on Friday morning carrying ink, tattoo machines, needles and stencils.

It takes 30 minutes to complete a tattoo, the artists say, aiming to complete around 200 such body arts for free

in three days.

"The purpose is to send out a message: the common man is with the farmers," says Sood, who runs 'Tattoo Club' in Punjab's Ludhiana district.

The theme for the tattoos is agriculture. It depicts farmers harvesting crops, holding farm equipment, tractor, among others.

There are tattoos with slogans too, such as 'kar har maidan fateh' (win every battle), 'nishchay kar apni jeet karo' (emerge victorious with firm resolve) and 'nirbhau, nirvair' (not afraid, no enemies).

"These are permanent tattoos. Each costs at least Rs 3,500," says 29-year-old Sood.

The farmers have been camping at several border points into Delhi for over three weeks, demanding that the new farm legislations be repealed as they claim it would benefit the corporates and end the traditional



wholesale markets and the minimum support price regime.

"People are talking about the farmers' protest in every household across the country," Sood says. "This is probably the largest organised movement in the modern India."

Dheerpal Singh, 33, from Hoshiarpur was upbeat after getting a tattoo of a tractor inked on his forearm. "This is surely going to lift the spirits of the youngsters here," he says.

At a nearby medical camp set up by Baba

Balwant Ji Charitable Trust, a team of 15 volunteers distributed kits of "immunity booster" medicines among the farmers and local residents on Friday.

Doctor Ashwini Kumar from Hoshiarpur district said the kit included multi-vitamins, zinc, iron.

"The farmers have been camping here for around three weeks. The weather has changed. The severe cold can harm the elderly. There are sanitation-related issues too," Kumar says. Of the 1 lakh kits,

50,000 have already been distributed.

Around 100 metres away from the spot where tattoos are being inked, volunteers of Meri Peri Welfare Society have been distributing free turbans among the farmers and locals. The twelve volunteers at the camp have also been teaching people how to tie a perfect turban.

"Guru Gobind Singh ji said anyone can wear a turban," Ranjit Singh, a volunteer from Ferozepur, said. "It unites everyone, binds everyone in one thread."

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

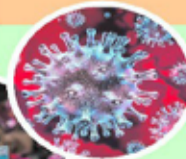
The Novel Coronavirus (nCoV) is new strain of Coronavirus that originated in Wuhan, China. Notorious for mutating quickly and acquiring new qualities, it is a rising epidemic that was previously not identified in humans.

### 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.



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## Meet the Others

*Insularity is unfortunately a national malaise. Address it*

Identity, as in the perceptions of the outside, is a touchy issue among the marginalized communities. The ill-informed clichés, the pedantic, and almost always offensive generalizations remain sore points for the offended communities, and we live in a region that has lived with such broad-brush impoliteness for ever since we started interacting with the plains. And the brush paints both ways, one may add here. We are seeing it play out live on national TV in how the bhakts define farmers, how the farmers see themselves, what the farmer sees when it she sees a godi media boom mike and what we think of the farmer protest depending on where we consume our news. Step back, go over what you are being fed and what inferences you have internalized and shallow superficiality of it all will hit you in the face. Confirmation bias, we need to accept, is what convinces us with a throwaway line that the protestors must be pseudo farmers if they wear denims, speak English and enjoy pizza. The stereotype of a suffering peasant is true, but not a necessary condition of being a farmer and there is enough evidence of a farmer's daughter shopping on Myntara even in Sikkim. Similarly, although the editors might have become lapdogs of the powers that be, it is wrong for farmers to see the beat reporter, despite her studio-directed “angles,” as being intuitively opposed to farmers. And even with these observations we are only scratching the surface of challenging insularity and hate.

While it is easy to take affront and fine to draft fresh introductions to correct the offending perceptions, it is infinitely not okay to allow the chip on the shoulder to burden any heavier than is healthy. The more a perceived slight is allowed to fester, the more it diverts energy from pursuits that take communities forward. One refers to a “perceived slight” here because most of the times, the clichés that hurt are products of ignorance and one should not really allow ignorance of others to justify withdrawals into cocoons by the othered. Defensive shells are not the best habitations from which to plan ahead because they keep thoughts and ideas rooted in a past that has lost its relevance for everyone except those who swoon in its fermented confusion. Also, while so enclosed, one fails to recognize changes elsewhere.

That said, it is important that the ignorance which has degenerated into disdain, mutual suspicion and distasteful stereotyping is lifted. One could argue that perceived slights are by nature pointless obsessions since they are born out of, well, perceptions which cannot really be tackled because, well again, they rest in perceptions and those are more difficult to address than actual instances of discrimination. They do, however, become worries when the perceptions start manifesting as actual attacks, like ones which triggered the exodus of NE people from the metros or the lynching which occurred in Nagaland a few years ago. And then there is the continuing parochialism everywhere else in the country and the reprehensible attempts at justifying such targeted attacks born out of Hate seeded in prejudices and stereotypes. These will repeat unless this country makes some earnest efforts at celebrating its much-vaunted diversity. 69 years as one nation and the citizens still don't behave as One People! This obviously needs to change, and the Supreme Court recently cracked the whip with its slew of directions, including the setting up of a three-member panel to “enhance the sense of security and inclusion of the people from the north-eastern states who faced violence and hate crimes”. The SC directive is the first step, an acceptance of sorts of a problem that exists. For it to be of any real consequence, wider, more collaborative initiatives will need to be taken.

The students provide the best opportunity to build the bridges which can span the chasms of mutual ignorance which feeds insularity among us. A simple and easily achieved course would be for the community/ state representative organisations of the students to become mediums which link communities, not strive to make them self-ensconced unit of self conscious groups. Take the freshers' welcome parties for instance. Instead of each community, each state or region hosting a welcome party for its own kind, they should use the funds to introduce the freshers to 'others' in the student community. Host the parties for 'your own' but invite guests from all other groups. Make celebrations the medium to proffer more congenial introductions and strike new friendships. Use the organisations to speak more often about the concerns of other groups and engage more earnestly in issues and challenges which face other communities. This openness is possible only with the idealism of youth, but is currently being stifled because student groups remain obsessively insular.

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# THE TOP SCIENTIFIC BREAKTHROUGH FOR 2020 Understanding SARS-CoV-2 and How It Causes COVID-19 – and Then Developing Multiple Vaccines

DAVID PRIDE

THECONVERSATION.COM

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes the respiratory illness COVID-19, has killed approximately 2.2% of those worldwide who are known to have contracted it. But the situation could be a lot worse without modern medicine and science.

The last such global scourge was the influenza pandemic of 1918, which is estimated to have killed 50 million people at a time when there was no internet or easy access to long-distance telephones to disseminate information. Science was limited, which made it difficult to identify the cause and initiate vaccine development. The world is 100% more prepared for the current pandemic than it was 100 years ago. However, it has still affected our lives profoundly.

I am a physician scientist who specializes in the study of viruses and runs a microbiology laboratory that tests for SARS-CoV-2 infections. I've seen firsthand patients with severe COVID-19 illness and have dedicated myself to developing diagnostics for this disease. It's a remarkable testament to science that a novel disease-causing virus has been discovered, the genetic material completely decoded, new therapies created to fight it and multiple safe and effective vaccines developed all within the span of a year – an accomplishment that the journal Science has pegged the breakthrough of 2020.

Most vaccines take 10-15 years to develop. Until now the fastest vaccine developed was against the mumps virus, which took four years. Now, in the midst of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, one vaccine is already authorized for use in the U.S., with a second close behind. Other vaccines have already been rolled out in countries across the globe.

SCIENCE FAST-TRACKED

This pandemic put science front and center. One of the most significant scientific advances in the past 15 years has been the ability to read the genetic instructions – or genome – that encode viruses. The process of sequencing the genome of a virus is called next generation sequencing, and it has revolutionized science by allowing researchers

to rapidly decode the genome of a virus or bacterium, quickly and cost-effectively. This strategy was used to determine the sequence of SARS-CoV-2 early in January 2020 before epidemiologists even recognized that it had already spread around the world. Obtaining the sequence allowed for the rapid development of diagnostics for SARS-CoV-2 and to figure out who was infected and how the virus might spread.

SARS-CoV coronavirus was responsible for an outbreak that spanned 2002-2004, but was not particularly contagious and was limited mostly to Southeast Asia.

SARS-CoV-2 has evolved two separate qualities that allow it to spread more easily. First, it has an enormous potential for triggering asymptomatic infections, in which the virus infects carriers who don't experience symptoms and may never know they are infected and transmitting the virus to others.

