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Summit **TIMES**

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Covid claims one more, Sikkim's toll reaches 403

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 NOV:**

Covid claimed one more life in Sikkim in the last 24 hours, the virus causing fatalities for two consecutive days after a while, to take Sikkim's Covid toll to 403. This death was reported from STNM Hospital. The last COVID death was reported from Central Referral Hospital, Tadong on 18 November.

In the meantime, the state reported 18 new cases over the same 24-hour period to take the state's tally of confirmed cases to 32,147.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in

Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of Health Department, these 18 cases were detected from the testing of 456 samples yesterday, giving the State a daily test positivity rate to 3.9%.

While 13 of the new cases were picked up in rapid antigen testing of 267 samples, the remaining five were detected in RT-PCR testing of 186 samples. While five of the cases were registered in East District, 13 were in West District.

On the other hand, the state recorded nine new recoveries to further improve the

figure of the recovered cases to 31,296. Sikkim's current recovery rate stands at 98.4%.

There are 114 active cases Covid-19 cases in the State at present, of whom 16, including two under-18 year olds, are admitted in hospital and the rest are recovering under home isolation. Three of the hospitalised Covid patients, none of whom is a minor, are in ICU.

On the vaccination front, a total of 1,068 people received a jab of Covishield on Thursday. Of these, 987 completed their vaccination schedule with the second dose and 81 received their first dose.

Health Minister promotes Yoga Breaks at workplaces



GANGTOK, 19 NOV [IPR]: HEALTH MINISTER DR MK SHARMA TODAY BRIEFED THE MEDIA about the recently launched Y-Break Mobile Application and called on people here to install the app and experience the benefits of yoga breaks at workplaces.

The Y-Break Mobile App consists of a yoga protocol with very few useful, yoga practices devised to de-stress, refresh, and re-focus at work to increase productivity of individuals at workplaces.

The Minister informed that the app was formally launched on 01 September 2021 at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi in the presence of five Central Ministers as part of the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav'.

According to a survey, changing lifestyle and spending long hours in front of computers are resulting in work-related stress among employees.

The Ministry of AYUSH had designed and developed five minutes duration Yoga protocol, named Y-Break, for workplace by an expert committee in 2019.

The module was initially launched in Janu-

ary 2020 on pilot project basis in six metro cities - Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Kolkata - with the help of various stakeholders. A total of 717 participants from different private and government bodies participated and the trial was a huge success.

The feedback had been highly encouraging, and consequent to this success, the Ministry of AYUSH developed an android based application Y-Break and the same was made available recently in Google Play Store for access by people.

A campaign was launched to spread awareness about access and usage of Y-Break protocol or app among workforce for all sectors (Public/Private), and all Ministries/Departments of Government of India were requested to promote the usage of Y-Break protocol among the employees.

The yoga protocol in the application comprises of a few simple yogic practices including Tadasana, Skandha Chakra, Ardhha Chakrasana, Nadi Shodhana Pranayama,

Bhramari Pranayama and Dhyana.

Asanas help to open up the chest cavity, improves lung-capacity and increases cardiopulmonary function, which lead to maintaining physical activity for longer duration. Nadi Shodhana Pranayama balances sympathetic and para-sympathetic nervous system. Bhramari Pranayama facilitates the production and release of nitric oxide (NO) which helps to reduce stress and helps in regulating pressure, improve blood circulation and maintain the supply of oxygen to the heart. Dhyana helps maintain focus and concentration and also in reducing anxiety, tiredness and depression.

This Y Break (Yoga Break) Application is devised to de-stress, refresh and re-focus on work and to increase the productivity of individuals at workplaces.

The Health Minister Sharma made an appeal to all employees and the public to install Y-break app from Google playstore and expressed hope that practical implementation of the Y-break App in the State will be of enormous help.

Red Run to be highlight of World AIDS Day events in Sikkim



**SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 19 NOV:**

Sikkim State AIDS Control Society [SSACS] is gearing up to organize a series of events to generate wider awareness on HIV/AIDS leading up to the World AIDS Day coming up on 01 December. The main highlight of this state-level celebration in Gangtok will be the 'Red Run'.

Addressing a press conference here on Friday, SSACS Assistant Director, Lubhana Rai, informed that an elaborate state-level World AIDS Day observance was being held after a gap of two years, a pause forced by the pandemic.

Ms Rai did, however, point out that SSACS, even if a grand AIDS Day observance could not be held for nearly two years, district-level and smaller engagements have been continuously held in keeping with Covid protocols.

As for the Red Run, she informed that this will be held in two categories - an Open half marathon [21 KMs] and 'We Care Run' of 10 KMs for students aged be-

tween 13 to 17.

The Red Run is being organized with technical support from 'Service to Mankind'.

The half marathon carries cash prizes of Rs 25,000, Rs 15,000 and Rs 10,000 for first, second and third position holders and Rs 10,000, Rs 7,000 and Rs 5,000 for the top-three each in the We Care Run. Registration fee for the Red Run has been fixed at Rs 200 and the last date for the registration is 27 November.

Interested persons can register online by visiting sikkimsacs.com or social media pages of SSACS or offline registration at the counter at MG Marg or SSACS office at Hospital Dara.

A 5KM Walkathon will also be held for invitees and people from different walks of life.

The Assistant Director mentioned that a 10 KM run is also being organised in Namchi for students in South Sikkim in association with Red Ribbon Clubs and the sports community.

Ms Rai added the celebration will also feature skits and storytelling sessions along with performances by Sikkim Girls and a local artist Dichen Pinasa along with members of Freedom Facility of Gangtok.

Additional Director [Health Services], Health Department, Dr PK Basnet, who is the SSACS Project Director [in-charge], appealed to everyone to participate in the event to create mass awareness especially among the younger generation on HIV/AIDS and its related issues.

While responding to media queries on the latest data on HIV cases in Sikkim, SSACS Deputy Director Passang Tamang informed that there are [as of 31 Oct, 2021] 524 HIV cases in Sikkim - 320 male and 204 female. Eighteen of the HIV+ve cases are below 10 years of age, 12 in 11 to 19 years age-group, 188 are aged 20 to 29 years, 179 in 30 to 39 years, 73 in 40 to 49 years, 32 in 50 to 59 years and 13 cases in the above-60 age-group.

PM Modi cancelling farm laws is his biggest policy reversal yet

NEW DELHI, 19 NOV [NDTV]: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will scrap three controversial farm laws that led to angry street protests over the last year, his biggest policy reversal since assuming power in 2014.

In a televised address to the nation on Friday, PM Modi apologized for failing to convince a section of farmers and said the parliament will repeal the legislation by end of the month.

"The purpose of the new laws was to strengthen the country's farmers,

especially small farmers," he said. "We have failed to convince some farmers despite all our efforts."

The announcement comes ahead of key provincial polls in the state of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab where farmers are an influential voting bloc. The long drawn protests by hundreds of thousands of farmers could have hurt his Bharatiya Janata Party's chances in both elections. The government had, so far, refused to budge from its position which the protesters claimed would ruin their livelihoods, making it

the longest stand-off since PM Modi swept to power seven years ago.

While PM Modi has backtracked on policy moves by his government earlier, including on land laws, that move hadn't resulted in long drawn public protests. "It's a very un-Modi-like act to take back a decision. And it is obviously because of the elections," said Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, a New Delhi-based political analyst and PM Modi biographer. "This is about Uttar Pradesh and Punjab elections and the fact that a decision that

brought farmers to the streets kept them there for an entire year." The majority of the protesters come from Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, states heading to the polls in the first half of 2022 though dates have not been announced yet.

The government had insisted the new policy would benefit the growers and refused to withdraw the legislation. The Supreme Court too had ordered temporary suspension of the laws, but the protesting farmers had refused to compromise.

Second burial of J&K businessmen after bodies exhumed by administration

SRINAGAR, 19 NOV [NDTV]: Three days after their secret burial by the police, the bodies of two Srinagar businessmen were exhumed by the Jammu and Kashmir administration and handed over to families for last rites amid emotional scenes.

The burial was performed before dawn as the families were strictly asked to ensure that burial takes place before morning. A grieving family member said that "wait till daylight was not an option."

Mohammad Altaf Bhat, a businessman and Mudasir Gul, a dental surgeon turned businessman, were killed in a controversial encounter with the police on Monday evening at Hyderpora in Srinagar.

