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SummitTIMES

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Two more die with nCoV taking Sikkim's COVID-19 toll to 117

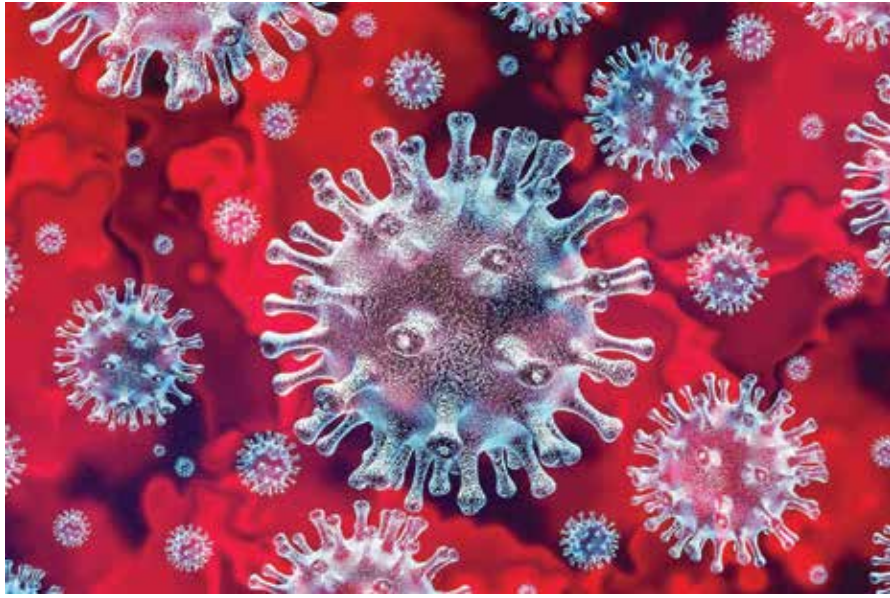
**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 07 DEC:**

Sikkim recorded two more COVID-related deaths in the last 24 hours taking the number of people who have died with Novel Coronavirus in the State to 117 on Monday.

A 27-year-old lady from Central Pendim in East District and a 50-year-old male from Daramdin in West District succumbed to COVID-19 with co-morbidities.

In the daily health bulletin on Monday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia, informed that the 27-year-old passed away at around 10:35 PM Sunday night here at the COVID-dedicated STNM Hospital.

She was admitted to STNM hospital on 04 December after testing positive for COVID-19 in



RT-PCR at Central Referral Hospital. She had had liver complications with many other co-morbid conditions, the Department informs.

The 50-year-old male from Daramdin passed away at STNM Hospital at around 7:15 AM Monday morning.

He was admitted to

STNM Hospital on 30 November after testing positive in rapid antigen testing. He was Quadriplegic and had a history of Cervical Spinal Injury.

In the meanwhile, Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 now stands at 5,203 six new cases of novel coronavirus being confirmed

in the last 24 hours. The numbers are low because the VRD Lab at STNM Hospital, the only facility currently where RT-PCR tests can be conducted is closed on Sundays.

On the other hand, the number of discharged COVID-19 patients here has further improved to 4,622.

There are current-

ly 371 active cases, of whom six are currently in the ICU facility of STNM Hospital.

The six new cases were reported from the testing of 43 samples on Sunday - one case picked up in TrueNat testing of 13 samples and five in rapid antigen testing of 30 samples.

Of the six new cases in the State, four were reported from East District and one each from West and South districts.

Among the new cases are a person from Bojoghari, one from near Rumtek Monastery, one from Daragaon-Tadong and one from near the District Court in Sichey in East District.

Likewise, one person from Hee Gaon, Denta in West District and one from Upper Singhiang in South District also tested positive for COVID-19.

Ex-servicemen call on CM on Armed Forces Flag Day



GANGTOK, 07 DEC [IPR]: A team of ex-servicemen led by Secretary, Rajya Sainik Board, Col DN Sherpa, who is also currently the Director, STNM Hospital, called on Chief Minister PS Tamang at his Mintokgang office on Monday.

During the visit, the

Chief Minister offered his gratitude to the visiting ex-servicemen for their service to the nation and extended his wishes on the occasion of Armed Forces Flag Day.

Col Sherpa provided an update regarding Rajya Sainik Board and ap-

prised him about several matters from the members' point of view.

The Chief Minister assured them that the Government will extend every possible support for their welfare and informed them that they can approach him for any form of assistance.

Supreme Court rebukes Centre for "Moving Aggressively" on Central Vista

NEW DELHI, 07 DEC [NDTV]: There must be no construction or demolition for the central vista project after Prime Minister Narendra Modi launches a part of it this week, the Supreme Court said today, rebuking the government for "moving forward aggressively" on the plan even before a decision on petitions challenging it.

As the government agreed to its condition, the Supreme Court said the "authorities are free to undertake formal process without altering site in question in any manner". "You can lay the foundation stone, you can carry on paperwork but no construction or demolition, no cutting down any trees," the Supreme Court told Solicitor General Tushar Mehta.

PM Modi will perform the groundbreaking ceremony on Thursday for a new parliament building to be built at nearly ₹ 1,000 crore as part of the central vista project,

it was announced on Saturday. Construction work was put on hold only this morning after the Supreme Court reprimand.

"We expected that you will continue with paperwork etc but not move forward so aggressively that you will start construction," the Supreme Court said to the Solicitor General.

"Just because there is no stay that does not mean you can start construction. We did not pass any clear stay order because we thought you are prudent litigant, and you will show deference to the court. The news items in public domain show you are starting construction," said the judges.

When Mr Mehta sought time to respond to the court's order that no construction or demolition could continue, the court said sternly: "Respond in five minutes or we will pass this order." After consulting the government, the lawyer told the court: "There will be no construction, dem-

olition or felling of trees. Only foundation stone will be laid." As the judges passed the order, they said: "This matter was listed in view of certain developments. The Solicitor General states that there will be no construction activity of any nature on the concerned sites, nor any demolition, including further translocation of trees until pronouncement of judgment in all the cases."

The court has reserved its verdict on a batch of petitions questioning the project on environment grounds.

The ₹ 20,000-crore Central Vista project seeks to refurbish and build government buildings on a 3-km stretch from the presidential palace Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate. The project will be aligned along Rajpath, the ceremonial road cutting a swathe across the heart of Delhi, and form the seat of the government that will start with the North Block.

Petrol, diesel prices rise for sixth straight day



NEW DELHI, DEC 7 (PTI): Petrol and diesel prices rose for the sixth day in a row on Monday as rates went up by 26-30 paise per litre.

Petrol price was hiked by 30 paise per litre and diesel by 26 paise, according to a price notification of oil marketing companies.

Rates for petrol in Delhi rose to Rs 83.71 per litre, from Rs 83.41 while diesel price went up from Rs 73.61 to Rs 73.87 per litre.

This is the sixth straight day of price hike

and the 15th increase in rates since November 20, when oil companies resumed daily price revision after nearly two-month hiatus.

Rates are now at the highest level since September 2018.

In 18 days, the petrol price has gone up by Rs 2.65 per litre and diesel rate has risen by Rs 3.41.

The rate increase follows international oil prices rising by a third from lows in October-end. Brent crude oil is nearing USD 50 per barrel mark on hopes

that COVID vaccines would lead to demand recovery.

Prior to the November 20 hike in rates in India, petrol prices had been static since September 22 and diesel rates hadn't changed since October 2.

In Mumbai, petrol price rose to Rs 90.34 per litre from Rs 90.05, while diesel rates went up from Rs 80.23 to Rs 80.51.

Rates vary from state to state depending on the incidence of local sales tax or VAT.

Bharat Biotech seeks emergency use approval for Covaxin: Report

NEW DELHI, 07 DEC [PTI]: After Pfizer and Serum Institute, Hyderabad-based pharmaceutical firm Bharat Biotech on Monday applied to the central drug regulator seeking emergency use authorisation for its COVID-19 vaccine Covaxin, official sources said.

Covaxin is being indigenously developed by Bharat Biotech in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

On December 4, Prime Minister Narendra Modi at an all-party meeting had expressed hope that a COVID-19 vaccine may be ready in a few weeks. That same evening, the Indian arm of US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer sought emergency use approval for its vaccine from the central drug regulator, after the firm secured such clearance in the UK and Bahrain.

The Serum Institute sought such nod for the Oxford COVID-19 vaccine, Covishield, on December 6. The applications of Bharat Biotech, Serum Institute of India and Pfizer will be reviewed by the subject expert committee (SEC) on COVID-19 at the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) in the coming days.

"However, none of the applications has so far been forwarded to the committee and no date has been fixed as on when the SEC will meet for assessing and evaluating the applications," the official source said.

Central team to visit Andhra Pradesh to probe mystery disease affecting over 350

NEW DELHI, 07 DEC [PTI]: A central team will visit Andhra Pradesh to investigate a mysterious disease that has begun spreading in the state's Eluru city claiming one life and affecting around 350 people so far.

According to an office memorandum issued by the Union Health Ministry on Monday, the team comprising Dr Jamshed Nayar, Associate Professor (Emergency Medicine), AIIMS, Dr Avinash Desohtawar, Virologist, NIV, Pune and Dr Sanket Kulkarni, Deputy Director, PH, National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) will reach Eluru on Tuesday.

The team would make "an urgent visit to East Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh, to investigate the incident of sudden illness



of people in an around Eluru, East Godavari District", it stated.

"The team should reach by tomorrow morning and submit a preliminary report by evening," according to the office memorandum.

People afflicted with the mysterious disease suddenly

fell unconscious after suffering from fits and nausea. It started in the One-Town area of Eluru and most of the victims were in the 20-30 age group while there were about 45 children below the age of 12 years.

Health authorities could not yet establish the cause of the dis-

ease though blood tests and CT (brain) scans were performed. Cerebral Spinal Fluid tests also turned out to be normal.

Though initially it was suspected that water contamination could have been the cause of the disease, sample tests ruled that out.

COVID-19: Active caseload falls below 4 lakh in country

NEW DELHI, DEC 7 (PTI): India's coronavirus infections rose to 96.77 lakh, while the active caseload fell below 4 lakh and the recoveries surged to 91.39 lakh, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Monday.

The total coronavirus cases mounted to 96,77,203 with 32,981 new infections being reported in a day, while the death toll rose to 1,40,573 with 391 new

fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

There are 3,96,729 active coronavirus infections in the country which comprises 4.10 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 91,39,901 pushing the national recovery rate to 94.45 per cent, while the COVID-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent.

India's COVID-19 tal-

ly had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23 and 40 lakh on September 5. It went past 50 lakh on September 16, 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, and surpassed 90 lakh on November 20.

According to the ICMR, 14,77,87,656 samples have been tested up to December 6 with 8,01,081 samples being tested on Sunday.

Sushil Modi gets elected unopposed to Rajya Sabha

PATNA, DEC 7 (PTI): Former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister and senior BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi was on Monday declared elected unopposed to the Rajya Sabha in a by-poll that was necessitated by the death of Union minister and Lok Janshakti Party founder Ram Vilas Paswan.

Modi was handed over his certificate in presence of a host of dignitaries including Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, with whom the former is known to enjoy an excellent rapport, his successors as Deputy CM Tar Kishore Prasad and Renu Devi and state BJP president Sanjay Jaiswal.

Modi was declared elected unchallenged on the last date for withdrawal of nomination papers.

With his election to the Rajya Sabha, Modi has come to hold the rare distinction of having been a member of both Houses of Parliament as well as the bicameral legislature in the state.

Sushil Modi has become the only well-known leader from Bihar to have achieved the "feat" after his bete noire Lalu Prasad.

