



**BRET MICHAELS IS SELLING HIS
TOUR BUS FOR \$170,000**
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**CONSERVATIVE ISLAMIC VIEWS
ARE GAINING GROUND IN SECULAR
BANGLADESH AND CURBING
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

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**'CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE'
MIGHT GETS ITS OWN BATTLE
ROYALE MODE NEXT MONTH**

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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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On anniv of Gangtok rally, aggrieved adhoc teacher highlights continuing denials

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

An adhoc teacher, Prakash Parajuli, today alleged that the both, the former and the present governments have failed to address the issues and problems being faced by adhoc teachers in the State.

His statement was to mark the anniversary of 19 February last year when adhoc teachers had taken out a massive rally in Gangtok demanding regularization of their services. Four teachers, including Mr Parajuli, had been taken into custody on the day marked with confrontation and tension in the capital, it may be recalled.

Addressing a press



conference here today, Mr Parajuli held up 19 February as 'Sikshak Chetna Diwas' [Teachers Awakening Day] and congratulated all teachers who had participated

in the movement.

He contended that although adhoc teachers had taken to the roads for their rights, their demands remain pending till date despite assuranc-

es made on the day in the run-up to the elections.

He stated that there were two types of teachers in government schools - regular and adhoc - who work equally hard but are

not paid the same.

Mr Parajuli stressed that this practice has been affecting teachers emotionally and would ultimately affect the development of students and schools as well.

He said, "Our movement is not only for job regularization but change in the system which allows such disparity."

He stressed the need to eradicate the adhoc system and insists that all appointments be on regular basis. In this regard, he said that the recent notification for appointment of adhoc teachers was a clear sign that the Department has no plans to end the adhoc system of teacher appointment.

NSS volunteers begin leadership and personality development camp



SAGAR CHETTRI

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

Five-day Inter Institutional Camp on Leadership and Personality Development for National Service Scheme [NSS] volunteers was inaugurated by the Minister for Sports & Youth Affairs Department, Kunga Nima Lepcha here at the Paljor Stadium complex on Wednesday.

The camp is being organized by NSS Cell of Sports & Youth Affairs Department, Government of Sikkim and funded by Regional Office Guwahati under Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, Government of India.

A total of 200 NSS volunteers from 100 educational institutions from different parts of the State are taking part in this residential camp. The five-day camp has life skill and leadership training sessions by resource persons from in and outside the State along with other sessions in different subjects.

Experienced life skill trainer, Ratna Singh from Guwahati, Senior Consultant from Blood Bank of

STNM Hospital, Dr CM Sharma, senior Psychiatrist, Dr Satish Rasaily and others resource persons will take sessions in their respective subjects. The camp will also have yoga and Zumba sessions by Tashi Lhamu Bhutia every morning.

In his inaugural address, the Minister expressed his happiness on the huge participation of NSS volunteers from different parts of the State in the camp. He said that such camps will help students to develop their personality and leadership quality and produce leaders for the society on different fronts.

While referring to NSS volunteers as Ambassadors, he encouraged participants to lead the society on the right path by carrying the right message to make the State vibrant.

"We need leaders on different fronts to lead the society on the positive and right path," he expressed.

Likewise, Secretary to Sports & Youth Affairs Department, Kuber Bhandari expressed that

activities in the camp would help in the holistic development of students. He stated that the overall development of students is the focus of the programme to make them responsible citizens of the society.

"We have been facing issues like drug abuse and NSS volunteers can play an important role in eradicating such menace from the society," he said. He added that such camps will further strengthen the bond and friendship between students from across the State.

Earlier, in her welcome address, Additional Director Sports & Youth Affairs Department, Doma Tshering Bhutia gave details of the five-day long camp. She informed that two NSS volunteers each from 75 senior secondary schools, 22 colleges and 03 universities of the State are participating in the camp. She stated that experts from different fields will take sessions in their respective subjects.

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Whale shark population declined by 63pc in 75 yrs: WTI

ADITI GUPTA

GANDHINAGAR, FEB 19

(PTI): The population of whale sharks, one of the endangered migratory species, has declined by 63 per cent in last 75 years in the Indo-Pacific region, a nature conservation body has said while urging the government to intensify steps and train enforcement agencies to conserve the species.

Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) said whale sharks, the largest living fish in the world, are vanishing from the face of the earth due to factors like climate change, rampant fishing and ocean pollution.

However, a senior official from the Union Environment ministry said efforts were on to revive the number of whale sharks and if needed, the government will spend around Rs 2-3 crores annually for its conservation.

Whale sharks have been classified as endangered in the red list of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and are also called 'Gentle Giants' with maximum aggregation off the Gujarat coast.

Sajan John, marine expert from WTI, said these giants are mainly targeted for their meat but ocean pollution and warming were also affecting them.

"India needs to have a stronger dialogue with countries to protect this mega fauna which migrates from one country's coast to another and gets killed on the way.

"The population of these large and vulnerable aquatic animals which are deliberately targeted for meat, has

declined by 63 per cent in the last over seven decades, also due to other factors like climate change, ocean pollution and fishing pressure," John said at the sidelines of The 13th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS COP 13) here.

WTI is working with the Gujarat government to rescue whale sharks which get stuck in fishing nets along its coast.

John said fishing of whale sharks is also done to collect and trade its fins.

"Though government has banned export of shark fins, illegally it is still being done," said the WTI official.

John also urged that the government should be proactive and intensify its steps to conserve the species.

"The enforcement agencies like Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, Customs etc should be trained on how to identify protected species of sharks. Capacity building of the enforcement team is a major thing that needs to be strengthened.

"Government needs to intensify the steps it is taking. Information dissemination in stages has to be ensured. People at ground level should also be aware of the importance of protected species," he said.

Soumitra Dasgupta, IG, Wildlife, Union Environment Ministry said, "Whale sharks have been under tremendous threat. Their population has seen a sharp decline but with the assistance of fishing community and WTI, revival work is going on.

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BJP Sikkim welcomes re-anointed president Chauhan

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

The newly appointed president of Bharatiya Janata Party Sikkim Pradesh, DB Chauhan was welcomed in a reception programme held at Singtam party office on Wednesday. The programme was organised by BJP workers of East and North Districts.

In the reception programme, two of BJP's 12 MLAs, YT Lepcha and ST Venchungpa, joined party workers in congratulating and extending best wishes to the newly appointed state president.

A BJP press release informs that in his address the state president said that the party



activities will be taken forward by forming the new state-level working committee of the party in consultation with the Central leadership.

He stated that some individuals in the party

have been running their personal agenda under the BJP mask and asserted that party workers should follow the direction and decision of the party and not of any individual.

turn to pg 02

Necessary to prevent statelessness when nationality laws are changed: UN chief

SAJJAD HUSSAIN

ISLAMABAD, FEB 19 (PTI): Amid concerns over India's Citizenship Amendment Act and the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC), UN chief Antonio Guterres has said it is necessary to do everything to prevent "statelessness" when a nationality law is changed.

Guterres, who was on a three-day visit to Pakistan, when asked whether he was concerned about new laws in India during an interview, said, "Of course (I am concerned). Because this is an area in which the relevant UN body is quite active."

"The present High Commissioner for Refugees is quite active to this situation like many others like this. Because there is risk of statelessness created by those national laws," the UN Secretary General told Dawn News TV. "It is abso-

lutely essential when a nationality law is changed, the statelessness is prevented. Because when basic right of anyone anywhere is to have a country that a person calls his, then everything should be done in order to avoid statelessness, he said.

The new citizenship law passed by the Indian Parliament in December 2019 offers citizenship to non-Muslim persecuted religious minorities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. After the enactment of the law, protests erupted across the country over fears that it may marginalise the minority Muslim community.

The Indian government has maintained that the CAA is an internal matter of the country and stressed that the goal is to protect the oppressed minorities of neighbouring countries.

The NRC has been prepared to identify genuine Indian citizens living in Assam since March 24, 1971, or before, and identify illegal Bangladeshi migrants in the state.

Out of 3.3 crore applicants, over 19 lakh people were excluded from the final NRC published on August 30.

On Kashmir, Guterres said two reports by the UN High Commissioner on Kashmir played an important role in clarifying exactly what is happening there and it is essential that these reports are taken seriously.

Guterres on Sunday said in Islamabad that he was concerned over the situation in Kashmir, and that he was ready to mediate between India and Pakistan to resolve the long pending issue.

Reacting to his offer, India said the

real issue needed to be addressed is to vacate territories "illegally and forcibly" occupied by Pakistan.

"India's position has not changed. Jammu and Kashmir has been, is, and will continue to be an integral part of India. The issue that needs to be addressed is that of vacation of the territories illegally and forcibly occupied by Pakistan," the Ministry of External Affairs said in New Delhi.

"Further issues, if any, would be discussed bilaterally. There is no role or scope for third-party mediation," it said.

India revoked Jammu and Kashmir's special status on August 5. Reacting to India's move, Pakistan downgraded diplomatic ties with New Delhi and expelled the Indian High Commissioner.

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Summit Times in Nepali



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SPCC accuses SKM of turning against drivers

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

Sikkim Pradesh Congress Committee has said that taxi drivers played a huge role in bringing Sikkim Krantikari Morcha to power but they are now being ill-treated by the SKM government.

In a press release, SPCC has accused the SKM government of raising crores of money from drivers by using the new Motor Vehicle Act. The drivers supported the party but they are suffering under the new government, the party has alleged.

SPCC has further alleged that there have been many instances of bad behaviour by the police and Transport department towards drivers. The party has also suggested that the revenue collected from drivers should be used to maintain roads and in the interest of drivers.

I&B minister Javadekar releases India 2020 yearbook

NEW DELHI, FEB 19 (PTI):

Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar on Wednesday released the India 2020 yearbook that highlights the flagship programmes of the government and important events of the year.

“The book is a complete reference manual for all people including those appearing for competitive examinations,” Javadekar said at the launch of the book.

The minister congratulated the Publications Division for coming out with the publication and said the book is becoming popular by the day. Javadekar also released the e-version of the publication.

The e-version can be accessed on a variety of devices such as tablets, computers, e-readers and smart phones. The book will be priced at Rs 300 and the e-book will be available at Rs 225. The book can be purchased online from February 20, 2020, from the website of the Publications Division.

Brought out jointly by the Publications Division and the New Media Wing of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, it is the 64th edition of the compilation.

‘India/Bharat -2020’ carries exhaustive and comprehensive information about India and the activities, progress and achievements of various government ministries/departments/organisations during the year, a statement said.

The book deals with all aspects of country’s development -- from rural to urban, industry to science and technology to human resource development, it added.

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Chuwatar Deaddiction Centre employees seek Govt support

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

Aggrieved employees of the Deaddiction Center, Chuwatar, Sawney in West Pendam have urged the state government to intervene and help the centre, which is on the verge of shutting down due to shortage of manpower.

According to the employees, lack of manpower is also making it difficult to provide proper treatment at the centre.

The deaddiction center was inaugurated by former Health Minister, AK Ghatani on 25 June, 2018.

It may be mentioned here that the elev-

en-bedded Centre was constructed at an estimated cost of Rs 89 lakh. The two storied building comprises of Male wards and rooms for Doctor, Counsellor, Psychologist, storage, Waiting Hall, MDR Card, Pharmacy and recreation, Multipurpose Hall, Canteen along with kitchen for OPD patients etc.

West farmers trained in raising vegetable seedlings

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

A training program in organic farming was organized by Mevedir service provider agency at Lower Daramdin and Tarey Bhir in Sombaria area in West Sikkim on 17 and 18 Feb, 2020, a press release informs.

The resource person of this program was Suzan Ahmed (Mevedir Agronomist), Rupen Tamang (Field Supervisor) along with Field staff, Bhumika Chettri and Ghanendra Sharma.