The police said two terrorists were killed in the encounter and two pistols were recovered from the site. One of them identified as Amir Ahmad Margay was working as an office boy at Mudasir Gul's office.

Abdul Latief Margay, the father of Amir, is an anti-militancy campaigner who has received an Army citation and state award for bravery in recognition of his fight against terrorism. In 2005, he killed a terrorist with a stone during a hand to hand fight.

Mr Margay alleged that his innocent son was killed in a staged encounter and demanded return of his body. But only two bodies were exhumed yesterday and there is no indication if and when the body of Amir will be exhumed and handed over to the families.

All the four people killed in the operation were buried at some nondescript place in Handwara, North Kashmir. Police had cited law and order problem to deny bodies of the businessmen to their families.

SNS submits corruption FIRs against State Govt with CBI



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 NOV:**

A delegation of Sikkimey Nagarik Samaj [SNS] met the Director, Central Bureau of Investigation, in New Delhi on 17 Nov. The meeting was held to apprise the CBI about massive corruption in Sikkim, informs an SNS press release.

The SNS team has submitted different FIRs to CBI about corrupt practices in the State Government involving politicians, bureaucrats, contractors and companies and all the relevant documents of corruption are submitted to the CBI Direc-

tor for immediate action.

In a separate meeting with officials of the Ministry of Urban and Housing Affairs, SNS apprised them of the illegality and irregularities in functioning of Gangtok Smart City Development Limited and a complaint letter in this regard was also submitted to the Ministry, the release informs.

Taking cognizance of the irregularities by Gangtok Smart City Development Limited, the Ministry has immediately initiated action and will be submitting its report to Sikkimey Nagarik Samaj within 30 days, the release mentions.

Legal awareness on gender issues at Kamrang College

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 NOV:

A legal awareness program on gender issues was organized by the Sikkim State Commission (SSC) for Women funded by the Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India, at Government College, Kamrang, Namchi, South Sikkim on 18 Nov, a press release informs.

The objective of the program was to sensitise the students and faculty members on gender issues like domestic vio-



lence, sexual harassment, trafficking and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act.

The Resource Persons for the program were panel Advocate, Sushila Thapa, District

Legal Service Authority and Centre Administrator, Sangita Gurung, One Stop Centre.

The program was also attended by Chairperson, Chungkipu Lepcha, member, Pavi-

tra Diyali, Principal, Deepak Tiwari, Government College, Member Secretary, Yousa Lachempa, Project Coordinator, Purna Bahadur Rai and staff of the Women's Commission.

Swachhta Rath flagged off on World Toilet Day

GANGTOK, 19 NOV [IPR]: On the occasion of World Toilet Day, the "Swachhta Rath Campaign" was flagged off by Minister, Rural Development Department, Sonam Lama, from Tashiling Secretariat today.

The programme was organised by Rural Development Department and had the presence of Principal Secretary, RDD, CS Rao, and officers of the department.

The vehicle launched by the Minister will carry out a five-day tour of Sikkim in order to spread awareness about sanitation in the villages. A survey will also be conducted on the sanitary status and awareness of the villages and the four districts will be graded



accordingly.

The Minister, in his brief message, appealed to the people to encourage sanitation and hygiene in their surroundings. He expressed his happiness on the initia-

tive of the Department to spread the message of cleanliness, and lauded the campaign team for the endeavour.

The Principal Secretary briefed the gathering about the signif-

icance of the program and also spoke about the various schemes of the Department. He also mentioned the initiatives of the Department to ensure safe drinking water to the people.

Yangthang constituency's first SGAY home inaugurated

SUMMIT REPORT
GYALSHING, 19 NOV:

Minister Bhim Hang Limboo today inaugurated the first house constructed under the Sikkim Garib Aawas Yojana (SGAY) in his constituency, Yangthang, at Upper Bhaluthang under Yangtey GPU.

The SGAY house has been constructed for Indra Maya Limboo and the inaugural function was organised by Gyalshing Block in co-ordination with Yangtey GPU.

As part of the cer-



emony, present guests presented the ten beneficiaries with a replica

keys and blankets as token of appreciation.

Nine other SGAY ben-

eficiaries were handed over replica keys at today's function.

Railways to resume serving cooked food on trains

NEW DELHI, 19 NOV [NDTV]: Passengers on long-distance train journeys need not worry about packing meals anymore as the Railways has decided to resume cooked food services that had been suspended during the Covid pandemic.

The move comes days after the national transporters decided to discontinue the "special" tag for mail and express trains and revert to pre-pandemic ticket prices with immediate effect.

In a letter to the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation Limited (IRCTC) today, the Railway Board said that in view of the normalising of train services and the relaxation of Covid curbs in restaurants and eateries across the country, it has been decided that cooked



meals would be provided again on trains. The letter added that the service of Ready To Eat meals would also continue.

The Railways is gradually returning to the pre-pandemic scale of services after the Covid's severely disrupted services. The national transporters first restored services of long-distance trains and then short-dis-

tance passenger services started operating as special special trains with "slightly higher fares" to "discourage people from avoidable travels".

As the number of passengers picked up amid a slide in Covid cases, there were demands for a return to pre-Covid ticket prices -- ticket prices of special trains and holiday special trains are

marginally higher.

Last Saturday, the Railways decided to drop the "special" tag and return to the pre-pandemic ticket prices.

The Railways' decision to resume serving cooked food on trains also comes days after the Ministry of Civil Aviation allowed airlines to serve meals on all domestic flights.

Rural Marketing Center at Lower Tintek inaugurated



WANGCHUK BHUTIA

DIKCHU, 19 NOV:

A Rural Marketing Center at Lower Tintek in East Sikkim was inaugurated by Panchayat President, Rakdong-Tintek Gram Panchayat Unit, Tika Maya Panday today. The structure was constructed under Gram Panchayat Development Fund 2019-20. The inauguration was also attended by all Ward Panchayats of the GPU.

PM Modi cancelling farm laws....

ELECTION PRESSURE

Farmers represent a potentially huge vote bloc: Some 60% of India's nearly 1.4 billion people depend on agriculture in one way or another. Both Uttar Pradesh and Punjab have large farming communities. The announcement came on the day India is marking a holiday to celebrate the birth anniversary of the founder of Sikhism. The Sikh community is a significant vote base in Punjab.

The main contention about the agricultural reforms was the shift to a free market regime for sale of farm goods -- a move that farmers saw as a means to end a state price support system for crops and which they feared would leave them at the mercy of big corporations that would control the market.

Also, central to PM Modi's reforms was an amendment to the Essential Commodities Act, a 1955 law, that sought to cap prices during times of higher demand -- which discouraged investment to increase production.

Farm leaders have reacted cautiously to the news, with Rakesh Tikait, a senior leader from Uttar Pradesh tweeting to say his supporters will wait to roll back the agitation until the day the laws are actually repealed.

"Just because the prime minister announced a repeal doesn't mean that we will pick up our tents and walk away from the protests," Mr Tikait said. "750 farmers have lost their lives in this agitation. We need to discuss all the issues." The protesting farm unions will meet and decide their next move, he added.

Rahul Gandhi, a leader of the opposition Congress party said that those "who feed the nation have peacefully defeated arrogance." He also linked to an earlier comment where he had said, "Mark my words, the govt will have to take back the anti-farm laws."

The latest move by PM Modi "will require some new calculations by the farmers' movement and opposition parties," said Yamini Aiyar, president and chief executive of the New Delhi-based Centre for Policy Research. "Although it's difficult to say how much this will help the BJP in the upcoming elections, it does send exactly the wrong message to all political parties: That power political lobbies are best left untouched."

"Mark my words...": Rahul Gandhi prediction on farm laws comes true

NEW DELHI, 19 NOV [NDTV]:

After Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared this morning he would withdraw three laws that farmers have been protesting against for more than a year, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi shared an old video in which he had predicted the rollback.

The comment made way back in January has been shared by many since PM Modi's surprise announcement. The Congress MP had tweeted the video on January 14 with the caption: "Mark my words, the government will have to take back the anti-farm laws."

In the video, he says: "I am very, very proud of

what the farmers are doing. And I fully support the farmers and I will continue to stand with them. I raised their issue in a yatra in Punjab and we will continue to do it. Mark my words. Take it from me. These laws - the government will be forced to take them back. Remember what I said."

