



GOT TO LIVE THE LIFE OF A POWERFUL MAN, EVEN IF IN FICTION: SUNIL GROVER ON 'TANDAV'
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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Sikkim receives first batch of Covishield vaccine

6000 PLUS HEALTHWORKERS TO BE VACCINATED IN FIRST PHASE

**TSHERING EDEN
GANGTOK, 13 JAN:**

The state received its first lot of 1250 vials containing 12,500 doses of the Covishield vaccine this evening which has been kept in the walk-in cooler of the Universal Immunization Program (UPI) Store, Cold Chain Section in STNM Hospital Complex, Gangtok. Sikkim is slated to begin the first phase of the vaccination process on 16 Jan with the vaccination of health workers and other frontline workers. Till today, around 15,000 health workers and other frontline workers have registered for the vaccine and the numbers could still go up. This means that in the first phase around 6,000 persons will get the vaccine.



since each individual will have to be given two doses of

the vaccine.

The first 6,000 health and frontline workers are being chosen on first-come-first-serve basis and there is no criteria as such, said Director/State Immunization Officer, Dr. Phumzay Denzongpa, during a sensitization workshop on COVID-19 vaccination for media and health officials organized by the Health Department today in Gangtok.

She informed that so far, 10,367 state health workers, 148 central health workers and 5,527 other frontline workers have registered for COVID-19 vaccination.

The vaccine will be launched in Sikkim at STNM Hospital in Gangtok and at District Hospital in Gyalshing on 16 Jan, she

informed. She added that 220 vaccinators have been trained so far.

This Covishield vaccine comes in multi-dose vials which means that each vial will contain 10 doses of the vaccine which will have to be used within 4 hours of opening the vial. The vaccine can only be administered to persons aged 18 years and above.

Beneficiaries will have to be registered online following which they will be allotted a site by the District Collector who is the District Manager for the vaccination process. They will then get an SMS on the date and venue of the vaccination as well as an acknowledgement SMS.

turn to pg02

CM begins three-day tour of Poklok-Kamrang

AARON RAI

GANGTOK, 13 JAN:

Chief Minister PS Tamang began his interactive tour of his constituency, Poklok-Kamrang, from Assangthang Helipad today, meeting the public of three GPUs, namely Assangthang, Damthang and Sorok Sampani.

He was accompanied by Secretaries, HoDs and other dignitaries along with party workers.

The CM met the panchayats along with party workers of all three GPUs and listened to their demands and grievances. He then met and listened to the public of the three GPUs.

The CM handed over 18 wheelchairs to the elderly, printers to SHGs and agricultural loans to the public.



Also today, 12 job-training work orders of Rs 6 lakh each through Water Resources Department were handed over to the youth of the constituency.

In its 25 years of government SDF has done nothing in this constituency and there are still

lots of problem here which have to be solved, he said.

"The main problem is that of water supply shortage which we will solve anyhow. It was one of the points in our election manifesto," said the CM.

It is informed that he will interact with the public of another three GPUs - Salghari, Tinik Chisopani and Poklok - Denchung - on Thursday at Nandugon BAC, followed by Sikkip BAC.

The Chief Minister also shared his conviction that the festival will be the start of better days ahead and offered prayers for the safety and prosperity of Sikkim and wished for success, abundance and good health of all the citizens.

Maghe Sankranti greetings from CM

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 JAN:**

Chief Minister PS Tamang has extended greetings to the people of Sikkim on the occasion of Maghe Sankranti.

In his message, the CM, while pointing out that the festival could not be celebrated on a grand scale this time due to the pandemic, expressed hope for the circumstances to improve. He shares that he was optimistic since the vaccination process will be commencing soon.

The Chief Minister also shared his conviction that the festival will be the start of better days ahead and offered prayers for the safety and prosperity of Sikkim and wished for success, abundance and good health of all the citizens.

SDF to send comprehensive report on State Govt's Covid management lapses to GOI

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 JAN:**

Sikkim Democratic Front has demanded that a comprehensive report of what it sees as "management lapses" in Covid management by the State Government will be sent to the Government of India.

An SDF press release informs that the party's chief spokesperson, MK Subba, addressed a video press conference to announce this decision and elaborated a series of lapses recorded by the party in how the SKM Government has managed the pandemic in Sikkim.

Mr Subba leveled several charges of lapses in mitigation & containment planning by the



State Government and reiterated how the SDF has been suggesting and demanding course corrections since March last year.

The delay in setting up a Covid-testing lab, erratic policy on testing and charging people for such tests, failure to increase the number of tests conducted daily despite community spread and lack of clarity on why fatalities were so high in

Sikkim, and disinterested and disconnected human resource management and hiring were some of the points raised by Mr Subba.

He also shared statistical details of how infections and fatalities spiked without any apparent change how the pandemic was being managed here.

"Sikkim remains in the bottom of the

turn to pg02

COVID-19 active caseload in India dips to 2.14 lakh

NEW DELHI, JAN 13 (PTI): India's active caseload has fallen to 2.14 lakh, which is the lowest after 197 days, and its share in the total cases has further shrunk to 2.04 per cent, the Union Health Ministry said on Wednesday.

The total active cases were 2,15,125 on June 30, 2020.

A net decline of 2051 cases has been recorded in the total active cases in a span of 24 hours.

"The share of active cases in the total cases has further shrunk to 2.04 per cent. This is lowest after 197 days," the ministry said.

The daily cases in India are registering a consistent decline on a daily basis, the ministry underlined.

Less than 16,000 dai-

ly new cases (15,968) were added to the national tally in a span of 24 hours while 17,817 recoveries were registered during the same period.

"Recoveries outnumbering new cases have ensured a steady fall in the active cases," the ministry said.

The total recovered cases stand at 10,129,111 which translates to a national recovery rate of 95.51 per cent.

"The gap between recoveries and active cases continues to grow and presently stands at 99,14,604," the ministry highlighted.

Of the new recovered cases, 81.83 per cent are observed to be concentrated in 10 states and UTs.

Kerala has reported the maximum number

of single day recoveries with 4,270 recoveries. Maharashtra follows with 3,282 new recoveries. Chhattisgarh recorded another 1,207 daily recoveries.

The ministry said that 74.82 per cent of the new cases are concentrated in 7 states and UTs.

Kerala reported the maximum daily new cases numbering 5,507 in the last 24 hours. Maharashtra recorded 2,936 new cases while Karnataka reported 751 new cases yesterday.

Seven states and UTs account for 70.30 per cent of the 202 case fatalities reported in a span of 24 hours.

Maharashtra reported 50 deaths. Kerala and West Bengal follow with 25 and 18 new deaths, respectively.

With eight new cases, Sikkim's Covid count crosses 6K

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 JAN:**

Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 edged past the 6000-mark on Wednesday to stand at 6,004 with eight new cases of novel coronavirus getting detected in the last 24 hours.

Meanwhile, with 10 COVID patients getting discharged from isolation, the number of so discharged patients in Sikkim has further improved to 5,469.

The state currently has 311 active cases of novel coronavirus, of whom four are admitted in the ICU facility of the COVID-dedicated STNM Hospital at present.

In the daily health bulletin on Wednesday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia informed that all eight new cases were reported from East

District from the testing of 377 samples on Tuesday. All the cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 299 samples.

The new cases reported from in and around the capital have come from Pani House, Lower Chandmari, JN Road, Thapa Gaon and Burtuk.

Likewise, one person from Pradhan Gaon, Rhenock-Aritar, one from Lingtam Dak Line, Rongli and one from Upper Mangzim, Yangyang in South District were also tested COVID-19 positive.

Mr Bhutia informed that a 22-year-old man from Gangtok and a 23-year-old lady from Lower Sichey who tested positive yesterday could not be contacted on the phone numbers provided by them during testing and has urged them to immediately contact the concerned authorities.

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Saraswati Shishu Vidyalaya's annual exam results distributed

SUMMIT REPORT

RANGPO, 13 JAN:

The annual examination result distribution program of Saraswati Shishu Vidyalaya, Nayabazar, West Sikkim, managed under Vidya Bharati Sikkim, concluded today.

The program was attended by Secretary of the School Managing Committee, Govind Lohagan, Advisor Chhewang Doma Bhutia, parents, Principal Khushen Rai, students,



Acharya Rajesh Gupta and Bidhya Bharti, Sikkim Vidhya Bharati Office

Secretary, Surya Dhital. Also on the day, the school discussed online

and offline teaching processes, new admissions and teaching in 2021.

SP coordinates Safai Abhiyan across North Sikkim

WANGCHUK BHUTIA

MANGAN, 13 JAN:

An elaborate cleanliness drive was carried out under in Mangan Bazaar and other parts of North Sikkim on Wednesday under the supervision of SP-North Ongmu Bhutia, the Mangan Nagar Panchayat MEO, Tempo Bhutia and coordinated by safai karmacharis of the MNP, police and fire department



personnel, members of the business community,

taxi and goods carrier drivers.

The initiative aimed to carry out a safai abhiyan simultaneously across the district to involve members of the civil society in a coordinate manner to promote cleanliness and hygiene.

At Mangan, the SP-North thanked everyone for participating in the drive and applauded the role of the safai karmacharis in keeping the district neat and clean.

PIB webinar deliberates on public awareness initiatives for Covid vaccination in NE States

GANGTOK, 13 JAN (PIB):

Efficacy of Information awareness is vital for effective Covid Vaccination Process, experts opined in a Webinar organised by Press Information Bureau, Guwahati on the topic 'Public awareness Initiatives for Covid vaccination process in North Eastern States' here today. Experts from Medical along with academicians deliberated and discussed about Covid-19 Vaccination process and its awareness from medical, psychological, academic, societal and policy perspective.

Regional Director, LR Sailo, Indian Institute of Mass Communication, Aizawl, Mizoram said that being optimistic and having a positive mindset is vital aspect during the Covid-19 Vaccination process. He said that Information Dissemination and awareness to all citizens of the country is going to play a vital role. He said that anyone should not have prior premonitions and be psychologically strong is very essential. Talking about the planning and coordination for Vaccination in Mizoram, Shri Sailo urged the youth to lead others in this awareness endeavour.

Associate Professor,

Dr Shams Tabrez Khan, Department of Agricultural Microbiology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, said that technology and information are two vital components which has to work in tandem to reach all the citizens of the country. Dr Khan said that Covid Vaccine storage and transportation at suitable temperature would necessitate a planning and demonstration of technological prowess so that vaccination reaches all.

Principal, Dr Lopamudra Datta, Guru Nanak Institute of Pharmaceutical Science and Technology said that awareness has to be seen from two perspectives. She said that, firstly the awareness about Covid vaccine and vaccination process is one aspect. Dr Datta further said that, the second dimension is about information communication after vaccination, what precautions to consider and how vital it is to complete the schedule of the vaccine in a timely manner and to be aware of the information and vaccination status after completion.

HOO, Gajanan Survase, Prasar Bharati, Guwahati said that Doordarshan and All India Radio are consis-

tently and in a concerted manner during public awareness programmes and having news about Ministry of Health and Family Welfare awareness initiatives and regular programmes including webinars are driven to that awareness endeavour.

Psychologist, Prachi Rathie talked about the precautions and preventive measures at the Covid vaccine session site, as she mentioned about the guidelines of Ministry of Health and Family Affairs and said that one must rest at the vaccination centre for atleast half an hour after having the vaccine. She said that any discomfort or uneasiness should be informed to the health authorities. She emphasised about vital component of protection such as protective gears, social distancing and sanitization to tackle Covid situation.