In addition to the former Deputy CM, only an Independent candidate Shyam Nandan Prasad had filed his nomination papers which were rejected during scrutiny since he could not garner support of at least 10 members of the 243-strong assembly which was mandatory, poll officials said.

Coming out of the office of Patna Commissioner after collecting his certificate, Sushil Modi thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other central leaders of his party for giving him opportunity to serve people of Bihar in different capacity.

He extended special thanks to his former boss Nitish Kumar for boosting his confidence through his presence during filing of nomination as well as receiving certificate after getting elected to Rajya Sabha.

Talking to reporters, Modi said he would continue to work for the development of Bihar by pursuing its interests as a member of Rajya Sabha.

Since November 2005 when he first became the Deputy CM, Modi has been a member of the legislative council.

He had returned to state politics giving up his Lok Sabha seat of Bhagalpur which he had won in the 2004 general elections. Having cut his teeth as an active ABVP activist in the 1970s, Modi had begun his career in mainstream politics as an MLA from the now abolished Patna Central constituency two decades later.

In the states political circles, it is being noted with bemusement that Modi has emulated RJD supremo Lalu Prasad by getting elected to both Houses in Parliament and the state legislature like him. Known to the jailed RJD president since the pre-Emergency era when they were prominent leaders of the Patna University Students Union.

SMC of Dikchu Sr Sec School meets

WANGCHUK BHUTIA MANGAN, 07 DEC:

The School Managing Committee of Dikchu Senior Secondary School in East Sikkim held a meeting today. The meeting was chaired by Zilla Member, BB Gurung, in the presence of ward panchayat Dikchu-Jang, CL Sharma, President SMDC, Lall Man Subba and other members.

Principal, Santosh Kr. Chettri, highlighted the different agendas of the meeting and stressed on some important work to be done at the earliest. He also informed about the progress of home schooling for students who cannot take online classes.

The school will not



compromise in academic performance and discipline, said Mr Chettri and urged support from all the SMC members. He further highlighted that the main school building

is in urgent need of repairs.

The meeting decided to hold monthly cleanliness drive of the approach footpaths to school, demand in-

troduction of science stream, purchase of xerox machine and chairs, demarcation of school compound, etc.

The Zilla member announced that the

drinking water platform for children will be constructed under the Zilla fund. The team also visited the school premises and inspected the school building.

Serum Institute applies for emergency use authorisation for COVID-19 vaccine

NEW DELHI, DEC 7 (PTI): Vaccine manufacturing major Serum Institute of India (SII) on Monday said it has applied to Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) for emergency use authorisation for its COVID-19 vaccine Covishield.

The Pune-based company has collaborated with Oxford University and pharmaceutical company Astra Zeneca for making the vaccine and is conducting trials in India.

"As promised, before the end of 2020, @SerumInstIndia has applied for emergency use

authorisation for the first made-in-India vaccine, Covishield," SII CEO Adar Poonawala said in a tweet.

He further said: "This will save countless lives, and I thank the Government of India and Sri @narendramodi ji for their invaluable support."

Last week, Pfizer India said it has applied to India's drug regulator DCGI for emergency-use authorisation for its COVID-19 vaccine, after the company's parent received clearance for the treatment from Britain and Bahrain.

A "Vajpayee" reference in ex-ally's letter to PM over farmers

CHANDIGARH, 07 DEC [NDTV]: Former BJP ally and NDA founder-member Parkash Singh Badal has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi a day ahead of the all-India strike in support of protesting farmers, and advised him stay away from confrontation. In a letter to PM Modi, Mr Badal had cited the days of Emergency and "dictatorship" and sought his personal intervention to resolve the stalemate. An amicable solution should be achieved through consensus with all the stakeholders, including the farmers and the states, he wrote.

"Consultation, conciliation and consensus are the foundation of any democracy. Consultative processes alone lead to consensus and consensus alone is the recipe for avoiding confrontations like the one we see now between the government and the farmers," Mr Badal's letter read.

"I have battled against dictatorship in the Emergency days. My experience tells me that respect for peaceful democratic values offer us the best solutions to even the most complex and intractable problems," wrote the 92-year-old.

The strongly-worded letter also questioned the government's failure to call an all-party meeting when it became clear that the Centre's new farm sector laws have been decisively rejected by the farmers.

The failure to consult states on an issue that affects 70 per cent of the population "shows the government's indifference or rejection of the federal principles", Mr Badal wrote.

This was "unbeliev-

able", Mr Badal wrote, as PM Modi had been "among the biggest champions of federal structure" as the Chief Minister of Gujarat, advocating "more power and a greater role for states in running the country".

It is "hard to believe" that a government with such a "massive mandate" allowed such failure in decision making, he wrote in the letter, where he also applauded the statesmanship of NDA's former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Mr Badal, whose Shiromani Akali Dal had parted company with the NDA over the farmers' issue, returned his Padma Vibhushan award to the government last week to protest the Haryana government's use of force against the Delhi-bound farmers.

His warning comes a day ahead of the all-India strike called by farmers, which has found support not only among opposition parties but also trade and transport unions, organisations including bar associations and media houses and market associations.

The farmers, who arrived by thousands at the borders of Delhi, demanding that the farm laws be scrapped by a special session of parliament, have declared that they would blockade Delhi tomorrow and allow passage to none except emergency services.

Five rounds of meeting between the Centre and the farmers have already failed. The farmers have turned down the government's offer of amending the laws and the formation of a special committee with all stakeholders to examine the issue.

Your petition is ambitious: Top Court refuses to hear Republic TV plea



NEW DELHI, 07 DEC [PTI]:

The Supreme Court Monday refused to entertain a plea filed by ARG Outlier Media Private Limited, which owns the Republic Media network, seeking protection for the group and its employees in the cases lodged against them in Maharashtra.

The matter came up for hearing before a bench headed by Justice D Y Chandrachud which said that prayers in the petition were "all ambitious".

"This petition is ambitious in nature. You want Maharashtra police not to arrest any employee and transfer the cases to CBI. You better withdraw this," Justice Chandrachud told senior advocate Milind Sathe, who appeared for ARG Outlier Media.

Mr Sathe told the bench that they have filed the plea to stop the Maharashtra police from "hounding" their media network, its Editor-in-Chief Arnab Goswami and its employees.

"You have sought all the reliefs and these can't be entertained in one petition," the bench said, after which Mr Sathe said he would withdraw the plea.

The top court allowed Mr Sathe to withdraw the petition with liberty to take appropriate remedies available under the law.

Besides seeking protection for the media group, Mr Goswami and its employees, the petition had said that Maharashtra government should be stopped from

"hounding them" and all FIRs lodged against them be either quashed or transferred to the CBI.

The petitioner had also said there should be CBI enquiry against the state and its police in the matter for lodging several cases against the media group and its employees.

It had also sought a direction that no editorial and other staffs of the media group be arrested by the Maharashtra police.

Mumbai Police had registered a case in the alleged Television Rating Points (TRP) manipulation scam and Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh had claimed that three channels, including Republic TV, had manipulated the TRP.

ARG Outlier Media Pvt Ltd has denied these allegations.

The alleged racket came to light when BARC, an organization which measures TRP, filed a complaint in this regard through Hansa Research Group Pvt Ltd, the police had said.

Besides this, some other cases are pending in Maharashtra against Mr Goswami.

The top court had on November 27 extended the interim bail of Mr Goswami and two others till four weeks after the Bombay High Court decides their pleas for quashing of an FIR in the 2018 abetment to suicide case, saying that the judiciary should ensure criminal law does not become a weapon for selective harassment.

Documentary team to promote tourism in Sikkim



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 07 DEC:

A team of "professional tourism marketers" was welcomed by MLA Rhenock Constituency, Bishnu Kumar Khatiwara accompanied by Chairman for Housing & Development Board, Karma Tashi Bhutia at Budang village under Rhenock constituency, East Sikkim, on 06 Dec, a press release from Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, Government of Sikkim, informs.

The team from West Bengal is led by Anirban

Dutta and has 18 years' experience in tourism marketing, the release mentions.

"They carry enormous experiences when it comes to promotion of tourism of many States and foreign countries like Singapore Tourism Board, Jordan Tourism Board, Egypt, Bangladesh Tourism Board and so on," the release states.

The team is shooting a documentary for tourism promotion in Sikkim and began shooting from Rolep and Losing villages under Gnathang-Machong

constituency on 02 Dec.

"The Budaang Village under Rhenock Constituency has been selected by the team as one of the prime destinations in their promotional venture. Under the close guidance and direction of Area MLA, Rhenock Constituency the team would be spending few nights at Budaang Village in preparing a documentary film using their latest electronic gadgets of popular tourist attractions and activities of the village," the release further states.

Sikkim Boys Club wins Lt Steeve Phipon Memorial football tourney



BIKASH CHHETRI NAMCHI, 07 DEC:

The final match of the 4th Late Steeve Phipon Memorial Veteran Football Tournament, 2020 was held today. The football tournament was organized by Siniolchu Football Club, Sikkim, in memory of their teammate Late Steeve Phipon at Namchi Singithang public playground.

The tournament began

on 02 December and had 10 teams from Sikkim with veteran football players.

In the match, Sikkim Boys Club defeated Sikkim Armed Police 3-0. Sushil Katuk, jersey number 17 was declared the man-of-the-match.

The chief guest for the final match was SKM Melli Constituency in-charge, Tilak Basnet and the special guests were Southern Enfielders, a

motorcycle riders' group from Namchi.

A member of the organizing team, Bhaskar Subba mentioned that the tournament is being organized to encourage the younger generation of football players. He informed that in future the tournament will be organized at the Bhaichung Stadium and alongside, under sixteen football matches will be organized.

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Price negotiable

Contact : 6296366498, 9641878315, 9593262407

LAND FOR SALE

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

LAND FOR SALE

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

FOR RENT

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

GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

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

Building for sale

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

Ambika Bhattacharai elected East DFAC chairperson

SUBASH RAI

GANGTOK, 07 DEC:

Ambika Bhattacharai, a farmer from Martam block, East Sikkim, was elected the new Chairperson of the District Farmer's Advisory Committee during meeting organised by ATMA [East], Agriculture Department held here at the SAMETI Hall, Tadong.

The programme was chaired by Additional Director, Agriculture [East], Bina Rai, and had Joint Director, Horticulture East, Passang Tamang, as guest of honour and Joint Director, Agriculture, Rachana Gurung, who is also the Deputy Project Director.

The programme was also attended by Block Technology Managers and Assistant Technology Managers, computer programmers, accountants of ATMA, East district.



The Deputy Project Director, ATMA, highlighted the idea behind DFAC and detailed the role and responsibilities of the DFAC.

During the programme, presentation on District Action Plan for the year 2021-22 was given by BTM, Rakdong Tintek, Sachin Subba and

a presentation on the ongoing ATMA schemes was given by BTM, Darshan Upreti.

The Deputy Project Director also urged the participants to follow up on schemes under ATMA.

The chief guest, in her address, congratulated the newly elected DFAC chairperson and called

on her to work with enthusiasm in association with other members.

The newly elected chairperson, in turn, urged all DFAC members to work jointly to achieve the goal targeted by the the concerned department. She also thanked ATMA for giving her the opportunity to serve as

the DFAC Chairperson.

She assured that she will work in close coordination with ATMA for the implementation of every scheme sponsored by the Department.

The programme concluded with the vote of thanks by Geeta Sharma, Block Technology Manager, Ranka Block.

Bankers not to participate in Bharat Bandh on Tuesday

NEW DELHI, DEC 7 (PTI):

Bank unions said they will not participate in the 'Bharat Bandh' on Tuesday, even as they expressed solidarity with farmers protesting against the new farm laws.