This morning, he shared the video again with the comment: "The country's 'annadatas' have defeated arrogance with their satyagraha. Congratulations on this victory against injustice. Jai Hind, Jai Hind ka Kisan!"

The government had always asserted that the three farm laws intro-

duced in September last year were aimed at reforms in the sector, that farmers could now sell produce to buyers beyond government-regulated wholesale markets, where growers are assured of a minimum price. Farmers said the laws would take away the guaranteed minimum price of their produce and leave them at the mercy of corporates.

The unrelenting protests and anger presented a huge challenge for the BJP ahead of a series of important state polls, especially in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, where farmers form a sizeable voting bloc. The

party has already been singled by recent bypoll setbacks.

"While apologising to the nation, I want to say with a sincere and pure heart that maybe something was lacking in our tapasya (dedication) that we could not explain the truth, as clear as the light of the diya, to some of our farmer brothers. But today is Prakash Parv, not the time to blame anyone. Today, I want to tell the country that we have decided to repeal the three farm laws," PM Modi said today.

The opposition welcomed the move but accused the government of brazenly eyeing poll gains while doing it.

Chandrababu breaks down, vows to stay away from Assembly

Amaravati, Nov 19 (PTI): A sobbing Telugu Desam president N Chandrababu Naidu on Friday vowed to step into the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly again only after returning to power.

"Till then, we will go to the people and sort it out," he told a press conference at the TDP headquarters here.

The former Chief Minister, who hitherto had rarely shown any emotions overtly, broke down in the press conference and cried for a while, alleging that the ruling YSR Congress had been humiliating him no end.

"This is a dharma paratam (just battle) against the atrocious rule of the YSRC. I will go to the people and seek their

support. If people cooperate, I will strive to save the state, the TDP chief said.

Earlier in the state Legislative Assembly, the Leader of the Opposition said in an emotion-filled tone that the Jagan Mohan Reddy-led party had been continuously casting a slur on him for the past two-and-a-half years.

"I have been bearing the insults for the sake of people, but remained calm. Today, they have targeted even my wife. I always lived with honour and for honour. I can take it no more," Chandrababu said.

Though he continued to speak, Speaker Tammineni Seetaram cut the mike even as the ruling party members called

Chandrababu's remarks a "drama".

The former Chief Minister vent his frustration following an acrimonious exchange of words between the two sides in the House during a short discussion on the farm sector.

Later, he held an impromptu meeting with his party legislators in his chamber, where he reportedly broke down.

Stunned TDP legislators consoled Chandrababu, after which they all came back into the House.

Chandrababu then announced his decision, but that did not go on record, even as he left in a huff.

Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy, who later came into the House, said the Opposi-

tion leader's behaviour and words were nothing but a drama.

"Chandrababu only seeks to derive political mileage out of everything. It is very unfortunate. His drama was visible to all eyes, though I was not inside the House at the time, Jagan observed.

"Yes, Chandrababu Naidu's condition, and that he is in frustration, is known not only to me, but also to everyone in the state. People of the state have openly rejected him. Even in his own Kuppam constituency, he, unimaginably, faced people's rejection, the Chief Minister remarked.

He said the YSRC legislators did not speak anything about the (opposition leader's) family members.

VC National Commission for SC visits ITBP Gangtok



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 18 Nov: Vice-Chairman National Commission for Scheduled Caste, Government of India, Arun Halder visited ITBP regional headquarter, Gangtok on 15 Nov. He was received with a guard on honour on

his arrival and DIG, RK Saha welcomed him with a khada on behalf of the regional headquarter. The Vice-Chairman was accompanied by his Personal Assistant, Sanjay Gautam Nayak and Deputy Secretary, government of Sikkim, Himmat Rai. An ITBP press release

informs that the Vice Chairman highlighted the works of the commission in the interest and welfare of SC community and also spoke about various welfare schemes and policies of the central government for SC community. The release mentions

that the brief function started with the welcome address by DIG, RK Saha. Later, he also gave a power-point presentation on duties and responsibilities and activities of ITBP regional headquarter and 11th, 13th and 48th battalions under it in the State.

Bengaluru Archbishop opposes Bill on conversion, writes to Chief Minister

BENGALURU, 19 NOV [NDTV]: An anti-conversion bill, which is likely to be tabled in the Karnataka Assembly next month, could "become a tool for the fringe elements to take law into their own hands and vitiate the atmosphere with communal unrest in the otherwise peaceful state," Bengaluru Archbishop Reverend Peter Machado said today in a letter to Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai. Calling the proposed law "undesirable" and "discriminatory", the Archbishop insisted: "The entire Christian community in Karnataka opposes the proposal in one voice and questions the need for such an exercise when sufficient laws

and court directives are in place to monitor any aberration of the existing laws." He also protested an order on "a survey of both official and non-official Christian Missionaries functioning in the state, the collection of data from their Churches, institutions, and establishments." "When all the relevant data is already available (through the census) with the government, why do we need yet another futile exercise? Why only the Christian community is targeted and marked for this arbitrary, fallacious and illogical move?" the Archbishop asked. The Chief Minister had last week told re-

porters that his government is "studying related laws enacted by other states and soon an anti-conversion legislation will be formulated", news agency PTI reported. In September, he had said that the state was considering the law as "several incidents (of forced conversion) had been reported". "Couple of days ago I gave appropriate directions to district administrations to not allow any religious conversion through inducement or by force, as it is illegal," he had said. Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh are some of the BJP-ruled states that already have laws against forced religious conversion in place.

In his letter, however, the Archbishop said "such laws would infringe the rights of the citizens, especially of the minority communities". "Thousands of schools, colleges, and hospitals are run and managed by the Christian community across the state. When lakhs of students are graduating from these institutions year after year and thousands of patients irrespective of caste, creed and colour receive the best medical attention from our hospitals and care centers, let the government prove that even one of them has ever been influenced, compelled or coerced to change his or her religion," the letter read.

Will release report if Supreme Court doesn't: Farm Laws Panel Member

NEW DELHI, 19 NOV [PTI]: With the centre deciding to repeal the three farm laws, a member of the Supreme Court-appointed panel, which has already submitted its report on these contentious laws to the Supreme Court, today said the purpose of the report is over now and will release the report in the public domain, if the Supreme Court does not do so. Shetkari Sanghatana chief Anil J Ghanwat said the panel's report was in "favour of farmers" and will decide next week on releasing the report to the public. The three-member Supreme Court-appointed committee, after studying the three farm laws and consultation with stakeholders, had submitted its report to the Supreme Court on March 19. Since then, the report has not been made public yet despite Mr Ghanwat having requested the Chief Justice of India in a letter on September 1 to



release the report, saying its "recommendations will pave the way to resolve the ongoing farmers agitation." In a big move, Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his address to the nation this morning announced he would cancel all the three central farm laws. "If these three farm laws are withdrawn, this report has no sense at all... If the Supreme Court does not make it public, I will make it public," Mr Ghanwat said. The committee has spent three months preparing the report. "This should not go into the dustbin. It should not happen. I will make it

public," he said. The committee will meet on Monday and take views of all three members on releasing the report in the public domain, he added. "The other members are academicians and professionals and they don't have anything to do with the farmers' movement. But I am a farmers' leader. I have to take care of farmers. I will take the initiative of releasing the panels' report in the public domain in the interest of farmers. The farmers, press and the government should know recommendations made by the panel," he said, adding that the report was in favour of farmers.

The report will be a good reference for framing future laws on agriculture, he added. On what will be the fate of the report, the panel's other member Ashok Gulati, agricultural economist and former chairman of the Commission for Agricultural, said, "It is the prerogative of the Supreme Court whether it wants to make it public or not." With the government's decision to cancel the new farm laws, the purpose of the report ends, he said. It has been over a year now that farmers are protesting at Delhi's border against the three farm laws.