Second, it can spread via aerosolized particles. Most of these viruses spread via large respiratory droplets, which are visible and fall out of the air within three to six feet. But SARS-CoV-2 can also spread through airborne transmission via much smaller particles that remain in the air for several hours.

While in 1918 people went on blind faith that masking reduced transmission, this time around, science provided us with concrete answers. There have been several studies demonstrating the efficacy of masking. These types of studies inform the public that mask-wearing, social distancing, hand-washing and limiting crowd sizes decrease circulating virus and thus reduce hospitalizations and death. While they don't get much fanfare, these studies are among the most important discoveries in response to this pandemic.

SCIENCE AIDS DIAGNOSTICS

Many tests for the virus are performed using PCR, which is short for polymerase chain reaction. This method uses specialized proteins and virus-matching DNA sequences called primers to create more copies of the virus. These additional copies allow PCR machines to detect the presence of the virus; doctors can then tell you if you are infected. Because of

the availability of the virus's genome sequence, any researcher can design primers that match the virus to develop a diagnostic test.

Early on, the World Health Organization developed a PCR test to detect the virus and disseminated instructions on how to use it to researchers and physicians around the globe.

This was a remarkable achievement that allowed countries across the world to rapidly develop diagnostic tests using this template. This distribution changed the course of the pandemic in many countries.

TREATMENTS HAVE LOWERED MORTALITY RATES

Treatments for infectious diseases often evolve over time. There is no vaccine yet for hepatitis C, but over recent years treatments have evolved from those that make you very ill to those that are highly efficacious with few side effects.

We are now seeing similar things in the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, just on an accelerated timeline. With the aid of clinical studies, we now have treatments such as steroids, antiviral medications like Remdesivir and infusions of antibodies. Physicians also know how to alter a patient's position in ways that increase the chance of survival.

VACCINE DEVELOPMENT COULD END PANDEMIC

This pandemic could end if the virus swept through the population killing millions but leaving the survivors with natural immunity. More likely the virus will snuff itself out when most of the population has been vaccinated with a SARS-CoV-2 vaccine. That is especially true in parts of the world where frequent testing and public health strategies are difficult to implement.

It took many years to develop an influenza vaccine, with the first available in 1942. Other successes with smallpox and polio, and more recent ones like HPV and Haemophilus influenzae Type b, have provided blueprints for vaccine development.

Governments across the world have partnered with private companies to expedite the development of SARS-CoV-2 vaccines. This has led to multiple

different companies developing their own different versions of vaccines. Normally, these take years to develop; however, by leveraging recent successes and accumulated knowledge, the timeline was accelerated significantly. Normally, new vaccines go through phase 1 (safety), phase 2 (efficacy) and phase 3 (comparison) trials, but as demonstrated in the current trials, phases 2 and 3 can be combined for expediency. And large-scale manufacturing can begin when the vaccine is still in trials, potentially cutting years off the timeline.

Technology is at the forefront of the development of these vaccines. Some of the coronavirus vaccines take advantage of mRNA technology, which essentially programs our cells to develop immune responses against SARS-CoV-2.

Others use viruses as delivery mechanisms for SARS-CoV-2 proteins to which your body develops an immune response. Both types have thus far been shown to be effective, but long-term safety will remain controversial when vaccines are developed on such an expedited timeline.

LESSONS LEARNED

This disease, which began in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, and was first diagnosed in either November or December of 2019, is the perfect illustration of just how rapidly viruses spread in a connected world. We got previews of what could happen from the recent outbreaks of Ebola and Zika virus, but the spread of SARS-CoV-2 has been on a different level. It has underscored that when we receive warnings about contagious viruses, rapid and decisive action must be taken in all parts of the world to reduce its spread.

Where there is more strict compliance with public health policies, there have been profound reductions in virus transmission.

While the research that has made all this possible might fly under the radar right now, history will record this time as one of the greatest periods for scientific advancements.

*[the writer is Associate Director of Microbiology, University of California San Diego]*

## As Heavenly Bodies Converge, Many Ask: Is the Star of Bethlehem Making a Comeback?

ERIC M. VANDEN EYKEL

THECONVERSATION.COM

On Dec. 21, 2020, Jupiter and Saturn will cross paths in the night's sky and for a brief moment, they will appear to shine together as one body. While planetary conjunctions like this are not everyday events, they also are not particularly rare.

This year's conjunction is different for at least two reasons. The first is the degree to which the two planets will be aligned. Experts predict that they will appear closer during this conjunction than they have in nearly eight centuries and also brighter.

But the second factor, and the one that has thrust this event into the spotlight, is that it will occur on the winter solstice, just before the Christmas holiday. The timing has led to a speculation whether this could be the same astronomical event that the Bible reports led the wise men to Joseph, Mary and the newly born Jesus – the Star of Bethlehem.

As a scholar of early Christian literature writing a book on the three wise men, I argue that the upcoming planetary conjunction is likely not the fabled Star of Bethlehem. The biblical story of the star is intended to convey theological rather than historical or astronomical truths.

LEADING LIGHT

The story of the star has long fascinated readers, both ancient and modern. Within the New Testament, it is found only in the Gospel of Matthew, a first-century account of Jesus' life that begins with the story of his birth.

In this account, wise men arrive in Jerusalem and say to Herod, the king of Judea: “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage.” The star then leads them to Bethlehem and stops over the house of Jesus and his family.

Many have read this story with the presupposition that Matthew must have been referencing an actual astronomical event that occurred around the time of Jesus' birth. The astronomer Michael R. Molnar, for example, has argued that the Star of Bethlehem was an eclipse of

Jupiter within the constellation Ares.

There are at least two issues involved in associating a specific event with Matthew's star. The first is that scholars are not certain exactly when Jesus was born. The traditional date of his birth may be off by as many as six years.

The second is that measurable, predictable astronomical events occur with relative frequency. The quest to discover which event, if any, Matthew might have had in mind is therefore a complicated one.

BELIEFS ABOUT THE STAR

The theory that the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn may be the Star of Bethlehem is not new. It was proposed in the early 17th century by Johannes Kepler, a German astronomer and mathematician. Kepler argued that this same planetary conjunction in or around 6 B.C. could have served as inspiration for Matthew's story of the star.

Kepler was not the first to suggest that the Star of Bethlehem may have been a recognizable astronomical event. Four hundred years prior to Kepler, between 1303 and 1305, the Italian artist Giotto painted the star as a comet on the walls of the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, Italy.

Scholars have suggested that Giotto did this as an homage to Halley's Comet, which astronomers have determined was visible in 1301, on one of its regular flights past the Earth. Astronomers have also determined that Halley's Comet passed by the Earth in or around 12 B.C., between five and 10 years before most scholars argue that Jesus was born. It is possible that Giotto believed Matthew was referencing Halley's Comet in his story of the star.

Attempts to discover the identity of Matthew's star are often creative and insightful, but I would argue that they are also misguided.

The star in Matthew's story may not be a “normal” natural phenomenon, and Matthew suggests as much in the way that he describes it. Matthew says that the wise men come to Jerusalem “from the East.” The star then leads them to Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem. The star therefore makes a sharp left turn. And astronomers will agree that stars do not make sharp turns.

Moreover, when the wise men arrive in

Bethlehem, the star is low enough in the sky to lead them to a specific house. As physicist Aaron Adair puts it: “the Star is said to stop in place and hover over a particular lodging, acting as an ancient GPS unit.” The “description of the movements of the Star,” he noted, was “outside what is physically possible for any observable astronomical object.”

THEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNING

In short, there appears to be nothing “normal” or “natural” about the phenomenon that Matthew describes. Perhaps the point that Matthew is trying to make is a different one.

Matthew's story of the star draws from a body of tradition in which stars are connected to rulers. The rising of a star signifies that a ruler has come to power.

In the biblical book of Numbers, for example, which dates to 5th century B.C., the prophet Balaam predicts the arrival of a ruler who will defeat the enemies of Israel. “A star shall come out of Jacob, [meaning Israel]... it shall crush the borderlands of Moab.”

One of the most well-known examples of this tradition from antiquity is the so-called “Sidus Iulium,” or “Julian Star,” a comet that appeared a few months after the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 B.C. Roman authors Suetonius and Pliny the Elder report that the comet was so bright that it was visible in the late afternoon, and that many Romans interpreted the spectacle as evidence that Julius Caesar was now a god.

In light of such traditions, I believe Matthew's story of the star exists not to inform readers about a specific astronomical event, but to support claims that he is making about the character of Jesus.

Put another way, I argue that Matthew's goal in telling this story is more theological than it is historical.