Farmer groups, camping at various Delhi border points for over a week, have called for a nationwide shutdown on Tuesday to protest against three recently enacted agriculture-related legislations.

All India Bank Officers' Confederation (AIBOC) General Secretary Soumya Datta said the union has expressed its solidarity with farmers but will not be participating in the Bharat Bandh called by them.

Similarly, All India Bank Employees' Association (AIBEA) General Secretary C H Venkatachalam said the union would not go on strike or abstain from work but it supports the

farmers' agitation.

Union members would wear black badges while on duty, stage protest after or before working hours and display placards before bank branches to support the cause of farmers of the country, Venkatachalam said, but added that banking operations will not be hit.

Thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab and Haryana, are protesting against the new farm laws which they claim will dismantle the minimum support price (MSP) system, leaving them at the "mercy" of big corporate houses.

Meanwhile, farmer leaders have said that nobody should be forced to observe 'Bharat Bandh' on Tuesday and that emergency services will be allowed.

Several rounds of talks between the Centre and farmers have failed to break the deadlock.

"Don't support bandhs but backing farmers' demands": Mamata Banerjee

WEST MIDNAPUR, 07 DEC [NDTV]:

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee today, more than ever, came out in support of farmers protesting against the central government's three new agricultural ordinances saying Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration must either withdraw the laws or simply quit.

"I have not forgotten Singur, I have not forgotten...I am promising full support to farmers," Ms Banerjee said, holding up a reaped sheaf of paddy, at a rally held in Medinipur, the headquarters of West Midnapur district. She was referring to her 26-day hunger strike of 2006 in Singur against the forcible acquisition of fertile land by the then government.

Making it clear today that her party does not support a "bandh", the Chief Minister, however, said, "We are supporting the demands being made by farmers tomorrow." Various groups protesting the new laws have called for a Bharat Bandh on Tuesday. Besides her

vociferous support for farmers, the place she chose to speak from is also loaded with political significance.

West Midnapore is the bastion of Suwendu Adhikari, the disgruntled Trinamool MLA from Nandigram in East Midnapore who is in charge of both districts. Mr Adhikari had quit as state cabinet minister last month, sparking off strong rumours of defection, though he still remains a TMC member.

Arriving in Medinipur on Sunday, Ms Banerjee had issued a stern warning against "anti-party activities", asking TMC leaders in touch with the opposition to quit her party, according to a PTI report. She had also asked East Midnapore TMC president Sisir Adhikari, Suwendu Adhikari's father, to rein in anti-party activities.

Slamming the BJP as a party of "outsiders", she said she would never allow the saffron camp to take control of Bengal and urged the people of the state to resist any such attempt.

Govt Law College inducts 72 freshers



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 07 DEC:

Sikkim Government Law College, Gangtok, organised its first online Orientation Program for inducting freshers into the 5-year B.A. LL B (Hons.) course on 07 Dec, 2020 using the Google Meet platform.

The program was attended by the Principal, Dr TD Lama, Sikkim Government Law College, Dean of Students, Dr Dilip Pandey, Assistant Professors of the college along with the 1st Semester students.

The session began at 11:00am wherein the

Principal addressed the gathering by first highlighting the rich history of the college and explaining the aims and objectives that the college stands for. He also briefed them about the attendance, assessment and discipline to be followed and maintained, along with how it is essential to develop a sense of belonging towards the institution to collectively achieve the desired goal.

The Dean of students also stressed upon the importance of education and how the faculty are always keen on helping the students learn in the

best way possible. He further briefed the students regarding the online timetable to be followed and encouraged them to make online class links themselves in order to be digitally equipped. Finally, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Palmu Kaleon welcomed the freshers on behalf of the faculty and spoke on the merits and limitations of online learning.

The session saw the overall participation of 72 participants and ended with the moderator asking the students to make a note of things they want clarified later.

SMIT students completes 267 online courses

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 07 DEC:

Lockdown due to COVID-19 halted many of our plans forcing us to stay home but there were some who chose to make use of the free time. One such person was Shivam Kashyap who has recently completed B.Tech in Computer Science from Sikkim Manipal Institute of Technology (SMIT) under Sikkim Manipal University (SMU).

Shivam has completed 267 online courses using the Coursera platform so far, a press release informs.

With his project stalled due to the lock-



down, Shivam decided to undertake online courses made free by Sikkim Manipal University. He took up courses from different universities around the

globe like the University of Toronto, UC San Diego, University of Michigan, UCDAVIS, University of Colorado, Cape Town, Johns Hopkins, and more.

Cop dies of COVID-19 in Kolkata

KOLKATA, DEC 7 (PTI):

An assistant sub-inspector of the Kolkata Armed Police died of COVID-19 on Monday, taking the total number of policemen in the force who have succumbed to the infection to 14, a senior

officer said.

Samir Kumar Nath, who belonged to the sixth battalion of Kolkata Armed Police, had been battling the disease for the last two to three weeks, he said.

"Nath, in his early

50s, died of COVID-19 on Monday morning. He was undergoing treatment for around three weeks.

His condition, however, did not improve. We deeply mourn his untimely demise," the officer added.

3rd Indian Himalayan Youth Summit on 08 Dec



SUMMIT REPORT

Gangtok, 07 Dec:

Youth delegates from the 10 Himalayan Mountain States, Union Territories of J&K & Ladakh, Districts of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasau will be participating in the 3rd Indian Himalayan Youth Summit that starts on 08 Dec, 2020.

They will discuss amongst themselves a range of themes that they themselves have decided upon, a press release informs.

The themes are: Skills & Entrepreneurship; Sustainable Resource Management; Migration,

Politics and Policy; Sustainable Development Goals and; Sustainable Tourism.

A total number 112 of delegates will represent the States. However, many more youth will be joining via Facebook live etc. to watch the proceedings.

The Integrated Mountain Initiative (IMI) invites one and all to join the plenary session starting at 2.00pm on 08 December to get a sense of what innovation is happening in the mountain economies during this pandemic period. To join: <https://www.facebook.com/inmi.in/>

com/inmi.in/

The valedictory session will be on the 09 Dec, 2020. CEO of NITI Aayog, Amitabh Kant and Principal Economic Advisor in the Finance Ministry, Sanjeev Sanyal will be joining the meeting.

The 3rd Indian Himalayan Youth Summit is being organised by the Integrated Mountain Initiative (IMI) and hosted by the Sustainable Development Forum of Uttarakhand (SDFU). This is part of the Sustainable Mountain Development Summit IX - (SMDS IX) which is starting on the 11 December.

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV

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

Treatment

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

Precautions to Prevent nCoV

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



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This Festive Season, Let's Keep Safe

It is time to make precautions a habit

The year-end is festive season the world over, more so in Sikkim where the month of December is packed with red in celebration of festivals building up to the traditional send off of a year, a rather desolate one at that, and the welcoming of the next. This New Year's eve comes in the wake of Losoong, and that is bound to ratchet up the celebration quotient despite the COVID dampener; festivities can be expected to be scaled commensurately high. This is also holiday season, and just as Sikkim residents move to warmer climes to end their year, the more adventurous tourists head here to the hills. This to and fro, however, has been wet-blanketed by the COVID management experiment. That said, this is the time for fun and frolic. However, for all the fun that a festive season promises, it also carries the potential for mishaps, especially those that occur on the roads. This, Sikkim should bear in mind, is also road accident season.

Several factors collaborate to mar the frolic of the season with unfortunate incidents. For one, the conflicting pressures of tourist bookings and celebration opportunities automatically contribute to speeding and reckless driving. Celebration binges also involve copious consumption and that never mixed well with road safety. This is also that time of the year when reflexes are dulled by the many layers of clothing and bulky jackets that are required. Visibility is poor, and dew and frost are not safe driving surfaces. These are but some off-the-cuff references on what the driving conditions are like at this time of the year. To ensure that this festive season passes without mishap, the personnel who police the roads and individuals who travel in groups, should take adequate precautions at least as far as the obvious challenges are concerned. It is not too difficult to arrange for a driver who will not drink and drive, and it is not impossible to ensure that only the road worthy vehicles carry passengers. Remember, this is also picnic season, a celebration which, apart from being outdoors and in the winter sun, also involves overcrowded vehicles and distracting boisterousness - all the more reason to incorporate some advance precautions into the planning.

With the schools closed for all practical purposes and the weather packing up, more Sikkimese will also be holidaying more in the coming weeks and month. This means that there will be a lot of locked homes around Sikkim, and no one home has now become a magnet for burglars. With people huddled under blankets and glued to their televisions and smartphone distractions, breaking and entering will not even bother with keeping the noise down. Some precautions will be well advised. In fact, this, the people should insist upon. Beyond that, a Sikkim Police advisory on how to keep homes safe would be well advised and should be heeded. The cops could really do much more service to the people than getting caught up in understanding and enforcing the odd-even confusion and curfew conundrums

Festivals are also about having fun and indulging, but here's hoping that Sikkim will do so responsibly and this festive season brings only good and positive tidings...

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Exploring the Indian Ocean as a rich archive of history – above and below the water line

ISABEL HOFMEYR &
CHARNE LAVERY
theconversation.com

On many beaches around the Indian Ocean, keen observers may spot bits of broken pottery. Washed smooth by the ocean, these shards are in all likelihood hundreds of years old, from centres of ceramic production like the Middle Eastern Abbasid caliphate and the Chinese Ming dynasty.

Originally destined for Indian Ocean port cities, this pottery would have been purchased by merchant elites accustomed to eating off fine plates. These traders formed part of vast commercial networks that crisscrossed the Indian Ocean arena and beyond, from East Africa to Indonesia, the Middle East and China.

These trade networks stretched back thousands of years, powered by the monsoon winds. Reversing direction in different seasons, these winds have long shaped the rhythm of life around the ocean, bringing rain to farmers, filling the sails of dhows and enabling trade between different ecological zones.

The monsoon wind pattern makes the Indian Ocean relatively easy to cross both ways. In the Atlantic, by contrast, winds blow in one direction all year round. That's why the Indian Ocean is the world's oldest long-distance trans-oceanic trading arena, and is sometimes known as the cradle of globalisation.

This cosmopolitan world has long fascinated scholars and has become a vibrant domain of research. Yet this work has had little to say about the sea itself. Its focus is on human movement with the ocean as a passive backdrop. In the age of rising sea levels and climate change, it's important to learn more about the sea from a material and ecological point of view.

Over the past few years, this situation has started to shift. In this article we survey both the older and the newer forms of Indian Ocean studies, of surface and depth.

SURFACE HISTORIES OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

Given the long millennia of trade and exchange, one key concern of Indian Ocean studies has been a focus on cultural interaction. Cities on the shores have sustained deep forms of material, intellectual and cultural exchange, so that the denizens of these ports had more in common with each other than with their fellows inland.

This early cosmopolitan world has famously been explored in Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*, which traces the travels of Abram bin Yiju, a 12th century Jewish Tunisian merchant based in Cairo and later in Mangalore, India. The book contrasts the rigidity of borders in the 1980s with the relative ease of movement in the late medieval Indian Ocean.

The Swahili coast provides another famed example of Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism. Stretching a thousand miles from Somalia to Mozambique, Swahili society arose from centuries of interaction between Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Centred on coastal city states like Kilwa, Zanzibar and Lamu, Swahili trade networks reached far inland to present day Zimbabwe and outward to Persia, India and China. After reaching their height from the 12th to the 15th centuries, these city states were eventually undone by the Portuguese, who arrived from the early 16th century, seeking to establish a monopoly of the spice trade.

