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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Sikkim goes 10 days without any Covid deaths

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 Nov:**

Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 detected since testing began on 28 Feb, 2020, stood at 32,228 on Sunday with 17 fresh cases reported in the State in the past 24 hours. While Covid infections continue to remain erratic, what has remained consistent for a while is that these infections have been milder, as reflected in the lower hospitalisation of Covid patients and the fact that Sikkim today completed ten days without any Covid deaths. The last Covid fatality in Sikkim, the 403rd, was recorded on 18 November.

Of the 17 new cases, most, 11, were registered in West Sikkim where 181 samples were tested yesterday and six from East district from 158 samples screened. All the 19 samples tested for Covid in South Sikkim returned negative while no tests were conducted in North Sikkim yesterday.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Sur-

veillance Programme of Health Department, daily test positivity rate for Sikkim came in at 4.70% this morning from the 17 cases being picked up from 358 tests.

Over the same 24 hours, four COVID patients were discharged from home isolation after completing their isolation period to improve the count of recovered cases here to 31,358. The current recovery rate of COVID-19 in Sikkim is 98.3%.

There are 127 active cases of Covid-19 in the State at present, of whom 16 are in hospital and the rest recovering under home isolation. There is no under-18 year old Covid patient in hospital. Meanwhile, of the 16 others in hospital, two are admitted in ICU.

Also on Saturday, 924 people received their Covid shieldjabs in the State, 874 of whom completed their vaccination schedule with the second dose and 50 received the first jab of the vaccine. 90.44% of the State's adult population, numbering 4,67,595, are now fully vaccinated against Covid.

SICA condemns Bhaichung's statements on grants

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 Nov:**

Sikkim Cricket Association has accused Bhaichung Bhutia of making false statements regarding grants provided to SICA and condemned the same in a press release issued today.

SICA has said that Mr Bhutia has repeatedly stated that SICA receives grants in aid to a turn of Rs 15-20 crore per year.

"This is entirely false and we urge Mr. Bhaichung to get his facts checked before speaking out against other associations or sporting bodies, who are only trying their best to help the state of Sikkim and its people," the release states.

The association has further said that reforms and policies have led to its proper functioning and not money.

"We at SICA would also like to state that money doesn't equate to good governance, various structural reforms have been undertaken by SICA bringing in transparency in all aspects from governance to financial matters, introduction and formation of District bodies and even giving them voting rights and powers in governance.

Introduction of Club culture in the State for both Men and Women along with voting rights for clubs, implementation of policies such as representation of Players Association in SICA's governing body, as two members of the Players Association form part of SICA's Apex Council, these are but a few of the many reforms and policies taken up by SICA which has nothing to do with money," the release mentions.

The release goes on to state that SICA's revival with reforms and restructuring started in the year 2016, which was several years before it even became a full member of BCCI. Therefore, the real groundwork was already in motion before SICA had received a single penny.

"Organizations and its representatives should acknowledge the responsibility they owe towards Sikkim and its people, while striving to inspire and encourage each other rather than indulging in passing false information and propaganda," the association further states.

The release further mentions that people can find all details of grants provided to SICA on the BCCI website.

Temi Tea Autumn Festival concludes with applause and new product launches from CM

NAMCHI, 28 Nov (IPR): Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang attended the concluding day of Temi Tea Autumn Festival, 2021 themed 'Vocal for Locals' at Temi Tea Garden, today.

Present amongst others were Speaker SLA, L.B. Das, Area MLA cum Tourism Minister, B. S. Panth, MLA's, Advisors, Chairpersons, Temi Tea Estate Managing Director M. Ravi Kumar, Panchayat, other dignitaries and public at large.

Addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister extended his warm wishes on Temi Tea Autumn Festival and urged one and all to enjoy this festival keeping in mind the protocol laid by the State Government for COVID-19.

He also acknowledged immense assistance of the managing committee who have provided for the grand celebration of this festival. He said that this festival needs to be made popular and renowned domestically



as well as internationally as it is being organised at Temi, which is one of the most picturesque places in Sikkim and is capable of producing organic tea leaves.

He added that this type of

festival will give impetus in engaging local businesses by putting up various types of tourist-attracting amenities from which they can also earn a livelihood.

Apart from temi tea, this place

also boasts of lush Cherry trees, which gives a stunning visual delight especially for locals as well as tourists.

He further added that these trees appeal should be utilised

by the festival organizers in attracting more tourists and also making this Temi Tea Festival one of the sought after festivals in the country.

He also spoke about how Temi Tea Garden faced challenges at the peak of the pandemic impacting the production of the tea and said that the State Government has and will always provide assistance to augment the production of tea leaves and also for the betterment of the factory employees.

Speaking on the education sector, the Chief Minister said that the foundation stone for the upcoming Khanchendzonga State University at Temi will be held soon. The establishment of this university will aid a myriad of local people to gain employment, quality education amongst many other great opportunities.

Further, he also reiterated that the National Medical

turn to pg02

Local delivery start-ups raise concern over national players entering Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 Nov:**

Entrepreneurs from all major local delivery start-ups of Sikkim representing Chitto, Dash, Uppai, Mitho, Let's Local, DocoPoco, and others held a virtual meeting with president, Sikkim Hotel & Restaurant Association, Roshan Raj Shrestha, on 27 Nov.

"The objective of the meeting was to discuss the future of the local on-demand delivery industry within Sikkim in regards to national billion-dollar players entering the market and their well-reported disruptive and anti-competitive practices," a press release informs.



It may be mentioned that there have been reports of Zomato and other big delivery companies starting operations in Sikkim.

During the meeting, the gathering discussed the negative short-term

and long-term impacts on local independent restaurants, local entrepreneurs, and other local stakeholders caused by national billion-dollar players.

The local entrepreneurs have thanked Mr.

Shrestha for listening to their concerns and assuring complete support from the Sikkim Hotel & Restaurant Association and for supporting local entrepreneurship and local job-creation.

Casteism not annihilated after 75 years of Independence: Supreme Court on dishonour killings

NEW DELHI, 28 Nov [PTI]: Incidents of caste-motivated violence show that casteism has not been annihilated even after 75 years of independence and it is high time civil society reacts and responds with "strong disapproval" about the ghastly crimes committed in the name of caste, the Supreme Court has said.

The top court, which delivered its verdict on a batch of pleas in a 1991 Uttar Pradesh dishonour killing case, in which three persons, including a woman, were killed, said it had earlier issued several directions to the authorities to take strong measures to prevent dishonour killings. Those directives should be carried out without any further delay, it said.

A bench headed by Justice L. Nageswara Rao also said that to avert trials getting tainted and "truth becoming a casualty", the State has a definite role to play in protecting witnesses, to start with, at least in sensitive cases involving those in power who have political patronage and could wield muscle and money power. It said

that "bigotry" perpetuated by caste-based practices, which are prevalent even today, impedes the Constitution's objective of equality for all citizens. "Two young men and a woman were physically assaulted for nearly 12 hours and killed by the accused of violating caste-ridden societal norms. These episodes of caste-motivated violence in the country demonstrate the fact that casteism has not been annihilated even after 75 years of independence," the bench, also comprising justices Sanjiv Khanna and BR Gavai, said.

The top court, while upholding the Allahabad High Court verdict convicting 23 accused in the case, acquitted three persons in view of ambiguity in their identity.

Referring to the aspect of witness protection, the bench noted that 12 prosecution witnesses in the case turned hostile.

"Even if the witnesses have turned hostile, their evidence can be accepted, if they are natural and independent witnesses and have no reason to falsely implicate the accused," it said. The top court said

the right to testify in courts in a free and fair manner, without any pressure and threat whatsoever, is "under serious attack today", and if one is unable to testify in courts due to threats or other pressures, then it is a clear violation of the rights under articles 19 (1) (a) and 21 of the Constitution.

"Right to life guaranteed to the people of this country also includes in its fold the right to live in a society which is free from crime and fear, and the right of witnesses to testify in courts without fear or pressure," it said.

The bench said one of the main reasons why witnesses turn hostile is that they are not accorded appropriate protection by the State. It is a "harsh reality", particularly, in cases where the accused are influential people and are tried for heinous offences and they make attempts to terrorise or intimidate witnesses, the bench said.

"This unfortunate situation prevails because of the reason that the State has not undertaken any protective measures to ensure

turn to pg02

SDF will continue to fight, says Chamling

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 Nov:**

Former Chief Minister and president of Sikkim Democratic Front party, Pawan Chamling has said that his party will soon intensify its programs.

In his weekly Facebook Q&A session, Mr Chamling said that his party has not been holding public meetings because of the pandemic and to give time to SKM to prove its mettle.

However, the SKM government has failed miserably and SDF will soon intensify its

programs to raise voice against misgovernance, loss of law and order and utter lack of development, he stated.

"Those who are saying that Pawan Chamling will exit the arena of active politics are only expressing their wishful thinking. They know that the SDF is the most popular party, the centre of hope and the aspiration of the Sikkimese people," said Mr Chamling.

He assured that SDF will continue to oppose the government's "anti-Sikkim, anti-people decisions".

Bear rescued from Jalpaiguri tea garden

JALPAIGURI, Nov 27 (PTI): A Himalayan Black Bear which strayed into a tea garden in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district was rescued by the forest department on Saturday, an official said.

The animal was tranquilised and taken to Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary.

The bear was first spotted at Sulkapara tea garden's new section, adjacent to Gathiariver in Nagrakata block in the morning.

When forest department personnel reached the tea garden after being informed, the animal was not found. After a search, it was found in a bush in another tea garden nearby, the Ranger of Khunia Range, Rajku-

mar Layek, said. It was then tranquilised.

A youth was killed by a bear in Meteli tea garden of the district on Wednesday, following which irate locals beat the animal to death.

Though incidents of elephant and leopard attacks are common in the Doars region, bear attacks were never heard of before. The bear is suspected to have come down from the nearby hills, a forest officer had said.

"After elephants and leopards, now even bears are venturing into human habitations for food. This is a result of massive deforestation in north Bengal for developmental projects," a local environmentalist had said.

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IAS Assoc of Sikkim bids farewell to 4 officers

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 28 Nov:

Newly formed IAS Association of Sikkim bid farewell to four recently retired officers, namely, Tenzing Dolkar, Samten Dolma, Tenzing Gelek and LB Chettri in a function held at a local hotel in Gangtok on 27 Nov, a press release informs.

The event had the presence of Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang as the chief guest and was attended by Cabinet Ministers and the IAS fraternity of Sikkim.

The programme started with the welcome address by president of the IAS Association, GP Upadhyaya, wherein he outlined the vision and objectives of the Association and also introduced the office bearers of the Association. He also expressed his gratitude to the Chief Minister who



gave his blessings and support to the idea of forming the Association.

This was followed by the inauguration of the website of the Association and felicitation of retired officers by the Chief Minister.

During the programme, the IAS Asso-

ciation also felicitated the Chief Minister for his constant support and guidance provided to the Association. The retired officers also shared their bureaucratic experience.

Chief patron of IAS Association, SC Gupta, reminisced the past, wherein efforts to form

such an Association could not fructify and expressed much satisfaction and happiness to finally see the Association getting registered.

The Chief Minister, in his address, outlined that "the formation of the IAS Association has to be taken in a positive stride and that

it will act as a big enabling human resource for the development of Sikkim state and society as a whole".

He also said that his doors are always open for everyone and added that it is not a retirement but a felicitation to the officers.

A musical programme was also held on the day.

"No place for hate": Jharkhand CM on attack on Kashmir men

RANCHI, 28 Nov [PTI]: The Jharkhand Police on Sunday said it has detained three persons who were a part of a group that allegedly forced Kashmiri traders to chant "Jai Shri Ram" and "Pakistan Murdabad" in Ranchi.

A 34-year-old man from Kashmir, who makes a living by selling winter clothes, lodged a complaint with the police on Saturday stating that a group of around 25 people attacked him and some other traders from the union territory in Ranchi's Doranda area and forced them to chant "Jai Shri Ram" and "Pakistan Murdabad".

A purported video of Kashmiri traders complaining about the incident has been shared on Twitter.

One of them is heard saying, "Is it a crime to be a Kashmiri. They have made our life hell here.

Are we not Indians? They ask us always to chant "Jai Shri Ram" and "Pakistan Murdabad". Four of us were beaten mercilessly..We are Indians and law is equal for all.... There should be no discrimination."