The upcoming conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn is therefore likely not a return of the Star of Bethlehem, but Matthew would likely be pleased with the awe it inspires in those who anticipate it.

*[the writer is Associate Professor of Religion, Ferrum College]*

## Nagaland reports 33 fresh COVID cases

**KOHIMA, DEC 17 (PTI):** The detection of 33 fresh cases of coronavirus infection raised Nagaland's tally to 11,820 on Thursday, health department officials said.

In a tweet, Health and Family Welfare Minister S Pangnyu Phom said, "33 +ve cases of # COVID-19 have been detected today. Kohima- Mokokchung- 13 each, Tuensang- 6, Mon- 1. Also, 76 +ve patients have recovered. Kohima- 64, Tuensang- 6, Wokha- 4, Zunheboto- 2."

The caseload includes 11,071 recovered people while 547 are active patients, he said.

The COVID-19 death toll in the state remained unchanged at 73. Ten of them succumbed due to comorbidities, an official said.

Altogether 129 patients have migrated to other states.

So far, a total of 1,18,202 samples have been tested for COVID-19 in Nagaland, the official said.

Meanwhile, the Nagaland Health and Family Welfare Department asserted that the state is fully prepared for the COVID-19 vaccination process.

Addressing a press conference here, Mission Director of National Health Mission Nagaland, Dr Kevichusa Medikhrur, said that state level training for COVID-19 vaccination has been completed and that at the district level would be over before the Christmas.

He said that the state has a total of 119 cold chain points for storage of COVID-19 vaccine.

## 10 new COVID-19 cases in Andamans

**PORT BLAIR, DEC 18 (PTI):** Ten more people have tested positive for COVID-19 in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, raising the tally in the Union Territory to 4,860, a health department official said on Friday.

Of the 10 fresh cases, nine have travel history while one was detected during contact tracing, the official said.

The death toll remained at 61 as no new fatality due to the infection was reported, he said.

The Union Territory now has 92 active cases.

Nine more people were cured of the disease on Thursday, taking the total number of recoveries in the archipelago to 4,707, the official said.

The Andaman and Nicobar administration has conducted 1,59,026 sample tests for COVID-19 so far, and the positivity rate stands at 3.06 per cent, he added.

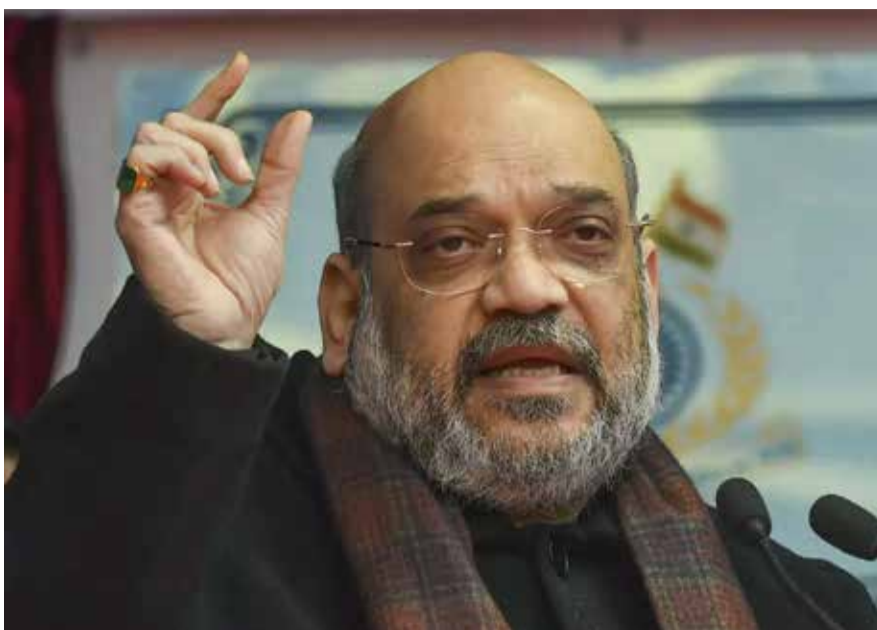
# Amid rebellion in TMC, Shah on two-day visit to Bengal

**KOLKATA, DEC 18 (PTI):** Home Minister Amit Shah will arrive in Kolkata on Friday night on a two-day visit to take stock of the BJP's affairs in the state as the assembly elections draw near, amid a rebellion within the ruling Trinamool Congress.

Speculations are rife that heavyweight Suwendu Adhikari, who quit the Trinamool Congress and gave up cabinet portfolios in the Mamata Banerjee government, may join BJP during Shah's visit along with a slew of disgruntled TMC leaders, including some MLAs such as Silbhadra Dutta and Jitendra Tiwari.

Shah will be staying at a hotel in Newtown after arriving in Kolkata, a BJP leader said.

"On Saturday morning, he has a scheduled meeting with NIA officials. Then he will



visit Swami Vivekananda's residence in north Kolkata to pay tributes," the state BJP leader said.

"Later, Shah will travel to Midnapore where he will pay tributes to revolutionary Khudiram Bose and offer puja at two temples," he said.

After this, he will

visit a farmer's home for lunch, followed by a public rally at the Midnapore College ground.

"There are chances that several TMC leaders will join the party at this rally. After the rally, he will return to Kolkata and hold meetings with state leaders and take stock

of the organisation," the BJP leader said.

On Sunday, Shah is scheduled to visit the Visva-Bharati university in Shantiniketan and then have lunch at the house of a Baul singer.

"He will then lead a roadshow in Bolpur. It will be followed by a press conference. After

that, he will leave for Delhi," the BJP leader said.

Shah's visit comes in the backdrop of growing animosity between the Centre and the state with the Home Ministry asking the West Bengal government to immediately relieve its three IPS officers for central deputation, provoking a combative Mamata Banerjee to brand the move as "unconstitutional and unacceptable".

BJP state chief Dilip Ghosh has said that Shah and party president JP Nadda would visit West Bengal every month till the assembly elections, likely in April-May, are over.

Nadda was on a day-long visit to north Bengal in October and came on a two-day tour last week, while Shah was in the state for two days in November.

## Illegal fish breeding centres found in Palghar; 2 booked

**Palghar, Dec 18 (PTI):** Maharashtra fisheries department personnel raided illegal fish breeding centres in Palghar district and destroyed stocks of the exotic Thai Mangur fish, whose cultivation is banned, officials said on Friday.

The raids were conducted at illegal fish breeding centres in Shimpipada and Suksal areas of Vikramgad taluka on Wednesday, an official release said here.

Stocks of Thai Mangur fish were destroyed and offences were registered against two persons, Kuldeep Patil and Azim Khan



Saeed Akhtar, who were operating these centres, under IPC sections 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by

public servant) and 34 (acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention), it said.

Anand Dattatraya Palav, Assistant Commissioner Fisheries, Thane-Palghar, said the breeding of Thai Mangur

has been banned and these centres were operating illegally.

In February this year, the Maharashtra government had launched a special drive to destroy cultivation centres of Thai Mangur fish, whose cultivation is considered bad for biodiversity.

The Thai Mangur is cultivated in highly unhygienic conditions, which may lead to people falling sick after consuming it, the government had said.

Its cultivation is considered harmful for local fish species and aquatic life since it is carnivorous.

## CBI says Hathras victim was gang-raped, killed

**HATHRAS, 18 DEC [NDTV]:** The four accused in the alleged gang-rape and torture of a young Dalit woman in Uttar Pradesh's Hathras in September were today charged by the CBI of gang-rape and murder, over three months after the incident that triggered outrage across the nation.

The CBI has also invoked charges against the accused under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. The probe agency filed its chargesheet before a court in Hathras, some 200 km from Delhi.

The 20-year-old Dalit woman was allegedly raped by the four men from the so-called upper caste community in Hathras on September

14. She later died due to her injuries at a hospital in Delhi. The victim was cremated near her home on September 30.

The handling of the case by Uttar Pradesh Police - particularly the late-night cremation of the victim allegedly without the family's approval - led to angry protests across the country. The officials, however, said the cremation was done "as per the wishes of the family".

In October, the Supreme Court said the Allahabad High Court will monitor the probe conducted by the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation).

The main accused had written to the Uttar Pradesh police from jail,



claiming that he and the three other accused are being framed in the case and sought "justice" for the four men. He also accused the woman's mother and brother of torturing her. The woman's family has denied these

allegations.

Earlier this week, the CBI sought more time to conclude its investigation following which the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court on Wednesday fixed January 27 as the next date of hearing in the case.

## Elephant found dead in Kuldiha reserve forest in Odisha



**BALASORE, DEC 18 (PTI):** A forest department patrolling team found the carcass of a female adult elephant in Kuldiha reserve forest in Odisha's Balasore district, an official said on Friday.