Central to these histories of mobility and exchange in the Indian Ocean has been the spread of Islam across land and sea from the 7th century CE. By the 14th century, mercantile networks around the Indian Ocean were almost entirely in the hands of Muslim traders.

In their wake came scholars, theologians, pilgrims, clerks, legal pundits and Sufi divines. Together, these groups created a shared economic, spiritual and legal frameworks. Sufism, a mystical form of Islam is an important strand in the Indian Ocean histories, as is the centrifugal power of the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.

EUROPEAN COLONISATION ALONG THE INDIAN OCEAN

When the Portuguese rounded the Cape in the late 15th century, they entered what many have termed a Muslim Lake, dominated in the north by the Turkish Ottoman, Persian Safavid and Indian Mughal empires. When the Dutch arrived in the Indian Ocean in the 17th century, "they were able to go from one end of it to another by carrying letters of introduction from Muslim sultans on various shores".

As Engseng Ho has indicated, these sprawling networks of Muslim commerce operated without the backing of an army or a state.

The Portuguese, Dutch and English in the Indian Ocean were strange new traders who brought their states with them. They created militarised trading-post empires in the Indian Ocean, following Venetian and Genoese precedents in the Mediterranean, and were wont to do business at the point of a gun.

Early European entrants to the Indian Ocean world initially had to adapt to the trading orders that they encountered. But by the 19th century, European empires dominated. Their military, transport and communication infrastructure intensified the movement of people across the Indian Ocean world.

As Clare Anderson has demonstrated, much of this mobility was forced and conscripted. It involved slaves, indentured labourers, political exiles and prisoners who were transported between regions. At times, these systems built on existing foundations of labour exploitation. As recent research indicates, South Asian indentured labour was often taken from regions in India where slavery existed. Old and new systems of unfree labour produced an archipelago of prisons, plantations and penal colonies.

As an archive, the Indian Ocean provides a new way of looking at world history, that has previously been dominated by European accounts. The age of European empires is only one tiny sliver of time in a much longer arc. A view from the Indian Ocean unsettles ideas of the relationship between European colonisers and colonised groups.

As historians like Engseng Ho and Sugata Bose have argued, the Indian Ocean world was an arena of competing claims.

The ambitions of British imperialism, for example, were countered by the equally grand visions of Islam. Indeed, the Indian Ocean arena produced a rich repertoire of transoceanic ideologies, including Hindu re-

formism and pan-Buddhism.

Such ideologies eventually acquired an anti-imperial character which also fed into ideas of Afro-Asian solidarity and non-alignment. These arose from the Bandung Conference in 1955 at which 29 newly independent nations gathered to forge a new path rather than falling in line with either of the rival camps in the emerging Cold War.

In the 21st century, these older alliances have come under pressure as China and India elbow each other for dominance in the Indian Ocean. China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative involves massive transport and port infrastructure and aims to extend China's footprint across much of the Indian Ocean arena. In response, New Delhi has bolstered its economic and military activity in this domain.

DEEP HISTORIES OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

While the uniquely well-travelled surface of the Indian Ocean has received much attention, its depths barely register in the cultural or historical imagination. Its waters constitute nearly 20% of the ocean's total volume, and its deepest point, the Sunda Deep of the Java Trench, lies nearly 8km below the surface. Yet its seafloor, like much of the world's oceans, is largely unmapped.

Seafloor features determine weather patterns, fish concentrations and tsunami dynamics. Initial explorations by mining companies revealed mineral-rich deposits on submarine volcanic vents, while new species are continually being discovered.

The deep Indian Ocean is far less studied than the depths of the other oceans, for economic reasons: it is ringed by underdeveloped countries. The second International Indian Ocean Expedition was launched only in 2015, fifty years after the first. It aims to increase understanding about the oceanographic and biological characteristics of this under-sampled ocean, as well as the ways in which it is changing.

Paying attention to the submarine world is becoming increasingly important in a time of climate change prompted by human activities. The Indian Ocean is warming faster than any of the other oceans, holding more than 70% of all the heat absorbed by the upper ocean since 2003. Indian Ocean islands – the Maldives being a well-known example – are already being submerged by rising global sea levels.

Cyclone patterns are shifting further south and happening more often as a result of the ocean's rising temperature. The monsoon, which underpinned the Indian Ocean's shipping networks and the rainfall patterns on its coastlines, is losing its power and predictability.

DEITIES, SPIRITS AND ANCESTORS

While the Indian Ocean's depths are in many ways opaque, they are not unpopulated in people's imaginations. The ocean bustles with water deities, djinns, mermaids and ancestral spirits – a mythical submarine world that reflects the cosmopolitanism of its land populations.

In southern Africa this mix is especially rich: Khoisan/ First Nation water sprites, Muslim djinns introduced by South East Asian slaves, African ancestors, one of whose do-

mains is the ocean, and British imperial ideas about the romance of the sea.

These ideas encounter each other and turn bodies of water into rich sites of memory and history. They have been explored by the Oceanic Humanities for the Global South project. Work by Confidence Joseph, Oupa Sibeko, Mapule Mohulatsi and Ryan Poinasamy explores the literary and artistic imaginations of southern Africa's creolised waters.

Afrofuturist science fiction is also turning to the deep Indian Ocean. Mohale Mashigo's *Floating Rugs* is situated in a submarine community on South Africa's east coast. Mia Couto's stories from the Mozambican coastline have long paired myths of mermaids with marine biology. Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's novel *The Dragonfly Sea* links contemporary Afro-Asian networks to the undersea.

DEEP SEA MINING

Some exploration of the deep ocean can seem science-fictional, but isn't.

The International Seabed Authority, a branch of the United Nations in operation since 2001 and responsible for parcelling out potential marine mining areas, has granted contracts for mining exploration in the Indian Ocean. At the same time, researchers are discovering an astonishing number of new deep ocean species on the same sites.

The submarine world has long been plundered for riches. Histories of pearl diving in the Indian Ocean – as in a central scene of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* – are continued in today's illegal abalone trade. Poachers on the coast of South Africa don scuba gear to harvest abalone to trade with Asian markets, linking the undersea to Indian Ocean criminal underworlds, along the same lines as the ancient trade networks.

At times these networks are the source of treasure. On the Island of Mozambique, for instance, the shards of blue pottery that were traded around the Indian Ocean are one of the objects of the active treasure hunting trade today. While some of the treasures are sold by dealers in antiquities, others provide crucial evidence for maritime archaeological research. Recently, the Slave Wrecks Project has discovered slave shipwrecks that provide concrete symbols of the transatlantic slave trade and link it to histories of Indian Ocean slavery and indenture.

The old waterfronts of East African port cities like Mombasa, Zanzibar and Lamu are dominated by buildings with a pure white finish. This present-day architecture echoes a centuries-old tradition of building houses, mosques and tombs from white coral stone and dressed with lime plaster. Made from shells and corals that began their life under the sea, this luminous plaster made port cities visible from afar to incoming vessels.

The ocean's submarine life and its human histories are always entangled. And now writers, artists and scholars are increasingly drawing attention to their connectedness.

[Isabel Hofmeyr is Professor of African Literature, University of the Witwatersrand; Charne Lavery is Lecturer and Research Associate, University of Pretoria]

Native fish from M'laya thriving in Bangladesh

NEW DELHI, 07 DEC [SHILLONGTIMES]: Native fish in the rivers of Meghalaya, affected by open cast coal mining despite official ban for years, have found a safe haven in the downstream fish sanctuaries set up by neighbouring Bangladesh.

With successful water management systems in the fish sanctuaries, endangered fish species like Pabda, Mala, Dhela, Boal, Chital, Ghora, Khari and Nanad fish, are now available in the Shari-Goyain River.

Aimed at providing safe havens and breeding grounds for endangered native fish species of the region, the two fish sanctuaries, recently built in Ratargul Swamp Forest area, have started to show promise of bringing back lost fish species once found abundantly in local waters.

According to research done on the rivers in coal mining areas of Megha-



laya, a total of 64 fish species under 20 families were collected. The calculated value of diversity indices reflected the declining trend of fish diversity in the coal mining affected areas of the river due to degradation of water quality.

Sylhet Agricultural University (SAU) under-

took the project in 2018 and set up the fish sanctuaries on three acres at two locations in Ratargul Swamp Forest and its Gurokachi canal. The fruits of the five-year research programme have already begun to show, reports said.

There has been a sharp rise in the popula-

tion of micro-nutrients rich Mala and Dhela because of the pen method of breeding. Prior to the project, fish were dying in the Shari-Goyain River, being heavily polluted with coal mineral composition when flowing from the hilly regions of Meghalaya into Sylhet.

Since the launch of the project, farmers were able to catch huge quantities of native fish from the surrounding beels and haors. The sheer number of fish found this year has made it difficult for local fishermen to sell them but no one has been complaining.

Odisha jail inmates to watch movie on Sundays



BHUBANESWAR, DEC 6 (PTI): Jail inmates in Odisha will soon get an opportunity to watch patriotic and motivational movies on Sundays besides enjoying soothing music in their cells every day, officials said.

The facilities are being provided to prisoners as part of the implementation of the "Odisha Model Jail Manual-2020" said DG (Prisons) S K Upadhyay.

Inmates of the special jail here were the first to get the facilities from Sunday. These schemes will be extended to other prisons of the state gradually, an official said.

Odisha has a total of 91 jails currently housing around 8,000 inmates.

"A projector along with a large screen and a sound system has been installed in a room having 100 seating capacity for the entertainment of prisoners," a senior official of the special jail here said.

He said that patriotic and motivational movies and those with good moral value will be screened every Sunday to make the inmates stress free.

Besides, awareness programmes relating to issues on health, human rights, legal aid and others will be shown to the prisoners, the official said.

As part of the reforms, the authorities of the special jail here also installed speakers at various places, on which soothing devotional and spiritual songs will be played to ease stress, anxiety and tension among prison inmates,

he said. According to the official, many prisoners die by suicide in prisons due to stress and the National Human Rights Commission has suggested that soothing music be played in jails as it may help in preventing such incidents.

Two water purifiers were installed in the female enclosure and the jail hospital, he said adding that arrangements have been made so that women prisoners with children and those who are sick are able to keep their cooked food warm for taking at late hours.

A turmeric powder processing unit was set up at the female enclosure from where turmeric powder will be produced.

This will be sold to people and the female inmates will in turn earn some money by engaging themselves in the unit, he said.

This apart, two units for processing mustard oil and wheat 'atta' will be opened in the female enclosure by the end of March, 2021.

A sanitary napkin incinerator was also installed in the female enclosure for destroying used napkins, he said.

About 5,000 marigold saplings have been planted on the special jail premises here to sell the flower in local market.

Arrangements are also being made to sell fish and compost manure produced in the jail.

A sales counter of the Special Jail, Bhubaneswar will be inaugurated shortly to sell products made in the prison.

Arunachal Pradesh reports 11 new COVID-19 cases

ITANAGAR, DEC 7 (PTI): Arunachal Pradesh's COVID-19 tally mounted to 16,395 as 11 more people tested positive for the infection, a senior health official said here on Monday.

Of the 11 fresh cases, 10 were reported from the Capital Complex region and one from Tawang, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Dr Lobsang Jampa said.

Eight infections were detected through rapid antigen tests while three were diagnosed through True NAT tests, the SSO

said. Barring five, all the new patients are asymptomatic and shifted to Covid Care Centres, he said.

Twenty-four more people were cured of the disease, taking the total number of recoveries to 15,605.

The state now has 735 active coronavirus cases. A total of 55 patients have succumbed to the infection so far, the official said.