The training was held to raise awareness and introduce techniques in planting seeds in appropriate manner and raising seedling of vegetables in pro tray in poly houses. The farmers were trained on preparing soil mixture with a combination of soil, farm yard manure, sand and coco peat



– how such soil preparations decreases mortality rate and prepared healthy planting material.

Thereafter the farmers of the two clusters were given a demonstration on sowing the seeds and the methods of fertigation.

Mr Ahmed distributed sample seeds of zucchini crop, broccoli and red cabbage to the farmers and each of them sowed the seeds using appropriate technology. The next session was facilitated by Ruben Ta-

mang who explained how to prepare main field and transplant these crops using Neem Cake.

Before concluding Mr. Ahmed assured the farmers to give all the support that is needed for the production of crops and whatever material that is grown by the farmers, the same would be marketed by Mevedir.

The training was attended by more than 25 farmers from the two sites of Daramdin and Tarey Bhir.

Poet, journo held over recital of anti-CAA poem at govt function in Karnataka

BENGALURU, FEB 19 (PTI):

A poet and a journalist have been arrested in connection with recital of a poem against CAA and NRC at a government sponsored function in Koppal district of Karnataka last month, police said on Wednesday.

The arrests were made based on a complaint from a BJP functionary alleging that Siraj Bisaralli, a poet had recited an anti-CAA poem at ‘Anegundi Utsava’ in Gangavathi town of Koppal district in January and Rajabaxi, editor of an online news portal uploaded it on social media.

Police had registered a case against them under section 505 of IPC (statements conducing to public mischief).

On Tuesday, Bisaralli and Rajabaxi surrendered before a court in that district, which rejected their

bail plea and remanded them to police custody for investigation into the matter. “Siraj had recited the poem and Rajabaxi had shared it on the social media. Based on a complaint by a BJP leader the case was registered under section 505 of the IPC.

They went absconding after that and surrendered before the court on Tuesday,” a police officer told PTI. The duo sought an interim bail, which the public prosecutor objected to and sought police custody to conduct inquiry.

The court granted sent Bisaralli and Rajabaxi to police custody till Wednesday afternoon.

“We may not seek further extension of their custody until some fresh evidences surface. We have seized their mobile phones to ascertain whom they had shared the details with,” police said.

Govt makes crop insurance schemes voluntary for farmers

NEW DELHI, FEB 19 (PTI): The government on Wednesday made its flagship crop insurance schemes voluntary for farmers with existing crop loans or those willing to take new ones, as it seeks to address the concerns raised by farmers’ body and states in implementation of these programmes.

“The Union Cabinet has approved revamping of ‘Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMF-BY)’ and ‘Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme (RWBCIS)’ to address the existing challenges in implementation of crop insurance schemes,” an official statement said.

Under the PMFBY, which was launched in February 2016 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it is mandatory for loanee farmers to take insurance cover under this scheme.

The PMFBY provides comprehensive crop insurance from pre-sowing to post-harvest period against non-preventable natural risks at extremely low premium rate of 2 per cent for kharif crops, 1.5 per cent for rabi crops and 5 per cent for horticulture and commercial crops.

The Cabinet approved modification of certain parameters/provisions of ongoing PMFBY and RWBCIS schemes.

“Enrolment under the scheme to be made voluntary for all farmers (both PMFBY/RWBCIS),” Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar told re-

porters here.

He said currently 58 per cent of total farmers are loanee and the remaining 42 per cent are non-loanee. The number of farmers opting for these crop insurance schemes may drop immediately but the enrolment would eventually pick up, Tomar said.

The minister said the government would launch a campaign for creating awareness among farmers about the need to take a crop insurance policy.

These modifications will help in addressing the concerns raised about the PMFBY scheme by farmers organisations and states, he said.

Among other modification, Tomar said the allocation of business to insurance firms through tender process would be done for three years as against the current policy of one to three years.

“Central share in premium subsidy to be increased to 90 per cent for north eastern states from the existing sharing pattern of 50:50 (Both PMFBY/RWBCIS),” the statement said.

Tomar said States will not be allowed to implement these schemes in subsequent seasons in case of considerable delay in release of requisite premium subsidy to insurance companies beyond a prescribed time limit. Cut-off dates for invoking this provision for Kharif and Rabi sea-

sons will be 31st March and 30th September of successive years, respectively.

The Cabinet also approved provisioning of at least 3 per cent of the total allocation for the scheme to be made by the Centre and implementing state governments for administrative expenses.

For estimation of crop losses/admissible claims in the PMFBY, two-step process will be adopted based on defined deviation matrix using specific triggers like weather indicators, satellite indicators, etc, for each area along with normal ranges and deviation ranges. Only areas with deviations will be subject to crop cutting experiments (CCEs) for assessment of yield loss.

Technology solutions like Smart Sampling Technique (SST) and optimization of number of CCEs would be adopted in conducting CCEs. In case of non-provision of yield data beyond cut-off date by the States to implementing insurance firms, claims will be settled based on yield arrived through use of technology solution.

The central subsidy under PMFBY/RWBCIS to be limited for premium rates up to 30 per cent for un-irrigated areas/crops and 25 per cent for irrigated areas/crops. Districts having 50 per cent or more irrigated area will be considered as irrigated area/district.

Whale shark...

“We know work is being done in Gujarat, but we don’t have reports from other coastal states on their status. Presently we don’t have a project to conserve whale sharks,” Dasgupta told PTI.

Gujarat has the maximum density of whale shark population in the Indo-Pacific region and between 2005 and 2019, over 700 whale sharks have been rescued in the state alone, the WTI said.

It said around 75 per cent of the global whale shark population occurs in the Indo-Pacific and 25 per cent in the Atlantic.

The CMS COP 13 kickstarted on February 17 with pre-COP meeting held on February 15 and 16 setting the agenda of India. The COP will conclude on February 22 with a Gandhinagar declaration.

BJP Sikkim...

He also suggested that party workers should present their thoughts and views on social media in a disciplinary and parliamentary language.

Mr Chauhan warned to take legal action against those individuals who have been running their personal agenda on Facebook using the party’s name.

The release informs that the programme was also addressed by BJP leaders, Bhanu Dahal and SB Karki and BJYM president, Laten Sherpa. He also suggested that party workers should present their thoughts and views on social media in a disciplinary and parliamentary language.

Mr Chauhan warned to take legal action against those individuals who have been running their personal agenda on Facebook using the party’s name.

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NSS volunteers...

The Minister has also presented NSS cap to participants in the camp. The inaugural session was also addressed by life skill trainer, Ratna Singh.

The inaugural session also witnessed ice-breaking session by NSS coordinator, Babita Chettri and cultural presentations by NSS volunteers of Burtuk Degree College, West Point SSS and Modern SSS. The day ended with the vote of thanks by SYA Department Assistant Director, Pintso Bhutia. The valedictory function of the camp will be held on 23 Feb.

Necessary to...

When asked why the UN has failed to constitute a high-powered inquiry commission to go to Kashmir and investigate alleged rights violations, the Secretary General said: Only the governing bodies of the UN or the Security Council can make that decision, but these reports are credible, relevant and very important.

He acknowledged that the current structure of the UN and the veto power to only its five permanent member states were hampering the ability of the UN to deliver the very objective it was created for conflict resolution.

In order to ensure increased efficacy of the UN, he felt the body had to be reformed to be made “more democratic, more open and more effective and to be more representative of today’s multilateral world.

“We lived in a bipolar world, the rules were relatively clear. Today it is no longer bipolar, not yet multipolar, it is a kind of a chaotic world. Power relations are unclear so we see situations of conflict to which many spoilers can do whatever they want because there is no way to create a minimum of order, he added.

When asked about the position of the UN on the Palestinian question, Guterres responded that our position has not changed , asserting that he remained committed to the two-state solution, with the “two states living side by side .

Guterres also affirmed that the UN stood ready to facilitate a dialogue between Israel and Palestine based on international law and principles .

Guterres during his three-day visit to Pakistan met officials, attended a conference on Afghan refugees, visited Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib and saw cultural places in Lahore.

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SAATHI Training Camp on Life skills at Chemchey

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

With a view to impart training on life skills, SAATHI (Sikkim Against Addiction Towards Healthy India) had organized its 3rd Off-site training camp on life skills at IHCAE, Chemchey, South Sikkim from 17 to 19 Feb, 2020.

As per a press release, ninety students from nine Government Schools viz. Sir Tashi Namgyal Sr Sec School, Westpoint Sr Src School, Sang Sr Sec School, Khechuperi Sr Sec School, Nayabazaar Junior High School, Pelling Sr Sec School, Soreng Sr Sec School, Middle Gyalshing Sr Sec School and Gyalshing Girls Sr Sec School (Khyongsa) participated in the training camp.

The objective of this camp is to familiarize students with basic aspects of life skills and its conceptual treatment,



theoretical perspectives and practical strategies of life skills education, the release mentions.

Over the two days of the camp, various life skills sessions along with story-telling, learning based fun and physical activities were conducted with the students. The session on the coping with stress and

emotion was taken by Psychologist, Kavya Rai; Interpersonal Relationship & Team management was taken by Psychologist, Divyaswari Rai; Decision making, problem solving & critical thinking was taken by Research Scholar, Roshni Chhetri, Counselling Psychologist, Communication skills

& time-management by Himanjali Pradhan and career guidance by Sumitra Chhetri of SAATHI team.

The other activities included story-telling, team building sessions, planning sessions, meditation, nature walk/physical training, etc.

As an ongoing endeavor to curb drug

abuse issues amongst school age children, SAATHI conducts these residential camps at the Indian Himalayan Centre for Adventure and Eco-Tourism (IHCAE) in Chemchey, South Sikkim. The students are accompanied by the Teacher Coordinators of the respective schools and also the SAATHI Project Team.

COVID-19: 36 return to Maharashtra from quarantine camps

MUMBAI, FEB 19 (PTI): Thirty-six people from Maharashtra, who were airlifted from the novel coronavirus-hit Wuhan city of China and quarantined for 14 days at facilities in the National Capital Region, returned to the state on Wednesday, Health Minister Rajesh Tope said.

These 36 people were among the 645 Indians who were airlifted from Wuhan about a fortnight back due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in China. Wuhan is the capital of central Hubei province, the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak. They were kept under observation at two special facilities - an ITBP camp in Delhi and an Army camp at Manesar near Gurugram - for two weeks.

Tope said the 36 travellers from Maharashtra were allowed to return home as they had completed 14-day-long follow-up period.

"Their swab samples also tested negative for the novel coronavirus infection," said Tope.

However, authorities will still keep a tab on the health on these people for 14 more days, he said.

"The authorities concerned have been

instructed to keep follow-up of these 36 people (for 14 days)," he said.

Medical teams deputed at the Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport have screened 41,208 passengers for coronavirus since January 18, the state health department said.

According to the department, another 266 travellers have come to Maharashtra from coronavirus-affected areas and dedicated teams are keeping a constant watch on them.

Tope said 114 of these 266 travellers have completed their mandatory 14-day health follow-up period.

The department said 71 people were admitted to isolation facilities in the state since January 18. Of these, 70 tested negative for the viral infection.

Sixty-nine of the 71 people were discharged from isolation wards and the remaining two are admitted at Kasturba Hospital in Mumbai," said an officer.

No positive case of the virus, which has killed more than 2,000 people in China since December-end, has been reported from Maharashtra so far.

I&B minister Javadekar releases India 2020 yearbook

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The minister congratulated the Publications Division for coming out with the publication and said the book is becoming popular by the day.

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Nursing students spread awareness on COVID-19 virus

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 FEB:

Final year BSc Nursing students of Sikkim Manipal College of Nursing (SMCON) organized a public awareness programme on Corona virus or COVID-19 virus at Mandi Bazaar, Rangpo, on 13 Feb, a press release informs.