Chief Minister Hemant Soren retweeted the link to the video and sought strict action against the culprits.

"There is no place for religious enmity and discrimination in Jharkhand," Mr Soren said in the tweet. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Surendra Kumar Jha told PTI that an investigation into the case is underway.

"We have detained three persons in connection with the incident. An investigation has been initiated into the matter and action will be taken against anyone found guilty," he stated.

PWD Minister inspects construction of Polytechnic College at Ringhim



WANGCHUK BHUTIA MANGAN, 28 Nov:

Minister Cum Area MLA, Samdup Lepcha reviewed the progress of the under-construction Polytechnic College at Ringhim, Mangon, North Sikkim, today.

During his visit, he took stock of the construction of North District's first polytechnic college. The Minister informed that the project was sanctioned in

the year 2016 but the previous government didn't give importance to this project. Hence, he stressed that the project must be completed by March 2022, as this project is of utmost priority to the state government under the visionary leadership of Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang.

Further, he commented that this centre of learning shall be dedicated to the people

of North Sikkim by the state government in the next year. In addition, the Minister urged the concerned department and other stakeholders for speedy construction with quality work.

During the visit, the Minister was accompanied by Ward Panchayat, Phigtsh. Lepcha, concerned department officials and contractors along with the local public.



NALI FUNGWA YAKTHUNG SAPSOKIBA CHUMBOO TO CELEBRATE FOUNDATION DAY ON 04 JAN

Nali Fungwa Yakthung Sapsokiba Chumboo convened a meeting at Mongtolum Manghim at Daramdin in West Sikkim to discuss plans for its second foundation day coming up on 04 Jan, 2022. The meeting was chaired by the organisation's president, BL Limboo, and attended by language teachers, officials from the department and members of the NFYSO committee, a press release informs. The committee

decided to organise the foundation day on 04 January 2022 at Thambong Yuma Manghim yard in Daramdin with essay, poetry, and story-writing competitions. Participants have been invited to submit their works by 31 December 2021 or contact +91 97332 75447, +91 89182 51531 for more details. The MB Nembang Literary award and other literary awards will also be conferred on the day.

Obesity rising among children, adults: National Family Health Survey

NEW DELHI, 28 Nov [PTI]: There has been a rise in obesity among children under five years of age with 33 states and union territories registering a spike in the number of overweight children, according to the latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS).

Experts attributed the increase in obesity to lack of physical activity and unhealthy food habits. The

number of overweight children increased from 2.1 per cent in NFHS-4 to 3.4 per cent in NFHS-5. Not just children, obesity among women and men also increased. The percentage of overweight women rose from 20.6 per cent to 24 per cent while in men the number increased from 18.9 per cent to 22.9 per cent, according to the NFHS-5. According to the NFHS-5,

several states and union territories, including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Mizoram, Tripura, Lakshadweep, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Ladakh, have registered increase in the percentage of obesity among children below five years of age in comparison to NFHS-4 conducted between 2015 and 2016.

Over 30% women in 14 states justify men beating wives: Government Survey

NEW DELHI, 28 Nov

[PTI]: Over 30 per cent women from 14 of the 18 states and Union Territories that were surveyed justify men beating their wives under certain circumstances, while lesser percentage of men rationalised such behaviour, according to the recent National Family Health Survey (NFHS).

According to NFHS-5, over 75 per cent women justified men beating their wives in three states -- Telangana (84 per cent), Andhra Pradesh (84 per cent) and Karnataka (77 per cent).

Manipur (66 per cent), Kerala (52 per cent), Jammu and Kashmir (49 per cent), Maharashtra (44 per cent) and West Bengal (42 per cent) were the other states and Union Territory where a large number of women justified men beating their wives.

To a question by the NFHS, "In your opinion, is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife...?", over 30 per cent women from as many as 14 states and Union Territories said, "yes".

The survey put forward the probable circumstances under which a husband beats his wife: if he suspects her of being unfaithful; if she disrespects in-laws; if she argues with him; if she refuses to have sex with him; if she goes out without informing him; if she neglects the house or the children; if she doesn't cook good food.

The most common reasons given by the respondents to justify beating were neglecting the house or children and showing disrespect to in-laws.

Of the 18 states, women respondents in 13 -- Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Manipur, Gujarat, Nagaland, Goa, Bihar, Karnataka, Assam, Maharashtra, Telangana, Nagaland and West Bengal -- cited "disrespect to in-laws" as the main reason to justify beating.

The lowest population of women that justified beating by husbands was in Himachal Pradesh (14.8 per cent).

Among men, 81.9 per cent respondents from Karnataka said such be-

haviour is justified as against 14.2 per cent in Himachal Pradesh.

Ushasree, director of "Roshni", a Hyderabad-based NGO which provides counselling and other services to those in emotional distress, said her organisation has seen a rise in sexual abuse and domestic violence during COVID-19.

"Some men appear to vent their frustration, caused by loss of income and other reasons due to the pandemic, on their family members," she said.

"There is an increase in the number of calls we received because friction has grown among family members as they stay confined within four walls round-the-clock due to the pandemic," she said. Though the number of calls is on the decline of late, women are generally facing domestic violence, she said.

Roshni is a member of Befrienders Worldwide, an international organisation. It has two helpline numbers, 040-6620 2001 and 040-6620 2000, she said.

Temi Tea Autumn...

Commission has approved 50 MBBS seats in Sikkim Manipal Institute of Medical Sciences (SMIMS) for Sikkimese students, annually.

These 50 seats will be free of cost for students who top NEET exams and the State Government will pay all related expenses of the course, he added. In this regard, the Chief Minister said that education is one of the topmost priorities of the State Government and they will always help students with their educational requirements.

Area MLA cum Minister, B. S. Panth in his address spoke about the importance of the festival and its theme, which was focused primarily on the locals of the area and their business ventures to uplift their enterprise.

Casteism not annihilated...

the safety of these witnesses, commonly known as 'witness protection,' it noted while referring to an earlier judgment of the Supreme Court.

The bench said that as a protector of its citizens, the State has to ensure that during a trial a witness can safely depose the truth, without any fear of being haunted by those against whom he or she has deposed.

It noted that according to Dr BR Ambedkar, inter-caste marriage is one remedy to get rid of casteism in order to achieve equality.

"His vision for ensuring justice and equality to all sections of society, especially to the repressed segments, is well enshrined in the preamble of the Constitution," the bench said.

"Though the number is a tad less, (dis)honour killings have not stopped in this country and it is high time that the civil society reacts and responds with strong disapproval about the ghastly crimes committed in the name of caste," it said.

Referring to an earlier verdict of the Supreme Court, the bench said dishonour killings, pursuant to the decree of khappanchayats have been strongly criticised by the top court in its earlier verdict.

It said harsh punishment was recommended to those "brutal and feudal

tures to uplift their enterprise.

He also listed down various developmental works that the State Government has done in the area which are soon to be constructed Khanchendzonga State University at Temi, road upgradation, construction of SGAY houses and many other projects, which has been framed for the advantage of the area and its locals.

During the course of the programme, the Chief Minister launched various products from Temi Tea Garden, namely, Silver Tea, Black and Green dip bag tea's. Besides the tea, he also introduced Tapioca Chips, which has been developed by a local Self-Help Group and is being marketed by Temi Tea.

mind persons" who commit atrocities in the name of castes.

"The Law Commission of India in its 242nd report suggested the legal framework on prevention of interference with the freedom of matrimonial alliances in the name of honour and tradition," the bench noted.

The 'panchayatdars' or caste elders have no right to interfere with the life and liberty of young couples whose marriages are permitted by law. They cannot create a situation whereby such couples are placed in a hostile environment in the village or locality concerned and exposed to the risk of safety, it said.

The bench said in the interest of "liberty and dignity" of young men and women in choosing their life partners and in the interest of peace, tranquillity and equality in society, it is imminently necessary that directions issued by the top court earlier should be carried out by states without any further delay.

In the 1991 Uttar Pradesh dishonour killing case, a trial court in November 2011 had convicted 35 accused. The high court had acquitted two while the conviction of the remaining persons was upheld by the high court. However, the high court had commuted the death sentence awarded to eight convicts to life term till the end of their natural lives.

NDTV, Week journalists honoured with IPI award

NEW DELHI, NOV 28

(PTI): The International Press Institute (IPI) India Award for Excellence in Journalism-2021 has been awarded jointly to Sreenivasan Jain and Mariyam Alavi of NDTV, and Lakshmi Subramanian and Bhanu Prakash Chandra of The Week.

Jain and Alavi have been awarded for their report on "untruthfulness of the cases of forcible conversion registered against young men belonging to the Muslim community who had married Hindu women in Uttar Pradesh, in the name of love Jihad", a statement issued by IPI on Saturday said.

The award has been jointly given to Subramanian and Prakash Chandra of The Week on their report on tracing Indians, especially women, who were trapped in refugee camps in the civil war-torn regions of Syria and Iraq. The team presented the extremely distressing conditions and the immense dangers faced not only by Indians but other refugees, the statement said. The award comprises a cash prize of Rs one Lakh, a trophy and a citation to each team.

The selection was made by a jury of editors headed by former

Supreme Court judge Madan B Lokur after considering the entries received. The Excellence in Journalism Award 2020 had been awarded to Ritika Chopra of The Indian Express for her exclusive reports on the internal fissures in the Election Commission of India on complaints on Model Code of Conduct violation against VIPs.

However, the Award ceremony could not be conducted due to restrictions on public functions necessitated due to COVID-19 conditions.

The Awards for 2020 and 2021 will be presented at a function in New Delhi in December 2021/January 2022. The Award has been given to 16 media organisations and journalists in print and electronic media so far.

The Indian Chapter of the IPI is an active forum of editors, publishers and senior executives of newspapers, magazines and news agencies, all of whom are members of the International Press Institute. The Indian Chapter has successfully hosted the World Congress and General Assembly of the IPI in India in 1966 and 2001, and is taking up various issues related to press freedom.



BEDAN KR. CHETTRI

02.04.1965
17.11.2021

ANTHYESTHYI KRIYA

The anthyesthyi kriya of Late Shri. Bedan Kr. Chettri who left for heavenly abode on 17.11.2021 shall be take place on 29.11.2021.

All the relatives, well-wishers and friends are hereby requested to join us in the offering prayers for the departed soul at our own residence in Bhurung, Central Pendim.

BEREAVED FAMILY MEMBER

1. Smt. Arati Chettri (Wife)
2. Mr. Abin Chettri (Son)
3. Mr. Bebek Chettri (Son)
4. Smt. Pranita Chettri (Daughter in law)

PH. NO:- 9593576435, 8101447015

OSC-South observes Int'l Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 NOV:

International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women was observed at One Stop Centre (South) premises on 27 Nov, a press release informs.

On the day, awareness was created on issues related to the safety and security of women and girls and the services they can access from the One Stop Centre. They were briefed about Gender Based Violence and other forms of violence related to women. The women were informed about the free legal aid services provided through SLISA/DSLA and other relevant legal provisions for the protection of women.

One Stop Centres are intended to support women affected by violence in private



as well as in public spaces, within the family, community and at the workplace. Women facing physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic abuse, irrespective of caste, age, class, religion, educational status, marital status, race and culture

will be felicitate with support and redressal. The OSC are integrated with 181-WHL and the women affected by violence and in need of redressal services could be referred to OSC through these helpline. The Main objective of One Stop Centre are: i)

To provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces and ii) To facilitate immediate emergency and non-emergency access to a range of services including medical, legal, psychological

and counselling support under one roof to fight against any forms of violence against women. The OSC are integrated with 181-WHL and the women affected by violence and in need of redressal services could be referred to OSC through these helplines.

Thailand's Monkey Festival returns after two years, draws in tourists

LOPBURI, 28 Nov [REUTERS]: Watched by tourists and locals, thousands of monkeys in Lopburi in central Thailand feasted on two tonnes fruits and vegetables after the town's Monkey Festival resumed following a two year hiatus caused by the pandemic.

Hundreds of macaques, also known as long-tailed monkeys, were seen climbing on people and stacks of fruit, munching away on bananas and pineapples.