The dead elephant was found near a water source in the forest on Thursday by the patrolling

team, the official said.

He said the elephant might have slipped from a high rock while coming down to the water source and died there.

However, post-mortem has been conducted and the body cremated inside the forest, the official added.

## We believe in communal harmony: Mamata



**KOLKATA, DEC 18 (PTI):** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday said that it is our duty to protect the rights of people of all faiths, communities, castes and creed.

In a tweet, she said "Today is #MinorityRightsDay.

India is the land of unity in diversity, and it is our duty to protect the rights of people of all faiths, communities, castes and creeds. We believe in communal harmony. Unity is strength. Divided we fall".

The chief minister said the West Bengal

government runs the 'Aikyashree' scheme to provide scholarships to minority students.

"Since 2011, 2.03 crore scholarships worth Rs 5,657 crore have been provided to minority students, the highest in the country", she tweeted.

The Aikyashree scheme provides scholarship to students belonging to the minority community of financially poor background. It also provides training to students for various competitive exams and training programmes to develop and upgrade their skills.

## Odisha reports 358 new COVID-19 cases, 4 more deaths

**BHUBANESWAR, DEC 18 (PTI):** Odisha on Friday reported 358 new COVID-19 cases, pushing the tally to 3,25,505, while the death toll rose to 1,829 with four fresh fatalities, a health department official said.

The new cases were detected in 27 of the state's 30 districts, with 208 of them reported from different quarantine centres, while the remaining 150 are local contact cases.

Three districts - Boudh, Kandhamal and Malkangiri, did not register any new cases during the last 24 hours, he said.

Angul district recorded the highest of new cases at 52 followed by Khurda (36) and Balasore (35).

Taking to twitter, the Health and Family Welfare department said: "Regret to inform the demise of four numbers of Covid positive patients while undergoing treatment in hospitals."

One each patient

succumbed to the infection in the districts of Khurda, Puri, Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara, he said.

Of the total 1,829 fatalities reported so far in the state, Khurda district alone accounted for 312 deaths followed by Ganjam (246), Sundergarh (158), Cuttack (138) and Puri (112).

Twenty-five other districts reported fatalities below 100, he said.

Apart from the 1,829 COVID-19 deaths, 53 people who were COVID-19 positive had also died due to cormorbidities.

Currently, Odisha has 3,039 active COVID-19 cases, while 3,20,584 patients have so far recovered from the infection.

The state has tested 65.36 lakh sample for COVID-19 so far, including 33,809 on Thursday. Odisha's positivity rate stands at 4.98 per cent, the data released by the health and family welfare department said.

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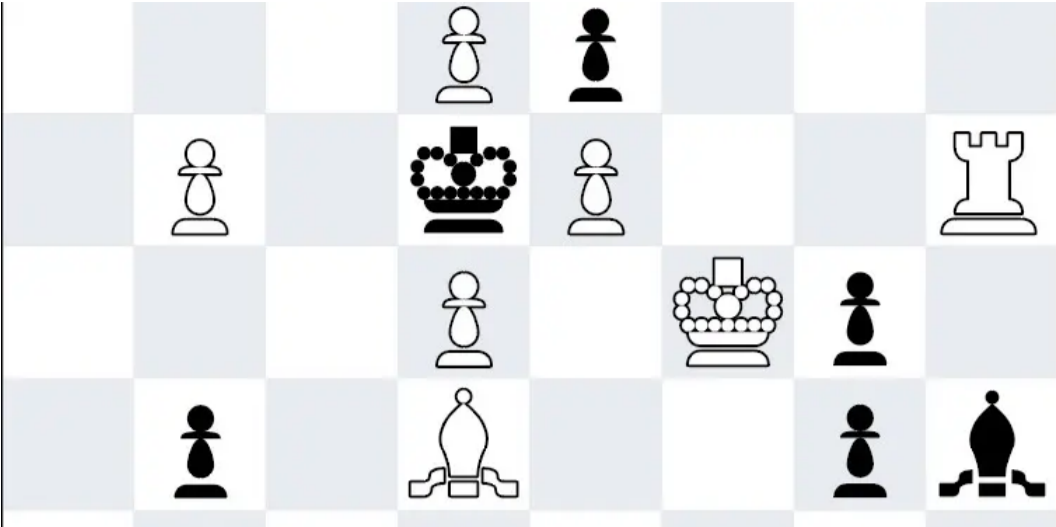
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## Chess: 'Game of the Year' decides title as Covid-19 hits Russian championship



**LEONARD BARDEN**  
**LONDON, 18 DEC**  
[THEGUARDIAN]: A game cast in the romantic mould of the nineteenth century and of the legendary Latvian Mikhail Tal decided first prize at this week's Russian championship.

Its creator Daniil Dubov, 24, an aide to Magnus Carlsen for the 2018 world championship, played what has been widely hailed as the "Game of the Year", as he took down Sergey Karjakin with a prepared gambit where Dubov blitzed out his first 13 moves and followed up with sacrifices of bishop and queen.

Dubov's 15 Bf6! and 19 Qxg6!! sacrifices were too hard to defend in practical play. The square g6/g3 was the setting for two of the classic queen sacrifices of chess history, Frank Marshall's "golden coins" Qg3!! game against Stefan Levitsky at Breslau 1912 and Alexander Alekhine's Qxg6! against Emanuel Lasker at Zurich 1934.

Covid precautions have featured prominently in the handful of major international tournaments which have continued despite the pandemic. Some or all of flexi-glass screens, large size tables, face masks, daily virus tests and no spectators were the norm at Biel, the German Bundesliga, and Stavanger.

All successfully completed their schedules, but the virus struck back at Moscow's historic Central Chess Club when Mikhail Antipov was forced to withdraw on the rest day after six of the 11 rounds. The reason for Antipov's departure was made public only on the final day, and the outcome could have been worse – all the other competitors tested negative. The 23-year-old Muscovite, junior world champion in 2015, had played more than half his games, so his score stood, but he had already met all the top four finishers so the result was unaffected.

Ian Nepomniachtchi, the world No 4, won his second national title with 7.5/11, ahead of Karjakin 7, Vladimir Fedoseev and Dubov 6.5. Nepomniachtchi is 30, part of chess's 1990 vintage birth year which also produced the world champion, Carlsen,

France's world No 5, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, and the 2016 world challenger Karjakin, for whom this week was another failed attempt at a tournament he has never won.

Nepomniachtchi has been less successful than Carlsen or the American duo Hikaru Nakamura and Wesley So in the 2020 online Tour, but he is well placed for when over-the-board play resumes. The Russian is joint halfway leader in the Candidates, abandoned in April 2020 and planned for resumption in spring 2021, so has a serious chance to become Carlsen's official challenger. If he does, he can expect stronger support than Karjakin got against Carlsen at New York 2016. There is now a new Fide president, Arkady Dvorkovich, who has been impressive in the job but also remains committed to helping Russia regain its pre-eminence of the Soviet era.

The Russian women's championship went to the favourite, Aleksandra Goryachkina, as Polina Shuvalova, who won all her first six games, could not win another in the second half, where she was caught in the final rounds then lost an Armageddon tie-break.

England's 4NCL online league attracted 228 teams in six divisions in its second season which ended this week with a surprise winner. ChessPlus Kingston were the promoted second team of ChessPlus, which organises courses for actual and potential chess teachers in 14 European countries.

Its founder John Foley's contacts produced a strong team for the finals, led by two women whose careers have included Beth Harmon moments. Pia Cramling was within one move of defeating Viktor Korchnoi at his peak, while Dana Reizniece-Ozola beat the world No 1, Hou Yifan, at the 2016 Olympiad.

CPK won the semi-final against Guildford's youth team, then the final against Wood Green. The clincher came when CPK led 2-1 but Cramling had rook against the rook and two pawns of England's youngest GM, Dan Fernandez. She considered resigning, but "I had been telling my students not to give up early" and Fernandez blundered into a draw.

The result is a disappointment for Wood Green's Loz Cooper, probably England's best team manager, who helps many rising talents. This weekend Cooper is managing four teams of England women and girls in the 42-team Euro Club Cup for women.

**KUSHAL, AGED FIVE, BECOMES A LONDON CHAMPION**

A five-year-old boy who learnt the moves less than a year ago has set an age record by winning the London under-eight championship. This annual event, played online last weekend, started in the 1970s boom and launched the careers of England's elite GMs Gawain Jones and David Howell.