The recovery rate among the coronavirus patients in the state stands at 95.18 per

cent, he said.

The state's positivity and fatality rates stand at 4.82 per cent and 0.33 per cent respectively, Dr Jampa said.

The Capital Complex region, comprising Itanagar, Naharlagun, Nirjuli and Banderdewa areas, has the highest number of active cases at 559, followed by West Kameng (54), Namsai (15) and 11 each in Tawang and Lower Subansiri districts.

The state has so far tested 3,64,420 samples for COVID-19, including 467 on Sunday, he added.

Experts to begin rejuvenation of Lukha river soon

SHILLONG, 07 DEC [SHILLONGTIMES]: The rejuvenation process of Lukha River in East Jaintia Hills will be initiated soon during which an expert consultant, the Trinity Impex International, will use algae to clean the river.

Secretary of Sonapardi village, Daiapherbha Lamare, is hopeful that with the river being rejuvenated, it will not turn blue (polluted), which is an annual affair. He said, "Work will start soon. We follow up schemes on how to clean the Wah Lukha and to revive the water body".

An urgent meeting of the District Mineral Foundation (DMF) Trust was held on December 23 last year with an agenda to decide on rejuvenation of Lukha River.

PATNA, DEC 6 (PTI): Bihar's COVID-19 tally rose to 2,39,125 as 585 more people tested positive for the infection, while three fresh fatalities pushed the toll to 1,295, a health department bulletin said on Sunday.

At least 572 people were cured of the disease in the past 24 hours, taking the total number of



After the discussion, the DMF Trust committee decided to earmark Rs 1 crore for the project on rejuvenation of the river by an expert consultant, Trinity Impex International.

In November 30, 2020, the Water Resources department invited bids to be submitted in the e-procurement portal for procurement of equipment and chemicals for "study of water quality of rivers in East Jaintia Hills

District with specified study on change of colour of Lunar-Lukha river at certain periods of the year".

The expression of interest (EOI) was also floated on January 8, 2020, by the DMF Trust, East Jaintia Hills, for the pilot project. The EOI was for the treatment of polluted Lunar rivers from Ummutha-Lunar confluence to Lunar-Lukha confluence, which is 2.5 km approximately, in Kliehriat.

Bihar reports 585 new COVID-19 cases, three more deaths

recoveries in the state to 2,32,438, it said.

The recovery rate among coronavirus patients in the state stands at 97.20 per cent.

Three new fatalities were recorded in Patna, Purnea and Saran.

Patna reported the highest number of fresh cases at 261, followed by Muzaffarpur (27),

Katihar (26), Sitamarhi and Saharsa (16 each), Purnea and Rohtas (13 each), East Champaran and Gaya (11 each).

Bihar now has 5,392 active cases, the bulletin said.

The state has so far tested 1.54 crore samples including 1,25,904 in the past 24 hours, it added.

Bengaluru, NorthEast aim to keep unbeaten streak intact

MARGAO, DEC 7 (PTI): Bengaluru FC and North-East United will look to keep their unbeaten streak intact when they cross swords in an Indian Super League match here on Tuesday.

Both teams are coming off morale-boosting wins. NEUFC, who are placed third on the table with eight points, got back to winning ways with a victory over SC East Bengal after two back-to-back draws. They had won their opening game as well.

On the other hand, Bengaluru notched up their first win of the campaign against Chennaiyin FC after being held to draws in their opening two fixtures. They have five points from three outings and occupy the fourth spot in the 11-team table.

The match will pit Bengaluru's defence, against NorthEast United's attack.

The Blues have been solid at the back but they are yet to score from open play, while the

Highlanders have scored in every game they have played so far. Bengaluru coach Carles Cuadrat knows his team is in for a tough match, but remains confident of his side's abilities.

"It's going to be a very tactical match because they are a very well-organised team. In three games, we have two clean sheets. I think we are showing a lot of consistency in defence. We look like a very well-organised team," Cuadrat said on eve of the match.

"During my time as Bengaluru coach, we have only lost one time against Chennai, we have never lost against Goa. What I mean is that it's very clear that we are a very consistent team with a clear plan.

"It's very difficult to play against us. At the same time, we know that we have room for improvement and that is what we are trying to do," Cuadrat added.

NEUFC coach Gerard Nus is also planning to play to his team's

strengths. "There are things that are principal to our style that we will not change because we believe in those. There are things that we will have to take into consideration regarding the opponents. So obviously it's a mix," he said.

NEUFC have never beaten their opponents in the league stage before and on current form, this is a great opportunity for Nus to set that record straight. However, he is not underestimating his side's opponents despite their less-than-stellar start to the season.

"The truth is that Bengaluru won the title two years ago. They were in the playoffs last season. That tells you already how good they are. They're a massive side.

"I'm really concerned about the game tomorrow because we did not have a long time to prepare. We played two days ago. But it doesn't matter. That's the way it is and we are going to fight from the first minute till the last," he said.

Raj Kamal Jha wins Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize

NEW DELHI, DEC 7 (PTI): Journalist-author Raj Kamal Jha has won the 3rd Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize for his novel, "The City and The Sea", organiser and publisher Peter Bundalo announced on Monday.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the winner of the USD 5,000 prize was announced online in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Jha's book, which is based on the December 2012 Nirbhaya rape and murder case, was chosen from ten shortlisted books including Amitav Ghosh' "Gun Island", Nirmala Govindarajan's "Taboo", and Ranjit Hoskote's "Jonahwhale".

"In this brilliant work of fiction Raj Kamal Jha succeeds in making us witnesses to the vastness of existences, possibilities, hopes and dreams annulled by an act of horrific violence rooted in inveterate biases in how malignant to each other we believe we have a right to be.

"Genuinely concerned with present day afflictions, this novel is a lament of the flawed

society, evocation to all who perished in violation of their fundamental rights, but also a ray of hope for a different humankind, awake to our intrinsic unity, even in sorrow," said Maja Markunovic, member of the jury and Literary Director of Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize.

"Cobalt Blue" by Sachin Kundalkar translated from Marathi into English by Jerry Pinto, "The Black Dwarves of the Good Little Bay" by Varun Thomas Mathew, "Karmic Chanting" by Sonnet Mondal, "Paper Asylum" by Rochelle Potkar, "Shadow Men" by Bijoya Sawian, and "EroText" by Sudeep Sen were the other shortlisted entries for the prize.

"Introducing Tagore's Gitanjali, WB Yeats talked about how the poet's work took the 'immeasurably strange' and moved us, not because of its strangeness but because we met in it our own image, heard in it our own voice. There couldn't be a more powerful imperative of storytelling today than this

humanism - this is what the Tagore Prize celebrates and it's a privilege to be in the company of its extraordinary finalists," Jha said upon receiving the prize.

The Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize was founded in 2018 by US-based publisher Bundalo as a platform for world peace, literature, art, education and human rights.

Last year, British Indian novelist Rana Dasgupta was awarded the literary prize for his novel "Solo".

The award also recognises works towards human rights and world peace with the Social Achievement Prize.

The Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize for Social Achievement 2020 was conferred to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said, the late Sultan of Oman and The People of Oman, and renowned Indian choreographer Sandip Soparrkar for his contribution to the betterment of society through his initiative Dance for a Cause.

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Pakistan squad clears fifth COVID test, to leave managed isolation on Tuesday

CHRISTCHURCH, DEC 7 (PTI): The touring Pakistan squad has returned negative in a fifth round of COVID-19 tests and will now be able to leave their managed isolation on Tuesday, subject to clearance from the health ministry, New Zealand Cricket said on Monday.

The 53-member Pakistan team was denied the right to train while in managed isolation in New Zealand after eight members of the touring squad had tested positive for COVID-19.

"This is to advise the Pakistan squad's fifth and final day 12, COVID-19 tests have all been returned as negative," NZC said in a statement.

"As a consequence, and pending final Ministry of Health approval, the squad will leave managed isolation tomorrow and fly to Queenstown, where they will train ahead of the T20 and Test series against the BLACKCAPS."

Pakistan are scheduled to play three T20Is, beginning in Auckland on December 18 followed by two Tests starting December 26. Six members of the Pakistan team had tested positive on arrival, while two more returned positive tests later and all eight are now in quarantine.

"The member of the Pakistan squad who tested positive on Day 6 will remain in managed isolation until departing, negative tests permitting," NZC said.

"Additionally, the member of the squad who was taken into quarantine in Auckland after arriving from Dubai feeling unwell but subsequently testing negative, has also been cleared to leave the facility."

Madrid on the brink in CL group stage; Messi vs Ronaldo

BARCELONA, DEC 7 (AP) Real Madrid is used to breezing through the Champions League, rather than facing must-win matches near the end of the group stage.

But poor performances this season have left Zinedine Zidane's team needing a victory on Wednesday against Borussia M nchengladbach to ensure the record 13-time European champions don't miss out on the knockout phase for the first time in the club's Champions League history.

With a draw, Madrid can still squeak through to the round of 16 if Shakhtar Donetsk loses at Inter Milan.

Madrid has never failed to get past the group stage in its 25 previous campaigns. Before falling in last season's round of 16, Madrid had reached at least the semifinals for eight consecutive seasons, winning the title four times in that stretch.

Lionel Messi's latest meeting with old rival Cristiano Ronaldo features as the other main attraction in the last of the group games. Messi's Barcelona hosts Ronaldo's Juventus on Tuesday with both already qualified.

Group B has proven to be the most competitive. Gladbach leads it with eight points. Madrid and Shakhtar each have seven, two more than last-place Inter. All four can still advance, and all four can still miss out.

When Gladbach hosted Madrid in October, the German club was leading 2-0 until Karim Benema and Case-miro scored late to salvage a



2-2 draw.

Madrid's only two wins both came against Inter. It was beaten twice by Shakhtar.

Struggling in attack, Madrid has also had problems in defense, conceding nine goals in five group games, its worst defensive record up to this point in the competition.

A hamstring injury has sidelined defensive leader Sergio Ramos for the last two weeks. Injuries to right backs Dani Carvajal and Ivaro Odriozola have forced Zidane to play a forward, Lucas V zquez, in their spot.

Madrid has underperformed for a squad of its caliber in the Spanish league as well. It had gone three rounds without a win until it eked out

a 1-0 victory at Sevilla last Saturday thanks to a goal-keeping blunder.

"We're going through a bit of a tough spell lately," Zidane said after the win at Sevilla.

"The recent days have been difficult, (but) this team is full of character. It thrives on challenges and this win is hugely important for what is to come."

Gladbach can go through with a draw. In the case of a loss at the Alfredo Di St fano Stadium, it would need Shakhtar and Inter to draw.

STALEMATE

Two of the trio of Paris Saint-Germain, Manchester United and Leipzig will advance from Group H; the other having to settle for the Europa

League. All three are tied on nine points.

Last year's losing finalist PSG can win the group with a victory over eliminated Istanbul Basaksehir on Tuesday. It can even advance with a loss as long as United's game at Leipzig does not end in a draw.

A draw in Germany would be enough for United. Leipzig will aim to beat United because a draw will leave the German team needing Basaksehir to upset PSG.

If he plays, PSG star Kylian Mbappe will be trying to break his 13-match, nine-month scoring drought in the Champions League.

Here's a look at other group games:

TUESDAY

GROUP E

Chelsea welcomes Krasnodar and Sevilla is at Rennes with absolutely nothing at stake. Chelsea is already through as group winner and Sevilla is through in second place. Krasnodar is going to the Europa League; Rennes will place fourth.

GROUP F

Borussia Dortmund is already classified but can claim the group outright if it wins at eliminated Zenit St. Petersburg.