Farmers to continue protest until farm laws repealed by Parliament

NEW DELHI, 19 NOV [NDTV]: Farmers protesting against the contentious farm laws will keep occupying the six protest sites on Delhi's borders and won't immediately go back to their homes, leaders associated with the movement have said. Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), the umbrella

organisation of various farm unions, has said that they have plans for the next three-four months including visiting poll-bound Uttar Pradesh, keeping an eye on the winter session of the Parliament, and organising large-scale protests across the country on January 26. A concrete plan of action in light of the Centre's

climbdown on farm laws will be decided in a meeting of farmers' leaders tomorrow. "There are two distinct issues we have been raising, the farm laws were one and the issue of Minimum Support Prices is another," SKM leader Darshan Pal told NDTV. He said that the SKM is organising a meeting tomorrow to discuss the future plan

of action. Mr Pal has been part of the farmers' delegation in all the meetings with the government regarding the farm laws. He congratulated the farmer for forcing the government to back down on the farm laws but said that the issue of MSP is also crucial as it affects all farmers and is linked to farmer suicides.

Kala Utsav for West Sikkim students

SUMMIT REPORT
GYALSHING, 19 NOV: Kala Utsav 2021, a district-level celebration of creativity among school students, was organized here at the Gyalshing Girls Senior Secondary School auditorium today. Joint Director PL Subba was present as the chief guest for the Utsav participated in by 21 students from 12 schools.



Kala Utsav is an initiative of the Department of School Education and Literacy,

The competition was judged by DK Gurung, HM Lower

Tadong Primary School, and Dinesh Pradhan, AEO Chongrang BAC.

Mock Drill at Yangang Bazaar by District DMA

BIKASH CHETTRI
Yangang, 19 Nov: A Mock Drill was organised by District DMA(s) in collaboration with 2 BN National Disaster Response Force at Yangang Bazaar today.



Various stakeholders were invited along with HODs of various departments, school students and local gentries. During the program, awareness on different activities of MFR (Medical first aid responder) like methods of controlling bleeding, CPR (Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation) were demonstrated to all followed by an exhibition of CSSR equipment. Mock Drill on various rescue operations were performed for the awareness of general public during times of disaster.

CBSE to train teachers in alternative activities for classes 9-12 practical work

NEW DELHI, 19 NOV [NDTV]: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) will hold online training sessions for teachers to inform them about alternative activities developed by the board for classes 9-12 practical work. The board had earlier said students can do these experiments at their homes using simple household materials and will have similar outcomes as lab-based experiments prescribed for the 2021-22 batch. The board has introduced these alternative measures to address academic loss and reduced time for face-to-face interaction between teachers and students caused by the COVID-19 lockdown. The online training session will be for one hour duration and there will be no participation fee, the CBSE said. E-certificate will be issued to the participants, it said. The board has asked schools to ensure all science teachers of Classes 9 and 10 participate in the training programme. About the alternative activities, the board said, "These hands-on activities are accompanied by step-by-step guides, videos, and worksheets for students to record observations. A list of material needed for each experiment, together with alternatives have also been included in the content package to facilitate the learners," the board said regarding the alternate activities. The content of the activities has been provided by ThinkTAC. It is also available on the Diksha portal, the CBSE said. "While the activities and materials have been chosen to be safe for learners to do on their own, teachers are required to review these before assigning them and advise parents if supervision is required for any specific activity," the board said.

Indira Gandhi Peace Prize awarded to Pratham for school education work

NEW DELHI, 19 NOV [NDTV]: Pratham, a pioneering civil society organisation dedicated to improving the quality of education for underprivileged children in India and across the world, has been awarded the Indira Gandhi Peace Prize 2021. "The 2021 Prize is awarded to Pratham for its pioneering work over more than a quarter century in seeking to ensure that every child has access to quality education, for its innovative use of digital technology to deliver education for its programs to provide skills to young adults, for its regular evaluation of the quality of education, and for its timely response in enabling children to learn during the COVID-19 related school closures," read a statement from Indira

dropping out of school, with special programs especially for girls and women aimed at giving them a second chance to complete their education," it further said. The jury was headed by former Chief Justice of India TS Thakur. The Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development was instituted in the memory of the former prime minister by a trust in her name in 1986. It consists of a monetary award of ₹ 25 lakh along with a citation. The award is given to individuals or organisations who work towards ensuring international peace and development, ensuring that scientific discoveries are used to further the scope of freedom and better humanity, and creating new international economic order.

Established in 1995 by Dr Madhav Chavan and Farida Lambay, it started work in Mumbai slums setting up community-based pre-schools and offered remedial education for students lagging behind in their classes. Its annual Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), based on surveying 600,000 rural Indian children, is now used as a model to assess education outcomes and learning deficiencies in 14 countries over three continents. "In basic education, Pratham develops low-cost and replicable innovations, working with the government and engaging the community to improve learning outcomes," the Trust said. "Pratham seeks to prevent children from



SIKKIM FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION
FOOTBALL HOUSE
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AGM CUM ELECTION NOTICE

Annual General Meeting of the Sikkim Football Association will be held at 1 PM on Saturday the 11th Dec 2021 at Football House, Gangtok. All the eligible members of the association including women wing members and the authorised representative of the Premier Division Clubs with voting rights are requested to kindly make it convenient to attend and exercise their franchise. The AGM will be followed by the election of the President & General Secretary as per article 7, clause 1 to 4 of the constitution of SFA for the session 2022-25 as per following time table.

Issue of nomination paper.....	04.12.2021 to 10.12.2021
Filing of nomination.....	10.12.2021 by 4 PM
Withdrawal of nomination (if any) by	1 PM of 11.12.2021
Election (if required).....	after AGM on 11.12.2021

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Children Still Labour

...and we still don't really care

Yes, we had Children's Day recently. What we also have coming up is the Universal Children's Day on 20 November. That day is observed to mark the UN's adoption of the Declaration of Children's Rights in 1959. The Convention is a legally binding treaty that obliges governments to "respect, protect and fulfill" child rights through their legislation and policies. Child Rights include the right to life, health, education, participation, and protection from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. All the rights of the children are equally important and reinforce each other.

Now, let's look at what India has achieved seventy-four years since it gained Independence and 62 years since the Declaration of Children's Rights was passed. Back in the year 2001, when the Census of India counted child labour for the first time, the data suggested that 12.6 million of our minors were engaged in the work-force we know as child-labour. Even at that time, statistics for the informal labour force contended that the number of under-14 year olds – the "hidden workers" – made to work was as large as 60 million. Since then, the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act has been amended to ban the employment of children in any kind of work. This, admittedly, has had only limited impact and NGOs working on child labour issues believe that as many as 20 million continue to be employed in private homes. And now that the rallies and awareness drives to protect children from labour have dried up, horror stories crop up occasionally, like in the case of the runaway who strayed into Sikkim town or the children from Assam rescued from homes here (where they were employed) more recently.

With some shops in some corners of the state openly flouting the rules, the presence of minors as servants in homes is also noticeably present even though hiring such help is now a criminal offence. Look around Sikkim, by how much do you think has the number of minors employed as domestic servants gone down since the Act was amended? As per the Childline India Foundation, a group that works for child rights, 11% of the workforce of India is made up of child labour! This is shamefully shocking because what this reflects is that one in every ten workers in India is a child!! Counting children employed as domestic help and supposedly treated like "family", how do you think Sikkim fares in this statistic? Is enough being done to "respect, protect and fulfill" the rights of the underprivileged and marginalised children that the nation has undertaken to ensure?

Children who make it to school on a regular basis, no matter how deplorable the condition of the schools, are actually privileged. It is the army on the streets which rummages through trash to pick a livelihood, the domestic servants engaged in household chores when they should be playing with friends, who need to be reassured that they are still important and that their problems are being addressed, one tiny step at a time. Or scratch that. That would be plain hypocrisy. No one is really concerned. But they should be. It would be safe to vouch that the few gains made in battling child labour are all but lost in the massive disruption that the pandemic and the lockdown have wrecked. With the economy in slump and opportunities lost, children, especially those from economically weak families, have been put at risk. With schools shut and kitchens under stress, everything that drove children to labour when they should be at play or learning is back. Unfortunately, we have not even begun putting up the defences to save at least some of them.

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Bringing people of different faiths together to solve the world's problems is a noble goal – but it's hard to know what it achieves

KATHERINE O'LONE & JULIAN HARGREAVES

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An estimated 84% of the global population identifies with a religion. This is over 6.5 billion people. Among thousands of world religions, Christianity is the largest, with 2.3 billion followers. The second, and fastest growing, is Islam with 1.8 billion followers.