Most chess talents tend to emerge at seven, eight or nine, occasionally at six. Globally, the top prodigy was Samuel Reshevsky, who gave simulms at six and later became the best US player before Bobby Fischer – but there were claims that Reshevsky was born in 1909, not 1911.

Kushal Jakhria, five years eight months old and a first year pupil at the Pointer School, Blackheath, finished level with the top seed, Patrick Damodaran, on 6.5/7, but had a better tie-break. Both had winning chances during their drawn individual game.

Two years ago Damodaran, then five himself, missed out by half a point. He is now England's No 1 ranked under-nine, with a very respectable 1750 rating, and has already represented England in world events. Jakhria's, in contrast, has no over-the-board graded games yet, as he only began competitive play during the pandemic.

His under-eight victory was not just a one-off. Jakhria also scored 6/7 in the London under-10, and has a lichess rating in the top 9% of the website's 250,000 rapid chess players.

Jakhria's South-East London school has also produced England's best-known junior, Shreyas Royal. The Pointer chess coach, Fide Master Alexis Harakis, attributes his pupil's success to his exceptional pattern memory, visual skills and stamina for his age.

3702: 1 Be2! h6 2 Rh4! h5 3 Kg5! Ke4 4 Bf3 mate.

## Lucy Bronze and Robert Lewandowski named Fifa's best players of the year

**SUZANNE WRACK**  
**LONDON, 18 DEC**  
[THEGUARDIAN]: Lucy Bronze said she would "remember this moment for the rest of her life" after she became the first England player and first female defender to win one of Fifa's main awards, having been named the best women's player of the year.

"I don't think I have the words right now to explain how I'm feeling but if there's anything that 2020 has taught us, it's to appreciate every moment you have and not think too far ahead," Bronze said.

"[Being the first is] something that I'm always very proud of. There's no better way to be a role model than to show people there is a path. So to be the first and be successful at certain things shows so many people in England, so many little girls, so many defenders, that it is possible."

Bronze won the treble and her third successive Champions League trophy with Lyon before rejoining Manchester City, saying she brought with her the French champions' "crazy winning mentality, wanting to be the best". The 2019 European player of the year won her second FA Cup on her return to England, as City beat Everton in the pandemic-rescheduled final.

The 29-year-old, whom the England manager Phil Neville described as "the world's best" on the eve of



the 2019 World Cup, said she is "quite an obsessive person with winning". She added with a laugh: "Even when it comes to tying shoelaces the fastest, I've been very lucky to have an older brother who I've been competitive with. Actually, I need to say happy birthday to my brother, I've outshone him again, on his birthday."

Neville had also said Bronze is good enough to play against men. "Put me on the field and we'll find out," she laughed when reminded of his comments. "I think that's because one of my great assets is my physicality, I was genetically blessed, I guess. I would quite happily go toe to toe with anyone in that respect. So I'd welcome the competition. Phil was probably joking but there's a little bit of truth to it too, sometimes he joins us in training and gets a little bit embarrassed."

## IOC accused of ignoring human rights for 2022 Beijing Games

**WASHINGTON, DEC 18 (AP)**  
A coalition representing ethnic minorities in China is again accusing the International Olympic Committee of ignoring widespread human rights abuses as the country prepares to hold the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing.

Rights groups speaking for Tibetans, Uighurs and others representing Hong Kong have sent an open letter to IOC President Thomas Bach and IOC member Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr., who oversees preparations for the Beijing Games.

Obtained by The Associated Press, the letter says the IOC has "turned a blind eye to the widespread and systematic human rights violations being committed by the Chinese authorities."

Rights advocates are asking to see evidence which the IOC says it has received that China will abide by human rights commitments that it made when it was awarded the games in 2015.

It also says that China

has promised to allow unfettered reporting and to permit demonstrations or protests.

Athletes around the world have been pressing for more latitude to express themselves at the Olympics and argue that lobbying for human rights is not a political issue.

Representative of rights groups met two months ago with IOC leaders but say their requests have been largely ignored. They also sent an open letter three months ago asking the IOC to take the Olympics away from Beijing.

China is widely reported to have incarcerated more than a million Uighurs, a mostly Muslim ethnic group, in the western Xinjiang region.

China at first denied the existence of the camps, but now says they are training and education centers.

Forced labor, torture and forced sterilization and abortion are being widely reported in Xinjiang. The treatment of the religious minority has been termed "cultural genocide" or

"ethnic cleansing."

The campaign staff of President-elect Joe Biden suggested several months ago the treatment amounted to "genocide."

"History has shown us that the IOC has made an active decision to continue with the charade of political neutrality to justify its inaction towards China's human rights violations," the letter said.

"This willful ignorance is shameful and fails to value the personal experiences of all of us struggling under this repressive regime."

The IOC has repeatedly said it runs a sports event and is not responsible for domestic policies in the host country.

It repeated this in a statement to The Associated Press. It said that human rights issues had been raised with "government and local authorities" in China. It said it had received "assurances" but offered no details as the letter requested.

Beginning with the 2024 Olympics in Paris, cities will have to adhere to the United Nations Guiding Principles

the way to the Champions League final where the German champions beat Paris Saint-Germain.

Jürgen Klopp was named the men's coach of the year for the second time in a row after leading Liverpool to their first league title in 30 years. "I had no idea how it would feel and it felt absolutely overwhelming," he said of the Premier League triumph which followed last year's Champions League win.

The incoming England manager, Sarina Wiegman, collected the women's coach of the year award following an unbeaten Euro 2022 qualifying campaign with the Netherlands. She will take over from Neville after the Olympics next summer.

Son Heung-min's stunning solo goal for Tottenham against Burnley last December won the Puskas goal of the year award.

on Business and Human Rights.

However, China is not subject to these rules because the IOC mandated the provision after picking Beijing for 2022.

"For decades we have brought evidence to the IOC about the severe repression, the beatings, torture, and even death of our people at the hands of Chinese authorities, some linked directly to peaceful protests related to the Olympic Games," the letter said. "But the IOC has failed to act on these reports."

The Olympics open on Feb. 4, 2022. Beijing was chosen in a final vote over Almaty, Kazakhstan after several European venues dropped out over costs, or after referendums were rejected to hold the games.

China and other authoritarian states have become favored venues for Olympics and other mega-events since they never face public opposition and seldom openly question the costs.

## Rashford double as Man United fight back again to sink Blades

**SHEFFIELD, 18 DEC (REUTERS):** Marcus Rashford scored twice as Manchester United extended their 100 percent record on the road, coming from behind again to win 3-2 at the Premier League's bottom club Sheffield United on Thursday.

United have now won all six away league games this season -- conceding first on each occasion -- and the latest comeback victory moved them up to sixth place, on 23 points, five behind leaders Liverpool but with a game in hand. Sheffield United's solitary point from 13 matches is the worst start by a team in any top-flight campaign and the Blades have now lost eight matches in a row and 15 of their last 16 going back to last season.

Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer opted to play

keeper Dean Henderson ahead of David De Gea for the trip to Bramall Lane where the English keeper played and impressed on loan last season.

But Henderson made a nightmare start, getting caught in possession by Oliver Burke who slid the ball to David McGoldrick who fired the Blades into a fifth-minute lead.

John Fleck failed to take a great chance to make it 2-0 for Chris Wilder's team and that let-off sparked Manchester United into life.

After wasting a good opportunity with a wild shot, Rashford made no mistake in the 26th minute as he collected a long ball from Victor Lindelof with a deft first touch and deadly first-time strike.

Paul Pogba set up the second with a one-touch pass on the turn, over the top of the Sheffield defence to Anthony Martial, who rounded Aaron Ramsdale before slotting home.

**FINE MOVE**

Six minutes after the break, Rashford added his second to make it 3-1, finishing off a fine passing move started by Pogba, with a shot that squeezed under Ramsdale's body.

McGoldrick pulled one back for the Yorkshire strugglers three minutes from the end, heading in a corner from close range before Henderson made amends for his early mistake with a reflex save to keep out a Lys Mousset drive.

Solskjaer was pleased with most of United's display after another slow start.

"We played some brilliant

football between their first goal and their second goal - the end was a bit too uncomfortable for my liking," he said.

Asked about his players believing they could yet win the title, the Norwegian was cautious.

"We can't get our heads too far ahead, but I am happy the players might be thinking that way because that means recovery, focus is better and those little margins mean a lot," he said.

Wilder took heart from his side's performance.

"It has given myself and the players a belief that if we do play in the manner we played - especially out of possession - that there is something left in this season for us," he said.

"I will stick my head on the pillow tonight knowing the team has left everything out there."