Advocate Delhi High Court, Abdur Rahman Mallick opined that states should start making arrangements to tackle any Covid-19 vaccine related side-effects. He said that as with any other vaccine, common side-effects such as mild fever, pain, among others could be anticipated at the site of injection.

He said that vaccination process and infrastructure are aspects were all have to lead together so that WIN-WIN results are possible.

The informative and knowledge webinar was planned and coordinated by Joint Director (M&C), Samrat Bandyopadhyay, PIB, Guwahati. Senior officers of PIB were present in webinar.

Field Publicity Officer, Sucharita Sahoo, Field Outreach Bureau, Barpeta welcomed the experts as the webinar delved into details on the various aspects of the topic such as Covid information management including in the arena of health, efficacy of communication, among others. The interactive Webinar has enthusiastic participation of students, academicians and medical fraternity as they said that this information cum knowledge Webinar would help them in informed decision making and to be aware about the Covid precaution and about Vaccination process.

Along with students, eminent journalists and other government senior officials from Doordarshan Guwahati, Regional Outreach Bureau, Guwahati, All India Radio Guwahati were also present on the occasion.

Amid virus worries, millions expected at Kumbh Mela

HARIDWAR, 13 JAN [AFP]:

Hindu pilgrims flocked to the Ganga river on Wednesday, shrugging off the risk of coronavirus a day before the start of the Kumbh Mela -- a religious festival that attracts millions each time it is held.

Despite India having the second most coronavirus infections in the world -- and more than 150,000 deaths -- the virus has not stopped devout Hindus from making the pilgrimage.

"The pandemic is a bit of a worry, but we are taking all precautions," said organiser Siddharth Chakrapani, who expected between 8,00,000 to

10 lakh people to attend on Thursday alone.

"I'm sure Maa Ganga will take care of their safety," he added.

According to Hindu mythology, gods and demons fought a war over a sacred pitcher containing the nectar of immortality. Drops fell at four different locations, which now alternate as hosts for the immense gatherings.

Recognised as a cultural heritage by UNESCO in 2017, the last Kumbh Mela in Allahabad in 2019 attracted around 55 million people over 48 days.

This year, beginning Thursday, Haridwar is the host, and several mil-

lion people were expected to throng the holy city in Uttarakhand over the coming seven weeks.

'Not like Europe'

Sadhus are a regular feature at the Kumbh Mela, camping by the river and offering blessings to those who come for the holy immersion.

On Wednesday, its banks teemed with pilgrims and vendors while families laid out plastic sheeting for picnics.

Most were oblivious to the threat of coronavirus.

"India is not like Europe... when it comes to immunity we are better," said 50-year-old pilgrim Sanjay Sharma.

"It's really sad to see people not gathering at Kumbh in the same numbers as they would earlier -- just because of a sneeze or a cough.

"The greatest truth on earth is death. What's the point of living with fear?"

This week sees several other religious festivals in the country, including the Gangasagar in Kolkata where officials expect around 15,000 people.

Tamil Nadu's Madurai is due to host Jallikattu, the bull-taming sport, when revellers grab hold of the beasts' horns as they run through crowds of people.

Lungchok-Kamery GPU convenes 32nd Gram Sabha

SUMMIT REPORT

Namchi, 13 Jan:

Lungchok-kamery Gram Panchayat Unit under Melli Block Administrative Centre conducted its 32nd Gram Sabha today. The village assembly, chaired by Panchayat president, Deoraj Rai, passed the following resolution:

- Collection of garbage fee from public @2 per month.
- Water sources available at public and forest area shall not be privatised. And every individual shall be entitled to get the water.
- Revised rate for hawker's license @200 per month.
- GPU level open tender for camping at Tamley.
- Collection of entry fee and parking fee at Tamley Chaurr.
- Compulsory plantation at water sources and avenue plantation by every households.
- Panchayat



recommendation for marking order should be mandatory.

- Grazing of cattle at roadside and reserve forest should be strictly stopped.

The resolutions were placed on the house, and after thorough discussions, passed unanimously for the holistic development of the GPU, a press release informs.

The Gram Sabha also passed different developmental proposals prepared through the Participatory Rural Appraisal

process in all six wards and prioritized by the Gram Planning Forum under the Gram Panchayat Development Plan 2021-22, a press release informs.

The Panchayat secretary placed the Resource Envelope of the GPU under 15th Central Finance Commission Grant, 5th State Finance Commission Grant, Share of Net Profit and Own source of Revenue.

Draft plans were also placed by the concerned ward Panchayat repre-

sentatives and passed as per availability of the resources and need of the people, the release adds.

The beneficiary list of various centrally-sponsored schemes and state-sponsored schemes were also finalized today and verification for COI of applicants completed.

Officials from various Line Departments also placed information regarding schemes of the concerned departments during the Gram Sabha.

NHPC signs Definitive Agreement to take over Rangit Stage-IV

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 13 JAN:

NHPC signed the "Definitive Agreement" for the implementation of the "Approved Resolution Plan for takeover of 120 MW Rangit-IV HE Project of Jalpower Corporation Limited in Sikkim" today.

The agreement was signed between NHPC, Resolution Professional and Secured Financial Creditors (PFC and PNB)



in the presence of YK Chaubey, Director (Tech) NHPC, RP Goyal, Director (Finance) NHPC and se-

nior officers from NHPC and PFC.

National Company Law Tribunal's Hyder-

abad bench has approved NHPC's Resolution Plan to take over Jalpower Corporation Limited. The total cost of the project is estimated as Rs 943.20 Crore.

Jalpower Corporation Limited is the second company in Sikkim after Lanco Teesta Hydro Power Ltd (LTHPL) to be acquired through NCLT process by NHPC.

ITIs reopen in Gujarat after gap of nearly 10 months

AHMEDABAD, JAN 13 (PTI):

Industrial training institutes (ITIs) in Gujarat reopened on Tuesday after remaining shut for close to 10 months due to the coronavirus pandemic, an official said on Wednesday.

As per an official release, the decision to reopen these institutions was taken following an advisory issued by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.

In view of space constraints, the ITIs will have scheduled batch timings to ensure social distancing, said Vipul Mittra, additional chief secretary, Labour and Employment.

Online classes will continue as per the schedule and students will be allowed to attend virtual lessons for theory subjects till the exams of the previous batch are over, the official said.

"We have issued in-

structions to ensure that guidelines of the state and Central governments are adhered to. Each ITI has to appoint nodal officers who will monitor and ensure that the COVID-19 guidelines are followed," Mittra said.

Classes will be conducted in shifts each day or on alternate days, whichever the ITIs find suitable, he said.

The institutes have been asked to carry out

temperature screening on entry, use hand sanitisers, maintain social distancing and make sure students do not gather at one place, the official said.

"Around 200 to 250 hours of training will be required to complete the curriculum, and we will ensure that the training is completed in time. We will conduct classes even on second, fourth Saturdays and holidays," he added.

SDF to send comprehensive report....

table with respect to the establishment of testing centers, Covid-19 facilities i/c Designated CovidHospital, the Fatality rate, the Covid-19 emergency fund," SDF has contended.

Mr Subba also alleges that the State Task Force has never corresponded with the Central Government with regard to upscaling and enhancing measures to contain and mitigate Covid-19 in Sikkim.

"Also noted in the public domain is that the Govt. of Sikkim never constituted any expert committee to guide the medical preparedness of Sikkim against Covid-19 and bring awareness amongst the general public against the never seen before scale of Covid-19 induced pandemic in Sikkim," he adds.

About the vaccination drive which begins soon, SDF has stressed that the State Government should adhere to the laid down guidelines of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare "so that all the various sections of the people of Sikkim are inoculated with the eagerly awaited Covid-19 vaccine on time."

Sikkim receives first batch of Covishield vaccine....

They will also receive a Unique Health ID and after the vaccination is complete, a QR code based certificate. Dr Denzongpa informed that in case of any adverse effects after vaccination, health workers have been trained and provided Adverse Effect Following Immunization [AEFI] kits.

In response to media queries, she said that there is no information on whether the state will receive the same vaccine Covishield in the second phase as well and that the centre will decide which vaccine to send.

It may be mentioned that the other vaccine approved for distribution is Bharat Biotech's Covaxin which is surrounded by controversy as of now since there is no data on its efficacy yet.

Dr Denzongpa also said that the vaccine cannot be given to pregnant women but they can receive the vaccine after delivery.

Mission Director, National Health Mission, Sikkim, Dr T Yamphel said that it will take 3-4 months to cover just the health workers in the vaccination process. For the general public to be vaccinated it will take more time and like in elections, booth level set-ups might have to be done, he added.

Speaking to Summit Times, Dr Sumit, Nodal Officer, Central Referral Hospital, Tadong, said that around 2000 health workers from CRH have registered for vaccination. The hospital is also trying to start vaccinating its staff from 18 Jan onwards, he added.

On being asked, Dr Sumit said that the CRH staff will have to be vaccinated from the state's quota of vaccines.

The workshop was also attended by DG-cum Secretary, Health Department, Dr Pempa T. Bhutia, Medical Superintendent STNM Hospital, CRH Tadong staff, Health officials and media personnel.

LOST

I Chumit Lepcha, D/o. Chukit Lepcha /Cho Lepcha, Have lost my CBSE Board, Government Sr. Sec. School, Mangan North Sikkim original Marksheet of Class X bearing Roll No: 3152297. Marksheet lost while traveling from Mangan, N/Sikkim' to Gangtok, E/Sikkim. So I would like to obtain the same from the Respected education CBSE Board at earliest.

Madhya Pradesh man digs well at home in 15 days to ease wife's water woe

GUNA, 13 JAN [PTI]: Concerned about his wife having to fetch water daily from a hand-pump half-a-km away from their home in Madhya Pradesh's Guna, a poor labourer has dug a well in his own house in just a fortnight.

The district administration has lauded the man's efforts and decided to extend the benefits of some government schemes to him for make his life better.

46-year-old Bharat Singh had been worried about his wife travelling all the way to the hand-pump for the daily needs of his family of four.

One day, after being unable to get water due to a fault in the machine,



his wife returned home dejected and complained to him about it.

Mr Singh later told his wife that he will dig a well for her in the house, but she laughed at the

idea, the labourer told news agency PTI.

He then took it up as a challenge and to everyone's surprise, dug a 31-feet-deep and 6-feet-wide well in just 15 days

about two months back.

The well not only provides enough water for the daily needs of his family, which includes his aged mother, but also helps in irrigating their

small tract of land where the family grows crops for their consumption, he said.

Mr Singh, who lives in a hutment, said though he belongs to the Other Backward Classes and BPL (below poverty line) category, he had been unable to get a ration card for his family despite several efforts.

Guna Collector Kumar Purshottam appreciated Mr Singh's gesture towards his wife and directed officials of the zilla panchayat to provide benefits of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna and various other government schemes to him for the betterment of his life, a panchayat official said.

Sikkim stumbles on turning track against Bihar

SUMMIT REPORT

CHENNAI, 13 JAN:

Sikkim played its second match of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy and went down to Bihar at SSN College Ground, Chennai, today.

Sikkim won the toss and scored 110 runs in 20 overs for the loss of 8 wickets. Sikkim lads Nileshe Lamichaney and Ashish Thapa gave a good start with an opening partnership of 43 runs, a press release informs.