Students performed an educative role play on the virus creating awareness on causes, symptoms, mode of transmission of the

disease and provided health talk on preventive measures. Information leaflet prepared by students were distributed among the public and the school students.

Addressing the gathering, Dean SMIMS, Brig (Dr) V K Mehta, said that the key measures involved in tackling the Corona virus threat is to educate ourselves, to follow all available precautions and to avail medical help as early as possible.

Medical Officer of Rangpo PHC, Dr Manoj Mishra, Prof Mridula Das Principal, faculty members from Sikkim Manipal College of Nursing, President of Rangpo Nagar Panchayat, ASI from Rangpo police station, teachers and students from Govt. Secondary School Rangpo and local public attended the programme.

The programme ended with an interactive question answer session and a group song.

Cong demands HC judge probe into Mangaluru police firing during anti-CAA protest

BENGALURU, FEB 19 (PTI):

The violence during the anti-CAA protest in Mangaluru in December 2019, which left two people dead in police firing, rocked the Karnataka assembly on Wednesday, with Congress holding the ruling BJP responsible for it and demanding a judicial probe headed by a sitting High Court judge into the incident.

Terming the 'golibar' (firing) as "pre planned" and blaming the city police commissioner for it, Leader of the Opposition Siddaramaiah questioned the government on the rule of law, as he expressed fears about the 'danger' to democracy and 'anarchy' taking over the system.

The debate on the law and order condition saw heated exchanges between ruling and opposition sides, even forcing an adjournment

Treasury and opposition benches clashed over LoP quoting the High Court's observations against police, while granting conditional bail to 21 people, who were allegedly involved in Mangaluru violence, stating that the matter was sub-judice.

"It was pre planned by police. The court itself has remarked about police excess. Even the complaint by the family of two innocent persons killed in the Golibar was not taken.

Twenty one people, mostly youths, were arrested in the case and sent to jail... This is police excess. Karnataka had never in the past become

a police state," Siddaramaiah said.

Questioning whether there was rule of law in Karnataka, he said "we believe in rule of law. Without rule of law there will be anarchy and democracy will be in danger."

Stating that those killed did not belong to any party, he demanded to know how police had opened fire, despite instructions from the Chief Minister that there should not even be a lathicharge.

He suspected the role of some "unseen hand" behind the violence and police firing.

"I demand a judicial inquiry into the Mangaluru incident by a sitting judge of the High Court. The guilty should be punished," he said as he held the police department, Mangaluru police commissioner and state government directly responsible. Two people were killed in police firing in Mangaluru in December 19 as the protest against the CAA had turned violent, following which the city was brought under curfew and mobile internet service was suspended.

Siddaramaiah referred to the recent arrest of a parent and a school headmistress (now on bail) in the "sedition case" for their alleged involvement in staging a drama, portraying the Prime Minister in poor light over CAA and NRC and charged the government with using police to 'fix' political opponents and those opposing BJP's "divisive policies."

Can transport minister come to explain govt proposal for introducing EVs, asks SC

NEW DELHI, FEB 19 (PTI):

The Supreme Court Wednesday expressed desire to interact with the Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari on the proposal for gradual conversion of all public transport and government vehicles into electric vehicles (EVs) to curb air pollution.

The apex court, however, did not seek presence of the minister after Additional Solicitor General A N S Nadkarni raised objection. A bench, headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde, enquired from Nadkarni as to whether the minister can come over for an interaction to assist this court.

"Can the minister come to Supreme Court and explain proposal to introduce non-polluting vehicles run on electricity/hydrogen," the bench asked the law officer.

The bench noted that the minister has been

talking about use of alternative fuels in private and public transport, so the court would like to interact with him.

"Your minister talks about it. We would like to hear him. Somebody responsible should come," it said.

Nadkarni raised objection, saying the appearance of the minister may be misused for political purposes.

He added however that there was nothing wrong in politicians appearing before the court.

"We understand that Mr Prashant Bhushan is a political person but he is not going to argue with the minister," the bench said.


Without seeking the presence of the transport minister, the top court further said: "We consider it appropriate that all the issues be considered simultaneously with the

assistance of authority empowered to take decision." It then put up the matter for hearing after four weeks.

During the hearing, Bhushan, appearing for NGO - CPIL, said that as per the National E-Mobility Mission Plan (NEM-MP), 2020 EVs were to be procured by the government. The authorities were also required to provide charging points for electric vehicles at public places like malls and petrol pumps.

Bhushan also said that under the scheme the authorities were required to promote sale of EVs by providing subsidies.

The bench adjourned the hearing for four weeks and ordered that in the meantime all issues relating to EVs be considered by the government with the assistance of an authority empowered to take decisions.



TASHI CHOPHEL

HOW TO COLLECT A FOLK TALE

POEMS

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a collection of poems by

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in conversation with

ANURADHA SHARMA, Journalist

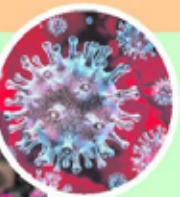
20 February 2020 / 4PM





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	Precautions to Prevent nCoV
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fever ● Difficulty in breathing ● Dry Cough ● Severe acute respiratory syndrome ● Pneumonia - like symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wash your hands often with soap. ● Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer ● Observe good personal hygiene. ● Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands. ● Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms. ● Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats. ● Avoid travel to nCoV affected places. ● Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome, and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.
<div style="background-color: #d4edda; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> Treatment </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition. ● No vaccinations available as of now. ● Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected. 	<div style="text-align: center;">    </div> <p>If you seek help, you may call :</p> <p>-Toll free no. 104</p> <p>District surveillance Officer</p> <p>EAST : 7029372100</p> <p>WEST : 9593297809</p> <p>NORTH : 9641957468</p> <p>SOUTH : 7407691463</p> <p>New STNM</p> <p>AMS : 9434711402</p>
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM	

On Every Street

...there are just too many vehicles to allow for managed traffic

Drive through Gangtok at night, and you will not be faulted for thinking that there was a traffic jam because that is the appearance that the sheer number of vehicles give out, parked as they are, even double-parked at some places, all along the highway in town. Okay, we exaggerate. But only very slightly. And since the parking regulations kick back into force with daybreak, these vehicles, as one of the taxi drivers once explained to his half-full share-cab, need to keep moving around because to stop would bring in the headache of finding a place to park. And this, in a nutshell and only in partially accurate terms, explains the endless march of traffic snarls in the capital.

Several years ago, the Traffic cops in Gangtok had organized a “khulla manch” (open session) to discuss Gangtok’s traffic problems. Questions were fielded from vehicle owners and drivers to open deliberations on how the issue could be resolved. In the end, the session succeeded only in one aspect – allowing a platform for the “stakeholders” to let off some steam and rant against traffic personnel. The agenda set for the day could not be addressed in any earnest, which is perhaps why the Khulla-Manch platform is not a regular feature of police-driver interactions any more. What the deliberations also served to remind us was that traffic, despite every innovative measure deployed to manage it, will remain a problem in a hill town like Gangtok where the girth of the roads has no scope of increasing and the aspiration for bigger cars is showing no signs of receding. As things stand, the number of vehicles on the roads will increase every day and since there cannot be a commensurate increase in road-cover, congestion will get worse, skilled drivers will become rarer, pedestrians will keep getting pushed out and traffic management will get more complicated.

The problem with traffic in Gangtok is clearly not so much its management as its size. There are simply too many vehicles on the roads and a big contributor to the congestion on the streets is the absence of a proper and dependable public transport system in the capital [the city runner, let’s accept it, is a poor pretender]. It is in the absence of a cheap, affordable and reliable public transport, that taxis abound and private vehicles proliferate. A regulation size bus for Gangtok roads was always a bad idea and an example of not thinking a good idea through. Smaller buses and more of them to more destinations within Gangtok on a fixed and reliable routine is what the capital needs. Even though people prefer a cheap mode of transportation [and even the share cabs are not cheap], they also need it to be reasonably quick [a bus-ride in Gangtok can hardly be swift]. If such a system is put in place, fewer people will take cabs, there will be no pressing need to own a vehicle (or ride it routine chores) and even the numbers of government vehicles can be reduced. Individual officers, speeding around in individual government vehicles is a luxury that Gangtok cannot afford to enjoy for long. Departmental vehicles should be pooled and issued out on individual basis only for field visits. The resources thus saved could be invested in strengthening the public transport system and maintaining the fleet. Tourist and city taxis could also be segregated so that they do not poach on each other’s passengers or parking space.

If thought out properly, these options are not very complicated to implement and could make the traffic on our streets much saner.

WRITE US:

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

Conservative Islamic views are gaining ground in secular Bangladesh and curbing freedom of expression

ANDERS C. HARDIG
theconversation.com

Bangladesh has seen an increase in terrorist activity in recent years, including attacks on foreigners, activists and religious minorities.

Perpetrators of these attacks have included people from privileged backgrounds. News reports indicate they were all motivated by the idea that Islam is under attack by secularists and must be defended.

This is significant in a country that was founded in 1971 on principles of secularism following an independence war with neighboring Pakistan.

My research on Islamist social movements has taken me to Bangladesh regularly for the past seven years. Over that time, I have found, conservative Islamic views have come to play a more central place in Bangladesh’s politics and society.

THE BIRTH OF BANGLADESH

When the Indian subcontinent gained independence from the British Empire in 1947, it was partitioned into two states, creating Pakistan out of the Muslim-majority regions of British India. The newly formed Muslim country was split in two parts, West and East Pakistan, separated by the vast landmass of northern India.

While these two parts of Pakistan shared a common faith, Islam, there were significant cultural, linguistic and political differences between them. The population in the eastern region – predominantly ethnically Bengali and speaking their own language, Bangla – was politically marginalized by the western region.

In 1971, the people of East Pakistan launched a war for independence and founded the “Land of Bangla” – Bangladesh.

While language and culture was at the core of Bangladeshi national identity, most people still identified as religious. In other words, it was a secular country founded by people of faith. “Secularism” in Bangladesh did not imply absence of religion, but rather that the state be neutral toward religion.

ISLAMISTS AND POLITICAL POWER

Since then, my research shows, Islam has come to be a prominent political force in the country.

Islamists, a broad label that covers political parties, preachers and militant groups, among others, actively promote a more conservative version of Islam.

The most influential Islamist party is Jamaat-e-Islami, whose name means “Islamic gathering.” Though it has never won many parliamentary seats, Jamaat-e-Islami has come to exert considerable influence in government.

Bangladesh’s parliamentary system requires mainstream parties to ally with smaller ones to gain the majority necessary to form a government. Because of this, major political parties in Bangladesh have at different times relied on alliances with Jamaat to secure a parliamentary majority.

MOBILIZATION AGAINST SECULARISM

Other Islamists use “street power” to promote their agenda.

In February 2013, a high-ranking official with Jamaat-e-Islami received a life sentence for war crimes committed during the 1971 independence struggle. This was considered by some as too light a sentence. A few days later, protesters began rallying in the streets to demand the death penalty for this official.

These secular-minded supporters of the war tribunal wanted local collaborators of the Pakistani army to be punished for atrocities they committed against Bengalis and religious minorities.

Most of those being tried by the tribunal came from the ranks of the Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami.

The protesters wanted local collaborators of the Pakistani army to be punished for atrocities they committed against Bengalis and religious minorities. They demanded that Jamaat-e-Islami be banned and their financial interests, including Islamic banks, be dismantled.

This mobilization, however, was soon met with a coordinated counterprotest led by a movement known as Hefazat. As many as 500,000 people shut down major roads to the capital and interpreted the protesters demands as defaming Islam and the Prophet Muhammad.

In a 13-point list, the Hefazat demanded the death penalty for blasphemy. The group also asked for an end to Bangladesh’s education policy, which, in its view, prioritized “secular” subjects like science and math over religious studies. The group also wanted compulsory Islamic education.