## Implosion of former Trump casino pushed back a few weeks



**ATLANTIC CITY, DEC 18 (AP):** The implosion of one of President Donald Trump's former Atlantic City casinos is being delayed by a few weeks.

Atlantic City Mayor Marty Small said Thursday that the demolition company handling the job told the city the former Trump Plaza casino cannot

be brought down as scheduled on Jan. 29.

A more likely date is sometime in February, although a firm date has not yet been set, the mayor said.

The city is using the demolition as an opportunity to raise funds for the Boys And Girls Club of Atlantic City. Small said he hopes to exceed 1 million from the auction. The highest bidder

will win the right to press the button that implodes the building.

Trump Plaza opened in 1984, and was the site of numerous high-profile boxing matches that Trump, then a real estate developer, attended.

It shut down in 2014 and has fallen into disrepair, necessitating its demolition.

The property is currently owned by billionaire investor Carl Icahn.

## Freed Nigerian schoolboys welcomed after week of captivity

**KATSINA, NIGERIA (AP):** More than 300 Nigerian schoolboys, freed after being kidnapped last week in an attack on their school, have arrived in the capital of Katsina state to celebrations of their release.

The boys were abducted on the night of Dec. 11 from the all-boys Government Science Secondary School in Kankara village in Katsina state in northwestern Nigeria.

The students arrived Friday in Katsina, the capital of the state, and met with Katsina Gov. Aminu Bello Masari.

Beary-eyed and appearing stunned by their ordeal, the boys piled into chairs in a conference room, most still in their school uniforms, some wrapped in gray blankets. The oldest of the boys sat in the front row and were greeted by officials.

Masari had announced their release late Thursday, saying 344 boarding school students were turned over to security officials. Masari told The Associated Press that no ransom was not paid to secure the boys' freedom.

"I think we can say ...



we have recovered most of the boys, if not all of them," he said.

The boys from the secondary boarding school will get physical examinations in the state capital before being reunited with their families, the governor said.

Nigeria's Boko Haram jihadist rebels claimed responsibility for the abduction. Leader Abubakar Shekau said they attacked the school because they believe Western education is un-Islamic.

More than 800 students were in attendance at the time of the attack. Hundreds escaped, but it was believed that more than 330 were taken.

The government had said it was negotiating with the school attackers, originally described as bandits. Experts say the attack was likely

carried out by local gangs, who have staged increasingly deadly assaults in northwest Nigeria this year, who were collaborating with Boko Haram. Armed bandits, also known for kidnappings for ransom, have killed more than 1,100 people since the beginning of the year in the region, according to Amnesty International.

Friday's abduction was a chilling reminder of Boko Haram's previous attacks on schools. In February 2014, 59 boys were killed when the jihadists attacked the Federal Government College Buni Yadi in Yobe state.

In April 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped more than 270 schoolgirls from a government boarding school in Chibok in northeastern Borno state. About 100 of those girls are still missing.

While President Muhammadu Buhari cited the release of the Dapchi schoolgirls as a success during a statement to the public late Thursday, he reiterated that there was still a lot of work to do.

Amid an outcry in the West African nation over insecurity in the north, Buhari noted his administration's successful efforts to secure the release of previously abducted students. He added that the government "is acutely aware of its responsibility to protect the life and property of the Nigerians."

"We have a lot of work to do, especially now that we have reopened the borders," Buhari said, acknowledging that Nigeria's northwest region "presents a problem" the administration "is determined to deal with.

## Virus-stricken Macron at presidential retreat with fever

**PARIS (AP):** As French President Emmanuel Macron rides out the coronavirus in a presidential retreat at Versailles, French doctors are warning families who are heading for the holidays to remain cautious because of an uptick in infections — especially at the dinner table.

While Macron routinely wears a mask and adheres to social distancing rules, he hosted or took part in multiple group meals in the days before testing positive Thursday. Critics say that's a bad example for compatriots advised to keep their gatherings

to six people.

Macron is suffering from fever, cough and fatigue, officials with the presidency said Friday. They wouldn't provide details of his treatment. He is staying at the presidential residence of La Lanterne in the former royal city of Versailles.

Macron's positive test comes as French health authorities are again seeing a rise in infections and warning of more as French families prepare to get together for Christmas and New Year festivities. France reported another 18,254 new infections Thursday and its death

toll is just under 60,000.

France's Pasteur Institute released a study Friday suggesting that meal times at home and in public are a major source of contamination. Pasteur epidemiologist Arnaud Fontanet said on France-Inter radio Friday that during the holidays, "we can see each other, simply not be too numerous, and at critical moments at meals, not too many people at the same table."

Macron's aides have scrambled to contact all the people he had been near in recent days. The French health minister suggested that he might

have been infected at an EU summit in Brussels last week, but Macron had multiple meetings in Paris as well.

Macron took a test "as soon as the first symptoms appeared" on Thursday morning and will self-isolate for seven days, in line with national health authorities' recommendations, the presidency said in a brief statement. The 42-year-old president "will continue to work and take care of his activities at a distance," the statement added. Macron went ahead with a planned speech by videoconference Thursday.

## Pelosi, McConnell to get vaccine, urge members to do same

**WASHINGTON, DEC 18 (AP):** The top leaders of the US House and Senate will be receiving the coronavirus vaccine this week, and Congress' attending physician has informed members that they are all eligible for the shots under government continuity guidelines.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell both said Thursday that they will get vaccinated in the next few days.

Pelosi, D-Calif., is third in the line of succession for the presidency, after President Donald Trump and Vice President

Mike Pence. McConnell, R-Ky., is not in the line of succession, but as majority leader, he is in charge of running the Senate.

In a statement Thursday, Pelosi said: We must all continue to embrace testing, tracing, treatment, mask wearing and social distancing as the vaccine is being distributed.

It is imperative that we ensure that the vaccine will be free and delivered in a fair, equitable manner to as many Americans as soon as possible and that we accelerate its manufacture, including by invoking the Defense



Production Act.

McConnell said that as a polio survivor, he is especially aware of the extraordinary promise of hope vaccines offer. He said he'll continue to wear a mask and follow other health guidelines.

Dr. Brian P. Monahan, the Capitol physician, sent a letter to lawmakers urging them to make appointments

with his office to be vaccinated.

Once we have completed the vaccination of the Members, we will follow a process to identify the continuity-essential staff members, Monahan said, adding that his office would continue with appointments until the small vaccine supply is exhausted.

## Iran builds at underground nuclear facility amid US tensions

**DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (AP):** Iran has begun construction on a site at its underground nuclear facility at Fordo amid tensions with the U.S. over its atomic program, satellite photos obtained Friday by The Associated Press show.

Iran has not publicly acknowledged any new construction at Fordo, whose discovery by the West in 2009 came in an earlier round of brinkmanship before world powers struck the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran.

While the purpose of the building remains unclear, any work at Fordo likely will trigger new concern in the waning days of the Trump administration before the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden. Already, Iran is building at its Natanz nuclear facility after a mysterious explosion in July there that Tehran described as a sabotage attack.

"Any changes at this site will be carefully watched as a sign of where Iran's nuclear program is headed," said Jeffrey Lewis, an expert at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies who studies Iran.

Iran's mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The International Atomic Energy Agency, whose inspectors are in Iran as part of the nuclear deal, also did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The IAEA as of yet has not publicly disclosed if Iran informed it of any construction at Fordo.

Construction on the Fordo site began in late September. Satellite images obtained from Maxar Technologies by the AP show the construction taking place at a northwest corner of



the site, near the holy Shiite city of Qom some 90 kilometers (55 miles) southwest of Tehran.

A Dec. 11 satellite photo shows what appears to be a dug foundation for a building with dozens of pillars. Such pillars can be used in construction to support buildings in earthquake zones.

The construction site sits northwest of Fordo's underground facility, built deep inside a mountain to protect it from potential airstrikes. The site is near other support and research-and-development buildings at Fordo.

Among those buildings is Iran's National Vacuum Technology Center. Vacuum technology is a crucial component of Iran's uranium-gas centrifuges, which enrich uranium.

A Twitter account called Observer IL earlier this week published an image of Fordo showing the construction, citing it as coming from South Korea's Korea Aerospace Research Institute.

The AP later reached the Twitter user, who identified himself as a retired Israeli Defense Forces soldier with a civil engineering background.

He asked that his name not be published over previous threats he received online. The Korea Aerospace Research Institute acknowledged taking the

satellite photo.

Trump in 2018 unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from Iran's nuclear deal, in which Tehran had agreed to limit its uranium enrichment in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. Trump cited Iran's ballistic missile program, its regional policies and other issues in withdrawing from the accord, though the deal focused entirely on Tehran's atomic program.