Varun Sood was the highest scorer for the



side with 28 runs with Nileshe scoring 24, Ashish 22 and Anureet Singh 18. The turning

track worked in Bihar's

favour with Ashutosh Aman collecting 4 crucial scalps.

Bihar overcame the target in 19.1 overs at

the loss of 2 wickets and won the match by 8 wickets.

On a positive note, debutant Rajiv Malay

Darjee who was debuting for Sikkim today, displayed a good game. In his 4 overs, he took the important wicket of Mangal Mahrouf who was batting at 55 and was the leading scorer for the Bihar side. The other two debutants for Sikkim were Md Saptullah and Md Ronak.

The second wicket was taken by Anureet Singh who claimed Shashem Rathour's wicket.

Sikkim will be playing against Nagaland on 15 January next at IC-Gurunanak College Ground, Chennai.



PHURBA IS THE QUICKEST GIRL AT DALSINGPARA OPEN MARATHON

Phurba Tamang from Sikkim stood first in the girls' category of the 10 KM Dalsingpara Open Marathon held on the occasion of National Youth Day yesterday at Dalsingpara in West Bengal.

Farmers burn copies of farm laws on Lohri

CHANDIGARH, JAN 13 (PTI): Farmers in Punjab on Wednesday burnt copies of the Centre's three new farm laws at several places on the festival of Lohri as a mark of protest against the legislations.

The harvest festival of Lohri is celebrated in Punjab, Haryana and other parts of north India. Bonfires are an important part of the festivities.

Protesting farmers owing allegiance to different farm bodies held protest at many places in the state and burnt copies of new agriculture laws.

Farmers also shouted slogans against the BJP-led Centre and slammed the government for not acceding to their demands. They demanded that the new farms laws should be repealed.

Farmers including women under the banner of Kisan Mazdoor Sang-



harsh Committee held a protest at Pandherkalan village in Amritsar.

We burnt the copies of the farm laws as a mark of protest against these legislations, said committee's general secretary Sarwan Singh Pandher in Amritsar.

Similar protests are also being held at other places in Amritsar.

Until the Centre accepts all the demands of farmers, our agitation will continue, said Pandher.

We will not accept these farm laws as they are not in the interest of the farming community and the government should repeal these leg-

islations, said a protester.

Farmers also burnt copies of the new farm laws at many places including Hoshiarpur, Sangrur and Kapurthala in the state.

Farmers, who have been camping at the Delhi borders, are demanding a repeal of the farm laws and a legal guarantee to the minimum support price for crops.

The Supreme Court on Tuesday had stayed the implementation of controversial new farm laws till further orders and decided to set up a 4-member committee to resolve the impasse over them between the Centre and farmers' unions protesting at Delhi borders.

PATNA, 13 JAN [PTI]: The murder of an IndiGo Airlines executive in Bihar's Patna has triggered a political backlash for Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, with the opposition demanding his resignation and even leaders of his ally BJP criticizing him openly.

Rupesh Kumar Singh, 44, a manager with the private airline, was shot dead last evening outside the gates of his home, barely two km from the Chief Minister's residence. He was waiting in his SUV for the gates to open when two men riding a bike opened fire at him.

Hours earlier, he had been seen at the Patna airport when the Covid vaccine arrived. The police believe the killers chased him from the airport 3 km from his home.

"He was from Chhapra and we are looking

into whether there was some enmity involved," said Jitendra Kumar, a senior police officer in Patna.

The Chief Minister's Office said Nitish Kumar had spoken to the police, which has assigned the case to a Special Investigation Team. The Chief Minister had ordered quick and tough action against the accused and speedy trial to bring them to justice, said a statement, which, however, failed to silence the political attacks.

Mr Singh, a father of two children below 10, was a high profile figure known to many politicians and bureaucrats.

A BJP MP, Vivek Thakur, called for a CBI investigation, describing the killing as "as sad and serious". He said the police should produce results in the next few days or hand over the case to the CBI.



Another BJP leader, Rajya Sabha member Gopal Narayan Singh, was far more caustic as he said Nitish Kumar had no control over law and order in the state. "The government of Bihar is running with (BJP) our support, but we are aware of the situation. It is also necessary to speak on this for the improvement of Bihar. I think law and order is poor in the state and corruption cases are on surge. There is no control over the law order in the state. There is no visible grip of our government on the current police system presently," Mr Singh said.

"Our expectations

were that when Nitish Kumar became Chief Minister for the fourth time, he would work strictly on the law and order situation and rise above politics and think for the people of Bihar. But laxity is seen; it looks like the future is not looking bright," added the BJP parliamentarian.

The Bihar Police reports to Nitish Kumar, who is also the state Home Minister.

Reports of a rift within the ruling coalition were already in the air, ever since the November Bihar election in which the BJP gained an upper hand over the Chief Minister's party by scoring

many more seats.

The Chief Minister's party man, Janata Dal United MP Sunil Kumar Pintu, said, "Our leader's commitment to maintaining law and order will bear no fruits until and unless officials concerned pull up their socks."

But his words did nothing to block the attacks.

In sharp tweets, opposition leader Tejashwi Yadav said "power-protected criminals killed Rupesh Kumar Singh" and "criminals are running the government in Bihar".

"This incident has taken place just two km from the Chief Minister's residence, which proves no one is safe. If Nitish Kumar is not able to control law and order, he should resign," the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader told reporters.

Consider activist Varavara Rao's health while making submissions: Court to NIA

MUMBAI: The Bombay High Court on Wednesday said the NIA and the Maharashtra government should consider the age and health condition of poet-activist Varavara Rao, arrested in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case, while making submissions on his bail plea.

A division bench of Justices SS Shinde and Manish Pitale posted Mr Rao's plea seeking bail on medical grounds for hearing on Thursday.

Varavara Rao, one of the accused in the case being probed by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), was last month admitted to Nanavati Hospital here following the HC's intervention while hearing a

petition filed by his wife, raising concerns over his ill-health.

Since then, the private hospital has been submitting periodical reports on Rao's health condition to the HC.

The Maharashtra government last month agreed to bear the expenses for his treatment at the Nanavati Hospital.

"The petitioner (Rao) is 88 years' old. Keep in view his age and health conditions. While making submissions on the bail plea, reflect on his health. We are all human beings," Justice Shinde said.

Earlier, Mr Rao had been in and out of the state-run JJ Hospital here ever since his arrest in the case in June 2018.

In July last year, he tested positive for coronavirus following which he was admitted to the Nanavati Hospital, but later discharged and sent back to the Taloja jail in neighbouring Navi Mumbai.

Apart from Varavara Rao's bail plea, the court is also hearing a petition filed by his wife Hemlatha, alleging a breach of his fundamental rights due to his continued incarceration without adequate medical care.

Varavara Rao and some other Left-leaning activists were earlier arrested for alleged links with Maoists following the Elgar Parishad case in Maharashtra's Pune district on December 31, 2017.

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Study and Nurture the EMRS Model

Share the story of the Girls from Gangyap to inspire Sikkim

The schools will eventually reopen properly. And with that will begin the process of learning properly [hopefully] all over again. Good time then to relearn what Sikkim should aspire for when it comes to inspiring it young... what models to emulate...

Basketball has traditionally not been big in Sikkim, its popularity growing from a spectator sport to one diligently played being a rather recent phenomenon. Hill-people physiques, one was constantly told, were better suited for football or the martial arts, and although sportspersons from Sikkim have performed consistently well in the latter two disciplines, the phenomenal Girls from Gangyap have proven that no stereotype can hold out against passion and commitment supported by the right belief and faith. Basketball at EMRS-Gangyap started on a rough mud-court [which was not even regulation size] in remote West Sikkim, without even a proper hoop, and the idea since acquired legendary status and branched off into more disciplines ranging from academic excellence to professional-level musical performances. Two years back, in those simpler, more exciting pre-Covid times, five girls from the school team were invited to be part of the Madhya Pradesh and Assam teams at the National Basketball Championship. One of the EMRS students, Nima Doma Bhutia, was even appointed captain of the MP state team. This was a substantial achievement for the basketball players from EMRS, who, one may add here, are not new to breaking new ground. The girls' basketball team of Eklavya Model Residential School has also conclusively demolished the myth that basketball was an elite sport of tall kids sporting branded sneakers and having access to state-of-the-art facilities.

There is no denying the fact that such stereotypes held strong in Sikkim as well, because just about every "private" school here had a basketball court, but none had really invested time, belief or training which would have inspired their teams to aim for glory beyond Sikkim or dribble for more than court swag creds. Such support was however extended to the EMRS squad and the girls have reciprocated exceptionally well, turning all stereotypes on the head and blazing a triumphant path which has no equals. Their journey from remote Gangyap to glory as national champs needs to be celebrated by everyone in Sikkim, and their story shared widely... to inspire, motivate and reflect pride.

The Eklavya Model Residential School at Gangyap is one which few in Sikkim would have heard of until EMRS started grabbing headlines thanks to its girls' basketball team. Until the EMRS girls discovered the sport of basketball and excelled, few even in West Sikkim would even have heard of Gangyap. Most people in Sikkim will still not be able to find Gangyap on the map, but most would know that this is the village where an EMRS is based. To give such recall-value to a village of much greater antiquity than the school it hosts is a rich endorsement of what the school has achieved despite infrastructural and other handicaps. For those interested to know where Gangyap is – it is 19 kilometres north of Tashiding, en route to (officially) the remotest village of Sikkim, Karjee. It can be safely said that unless one is a student at EMRS or has friends there, there are very few reasons to head that way. And yet, the school has consistently produced basketball players of exceptional skill and resolve. Some years ago, the school management's persistence with the sport achieved its stars legendary status as the first school from the entire Northeast region to have won the CBSE under-19 Basketball Championship.

The model school's model to inspire its students to aim big needs to be studied, appreciated, understood and replicated across the State because what Sikkim students lack are not opportunities, but conviction and confidence. Who better to learn that from than the girls enrolled in a school which still does not have a proper campus, but does not allow conditions which would spread hopelessness among most to curtail their dreams?

It is important to bear in mind that the EMRS success is neither a flash in the pan nor is it born from the coincidence of a group of exceptionally gifted girls coming together by chance. The EMRS squad sees new players almost every year, but has still consistently grown in strength. Despite many of its students having never seen a basketball until they enrolled here, the school boasts an exceptional bench-strength with even its 'B' and 'C' teams strong enough to beat any other team in the State. It has obviously taken years of hard work, consistent commitment and rare optimism to craft together the skills and confidence which led to EMRS standing tall as national champs and as belonging to a tribe of players who command respect with mere introductions.

And to think that the school was only established in 2007!

The credit must largely go to the school management which believed in its students, worked with them, groomed their skills and ended up reflecting such pride on Sikkim. The school's administrators and its students should be contracted as resource persons and escorted to schools across the State to share their experience to inspire and motivate more among the young to believe in themselves and convince the elders to invest respect, belief, time and support in the young to deliver Sikkim the achievers it deserves.

They're Everywhere: New Study Finds Polyester Fibres Throughout the Arctic Ocean

PETER S. ROSS
THECONVERSATION.COM

The Arctic has long proven to be a barometer of the health of our planet. This remote part of the world faces unprecedented environmental assaults, as climate change and industrial chemicals threaten a way of life for Inuit and other Indigenous and northern communities that rely heavily on seafood and marine mammals for food.

But who would have imagined that the clothes we wear might add to this onslaught? Evidence increasingly shows that tiny synthetic fibres are permeating the Arctic Ocean and finding their way into zooplankton, fish, seabirds and marine mammals.