The feast, which cost over 100,000 baht (\$3,000), is an annual tradition for locals to thank the monkeys for doing their part in drawing in tourists to Lopburi, which is sometimes known as "Monkey Province." "Today's special is durian, which is expensive. Lopburi monkeys like expensive things," said Yongyuth-Kitwatanausont who has previously organised over 30 monkey festivals.

The theme for this year's festival was wheelchair monkeys, and Yongyuth planned to donate 100 wheelchairs to needy people.

Tourists have been gradually returning to Thailand after the government launched a quarantine-free travel scheme for vaccinated tourists in November, and the festival proved a popular draw.

Thailand saw more than 100,000 inbound travellers in November, as high as the number of arrivals in the first ten months combined.

"I'm really happy to get to see this and now I'm thinking about going to the next festival," said Moroccan tourist AyoubBoukhari.

"It's quite unexpected and the monkeys are quite silly." Some tourists were seen playing with the monkeys with their cameras. The resumption of the tradition also pleased locals.

4th Sikkim Strength Lifting Competition in Namchi



BIKASH CHETTRI
NAMCHI, 28 Nov:

The 4th Sikkim Strength Lifting Competition was held on 27 and 28 Nov which was organized by Sikkim Strength Lifting Association in collaboration with Sumo's Gym in Namchi, South Sikkim.

The event had 120 participants from Sikkim and 35 participants from Nepal among which, around 40 participants were women lifters.

The chief guest of the second day of the event

held in Sumo's Gym was Urban Development Minister, Arun Upreti, who said that Sikkim has played an important role in the Indo-Nepal friendship.

The chief patron of the event, Forest Minister, Karma Loday, said that the same event will be held in Gangtok and North Sikkim in 2022 and 2023, respectively.

The chairman of Namchi Municipal Council, Ganesh Rai was present on the second day of the event as a special guest.

The general secretary of Sikkim Strength Lifting Association thanked the Minister and the Chief Minister for supporting the event and also thanked the owner of Sumo's Gym, Pema Gyatso Bhutia for his support.

Judges both from state and national level were felicitated along with the participants of the event.

The main attraction of the second day was Mr Nepal, Lalit Nuniya Dhimai who posed during the event.

Rajya Sainik Board to hold Ex-Servicemen Rally after two-year gap

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 NOV:

Rajya Sainik Board, Gangtok, is conducting its Ex-Servicemen Rally after a gap of almost over two years due to Covid pandemic restrictions. The event will be held at IHCAE, Chemchey, South Sikkim on 01 Dec.

A press release informs that approximately 400 ex-servicemen and their families are expected to attend the function. This will also be an opportunity to get themselves updated with the latest policies from Ministry of Defence for various welfare aspects of ex-servicemen.

The main events of the day would be the felicitation of the Chief

Minister by the ex-servicemen and families to express gratitude for having provided necessary budget and commencement of construction of the much awaited Sainik Board Office-cum-Sainik Rest House at Gangtok which more than halfway complete.

A newly instituted "Chief Minister's Rolling Trophy" will be unveiled by the Chief Minister and will be dedicated to RajyaSainik Board Sikkim. The Rolling Trophy will then be presented to the best administered Zilla-Sainik Board, Gyalshing, West Sikkim for the year 2020.

Since the country is celebrating its 75 years of independence un-

der the banner "Azadi-KaAmritMahotsav" and also the "Swarnim Vijay Varsh" on completion of 50 years of 1971 Indo-Pak war and creation of Bangladesh. Therefore, RajyaSainik Board has decided to felicitate some of its 1971 war and WW-II veterans and widows as well as the "Young Achievers" - the wards of ex-servicemen who are doing extremely well in their respective career and making their parents proud as well as the ex-servicemen community.

In addition, there will be a display of mountaineering equipment and a short demonstration on sport climbing "Lead & Speed" and Ice wall climbing technique.

Robert Lewandowski tipped for Ballon d'Or as Lionel Messieyes seventh prize

PARIS, 28 Nov [AFP]: Robert Lewandowski threatens to deny Lionel Messi a record-extending seventh Ballon d'Or title as the prestigious awards ceremony returns Monday after it was cancelled last year because of the pandemic.

The Bayern Munich and Poland striker pilfered a Bundesliga record 41 goals in just 29 games last season to eclipse the long-standing mark set by the late Gerd Mueller. Lewandowski, 33, scooped FIFA's prize for best male player of 2020 and has the backing of both coach Julian Nagelsmann and Bayern teammate Thomas Mueller after a prolific start to the new campaign.

"'Lewy' has to win the thing on Monday when you see the way he is playing at the moment," Mueller said of a player who has already scored 25 times in 20 appearances this season.

Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo have combined to win 11 of the past 12 editions of the Ballon d'Or, the lone exception in 2018 when Luka Modric helped Real Madrid to another Champions League triumph and

inspired Croatia to the World Cup final.

"Robert deserves to win it, because in my view he has been more unbelievably consistent than any other player," Nagelsmann said last month in an interview with Munich newspaper Abendzeitung.

While Messi has endured a stop-start beginning to life at Paris Saint-Germain, the Argentine bagged 30 league goals in his farewell season at Barcelona and also won the Copa del Rey.

Further strengthening his case was a first major international trophy in July, as Argentina beat rivals Brazil to win the Copa America at the Maracana -- ending the country's 28-year wait for the title.

"My biggest prize was what I was able to achieve with the national team," Messi told Catalan daily Sport recently.

"After having fought and fought so much for that achievement, it was the best given all that it cost. If the Ballon d'Or were to arrive, it would be extraordinary for what it would mean to win one more. The seventh would be crazy," Messi added.

Ronaldo last took home the trophy in 2017. The Champions League's all-time top scorer has struck in all five games in Europe during his second spell at Manchester United but appears an outside contender for a sixth Ballon d'Or.

KarimBenzema received support from Thierry Henry, Zinedine-Zidane and tennis star Rafael Nadal following a tremendous year with Real Madrid.

However the France star this week received a one-year suspended sentence for complicity in a bid to blackmail his former international teammate Mathieu Valbuena with a sex tape. He was also given a 75,000-euro (\$84,000) fine.

Five members of Italy's Euro 2020-winning squad feature on the 30-man shortlist, including Chelsea midfielder and Champions League winner Jorginho.

KylianMbappe, ErlingHaaland -- viewed as Ballon d'Or winners of the future -- also feature alongside Neymar and Liverpool striker Mohamed Salah, the leading Premier League scorer this term.

"Colossal Outbreak": China could record over 6.3 lakh daily Covidcases, warns study

BEIJING, 28 Nov [PTI]: China is expected to continue its much-criticised Zero Covid policy, shutting the country to most of the world as a new study has warned of a "colossal outbreak" with over 6.30 lakh patients per day if it opens up.

According to a report by the Peking University mathematicians, China could face more than 630,000 coronavirus infections a day if it dropped its zero-tolerance approach and followed other countries by lifting travel bans.

"The estimates revealed the real possibility of a colossal outbreak which would almost certainly put an unbearable burden on the medical system," the report said.

The country on Saturday reported 23 new COVID-19 cases, including 20 imported ones as the country appears to have contained a recent spike of infections in Beijing and other cities.

China, where the coronavirus first surfaced in Wuhan in late

2019 before it turned into a pandemic, has so far reported 98,631 cases and 4,636 deaths, the National Health Commission said on Sunday.

This included 785 patients still receiving treatment.

On Saturday, Chinese top respiratory expert ZhongNanshan warned that the new and more contagious coronavirus variant Omicron, reported in South Africa causing global alarm, may cause more challenges to the work of preventing and controlling the pandemic as the World Health Organization (WHO) said it carries a large number of mutations.

He said that about 76.8 per cent of China's population have been vaccinated, laying a good basis for the country to reach the target of 80 per cent vaccination to build herd immunity by year end.

One of China's major vaccine producers, Sino-vac Biotech, told state-run Global Times that the company is paying close

attention to Omicron and have tapped into a global partner network to collect and obtain information and samples specific to the mutant virus.

As the outbreak turned into a pandemic, China shut itself mostly with flight bans to most of the countries, including India, and did not permit thousands of foreign students, including 23,000 from India, studying in Chinese universities despite scathing criticism.

Earlier China had no option but to aim for zero infections because the coronavirus was replicating quickly and the global death rate of about 2 per cent was unacceptable, Zhong told state-run CGTN-TV.

In a report published in China CDC Weekly by the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, the four mathematicians from Peking University argued that China was not ready and could not afford to lift entry-exit quarantine measures without more

efficient vaccinations or specific treatment. Currently, people arriving from abroad have to undergo 21-day quarantine in designated hotels.

Using data for August from the US, Britain, Israel, Spain and France, the mathematicians looked at the potential results if China adopted similar pandemic response strategies to those used in the selected countries.

In August, most of these countries had presented higher vaccination rates than China, where 54 per cent of the eligible population were inoculated.

These countries also had a higher natural immunity ratio, despite having lower population densities than China.

The researchers estimated that China would have more than 637,155 daily confirmed cases if it went down the same pandemic strategy path as the US, which had an average of 150,098 daily cases towards the end of August. The report said China would have had 275,793 cases if it took

the same approach as Britain and 454,198 cases if it followed France.

"Our findings have raised a clear warning that, for the time being, we are not ready to embrace 'opening-up' strategies and rely solely on the hypothesis of herd immunity induced by vaccination advocated by certain Western countries," Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post quoted the report.

However, the study did acknowledge the estimates were based on basic arithmetic calculations and that more sophisticated dynamic models were needed to study the evolution of the pandemic if travel restrictions were lifted.

The researchers said that China would need a range of preparations in place - including more efficient vaccination coverage and specific treatment, different levels of non-pharmaceutical interventions and more hospital beds - before it could safely transition to opening-up strategies.

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The Right is Not Always Fair

Politics hence should make space for more voices

The rise and rise of the Right in India is not a phenomenon unique to the country. The Right, Far Right and the Alt-Right are increasingly recording gains in politics where such successes would have been unthinkable till even a few years ago. But that is the situation where electoral politics has delivered too many governments to. In all fairness, the Far Right, which is what every Right-wing faction aspires to be if allowed, has not stolen power and influence and has been voted to a stronger sitting by a democratic process. That, however, does not mean that there is no reason to worry. There is plenty that demands concern. But first, let's try and understand what allowed Radical parties to become so "mainstream".

It is obvious that frustration with status quo drove people to vote so far Right. Around the world, as also in India, the electorate has traditionally fought shy of radical parties and limited their presence to the fringe or as part of coalitions. While this kept such parties in check, it also, over the years allowed the more liberal and left-of-centre parties to grow somnolent, increasingly compromised and easily distracted. When the economy was doing fine and the lay citizenry could go about their lives partaking in politics only during election cycles, when the economic meltdown happened, the disparity that had settled in became stark and the blame was shouldered on dispensations that had been in office for too long. People lost faith in their leaders and their politics and leveraged the vote to effect radical change. Populist and majoritarian rhetoric presented options that the then leaders were unable to offer. This space could have been filled by the Left as well, but the timing was against them because their ideology had by then collapsed under the persistent stress a world that had changed faster than they could adapt. Further, the current rage of change has been powered by a middleclass which finds itself unmoored from its sense of security and they, while they may lean socialist, are not conditioned to lean far enough left. The Right and its other extremities thus found their favour.

While this may, to some extent, explain what is happening in the political space around us and even though most such elevations have been democratically endorsed, there is an inherent problem with such a situation which militates against the basic premise of democracy – diversity. The Right has traditionally been disinterested in the rights or even protection of the minorities and so seeped in insularity that authoritarianism is its natural position. We already see enough evidence of this everywhere, but will continue to flag some worries. Even as they peddle populist spiel with one hand, they reinforce control and authoritarianism with the other, foisting nationalism and majoritarian paranoia to destroy free media, undermine independent institutions and muzzle the opposition. None of this is desirable or safe, and yet, because they ride a wave, they pull it off. It goes without saying that for a democracy to be stable and healthy, all political actors need to believe in its basic precepts of free will, fair competition and checks & balances. None of these find resonance with the Far Right and efforts, overt and subversive, are always underway to undermine the executive, judiciary, free expression and free press. Take a look around. Such political actors, convinced of their right to rule and claiming righteousness, also lose the ability to sift fair criticism from spite. More dangerously, they see their adversaries as enemies. Here, one needs to quote Michael Ignatieff, a political theorist and former leader of the Liberal party of Canada, who wrote this a few years ago: "For democracies to work, politicians need to respect the difference between an enemy and an adversary. An adversary is someone you want to defeat. An enemy is someone you have to destroy."