ISLAM UNDER THREAT

To appease Islamist interests, the government agreed to meet some of the demands.

One major concession was expanding the government’s ability to crack down on those who “hurt religious beliefs” and for “acts of defamation.”

Under this revised law, called the Information and Communication Technology Act, Bangladesh has arrested at least eight bloggers since 2013. The alleged crimes of these bloggers include writing articles critical of the Saudi government and posting derogatory remarks about the Prophet Muhammad online.

Police have used the defamation clause of the Information and Communication Technology Act and its replacement, the Digital Security Act of 2018, to silence criticism of the government. Over 1,200 people have been charged under this law between 2013 and 2018.

Educational policy too has shifted toward Islamic education.

THE ISLAMIC REVIVAL

Hefazat did not see all their demands met, but my research shows it moved Bangladesh away from its secularist ideals.

In truth, the shift in Islam’s role in politics and society really began as early as 1975 when Bangla-

desh’s founder and first president, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was assassinated in a military coup.

After that, Bangladesh experienced considerable political instability and was ruled by successive military governments until 1990, when a nonviolent mobilization ushered in a return to democracy.

During the dictatorship years, however, military rulers began to gradually open up politics to Islamists.

A ban on Islamist political parties was lifted in 1975, which allowed Jamaat-e-Islami to run candidates for office and establish itself as a legitimate Bangladeshi political party.

In 1979, the commitment to secularism was removed from the preamble of Bangladesh’s constitution. In 1988, Islam was made the official state religion.

The number of religious schools – madrasas – increased exponentially, from 1,830 in 1975 to 5,793 in 1990. And that’s just government-sanctioned Islamic schools following a state-approved curriculum.

Reliable data is missing for the vast majority of private madrasas in Bangladesh, which operate without any curricular control from the state.

CHANGES IN SOCIETY

In today’s Bangladesh there is another influential group: preachers who aspire to shape society according to their interpretations of what constitutes “pure” Islam.

Popular Islamic televangelists reach millions across the Muslim world, spreading the notion that Islam in the Indian subcontinent must be “purified” of non-Arab elements. They believe Arabic is God’s language and to be properly pure, Muslims should use Arab practices and the language whenever possible.

For example, Muslims in South Asia commonly say “Khuda Hafiz” when parting, a phrase derived from Persian, meaning “God be your protector.” Now, a popular Islamic televangelist, Zakir Naik, has revived an old argument that emerged in the 1980s in Pakistan, saying that “true Muslims” should use the Arabic version “Allah Hafiz” instead.

Similarly, as several Bangladeshis have told me, it is not uncommon in today’s Bangladesh to be corrected when using the Persian “Ramzan,” when referencing the Muslim holy month. The Arabic is “Ramadan.”

These may seem like minor semantic changes, but they are representative of a broader “corrective movement” that seeks to “purify” Islam of perceived “un-Islamic” tendencies.

In my view, Bangladesh’s secularism, a constitutional concept meant to guarantee the separation of religion and state, has become so vilified by Islamists that it has come to mean something akin to “atheistic” or “anti-Islamic.”

[the writer is Professorial Lecturer, American University School of International Service]

Even very young children can become prejudiced but schools can do something about it

MELANIE KILLEN
theconversation.com

Racism has negative consequences for children’s health. It harms the kids who experience it personally and those who witness it, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, an organization that represents 67,000 doctors who treat children.

I’m a developmental psychologist who studies the origins of prejudice in children, including teenagers. The research team I lead investigates the kinds of experiences that can help make kids become less prejudiced. We help local school districts with their efforts to encourage all children to get along well with others, including their classmates and teachers.

WHAT MAKES IT HARD TO HAVE FRIENDS?

Getting along well with others in childhood is about making friends, respecting others’ viewpoints, and thinking about what’s fair when resolving conflicts. Kids who have repeated conflicts with their classmates suffer in many ways, including experiencing stress and anxiety. Consequently, they may become withdrawn and not feel like going to school.

Bias can make it harder for people from different backgrounds to become friends with each other. That includes implicit biases that lead to things like microaggressions – everyday verbal and nonverbal insults that are often unintentional but nevertheless convey negative messages about others based on personal characteristics. It is also hard to make friends when other kids at school exclude you simply because your family is from another country.

By adolescence, implicit bias can

lead teenagers to use explicit racial slurs or harass their classmates. Unfortunately, instances of explicit bias in childhood and adolescence – such as calling someone the n-word or disparaging them for being an immigrant – are growing more common.

What’s important to know, though, is that while these biases are taking hold, children also are developing positive beliefs about the importance of what it means to be fair. That can mean the need to take turns, share toys and avoid hurting anyone.

This contradiction can sometimes result in confusion and conflict.

CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

Children often don’t get the consequences of their actions or what makes someone else feel bad. The good news is that the biases of children are not as hard to overcome as is the case with adults. Scholars like me call friendships with other kids from different cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds “cross-group friendships.” These bonds play a positive role to help children to reject or at least question stereotypes, from the internet, movies, politicians, the media, family or peers may not be true.

My research team has found that children who have friends from different backgrounds are able to reject stereotypes.

When children observe others who are friends from different groups then they are more likely to think “If someone from my group likes them then they must be OK.” Discovering shared interests, hobbies, and values with new kids helps to diminish attitudes that might be based on stereotypes.

Psychologists have found that people who form cross-group friendships when they’re young are less

likely to harbor prejudice as children or adults.

EQUIPPING TEACHERS

My colleagues and I have learned that when teachers encourage children to listen to one another, care for each other, and form friendships, children do better in school. What’s more, when students learn about the historical contributions of famous individuals from both majority and minority backgrounds, they are less likely to display prejudiced attitudes.

Our University of Maryland program, Developing Inclusive Youth, is an eight-week program for elementary school students in third through fifth grade. Students log into an online curriculum tool and watch social exclusion scenarios among an animated group of characters, boys and girls, spanning many ethnicities as well as different immigration and class statuses. These situations occur during recess, in class, at home, and other everyday situations.

Kids use this app for 15 minutes, clicking on options to make decisions about how each character feels, and what should happen in the situation. Immediately afterwards, they sit in a circle with a teacher and talk about what they’ve been feeling and learning for half an hour.

Students often open up and describe their own personal experiences.

“Some kids said ‘you can’t play with me because you’re a different skin color,’” observed an African American girl in third grade. A white girl sitting next to her replied: “That’s not nice.” The teacher asked the children what they should do if they see this happen and talked about the importance of changing this type of behavior. After participating in the eight-

week program, children’s responses to an in-depth survey about their attitudes and behavior revealed fewer stereotypes about girls and kids of color. They also expressed an increased desire to have friends from different social and cultural backgrounds than do students who don’t take part in the program.

COUNTERING STEREOTYPES

A group of Harvard and Arizona State University researchers developed another program, the Identity Project, to give 9th graders the tools they need to learn about their racial and ethnic identity, and to make them more aware of the historical and societal sources of stereotypes and discrimination. Students get eight lessons that combine brief lectures, classroom activities and homework assignments.

As an example, students create a family tree and learn about their family’s origins. Following the program, students had a greater understanding about their own ethnic and racial background and improved self-esteem. In addition, they learned about their classmates’ cultural backgrounds and traditions.

The prejudices kids acquire early on can become deeply entrenched and hard to change as adults. In my view, it’s important for schools to encourage students to overcome the bigotry they’ve learned by making friends with people who don’t look like them. This will not only help these children. If it’s done on a big enough scale it may well contribute to the creation of a more just and civil society.

[the writer is Professor, Human Development and Quantitative Methodology, University of Maryland]

Mamata blames Centre for Tapas Paul's death



KOLKATA, FEB 19 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday alleged that “pressure” created by central agencies and “vendetta politics” led to the death of Trinamool Congress leader and actor Tapas Paul.

Paul, a two-term former MP, died at the age of 61 in Mumbai on Tues-

day after a heart attack.

The actor-turned-politician was an accused in the Rose Valley chit fund scam case and was in jail for over a year. He was the brand ambassador of the Rose Valley group.

Banerjee, while paying homage to Paul, also alleged that another TMC leader Sultan Ahmed had also died of cardiac

arrest as he was under stress after being named an accused in the Narada tapes scandal of 2017.

Ahmed, a former Union minister, had died the same year.

The wife of party MP Prasun Banerjee, too, was a victim of the Centre's “vengeful” politics, the TMC supremo claimed.

Prasun Banerjee's

name had also cropped up in the Narada tapes scandal and was subjected to interrogation by both the Enforcement Directorate and the CBI.

“Tapas Paul was under tremendous pressure from central agencies and was a victim of the Centre's vendetta politics,” she told reporters at Rabindra Sadan

where Paul's mortal remains have been kept for people to pay homage.

“It is an untimely death for Tapas Pal. He was a victim of continued mental torture by a central agency and that led to his death,” she alleged.

Praising Paul for his work in films such as “Dadar Kirti” and “Saheb”, the chief minister said actors and artistes are associated with several organisations as brand ambassadors.

“But is this a fault for which he (Paul) had to spend more than one year in jail? Is this right? This is pure political vendetta,” she said. Even charge-sheets in murder cases are filed within three months, the TMC leader said.

She said the same was the case with film producer Shrikant Mohta and a veteran journalist who had been incarcerated for a long time.

The CBI had in January last year arrested renowned Bengali film producer Shrikant Mohta in connection with the Rose Valley chit fund case.

500 agitators buy tickets to board train

BHUBANESWAR, FEB 19 (PTI): The railways was in for a pleasant surprise when around 500 people who came to Bhubaneswar from Dhenkanal to attend a rally bought tickets to board a train, a railway official said on Wednesday.

People travelling to attend a public meeting hardly purchase tickets in any part of the country. “Those passengers from Dhenkanal have set

a good example for others. Their leader came to Bhubaneswar railway station and requested the authorities to provide them with more time to board the train,” the official said.

The agitators, who were mostly tribal people, purchased 500 general tickets for Puri-An-gul MEMU train to reach from Bhubaneswar to Dhenkanal on Tuesday, he said.

Dozens of crude bombs found in West Bengal village

BOLPUR (WB), FEB 19 (PTI): Dozens of crude bombs were found in front of a panchayat office, a Trinamool Congress party office and a bank in Birbhum district on Wednesday, police said.

Several bombs lay scattered on the ground in front of the closed

gate of the local panchayat office, said people of Sian Muluk village near Bolpur. The crude bombs were also found before the party office and a nationalised bank early in the morning.

Bomb squad have been informed, police said adding that the matter is being investigated.

2 crew members of Chinese ship under isolation in TN



CHENNAI, FEB 19 (PTI): Two Chinese crew members of a ship, which arrived from the novel coronavirus-hit China, have been kept in isolation due to fever while the vessel has been “kept away from access”, the Chennai Port Trust said here on Wednesday.

The ship with 19 Chinese crew had visited ports in that country and was allowed here on Tuesday after the 14-day incubation period from its last visit to a Chinese Port and after ensuring that all the crew were healthy based on pre arrival monitoring, a release from the Port Trust said.

On berthing, a health team of the Port Health Officer (PHO) boarded the vessel and examined all the crew.

“It was observed that two of the 19 crew members had mild fever without other respiratory symptoms and otherwise

healthy in all respects.”

“These crew members were isolated within the ship and the ship is kept away from access of anybody from shore side and no crew is allowed shore access,” it added.

The blood samples of the isolated individuals were collected on Wednesday by a state Health team and the PHO and sent to the city-based Kings Institute of Preventive Medicine, it said, adding, the results were expected later in the day.

“After receipt of the report, the Port authorities and officials of PHO will take strict measures as per the SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) regarding further action,” the release added.