In a new study published in Nature Communications, my colleagues and I find a stark confirmation that microplastics are found throughout the Arctic Ocean from Europe to the North Pole and the North American Arctic. Their presence raises concerns that textiles, laundry and municipal wastewater may be an important source of these emerging pollutants.

EXTENSIVE ARCTIC SAMPLING AND IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

Our research was led by a team at Ocean Wise Conservation Association in Vancouver, and supported by field teams from Fisheries and Oceans Canada. We collected seawater samples were collected from just below the surface of the Arctic Ocean as part of four scientific expeditions stretching from Tromsø, Norway, to the Beaufort Sea in North America.

A total of 71 near-surface samples were collected across the Arctic. We also collected 26 samples from the Beaufort Sea from just below the surface down to a depth of 1,015 metres. We then filtered and analyzed the samples back at the Ocean Wise Plastics Lab using microscopes and spectroscopy to identify plastic polymers.

Microplastics are particles less than five millimetres long. We found an average of 49 microplastic particles per cubic meter of seawater throughout the Arctic, illustrating just how widespread synthetic plastic pollution has become in this remote region. This is lower than concentrations found in more urbanized



regions in the South, but approaching levels found in the open Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

Of these, 92 per cent were fibres, averaging 14 microns (0.014 mm) thick and 1,100 microns (1.1 mm) long. We documented every colour imaginable: red, blue, yellow, green.... But perhaps the most striking finding in the lab was that 73 per cent of these fibres were polyester.

TRACKING THE SOURCE OF MYS-TERY FIBRES

Our research expedition covered more than 20,000 kilometres and provided clues as to the origins of these fibres. Their widespread distribution points to sources outside the Arctic, rather than local ones.

We found that fibres in the eastern Arctic were three times more abundant in the eastern Arctic than the west. They were also 50 per cent longer in the east, and their infrared signature more closely resembled commercial polyester.

All this evidence suggests most of these fibres entered the Arctic Ocean from the Atlantic Ocean. Oceanographic features provide a supporting explanation for these observations, with approximately nine times more water entering the Arctic Ocean from the Atlantic than the Pacific.

The size, shape, colours and polymer identity of the majority of

these particles provide additional indications of their origins. These physical characteristics closely resembled what we encountered in our 2018 study of microplastics in the largest domestic wastewater treatment plant in Vancouver.

The size and shape of these fibres also closely mirrored those observed in laundry effluent, and builds on a series of studies showcasing the vulnerability of textiles to shedding during home laundry. In fact, we recently estimated that the average Canadian or U.S. household releases over 500 million fibres per year from laundry. This adds up to 3.5 quadrillion fibres weighing 878 tonnes from these two countries alone.

NOT ALL TEXTILES SHED EQUALLY

The weight of evidence points to something most of us could not even imagine: that washing our clothes is contributing to the widespread contamination of the world's oceans with microfibers — both synthetic and natural. There is a glimmer of hope, though, as we see many textile design, manufacture and retail firms steeping onto the sustainability path.

In launching our Microfibre Partnership — now supported by organizations in Canada, the United States and Europe, including MEC, Patagonia, REI, Arc'teryx, the

Outdoor Industry Association, Joe Fresh, Aritzia, Cotton Inc., McLean Foundation, Laudes Foundation, MetroVancouver and Environment and Climate Change Canada, we have discovered that not all textiles shed equally. In fact, an 800-fold difference between low and high fibre shedding material points to a significant opportunity for more sustainable clothing design.

And there is much more opportunity for positive momentum, with governments working around the world on a legislative agenda for plastics. Canada launched the Ocean Plastics Charter at the G7 in 2018.

Consumers and homeowners are stepping up, too, as the world increasingly embraces a closed-loop economy for plastics, where items are reused or recycled instead of thrown away. In the case of laundry, one can install a lint trap that reduces fibre release from washing machines by up to 95 per cent.

There is much bad news about the environment these days, but our report about microplastics in the Arctic can help us chart a clear set of solution-oriented opportunities for the public, for governments and for the private sector.

[the writer is Adjunct professor, Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Sciences, University of British Columbia]

US Capitol Riot: The Myths Behind the Tattoos Worn by 'QAnon Shaman' Jake Angeli

TOM BIRKETT
THECONVERSATION.COM

The defining image of the storming of the US Capitol on January 6 was undoubtedly that of a bare-chested man posing resplendent in a horned fur hat and face paint. Images of him in his weird costume have been shared across the globe – he seems to perfectly encapsulate the absurdity of the mob takeover of America's sacred seat of power.

The individual in question has since been identified in the media as a far-right activist from Arizona by the name of Jacob Chansley (also known as Jake Angeli). He was quickly alleged to be an adherent of the QAnon conspiracy theory – though not before fake rumours spread that he was actually an antifa "plant".

One thing that should make it very clear where Angeli's politics lie are his tattoos. On his torso he has a large Thor's hammer, known as Mjölnir, and what appears to be an image of the Norse world tree, Yggdrasil.

Mjölnir is one symbol we can be pretty sure was used by the original adherents of the Norse belief system, perhaps to summon the protection of the god Thor. Yggdrasil is the giant ash tree that supports the Norse cosmos, its branches reaching into sky realms inaccessible to humans, and its roots to the subterranean realm of the dead. Unlike Thor's hammer, it was only rarely depicted by the Vikings, and representations such as the one below are modern interpretations.

Above these tattoos with a central place in Norse mythology is one that is more contentious. It depicts a valknut – an image that appears on two Viking-Age stones from Sweden carved with scenes from Norse mythology, including the Stora Hammars I stone on the island of Gotland.

The symbol's original meaning is unclear, but it appears in close proximity to the father of the gods, Odin, on the stones. As Odin is closely connected with the gathering of fallen warriors to Valhalla, the valknut may be a symbol of death in battle.

Snorri Sturluson, a medieval Icelandic collector of myths, tells us in his "Language of Poetry" that a famous giant called Hrungnir had a stone heart "pointed with three corners", and so the valknut is



sometimes also called "Hrungnir's Heart". Whatever its original meaning, it has been used in more recent times by various neo-pagan groups – and increasingly by some white supremacists as a coded message of their belief in violent struggle.

BORROWED SYMBOLS

Angeli claims that he wears his bizarre costume to draw attention to himself – but there's surely another reason for the bare chest and precariously low-slung pants. He is displaying these tattoos to full effect, and wants them to be seen.

Many people have similar tattoos which express their neo-pagan belief, Scandinavian heritage, or interest in the myths. But there is no doubt that these symbols have also been co-opted by a growing far-right movement. A hint at where Angeli lies on this continuum is in a tattoo that is less visible on his left shoulder, but which several academics including archaeologist Kevin Philbrook Smith have pointed out seems to be a version of the Sonnenrad, or sun-wheel.

This is a symbol listed by the Anti-Defamation League as "one of a number of ancient European symbols appropriated by the Nazis in their attempt to invent an idealised Aryan or Norse heritage". Often it contains a swastika or other hate symbol – but worn with nothing inside, it is very easy for other white supremacists to fill in the blank.

DOG WHISTLES

There is, of course, a long history of the co-opting of Norse imagery by the far right. Beloved of Himmler, the runic script inspired the insignia of the SS, while the swastika is another of those "ancient European symbols" that features in various

forms on picture stones and runic inscriptions.

This misappropriation continued after the fall of the Third Reich, though in a more muted form. Neo-Nazis – at least those not brazen enough to wear a swastika – tend to opt for less recognisable symbols. These include numbers representing "Heil Hitler" (88 – H is the eighth letter of the alphabet) or "Aryan Brotherhood" (12 – letters one and two). Far-right adherents also favour other characters from the Germanic runic writing system which communicate similar messages.

One of these is the Othala runic letter – its name means "inherited land", and so it frequently appears in the emblems of white nationalist groups from Ukraine to the US.

These "coded" symbols, and others newly borrowed from Norse myth, are even harder to spot and condemn. Sky recently cancelled a reality TV show after viewers complained one contestant was covered in tattoos – including on his face – that could be seen as having far-right connotations. But if certain symbols are hard for the general public to spot, they are certainly dog whistles to members of an increasingly global white supremacist movement who know exactly what they mean.

Many scholars argue that the best way to counter far-right misuse is to drown it out with positive and accurate representations of Norse myth – the position I took in my recent retelling. But in the wake of the mass shooting in Norway in 2011 by Anders Breivik, who named his guns after weapons of the Norse gods, as well as the 2019 Christchurch mass shooter Brenton Tarrant, with his allusions to Valhalla, and of this latest poster-boy of far-right insurrection, we have to think very hard about whether this is the right approach to counter a truly global extremist movement. At the very least, academics – and anyone else with a genuine interest in Norse mythology – need to be far more involved in countering these abuses of our subject on the ground.

Otherwise, we run the risk of ceding the field to those who see the vague concept of "Norse heritage" as a way to further unite an international fraternity of violent white supremacists.

[the writer is Lecturer in Old English, University College Cork]

Army to recruit women pilots from 2022

NEW DELHI, JAN 12: Women will be inducted as pilots in the Army Aviation Corps from next year, Indian Army Chief General Manoj Mukund Naravane said on Tuesday.

Till now, women are only part of ground duties in the Army Aviation Corps. Women pilots would be flying helicopters to forward locations and be part of operations at the borders, the Army Chief said, adding that the proposal has been cleared.

The Indian Air Force has 10 women fighter pilots. In the Indian Navy, women pilots are flying the Dornier aircraft and also as observers on board helicopters and P8I surveillance aircraft.

Other than the 10 fighter pilots, the IAF has 111 women pilots who fly transport planes and choppers.

During his annual press conference in New Delhi, General Naravane said:

"Last month, I had initiated a proposal that women officers can be recruited to Army Avi-



ation. The next course which will begin in July this year, will induct women for training purposes in flying branch and after one year they will be able to join in operational duties."

The Indian Army raised the Army Aviation Corps on November 1, 1986 and it comprises helicopters that fly in conflict and peace zones.

The Aviation Corps is critical for the Indian Army as it is pressed into action for evacuation of injured troops during operations or health emergencies in high altitude areas.

Army Aviation Corps choppers are also used for reconnaissance, observation, casualty evacuation, essential load drops, and combat search and rescue.

The helicopters participate in Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations across the country. The corps has played an important role in the past in operations like Kargil but has also been at the forefront carrying out varied tasks during the ongoing India-China military standoff in Ladakh.

Army on high alert
Indian Army is on

high alert not only in Eastern Ladakh but across the Northern Border with China, General Naravane said on Tuesday.

"We have gone into a winter deployment situation... We (India and China) will reach amicable solutions. However, we are ready to meet any eventuality," he said.

General Naravane said that last year the Army had to walk the talk to meet the challenges and the force did so successfully.

"First biggest challenge was Covid and the next was the situation at

the northern border," he said.

He also said there was no cause of concern on the logistical issues and the force's operational preparedness is of high order. "Morale of the troops is high," General Naravane said.

"The situation at the Line of Actual Control is the same as it was last year. The status quo remains the same. We have received directions from the government to remain in the same position where we are deployed at the friction point.

"There is no change in the deployment in the friction area in Eastern Ladakh," said the Army Chief.

"There is no decrease in the number of troops in the friction areas," said the Army Chief.

"In depth area of the Tibet region, every year Chinese People's Liberation Army troops come for training and after training they leave. Troops from some training areas have been vacated," he added.