And when democracy allows adversaries to be "destroyed," democracy itself is dealt a fatal blow. Do we want that to happen?

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What the Peng Shuai saga tells us about Beijing's grip on power and desire to crush a #MeToo moment

YAN BENNETT & JOHN GARRICK
theconversation.com

Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai's apparent disappearance may have ended with a smattering of public events, which were carefully curated by state-run media and circulated in online clips. But many questions remain about the three weeks in which she was missing, and concerns linger over her well-being.

Peng, a former Wimbledon and French Open doubles champion, had been out of the public eye since Nov. 2, 2021 when she penned a since-deleted social media post accusing former Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli of sexual misconduct.

In the U.S. and Europe, such moments of courage from high-profile women have built momentum to out perpetrators of sexual harassment and assault and give a voice to those wronged. But in the political context of today's People's Republic of China (PRC) – a country that tightly controls political narratives within and outside its borders – something else happened. Peng was seemingly silenced; her #MeToo allegation was censored almost as soon as it was made.

As scholars of Chinese legal culture who have watched as the nation has become increasingly repressive under the premiership of Xi Jinping, we believe the mysterious disappearance – and brief reappearance – of Peng should be viewed within a broader sociolegal context. The episode shows that when presented with a potential pivotal #MeToo moment, Beijing is prepared to violate its own legal principles and respond with a state-media controlled operation aimed to chill any challenge to CCP authority.

CLAIM OF A SEXUAL ASSAULT

Peng's Nov. 2 post on Weibo, the popular Chinese social media platform, reads like an open letter to Zhang, a retired but still powerful member of China's Communist Party elite.

In it, the tennis star alleges coercion, duress and sexual assault. Peng wrote to the 75-year-old Zhang: "Why did you have to come back to me, took me to your home to force me to have sex with you? ... I couldn't describe how disgusted I was, and how many times I asked myself am I still a human? I feel like a walking corpse."

The post was quickly taken down and Peng dis-

appeared. But it sparked widespread international outrage. Current and former athletes expressed concern over Peng's safety, including Naomi Osaka and Serena Williams. The hashtag #WhereIsPengShuai started trending.

Chinese state media responded by publishing a message purportedly from Peng, stating that "everything is fine." But it was met with deep skepticism across the international community. Even with her reemergence at public events, concerns over her safety remain.

Behind the saga, however, is a clear message: It is dangerous to publicly criticize even a former senior Chinese Communist Party official. The party does not want any American-style #MeToo movement in China, as it is hostile to any grassroots movements that challenge its authority.

BEING 'DISAPPEARED'

Peng's disappearance also shows how authoritarian instruments of control are triggered by politically sensitive matters that contradict Communist Party narratives.

Such control of any sensitive narrative in China is commonplace with the CCP. Just ask Jack Ma, the former head of Alibaba, or movie star Fan Bingbing. Ma, who was the richest man in China and a worldwide celebrity, criticized the Chinese financial industry. This criticism led to his quick disappearance from public view. Thereafter, his ANT Group IPO was quashed and assets disassembled and appropriated by government-controlled entities. Fan also disappeared from public view and eventually resurfaced, only to be fined for tax evasion. It appeared that the Communist Party considered her conduct may have had a corrupting influence on socialist values with displays of wealth and glamour out of sync with Xi's revival of Maoist concepts such as "common prosperity."

In Peng's case, her story directly contradicted the Communist Party's official narrative of harmonious relations between people and Party. In particular, her allegations contradict the narrative that women, who purportedly "hold up half the sky in China", enjoy gender equality under this government.

Peng, for challenging this view, was given a taste of being canceled from China's history and stripped of her rights under the Chinese constitution to seek justice in relation to her serious alle-

gations. Indeed, the Chinese government has a history of unjustly detaining people involved in contentious cases, limiting their capacity to talk freely, and forcing statements.

Under Xi, China enjoys a self-described "socialist democracy with 'Chinese characteristics,'" in which "the citizens' basic rights are respected and guaranteed."

But the response to Peng, amongst others, shows that rule of law has become a ruthless, blunt force instrument wielded by party leadership.

As Cai Xia, former professor at the Central Party School of the CCP, argued in June 2021: "the regime has degenerated further into a political oligarchy bent on holding on to power through brutality and ruthlessness [and] has grown ever more repressive and dictatorial."

Cai continued: "A personality cult now surrounds Xi, who has tightened the Party's grip on ideology and eliminated what little space there was for political speech and civil society."

In Peng's case, her "being disappeared" appears to be an attempt to kill several birds with one arrow: crush dissent, stem any Chinese #MeToo momentum and instill fear about criticizing CCP officials because, as the vanguard of the Communist Party under Xi Jinping Thought, they must always be seen as virtuous. In short, "Xi Jinping Thought" is a set of policies and ideas taken from the various writings and speeches of General Secretary Xi.

'FIGHT TO THE END'

Peng's allegations came at a particularly sensitive time for the CCP. It came just as Xi was preparing to deliver a historical resolution aimed at further cementing his grip on power.

"The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has entered a key phase, and risks and challenges we face are conspicuously increasing," Xi remarked, while vowing to "fight to the end" with any forces that attempt to subvert the party's leadership.

"Any forces" apparently includes anyone who criticizes or challenges the Communist Party – even one of its own international sports stars making serious allegations against a former party official.

[Yan Bennett is Assistant Director for the Paul and Marcia Wythes Center on Contemporary China, Princeton University; John Garrick is University Fellow in Law, Charles Darwin University]

Why some people find it harder to be happy

JOLANTA BURKE
theconversation.com

The self-help industry is booming, fuelled by research on positive psychology – the scientific study of what makes people flourish. At the same time, the rates of anxiety, depression and self-harm continue to soar worldwide. So are we doomed to be unhappy, despite these advances in psychology?

According to an influential article published in Review of General Psychology in 2005, 50% of people's happiness is determined by their genes, 10% depends on their circumstances and 40% on "intentional activity" (mainly, whether you're positive or not). This so-called happiness pie put positive-psychology acolytes in the driving seat, allowing them to decide on their happiness trajectory. (Although, the unspoken message is that if you are unhappy, it's your own fault.)

The happiness pie was widely critiqued because it was based on assumptions about genetics that have become discredited. For decades, behavioural genetics researchers carried out studies with twins and established that between 40% and 50% of the variance in their happiness was

explained by genetics, which is why the percentage appeared in the happiness pie.

Behavioural geneticists use a statistical technique to estimate the genetic and environmental components based on people's familial relatedness, hence the use of twins in their studies. But these figures assumed that both identical and fraternal twins experience the same environment when growing up together – an assumption that doesn't really hold water.

In response to the criticism about the 2005 paper, the same authors wrote a paper in 2019 that introduced a more nuanced approach on the effect of genes on happiness, which recognised the interactions between our genetics and our environment.

NATURE AND NURTURE

Nature and nurture are not independent of each other. On the contrary, molecular genetics, the study of the structure and function of genes at the molecular level, shows that they constantly influence one another. Genes influence the behaviour that helps people choose their environment. For example, extroversion passed from parents to children helps children build their friendship groups.

Equally, the environment changes gene expression. For example, when expecting mothers were exposed to famine, their babies' genes changed accordingly, resulting in chemical changes that suppressed production of a growth factor. This resulted in babies being born smaller than usual and with conditions such as cardiovascular disease.

Nature and nurture are interdependent and affect each other constantly. This is why two people brought up in the same environment may respond to it differently, meaning that behavioural genetics' assumption of an equal environment is no longer valid. Also, whether or not people can become happier depends on their "environmental sensitivity" – their capacity to change.

Some people are susceptible to their environment and so can significantly change their thoughts, feelings and behaviour in response to both negative and positive events. So when attending a wellbeing workshop or reading a positive psychology book, they may become influenced by it and experience significantly more change compared to others – and the change may last longer, too.

But there is no positive psychology intervention that will work for all

people because we are as unique as our DNA and, as such, have a different capacity for wellbeing and its fluctuations throughout life.

Are we destined to be unhappy? Some people might struggle a little harder to enhance their wellbeing than others, and that struggle may mean that they will continue to be unhappy for longer periods. And in extreme cases, they may never experience high levels of happiness.

Others, however, who have more genetic plasticity, meaning they are more sensitive to the environment and hence have an increased capacity for change, may be able to enhance their wellbeing and perhaps even thrive if they adopt a healthy lifestyle and choose to live and work in an environment that enhances their happiness and ability to grow.

But genetics does not determine who we are, even if it does play a significant role in our wellbeing. What also matters are the choices we make about where we live, who we live with and how we live our lives, which affect both our happiness and the happiness of the next generations.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer, Centre for Positive Psychology and Health, RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences]

Odisha logs 191 fresh COVID-19 cases, 1 new fatality

BHUBANESWAR, Nov 28 (PTI): Odisha on Sunday registered 191 new infections, 73 less than the previous day, taking the state's caseload to 10,48,683 while one more fatality pushed the coronavirus death toll to 8,407, a health department official said.

The state has registered new infections below 200 after a gap of six days. The state recorded 264 new cases on Saturday, 219 on Friday, 335 on Thursday and 288 cases on Wednesday.

The new infections included 33 children and adolescents in the age group of 0 to 18 years, which is 17.27 per cent of the total cases of the day. The rate of infection in the 0 to 18 years age group was 16 per cent on Saturday.

Of the 191 new infections, Khurda district of which the state capital Bhubaneswar is a part, reported the highest 87 cases, followed by 13 each in Sundergarh and Cuttack. Nine other districts did not report any new cases in the last 24 hours.

The state's COVID-19 death toll increased to 8,407 after one fatality was reported from Bar-



garh district. This apart, 53 COVID-19 patients have also died due to comorbidities, he said.

The state's daily test positivity rate (TPR) stands at 0.33 per cent as 191 people tested positive for infection out of 56,199 samples tested on Saturday. The TPR was 0.47 per cent on Saturday, 0.37 per cent on Friday and 0.53 per cent on Thursday.

Odisha currently has 2,359 active COVID-19

cases while 10,37,864 patients including 255 on Saturday recovered from the highly infectious disease.

The state has thus far conducted over 2.36 crore sample tests including 56,199 on Saturday. The positivity rate now is 4.43 per cent.

More than 1.51 crore people have so far been inoculated with double doses of COVID-19 vaccines. Meanwhile, the Odisha government has

alerted all district collectors on the new variant of Coronavirus being detected in South Africa, Botswana and Hong Kong.

After the Centre advised all states, Union Territories for conducting screening of passengers coming from the countries where the new COVID-19 variant has been detected, the Odisha government also issued an advisory to the district collectors to focus on strategy of test-

ing-tracking-treatment-vaccination-enforcement of Covid appropriate behaviour and containment measures.

Director of Public Health, Niranjan Mishra Saturday said: "The foreign travellers who will test positive will be isolated and their samples will be sent for genome sequencing to find out whether the new sub-variant is there or not."

This apart, the official said that the state has also asked the district collectors for constant and close surveillance over hostels, schools, colleges and other congregations following detection of infections in certain educational institutions in different parts of the state.

The Health Department has instructed the District Administrations and Municipal authorities to discourage students with mildest of symptoms from attending the classes, regular sensitization of classrooms, he said.

Besides, the district administrations have been told to intensify the door to door campaign for vaccination, involving all field functionaries, PRI members, SHGs.

2 new COVID-19 cases push Andamans tally to 7,680

PORT BLAIR, Nov 28 (PTI): Andaman and Nicobar Islands reported two new COVID-19 cases, one more than the previous day, pushing the tally to 7,680, a health department official said on Sunday.

The union territory now has five active COVID-19 cases and all the patients are in the South Andaman district. The other two districts - North and Middle Andaman and Nicobar - are coronavirus free, he said.

The COVID-19 death toll in the archipelago remained at 129 as no

fresh fatality was reported in the last 24 hours.

A total of 7,546 people have recovered from COVID-19 so far, the official said.

The administration has tested 6,31,247 samples for COVID-19 thus far and the cumulative test positivity rate is 1.22 per cent.