The outbreak of coronavirus, known as COVID-19, in China has left 2044 people dead in the Asian country, even as the overall confirmed cases has crossed 74,000.

Child workers rescued from eateries in Odisha



BERHAMPUR, FEB 19 (PTI): Seven child labourers have been rescued from eateries in Baidyanathpur area by a task force set up by the Ganjam district administration in Odisha, officials said.

Five children belonged to Ganjam district while the rest were from neighbouring Gajapati district, they said.

The task force comprising the district labour officer (DLO), Berhampur, a member of the district child welfare committee (CWC), the district child protection officer (DCPO), member of Childline, Berhampur

and the police conducted raids in several hotels and fast-food centres within Baidyanathpur police station limits on Tuesday.

“The children were rescued from at least five eateries.

“We will verify the age of the children. If their age is found to be below 14 years, we will register case against the owners of the eateries under the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act for engaging them as labourers,” said Berhampur DLO Babul Patra.

The district task force would conduct raids in

different areas of the city in the next few days.

The raids will continue till the end of this month to rescue child labourers as part of the campaign, “Action Month against Child Labour”, sources said.

Ganjam district collector Vijay Amruta Kulange has asked the task force to conduct frequent and surprise raids in establishments where children are employed.

On February 9, two children were rescued from a brick-kiln at Jhugudi, near here. The children were from Bolangir district, the sources said.

11 Indian universities in top 100 for emerging economies

ADITI KHANNA

LONDON, FEB 19 (PTI): Indian universities had a good performance year within the emerging economies of the world as a record 11 made it to the top 100 Times Higher Education's (THE) Emerging Economies University Rankings 2020.

Only China has more universities than India in the top 100 at 30 from a total of 47 countries and territories included in the analysis released in London on Tuesday evening.

A total of 56 Indian universities appear in the full ranking of a total of 533 universities across emerging economies of the world. The Indian Institute of Science (IISc), ranked 16th, is India's top-ranked institution followed by the Indian Institute of Technologies (IITs).

“There has long been a debate about the success of Indian universi-

ties in world rankings, and for too long they have been seen as underperforming on the global stage,” notes Phil Baty, Chief Knowledge Officer for the THE.

“The Emerging Economies University Rankings 2020 suggests that real progress is being made by a number of institutions in a number of metrics across our robust methodology, and could mark an exciting turning point for Indian higher education, enabled in part by the Institutes of Eminence scheme,” he said.

The Indian government's Institutes of Eminence scheme was established in 2017 and one of its participating universities, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, has entered the top 100 for the first time, moving up a huge 51 places from joint 141st in 2019. Amrita declared improvements in almost all the rank-

ing metrics compared to 2019, THE notes.

The other universities included in the Institutes of Eminence scheme that appear in the top 100 mark the biggest improvers in the ranking with IIT Kharagpur moving up 23 places to 32nd, IIT Delhi improving by 28 places to joint 38th and IIT Madras climbing 12 places to joint 63rd.

Indian Institute of Technology Ropar and Institute of Chemical Technology are entering the ranking for the first time, and both debut in the top 100.

The Institutes of Eminence scheme provides participating universities with government funding and greater autonomy with the aim of moving them into the top 100 of the world university rankings, including Times Higher Education's World University Ranking, over time.

Two arrested in APSSB exam irregularities

ITANAGAR, FEB 19 (PTI): Two persons were arrested for their alleged involvement in irregularities in an examination conducted by the Arunachal Pradesh Staff Selection Board, police said on Wednesday.

They were arrested by the special investigation cell (SIC) of the state police after a suspicious optical mark recognition (OMR) sheet of a candidate was widely circulated on social media for which the board came under public criticism.

“Senia Bagang, the candidate whose OMR sheet went viral, and Mongam Basar were arrested on Tuesday,” the special investigation cells SP M Harsha Vardhan said.

Several candidates, who appeared in the examination, alleged that Bagang had submitted the blank answer sheet, though he was shortlist-

ed for the skill test.

The arrests were made based on evidence collected in the case so far. Basar acted in connivance with the officials of the APSSB, the SP said.

Vardhan also alleged that APSSB under secretary, Kapter Ringu, has been “avoiding interrogation by SIC personnel”.

“A non-bailable warrant has been issued against her by the additional district and sessions judges court at Yupia,” the SP said, adding that all efforts are being made to unearth the conspiracy and action will be taken at the earliest.

The results for the examination for lower divisional clerk (LDC), junior secretariat assistant (JSA) and other posts were published on the boards website on February 14.

On Tuesday, Chief Minister Pema Khandu had said those involved in the APSSB fiasco will

not be spared and the guilty will be punished.

Meanwhile, the state government had, on Tuesday, relieved APSSB chairman A C Verma and secretary SK Jain from their respective posts.

Chief secretary Naresh Kumar took charge of the Board as an additional responsibility while special education secretary Santosh Kumar Rai replaced Jain.

However, Rai has been relieved from his responsibility of the education department.

Parliamentary Affairs department's secretary Onit Panyang has been given additional charge as the board member while joint secretary to Governor, Mamta Riba, has been posted as boards joint secretary, replacing Tamune Miso.

Home and Vigilance department under secretary Habung Lampung has been posted in place of Kapter Ringu.

UP BJP MLA among 7 booked for raping woman

BHADOHI (UP), FEB 19 (PTI): An FIR was lodged against BJP MLA Ravindra Nath Tripathi and six others here on Wednesday for allegedly raping a woman repeatedly for a month in 2017, police said.

The woman, 40, lodged a complaint on February 10, they said.

The complainant has alleged that in 2017,

Tripathi, the MLA from Bhadohi, and his six accomplices kept her at a hotel for a month and repeatedly raped her, Superintendent of Police (SP) Ram Badan Singh said.

She also claimed that she got pregnant and was forced to undergo abortion, he said.

A probe in this regard was handed over

to Assistant Superintendent of Police Ravindra Verma. After he submitted his report, an FIR was registered against the seven men at the city police station, the officer added.

Singh said the woman's statement will be recorded before a magistrate and further action will be taken in the matter as per law.

MP: Khajuraho Dance Festival to begin on Feb 20

BHOPAL, FEB 19 (PTI): The week-long Khajuraho Dance Festival will begin from February 20 at the famed Khajuraho Temples in Madhya Pradesh's Chattarpur district, a minister said here on Wednesday.

State Culture Minister Dr Vijaylaxmi Sadho said the festival will be held from February 20 to 26 near the western complex of temples from 7 pm onwards. On the

opening day, noted dancers Uma Sharma and Jatin Goswami will be awarded Kalidas Samman for 2017 and 2018 respectively, the minister informed.

Dance forms such as Kathak, Odissi, Manipuri, Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Mohiniyattam among others will be performed by reputed artistes including Delhi's Uma Sharma, Assam's Jatin Goswami and Cuttak's Meera Das. The event is organised by

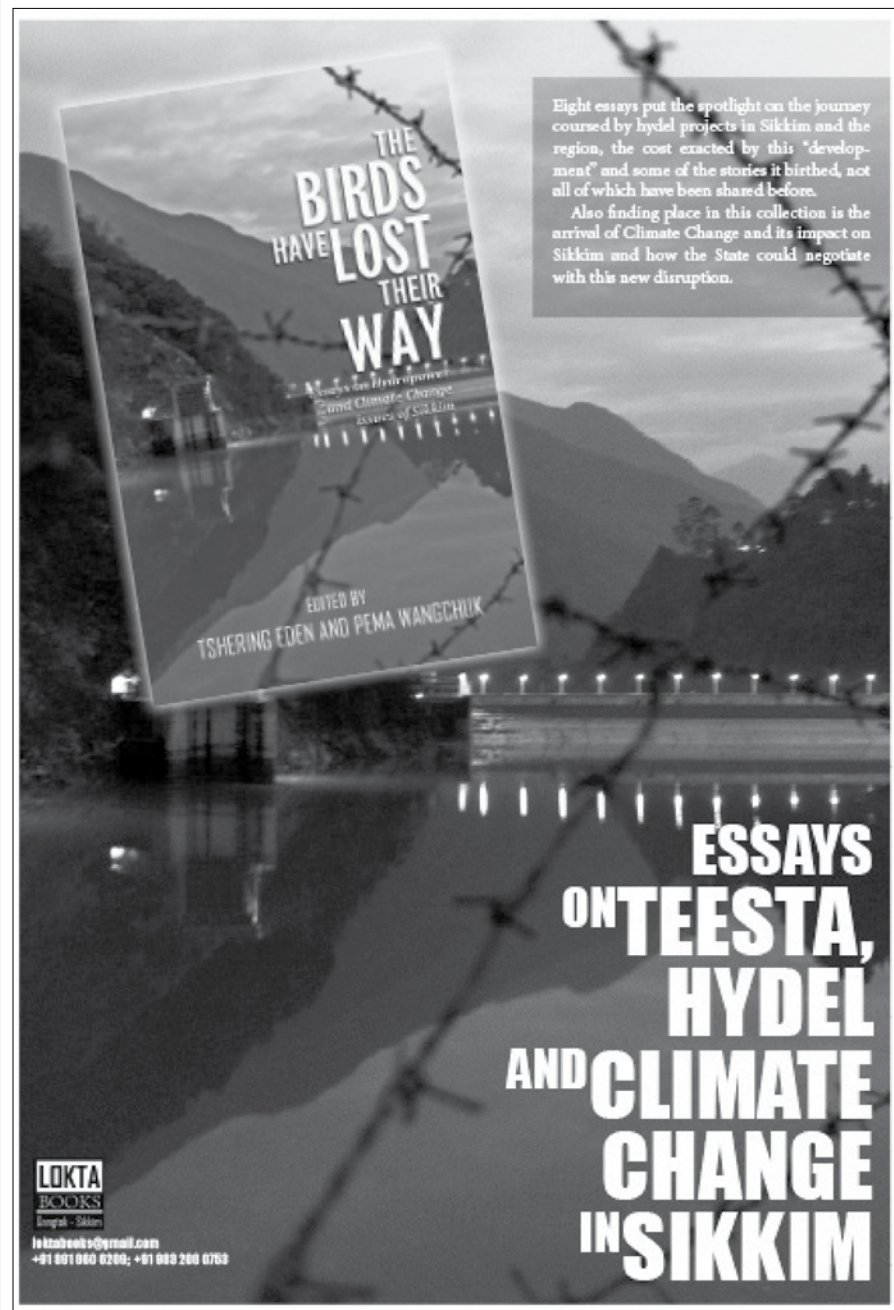
the Ustad Allauddin Khan Sangeet Evam Kala Academy under the Department of Culture.

“The week-long festival celebrates our rich cultural heritage,” academy director Akhilesh Verma said.

The open-air auditorium in front of the Chitragupta Temple and Vishwanatha Temple, provides a breathtaking setting to the audience, he added.

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We are the happiest team at T20 World Cup, Thailand distant second: Mandhana

Sydney, Feb 19 (PTI): India are not just among the strongest contenders for the Women's T20 World Cup but the youthful exuberance also makes them the happiest team in the tournament, says swash-buckling opener Smriti Mandhana.

The Indian squad's average is under 23. Ahead of the tournament opener against Australia here on Friday, Mandhana joked that only debutants Thailand can given them competition when it comes to having fun.

"This group really knows how to have fun. It's about making the young players feel comfortable and I've become one with them. We have a lot of dances, a lot of singing and a lot of things that happen," Mandhana was quoted as saying by the ICC.

"I think we're the happiest team at the World Cup - although Thailand might give us some competition," she quipped.

The leader of the 'cool pack' is Jemimah Rodrigues, who is known for making funny videos and is also a decent guitar player. One would often see the players turning the dressing room into a dance floor.

"You can think of the vibe if you see the age of our team. With that kind of age group, there has to be fun and if there's no fun there's something wrong with the girls.