Sapana Pradhan Malla replaces Hari Krishna Karki as Constitutional Bench is set to hear House dissolution case

KATHMANDU, 13 JAN [KATHMANDUPOST]: Chief Justice Cholendra Shumsher Rana has inducted justice Sapana Pradhan Malla into the Constitutional Bench in place of Justice Hari Krishna Karki who had recused himself from the bench on January 6.

Rana has given continuity to Bishowambhar Prasad Shrestha, Anil Kumar Sinha and Tej Bahadur KC as other members of the bench, which will continue the hearing on the 13 writs filed against President Bidya Devi Bhandari's decision to dissolve the House of Representatives as per the recommendation of the KP Sharma Oli government.

During a hearing on January 6, the petitioners and the lawyers had raised why Karki was on the bench, saying his



presence constituted a conflict of interest.

Karki was appointed attorney general in October 2015 after Oli was elected prime minister for the first time following the promulgation of the constitution.

The lawyers argued that since Karki, in the capacity of the attorney

general, had served as the chief legal counsel to Oli back in 2015, his presence on the bench constituted a conflict of interest as the bench was hearing the petitions in which Oli is one of the defendants.

Karki had then decided to recuse himself from the bench, resulting in

the adjournment of the hearing on January 6.

According to Kishor Poudel, a communication expert at the Supreme Court, Wednesday's hearing will focus on whether to send the writs to the extended full bench or continue the hearing by the Constitutional Bench itself.

"The final hearing will begin only after the decision over the bench," he told the Post.

The formation of five-member bench had run into controversy on the very first day, on December 25, after Chief Justice Rana chose the members for the bench from the roster of 14 justices leaving out some senior justices.

Malla, the new member on the bench, was appointed a Supreme Court justice in March 2016 along with Karki and Sinha.

While Karki and Malla were appointed under the erstwhile CPN-UML quota, Sinha was recommended by the Nepali Congress.

Malla was also a member in the first Constituent Assembly under proportional representation system from the UML party.

Chhattigarh receives 3.23 lakh Covishield vaccine doses

RAIPUR, JAN 13 (PTI): The first consignment of 3.23 lakh doses of Covishield vaccine reached Chhattisgarh's capital Raipur from Pune on Wednesday, a health official said.

An IndiGo flight carrying the consignment arrived at the Swami Vivekanand Airport here around 1.40 pm, an airport official said.

Amid high security, boxes containing the vaccine vials were shifted in refrigerated vans to the state vaccine store in Shashtri Chowk area, Chhattisgarh's Mission Director for the National Health Mission, Priyanka Shukla, told PTI.

In the first batch, the state has received 3.23 lakh doses of the Cov-



ishield vaccine manufactured by the Pune-based Serum Institute of India, she said.

A total of 2,67,399 healthcare personnel and other frontline workers will be vaccinated in the first phase, for which 1,349 centres have been

identified across the state.

However, for the rollout scheduled on January 16, 99 vaccination centres have been selected, said Shukla, the state's nodal officer for the coronavirus vaccination drive.

Later, vaccine stocks from the storage centre here will be ferried to other storage facilities in various districts in insulated vans, she said.

For the storage purposes, one state-level, three regional and 27 district-level cold chain

points have been set up, she said.

At present, the state has 630 active cold chain points for the safe storage and transportation of vaccines, while there are 81 additional cold chain points, she said.

As many as 1,311 cold-storage boxes are available for transportation, while 360 dry-storage facilities have been set up for syringes, needles and other material, she added.

Chhattisgarh's COVID-19 caseload stood at 2,90,813 till Tuesday.

Of these, 2,79,236 people have so far recovered, while 3,517 patients have died till now due to the disease, as per official figures.

Cold affects life in Nepal's Tarai districts

BUTWAL, 13 JAN [KATHMANDUPOST]: Tulasa Chaudhary, 56, of Butwal Sub-metropolitan City Ward No. 17 in Rupandehi has been housebound for the past four days due to a plunge in temperatures. A vegetable seller, she moves around the city selling the produce from her field.

"The past few days have been very difficult for me. The cold wave has made it difficult for me to go about my daily work. It's hard to preserve my vegetables too," she said.

Hawkers generally go from street to street in the morning to sell vegetables but the streets have been empty of hawkers in Butwal of late due to the cold wave.

Rupandehi, a Tarai district in Lumbini Province, has not received sunshine for the past four days, according to local residents. Human movement in the marketplaces and even the traffic flow in the streets have significantly decreased.

The cold wave has affected everyone but it's the daily wage earners like Chaudhary who have been hit the hardest.

Sharada Tharu of Butwal says she is worried about managing her daily expenses since it's getting difficult for her to go out in the morning to sell vegetables.

"I sell vegetables door-to-door but the past few days have seen a thick blanket of fog in the morning," said Tharu. "It's difficult to go out in the morning but I am braving the cold for now. If the cold wave continues, I may not be able to step out."

Cold wave is a weather condition with a rapid fall in temperature due to a lack of sunshine, dense fog and cold wind.

Districts across the Tarai region are affected by the cold wave every year.

Patients with special medical needs are also hit hard by the increasingly cold weather in the area.

"I have to provide special care to my elderly father-in-law, an asthma patient. The cold is cruel to patients like him," said Dharmikala Chaudhary of Kohalpur-2 in Banke district. She too has not been able to venture out of her house for the past few days due to the cold wave.

In Nepalgunj, business activities have come to a standstill, which has pushed many wage earners into difficult times.

"I haven't been able to find any work in the past two days," said Jyendra Khatri, who ekes out a living as a porter in BP Chowk, Nepalgunj. "So many of us have been jobless with no alternate source of income."

Various district administrations and local units have started distributing warm clothes and firewoods to the impoverished people. The district administration office in Baridaya has distributed 50 blankets to elderly people and postpartum mothers. Chief District Officer Liladhar Adhikari said the district administration released Rs 1 million budget as disaster management to eight local units in the district in light of this year's cold wave.

In Kapilvastu, marketplaces and government offices on Tuesday wore a deserted look due to the biting cold. According to Ramu Regmi, an officer at Ramnagar field unit of the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology, Tuesday was the

coldest day in Kapilvastu this year.

"The minimum temperature was recorded at eight degree Celsius on Tuesday. The sky might not open up for the next few days," said Regmi.

Medical professionals advise people to stay indoors to avoid catching cold-related diseases like pneumonia and viral fever.

"In cold weather, the chances of infants below five years catching pneumonia are very high. Special care should be provided to senior citizens and people with chronic diseases," said Dr Dinesh Shrestha, the deputy director at Nepalgunj Medical College.

Dharan in Province 1 witnessed dense fog for the first time in 12 years and visibility was reduced to 50 metres on Tuesday morning, according to Akhalesh Chaurasiya, an assistant meteorologist in the Dharan-based Meteorological Forecasting Division. Geographically, Dharan, which is encircled by hills from three sides and connected to Chhar Koshe forest in Tarai, is listed as a low fog area.

"Cold waves are common in Tarai during this season. The dense fog in Dharan is mainly due to the western low-pressure system," said Chaurasiya.

According to him, the minimum temperature was recorded at 14.4 degree Celsius in Dharan on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, normal life in Province 2 has also been affected due to the cold wave since the last two days. But authorities have done nothing for impoverished households who are facing extreme cold weather conditions.

Nepal's Covid-19 toll reaches 1,937 with five more deaths

KATHMANDU, 13 JAN [KATHMANDUPOST]: Nepal on Wednesday reported five more Covid-19-related fatalities, pushing the death toll to 1,937. The country also recorded 445 new cases.

The overall infection tally has reached 266,143 with 4,434 active cases.

According to the Ministry of Health and Population, 259,772 infected people have recovered

from the disease so far; of them 414 in the past 24 hours.

Kathmandu Valley recorded 246 new infections in the past 24 hours. Of them, 189 cases were confirmed in Kathmandu, 38 in Lalitpur and 19 in Bhaktapur.

As of Wednesday, the number of confirmed cases in the Valley has reached 124,103. While Kathmandu has reported 483 Covid-19-related

fatalities so far, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur have recorded 152 and 111 deaths respectively.

According to the ministry, 963 individuals from Bagmati Province, 251 from Lumbini Province, 222 from Province 1, 216 from Province 2, 194 from Gandaki Province, 65 from Sudurpaschim Province, and 26 from Karnali Province have died of Covid-19 so far.

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Manchester United 'excited and hungry' for summit meeting with Liverpool



LOUISE TAYLOR
LONDON, 13 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Ole Gunnar Solskjær said his Manchester United players are “ready, excited and hungry” before Sunday’s Premier League summit meeting at Liverpool.

Following Tuesday night’s 1-0 win at Burnley, United travel to Anfield top of the table, three points ahead of Jürgen Klopp’s side. “We’re getting better and better,” said Solskjær. “We’re in a good position. But no one will remember the league table on the 12th of January; Sunday is a test of character and quality. We’re looking forward to it; it will be a great test of we’re at against the deserved champions and the best team by a mile in this country for quite a long time. We’re ready, excited and hungry.”

Paul Pogba’s deflected volley clinched victory on a night punctuated by VAR controversy but which ended with United top at this stage of a season for the first time since Sir Alex Ferguson’s final year in charge.

“We’re seeing the best of Paul at the moment,” said Solskjær, who could be without Anthony Martial on Merseyside after the forward limped off late on. “Paul’s had in-

juries and Covid [earlier in the season] so it was natural for him to need time to get back to full fitness. I’ve always said Paul is a big player for us. He’s a good character in the dressing room.”

Pogba was suitably delighted. “We knew if we won we’d be top when we played Liverpool on Sunday,” said the match-winner. “We have to keep calm. Now is the big moment. Sunday will be a beautiful game for everybody.”

While Burnley’s manager, Sean Dyche, described United as “a top side”, Solskjær acknowledged that his team’s ninth victory in 11 games was not straightforward. “We should have scored more, but we always do it the hard way,” said United’s manager who saw Harry Maguire have a goal disallowed contentiously. “Patience and calmness was the key.”

Solskjær admitted it is extremely difficult to prevent footballers celebrating goals amid the pandemic. “It’s an emotional game,” he said. “You have to understand footballers and you also have to understand the concern. It’s difficult. Football brings the best and the worst out in you. We all do our best to stay within the guidelines. We all want football to carry on – and safely.”

Francesca Jones books trip to Australian Open with impressive straight-sets win



SYDNEY, 13 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Great Britain’s Francesca Jones qualified for the main draw of a grand slam for the first time after beating Lu Jia-jing in the final round of qualifying for the Australian Open. The 20-year-old from Leeds only won her first slam qualifying match on Monday, but has now reached her first major tournament with a confident 6-0 6-1 victory over Lu.

Jones broke with her first opportunity of the match, and continued in the same fashion before taking the first set without dropping a game. It was on her serve that Jones found dominance, winning 90% of points when she landed her first serve, and Lu was unable

to fight back.

Jones went into the game ranked 241 in the women’s singles and having never featured in a grand slam, with Lu ranked 40 places ahead of her and with significantly more experience.

The British No 5’s progress is especially impressive because she was born with a congenital condition that means she only has three fingers and a thumb on each hand, three toes on one foot and four toes on the other.

The youngster was the only one of Britain’s five entrants to make it past the opening round of the qualifying events, which are being played in Dubai and Doha to limit the number of players travelling to Australia.