A total of 5,49,066 beneficiaries have been vaccinated so far, of which 2,96,557 have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine and 2,52,509 have received both doses of the vaccine, the official added.

Bengal logs 701 new COVID-19 cases, 11 fresh fatalities

KOLKATA, Nov 27 (PTI): West Bengal recorded 701 new COVID-19 cases and 11 fresh fatalities due to the disease on Saturday, the health department said in a bulletin.

As many as 710 new infections and nine deaths due to COVID-19 were reported on Friday.

The virus tally and the death toll went up to 16,14,152 and 19,450 re-

spectively.

Of the 11 deaths, North 24 Parganas recorded four, while Kolkata and Paschim Bardhaman two each.

South 24 Parganas, Hooghly and Dakshin Dinajpur districts reported one death each, it said.

As 717 COVID-19 patients were discharged in the last 24 hours, the recovery rate stood at

98.31 per cent. Altogether 15,86,882 people have recovered from the disease in the state so far.

The number of active cases on Saturday was 7,820.

In the last 24 hours, 37,180 samples have been tested for COVID-19 in the state, and 2,02,22,744 such clinical examinations have been tested in the state so far.

Mizoram committed to maintain peace along borders with all states: Official

NEW DELHI, 28 Nov [PTI]: The Mizoram government led by Chief Minister Zoramthanga is committed to maintain peace and tranquillity with all its neighbouring states, a senior official said on Sunday.

K Lalsawmvla, adviser (Tech) to the Mizoram chief minister, also made it clear that Zoramthanga had never said about extending fencing along the Mizoram-Assam interstate border as no fencing exists there.

"The Mizoram government led by Hon'ble Chief Minister Zoramthanga has always been committed to maintain peace and tranquillity with all our neighbouring states and countries," K

Lalsawmvla said in a statement.

Referring to a report which quoted the chief minister as saying that "we will try to increase our fencing all along.", the adviser to the chief minister said Zoramthanga had rather said "we will try to increase the friendship that we have all along", after his meeting with Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on November 25 in New Delhi.

"As there is no border fencing to be increased between Mizoram and Assam, there is no question of border fencing. The word friendship was taken as fencing which is a misleading statement," he said.

Passenger removed from SpiceJet Guwahati-Delhi flight for creating ruckus

NEW DELHI, 28 Nov [PTI]: A passenger was offloaded from a SpiceJet plane for unruly behaviour at Guwahati airport on Friday and was handed over to CISF personnel, according to the airline.

The incident happened on Friday morning on the Delhi-bound flight SG 8169, when the aircraft was taxiing on the runway.

In a statement on Sunday, the airline said the passenger was offloaded as he repeatedly got up from his seat and created a ruckus.

"Repeated attempts to pacify him failed and



co-passengers told the crew that they were not ready to fly with the said passenger on board. The aircraft was brought back to the bay where airport security officials along with SpiceJet staff deplaned the passenger

and handed him over to the CISF," the statement said. Later, the plane took off for Delhi.

It could not be immediately ascertained whether any action will be taken against the passenger.

Nepal census team awaits clearance from MEA

PITHORAGARH (U'KHAND), Nov 28 (PTI): Permission to a Nepalese census team to visit Nepal's border villages of Tinkar and Changru via India is still awaited from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

Nepal had sought the permission for the team for the ongoing census exercise in the neighbouring country.

"Whenever the permission reaches us from the government, we will inform Nepal," Pithoragarh District Magistrate (DM) Ashish Chauhan said.

Chauhan, who was briefing the media after chairing an Indo-Nepal coordination meeting here on Saturday, said

the meeting of administrative officers of the border districts of the two countries was concluded with an agreement to maintain the coordination of security agencies on the border and the mutual cooperation.

"Both the teams have given their nod to consider the proposal of making it essential for the citizens of either country to produce identity cards issued by their respective governments while crossing the borders.

"This is essential to identify unwanted elements who enter both India and Nepal, taking advantage of the open-entry system between the two countries," he added. According to the

DM, the construction of a motorable road on the Kali river at Charchum and a suspension bridge at Ailagar was also discussed at the meeting.

The officers from both the countries agreed to pursue the matter with their higher-ups, he said.

Besides the DM, others who took part in the deliberations from the Indian district were Chief Development Officer Anuradha Pal and ADM PR Chauhan.

Nepal was represented by Chief District Officer of Darchula Siddh Raj Joshi, DIG, Nepal Armed Police, Narendra Bam and 10 other officers from various departments in the neighbouring country.

Ruling BJP sweeps Tripura civic polls

AGARTALA, Nov 28 (PTI): The ruling BJP on Sunday swept the civic body elections in Tripura, having won all the seats of the 51-member Agartala Municipal Corporation (AMC) and clinching several other urban local bodies.

The opposition TMC and CPI(M) failed to open their account in the AMC.

The saffron party secured all the wards in the 15-member Khowai Municipal Council, 17-seat Belonia Municipal Council, 15-member Kumarghat Municipal Council and nine-member Sabroom Nagar Panchayat, state election commission officials said.

The party made a clean sweep in the 25-ward Dharmanagar Municipal Council, 15-seat Teliamura Municipal Council and 13-member Amarapur Nagar Panchayat, they said.

Sonamura Nagar Panchayat and Melaghar Nagar Panchayat became opposition less with the BJP having won all the 13 seats each. It also bagged the 11-member Jirania Nagar Panchayat.

The party secured 12 seats of Ambassa Municipal Council, while the TMC and the CPI-M won one seat each and another went to an independent candidate.

The BJP also won 16 seats of Kailashahar Municipal Council and the CPI(M) got one.

In Panisagar Nagar Panchayat, the BJP emerged victorious in 12 seats, and the CPI (M) bagged one.

The saffron party had fielded candidates for all the 334 seats of Agartala Municipal Corporation, 13 municipal bodies and six Nagar Panchayats in the state where its nominees won in 112

places uncontested. Elections to 222 seats were held on November 25.

The ruling BJP is locked in a battle with the Trinamool Congress, which is foraying into the North east and elsewhere to establish itself as a national party, and with the CPI(M), which the saffron camp had dethroned from power in the state some years ago.

The TMC, which alleged vote-rigging and intimidation in the elections, had demanded countermanding of the entire polls. The CPI(M) had sought fresh elections in five municipal bodies, including the AMC.

Both parties had claimed that the authorities remained silent spectators as BJP supporters attacked political rivals and rigged the elections. The saffron camp, however, stoutly denied the charges.

Reacting to the impressive performance by his party in the elections, BJP vice president Dilip Ghosh said in Kolkata that the results of Tripura civic polls have exposed the "hollowness" of TMC's claims of having made inroads into the northeastern state. He said people there have faith in the saffron party.

Describing TMC workers campaigning in Tripura as "hired people", Ghosh told reporters his party shares a "strong bond" with the residents of that state.

"The civic poll results are on expected lines. The TMC did not have any chance to open its account in Tripura, they only made noises. This verdict shows hired people from West Bengal cannot help a party create a base in a state, which has faith in the BJP," Ghosh added.

Ladakh reports 27 fresh COVID cases

LEH, Nov 28 (PTI): Twenty-seven people tested positive for Covid-19 in Ladakh in last one day, taking the overall virus tally in the Union Territory (UT) to 21,494 and active cases to 249, an official statement said on Sunday.

Ladakh has registered 213 Covid-related deaths -- 155 in Leh and 58 in Kargil -- since the outbreak of the pandemic last year.

Of 2,366 people tested for Covid-19 on Saturday, 25 were found infected in Leh and two in Kargil.

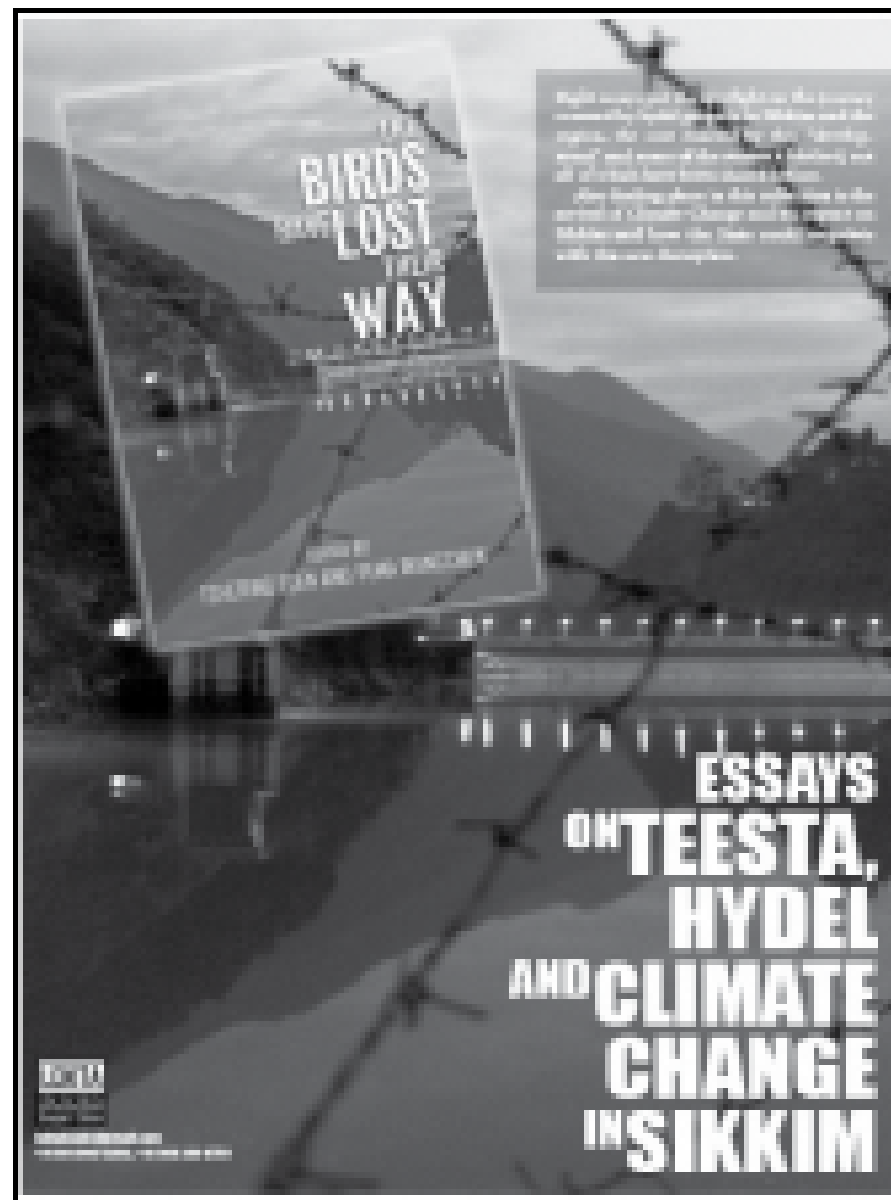
Twenty coronavirus patients were discharged

from a hospital in Leh and one in Kargil, taking the number of recoveries in Ladakh to 21,032, which is 97.85 per cent of the caseload, the statement said.

There are at present 229 active cases in Leh and 20 in Kargil.

There has been a spike in Covid-19 cases since the beginning of this month in Leh district, prompting the authorities to impose certain restrictions including night curfew and closure of all schools and residential hostels besides intensifying testing and imposing of fine on COVID norm violators.

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Tuchel used pain of Juventus defeat to refine his Chelsea approach

DAVID HYTNER

LONDON, 28 NOV [THE-GUARDIAN]: “It was a moment to shake things up but not in a crazy way,” Thomas Tuchel says, looking back on the fallout from Chelsea’s 1-0 Champions League defeat at Juventus on 29 September. And yet it was certainly in a forensic way, heavy on soul-searching and argument. So perhaps a little crazy? “It’s not about being super angry or blaming somebody but it was the moment to turn every stone and this is what we did for the next days in the coaching office,” the manager adds.

“To find the mix between being honest and critical but also supportive, to show a way out of this in which we believe and which suits us. With the help of the team, with the openness of the team and the mentality, we did it.”

Chelsea had travelled to Turin on the back of the 1-0 home loss to Manchester City in the Premier League and the Juventus performance was marked by a lack of sharpness and confidence. Too often it was safe and sideways and just too slow, with precious little penetration.