"It's been like that for the last one or two years. I won't say it wasn't like that in the years before but since the teenagers have come, there is a different energy," said the 23-year-old Mandhana.

"Young players come into it with fresh thinking, they don't have anything behind them. They know nothing. They're very different people to we were when we came into the side at 17.

"They are very fearless, they don't have a lot of pressure on them."

The teenagers -- Rodrigues, Shafali Verma and new entrant Richa Ghosh -- contribute immensely to the high spirits of the team.

10-year-old Hansini set for ITTF debut in Sweden

CHENNAI, FEB 19 (PTI): Following impressive performances on the national circuit, 10-year-old M Hansini is all set to feature in her maiden International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) junior circuit event, Swedish Junior and Cadet Open, to be held in Orebro from February 19 to 23.

It has been a memorable year for Class V student who bagged bronze medal in cadet girls' singles at the 2019 National Table Tennis Championships and will start the upcoming season as India No.1 in the U-12 category.

It was coach Muralidhara Rao, who has experience of coaching top paddlers in the country such as Sharath Kamal and K Shamini, spotted the talent in Hansini at SDAT AKG Table Tennis Development Centre in Chennai.

Ishant is hitting good areas, Prithvi should follow instincts: Kohli hints on playing XI

KUSHAN SARKAR

WELLINGTON, FEB 19 (PTI): India captain Virat Kohli on Wednesday dropped enough hints to indicate that senior-most pacer Ishant Sharma and young opener Prithvi Shaw will be in the playing XI for the first Test against New Zealand here.

If India's net session on Wednesday is taken into consideration, Wriddhiman Saha is starting as the wicketkeeper ahead of Rishabh Pant for the series opener beginning here on Friday.

Hanuma Vihari, team's designated No 6 batsman for away Tests, will be the fifth bowling option with Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami and Ishant being three specialist pacers.

Ravichandran Ashwin is in the mix for the lone specialist spinner's spot though Ravindra Jadeja's all-round skills can't be ignored either.

Ishant, who was out for three weeks with ankle injury sustained during the Ranji Trophy game, bowled full tilt at the nets and even earned appreciation for troubling batsmen with his pace and bounce.

"He (Ishant) looked pretty normal and pretty similar to what he was bowling before the ankle injury. He is hitting good areas again and he has played (Test cricket) in New Zealand couple of times, so



his experience will be useful to us. It was really good to see him bowling with pace and in good areas," Kohli said during his media interaction.

The skipper also said in as many words that the team wouldn't like to change Shaw's natural stroke-play which was a good enough hint that Shubman Gill will have to warm the benches for now.

"Prithvi is a talented player and he has his own game and we want him to follow his instincts and play the way he

does. Look, these guys have no baggage and are not desperate to perform in any manner," the skipper said.

The skipper wants Shaw to take a leaf out of Mayank Agarwal's performance in Australia back in 2018-19 when he hit back to back half-centuries in Melbourne and Sydney.

"They don't have any nerves to do well overseas. Like a clear head with which Mayank played in Australia, Prithvi can do the same

in New Zealand. "A bunch of guys playing with fearlessness, something that can motivate the whole team, gives us start that the team wants and not get intimidated by the opposition in any way."

The skipper downplayed India's below-par show in the three-match ODI series, especially that of Agarwal.

"Prithvi, I think you can call him relatively inexperienced and Mayank, I wouldn't call him that inexperienced because he has scored a lot

of runs last year. So he understands what his game is like in Test cricket.

"I think sometimes in white ball cricket we try to do too much but once you come into red ball cricket, you fall into that disciplined mode of batting, which obviously suits him much more at this stage."

While he didn't give an answer on the Saha-Pant debate, the burly Delhi keeper had precious little to do at the main nets and was seen spending more time doing his

keeping drills and only got an opportunity to bat when the first team completed its routines. New Zealand are likely to go with an all-pace attack but the Indian captain wants to stick to his team's strengths which is play with one spinner in the four-pronged bowling attack.

"If it had been a Johannesburg pitch, I could have said it's a possibility (to play four pacers) but our team has that skill that we can bowl out other teams with only three fast bowlers," he sounded confident.

"But you need one world class skillful spinner, who can take wickets on any pitch. We won't copy the home team. We would rather figure out what is the most lethal combination, which gives us balance," he added.

"As a bowling group it's better than the one that came to NZ last time and that is why we have got so many teams all out in last two and half years. We would like to repeat that here also," Kohli added.

The Likely XI: Openers: Mayank Agarwal and Prithvi Shaw; Middle order: Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli (captain), Ajinkya Rahane (vc), Hanuma Vihari; WK: Wriddhiman Saha, Spinner/all-rounder: Ravi Ashwin/Ravindra Jadeja, Pacers: Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami and Ishant Sharma.

Liverpool FC World heads to Delhi

NEW DELHI, FEB 19 (PTI): Top English Premier League club Liverpool FC has confirmed Delhi as the next stop for its interactive roadshow, LFC World.

The unique fan experience will arrive at the city's Select Citywalk Mall on March 7, bringing Liverpool FC directly to supporters in India via the LFC World hub.

LFC World is now in its fourth season, having

met thousands of fans in eight countries across the world since 2016.

Liverpool legends Emile Heskey and Jason McAteer will be in town for the event, giving local fans the opportunity to meet former players as well as take part in a range of engaging and interactive activities.

Reds in Delhi can also have their photograph taken with one of the most prestigious

trophies in world football the UEFA Champions League trophy, which LFC won for the sixth time last season and various iconic recreations of Anfield such as the Shankly Gates, This Is Anfield sign and the players' dressing room.

Emile Heskey said: "LFC World Delhi is the place to be for Reds in India. We know not all our fans can get to Anfield, so we want to bring the club closer to them.

Keshavan plans to have academy to promote winter sports



MUMBAI, FEB 19 (PTI): Shiva Keshavan, the first Indian representative to compete in luge at the Winter Olympics, is aiming to build an academy to nurture talented youngsters and is in talks with a couple of state governments.

"My idea is to have a residential complex with all the multi-sports facilities and since (it will be) in the mountains, we will have access to the ski area, ice hockey," Keshavan told reporters here.

"It can be built over time. So, I'm speaking to a couple of state governments to give a little bit of land or get some sponsors (involved in it)."

Keshavan, a six-time Olympian, was speaking on the sidelines of the 'CII Conclave on Winter Sports', but he did not divulge which state governments he is in talks with.

"By doing so (having an academy), India can become a hub in the

region. We have Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, all countries that have budding winter sports teams," he said and wished that other athletes should not go the way he had to take in his career.

He's happy to see the sports ministry's interest in winter sports.

"The investments are starting to come in from the ministry and I think that was the missing link. I have been participating in winter sports for over 20 years. There is not a single winter sports federation recognised by the Sports Ministry.

"It is incredible to think how did I do (make) six Olympics without a Federation being recognised, which also means that I was not funded," Keshavan lamented.

Asked if he believed that India could win a medal in Winter Olympics, he said: "100 per cent. I

could have won a medal if I had a coach few years before, by the end of it I was (just) 6/10th of a second behind. It is possible"

He also rued the fact that a country like the Netherlands has 130 medals at the Winter Olympics, while India was yet to open its account.

"At five meters below sea-level, Netherlands has 130 medals at the Winter Olympics and we (India) at the roof of the world are yet to open an account," he said.

He was also asked whether winter sports can help a state like Jammu and Kashmir.

"A lot of athletes who I have met, people who have strong emotions, anger in them, they can be that much more successful since they have something to prove, the way to prove it in a non-destructive way and you can get your platform.

Liverpool's Jürgen Klopp says Atlético Madrid tried to get Sadio Mané sent off

ANDY HUNTER

MADRID, 19 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: Jürgen Klopp admitted he substituted Sadio Mané during Liverpool's Champions League defeat at Atlético Madrid for fear the Senegal forward would be sent off after being targeted by Diego Simeone's players.

The influential Mané was withdrawn at half-time during the 1-0 defeat having received a booking late in the first half for catching Sime Vrsaljko with a flailing but accidental arm.

Several Atlético players surrounded the referee asking for a second yellow card when Mané was caught up in an innocuous incident moments later, and Klopp confirmed the striker was replaced by Divock Origi as a precaution. Mané's speed and penetration were sorely missed as Liverpool failed to register a shot on target at Estadio Metropolitano.

"It is obviously a part of football that I don't like," said Klopp. "The plan tonight was to get Sadio out of the game with a second yellow card. I was afraid that Sadio's opponent would go down if he took a deep breath on him or something. I don't want to have this situation and that is why I took him off."

Jordan Henderson was replaced with a hamstring injury and will be assessed on his return to Merseyside.

Saúl Ñíguez's early goal gave Atlético a win that was wildly celebrated by their players and fans, and Klopp believes the intensity of the home crowd will be matched by what awaits at Anfield in the



home leg on 11 March. The Liverpool manager added: "Yes, there were things we could have done better and things that could have made our life easier. Atlético very obviously were here to squeeze a result out of this game and against that our pressing was exceptional, our buildup was outstanding, our counter-press was exceptional.

"The intensity was exactly how it should be. We had not enough clear-cut chances, that is how it is. We had chances but not enough. We had games in atmospheres like this where we lost focus a little bit and they could score a second one. It didn't really look like that tonight. I say to all the Atlético fans who are lucky enough to get a ticket for the second leg: welcome to Anfield."

Andy Robertson insisted Atlético were wrongly awarded a throw-in in the buildup to the winning goal. The Liverpool defender said: "The officials made a mistake and the corner is just a ricochet. We gave them the best possible start to get their fans up and then they

started falling over and trying to get under our skin but we handled it well. "They were falling over easy but we got on with it and we are better than that. It was a decent performance but we have a second leg to put it right. They celebrated as if they had won the tie. But let's see. We have some weeks then they come to Anfield. We know our fans will be there so it is up to them to come as well."

Simeone, the Atlético coach, said his players were roused by the impassioned reception they received from their fans on arrival at the stadium.

"I think we started winning the game when our bus turned at the roundabout and we saw the reaction of the people. It enthused us. Something beautiful woke up in us," he said.

"The feeling that came out of the people, the reply of the people, I've rarely seen from our fans at this level. They were there the whole game. It made me want to put my boots on and go on the pitch."

Vidit Gujrathi draws 6th round game, stays top in Prague chess tourney

PRAGUE, FEB 19 (PTI):

Indian Grand Master Vidit Gujrathi maintained a one-point lead after settling for a draw against Nikita Vitiugov of Russia in the sixth round of the Prague Chess Festival's Masters category here.

He has 4.5 points and is ahead of Vitiugov and top seed Jan-Krzysztof Duda of Poland, both on 3.5 points.

The 25-year old Indi-

an no.2 opted for a London opening in his game against the Russian GM and had to sign the peace treaty in 39 moves late on Tuesday.

Gujrathi's compatriot P Harikrishna had to be content with his fifth draw in six games, against lower-rated Spanish GM David Anton Guijjarro.

Harikrishna, who chose a Catalan opening against Guijjarro, shared

the point in 30 moves. The India no.3 now has 2.5 points after the conclusion of six rounds.

Gujrathi and Harikrishna will meet in an interesting clash in the seventh round later Wednesday.

All the five games in the sixth round ended in draws with American Sam Shankland and Markus Ragger (Austria) being involved in a 76-

move marathon. Results of Round 6: P Harikrishna (IND) 2.5 drew with David Anton Guijjarro (SPA) 3; Nikita Vitiugov (RUS) 2.5 drew with Vidit Gujrathi (IND) 4.5; Alirez Firouzja (Iran) 3 drew with David Navara (CZE) 2.5; Markus Ragger (AUT) 2.5 drew with Sam Shankland (USA) 2.5; Jan-Krzysztof Duda (POL) 3.5 drew with Nils Grandelius (SWE) 2.5.