Lazio can advance for the first time in 20 years if it avoids defeat against Brugge, which must win in Rome to progress to the next stage.

GROUP G

Barcelona will win the

group unless Juventus can overtake it in head-to-head goals. Barcelona won 2-0 in Turin. Ronaldo missed that possible rematch with Messi after catching the coronavirus.

The two best players of their generation have not faced another since Ronaldo left Real Madrid in 2018.

Dynamo Kyiv hosts Ferencvaros. Both teams have one point.

WEDNESDAY

GROUP A

With defending champion Bayern Munich already through as group winners, the second spot is down to either Atletico Madrid or Salzburg when they face off in Austria.

Diego Simeone's Atletico has only lost once in all competitions this season. A draw is enough to send it through, while Salzburg must win.

Bayern is likely to rest players for its game against Lokomotiv Moscow. Lokomotiv must win to have hope of taking third place and a Europa League spot.

GROUP C

Manchester City and FC Porto have already booked their spots in the last 16. Olympiakos faces Porto, while City hosts Marseille. Olympiakos will take the Europa League berth as long as it matches the result of Marseille.

GROUP D

Liverpool is already through, leaving Atalanta and Ajax to decide who joins the English champions. Atalanta can go through with a win or draw in Amsterdam. Liverpool visits Danish club Midtjylland.

Liverpool plan to reward 'untouchable' Fabinho with new contract

FABRIZIO ROMANO

LIVERPOOL, 07 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: Liverpool hope to start negotiations with Fabinho over a new contract soon, the champions considering the Brazil international to be one of the "untouchables" at the club after an impressive first two and a half years there.

Fabinho joined Liverpool from Monaco in 2018 and after a quiet start in England he has grown to become a key member of the squad that won the Champions League

in 2019 and the Premier League last season. The 27-year-old has played mainly in central defence this term because of injuries to Virgil van Dijk and Joe Gomez. His deal runs until 2023 but Liverpool hope to extend that to 2025 or 2026 with a hefty pay rise. Fabinho earns £100,000 a week but is in line for an increase that would see him move towards the selection of players just underneath the top earners.

Liverpool also hope to tie Georginio Wijnaldum to a new

contract. The 30-year-old's deal runs out in the summer and he has been linked with Barcelona. Liverpool hope to restart talks with the Dutch midfielder, who has been at the club since 2016, in the next few weeks. Wijnaldum is still not convinced about what his role will be at the club.

Jürgen Klopp's side beat Wolves 4-0 on Sunday to move to second in the Premier League, level on points with Tottenham but with inferior goal difference.

Eyeing Clean Sweep: India ready to crush Aussie morale in 3rd T20 International



SYDNEY, DEC 7 (PTI):

The series pocketed and their confidence restored, India would eye nothing less than a clean sweep when they take on an Australian side significantly weakened by injury blows, in the third and final T20 International here on Tuesday.

Skipper Virat Kohli and his main protagonist of the white-ball leg, Hardik Pandya, will feel a sense of deja vu given that the script has panned out exactly like 2016 when the team got walloped in the ODIs but came back strongly to rout the Aussies 3-0 in the T20 International series.

After a couple of crushing defeats in the first two ODIs, the Indians have turned a corner starting with the final ODI in Canberra.

Even the absence of a white-ball pro like Ravindra Jadeja didn't have an impact during their convincing six-wicket win in the series-clinching second T20 on Sunday.

What will boost the Indian team's morale manifold is the fact that it had the confidence to rest both Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah, relying on a troika of pacers, who between them haven't played even 40 games collectively.

India's new white-ball sensation Thangarasu Natarajan has had a superb initiation in international cricket with Australian batsmen still

finding it difficult to read him.

As Pandya so rightly put it, Natarajan's spell and the 10 runs that Australia failed to score became the difference between winning and losing on Sunday.

The difference between India and Australia during the last game was the batting of the two teams during the middle overs.

Australia lost a bit of momentum after stand-in skipper Matthew Wade was dismissed while his opposite number Kohli played some outrageous shots after the Powerplay to up the ante.

Shreyas Iyer's induction in place of an injured Manish Pandey also worked well for the visitors.

The only glitch in an otherwise solid show was Yuzvendra Chahal's rare off-day. Not having a sixth bowling option meant that Kohli was forced to have his premier leg-spinner complete his quota.

For Australia, the absence of regular skipper Aaron Finch, David Warner, Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood did have an impact although three of the five did play in the first T20 International that India comfortably won by 11 runs.

D'Arcy Short hasn't looked the part as an opener in the two games and one would expect Marcus Stoinis and Glenn

Maxwell to shoulder more responsibility as senior players.

But Australia's thin-on-experience bowlers will have to play out of their skins to stop the Indian juggernaut which has started rolling.

A 3-0 win would be the perfect booster shot for it before the all-important Test series.

In case of Australia, while a thrashing would impact them a lot but they would try and look at it from a different perspective -- most of their Test specialists will not have the scars of a clean sweep when they take on India under the lights at the Adelaide Oval, starting December 17.

Squads:

India: Virat Kohli (Captain), Shikhar Dhawan, Mayank Agarwal, KL Rahul (vice-captain and wicket-keeper), Shreyas Iyer, Manish Pandey, Hardik Pandya, Sanju Samson (wicket-keeper), Washington Sundar, Yuzvendra Chahal, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Navdeep Saini, Deepak Chahar, T Natarajan, Shardul Thakur.

Australia: Matthew Wade (Captain), Sean Abbott, Mitchell Swepson, Alex Carey, Nathan Lyon, Josh Hazlewood, Moises Henriques, Marnus Labuschagne, Glenn Maxwell, Daniel Sams, Steven Smith, Marcus Stoinis, D'Arcy Short, Adam Zampa, Andrew Tye.

Match starts 1.40 PM IST.

QPR to take a knee at Millwall in show of 'solidarity' after booing

ED AARONS

LONDON, 07 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: Players from Queens Park Rangers have asked to change the club's policy on taking a knee and will now perform the gesture against Millwall on Tuesday in what manager Mark Warburton described as a show of "solidarity" after booing at the Den on Saturday.

In September Les Ferdinand – the only black director of football in the senior English game – defended the club's decision for players to no longer take a knee because the gesture had become "little more than good PR". But after the decision of some home supporters to boo Millwall and Derby players when they took a knee before the 1-0 victory for Wayne Rooney's side at the weekend was heavily criticised by anti-racism campaigners, Warburton revealed that his players' request to reverse the decision for their trip to south-east London had been granted.

"In light of certain events, we'll stand solidly behind the cause and our players will take a knee," Warburton said. "Tomorrow night we will show solidarity because we will not tolerate any form of discrimination. It's the right thing to do, everyone can see that. The players have come to me and told me their thoughts and I absolutely agree with them."

Millwall have admitted they were "dismayed and saddened" at events on Saturday and vowed to work with anti-racism charities "to be a force for good".



Ferdinand had likened the decision to stop his players taking a knee to when the Clap for Carers initiative came to an end, adding "it got to a stage where it had run its natural course".

"What Les said, we agree 100% with," added Warburton. "Using the NHS clap for carers as an example, it was a fantastic cause but it ran its course and now we move on from there. Going forward, this club is so proactive in this area and this is one of the most diverse clubs in the country. It's not about token gestures, it's about positive action."

Meanwhile, the Colchester chairman and owner, Robbie Cowling, has told supporters who want to boo players taking a knee that they are not welcome at the club and offered to refund

their season tickets. The League Two side's win over Grimsby on Saturday was overshadowed by a number of fans booing both sets of players during the gesture before kick-off.

"It is undeniable that black and other ethnic minority people are still the victims of racism, and the black footballers and staff at Colchester United feel that they are in a position of privilege that has been fought for through the blood and sweat of their ancestors. A position that in 2020 the average black person is still not afforded," Cowling said in a statement.

"Those taking the knee, and supporting the taking of the knee, not only show their willingness to support the drive to eradicate racial oppression but force it to

be a talking point even when it's uncomfortable.

"Maybe those that booed on Saturday might now understand what this gesture means to our club and will at the very least remain silent during future games whilst the players continue to take the knee before each kick-off. Alternatively, they should just stay away from our club because anyone that still wants to boo now that I have explained the purpose and importance of the taking of the knee is not welcome at our club."

"I will be happy to refund anyone for the remaining value of their season permit if that is the reason they feel they can no longer attend our games."

China trade surplus hits record \$75B as Nov exports soar



BEIJING (AP): China's politically sensitive trade surplus soared to a record \$75.4 billion in November as exports surged 21.1% over a year earlier, propelled by American consumer demand.

Exports to the United States rose 46% despite lingering tariff hikes in a trade war with Washington, customs data showed Monday.

Total exports rose to \$268 billion, accelerating from October's 11.4% growth. Imports gained 5% to \$192.6 billion, up from the previous

month's 4.7%.

Chinese exporters have benefited from the economy's relatively early reopening after the Communist Party declared the coronavirus pandemic under control in March while foreign competitors still are hampered by anti-disease controls.

"Exports were much stronger than expected in November," said Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics in a report.

Forecasters say that surge is unlikely to last into 2021 once coronavirus vaccines are rolled out.

"We expect export performance to be less impressive," said Louis Kuijs of Oxford Economics in a report. China's global trade surplus for the first 11 months of 2020 is \$460 billion, up 21.4% from this time last year, already one of the highest ever recorded.

Exports to the United States rose to \$51.9 billion while imports of American goods gained 33% to \$14.6 billion. The trade surplus with the United States swelled 52% over a year earlier to \$37.3 billion.

Beijing promised to

buy more American soybeans, natural gas and other exports as part of the "Phase 1" agreement signed in January and aimed at ending a costly tariff battle over Chinese technology ambitions. China fell behind on meeting those commitments earlier in the year but is catching up as demand rebounds.

The two governments agreed to postpone further planned tariff hikes on each other's goods but most penalties already imposed on billions of dollars of imports stayed in place.

Chinese imports are growing faster by volume than by value because demand has been chilled by the shutdown of travel and industry, driving prices lower. China is on track to become the only major economy to grow this year while activity in the United States, Europe and Japan falls.

China's economy shrank by 6.8% from a year earlier in the first three months of 2020 after factories, shops and offices were shut down to fight the virus. Growth rebounded to 3.2% in the second quarter and accelerated to 4.9% in the three months ending in September. Automakers and other large manufacturers are back to normal activity, helping to drive demand for imported iron ore, copper and other raw materials. Retail sales are back above pre-virus levels and rose 4.3% over a year earlier in October.

Also in November, exports to the 27-nation European Union rose 8.6% over a year ago to \$37.5 billion while imports of European goods gained 4.5% to \$26.2 billion. China's trade surplus with Europe widened by 20% to \$11.3 billion.

Chinese probe orbiting moon with Earth-bound samples



BEIJING (AP): A Chinese probe was orbiting the moon on Monday in preparation for the returning of samples of the lunar surface to Earth for the first time in almost 45 years.

The ascent module of the Chang'e 5 spacecraft transferred a container with 2 kilograms (4.4 pounds) of samples after docking with the robot spacecraft on Sunday and was then cut free.

The orbiter and re-entry vehicle will circle the moon for another week awaiting a narrow time window to make the roughly three-day, 383,000-kilometer (238,000-mile) journey back to Earth. It will first "bounce" off the Earth's atmosphere to slow its speed before the reentry vehicle separates and floats down on parachutes to land on the vast steppes of Inner Mongolia, where China's Shenzhou crewed spaceships have also made their landings.

If the mission succeeds, it will make China the third country after the United States and former Soviet Union to bring moon rocks to Earth. They will be the first fresh samples of the lunar surface obtained by scientists since the Soviet Union's Luna 24 probe in 1976.