When the U.S. ramped up sanctions, Iran gradually and publicly abandoned the deal's limits as a series of escalating incidents pushed the two countries to the brink of war at the beginning of the year. Tensions still remain high.

Under the 2015 nuclear deal, Iran agreed to stop enriching uranium at Fordo and instead make it "a nuclear, physics and technology center."

"This location was a major sticking point in negotiations leading to the Iran nuclear deal," Lewis said. "The U.S. insisted Iran close it while Iran's supreme leader said keeping it was a red line."

Since the deal's collapse, Iran has resumed enrichment there.

Shielded by the mountains, the facility also is ringed by anti-aircraft guns and other fortifications. It is about

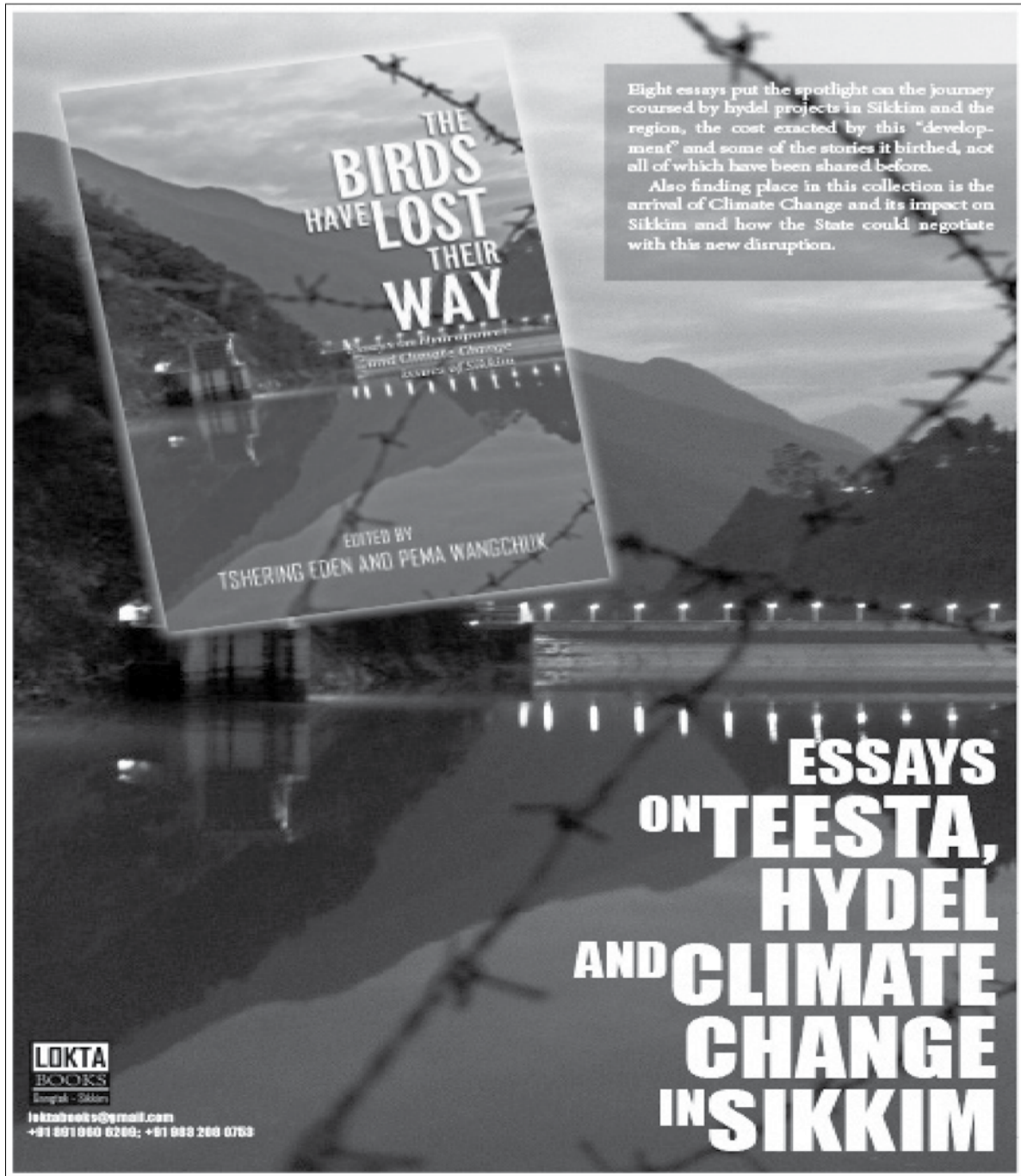
the size of a football field, large enough to house 3,000 centrifuges, but small and hardened enough to lead U.S. officials to suspect it had a military purpose when they exposed the site publicly in 2009.

As of now, Iran is enriching uranium up to 4.5%, in violation of the accord's limit of 3.67%. Iran's parliament has passed a bill that requires Tehran to enrich up to 20%, a short technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%. The bill also would throw out IAEA inspectors.

Experts say Iran now has enough low-enriched uranium stockpiled for at least two nuclear weapons, if it chose to pursue them. Iran long has maintained its nuclear program is peaceful.

While Iranian President Hassan Rouhani opposed the bill, the country's Guardian Council later tweaked and approved it. The bill seeks to pressure European nations to provide relief from crippling U.S. sanctions.

Meanwhile, an Iranian scientist who created its military nuclear program two decades ago recently was killed in a shooting outside of Tehran. Iran has blamed Israel, which has long been suspected of killing Iranian nuclear scientists over the last decade, for the attack. Israel has not commented on the attack.





**TOTALLY MOD!** The "Levitating" singer, Dua Lipa rocks a matching bold mod print puffer coat, pants and shoes while out in New York City.

## Noomi Rapace to lead Ali Abbasi's 'Hamlet'

**LOS ANGELES, DEC 18 (PTI):** Noomi Rapace, popular for films like "The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo" and "Prometheus", has come on board to feature in the new film adaptation of Shakespeare's play "Hamlet".

The film will be helmed by Ali Abbasi, known for directing "Border", the Oscar -nominated sleeper hit.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, Icelandic writer Sjon, who co-wrote Robert Eggers' upcoming "The Northman", is working on the script.

"Hamlet", the play in which the titular Danish prince enacts bloody revenge on his uncle for killing his father and marrying his mother, has been a dream project for Rapace, the Scandinavian actor said.

"'Hamlet' is a dream project in its purest and most explosive way. I've been hoping, dreaming, wishing for this as long as I've been an actress. I base this as much on the material as on the creative alliance that surrounds it... To take on a Danish story with a Scandinavian touch and bring it out into the world with this group of people is a dream," she said.

Abbasi said it was time to make "Hamlet" great again.



"Shakespeare stole the Hamlet story from us. Now it's our turn to claim it back and make a version so insane and so bloody that it makes him turn in his grave," the director quipped.

Abbasi will reunite with his "Border" producers Meta Film for the project.

Meta Film's Stine Meldgaard Madsen will produce in collaboration with Boom Films.

Details of the project are still under wraps but principle photography is set for autumn 2021.

"Hamlet" has been adapted for the screen numerous times, including Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 version starring Mel Gibson as Hamlet, Michael Almereyda's take with Ethan Hawke in the title role and Kenneth Branagh's four-hour version from 1996.

# Dhanush joins cast of Russo brothers' 'The Gray Man'



**LOS ANGELES, DEC 18 (PTI):** Dhanush, known for movies such as "Aadukalam" and "Raanjhanaa", is set to make his debut in Hollywood as the actor has joined the cast of Ryan Gosling and Chris Evans-starrer "The Gray Man".

The movie, set up at Netflix by filmmaker duo Anthony and Joe Russo, is based on Mark Greaney's 2009 novel of the same name and revolves around freelance assassin and former CIA operative Court Gentry (Gosling).

It follows Gentry as he is hunted across the world by Lloyd Hansen (Evans), a former member of Gentry's CIA team.

Dhanush joins the cast along with "Narcos" star Wagner Moura, "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood" child actor Julia Butters and "Game of Thrones" alum Jessica Henwick, Netflix said in a post on Twitter.

The details of their characters have been kept under wraps.

"The Gray Man" will also feature actor Ana de Armas in a pivotal role.

Netflix aims is to create a new franchise with a James Bond level of scale and a budget upward of USD 200 million.

Anthony and Joe Russo will be producing the project through their AGBO banner.

Joe Russo wrote the script, with "Avengers: Endgame" screenwriters Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely polishing the final draft.

AGBO's Mike Larocca, along with Joe Roth and Jeff Kirschenbaum for Roth Kirschenbaum, are also on board as producers.