Priti Patel launches UK's historic' points-based visa system

BY ADITI KHANNA

LONDON, FEB 19 (PTI): Home Secretary Priti Patel on Wednesday announced the launch of the UK's new points-based visa system, aimed at attracting the "brightest and the best" from the world, including from India, and cutting down numbers of cheap, low-skilled workers coming to the country.

The new system will come into force from January 1 2021 at the end of the transition period after the UK's exit from the European Union (EU) last month, which will formally end free movement of people within the economic bloc for the UK as a non-member.

The new post-Brexit system, which will apply equally to the EU and non-EU countries like India, is based on assigning points for specific skills, qualifications, salaries and professions, with visas only awarded to those who gain enough points.

"Today is a historic moment for the whole country. We're ending free movement, taking back control of our borders and delivering on the people's priorities by introducing a new UK points-based immigration system, which will bring overall migration numbers down," said Patel, the senior-most Indian-origin Cabinet minister.

We will attract the brightest and the best from around the globe, boosting the economy and our communities, and unleash this country's full potential, Patel, in charge of the UK's visa and immigration system, said.

The UK Home Office said the new system is a direct response to the 2016 referendum in favour of Brexit, which was seen as a vote to end the country's reliance on cheap migrant labour and reduce overall levels of migration with tighter security.

"The new single global system will treat the EU and non-EU citizens equally. It will give top priority to those with the highest skills and the greatest talents, including scientists, engineers and academics, the Home Office said.

The Global Talent Scheme, a fast-track visa to be in operation from Friday, will also apply to the EU citizens from next year to allow highly-skilled scientists and researchers to come to the UK without a job offer.

Professor Alice Gast, President of Imperial College London, said: British science is global. The new post-study work and Global Talent visas will help us to attract the world's brightest students and researchers, wherever they come from. From the race to develop a coronavirus vaccine to clean energy, British science's international collaborations drive innovation and excellence.

The government said the points threshold for the new system will be carefully set to attract the talent the UK needs.

China turns to internet for food supplies amid virus fears

BEIJING, FEB 19 (AP): Wang Feng, house-bound by China's virus outbreak, counts on the parka-clad delivery drivers of e-commerce giant JD.com to keep her kitchen stocked. Demand for online food vendors has surged since China's government told the public to stay home as part of the most sweeping anti-disease controls ever imposed.

On Tuesday, Wang's phone buzzed with a text message that a delivery had arrived. The retiree bundled up against the winter cold, put on a face mask and emerged from her apartment complex to collect walnut milk and other goods from shelves on the sidewalk an anti-virus measure to limit contact with drivers who normally go door to door.

They work really hard, and it's dangerous, said Wang. Without their services, we would not be able to survive at all." JD.com Inc. and rivals including Pinduoduo, Missfresh Inc. and Alibaba Group's Hema are scrambling to fill a boom in orders while trying to protect their employees.

E-commerce is one of the few industries to thrive after anti-virus controls starting in late January closed factories,



restaurants, cinemas, offices and shops nationwide and extinguished auto and real estate sales.

The government is trying to revive economic activity but has told anyone who can work from home to stay there. Some cities have imposed controls that allow only one member of a family out each day. That creates a ready market for online entertainment and shopping.

I can't go out and can't go to work, said one of Wang's

neighbours, Chen Guang, who was picking up a box of vegetables from the sidewalk shelves under a sign that said, Contactless Distribution Point.

Chen, who wore an entry pass for his apartment complex around his neck, said he shops online two to three times a week to replenish kitchen supplies. JD says over the past month, its drivers delivered 71,500 tons of rice, flour and other grains 20 times more than the same pe-

riod last year, 27 million liters of cooking oil and 50,000 tons of meat, eggs, vegetables and other fresh products.

Pinduoduo said orders for apples, strawberries and other fresh fruit from its 586,000 sellers of agricultural products were up 120% in January.

Disease fears in other Asian markets also have propelled e-commerce demand for food and hygiene supplies. The Korea Economic Daily said online mask sales in South Korea rose 37,000%

Passengers leave Japan virus ship as China toll tops 2,000

Hundreds of relieved passengers finally disembarked a coronavirus-stricken cruise ship in Japan Wednesday after testing negative for the disease that has now claimed more than 2,000 lives in China and spread panic worldwide.

With 542 positive cases, the Diamond Princess is easily the biggest cluster outside China, and Japan has faced mounting criticism for its quarantine arrangements as the passengers disperse into the wider world.

"I'm relieved... I want to take a good rest," said a 77-year-old Japanese passenger, who declined to give his name. He said he would be boarding Japan's famously crowded railway system home.

A fleet of yellow-dotted city buses, plus a dozen or so taxis, whisked away the passengers, many of whom dragged their luggage behind them and waved to former ship-mates on balconies as they disembarked.

Fresh figures from China showed the death toll surging beyond 2,000 with more than 74,000 infected, although the rate of new cases continued to slow.

Hundreds more cases have been reported in two dozen countries, including 15 in South Korea -- a 50-percent rise -- with a cluster of at least 11 around the southern city of Daegu.

Hong Kong also reported its second death from the virus, which has proved extremely infectious.

For the 500 passengers disembarking the Diamond Princess after testing negative, a difficult 14-day quarantine period has come to an end after their dream cruise turned into a nightmare of fear and boredom confined in many cases to small windowless cabins.

"Our last deep gratitude to the crews and captain for such an amazing care... during the epic crisis... we can't wait to see you again

soon on board again," tweeted passenger Yardley Wong, who left after 14 days cooped in a small cabin with her six-year-old son.

- 'Major failure' - Many were left onboard with an anxious wait for test results that would allow them to disembark.

Asked how he felt seeing others disembark while remaining on the ship, American lawyer Matt Smith told AFP: "I need an emoji for envy."

Michael Ryan, head of WHO's health emergencies programme, said the outbreak was "very serious" and could grow, but stressed that outside China's Hubei, it was "affecting a very, very tiny, tiny proportion of people."

But in Japan, some have raised concerns about allowing people from the cruise ship to board flights home or spread out into the notoriously busy Japanese capital.

Kentaro Iwata, a professor at the infectious diseases division of Kobe University, blasted the on-ship quarantine as a "major failure, a mistake".

"It is highly likely secondary infections occurred," Iwata told AFP, saying scepticism from abroad of the quarantine was "only natural".

He later said in a video published online that he was self-quarantining after a brief visit to the ship where he raised major concerns about the procedures on board. "It was completely chaotic," he said.

- 'Hugs and flowers' -

Elated passengers also began disembarking from a second cruise ship that has been at the centre of coronavirus fear, the Westerdam, which made shore in Sihanoukville in Cambodia.

Hundreds were departing after receiving a clean bill of health, as Prime Minister Hun Sen greeted the first passengers with hugs and flowers.

American Christina Kirby, fret-

ted about the stigma some Westerdam passengers could face once they return home. "I want people to remember that... there's a human behind each of these stories and those who are ill deserve compassion," she told AFP.

Several countries appear to have lost patience with the quarantine on board the Diamond Princess and chartered planes to repatriate citizens.

In the first such evacuation Monday, more than 300 Americans flew home even though 14 had tested positive.

Britain, Hong Kong and Australia are among other countries that have vowed to repatriate people from the ship but will insist on a further 14-day quarantine on home soil. Nathalie MacDermott, a medical expert at King's College London, recommended a further 14-day self quarantine for those leaving.

"Given the circumstances on board the Diamond Princess, those passengers leaving the boat should be managed in a similar manner to those individuals departing a highly affected city or region," said MacDermott.

South Korea vowed to block foreigners who have been on board the Diamond Princess from entering the country.

Disembarkation is expected to take around three days as more test results become available. The crew will begin a new quarantine when the last passenger has left.

People in Yokohama appeared supportive of the decision to allow the passengers out despite the virus fears. "I am sure those people on board must be really worried. I hope they can go back to their normal life soon," said 51-year-old Isamu Habiro.

"As a Yokohama resident, I don't want them to be treated unfairly. I want to cheer for them," Habiro told AFP.

Death toll from China virus surges past 2,000



BY K J M VARMA

BEIJING, FEB 19 (PTI):

The death toll from the coronavirus epidemic in China crossed the 2,000-mark on Wednesday with the death of 136 more people, while the overall confirmed cases climbed to 74,185, authorities said.

The National Health Commission said in its daily report that 2,004 people had died of the disease known as COVID-19. NHC said 1,749 new cases of novel coronavirus infection have been confirmed.

Of the new deaths, 132 were reported from the worst-hit Hubei Province and one each from Heilongjiang, Shandong, Guangdong and Guizhou.

Another 1,185 new suspected cases have been reported. On Tues-

day, 236 patients became seriously ill, while 1,824 people were discharged from hospital after recovery.

The commission added that 11,977 patients remained in severe condition, and 5,248 people were suspected of being infected with the virus, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

By Tuesday, 62 confirmed cases including one death had been reported in Hong Kong, 10 confirmed cases in Macao and 22 in Taiwan including one death.

China's daily number of newly recovered novel coronavirus patients has surpassed that of new confirmed infections for the first time, according to NHC.

So far, 14,376 patients infected with the

novel coronavirus had been discharged from hospital after recovery, NHC said.

On Tuesday, Dr Liu Zhiming, president of Wuhan Wuchang Hospital in Hubei, died of the novel coronavirus pneumonia highlighting the risks posed by virus to the medical staff.

Liu was a leading neurosurgeon in Wuhan.

Last Friday, the NHC said a total of 1,716 medical workers had been confirmed contracting the infection. As of February 11, six medical workers were killed while treating patients. This included the whistle-blower ophthalmologist, Dr Li Wenliang who was reprimanded by police for alerting about the virus over the social media in December.

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Former South Korean president jailed after losing appeal

Former South Korean president Lee Myung-bak was taken to prison Wednesday to begin a 17-year term for bribery and embezzlement after losing an appeal against a lighter sentence.

Lee, in office from 2008 to 2013, was briefly jailed in 2018 after being sentenced to 15 years and fined 13 billion won (\$11million), but was

granted bail while he appealed. He was found guilty of creating slush funds of tens of millions of dollars and accepting bribes from Samsung Electronics in return for a presidential pardon for its chairman, Lee Kun-hee, who was jailed for tax evasion.

At a hearing on Wednesday, Seoul's Central District Court ordered a heavier sentence,

saying Lee "did not show a sign of remorse or sense of responsibility" for his wrongdoings.

He instead blamed civil servants he worked with and Samsung employees, the court said.

Several South Korean presidents have ended up in prison after leaving office -- often as a result of investigations started by political rivals. Lee's

successor, Park Geun-hye, is currently serving 32 years in jail for bribery and abuse of power after being ousted in 2017 over a nationwide corruption scandal that prompted massive street protests.

Another former leader, Roh Moo-hyun, committed suicide after being questioned in a corruption probe involving his family.



FTW! The singer, Billie Eilish continues her 2020 winning streak at the Brit Awards in London, picking up the trophy for Best International Female Solo Artist.

Bret Michaels Is Selling His Tour Bus for \$170,000

The bus that Bret Michaels has used on his most recent tours can be yours for \$169,995. According to the listing at RV Trader, Michaels is off-loading the 45-foot 2014 Entegra Aspire because he’s having another one built in advance of Poison’s summer tour with Motley Crue, Def Leppard and Joan Jett. The bus has logged 111,165 miles.

Inside you’ll find a bedroom with a king-size sleep number bed, two bathrooms (one in the front and another in the rear that has a shower), a full kitchen with a pull-out counter and a refrigerator with an ice maker, washer and dryer, propane fireplace, heated floors, sectional sofa, closet and cargo space, new carpet, electric grill, five televisions including one that’s part of an exterior entertainment center, electric shades, four slide-outs, home theater sound system, keyless entry with a touch pad and a GPS system with an in-motion satellite.