Look at Chelsea now, especially what they did to Juventus last Tuesday night in the Group H return. The 4-0 dismantling of the Serie A giants was all about high-tempo front-foot football, intelligent angles of attack and suffocating pressing. When Juventus’s torment was over, Chelsea’s could savour a ninth win in 10 matches (including the Carabao Cup penalty shootout victory over Southampton). The other game was the 1-1 home draw with Burnley.

Chelsea are flying going into Sunday’s visit of Manchester United, the bit firmly between their teeth in terms of a title challenge and as they begin a run of nine league matches in 36 days – taking them up to the home fixture with Liverpool on 2 January.

“It’s never easy, it hurts always ... it hurts me every single time, make no mistake,” Tuchel says of defeat and what bothered him after Turin was the fear that opposing teams had worked Chelsea out. They were lining up in defensive formations and seeking to make life as difficult as possible for them.

Tuchel also noted that Romelu Lukaku was being closed down and pushed “into spaces where he does not feel so comfortable”. The centre-forward would be injured three games later against Malmö in the Champions League; he could return as a substitute against United.

Were Chelsea getting a bit complacent before Turin, a little too comfortable in their ability to find the answers even when not at their best? Tuchel had prepared them meticulously for the game and was dis-

mayed at how it panned out. Yet he knows how to engineer title-winning seasons, having done so at Paris Saint-Germain; how to get through to his players, with arguably his greatest gift being how he packages his messages to them in a clear and simple way.

Fans can see the passion and emotion in Tuchel during matches but it is his rational and analytical side that is most pronounced at the training ground. It underpins a key element of any champion manager – the capacity to respond quickly and effectively to setbacks.

In Turin, Chelsea had tried to play patiently, to pass, pass and pass, and it was not them. Since then, they have upped the pace and intensity, seeking to be more fluid within their 3-4-2-1 system, and the high point was the remorselessness that they showed in the second game against Juventus. There was a period early in the second half when the visitors could not catch their breath. Chelsea made it 2-0 then 3-0 and Tuchel seemed to mainline the energy of the Stamford Bridge crowd.

“We changed the approach a bit towards the team [after Turin], a bit in training, a bit in our style of playing,” he says. “It was to find maybe new solutions and to install more of a mix of structure but also freedom in our game and the players did excellently.”

It is interesting to hear Tuchel describe the internal workings of his technical staff. When he joined the club in January, he brought with him the coaches, Arno Michels and Zsolt Low, and the analyst, Benjamin Weber, while he inherited the assistants, Anthony Barry and Joe Edwards, and the goalkeeper coaches, Henrique Hilário and James Russell.

“I am super protected by my staff – they know me, I know them,” Tuchel says. “And then we have new input here with our two assistant coaches and the goalkeeper coaches. So in one office we are also like one team and we are brutally honest with each other.

“Sometimes I confront with my doubts and somebody else has doubts. We have different opinions and then we start digging and we start asking ourselves: ‘What is here on us, how did we not see it? Could we have seen it? What can we do better? What could we have done better? What can we change?’ Everything is on the table. You need to have this trust and openness.”

The Juventus defeat has come to feel like an increasingly distant memory but not for Tuchel. “These moments are super-hard but sometimes they are necessary to refocus and resharpen,” he says. Chelsea are ready for a defining period.

George Kambošos Jr stuns Teófimo López for unified lightweight title in seismic upset

BRYAN ARMEN GRAHAM

NEW YORK, 28 NOV [THE-GUARDIAN]: Australia’s George Kambošos Jr won the IBF, WBA and WBO lightweight titles from Teófimo López in a seismic upset on Saturday night at the Theater at Madison Square Garden.

The unheralded Sydney native, who went off as a 6-1 underdog, dropped López in the opening round, then came off the floor himself in the 10th to win a split decision before a rollicking crowd of several thousand spectators almost entirely in the champion’s corner. Two of the ringside judges handed down scores 115-112 and 115-111 for Kambošos while the third scored it 114-113 for López. (The Guardian had it 114-112 to Kambošos.)

The gripping encounter was the upset of the year and, quite possibly, the fight of the year.

“I believed in myself, I backed myself,” Kambošos said in the immediate aftermath. “I said it time after time: You might not believe it, but I believe in myself. And look at me now. I’ve got all the jewels. I’m not the king, I’m the emperor because I come to every other country and I take them out one by one.”

López, the 24-year-old Brooklyn native and one of the sport’s brightest young talents, was back in action for the first time since delivering on his enormous promise more than 13 months ago with a comprehensive unanimous-decision win over Vasiliy Lomachenko, the three-weight champion from Ukraine who for years had been widely regarded as boxing’s pound-for-pound best.

That more than four hundred days passed between López’s star turn in the MGM Grand bubble and Saturday night’s thrice-postponed date with Kambošos, the IBF’s mandatory challenger, staged in the Garden’s smaller theater instead of the big room next door, offers an instructive if mind-numbing case study in boxing’s tragicomic institutional dysfunction.

But Kambošos (20-0, 10 KOs), an unbeaten 28-year-old who earned his crack at the belts with a career-best win over the Welshman Lee Selby last year, made the most of the



delayed opportunity, enduring López’s smothering onslaught in the early rounds, scoring a knockdown against the run of play and rallying from near-defeat to deliver the finishing kick of a champion in his opponent’s hometown.

López (16-1, 12 KOs) had said that patience was the big lesson that he learned during his tumultuous year on the shelf, but his pell-mell approach from the opening bell as he swarmed Kambošos with loaded punches behind a menacing glare in search of a first-round knockout was the embodiment of haste and recklessness.

The challenger fought deftly off the back foot as he weathered the hail from his heavy-handed foe, looking for opportunities to counter while trying to find his rhythm. Then near the end of the opening frame, Kambošos sent López crashing to the canvas with a flush counter right over the top that the champion never saw coming. López beat the count, but ate another concussive right from the Aussie right before the bell. The fight was on.

“When Muhammad Ali fought an unbelievable puncher in Joe Frazier, [he] rang Cus D’Amato and said, ‘What do I do?’” Kambošos said. “And [D’Amato] said, ‘You hit him with the best right hand you’ve ever thrown in your life in the first round and you change the fight.’ And that’s what I did. I had that in my head. That was my mentality: ‘I’m going to hit this guy clean, I’m going to him

hard and I’m going to put him down.’ And the fight changed after that.”

López spent the early rounds largely repeating the failed formula of the first, rashly flailing into the pocket with looping shots that Kambošos either absorbed well or slipped entirely. Kambošos continued to score with well-timed counters, most notably with blind overhand rights. By the end of the fourth both fighters were throwing together in the center of the ring and it appeared Kambošos was getting the better of the exchanges, just.

The champion was already far behind on all three judges’ scorecards with swelling under both eyes by the middle rounds when he realized he needed to impose his size and physicality with greater measure and ring intelligence. Kambošos enjoyed his best round of the fight in the sixth, boxing off the back foot beautifully, countering with brio and opening a cut over López’s left eye that would trouble him through the rest of the fight.

By the eighth, Kambošos was beating López to the punch consistently when López, whose once-frenetic work rate had started to wane, bothered to throw at all. But even this reduced version of the champion remained dangerous in those moments he barged into the pocket throwing punches with cruel intentions. He finally seemed to wrest back the momentum of the contest in the ninth, where he land-

ed a three-punch combination with a minute to go that moved Kambošos backward and whipped the hometown crowd into a frenzy. López finished the round unloading on the Aussie along the ropes only for Kambošos to escape danger when the bell sounded.

Then came the 10th, when López dumped the bloodied challenger to the floor early in the round. Kambošos beat the count but appeared in serious trouble, scarcely throwing back and bleeding badly from above his left eye as López doggedly moved in to close the show. Perhaps one clean shot from defeat with the referee Harvey Dock prepared to intervene at any moment, Kambošos somehow made it to the bell upright and the fight pressed on into the championship rounds.

“I tried to entertain the crowd a little bit too much,” Kambošos said. “Got excited a little bit too much and I got caught. But you know what? What a warrior. I got back up, against all odds, and still finished the fight and won the next two rounds.”

Kambošos’s recuperative powers saw him bounce back remarkably in the 11th, peppering López with jabs and straight punches and while opening the cut over López’s left eye until it poured blood down his chest and on to his trunks. Sensing he needed something special in the final round, López went for broke over the final three-minute

session but Kambošos continued to counter sharply while staying out of harm’s way.

“All respect to Teofimo,” said Kambošos, who connected on 182 of 739 punches (24.6%) compared to 176 of 565 for López (31.2%), according to Compubox’s punch statistics. “He’s a great kid. The buildup was the buildup. We’re both competitive, young guys. But it was my night and it’s going to be my night for a very long time.”

So exhaustive was the Aussie’s performance that López was booed lustily by the same fans who had cheered him all night when he interrupted Kambošos’s in-ring interview to claim he won the fight.

Afterward, Kambošos said he was open to a rematch. But López, who’s drained himself to make the lightweight limit for years, appears likely to campaign at 140lbs moving forward. That opens the door to a number of lucrative opportunities for the newly minted champion, not least delicious matchups with social-media sensation Ryan Garcia, three-weight titleholder Gervonta Davis or Devin Haney, who holds the WBC’s version of the title at 135lbs.

Both fighters went to the hospital afterward to be treated for their injuries, skipping the post-fight press conference.

“There’s no rematch clause, there’s no network attachments,” said Lou DiBella, who signed a then-unknown Kambošos to a promotional deal in 2018. “Right now George Kombošos is the king of the lightweight division. He’s going to take a little time off and enjoy the victory and we’re going to make the biggest fight we can make.”

DiBella continued: “It’s great to recognize the talent when no one else recognizes it. No one wanted George Kambošos. Peter Khan identified him. We talked about it, this Greek kid who lived in Australia that we thought had all this persona, all this confidence. We saw something. No one wanted him. And look where he is: the undisputed lightweight champion of the world.

“And he won tonight, man. Fair and square, he won tonight. In a brilliant performance, one for the ages. And he has something he can be proud of for the rest of his life.”

Going back to drawing board sparked Lewis Hamilton’s late F1 title charge

GILES RICHARD

LONDON, 28 NOV [THE-GUARDIAN]: For Lewis Hamilton the 2021 Formula One title race has been like no other. As it enters the final decisive phase, the world champion is in position to pull off perhaps the greatest achievement of his career. His fight with Max Verstappen has been an unmissable affair, but what has caught the eye is how Hamilton has fought to drag this mighty tussle into an enthralling endgame.

Two races remain, with the first 20 yielding no clear advantage for either driver. A season that has ebbed and flowed between them, punctuated by brilliance, bad luck, conflict and drama, has seen the lead change hands five times.

With Saudi Arabia next weekend and Abu Dhabi to come seven days later, Verstappen leads by eight points: 52 remain on the table but Hamilton is on a roll and may now have the edge as he strives for a record eighth drivers’ title.

Verstappen can wrap it up in Saudi Arabia. He will be champion if he wins and takes fastest lap and Hamilton finishes sixth or lower or if he wins and Hamilton finishes lower than seventh. More realistically, short of a DNF, Hamilton will almost certainly be either in front of Verstappen or close enough to force the contest to the wire. He has not reached

this point with ease. The 36-year-old has this season shown the maturity and judgment of a great champion, with the determination of a thoroughbred and a work ethic that is often overlooked.

Verstappen’s Red Bull has been, on balance, the better car and that has required the Briton to deliver in every aspect of his craft. The 24-year-old Dutchman is uncompromising. He will not back off, has the certainty, the conviction of youth and feels he has nothing to lose in this, his first title fight.

Early in the season, Hamilton chose to give Verstappen his head. At Imola and Barcelona he backed away from aggressive moves in order to avoid a potentially race-ending crash. His assessment of it was instructive and perhaps a little barbed. “I am not too big or too successful to have to back out to fight another day,” he said last week. “I know that is sometimes the route you have to take. You have to be the smarter one.”

Hamilton, though, has adapted as the season progressed. With Verstappen scoring heavily in the first half, the world champion realised he could no longer simply play the percentages. “There has been a need to gain points and you have to get a little bit less willing to give up too much,” he said.