The makers are planning to start the filming in January in Los Angeles while international locations are still being finalised.

Dhanush has previously featured in 2018's English-language movie "The Extraordinary Journey of the Fakir", directed by Ken Scott.

He is currently working on filmmaker Aanad L Rai's "Atrangi Re", opposite Akshay Kumar and Sara Ali Khan.

## 'Star Wars' actor Jeremy Bulloch dies

**LONDON, DEC 18 (PTI):** English actor Jeremy Bulloch, who played bounty hunter Boba Fett in George Lucas' original "Star Wars" trilogy, has died. He was 75.

According to The Guardian, the actor passed away on Thursday at a hospital in London after years of living with Parkinson's disease. His agent said his death was due to "health complications".

"He died peacefully, in hospital, surrounded by his family. Jeremy was best-known for the role of Boba Fett in the original 'Star Wars' trilogy.

"He had a long and happy career spanning more than 45 years. He was devoted to his wife, three sons and 10 grandchildren and they will miss him terribly. We ask that their privacy be respected at this very difficult time," the agent said in a statement.

Born in Market Harborough, Leicestershire, Bulloch broke into limelight with his portrayal of Boba Fett in Lucas' "The Empire Strikes Back" in 1980 and "Return of the Jedi" in 1983.

The actor had a lengthy career, appearing in several films and television shows, including James Bond movie "Octopussy", "Doctor Who" and "Robin of Sherwood".

Many actors from the "Star Wars", including Mark Hamill, Billy Dee Williams and director Lucas, paid tributes to Bulloch on social media.

Hamill, who played Luke Skywalker in the series, said in a post on Twitter, "Jeremy Bulloch was the quintessential English gentleman. A fine actor, delightful company & so kind to everyone lucky enough to meet or work with him."

"I will deeply miss him & am so grateful to have known him. RIP DearJeremy," he added.

Williams, who essayed the role of Lando Calrissian, posted, "Today we lost the best bounty hunter in the galaxy, RIP Jeremy Bulloch Boba Fett."

Lucas said Bulloch did justice to the character of Boba Fett by bringing a "perfect combination of mystery and menace" to his performance.

"In addition, Jeremy was a true gentleman who was very supportive of 'Star Wars' and its fans, and I'm very grateful for his contributions to the saga and its legacy," he added.

Daniel Logan, who portrayed a young version of Boba Fett in the 2002 prequel "Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones", also remembered the star on Instagram.

"RIP legend I'll never forget all you've taught me!! I'll love you forever!! Conventions won't be the same without you may the force be with you always," he said.

Pedro Pascal, the star of Disney Plus series "The Mandalorian", wrote on Twitter, "#RIP #JeremyBulloch #MayTheForceBeWithYou"

The official Twitter account of "Star Wars" tweeted, "He will be remembered not only for his iconic portrayal of the legendary character, but also for his warmth and generous spirit which have become an enduring part of his rich legacy."

## Jennifer Lopez to front Netflix's 'The Cipher'

**LOS ANGELES, DEC 18 (PTI):** Singer-actor Jennifer Lopez is set to topline the feature "The Cipher" for Netflix. The film is based on author Isabella Maldonado novel of the same name and the streamer optioned the book for Lopez and producing partners Elaine Goldsmith-Thomas and Benny Medina, reported Variety.

The "Hustlers" star will essay the role of FBI agent Nina Guerrero, who is pulled into a serial killer's case after he leaves complex codes and riddles online, which are linked to his recent murders.

Executive producers for the project are Liza Fleissig, Ginger Harris-Dontzin, Catherine Hagedorn and Maldonado.

Courtney Baxter will serve as associate producer.

Lopez will next feature in Universal Pictures "Marry Me" as well as filmmaker Reed Morano's "The Godmother".

She will also star in Lionsgate's "Shotgun Wedding", about a couple whose destination wedding is hijacked by criminals, co-starring Armie Hammer.



### ARIES:

The future is uncertain, Aries. The past? One you cannot go back into. So why are you spending so much time oscillating between the two? The cards are urging you to breathe and be here now. The present moment is where the magic is at. It's where the magic has been all along.

Tip: Be here now.

### TAURUS:

You've already done the dirty work, Taurus. You've hustled your way to the top. Now it's time for you to kick back, relax, and enjoy the fruits of your labour. So \*allow\* the Universe, and the people in your life, to come through for you. Allow yourself to receive what has always been yours. The more connected you are with the cosmic flow, the easier it will be for you to get things done around here.

### GEMINI:

What happens when we refuse to acknowledge a soul lesson? What happens when we make the same mistake over and over, and blame our circumstances for this? You're stuck in a loop and it's time to break out of it with love and awareness, Gemini. Turning on the light can lead to temporary blindness, and that's okay. Living in denial is something you no longer resonate with. Tip: It's time to break the cycle.

### CANCER:

Most modern yoga practitioners focus on the asanas or the exercises. There's no denying that challenging our bodies to get into form has a positive effect on our physical appearance. But when did the ancient practice become limited to postures alone? Today, you're being asked to focus on prayama, or breath work, which is a wonderful way to activate the circulation of energy throughout your body. Remember, sculpting your body is only one aspect. The ultimate goal is mind, body, and soul integration.

Tip: Focus on breath work as a way to alleviate stress and tension.

### LEO:

The cosmic confluence today is bringing all kinds of rare and precious opportunities to your doorstep. Strike when the iron is hot, Leo. This will help you take your career to a whole new level. Some may feel inspired to make a drastic career move, one that will open the door to prosperity. Let fearlessness continue to be your superpower in your journey to greatness.

Tip: The Universe is \*always\* playing on your team!

### VIRGO:

Expanding your business is showing up as a big theme, especially for those who are working on

something of their own. You may or may not have the funds to pull off something major, but don't let that deter you from dreaming big. The cards are pointing towards the exchange of gifts. In other words, you could offer your product (or service) to the other person in exchange for the support they render to the given enterprise. PS: creativity will help you open new doors! Tip: An exchange of gifts is indicated, which will facilitate the growth of your business.

### LIBRA:

You could do everything on your own, but where's the fun in that? Your tribe is coming through for you, Libra, so stay open and allow yourself to receive the assistance they want to provide you with at this moment. Yes, there is a way to make things easier around here. Be patient. As such, the need for rest and rejuvenation is also indicated. Do as much as is required of you this weekend. The bigger decisions can be figured out once clarity prevails.

Tip: Allow yourself to receive assistance.

### SCORPIO:

You are prepared for this change, Scorpio, as you have been working towards it for a lifetime. So trust in your abilities and take the next step. You won't regret a thing—we promise! For some, this change may be a monumental one—getting

hitched or taking on a new role, for instance. Others may receive rewards or public recognition for their contribution. No matter what transpires today, trust that you'll have plenty of reasons to celebrate.

Tip: You are prepared for this!

### SAGITTARIUS:

There are days when we participate in the game of life fully, and then there are days we watch everything that's unfolding as if it were a show. You're definitely having a 'save the drama for your mama' kind of weekend, Sagittarius, which is inspiring you to consciously cut the BS away. So spend time meditating, contemplating, making art, or poring over your favourite book. Connect with nature in order to harmonise your energy. Walking barefoot on the grass/sand, hugging a tree, or tending to your garden are some of the ways you can cultivate both inner peace \*and\* a deeper relationship with Mother Earth.

Tip: Eliminate the things that are not worth your time and energy.

### CAPRICORN:

The foundation you have laid is strong, but what's the next step? Now is not the time to stagnate, Capricorn. Look beyond the realm of possibilities. Ponder upon what you can create. Aligning action with intention is a powerful tool

of transformation. Given the state of affairs, you may be anxious about the future of this enterprise. Challenge yourself to take the next step anyway, knowing that the right people and resources will be made available to you.

Tip: Focus on the next step.

### AQUARIUS:

There's no such thing as coincidences. You have crossed paths with them for a reason. The butterflies in your stomach are reaffirming that it is time to invest in this relationship. Remember, following the rules has never been your style. Do as your heart is guiding you to, as you hold space for this love to blossom. Single water bearers who've been thinking about calling in a soulmate, now is the time. The Universe is supporting you in your mission to experience love in its most glorious form.

Tip: You are here to love and be loved.

### PISCES:

Hello, and welcome to the land of infinite possibilities, Pisces! You are about to unlock the next level of your life, and the potential of what you can create as a result of this cosmic confluence is limitless. So welcome the change, no matter how chaotic it may seem on the outside. Keep in mind that your higher self is working behind the scenes to bring joyous tidings to your doorstep.