On the technical side, it features a 450-horsepower Cummins diesel engine, automatic hydraulic leveling, Smart Wheel



steering, an active suspension system that “drives like a dream” and a 10K Onan generator that has recently been serviced and “has never let Michaels down.” Check out pictures below.

Whoever purchases the bus will also receive two tickets to a tour stop of their choosing, where they’ll have a meet-and-greet and photo opportunity with him. The tour begins June 23 in Kansas City’s City’s Kauffman Stadium and will run all the way through Sept. 5, when it wraps up at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles. You can see all the dates here.

‘Call of Duty: Modern Warfare’ might gets its own battle royale mode next month

When Call of Duty: Black Ops 4 added a battle royale mode in place of a single-player campaign, some players were disappointed. After all, while battle royales are very popular right now, there is a substantial portion of the fanbase that really enjoys the campaigns in the Call of Duty franchise, and so developer Infinity Ward prioritized the story mode in its follow-up, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare, last year. A new battle royale mode was expected as well, but months later, nothing official has been announced. That might change in the coming weeks, though.

Citing development sources, Video Games Chronicle reports that the Warzone battle royale game will launch in early March. The game was reportedly developed in collaboration between Infinity Ward and Raven Software, and although Activision hasn’t said anything yet, data in the files of Modern Warfare may have spoiled the game’s existence just the other day. At the time, it was suggested that Warzone could launch within a few days, but VGC’s sources claim that it is more likely the release of the new mode is “at least a

few weeks away.”

As VGC notes, major Modern Warfare updates typically roll out on Tuesday, which makes March 10th a likely date for the launch of Warzone. When the mode does launch, it will be instantly unlocked for all Modern Warfare owners as a new menu option, but there will also be a standalone release that anyone can download for free. They will have the option to “upgrade” to the full version of Modern Warfare if they so choose.

Sources tell VGC that the marketing

campaign for the mode will kick off this week, with content creators being invited to the studio to play Warzone for the first time and share footage from the event.

While the Blackout mode was part



MARVEL might’ve just confirmed another new Avenger for its upcoming ‘Avengers 5’ blockbuster

Marvel may not have an Avengers 5 film scheduled for MCU Phase 4, but it’s only a matter of time until the studio will reveal its plans for the soft reboot of the Avengers franchise. No studio would drop its most prized possession after the massive successes of Infinity War and Endgame, but Marvel can’t just go to the next chapter and expect the same results. Avengers 3 and 4 worked so well because Marvel built a massive overarching story that spanned a decade, allowing us to get to know a slew of exciting characters over the course of 24 movies. Now that Iron Man, Nat, and Captain America are gone from the Avengers team, and Thor and Hawkeye are on a course toward retirement, we’re going to need a new team — which is why Avengers 5 will be a soft reboot for the series. But before we get there, we need to meet these new heroes and fall in love with them just as we did with the original six.

As we’ve already explained, everything we’ve learned so far suggests Marvel is working on a new Avengers roster, one that could be more diverse than ever before. While we have no idea how many new Avengers we’re getting or when they’ll be officially anointed, we have one more name to add to the list, and this one is apparently confirmed to have a bigger role to play in the future of the MCU.

Comic book fans who have been following Marvel stories for years already expect that several of the upcoming MCU titles, whether they’re TV shows or regular movies, will deliver new origin stories that introduce brand new Avengers. The upcoming Eternals movie is one such example, where Sersi and Black Knight are supposed to be leads, and are therefore shortlisted for future crossover films. WandaVision is another, where Monica Rambeau will be introduced, and she might take over the Captain Marvel mantle from Carol Danvers in the future.

One more hero might come from a different Disney+ show that was confirmed

even more recently. That’s She-Hulk — again, you’ve probably foreseen this. But Marvel apparently made it clear with the help of a casting call for Jennifer Walters, aka She-Hulk — Illuminerdi reports:

Specifically, Marvel is looking for an actress with comedic chops in the 26 to 34-year old age range. They’re also leaving the casting open to all races, which should cast a wide net for their search.

Walters’ origin and background in the series will skew very close to the pages of Marvel. The description even cites Jennifer’s Marvel Comics’ origin, noting that she is indeed a lawyer who will gain her abilities after receiving a blood transfusion from her cousin Bruce Banner, who is specifically mentioned, after being shot. Additionally, the last sentence of the description explicitly states that she is a future member of the Avengers.

The report notes that Marvel is looking to start shooting in six months, so the studio is likely to soon cast the lead for the series. That said, we have no idea when She-Hulk will hit Disney+, or when the action is supposed to take place in the MCU timeline. She-Hulk is an excellent replacement for Hulk in the future Avengers lineup, Hulk being the only hero left from the original six whose arc didn’t reach a satisfying end in Endgame. Sure, Hulk and Bruce Banner solved their differences and we now have a Smart Hulk who is now beloved by the world instead of being viewed as a terrifying monster, and he’s the hero who undid Thanos’s snap. Still, it feels like Endgame didn’t give Hulk a proper send-off. With that in mind, we’d expect to at least get a Hulk cameo in the new She-Hulk TV series — and we already know Mark Ruffalo was supposed to meet Marvel to discuss more Hulk pitches.

What’s clear is that She-Hulk will definitely premiere well before the MCU treats us to the first Avengers sequel after Endgame. And by the time Marvel is ready to announce Avengers 5, Jennifer could be ready to join the Avengers.

Fans left stunned by Billie Eilish’s BRITs performance of Bond theme ‘No Time To Die’

“Try telling me again that Billie Eilish whispers, I dare you.” Billie Eilish was among the performers at this year’s BRIT Awards, with her powerhouse rendition of her new James Bond theme ‘No Time To Die’ proving a hit with viewers.

Eilish’s vocal range came in for particular praise. “Try telling me again that Billie Eilish whispers I dare you,” said one fan. “Say what you want about Billie Eilish but saying she can’t sing is FALSE,” said another Twitter user.

Eilish performed the theme alongside an orchestra conducted by Hans Zimmer, with former Smiths man and Bond theme collaborator Johnny Marr also on-stage. At the ceremony Eilish also picked up the award for International Female Solo Artist, and thanked her fans in an emotional acceptance speech.

She said: “I have felt very hated recently. When I was on the stage and saw you guys smiling at me, it genuinely made me want to cry. I want to cry right now.”

Earlier today, Eilish admitted that she was feeling nervous about the BRITs performance. “I’m so scared. We’ve never performed it ever, so it feels so weird that it’s in the public, especially now that I’m performing it and I’m hitting a note I’ve never hit before.”

Going on to discuss Bond actor Daniel Craig and his involvement in the theme song, Eilish revealed that he was “really involved” in its approval process. “He has a big say in it,” she said. “We learned that from this. He’s really involved. We haven’t met him but he’s got to like it before they move on.”

»THE DAY AHEAD«

ARIES: You have always had a big vision, but you haven’t always had the courage to pursue it. Something is changing within you right now and in this moment. There is an inner knowing that you are invincible when you set your mind on achieving a certain target. Trust that the Universe is co-creating with you to help you manifest your wildest dreams. But can you build an empire single handedly? Know that hiring the right team is an integral part of the expansion process.

Tip: Stick to the big vision.

TAURUS: If the expenses outweigh the income, you know you’ve got a problem, Taurus. Make a clear distinction between your needs and wants. Splurge within your limits. The cards are warning you against frivolous purchases. Some of you may be bearing the brunt of your miscalculations in the past. Learn from these mistakes and integrate the lessons. If you need financial aid at the moment, don’t be afraid to reach out to somebody who is willing to lend you a helping hand.

Tip: Be mindful of your expenses.

GEMINI: Where’s your focus at, Gemini? The cards are asking you to get your priorities in order, check in with your vision board, and make course correction where you need to. You have a long way to go and you simply cannot give

up now. You are also being reminded of the importance of perfection. Practice makes one perfect, magical one. Resist the urge to jump from one thing to another. Focus on the task at hand.

Tip: Imbibe the qualities of patience and persistence.

CANCER: It’s not that difficult to make a choice, Cancer. Get your act together! Grounding your energy will give you clarity on what is in alignment, and the courage you need to move forward. Remember, you’re not the only one being affected by this delay. The other person is having to bear the brunt of your decisions too. Some of you may feel like there are multiple doorways opening for you at this moment.

Tip: Examine the options carefully before committing.

LEO: Wise words by Neville Goddard to help remember your inherent power: “Assume the feeling of your wish fulfilled and observe the route that your attention follows.” Now is not the time to get caught in the nitty gritty. You need to pay attention to the big picture, Leo. Your manifestation game is on fleek this week. Spirit is co-creating with you right now and in this moment to create your best life. Get ready to see tangible proof.

Tip: The bigger picture needs your attention.

VIRGO: You’re slowly realizing there is more to your existence than bringing home a big, fat paycheck and expanding your empire. What are the areas of your life that need your attention? The relationships that need your care and nurture? Instead of prioritising one over the other, see how you can seek balance in all areas of your life. PS: There’s nothing more therapeutic than ending your days with your dad’s heartwarming stew, or listening to your flatmate rant about how she is 100 per cent likely to sabotage her date later that night.

Tip: Seek balance in all areas of your life.

LIBRA: You may not be where you imagined you would be, yet you are exactly where you need to be. Think of the Universe as your co-conspirator who is helping you break free from this karmic cycle. Success is close at hand, Libra, even though it may not seem likely from where you are standing at this moment. Let trust become your magic word. Some of you may be thinking about travelling abroad, working on your itinerary or purchasing your tickets. Seek new experiences.

Tip: The unknown beckons.

SCORPIO: Some of you may feel like your world is falling apart. Is it really though? Things to keep in mind before you give into the drama:

#1. Everything is taking place in divine order. #2. Chaos eventually leads to cosmos. #3. The Universe never gives you anything you’re incapable of handling. Turn to your inner reserve of strength and courage, Scorpio. Need somebody to lean on and remind you of who you really are? Your soul crew would be happy to step in.

Tip: Keep your feet firmly planted on the ground.

SAGITTARIUS: Indigo children, a term coined by parapsychologist Nancy Anne Tapp, refers to the special crew that came into this world with a strong sense of freedom. They are wise beyond their years and possess the uncanny ability to look beyond the veil. Sagittarius, have you always felt like the non-conformist member of the tribe? Perhaps, you are one of the children who possess these traits. Either way, you’re being asked to remember why you came here and reconnect with your higher self.

Tip: Calling all the old souls!

CAPRICORN: Victory isn’t about being on the top. It’s about the sense of fulfillment you derive from doing the things you were once incapable of. This is a big breakthrough moment for you, Capricorn. Trust that you are on the right track and that the people who matter are taking notice of your work. Yes, there is a long way to go before you reach the finish line (if

there is such a thing). But there is no reason you cannot bask in the afterglow now.

Tip: Your victory moment deserves to be celebrated.

AQUARIUS: Aquarius, you’re a magician, an alchemist, a sorceress—one who is gifted with the ability to transform base metals into something precious. 2020 requires you to fully awaken to your power and potential as you share your many gifts with the world. No more playing small or dulling your sparkle in order to fit in. Trust that you already have the required resources to manifest your best life. Don’t worry too much about what you are lacking. The Universe will surprise you by providing the right thing at the right time.

Tip: Tap into your inner alchemist.

PISCES: Perks of living in the digital age: you can work from anywhere you want as long as you can find a decent internet connection. If making magic with a view of the mountains has been in your mind, it’s time to pack your bags and set off on a solo adventure. Say yes to new people and experiences while you’re at it. The Universe is in the mood to send a whole bunch of surprises your way. Want to experience the unknown but not without your partner? They’ll be more than happy to unleash their adventurous side too.

Tip: Work with a view.