Religion is often seen as a major driver of conflict and, according to a 2018 report from the US-based Pew Research Center, religiously motivated violence is on the rise. Yet most religions, at their core, aim to build peace and foster reconciliation.

Bringing people from different faiths together is often seen as a way to tackle the world's most pressing problems. This is what's known as the interfaith movement and initiatives range from shared meals in local places of worship to high-level acts of international diplomacy.

Israel and Palestine, for example, have over 190 active interfaith organisations in operation. The All Nation Cafe is one such endeavour. Situated in a buffer zone between the Israeli Army checkpoint and the Palestinian Authority, the cafe is an easily accessible meeting place for Israelis and Palestinians. The cafe engages with young people on both sides of the conflict and provides a neutral space to foster dialogue and empowerment.

But despite the commendable intentions and enthusiasm of all involved, interfaith has its critics. For some, interfaith is no more than virtue signalling. For others less cynical, but no less sceptical, the goals of interfaith – such as world peace or the reconciliation of all religious differences – seem lofty and vague.

While conversations between people of different faiths appear to make a difference, and despite significant contributions made by faith communities, knowing if anything works remains a challenge, as the effectiveness of interfaith initiatives are rarely measured or



evaluated.

This is what our latest project aims to address. We have spent two years listening to interfaith organisations and studying decades of psychological research on inter-group relations to find out what a successful interfaith project or collaboration looks like.

GLOBAL REACH

The birth of modern interfaith can be traced back to the first Parliament of the World's Religions, held in Chicago in 1893. More recently, key events such as 9/11 have thrust interfaith onto the global stage.

The continued presence of religious conflict, extremism and prejudice in society has compelled many to seek solutions within interfaith practice. There are global projects such as the G20's Interfaith Forum, national initiatives such as the UK government's Near Neighbours programme – which aims to bring religiously and ethnically diverse communities together – and the Jewish Muslim women's network Nisa Nashim, and myriad local groups engaging in arts, sports and scripture studies across religious divides.

Interfaith groups often have bold ambitions, whether for their local area or the world at large.

How realistic these ambitions are is hard to assess. For some, success might be the cessation of hostilities between faith communities. For others, success could be an increased closeness to God or more engagement with people from different faiths. What came through in our research, was that for interfaith work to be successful, it has to lead to changes beyond the immediate project or initiative.

WIDER CHANGE

Indeed, encounters between people of different faiths might lead to more positive attitudes towards other faith groups. But for interfaith to be truly successful, changes within individuals must spread, or be "transferred", throughout whole communities and into wider society.

There are many examples of interfaith work at a community level – such as coordinated responses to COVID-19 or faith groups coming together to tackle knife crime. But many of these examples, as well-intentioned as they are, lack proper evidence to gauge the longer-term impact on wider community relations.

Another example is the Parliamentors programme, an interfaith initiative that equips young students of all faiths with the skills,

knowledge and networks needed to become leaders in their local communities. Students are mentored by an MP and contribute towards various initiatives.

Camden Cares, was set up as part of the Parliamentors programme to address the lack of integration opportunities for young asylum seekers. Young leaders from different faith backgrounds came together and, in partnership with two local refugee charities, the project ran two sports events for young asylum seekers at Arsenal's football ground, the Emirates Stadium in London. And again, while

the project itself was considered a success, it is hard to know what the wider community impacts may have been.

While such examples demonstrate the good work of interfaith groups and faith communities across the world, knowing what works and what might work better would help groups design more effective programmes. This is why, as part of our work, we have created a resource that allows local interfaith groups to measure their effectiveness. Helping interfaith initiatives quantify their success will allow them to identify areas that are not working.

This is important because this knowledge will allow for initiatives to improve. And ultimately, this should help interfaith groups worldwide to more successfully tackle interreligious hostility and ease the heavy cost of religious conflict upon society.

[Katherine O'Loone is Research Fellow at the Woolf Institute, University of Cambridge; Julian Hargreaves is Director of Research at the Woolf Institute, Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Islamic Studies, University of Cambridge, University of Cambridge]

What Star Wars can teach us about the decline of democracy

DAVID KENNY & CONOR CASEY

THECONVERSATION.COM

Not so long ago, in a galaxy not so far away... democracy was in danger. Our current political environment is filled with threats to democracy, from the rise of authoritarian populism around the world, to the massive expansion of state power during the COVID-19 pandemic that may never fully be undone.

As constitutional law researchers, we are interested in how these threats emerge and what can be done about them. We argue in a recent paper, that several useful lessons can be drawn from a surprising source: the Star Wars films.

You might fairly ask why we draw these lessons from Star Wars and not Weimar Germany or ancient Rome. But we think that there is an important role for culture in telling these stories in an accessible way.

More people will see Shakespeare's Julius Caesar than will read detailed histories of the fall of the Roman republic. Far more people will see Star Wars, and reflect on its stories, than will ever deeply consider the risks of democratic decay in our society.

Star Wars is not just a series of science fiction films, but a cultural phenomenon. Its stories resonate with countless millions. If we can

use this to highlight some of the way that democracies die – and maybe help people think about contemporary political challenges in a new way – that seems like a worthwhile effort.

LESSON 1: OVERLY STRONG GOVERNMENTS OFTEN COME FROM OVERLY WEAK ONES

In the most common telling, the rise of the Empire in Star Wars is a story about the dangers of concentrating power in one person, who can then tyrannically misuse it. This lesson is always worth learning, as this threat is very real. But in fact, Star Wars also teaches a different lesson: overly weak government is a major threat to democracy.

The Galactic Republic in Star Wars is a dysfunctional political system. The senate is full of squabbling delegates that, faced with the invasion of a planet, form an investigative committee. No one has faith in the leadership. There is no military, other than the Jedi, a tiny religious order of space wizards. Even when a secessionist movement threatens the Republic with vast military force, the senate can't agree to create an army.

It is this total failure of the political system to protect the welfare of the Republic that gives Chancellor Palpatine – who later

becomes the evil emperor – emergency powers to act unilaterally. As war continues, he accrues even more power, and the senate begs him to stay in office long after his term expires. This is how the seeds of the Empire are laid: an overly weak government fails, and people turn to a strong leader.

This has been called the Publius paradox, first observed by American founding father Alexander Hamilton. If government was not strong enough, Hamilton said, leaders may have to "over-leap the bounds" imposed by law in times of crisis, which may make them impossible to control later. Binding government too tightly, for fear of creating tyrants, may indeed create tyrants.

Star Wars teaches this lesson vividly: the disorder that can come when a state is not strong enough is the perfect breeding ground for a would-be emperor to agglomerate power and be met with, as one character laments, "thunderous applause".

LESSON 2: COMMITMENT TO LAW WON'T SAVE US

Literature on democratic decay often advises that states can avoid tyranny and dictatorship through commitment to the rule of law. Star Wars presents an interesting twist on this lesson: commitment to law

alone doesn't help.

Everyone in the Star Wars universe is obsessed with legality, even the bad guys. Yet it is only formal compliance with law that anyone thinks about, not the consequences of these legal actions. If Queen Amidala signs a treaty at gunpoint justifying the illegal invasion of her planet, we are told, the senate will think this makes it all okay. Almost no one questions Palpatine gathering more emergency powers and staying in office for far too long once this is approved by the senate.

Star Wars reminds us that we should not be misled into thinking that people using the language of law must be doing the right thing. Many autocratic and undemocratic regimes around the world wrap themselves in the law to justify their wrongful actions. To prevent the erosion of democracy, we have to look at how the law is used (and misused), and what "legal" actions do.

LESSON 3: CONFUSION AT THE APEX OF POWER LEADS TO CHAOS

Finally, Star Wars shows the risk of not knowing who is in charge. In the films we see serious confusion over who is the ultimate guardian of the common good of the Republic and defender of the constitutional order: the supreme chancellor or

the Jedi Council. It is clear that both consider themselves the ultimate custodian of the political community.

This ends badly, with Jedi master Mace Windu trying to overthrow Palpatine because he has "sensed" a plot to destroy the Jedi. It is unclear who, if anyone, authorised him to depose the elected head of the Republic. He then concludes that Palpatine is "too dangerous" to stand trial and tries to summarily execute him.