The Chang'e 5 ascent stage blasted off from the moon's surface on Friday, leaving behind the lander module flying the Chinese flag, according to the China National Space Agency, which also released a photo taken by the orbiter showing it approaching for its rendezvous with the ascender, a sliver of the Earth seen in

the background.

That marked the first time China had succeeded in lifting off a spacecraft from a celestial body, while no country had previously achieved the tricky feat of executing a robotic docking in lunar orbit. Controllers on Earth had to deal with distance and time lag while precisely maneuvering a clamp into position with almost no room for error.

The 23-day mission has been front page news in state media for days, paired with reports that China has officially lifted all of its citizens out of the most grinding form of poverty. Along with being a propaganda coup for the ruling Communist Party, the dual stories illustrate the vast economic and technological advances China has made since it became just the third country in history to launch a person into space in 2003.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying praised the "courage to explore, overcome difficulties and pay hard efforts" of those who made the mission possible.

"The entirety of the Chinese people are proud of the efforts and wisdom of the Chinese lunar exploration researchers," Hua told reporters Monday at a daily briefing.

By way of cautious incremental steps, China is now in the midst of a series of ambitious missions that include a probe en route to Mars and the development of a reusable space plane about which little information has been provided.

The Chang'e lunar

program, named after the ancient Chinese moon goddess, has also been operating the Chang'e 4 probe on the moon's less explored far side for the past two years, while the Chang'e 3 rover launched seven years ago continues to send back data.

Future plans call for returning a human to the moon five decades after American astronauts, along with a possible permanent moon base, although no timeline has been offered. China is also building a permanent space station to begin operating as early as 2022.

U.S. opposition has prevented China's secretive, military-backed program from participating in the International Space Station, although the CNSA has been expanding its ties with other programs, including the European Space Agency, which has helped guide Chang'e 5 on its mission.

Chang'e 5 touched down Dec. 1 on the Sea of Storms on the moon's near side close to a formation called the Mons Rümker, an area believed to have been the site of ancient volcanic activity.

The rocks and other debris were obtained both by drilling into the moon's crust and by scooping directly off the surface. They are thought to possibly be billions of years younger than those brought back earlier and may offer insights into the moon's history as well as that of other bodies in our solar system.

The lunar exploration program has set up dedicated labs to analyze the samples for age and composition.

Egypt's El-Sissi pays state visit to France; activists angry

PARIS (AP): Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi is paying a state visit to France for talks on fighting terrorism, the conflict in Libya and other regional issues, amid criticism from human rights groups over the Egyptian leader's crackdown on dissent.

French President Emmanuel Macron will host el-Sissi at the Elysee Palace on Monday, and is expected to raise human rights concerns among the other topics on the agenda, according to Macron's office.

El-Sissi has overseen the largest crackdown on critics in Egypt in living memory, jailing thousands of Islamists along with pro-democracy activists, reversing freedoms won in the 2011 Arab Spring uprising, silencing critics and placing draconian rules on rights groups.

Days before his arrival in France, amid pressure from U.N. and Western activists, Egyptian authorities released three workers at one of the last rights groups still functioning in Egypt. The three staffers of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, who were detained in November following a meeting with diplomats from Western countries, were released Thursday pending an investigation into charges of belonging to a terrorist group and spreading false news.

El-Sissi often warns that his tough hand ensuring stability is necessary, pointing to war and destruction in Syria, Yemen and Libya as the alternative. Egypt is a U.S. ally and has deep economic ties with European countries.

Georgia governor again rejects lawmakers replacing electors



ATLANTA (US), DEC 7 (AP): Georgia's governor is again telling lawmakers that he won't call a special session to overturn Georgia's election results and appoint 16 presidential electors who would support Republican President Donald Trump instead of Democratic president-elect Joe Biden.

Republican Brian Kemp issued a joint statement Sunday with Republican Lt. Gov. Geoff Duncan, saying it would violate state law for the General Assembly to name electors instead of following the current state law that calls for the governor to name electors after results are certified.

Any attempt by the legislature to retroactively change that process for the Nov. 3rd election would be unconstitutional and immediately enjoined by the courts, resulting in a long legal dispute and no short-term resolution, the two said in their statement.

Kemp earlier named electors after the state certified the results, but

he will have to repeat the process in coming days after a recount demanded by Trump is completed.

Trump and Kemp spoke by phone hours before Trump held a rally in Valdosta. The president asked Kemp to order the legislative session and the governor refused.

According to a tweet from the governor, Trump also asked him to order an audit of absentee ballots from the presidential race in his state. Kemp has said he can't do that because he has no authority to interfere in the electoral process on Trump's behalf.

Trump on Sunday tweeted more unproved allegations that Georgia's election was fraudulent, blaming Kemp and Duncan for inaction.

Has anyone informed the so-called (says he has no power to do anything!) Governor @BrianKempGA & his puppet Lt. Governor @GeoffDuncanGA, that they could easily solve this mess, & WIN. Signature verification & call a Special Session. So easy! Duncan

and Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger appeared on television Sunday to defend the integrity of the election.

I'm proud that we're able to look up after three recounts and watch and be able to see that this election was fair, Duncan said on CNN's State of the Union. Was it perfect? Absolutely not. I don't know if any election was perfect in the history of this country. Right now, we don't see anything that would overturn the will of the people here in Georgia, Raffensperger said on ABC.

Gabriel Sterling, who's in charge of implementing Georgia's voting implementation system, said on NBC's Meet the Press Trump is inciting unrest.

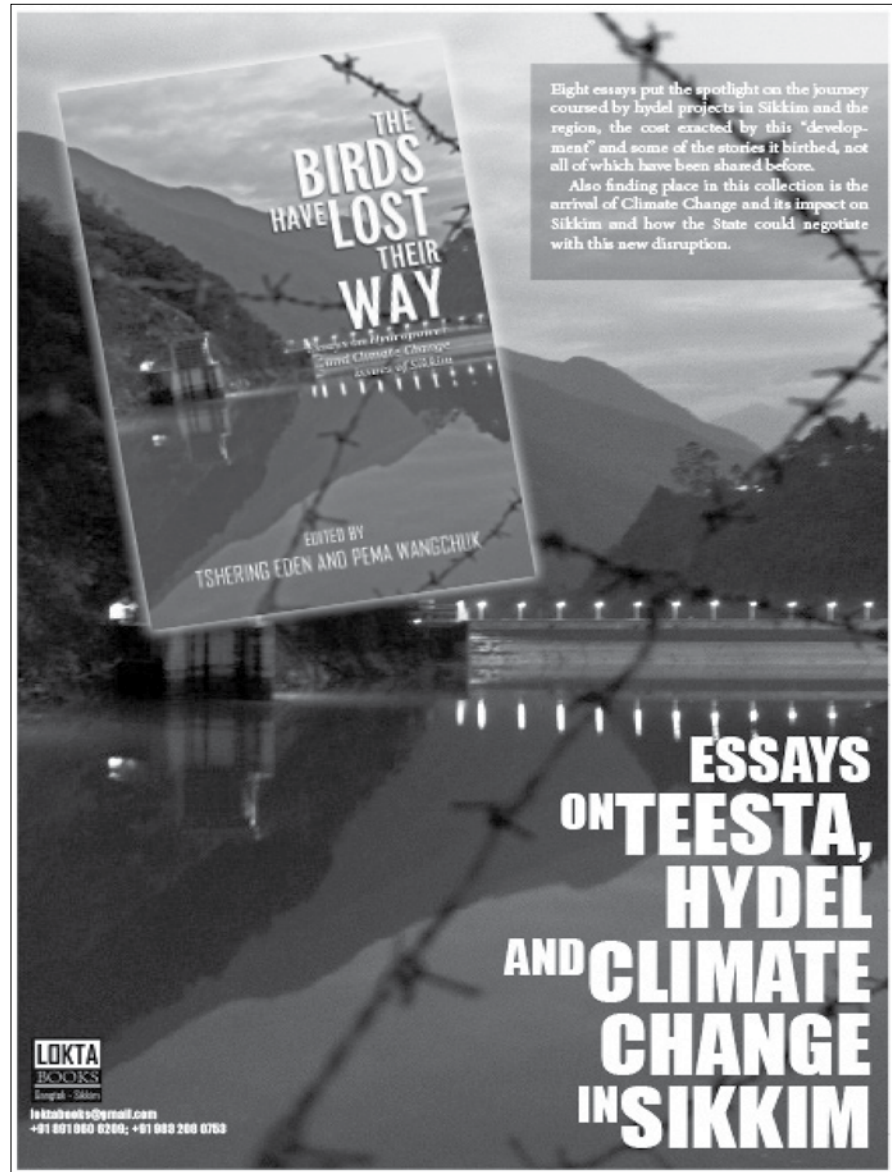
The president's statements are false. They're disinformation. They are stoking anger and fear among his supporters. And hell, I voted for him. The situation's getting much worse and it's an environment that's been built out over years," Sterling said.

State lawmakers could call a special ses-

sion on their own, but only if 60 per cent of members in both houses of the General Assembly demanded a session in writing. That's unlikely, especially because more than 40 per cent of the current members of the state House are Democrats.

On Saturday, four Republican state senators including William Ligon of Brunswick, Greg Dolezal of Cumming, Brandon Beach of Alpharetta and Burt Jones of Jackson launched a written petition trying to collect the signatures to force a special session. All four attended Trump's rally Saturday in Valdosta.

I don't believe that there's the will in the General Assembly for a special session, Raffensperger said. He said if lawmakers went ahead they would be then nullifying the will of the people. Kemp and Duncan said that going to court is the only viable and quickest option" for people challenging the results of Georgia's presidential balloting.





BIKINI BODY! Singer Pia Mia showed off her killer curves in a snakeskin-print bikini in Miami.

Actor Divya Bhatnagar dies of Covid-19 at the age of 34, Devoleena and Shilpa Shirodkar post heartbroken tributes

After battling Covid-19 and pneumonia for many days, actor Divya Bhatnagar has died in Mumbai on Monday. Her colleagues from the film industry have paid tributes.

TV actor Divya Bhatnagar, who had been diagnosed with Covid-19 and pneumonia, has died in Mumbai at the age of 34. She was put on ventilator support last week and her family had said her condition was critical. Her family had also shifted her to a different hospital to ensure better medical facilities for her.

Many of the colleagues of the Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai actor paid tributes to her. Devoleena Bhattacharjee wrote on Instagram, "Jab koi kisi k saath nahi hota tha toh bas tu hi hoti thi...Divu tu hi toh meri apni thi jisse main daant sakti thi, ruth sakti thi, dil ki baat keh sakti thi.. I know life was tooo hard on you.. the pain is intorelable... but i know today you must be in a better place and free from all the sorrows, pains, sadness, cheats, lies... I will miss you divu and tu bhi jaant i thi i loved you and cared for you...Badi tu thi par bacchi bhi tu hi thi...God bless your soul.Jahan bhi hai tu abhi bas khush reh. You will be missed



& remembered. I love you @divyabhatnagarofficial. Too soon to be gone my friend... Om shanty."

Her friend Yuvraj Raghuvanshi told Spotboye, "Divya passed away at 3am in the night. She had been shifted to Seven Hills Hospital and was suffering from breathing issues since 2 and at 3 doctor declared her death. Its a big shock for me and her family. May her soul rest in peace."

Late in November, Divya had shared a screenshot from one of her video calls on Instagram and wrote, "My my Instagram family. Pray for my speedy recovery. I love you all."