Megan Rapinoe on Capitol attack: 'This is America. We showed our true colors'

BRYAN ARMEN GRAHAM
NEW YORK, 13 JAN

[THEGUARDIAN]: Megan Rapinoe has decried the “devastating” attack on the US Capitol, putting forth the uncomfortable claim that America “showed very much our true colors” when a mob of pro-Trump supporters descended on Washington DC.

“This was about white supremacy and holding up white supremacy,” Rapinoe said.

The 35-year old forward, who is back in the US women’s national team fold for the first time since the 2020 She-Believes Cup nearly a year ago, opened a media teleconference on Tuesday with a six-minute exposition on the fractious state of the country in the wake of last week’s siege.

“Hopefully [it’s] the final straw for so many people to really understand the reason that we’re here is because we never have actually had a reckoning with what our country really is,” Rapinoe said. “This is America. Make no mistake about it. I think we showed very much our true colors. This is not the first time we’ve seen a murderous mob like that. Unleashing a white supremacy mob is nothing new to America as



people of color, black and brown, know very well.”

She added: “It’s just striking how horrible it was, and just how insane it was, from the climate in the country being such that we have our political leaders, our chief political leader, inciting an actual real-life murderous and deadly insurrection against his own government, against his own people, against his own party.”

Protesters swarmed the Capitol last Wednesday, putting it on lockdown, as Mike Pence rebuffed Donald Trump’s demand to overturn his loss to Joe Biden and the Senate’s Republican leader denounced a bid in Congress to undo the election outcome.

Trump supporters overturned barriers

and clashed with police on the Capitol grounds and streamed inside the building. Five people died in the attempted insurrection, including a police officer.

Rapinoe urged lawmakers to press for a thorough investigation of what led to the invasion, warning that rushed proceedings could encourage future attacks.

“All the calls for unity and moving forward obviously cannot come without justice. If we do not punish this and investigate this to the fullest extent, it only encourages more of this to happen,” she said. “We should not underestimate what could have happened. I think we are very lucky that that officer led that mob away from the Senate. We saw

people with weapons and people with zip ties and they put a gallows up outside the Capitol building where they were chanting to hang the vice-president of the United States.

“So anybody thinking, ‘Oh well, they really wouldn’t have done that much and I think we should give them sort of a pass’. Maybe we haven’t seen this in our lifetimes, but I think that we should make no mistake about what the intent was. It was a murderous moment. Five people are dead and we can’t bring them back.

“Hopefully this is the last layer that we needed to rip off, although it’s been abundantly clear for a number of hundred years what the real issue is. This was about white

supremacy, and holding up white supremacy, and I hope that we can see this and move forward with justice. I think that’s the only way that we can actually move forward. I think it’s all out in the open, it’s all stripped bare, and so hopefully the lawmakers will have the courage to do what needs to be done and every day citizens as well.”

During the question-and-answer session, Rapinoe was asked about the widely circulated photo of a Trump supporter returning from Washington wearing a USWNT sweatshirt.

“I feel like I can probably speak on behalf of a lot of my teammates,” Rapinoe said. “That is not the kind of fan that we will welcome. The US crest is not to be con-

fused with anything that has to do with white supremacy, anything that has to do with the Trump administration, anything that has to do with that divisive culture that we saw on the Capitol.”

She continued: “We want to create, and continue to create, a place that is inclusive and safe and diverse for our fans and for our players to play in front of and for people to watch on TV and for the media to cover.

“So don’t bring that bullshit here.”

The 2019 Ballon d’Or winner said the unanticipated break due to Covid-19 was a blessing in disguise, leaving her as physically and mentally refreshed as she has felt since the start of her international career.

Football transfer rumours: Agüero to Barça or PSG? Mbappé to Real Madrid?

GREGG BAKOWSKI
LONDON, 13 JAN

[THEGUARDIAN]: Having seen Luis Suárez propel Atlético Madrid to the top of La Liga with the best goals per game ratio in Spain, Barcelona have finally twigged that perhaps Lionel Messi was right and they did bundle the Uruguayan out of the Camp Nou prematurely.

And maybe, just maybe, letting him join madcap master motivator Diego Simeone wasn’t the greatest decision, either. So how do you replace an ageing South American goal machine? With an ageing South American goal machine, of course.

Yes, Sergio Agüero is top of Barça’s shopping list and with the Manchester City striker’s contract due to expire this summer, they might even be able to get him to scrawl his name on a pre-contract agreement to join for free on 1 July.

PSG are sniffing around too, mind, and if Messi decides once and for all to swap Catalonia for Paris, playing in a front three with Neymar and Messi wouldn’t be a bad way for Agüero to see out his career. The reason we didn’t mention Kylian Mbappé in that frontline is because, according to reports in

Spain, Real Madrid are going to offer a “symbolic fee” of £200m in the hope of taking the striker to the Bernabéu. Mbappé will have only a year left on his contract this summer and PSG are expected to want what they paid for Neymar for the 22-year-old. To raise funds for the deal, Madrid will try to flog Gareth Bale, Marcelo, Luka Jovic, Isco, Dani Ceballos and Brahim Diaz to whomever will take them for a combined £150m. Pandemic! What pandemic?

Rumour Mill favourite Kalidou Koulibaly probably won’t be moving to Liverpool, Man-

chester City, Manchester United or anywhere else soon. Napoli have stuck a £100m price tag on the 29-year-old centre-back and have dared anyone to match it. In any case, Pep Guardiola’s mantra of “Why buy a defender when a midfielder will do?” will fuel a City bid of £30m for Sassuolo’s Manuel Locatelli. The rock-solid Italian is seen as the natural long-term heir to Fernandinho’s holding midfield throne, with the Brazilian weighing up offers in Europe and South America when his contract expires.

Islam Slimani is off for a medical at Lyon before a move from Leicester, where his career pretty much nosedived after joining in 2016. The burly 32-year-old striker will cost peanuts, given his contract expires this summer. Another forward who could be on the move is Mariano Díaz, who is fed up of warming the bench at Madrid, with David Moyes keen on bringing the speedy striker in on loan to fire West Ham towards the European places.

Inter Miami are sniffing around for a new goalkeeper and their nose has led them to

Goodison Park. But don’t expect Jordan Pickford to be scissor-tackling players in MLS anytime soon, because it’s Jonas Lössl that David Beckham’s side wants. The Danish keeper is third choice at Everton and would likely jump at the chance to move Stateside.

Timothy Fosu-Mensah looks set to leave Manchester United and join Bayer Leverkusen for a cut-price £1.5m this month. Preston’s Josh Harrop is wanted in Ipswich and Avram Grant could be returning to Chelsea as an advisor to Frank Lampard. Can’t see that going wrong. Nope.

Hope Solo says she was bullied in USWNT's privileged 'mean girls club'

TOM LUTZ
LOS ANGELES, 13 JAN

[THEGUARDIAN]: Hope Solo says she encountered hostility when she first entered the United States national team set-up.

“When you grow up on the national team, there was a mean girls club,” she told the BBC’s The Players podcast. “It was a mean girls club. Most players have come from rich, white families. That is the culture of the United States women’s national team. It is a very privileged, white culture. I remember Carli [Lloyd] and I always talking about the culture: ‘We have to change this culture’. Carli and I were very welcoming, we weren’t bullies. We were very nice to the young kids coming in, but I think it’s because we were bullied.”

“We always wanted to change that culture, but ultimately I’m not sure we succeeded.”

Solo said she felt shunned when she first joined the national team.

“People were not nice to us, people were not welcoming, they didn’t invite you to sit at the dinner table. It was really difficult growing up on the national team for me in a social aspect, as well as learning the game,” she said.

Solo, widely considered one of the greatest goalkeepers of all time, won the last of her 202 caps for the US in 2016. She said that the tough environment on the USWNT was not entirely detrimental.

“It is a much more open and welcome environment [now] ... it is an easier transition but I also don’t think it helps build character in a lot of these younger athletes. They do have the road paved for them a lot of the time. I have a lot of older coaches, close friends of mine in division one soccer, a lot of them don’t know how to coach the younger generations anymore.

“You cannot push them the same way you used to be able to push



a really competitive athlete, somebody like Carli ... you have to cater to them. It’s a completely different environment and I don’t think it’s always a good thing. I think it creates some softer athletes.”

Lloyd, who appeared alongside Solo on the podcast, admitted she had been reduced to tears by other players when she first joined the team. But, like Solo, she said the environment helped toughen her up.

“I tell these young players, ‘you guys have it a bit easier’,” she said. “It is much more of a welcoming environment for them to come into now. Before, you were fighting

and clawing your way up. But that’s what made the team great for so many years. It was not easy.”

Lloyd has made nearly 300 appearances for the national team and scored a hat-trick in the 2015 World Cup final to help the US secure the title but lost her starting job in the run-up to the 2019 tournament.

“I believe that I didn’t have a shot at ever earning a starting spot from 2017 all the way to 2019,” said Lloyd. “I publicly stated that I should have been out there. I should have been playing more. But I also still stuck by my teammates and respected the coach’s decision.

As an athlete, I know I could have made a difference, I know I could have helped. You want people to have that mindset. I should hang up the boots if I’m OK with playing 10 minutes.”

The USWNT recently secured equal conditions, over aspects such as travel and accommodation, with their male counterparts but are still fighting for equal pay. Solo said more work needs to be put in to upset the status quo.

“I do believe work has to be put in, and when I say work I’m talking about legal documents, I’m talking about meeting with politicians, congress, and the United States senate,” she said. “I’m tired of talking about it. Things have to change. Things have to turn that corner. When you look at history, people in power don’t want to give up power, [people] have to take it.

“Look at the black vote, look at women’s rights to vote, they had to fight for it. It was never

just given. I think that’s where we stand today with equal pay. The people in power don’t want to just give women equal pay. We have to take it. We have to fight for it.”

The goalkeeper suggested her former teammates need to be doing more to address the issue.

“I don’t think we’re doing enough. I think the US women’s national team isn’t doing enough. We had the ability to get equal pay four years ago and the current players passed on that because they agreed to the new contracts,” said Solo. “Sacrifices have to be made. I do believe eventually we are going to see it, but we’re not there yet. We have to stand up together and be strong together and make sacrifices – and that hasn’t been done yet.”

USWNT players are seeking millions of dollars they say are owed to them after alleging years of “institutionalized gender discrimination” by US Soccer.

Germany says it has handed over 14 works from Gurlitt trove

BERLIN (AP): German authorities have now handed over all 14 works from the art trove accumulated by late collector Cornelius Gurlitt that so far were proven to have been looted under Nazi rule, the government said Wednesday.

“Piano Playing,” a drawing by Carl Spitzweg, was handed over to Christie’s auction house on Tuesday at the request of the heirs of its rightful owner, Henri Hinrichsen, the government said.

The work was seized from Hinrichsen, a Jewish music publisher, in 1939. The following year, it was bought by Gurlitt’s father, Hildebrand Gurlitt — an art dealer who traded in works confiscated by the Nazis. Hinrichsen was killed at the Auschwitz death camp in 1942.

The reclusive Cornelius Gurlitt, who died in 2014, had squirreled away more than 1,200 works in his Munich apartment and a further 250 or so at a property



in Salzburg, Austria. He inherited much of the collection from his father.

Authorities first stumbled on the art while investigating a tax case in 2012.

Gurlitt’s will bequeathed the works to a Swiss museum, the Kunstmuseum Bern. A German government-backed foundation has been working with it to ensure that any pieces looted from Jewish owners are returned to their heirs. A trickle of works has been handed back in recent years as the painstaking process of provenance research made gradual progress.