Star Wars shows the risk of having two rival guardians of the political order, with no means to choose between them. This constitutional tension tips over into chaos when their opposing claims meet in violence, and Palpatine uses the fact of this plot as a reason to consolidate the Republic into an Empire with him at its head.

These are important lessons to learn for anyone who wants to build and maintain a stable democratic state.

[David Kenny is Associate Professor of Law and Fellow, Trinity College Dublin; Conor Casey is Lecturer in Law, School of Law & Social Justice, University of Liverpool]

Odisha logs 242 new COVID-19 cases, 3 fatalities

BHUBANESWAR, NOV 19 (PTI): Odisha on Friday logged 242 more COVID-19 cases, 45 of them children and adolescents, taking the state's tally to 10,46,559, while three fresh fatalities pushed the toll to 8,389, a health department official said.

The rate of infection among children and adolescents stood at 18.59 per cent, up from 12.66

per cent the previous day.

Of the 242 new cases reported from 19 of 30 districts 141 were detected in quarantine centres and the rest during contact tracing.

Khurda district, of which state capital Bhubaneswar is a part, reported 120 new COVID-19 cases, followed by Mayurbhanj at

24 and Cuttack at 18.

Two fresh fatalities were recorded in Bhubaneswar and one in Ganjam district.

The state has reported 6,504 deaths during the second wave as against 1,876 in the first.

Odisha currently has 2,504 active cases, while as many as 10,35,613 patients including 351 on Thurs-

day, have recovered from the highly infectious disease.

Over 2.31 crore samples have been tested in Odisha, 56,515 of them on Thursday.

The state's positivity rate stands at 4.52 per cent.

As many as 1,40,93,910 people have been inoculated with double doses of COVID-19 vaccines.

Strike disrupts normal life in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, NOV 19 (PTI): Normal life was affected in the Kashmir valley on Friday due to a strike called by the Hurriyat Conference to express solidarity with the families of the civilians killed in the Hyderpora encounter earlier this week, officials said.

Most of the shops, fuel stations and other business establishments in Srinagar were shut, the officials said.

Public transport was largely off the roads, but private cars and auto rickshaws were seen plying in some areas of the city, they said.

The officials said similar reports of the strike being observed were received from other areas of the valley.

The effect of the strike was accentuated by the public holiday on account of Gurupurab, they added.

The Hurriyat Con-



ference led by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq had given the strike call.

"Hurriyat Conference regrets that as most people's leadership and political activists are either in jails or under house detention, to protest such inhumanity, and in solidarity with the devastated families of the

slain civilians and their demand that the dead bodies of their loved ones be returned to them for burial, people should observe a shut down on Friday 19th November on their own," the Hurriyat said in a statement here.

The bodies of the two civilians Altaf Bhat

and Mudasir Gul killed during Monday's encounter in Hyderpora area of the city were exhumed at Handwara late on Thursday and were handed over to the families. The bodies were buried here during the night after their last rites were performed by the families.

Russia reports record COVID deaths for 3rd straight day

MOSCOW (AP): Russian authorities on Friday reported a record number of coronavirus deaths for the third day in a row.

Russia's state coronavirus task force reported 1,254 virus deaths, up 1,251 on Thursday and 1,247 on Wednesday.

The task force also reported 37,156 new confirmed cases. The daily new infections in recent weeks appear to have taken a downward trend but still remain higher

than during previous surges of the virus.

The latest surge in infections and deaths comes amid low vaccination rates and lax public attitudes toward taking precautions. Fewer than 40% of Russia's nearly 146 million people have been fully vaccinated, even though the country approved a domestically developed COVID-19 vaccine months before most of the world.

In total, the corona-

virus task force has reported over 9.2 million confirmed infections and more than 261,000 COVID-19 deaths, by far the highest death toll in Europe.

Some experts believe the true figure is even higher. Reports by Russia's statistical service, Rosstat, that tally coronavirus-linked deaths retroactively reveal much higher mortality. They say 462,000 people with COVID-19

died between April 2020 and September of this year.

Russian officials have said the task force only includes deaths for which COVID-19 was the main cause, and uses data from medical facilities. Rosstat uses wider criteria for counting virus-related deaths and takes its numbers from civil registry offices where registering a death is finalized.

Three dead in flash flood in AP's Kadapa district

AMARAVATI, NOV 19 (PTI): At least three

people were killed and many others feared washed away in a flash flood in Kadapa district of Andhra Pradesh on Friday. A breach to the Annamayya project bund caused a flash flood in Cheyyeru rivulet that left some villages along its course in-

undated, official sources said.

A group of unsuspecting devotees, offering prayers in a Siva temple on the occasion of Kartika Pournami, were caught in the sudden flood and washed away in Rajampet area. Three bodies were later recovered near Nandaluru, the

sources said, adding efforts were on to trace the remaining persons.

The Rayalaseema districts of Chittoor and Kadapa have been witnessing a worst deluge in years as heavy rains, caused by the depression in Bay of Bengal, caused breaches to several ranks and kept rivers and rivulets

in spate.

NDRF and SDRF teams have swung into action to carry out relief and rescue operations.

Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy conducted a video conference with Collectors of the rain-battered districts and directed them to step rescue and relief measures.

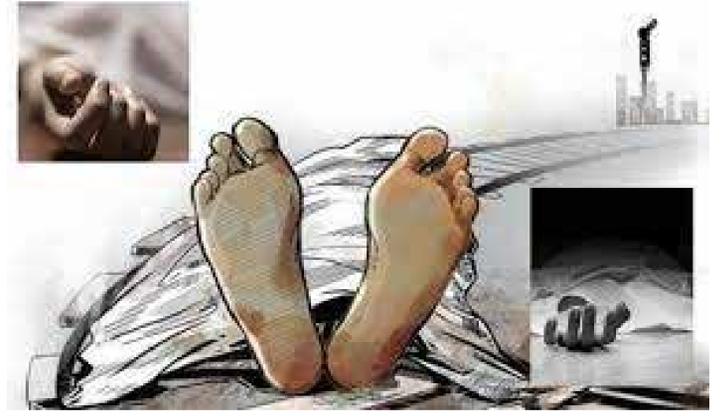
3 sisters end life by jumping before train in UP

JAUNPUR (UP), NOV 19 (PTI): Three sisters allegedly ended their lives by jumping before a train here, police said on Friday.

Preeti (16), Kajal (14) and Aarti (11), daughters of late Rajendra Prasad Gautam of Ahiroli village, jumped before Jansadharan Express train at Fattupur railway station under Badlapur police station limits on Thursday night, City Superintendent of Police Sanjay Kumar said.

Police suspect that poverty could have driven the siblings to take such an extreme step.

Their father Gautam



died nine years ago and their mother is visually impaired for the past three years. The three girls, along with their brother Ganesh, worked as labourers to run the house, the SP said.

The sisters went missing from their house since evening and around 11 pm, their neighbours received the information that they had allegedly jumped before a train.

Gateman Pradeep,

on seeing the mutilated bodies, informed the Superintendent of Shri Krishna Nagar railway station, Manoj Kumar. Their bodies have been sent for autopsy, the SP said.

Seven members of banned outfit held in Jharkhand

CHATRA (JHARKHAND), NOV 19 (PTI): Seven members of the outlawed Tiritiya Sangharsh Prastuti Committee (TSPC), including its self-styled sub-zonal commander, have been arrested with arms and ammunition here, a senior police officer said on Friday.

Acting on leads from a local man, who was

apprehended as he was trying to flee on seeing security personnel, the district armed police and the CRPF launched a search operation on Thursday in Simaria police station area and other parts of Chatra, and apprehended all seven TPSC members, SP Rakesh Ranjan said.

During the course of interrogation, the local

man had said that TSPC's self-styled sub-zonal commander Ramraj Rajak, who also went by names such as Gora Baitha and Nayak ji, and other members of the outfit were planning to assemble in the jungle and collect levy at gun point, the SP explained.

Altogether 105 live cartridges, along with sten gun, country-made rifles,

double-barrel guns and ten mobile phones, were seized from the possession of the extremists, Ranjan stated.

Rajak, who was earlier a sub-zonal commander of CPI(Maoist), joined the TSPC in 2015. At least eight criminal cases have been filed against him.

The TSPC is a splinter group of the CPI(Maoist).