Hamilton accepted he must match the unyielding Verstappen and at Silverstone

and Monza the pair clashed on the track. Hamilton was adjudged at fault in Britain and Verstappen in Italy. But, crucially, Hamilton had made his point: Verstappen could not expect him to give way. Now Verstappen had to consider the percentages, too, in the knowledge that his opponent was unafraid to back down. There would be no psychological advantage.

Much of this opening half of the season also took a physical toll. Hamilton revealed in Hungary, after a monumental race where he came from last place to claim second, that he was still feeling the effects of long Covid. Having contracted the virus toward the end of the 2020 season, he suffered from fatigue and dizziness. It was unheard of for a driver still dedicated to staying in top physical form and Hamilton confirmed he had been battling ill-health all year.

“The first half of the season was one of the toughest that I’ve had,” he said, before confirming the underlying symptoms have now passed. “I feel better than I’ve felt in a long time. So somehow I’ve managed to push through it.”

In other seasons Hamilton enjoyed such superiority that he could have battled through and shrugged off such an impediment, but this year the margins are so fine it must have played a part.

Yet it paled in comparison to the single challenge that has defined the

season and its climax. Hamilton believes the new rules were meant to hold back the all-conquering Mercedes. Aerodynamic changes, ostensibly to slow the cars down, affected downforce more on cars with a low rake (the angle from rear to front) such as the Mercedes than on the high-rake Red Bulls.

Since testing Mercedes have called their car a “diva”: hard to set up, sometimes presenting a mystery as to why it would perform on certain tracks and not others, its sweet spot often infuriatingly elusive. Hamilton was left having to wrestle a recalcitrant beast. So he went back with the team and they applied themselves to solving the issues with ceaseless dedication. On every tiny detail Hamilton has worked with his engineers to find the solutions.

“Those are things that I’ve been applying more energy towards and being a lot harder with the team on,” he said. “Because we need every millisecond we can get, particularly at the places where we have been really quite a bit down. Just going into more detail everywhere.”

In Brazil they found it. Finally able to fully exploit the upgrades they had fitted at Silverstone, the car was exactly where Hamilton wanted it and he flew from 10th place – the result of penalties – to the win. A week later in Qatar it was once more on song, vindication of that relentless pursuit of improvement.

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The week that Covidsucker punched the world

NEW YORK, 28 Nov [BLOOMBERG]: On Monday morning, Austria's near-9 million residents woke to life in lockdown. Days later, a new Covid-19 variant set off alarm bells across the world, Europe and the U.S. slapped a travel ban on countries in Southern Africa and health officials raced to get ahead of a new threat.

It was the week the coronavirus reminded the world that the pandemic is far from over, delivering a combination punch of escalating infections, restrictions and a new mutation. The developments, marking a setback in the battle against the disease and a dent to the economic recovery, slammed equities and oil prices.

Governments went to the tried and tested virus-fighting tools in their playbook as cases in Europe spiked.

Germany tightened restrictions for the unvaccinated, France toughened rules on mask wearing and health passes, and Austria closed businesses from hotels to gyms. Belgium ordered nightclubs to close, and banned the public from indoor sporting events.

The U.K. ruled out tightening pandemic rules, but was quick to halt flights from six countries once news of the variant - B.1.1.529 - emerged. The European Union proposed the same measure as several of its member states went ahead and restricted travel.

For London, it was a case of once bitten, having learned the price of dithering when it was slow to react to the delta variant, which has half as many mutations as B.1.1.529. Travel bans may be unpopular in some quarters, but it's easier than hitting a weary public at home with lockdowns and other curbs on socializing.

There's a sense that this script has become depressingly familiar after almost two years - but that familiarity also leavens the sense of panic that's greeted the arrival of previous variants.



Across Europe, peoples' reaction to the recent news was far more muted than in the early months of the disease, a shift from fear, even panic, to resignation. This is the Covid world. The foreseeable future will bring rises and falls in infections, variants, intensive care needs and deaths - as well as the accompanying litany of measures from masks to tests, partial or full lockdowns, travel limits and booster vaccines.

In Italy for example, the first European country to impose a nationwide lockdown in early 2020, gone are the days when people disinfected the supermarket shopping before it entered their homes, and the daily toll of cases and fatalities monopolized attention.

Back then, Italians watched aghast as army trucks were called into the northern town of Bergamo to ferry coffins away because the crematorium could no longer cope.

A few days ago, even as the country's daily infections were rising at the fastest pace in six months, the mood was far different. At a bar in a trendy area near Rome's main railway station, a group of locals celebrated a 50th birthday with freshly-baked pizza and

wine. No one wore masks as the partygoers milled about. Only a couple of the guests remarked afterward that staff had failed to check vaccination certificates, as required by law.

"As long as there are no further government directives related to the new variant, people will keep on living their lives as usual," said Simone Schnall, professor of experimental social psychology at the University of Cambridge. "There's currently a mix of emotions that also includes frustration or anger... Many people just won't be able to stomach the prospect of yet another largely compromised Christmas."

BioNTech SE, which has developed one of the most widely used Covid vaccines with Pfizer Inc., offered another reason to not panic. It expects data on how the variant interacts with its shot within two weeks. A new version could be ready in 100 days.

And more protection against the disease is coming - at some point - in the form of anti-viral pills.

Covid "moved into the human population through a biological accident," said Sarah Pitt, a virologist at the University of Brighton. "I don't think we

should be trying to 'live with' it or accept that it will become endemic. I think we should be trying to eliminate it as far as that is feasible in an interconnected world."

If the vaccines still offer a chance of that, it wasn't what markets heard on Friday.

They reacted to the variant body blow with a sell-off. European stocks fell the most since June 2020, the Dow Jones dropped more than 1,000 points at one stage and oil tumbled through \$70 a barrel in New York for the first time since September. U.S. Treasuries jumped, sending yields down the most in a year.

For aviation and other travel-dependent segments, the spread of a new variant threatens a return to the disruption caused by delta's rise earlier in

the year, when it delayed a rebound in flying at the start of the northern hemisphere's summer high season. Investors are worried that a third summer may be put at risk if people hold back from making plans early in 2022.

But health experts say it's going to take time to know what the variant means for the global virus battle. In the meantime, UBS AG economist Paul Donovan noted that fear of the virus is what causes the most economic damage.

"We need to get used to the fact that there will be large numbers of variants appearing globally over the coming months and years," said John Bell, professor of medicine at the University of Oxford, who's been working with the U.K. on its Covid response. "Stay calm, track the data, understand this particular pathogen and respond. We will need to do this again and again in the future."

As the week drew to a close, another taste of déjà vu loomed. The World Health Organization classified B.1.1.529 as a variant of concern and called it omicron.

Yet another Greek letter to add to the long-running Covid conversation.

Balloons, relief at Dutch airport as tourists beat Covidstrain shutdown

SCHIPHOL, 28 Nov [AFP]: Relieved passengers on a flight from South Africa streamed into Amsterdam's Schiphol airport Saturday, in stark contrast to the previous day when fears about a new Covid-19 variant sparked chaos.

Smiling relatives waiting with balloons and flowers greeted travellers from KLM's only flight from Johannesburg, who reached the Netherlands despite a growing international shutdown to curb the new 'Omicron' strain.

The mood was very different the previous day, when passengers aboard two flights spent hours mired at Schiphol while tests revealed that 61 out of the 600 passengers had coronavirus, with some possibly having the new 'Omicron' strain which has governments worldwide worried.

"We were scared of having to go back into quarantine," said Mariam van der Veen, an air hostess who was on holiday in South Africa with her husband Alexander.

"The funny thing is... nobody said anything to us," a visibly relieved Van der Veen, 58, told news agency AFP.

Her husband added: "We heard there was a new variant and maybe it would be impossible to go back after the weekend. So we decided not to wait (in South Africa) under these circumstances and booked a flight home."

In all, 161 people made it back Saturday aboard the sole KLM flight from Johannesburg, blending seamlessly with other arrivals from Istanbul and Atlanta as they plucked luggage from the conveyor belts.

At least 107 other passengers were stopped from boarding as they did not comply with new Dutch government rules hastily announced on Friday.

These bar entry to all passengers from southern African countries except for Dutch and EU residents who can show

a negative Covid test taken within 24 hours of boarding the plane.

"Each person is dealing with an individual situation. We cannot say when these people will be able to return," KLM spokesman Remco Rous told AFP.

Since the emergence of the new strain, one country after another has banned flights from southern Africa in what New York Times global health reporter Stephanie Nolen -- who was on one of the flights to Schiphol -- termed "variant panic."

On Friday, passengers arriving at Schiphol had to endure hours of waiting -- first on the plane and then in a cramped arrival hall "were people were breathing on each other" and many people failed to wear face masks, Nolen tweeted.

Passenger Paula Zimmerman who documented her night via videos posted on Twitter and finally tested negative, said the "organisation was terrible unfortunately. Lessons to be learned for future."

Dutch health authorities said on Saturday that some of the 61 who tested Covid positive and are now in hotel quarantine "probably" had the new variant.

"This was an extraordinary situation, unique, because the measures changed while people were on the plane," said Stefan Donker, spokesman for Schiphol.

"Coronavirus is something unexpected and it proves to be always more unexpected," he told AFP.

While passengers who missed connecting flights because of Friday evening's hold-up were fuming, those arriving on Saturday had a much smoother transit -- and those whose destination was the Netherlands were hugely relieved.

"We were all tense and little bit worried," said Rita Kizito, a professor teaching in the Netherlands, but things went "surprisingly very smoothly."

World's newest republic, Barbados to cut ties with Queen Elizabeth

BRIDGETOWN, 28 Nov [AFP]: Barbados is about to cut ties with the British monarchy, but the legacy of a sometimes brutal colonial past and the pandemic's impact on tourism pose major challenges for the Caribbean island as it becomes the world's newest republic.

Famed for its beaches and love of cricket, Barbados will this week replace its head of state, Queen Elizabeth II, with her current representative, Governor General Sandra Mason.

Ceremonies on Monday evening into Tuesday will include military parades and celebrations as Mason is inaugurated as president, with Prince Charles -- heir to the British throne -- looking on.

The dawn of a new era has fueled debate among the population of 285,000 over Britain's centuries of influence, including more than 200 years of slavery until 1834, and Barbados finally becoming independent in 1966.

"As a young girl, when I heard about the queen, I would be really excited," said Sharon Bellamy-Thompson, 50, a fish vendor in the capital Bridgetown who remembers being about eight and seeing the monarch on a visit.

"As I grow older and older, I started to wonder what this queen really means for me and for my nation. It didn't make any sense," she said. "Having a female Barbadian president will be great."

For young activists such as Firhaana Bulbulia, founder of the Barbados Muslim Association, British colonialism and slavery lie behind the island's modern inequalities.

"The wealth gap, the ability



to own land, and even access to loans from banks all have a lot to do with structures built out of being ruled by Britain," Bulbulia, 26, said.

"The actual chains (of slavery) were broken and we no longer wore them, but the mental chains continue to persist in our mindsets."

In October, Barbados elected Mason to become its first president, one year after Prime Minister Mia Mottley declared that the country would "fully" leave its colonial past.

But some Barbadians argue there are more pressing national issues, including economic turmoil caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has exposed overreliance on tourism -- which, ironically, is dependent on British visitors.

Eerie calm in usually bustling Bridgetown, paltry numbers at popular tourist spots and a dead nightlife scene all

point to a country struggling after years of relative prosperity.

Unemployment is at nearly 16 percent, up from nine percent in recent years, despite sharply increased government borrowing to fund public sector projects and create jobs.

The country has just eased a longstanding Covid curfew, pushing it back from 9:00 pm to midnight.

Opposition leader Bishop Joseph Atherley said this week's celebrations among dignitaries would largely not be accessible to ordinary people.

"I just don't think we are doing ourselves a credit and a just service by having this when people are being admonished to sit in the comfort of your home and watch on a screen," Atherley said.

"Increasing numbers of Covid cases, an increasing sense

of stress and fear -- I just don't think that it is the right time."

Some criticism has also focused on Mottley inviting Prince Charles to be the guest of honor, and to award him the Order of Freedom of Barbados, the highest national honor.

"The British royal family is a source of exploitation in this region and, as yet, they have not offered a formal apology or any kind of repair for past harms," said Kristina Hinds, international relations lecturer at the University of the West Indies in Barbados.

"So I don't see how someone from the family can be given this award. That is beyond me."