Germany’s culture minister, Monika Gruet-

ters, said it was “an important signal” that all the works so far identified as looted art have been restituted to their owners’ heirs.

“Behind every one of these pictures stands a human, tragic fate such as that of Auschwitz victim Dr. Henri Hinrichsen,” she said in a statement. “We cannot make up for this severe suffering, but we are trying with the appraisal of Nazi art looting to make a contribution to historical justice and fulfill our moral responsibility.”

She stressed Germany’s “lasting commitment” to continue with that appraisal and provenance research.

Indonesia starts mass COVID-19 vaccinations with president

JAKARTA, INDONESIA (AP): Indonesian President Joko Widodo on Wednesday received the first shot of a Chinese-made COVID-19 vaccine after Indonesia approved it for emergency use and began efforts to vaccinate millions of people in the world’s fourth most populated country.

After Widodo, top military, police and medical officials were vaccinated, as well as the secretary of the Indonesian Ulema Council, the clerical body that last week ruled the vaccine was halal and could be taken by Muslims. Others such as a health care worker, businesspeople and a social media influencer also received the shots to encourage people to get the vaccine when it is available to them.

“We need to do the vaccination to stop the chain spread of COVID-19 and give health protection to us and the



safety to all Indonesian people. It will also help accelerate economic improvement,” Widodo said.

“This vaccine is the instrument we can use to protect us. But more importantly, the vaccine is the instrument to protect our family, our neighbor, Indonesian people and the human civilization,” Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin said on Wednesday.

“This vaccine is giv-

ing to achieve herd immunity. All 70% of the world’s people must be vaccinated for that to be achieved. The participation of all Indonesians will greatly determine the success of this program,” he said.

Conditional use of the Sinovac Biotech Ltd. vaccine is scheduled to be rolled out in the coming months with health care workers, civil servants and other at-risk populations prioritized. It will be free for all Indonesian

citizens.

For Indonesia to vaccinate two-thirds of its population, 181.5 million people, Sadikin said the two-shot vaccine would require almost 427 million doses, including the estimate that 15% may be wasted.

Distribution will not be easy in the vast archipelago where transportation and infrastructure are limited in places. Health officials have cited concerns about keeping the vaccine refriger-

ated at the required 36–46 degrees Fahrenheit to maintain its safety and effectiveness.

“We know that the cold-chain distribution is not complete. This is the obstacle,” Sadikin said Tuesday. “The cold-chain facilities are not enough so we are still distributing some of the vaccines. We are worried.”

Indonesia received its first shipment of the Sinovac vaccines on Dec. 6 and began distributing the doses around the country while awaiting emergency use authorization. It was cleared for emergency use based on clinical trial data and after the Indonesian Ulema Council declared the vaccine holy and halal.

Indonesia’s vaccination program is the first large-scale use of the Sinovac vaccine outside of China.

Indonesia has recorded more than 846,000 cases of the virus, including over 24,600 deaths.

Japan widens virus emergency for 7 more areas as cases surge

TOKYO (AP): Japan expanded a coronavirus state of emergency for seven more prefectures Wednesday, affecting more than half the population amid a surge in infections across the country.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga also said Japan will suspend fast-track business entry permits, fully banning foreign visitors while the state of emergency is in place.

Suga’s announcement comes less than a week after he declared a state of emergency for Tokyo and three nearby prefectures. The new declaration, which adds seven other prefectures in western and central Japan, takes effect Thursday and lasts until Feb. 7.

The government is asking bars and restaurants in Osaka, Kyoto, Hyogo, Fukuoka, Aichi, Gifu and Tochigi prefectures to close by 8 p.m., employers to have 70% of their staff work from home and residents in the affected areas avoid going out for nonessential purposes.

Suga has been criticized as being too slow to act as the country’s number of reported coronavirus infections and deaths roughly doubled over



the past month to about 300,000 and 4,100. Both states of emergency were declared only after local leaders had pleaded with him to do so.

Experts have warned that even the state of emergency measures, which are non-binding and largely rely on voluntary cooperation, may be insufficient to significantly slow the infections.

Unlike the earlier seven-week emergency Japan had in April and May last year, schools, gyms, theaters and shops will stay open.

Suga has faced criticism for not taking strong enough government action earlier in the outbreak. He mostly limited his interventions to asking the public to take basic safety measures such as wearing masks, washing hands

and avoiding drinking and dining in groups until mid-December, when he finally announced the suspension of a government-subsidized tourism campaign.

Suga eventually took action after calls from the local leaders, while his support ratings nosedived in polls showing the public increasingly dissatisfied with his handling of the virus.

Suga took office in mid-September and pledged to keep the infections under control while also getting the economy back on track. He also promised to successfully hold the Tokyo Olympic, which were postponed from last year until this coming summer.

Despite the current surge in infections, Japan has reported far fewer infections than many countries of its size.

Japan made it through earlier surges in infections without a lockdown, but experts and officials warn that people are growing fatigued and are becoming less cooperative than before.

In a bid to more effectively enforce virus measures, Suga has said he will seek a legal revision in parliament next week to allow authorities to penalize business owners who defy official requests for coronavirus measures, while legally providing compensation to those who comply. Suga’s government also plans to revise the infectious disease control law so it can penalize patients who defy self-isolation requirements, hospitalization or cooperation with health authorities, Japanese media reports say.

Japan Medical Asso-

ciation President Toshio Nakagawa said at a news conference Wednesday that medical systems in the country have been collapsing, with regular daily treatment at many hospitals compromised due to the growing burden of coronavirus patients.

“I’m afraid a fear of explosive infections as in the U.S. and Europe can become a reality,” he said, urging people to cooperate, regain their sense of crisis and urgency.

Japanese coronavirus measures have relied heavily on widespread mask wearing, contact tracing and other safety measures. But the number of new cases in the current outbreak has made contact tracing impossible, prompting Tokyo and neighboring prefectures to announce a cutback on the strategy to relieve the burden on local public health officials.

Experts have also raised concerns about cases of more contagious variant of the coronavirus that has spread across Britain. About 30 cases of the new variant have been detected since late December. Another variant was also detected in four people arriving from Brazil this week.

New Zealand to review parliament security after door attack



WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND (AP): Officials plan to review security at New Zealand’s Parliament after a man armed with an axe smashed the main glass entrance doors early Wednesday.

Police said they were called to the Parliament complex in Wellington just before 5:30 a.m. after getting reports that a man with an axe was on the grounds. Police said that after smashing the doors, the 31-year-old man didn’t try to enter the building and was arrested within minutes without further incident.

New Zealand’s 120 lawmakers are currently on a summer break, and there were few people in the building at the time of the attack.

The man has been charged with intentional damage and possession of an offensive weapon. If found guilty, he could

face up to seven years in prison. A judge temporarily suppressed the man’s name, a common practice in New Zealand’s justice system.

It was not immediately clear whether the recent attacks at the U.S. Capitol in Washington played any role in inspiring the New Zealand attack.

Rafael Gonzalez-Montero, the chief executive of Parliamentary Service, said it was important to maintain a balance between security and accessibility.

“I am proud that the New Zealand Parliament is one of the most open, accessible parliaments in the world and I very much hope that this continues,” he said in a statement. “Our parliament belongs to the people of New Zealand, and it is incredibly important to our democ-

racy that people are able to visit, and interact with their parliament and elected representatives with ease.”

Gonzalez-Montero said the parliament remains a place where people are free to meet and express their opinions, and that hundreds of protests are held safely on the grounds every year.

However, he said, the safety of those who work at and visit the complex is crucial. He said officials are undertaking a full review of the incident and will assess whether changes to security measures are necessary.

Crews added retractable bollards in 2016 to prevent unauthorized vehicles getting too close to the Parliament, after a man posed a security threat by driving a truck up to the main entrance.

Thousands party in streets after Alabama win, despite virus

TUSCALOOSA, ALA. (AP): Thousands of University of Alabama football fans partied in the street near campus after the Crimson Tide defeated Ohio State 52-24 for the national championship, ignoring pleas for safety at the height of the coronavirus pandemic in a celebration a top health official said Tuesday could worsen disease.

Students and others poured out of jam-packed bars near campus as time expired in Miami late Monday, traffic cameras and images posted on social media show, gathering on University Boulevard in an area called “The Strip.”

Many of the fans screaming and cheering as they pressed against each other in the street

didn’t wear face masks. Dr. Scott Harris, the head of the Alabama Department of Public Health, said he expected more cases of COVID-19 to result from the street party.

“It’s disappointing to see people not paying attention to the guidance that we try to give to keep them safe. I was excited as anybody and wanted to celebrate also, but right now is not a time to be out in large groups of people close together when you are not masked,” he said.

Fourteen people were arrested on charges including public intoxication, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest, officials said at a news conference where Mayor Walt Maddox said the crowd was “larger

than any celebration that we’ve seen in recent memory.”

In an open letter released through social media, the United Campus Workers of Alabama, a labor group for university employees, said the gathering could become a “super-spreader event” and asked for hazardous-duty pay for workers in close contact with students; evidence of virus testing; and a two-week suspension of in-person classes.

The university is requiring virus screening for all students returning for the semester who plan to live on campus, with testing planned through next week at the basketball arena. Students and workers also

are required to complete online training about reducing the risk of spreading the illness.

A university statement released Tuesday afternoon said its officials had worked to minimize risk before, during and after the championship game, including “issuing warnings and admonitions about the need for masks, social distancing and responsible behavior.”

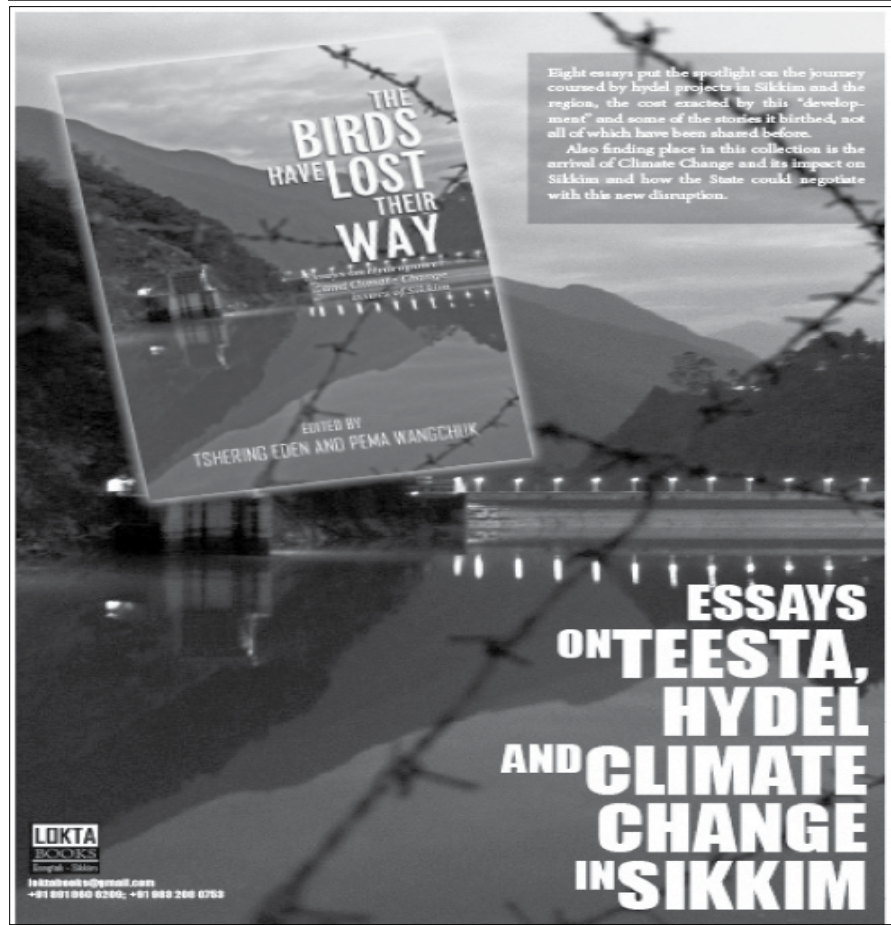
“As a result of recent events, we are allowing faculty to be flexible for the next two weeks with the option to temporarily hold classes remotely,” the statement added. “Students have the option to attend in-person activities remotely as well.”