China threatens Lithuania over Taiwan office opening



BEIJING (AP): China on Friday threatened to retaliate against Lithuania after the Baltic nation allowed Taiwan to open a representative office in its capital, Vilnius.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Lithuania would "reap what it sows," but gave no details.

Zhao described Lithuania's move as an "egregious act" that

"grossly interferes" in China's internal affairs.

The office, which opened Thursday, bears the name Taiwan rather than "Chinese Taipei," which is used by the International Olympic Committee and many foreign nations to avoid offending China, which claims the self-governing island democracy as its own territory.

Taiwan has just 15 formal diplomatic allies, but maintains

informal ties with all major nations through trade offices that act as de facto embassies, including in the United States and Japan.

It wasn't clear what actions China plans to take in response to the opening of the office. Beijing has already recalled its ambassador from Vilnius and expelled the Lithuanian ambassador.

Lithuania plans to open a representative

office in Taipei by the end of the year and has withdrawn from the "17 plus one" arrangement launched by China to bind it closer to countries in Eastern Europe.

China's threat underscores its extreme sensitivity to any challenge to what it considers its "core interests," as it presses ahead with its increasingly assertive foreign policy.

I like playing morally reprehensible yet fun to watch characters: Rosamund Pike

MUMBAI, NOV 19 (PTI): Oscar nominee Rosamund Pike says she gravitates towards characters that do not come across as likeable and believes such roles generate an excitement in the audience as well.

The 42-year-old actor is best known for her role as Amy, who sets up her own murder and frames her cheating husband in *Gone Girl*, for which she was nominated for the 2014 Academy Awards.

"I like playing people who are morally ambiguous, I like playing quite divisive characters, characters that you find yourself wanting to watch even though you might not agree with what they're doing. I think that creates an interesting feeling in an audience, Pike told PTI in a Zoom interview.

pointed legal guardian, Marla Grayson, who defrauds her older clients and traps them under her care.

Citing the example of her role in *I Care a Lot*, the British star said she was interested in where the line was, so that she could make Marla as someone who was "morally reprehensible and yet fun to watch".

"I never wanted to cross over into a place where you just thought this is just boiling and I'm not enjoying this at all. It's a line I'm really interested in, she added.

Up next for Pike is another fascinating role in the upcoming Prime Video series *The Wheel of Time*.

sied to save or destroy humanity.

The show is based on Robert Jordan's epic fantasy series of novels, which are set in a world where magic exists and only certain women are allowed to wield it.

The actor, who received international recognition for her film debut as Bond girl Miranda Frost in 2002's *Die Another Day* and followed it up with movies like *Pride and Prejudice*, *An Education*, *What We Did On Our Holidays*, *State of the Union*, said the series once again gave her the opportunity to play a layered character like Moiraine.

The idea that attracted me was that this fantasy world has a mysterious guide figure who takes the central heroes through the story, who is a woman. And the fact that Robert Jordan in 1990 created this world where women have this extraordinary power.

There are plenty of shows and books that have a very masculine world and there is one amazing female, but he's given us so many amazing females with intrigue and different political allegiances, there are layers of deception as it becomes apparent later on in the show. So, there are so many layers, twists, and that's why it's very exciting for me, she added.

Pike, who also serves as a producer on the series, praised author Jordan for dwelling deep into the minds of not one but several characters through his novels.

As far as our show and the book it is based on is concerned, he doesn't get inside the head of Moiraine. We got the internal voices of some of the younger characters, but you don't get the internal voice of Moiraine, which is something that will be interesting for fans, she said.

AB de Villiers retires from all cricket: 'I've had my time'

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP): AB de Villiers retired from all cricket on Friday, ending a career that saw him flourish into one of his generation's most gifted batsmen in any format, whether in test matches for his country or Twenty20 games for club teams across the world.

De Villiers had retired from all international cricket with South Africa in 2018 but remained a highly sought after commodity and continued playing in various domestic T20 leagues, most noticeably with Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Indian Premier League.

"It has been an incredible journey, but I have decided to retire from all cricket," de Villiers said in a statement on his official Twitter account. "Ever since the back yard matches with my older brothers, I have played the game with pure enjoyment and unbridled enthusiasm.

"Now, at the age of 37, that flame no longer burns so brightly. That's the reality I must accept - and, even if it may seem



sudden, that is why I am making this announcement today. I've had my time."

De Villiers gave up playing for his country three years ago while still at the top of his game and after being pivotal in a test series victory over Australia. Then, he spoke about the demands playing placed on him and his family, particularly for a player who was one of the first names on South Africa's team-sheet in every format and for every series.

He represented Roy-

al Challengers Bangalore for a decade after first signing for them in 2011, and had three years to concentrate on playing for them after giving up internationals. There, he struck up a close friendship and highly productive on-field partnership with India captain Virat Kohli. De Villiers also played T20 cricket for teams in Australia, Pakistan and Barbados toward the end of his career.

"I am aware that nothing would have been possible without the sac-

rifices made by my family ... I look forward to the next chapter of our lives when I can truly put them first," de Villiers said on Friday.

De Villiers played top-level cricket for 17 years and at times balanced the role of top batsman with duty as a wicketkeeper, and if not behind the stumps he was one of the best fielders in any team. He also captained South Africa.

The phrase most associated with him was "a 360-degree

batsman" — meaning he could hit the ball anywhere, such was the range of his shots and talent.

De Villiers considered coming out of international retirement this year to play for South Africa at the T20 World Cup, but he and Cricket South Africa couldn't reach an agreement, meaning there wouldn't be one last hurrah for de Villiers on the big stage.

Still, "cricket has been exceptionally kind to me," de Villiers said.

U.S. curling expectations on rise after winning gold in '18



OMAHA, Neb. (AP): For most of John Shuster's international curling career, Americans had the mindset that everything would have to go right on the ice for a U.S. team to win even a bronze medal on the world stage.

The improbable gold won by Shuster's team at the 2018 Winter Olympics — the United States' first gold in the sport — prompted a collective attitude adjustment.

"The expectation when we're sending a team to the world championships and Olympics now," Shuster said, "is that they should be a medal favorite and, if things go right, they could win the gold."

Jeff Plush, hired as USA Curling CEO in February 2020, said the gold medal can help lay a foundation for future success.

"It should, and it needs to," he said. "I don't think you run away from that. I say this often, that when you have success, you earn the right to demand more of yourself. We have to applaud what happened in 2018 and realize that that is over, and we have to go and try to achieve these things every year."

Team Shuster is a heavy favorite to make it through the U.S. team trials this week and defend its Olympic title in Beijing. The best-of-three trials finals begin Friday night at Baxter Arena with Shuster playing Corey Dropkin's team

on the men's side and Tabitha Peterson's team facing Cory Christensen's team on the women's side.

Shuster's first Olympics was in 2006, when he was a member of the Pete Fenson team that took bronze for the United States' first medal in the sport. It was still the Americans' only Olympic curling medal heading into the 2018 Games, with Shuster leading teams in Vancouver and Sochi that failed to make the medal rounds.

In Pyeongchang, Shuster and teammates Tyler George, Matt Hamilton and John Landsteiner rallied from the brink of pool-play elimination and upset favored Sweden 10-7 in nine ends in the gold-medal match.

Participation at the grassroots level has increased significantly across the country since then. There are about 200 curling clubs, and participation has grown from 20,000 to about 25,000.

The entire round robin was streamed on the NBC Sports app and NBCOlympics.com, and the finals will be live on NBC Sports Network.

Shuster said he has enjoyed being an ambassador for curling during its period of growth.

"It went from being an obscure kind of thing you'd see every four years," Shuster said. "Now when it's at the Olympics, I guarantee you a lot more people in

our country are searching to see when the curling games are going to be on rather than stumbling into whatever coverage there is."

Shuster's team has a slightly different look. George has retired, and Shuster replaced him with Chris Plys. Hamilton and Landsteiner are back.

The team's top-six finish in the world championships in Canada in April locked up the United States' spot in the Olympics. Shuster and his players were discombobulated after the round robin when Plys tested positive for COVID-19. It was later determined to be a false positive, but Plys said the situation drained the team emotionally, and it lost in the first round of the playoffs.

"We were in a rhythm and in a spot where I thought we had a chance to win a world championship," Shuster said. "We didn't even know Chris would be able to play until an hour before game time."