Buoyed by Black Lives Matter movements across the world, local activists last year successfully advocated for the removal of a statue of the British Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson that stood in National He-

roes Square for two centuries.

And the end of the queen's reign is seen by some as a necessary step towards financial reparations to address the historic consequences of the use of slaves brought from Africa to work on sugar plantations.

For many Barbadians, replacing the British queen is just catching up with how the nation has felt for many years.

"I think it's a very good thing we're doing, becoming a republic, because we were independent 55 years now and it's time enough that we stand on our own feet," said Derry Bailey, 33, owner of a beach chair and water sports rental business.

"I expect that things will be better under this system. It makes no sense being independent and answering to the crown. So I really believe that being a republic is the way to go."



New Zealand Politician Cycles To Hospital In Labour, Gives Birth

New Zealand Member of Parliament Julie Anne Genter got on her bicycle early on Sunday and headed to the hospital. She was already in labour and she gave birth an hour later.

"Big news!" the Greens politician posted on her Facebook page a few hours later. "At 3.04am this morning we welcomed the newest member of our family. I genuinely wasn't planning to cycle in labour, but it did end up happening."

The island nation of 5 million already has a reputation for down-to-earth politicians. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern famously took maternity leave while in office and brought her three-month old to a United Nations meeting as she was still breastfeeding.

"My contractions weren't that bad when we left at 2am to go to the hospital - though they were 2-3 min apart and

picking up in intensity by the time we arrived 10 minutes later," Genter wrote.

"Amazingly now we have a healthy,

moved to the Pacific country in 2006.

Genter - her party's spokesperson for transport issues and whose Facebook



happy little one sleeping, as is her dad," said Genter, a dual New Zealand-U.S. citizen who was born in Minnesota and

profile includes "I love my bicycle" - also biked to the hospital in 2018 to give birth to her first-born, local media said.

BTS in LA: RM thanks ARMY for 'being proof' of their existence



BTS promised to take Los Angeles by storm, and they did. Finally performing in front of their fans after over two years, the septet comprising RM, Jin, Suga, Jungkook, J-Hope, Jimin and V left the ARMY wanting more. RM and Jungkook became the subject of much discussion on social media, and their names trended on Twitter. There were several other grand moments from the Permission To Dance concert, including Jin getting excited by a smoke machine, and Suga throwing a water bottle at screaming ARMY members. A fan wrote, "Our man is wilding with the smoke machine!"

There was another video of V taking a swipe at fire as well.

RM gave an emotional speech about

how his sadness evaporated after seeing ARMY members in person. "Thank you for this historical night. I really thought that I am going to miss this moment in my forties, sixties. You guys are the proof of our existence, our leave. You guys are our proof! We are now truly bulletproof."

Of course, J-Hope's moves had fans screaming, too. In one video, Suga took out a bottle of water, and then sprayed it at fans while performing, making them shriek.

It has been a thrilling year for BTS, as they achieved new milestones, breaking records with Butter, Permission To Dance and My Universe, which was also a collaboration with Coldplay. They even scored a nomination at the Grammys.

Priyanka Chopra winks in new promo from The Matrix Resurrections, watch

A new TV spot from the fourth movie in the Matrix franchise, titled The Matrix Resurrections, is out. The promo, available on social media sites, features Priyanka Chopra, who winks in the new footage.

The TV spot teases Neo and Trinity's re-entry into the Matrix. There are colourful shots of a cyberpunk city like the trailer, a departure from the drab greys and greens of the original trilogy.

Although we have no confirmation yet, many believe, Priyanka is playing the role of Sati, the so-called 'Exile program' who first appeared as a child in The Matrix Reloaded.

The Lana Wachowski directorial brings back Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Anne Moss in their roles of Neo and

Trinity. Jada Pinkett Smith is back as well as Niobe. Yahya Abdul-Mateen II plays the role of Morpheus, which was portrayed by Laurence Fishburne in the original trilogy. Priyanka, Jessica Henwick, Neil Patrick Harris, and Jonathan Groff join the franchise with this film.

The official synopsis reads, "From visionary filmmaker Lana Wachowskicommes "The Matrix Resurrections," the long-awaited fourth film in the groundbreaking franchise that redefined a genre. The new film reunites original stars Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Anne Moss in the iconic roles they made famous, Neo and Trinity."

Catch The Matrix Resurrections on December 22.

"You Guys Do Not Stand A Chance," Salman Khan Tells Contestants

This week's Weekend Ka Vaar hit the Bigg Boss 15 contestants hard. Host Salman Khan took them to task regarding their performance on the TV reality show. Promo videos reveal how Salman schools them for not being able to create much of a buzz among the audience. While the show witnessed an eviction of three participants, it also saw three wildcard entries — Rakhi Sawant, Rashami Desai and Devoleena Bhattacharjee. Along with Salman Khan, these wild card contestants have also been complaining about the laidback performance of other contestants.

In one of the videos, Salman Khan says, "Aap logo ko jaganey ke liye, hum logo ko picheley season ke contestants laney pade (We had to bring contestants from the previous season in order to wake you up)."

Salman referred to contestants of Bigg Boss OTT and wildcard contestants who were part of previous seasons. He then went on to complain, "Aap log pehle bi clueless the, abhi bhi ho (You all were clueless earlier. You are still clueless)."

The Bigg Boss host was so furious with the contestants that he went on to say, "Yaha pe mujhe ek winner nahi dikhai deta hai (I don't see any winner here)."

Salman Khan also complained that all the contestants behaved superficially this season. When Tejasswi Prakash tried to retort, Salman stopped her midway. "You guys do not stand a chance," he said.

Earlier, Salman Khan had schooled Karan Kundrra for not playing the game properly. Salman said, "Karan, aisa lag raha hai ki tum chhutti mana rahe ho (Karan, it seems like you are on a holiday)," and added, "Kya ho gaya hai, tumko? Ishq mein nikamma (What's the matter with you? Are you going crazy in love)?" Wildcard or VIP contestants also slammed against Karan Kundrra and Tejasswi Prakash for not focussing on the game.

Devoleena Bhattacharjee also complained about Shamita Shetty's performance. She told her that the actress was busy trying to keep her public image intact while not focussing properly on her game strategies. Currently, Tejasswi Prakash, Umar Riaz, Karan Kundrra, Nishant Bhat, Rajiv Adatia, Pratik Sehajpal and Shamita Shetty are non-VIP members on Bigg Boss 15.



HAPPY HOLIDAYS! The RHOA star KandiBurruss and her husband, Todd Tucker, attend the Holiday Road Atlanta preview night in Georgia.

Australian TV Host Gives On-Air Apology to Adele, Says He's "Insulted" Her

When it comes to apologies, this man's mea culpa to Adele is (rolling in the) deep. On Saturday, Nov. 27, Matt Doran, a journalist and co-host of Australian TV show Weekend Sunrise, concluded his broadcast by addressing an embarrassing incident that drew scorn on social media: He recently admitted that while interviewing Adele, he disclosed that he had "only had the privilege of hearing" her new single "Easy On Me." However, Doran was previously offered the chance to listen to the singer's entire long-awaited new album, 30, and failed to notice a work email containing a link to it, making him ill-prepared for the interview, which ultimately was never broadcast.

"This is a story that has sparked a torrent of abuse and mockery from around the world and, if I'm being honest with you, the bulk of this savaging, I deserve and I totally own," Doran said on Morning Sunrise. "I flew to London to interview Adele, an unspeakable privilege and what was to be one of the highlights of my career."

He continued, "I made the terrible mistake

of assuming we weren't to be given a preview copy of this album because our interview was airing before it was released and Adele's album was the industry's most prized secret. The day after, after we landed in London, an email came through from Sony. It didn't mention Adele but it did contain a link to her al-



bum. The genuine, dead-set, hand-on-heart truth is that I missed it, by an absurdly long margin, the most important email I've ever missed in my life."

Adele has not responded publicly to Doran's apology or to the initial reports of the interview mishap.

Aries:

We're all built differently, Aries. You will never fully understand the other person and they may never fully be able to understand you. But, that doesn't mean you cannot love them unconditionally or accept them as they are. It's time to bring the gift of love into the equation, and watch how your relationship blossoms with you.

Tip: You're more connected than you give yourself credit for.

Taurus:

This is a period of cleansing, Taurus. You're paying off age-old debts and loosening the grip that karma has had on you for some time now. Yes, this is what true freedom looks and feels like. Something tells us there's a lot more where that came from! Some of you may be seeking a loan in order to invest in a property or car. Be confident, and ask for what you need. The Universe has a way of coming through unexpectedly.

Tip: Ask for what you need.

Gemini:

You've been to hell and back, Gemini. You've been to hell and back. But, it won't get better until you decide to get better. So, take the time out you need, address the pain and release the old. Work-

ing with a healer or therapist will help you a great deal at this time. If the pain ailments you're dealing with are more physical than mental or emotional, consult a medical practitioner you trust.

Tip: You will get better when you decide to get better.

Cancer:

Your manifestation abilities are heightened at this point, Cancer. Harness this power to bring movement into the areas of your life that have been stuck for a while and call in a miracle or two. Don't just think about yourself, though. Keep those around you and the world at large in your thoughts and prayers. The more selfless you are in your thoughts and actions, the more you will receive from the mysterious forces above.

Tip: Manifest mindfully.

Leo:

You're coming from a space of love, Leo, but not everybody is on the same level of realness as you are. In other words, your thoughts are likely to trigger a negative reaction within them sooner or later. So, act mindfully and tap into that space of love. Find a way to convey what matters in honest manner without making it sound like you're out to attack the other person.

Tip: Meditate on how you can convey the truth without

hurting or harming the other.

Virgo:

Wipe your tears, dust your knees and get ready to get back in the game for the only way to go from here is up! We're talking big manifestation energy, Virgo. We're talking about dreaming in HD *and* going after what you want with unbridled passion. Something tells us that you are at a turning point. Your creativity is also heightened at this point. So, make sure you maintain a diary to record all the weird and wonderful ideas that are coming through from your subconscious mind.

Tip: Dream in HD, baby!

Libra:

You're a kind and loving soul, Libra, and you can put a lot behind you. But, not this time. Not this time. Forgiveness is a virtue, yes, one that you're being advised to work towards. However, rushing the process or telling yourself you need to be a certain way is not going to help you in any way. Step back. Give yourself the time and space you need to assimilate the given experiences. You'll know when you're ready to reinitiate that conversation.

Tip: Take the time you need to assimilate the given experience.

Scorpio:

For a relationship to be balanced, there must be equal amounts of give and take. If you're the one constantly watering their garden, then it's a problem. If they're the ones who are constantly overextending themselves for you, it's a problem again. So, see how and where you need to readjust the scales. See how and where you're being called to show up for them in a manner that's unconditional. This could just be the secret to bringing about a magnificent shift in your relationship.

Tip: Find balance.

Sagittarius:

Doing anything for the first time can be intimidating, and that includes initiating a certain conversation. But, you've got to do what you've got to do, Sagittarius. You've got to tell them how you really think *and* feel about the given situation. This is the only way to clear the air and start afresh. On the upside, the cards are speaking about the gift of clarity. rsation you've been thinking about.

Capricorn:

Windfalls are cool, Capricorn. But, a steady flow of income? That's the real deal. The good thing is, you're manifesting the latter for yourself *and* experiencing the stability you have been yearning for for some time now. Expect a definite and positive change on the finance front. What's more, some of you might be

feeling a little bit indulgent as well. Allow yourself to splurge, but in moderation.

Tip: Expect a definite and positive change on the finance front.

Aquarius:

To quote a famous internet meme: "If it doesn't bring you energy, inspiration or orgasms, it doesn't belong in your life." Now, how's that for some Saturday morning inspiration? Today, you're being reminded that a certain degree of selfishness doesn't have to be a bad thing, and that we're all allowed to pick and choose who we give our time and attention to.

Tip: The process of elimination, Aquarius.

Pisces:

It's time to pause and breathe. Time to pause and breathe, Pisces. The cards are urging you to assess the things that have and haven't worked for you as you. The process of eliminating what hasn't will help create space for the things that truly matter. On the interpersonal front, you're being encouraged to ponder over the experiences you've had in the recent past. Not all of them have been pleasant, yet they taught you important life lessons. This is something you want to be grateful for as you move forward.

Tip: Assess the things that haven't worked out.