It added that while

classroom transmission “is almost nonexistent, we understand the concerns caused by recent events” and said all health and safety rules continue in effect.

More than 5,500 people have died in Alabama from the illness caused by the coronavirus, and about 408,000 have tested positive. About 20,000 people have tested positive in Tuscaloosa County, making it one of the worst in the state for the virus in overall numbers, and about 175 COVID-19 patients are being treated by DCH Regional Medical Center in the city.

The postgame scene was exactly what officials feared as they urged people to watch at home and celebrate privately.



Beau Willimon developing 'Risk' series

LOS ANGELES, JAN 12 (PTI): "House of Cards" creator Beau Willimon is working on a series adaptation of the board game Risk for studio Entertainment One (eOne).

According to The Hollywood Reporter, Willimon and Jordan Tappis will also produce via their banner, Westward, under which they have signed a multiyear, first-look TV deal with eOne.

Michael Lombardo, president global television at eOne, said they have found "perfect partners" in Willimon and Tappis to build the studio's world-class content slate.

"In Beau, we've found an amazing combination of brilliant producer, singular creator, and avid fan of Risk. We can't wait to work with him and the rest of the Westward team to re-imagine that brand and so much more," Lombardo said.

In a joint statement, Willimon and Tappis said they are excited to develop Risk as their first project together.

"All of us at Westward are thrilled to join forces with eOne to bring to life some of the most successful IP in the marketplace as well as partner on our extensive slate of scripted television shows," they said.

Risk, a board game in which players aim for global conquest via war, strategy and diplomacy, has been a favourite since its introduction in the late 1950s.



Got to live the life of a powerful man, even if in fiction: Sunil Grover on 'Tandav'

NEW DELHI, JAN 12 (PTI): When director Ali Abbas Zafar sent the script of the upcoming political drama "Tandav" to Sunil Grover, the actor asked him "Are you sure about this?"

Grover, the funny man behind popular characters like Gutthi, Rinku Bhabhi and Dr Mashoor Gulati on television, was sceptical about joining the cast of the Amazon Prime Video series where he plays the right-hand man to Saif Ali Khan's scheming politician.

But Zafar, who collaborated with the actor in 2019's "Bharat" opposite Salman Khan, knew Grover was the perfect fit to play Guralp Chauhan.

"I had worked with Ali in 'Bharat' and he said he wants me to work in 'Tandav'. He sent me the script, I read it. I called him back and said 'Are you sure about this because I have a very strong background as a funny guy?' He said 'I want only you to do this role'," Grover told PTI in an interview over Zoom.

Born in Sirsa, Haryana, the actor holds a master's degree in theatre from Panjab University and was discovered during his college days by the late satirist and comedian Jaspal Bharti.

Prior to his success on TV, Grover played bit roles in films like "Pyaar Toh Hona Hi Tha", "The Legend of Bhagat Singh", and it was the small screen that gave him his second innings in cinema with "Gabbhar Is Back", "Pataakha" and "Bharat".

"There is this constant question of 'who am I?' in my life. People say 'Oh I met Sunil Grover'. The other one would ask 'Who Sunil Grover?' 'Oh the same man who plays Gutthi, Gulati, etc..."

"I only know how to play different characters. I want to keep doing this and keep experimenting for as long as possible."



His character in "Tandav", the 43-year-old actor said, is close to the kingmaker, Khan's Samar Pratap Singh, and that gave him a chance to stay real.

"I love playing different characters, funny or not. Even when I have played funny roles, they are different characters in my body of work. I often made those parts funny or caricaturish, here I have kept the character realistic and approached it accordingly."

As Guralp is someone who is right next to the "kingmaker", his character also holds some authority in this fictional world of politics, Grover said.

"This is a true character, wrong or right, I can't say. I tasted what power feels like through this character. I got to live the life of a powerful man, even if fiction. The moves one makes to claim power, and all the mental and physical energy that it takes."

"It is difficult to return to a place without power after tasting it. Power is a drug. If you never had power, then it's a different thing. But if power is snatched away from you, dealing with it on a psychological level is very tough."

The actor said "Tandav" is an "insightful and intricate work" by writer Gaurav Solanki.

"The show is about humans who live a political life. It's not just about politics, it's more about people. The series is open to interpretation," he added.

Grover praised Zafar, who also serves as the creator on the show, for his multi-tasking skills and quipped direction is "more difficult than building the Sea Link bridge".

"I share a good relationship with Ali. He is very cool, calm and quiet. But many people don't know he is very funny. We share heartland humour between us. We kept laughing on the sets. He is also very sarcastic man, intelligent man. Laughing and making people laugh is the work of intelligent people."

The nine-part political drama also stars Dimple Kapadia, Tigraanshu Dhulia, Kumud Mishra, Mohd Zeeshan Ayyub, Sarah Jane Dias, Dino Morea, Anup Soni, Kritika Kamra, Sandhya Mridul and Amyra Dastur.

"Tandav" will start streaming from January 15.

Chuck Norris manager says actor was not at U.S. Capitol riot

NEW YORK (AP): Chuck Norris' manager says the "Walker, Texas Ranger" star was not present at last week's deadly riot at the U.S. Capitol.

A photo of a man resembling Norris apparently with a member of the mob began trending online. "This is not Chuck Norris," Norris manager Erik Kritzer told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

"Chuck remains on his range in Texas where he has been with his family," Kritzer said. He acknowledged that the man photographed looked somewhat like Norris but "Chuck is much more handsome."

"Walker, Texas Ranger," in which Norris played karate-kicking lawman Cordell Walker, ran on CBS from 1993 to 2001. In 2016, he announced his support for President Donald Trump.



PENSIVE PINE! Actor Chris Pine filmed All the Old Knives in London.

YouTube suspends Trump's channel for at least a week

HONG KONG (AP): YouTube has suspended U.S. President Donald Trump's channel for at least a week amid concerns over "ongoing potential for violence," making it the latest platform to limit the president's online activities.

The Google-owned platform said it removed content that was uploaded on January 12 from the Donald J. Trump channel for inciting violence, although it was not immediately clear which videos in question were in violation.

"After careful review, and in light of concerns about the ongoing potential for violence, we removed new content uploaded to the Donald J. Trump channel and issued a strike for violating our policies for inciting violence," a YouTube spokesperson said in an emailed statement.

Under the suspension, Trump's channel is temporarily prevented from uploading new videos or live streams for at least seven days, although the channel remains live, YouTube said.

Comments would be indefinitely disabled

on the channel, YouTube said. Under YouTube's policies, a second strike would result in a two-week suspension, while a third strike would get the account banned permanently.

The move to curtail Trump's social media activity comes after a mob of his supporters, urged on by his rhetoric, stormed the Capitol last week to try to stop Congress from certifying President-elect Joe Biden's win.

Tech companies have moved to suspend Trump's online postings, with Facebook and Instagram suspending Trump at least until the end of his term and Twitter permanently banning his account. Other sites, including Reddit and Snapchat have also banned Trump. Online shopping platform Shopify has pulled Trump stores off its platform.

Companies like Apple and Google have also moved to ban Parler, a social networking site popular among Trump supporters, from their app stores. Parler's site also went offline this week after Amazon ceased to provide hosting services to the company.

(or relationship) that is bringing you more sorrow than joy. You have done everything you can to get your points across, yet you haven't been able to find a resolution. Perhaps, the best thing you can do for yourself (and the other person) is to let go gracefully and with love in your heart.

CANCER: Often, we attempt to treat a disease by managing the symptoms on a physical level. While this may alleviate the problem temporarily, it may or may not be a long term solution. Today, the cards are urging you to change the approach a little. To understand the root of the given problem. Working with a holistic doctor such as an Ayurvedic practitioner or a healer could lead to many revelations.

LEO: You gave them your all, Leo, yet they left scars in places you cannot even count. It hasn't been easy getting past the hurt and the pain. The good thing is, you've given yourself time and space to work through the trauma and find your way back to joy—and the Universe is applauding you for your strength and resilience. What you want to focus on today: letting go of that last thread of hope. Nothing will free you like remembering you are responsible for your own happiness.

VIRGO:

They may be saying and doing the right things, yet you can't seem to shake off the feeling that something isn't as it seems. Your instinct never lies, Virgo. So stop second guessing yourself and approach the given situation from a space of wisdom. Confronting them at this point may not give you the answers you are looking for. Allow some time to pass. Clarity will eventually prevail.

LIBRA:

Sometimes things work out better than we imagine. At other times, our hopes and dreams are crushed before our own eyes. But if you look at things from a higher perspective, you will realise nothing is inherently good or bad. It simply is. So allow yourself to receive the wisdom this moment is offering you. Karmic retribution is also going to be a big theme. Word for the wise: don't stoop down to their level. You will find that your ability to think and act consciously will turn the wheel of fortune in your favour eventually.

SCORPIO:

You are in a good place, Scorpio. A place where you're able to look at the trajectory of your life through the lens of wisdom, and acknowledge all

the ways in which you moved past your own limitations and evolved. But the transformation doesn't end here. There is a lot more that you are meant to discover about yourself on this path. Know that the Universe is holding space for you to discover your hidden potential. The not-so-good news is that finances may be a bit of a problem right now. Word for the wise: continue to face your true north and know that you will be provided for.

SAGITTARIUS:

You're wearing the glow that comes from accepting the things you cannot change and changing the things that have dominion over. Leading by example has always been your superpower, Sagittarius. 2021 also sees you exploring that mind, body, and soul connection. You're looking at food from a holistic space and adopting practices that facilitate living a disease-free life. Consider delving into the world of herbs, spices, and superfoods such as ashwagandha and maca root to up your nutrition game. PS: The ancients were clearly onto something, weren't they?

CAPRICORN:

If you wake up with the black sheep syndrome, you've got your stars to blame, Capricorn. Con-

sider this: maybe you are the crazy one. Maybe you've been sent here to stir up a storm (in a good Samaritan kind of way). So, listen to what your instinct is telling you and work towards manifesting your crazier-than-thou vision. Your audience could surprise you by being more receptive than you're used to.

AQUARIUS:

Weekly reminder: If they wanted to be in your life, they would have. No force in the world could have stopped them from giving this connection the respect it deserves. Aquarius, it's time to awaken to the fact that their silence is communicating more than their words ever could. Trust that your guides are helping you dig into your reserves and find the strength, courage, and resilience required to move forward and onwards. PS: Do what's right for you this time.

PISCES:

We all have our limitations, Pisces. Limitations we don't always like to admit, even to our own selves. Today, you're being asked to take a good look at the (wo)man in the mirror and introspect on how you could be betraying them at this moment. Word for the wise: Don't say 'yes' when you want to say 'no'. Be okay with the idea of letting others down for a change.