Divya's brother had told Times of India on December 1, "We have shifted Divya to another hospital. She was hospitalised on November 26 and tested positive for COVID-19 on November 28. She was already suffering from pneumonia, which has worsened owing to coronavirus. Initially, she was on non-invasive ventilation to support her breathing, but is on ventilator now because of all the exertion of shifting hospitals. We want her to recover from the pneumonia, which has spread."

Victoria Monét Announces She's Expecting Her First Child with a Stunning Pregnancy Reveal

Victoria Monét announced on Saturday that she is pregnant with her first child by posting two stunning photographs of herself in costume and also penned a heartwarming letter to her unborn baby.

Now that's a pregnancy reveal!

On Saturday, Dec 5, Victoria Monét announced on her Instagram page that she is pregnant with her first child by posting two photos of herself showing off a baby bump in a goddess costume made up of a jeweled headpiece, a glittering top and long draped skirt.

"I'm so happy to share that I've been promoted to the title just above Queen...Mom," the 27-year-old singer-songwriter wrote alongside the pictures, taken by photographer Brian Ziff. "Two hearts beat inside of me now...That's more love. Two brains and two souls...that's so much power. Really been feeling like the ultra super Victoria cause my body is doing such miraculous work. This is absolutely the best thing that has ever happened to me and I can't wait to meet my tiny soul mate earth side!!!!"

She added, "@gainsbygaines we love you so much daddy!!! You're gonna be such an amazingly loving, extremely funny, protective (in the best ways) dad! I can't wait for a lifetime of family mo-

ments with you..." In her Saturday post, Monét also shared on Instagram a letter she wrote to her unborn child.

"To my baby, I thank you for choosing me as your mommy!" Monét wrote. "The core of me holds your life right

mine. I got you." While she does have her own singing career, Monét is also known for writing hit songs for artists and bands such as Ariana Grande, Fifth Harmony and Chloe x Halle. In 2019, she was nominated for two Grammys for



now, and soon your life will be my core! I hold my head higher with the confidence you already gift. You are the best of me and I promise to protect you and be the best version of myself for you all ways, always. Hold my pinky until we can hold hands and walk through this world together rain or shine. You're forever

co-writing Grande's "thank u, next" and "7 Rings." Monét was nominated for a 2021 Grammy Award for Best R&B Song for co-writing Chloe x Halle's "Do It."

Other stars who publicly offered their congratulations on her page included Sam Smith, Lauren Jauregui of Fifth Harmony fame, and Glee actress and singer Amber Riley.

Lauren Bushnell Is Pregnant, Expecting First Baby With Chris Lane

Lauren Bushnell Lane, former Bachelor star, shared a sonogram of her first child with country singer Chris Lane.

Country star Chris Lane and Bachelor alum Lauren Bushnell Lane have some big, big plans ahead, because they're about to be parents.

Lauren shared the couple's huge news in a Dec. 6 Instagram video of her watching a sonogram of her soon-to-be baby. The background music was Chris' song "Big, Big Plans," which he wrote for his now-wife and played for her during their engagement in 2019.

In the caption of her post, the reality star wrote, "A dream. Except I'm not dreaming. I'm wide awake. Holding your dad's hand, watching you dance around in my belly. Listening to your little heart beat. My new favorite sound. A miracle. New life. Our sweet baby. Thank you Jesus! All the glory belongs to You."

Chris joked in the comments section "Hunni when were you gonna tell me you were pregnant?" He also shared the same video with the caption, "Prayer works! Hope you look like your Mama."

Lauren, who was previously engaged to The Bachelor's Ben Higgins, married Chris in October 2019 in a private Nashville cere-

mony. She told fans that she hoped to expand their family earlier this year, but that it simply hadn't worked out.

"About to get personal but I am very excited to start a family and get asked when we are having kids ALL the time but it just hasn't happened yet," the 30-year-old shared in an Instagram post. "When I was talking about it with Chris he said 'well, have you prayed about it?' I said 'well, yes' and he responded 'Have you really prayed hard about it. If that's what we really want, pray, and know it will happen in God's time if it's what He wants for us!! I'll pray with you!' As I write this now I literally have tears streaming down my face because I cannot image living life without you @iamchrislane. I am so lucky I get to wake up next to you every morning, lucky I get to pray next to you and am continually humbled by your heart of gold."

Though the couple only now announced they are expecting a baby, their family also includes two furry kids: their beloved dogs Coop and Chloe. In October, Chris shared a video on Instagram of him holding Chloe with the caption "Daddy and Daughter."

Hopefully, the pups don't mind sharing the love!

Netflix rejects calls to add disclaimer to The Crown

London, Dec 7 (AP): Netflix has no plans to add a disclaimer to The Crown stating that its lavish drama about Britain's royal family is a work of fiction.

In a statement Saturday, Netflix said it has always presented the drama, as just that a drama. We have always presented The Crown as a drama and we have every confidence our members understand it's a work of fiction that's broadly based on historical events," it said.

As a result we have no plans and see no need to add a disclaimer. Netflix was urged last week by British Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden to add the disclaimer, in the wake of the broadcast of the drama's fourth series.

Questions of historical fidelity weren't

a major issue during earlier seasons of the show, which debuted in 2016 and traces the long reign of Queen Elizabeth II, which began in 1952.

But the current fourth season is set in the 1980s, a divisive decade in Britain. Characters include Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, whose 11-year tenure transformed and divided Britain, and the late Princess Diana, whose death in a car crash in 1997 transfixed the nation and the world.

Some Conservatives have criticized the programme's depiction of Thatcher, played by Gillian Anderson. Britain's first female prime minister, who died in 2013, is portrayed as clashing with Olivia Colman's Elizabeth to an extent that some say is exaggerated.

Alia Bhatt joins 'RRR' cast in Hyderabad

MUMBAI, DEC 7 (PTI): Actor Alia Bhatt has started shooting for S S Rajamouli's upcoming period action drama "Rise Roar Revolt" ("RRR") in Hyderabad.

The 27-year-old actor, who is making her debut in south cinema with the Telugu language film, shared the update on social media on Sunday.

Sharing her selfie from the car, Bhatt wrote on her Instagram Story, "And finally en route Team RRR."

"RRR" narrates a fictional tale based on the lives of two freedom fighters in the early 20th century -- Alluri Sitarama Raju and Kumram Bheem, played by Ram Charan and N T Rama Rao Jr.

In October, writer-director Rajamouli of "Baahubali" fame resumed shooting on the movie with the leading men in Hyderabad with necessary safety precautions amid the coronavirus pandemic, nearly seven months after the filming was halted.

Produced by DVV Entertainment, "RRR" also stars Bollywood superstar Ajay Devgn in a pivotal role.

The film is slated to hit cinema halls on January 8, 2021 and will also be released in Tamil, Hindi, Kannada and Malayalam.

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Aries:
What happens when the love you truly desire comes along? Do you embrace it with open arms, or run and hide for the fear of being exposed? You thought you had it all figured out, but looks like you don't, Aries. The old fears are finding their way to sabotage your growth. Word for the wise: learn to become a watcher. Watch your fear, anger, sadness, and insecurities too. This is the only way to move past the so-called negative emotions and allow in what is truly meant to be yours.

Tip: Allow.

Taurus:

We're all addicted to something or the other, Taurus. For some, it may be the thrill of smoking cigars. Others may find golden-hued spirits the equivalent of elixirs. And then, there's the third kind: people who take pleasure in relationships that are synonymous with pain, uncertainty, and emotional drama. Could you be a member of this club, Taurus? Could you be settling for something that is tearing you apart because you do not understand your own worth? Today, you're being asked to get real with yourself and raise the potent question, "What the hell am I doing here?" In moments of silence, you'll find the courage you need to break free from the vicious cycle.

Tip: Free yourself.

Gemini:

Given the uncertainty you are facing at this point, the old you would have lost the plot. The new you possesses the chill of a Zen master, and the uncanny ability to look past the chaos and find the underlying order. This too shall pass—of this you are sure. For now, you need to focus on showing up for your dream, doing your bit, and learning not to sweat the small stuff.

Tip: Tranquility looks good on you, Gemini.

Cancer:

Just when you think it's going downhill, that loneliness is going to be your bedfellow for the rest of your years, something in the Universe shifts for you. Trust that this cosmic collaboration is helping you move closer to the life you have always visualised for yourself, and believe that the love you desire is somewhere out there. Open your heart. Allow yourself to be swept off your feet. Life is too short to hold back!

Tip: The Universe wants you to believe in love again.

Leo:

Here's the thing, Leo: you already know. You already know what is and isn't good for you. So, why are you shying away from stepping into the spotlight and sharing your unique gifts with the world? Today, the cards are encouraging you to take that cloak of invisibility off. The career opportunities that are showing up right now will take you to the next level. The only thing you need to be mindful of is not diluting your message in order to make it more palatable. Authenticity is a superpower that will make you shine in the face of competition.

Tip: Reclaim your place in this world.

Virgo:

Everything's coming up roses for you, Virgo, especially on the home and family front. Domestic bliss is indicated for those who have already exchanged vows. Trust that this cosmic confluence is providing you with the opportunity to deepen your bond. Remembering that you both want the same things from a relationship will help you tide over the troubles, if any. As such, this is a time of witnessing your dreams and desires take tangible form. What the Universe wants you to remember, now and for the rest

of the month: you deserve to live a life that's abundant in every way.

Tip: Everything's coming up roses for you.

Libra:

How much time are you going to waste on this post-mortem? What is done is done and cannot be taken back. It is your choice to decide whether or not you want to carry the pain into the future with you. For the sake of your well-being, we hope you will choose love, compassion, and forgiveness over everything else. Remember, the other person may or may not be in agreement with you. They may not give you the closure you desire and deserve either. Make your peace with that. This is your story, and only you get to decide the kind of ending you want to give it.

Tip: Choose love, kindness, and forgiveness over everything else.

Scorpio:

Everything in the Universe is designed to perfection. This means that things will always work out in the way they're meant to work out—no push and pull required. Remembering this will help you honour the challenges as learning lessons and trust that your heightened awareness will clear the road blocks eventually.

Staying in your centre is the secret to moving mountains, Scorpio. PS: The mysterious forces are supporting this elevation!

Tip: You've got this.

Sagittarius:

Everything in our Universe works inside out, Sagittarius. So, when we choose to hold onto the pain and the resentment, that is what we end up giving more power to. Vibrating at the frequency of love, on the other hand, invites light and joyful experiences into our lives. So, be mindful of what you are focusing on as you

remember that every thought you think is creating your reality—right now and in this moment.

Tip: Breathe out the pain, resentment, and anger. Breathe in the love.

Capricorn:

Capricorn, you now have the wisdom to understand that Spirit wasn't punishing you. It was simply helping you strengthen your foundation, and preparing you for the changes that were yet to come. The waiting period is now over. So reclaim your power and jump into action mode. What awaits you on the other side is one hell of an adventure!

Tip: Get ready to jump into action mode.

Aquarius:

Just when you thought you're winning at life, the Universe hits you with another curveball. Here's the thing, Aquarius: you are prepared to deal with this. You have been training for this moment for lifetimes. So, honour this challenge as a karmic lesson and get ready to remind those around you who's in charge here. The given circumstances may take a lot out of you. But the exhilaration you will be left with at the end of it will make up for everything else.

Tip: You are more than prepared to deal with this challenge.

Pisces:

Sometimes everything seems perfect on paper, yet you can't get yourself to go through with a certain decision you made a while ago. Don't ignore what the signs are telling you, Pisces, or the voice in your head that's letting you know that a certain situation or person is not a vibrational match for you. Following your heart comes easy to you. PS: Don't let your head get in the way now. Tip: You know what you have to do here.