Shuster said his team has been at its best in Omaha, but Plush expects no team to cruise through the trials finals.

"Team Shuster to date is our best team, but they're going to get pushed, as they should," Plush said. "If they continue to be the best team, they're going to earn it rather than just being the best of a good-enough group."

China says 'not aware' of tennis player Peng Shuai issue

BEIJING (AP): China's Foreign Ministry on Friday stuck to its line that it wasn't aware of the controversy surrounding tennis professional Peng Shuai, who disappeared after accusing a former top official of sexually assaulting her.

Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian told reporters that the matter was "not a diplomatic question and I'm not aware of the situation."

The ministry has consistently disavowed knowledge of the issue since Peng made her accusation more than two weeks ago.

The 35-year-old former top ranked player in women's doubles won titles at Wimbledon in 2013 and the French Open in 2014. She also participated in three Olympics, making her disappearance all the more prominent with Beijing set to host the Winter Games starting Feb. 4.



Peng wrote in a lengthy social media post on Nov. 2 that she had been forced to have sex despite repeated refusals three years ago by Zhang Gaoli, a former vice premier who was a member of the ruling Communist Party's all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee.

The post was quickly deleted from her verified account on Weibo, a lead-

ing Chinese social media platform, but screenshots of the explosive accusation were shared on the internet.

Steve Simon, the chairman and CEO of the Women's Tennis Association, questioned the authenticity of what a Chinese state media outlet said this week was an email intended for him in which Peng said she was safe and that the assault

allegation was untrue. It was tweeted by CGTN, the international arm of Chinese state broadcaster CCTV.

The State Council Information Office, which represents the Chinese government, did not respond to emailed questions about Peng's current situation and Simon's doubts about the email.

Curry scores 20 of 40 points in 4th, Warriors beat Cavs

CLEVELAND (AP): Stephen Curry scored 20 of his 40 points in the fourth quarter, hitting three straight 3-pointers, and the NBA-leading Golden State Warriors overcame a 13-point deficit to beat the Cleveland Cavaliers 104-89 on Thursday night.

Curry made 8 of 12 shots, including 4 of 7 3-pointers, in the final period to help Golden State outscore the Cavaliers 36-8. The Warriors ran off the first 17 points of the quarter to take an 85-81 advantage, holding Cleveland to 12 consecutive empty possessions.

"With Steph on the floor, you always have a chance," Golden State coach Steve Kerr said. "He's one of the greatest

players in the history of the game and he is the greatest 3-point shooter of all-time. He's fearless and always capable of catching fire like that."

Playing with a bruised left hip, Curry finished 15 of 27 from the field, 9 of 16 beyond the arc and 1 of 1 from the foul line. The two-time MVP increased his NBA-best scoring average to 29.5 and had six assists and four rebounds.

Nemanja Bjelica added 14 points, Andrew Wiggins had 12 points and Draymond Green had four points and 14 assists for Golden State, which improved to 13-2. The Warriors have won

nine straight over the Cavaliers and are 17-1 against them since January 2017.

Golden State held an opponent to eight points or less in the fourth quarter for the first time since Nov. 5, 2003, against Atlanta.

"It was amazing to watch our energy in the fourth, and I had the best vantage point in the house," Curry said. "We're pretty good at wearing teams down with our defense."

Darius Garland scored a season-high 25 points as the injury-plagued Cavaliers dropped to 9-8. They took an 81-68 lead into the fourth after Dean Wade batted in a layup as time expired in the

third. Wade and Kevin Love had 17 points apiece, and Ed Davis added seven points and 14 rebounds.

"Stephen Curry is a hell of a basketball player," Cleveland coach J.B. Bickerstaff said. "The shots he was making weren't easy, but obviously, he's got the skill-set to make them and Draymond knows how to get him open. They're the best team in the league right now for a reason."

Cleveland was without four starters in rookie forward Evan Mobley (right elbow sprain), guard Collin Sexton (left knee meniscal tear), center Jarrett Allen (illness) and forward Lauri Markkanen (conditioning).

Forward Cedi Osman (back spasms) was a late scratch.

"I thought we did pretty well with the next-man up mentality," Garland said. "Steph just got hot. That's all it was."

Juan Toscano-Anderson provided a lift off the bench for Golden State, finishing with seven points, five rebounds and a pair of assists in the fourth, which ended with the sellout crowd at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse chanting "M-V-P" at Curry.

"It's like you get into a street fight and you've got Mike Tyson on your side," Toscano-Anderson said. "He makes the game that much easier and so much fun. It's a treat to play with that guy."

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Too early to comment on Dravid's coaching style: Ashwin

JAIPUR, NOV 19 (PTI): Ravichandran Ashwin says it's too early to comment on Rahul Dravid's coaching style but the premier India spinner is confident that happiness will be back in the dressing room under the stalwart's guidance.

Dravid replaced Ravi Shastri in the Indian set-up, beginning his stint with the ongoing India-New Zealand Twenty20 series.

Ashwin is back in the Indian limited overs squad after spending four years on the sidelines. Since mid-2017 the spinner did not get to play a single white-ball game and even warmed the benches in team's recent England Test tour.

The 35-year-old made a comeback at the recently concluded T20 World Cup when he played against Afghanistan and is now part of the team that is clashing with New Zealand, tak-

ing two wickets in the series opener.

"It's too early for me to comment on Rahul Dravid's coaching style, but he's put the hard yards in through the U-19 level," Ashwin told official broadcaster after India's five-wicket win on Wednesday.

"He won't leave much to chance, and he'll be all about preparation and process, so that we can bring the happiness back into the Indian dressing room," he added.

India has a new leadership in place with Dravid taking over from Shastri and Rohit Sharma replacing Virat Kohli as captain in T20s.

Talking about the first T20, Ashwin said he realised that taking the pace off the ball was working wonders.

"The slower you bowled, there was more purchase you got on this pitch. If you hit the seam and tossed it up, it did do things like Santner

showed in the second innings," he said.

"It's tricky in T20s, you can't miss your lengths and you don't know when to toss it up but here it did help to give it some air."

Given a manageable 165-run target, Ashwin thought that they will cross the line quite early and the match would not drag to the final over.

"It was a slightly under-par score and we thought 170-180 would be par. We thought we would cruise home around the 15th over, but that's T20 cricket for you."

"I bowled the first over in the powerplay, and figuring out the pace to bowl is important and it took me some time to figure that out."

"It's about varying to pace and knowing when to vary it. It's important to take each of the 24 balls as an event, and look at each ball in isolation and as an opportunity," he said.

Austria to enter lockdown, bring in mandatory vaccinations

BERLIN (AP): Austrian Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg said Friday that the country will go into a national lockdown to contain a fourth wave of coronavirus cases.

Schallenberg said the lockdown will start Monday and initially last for 10 days. Most stores will close, and cultural events will be canceled.

He initially said all students would have to go back into home schooling. Wolfgang Mueckstein, the country's health minister, later said that kindergartens and schools would remain open for those who needed to go there but all parents were asked to keep their children at home if possible.

Starting on Feb. 1, the country will also make vaccinations mandatory, public broadcaster ORF reported.

"We do not want a fifth wave," Schallenberg said, according to ORF. "Not do we want a sixth or seventh wave."

Austria had initially introduced a national lockdown only for the unvaccinated that started Monday, but as virus cases continued to skyrocket the government said it had no choice but to extend it to everyone.

"This is very painful," Schallenberg said.

The national lockdown will initially last for 10 days, then the effects will be assessed and if virus cases have not gone down sufficiently, it can be extended to a maximum of 20 days.

Austria's intensive care doctors welcomed the government's decision.

"The record infection figures that we have now experienced day after day will only be reflected in normal and intensive care units with a time lag. It really is high time for a full stop," Walter Hasibeder, the president of the Society for Anesthesiology, Resuscitation and Intensive Care Medicine told Austrian news agency APA.

"Given the current infection developments, we believe there are no alternatives to even greater contact restriction than recently, so any measures that help curb the momentum are welcome," he added.

For the past seven days, the country has reported more than 10,000 new infection cases daily. Hospitals have been overwhelmed with many new COVID-19 patients, and deaths have been rising again, too. So far, 11,525 people have died of the virus in Austria.

Austria, a country of 8.9 million, has one of the lowest vaccination rates in Western Europe — only 65.7% of the population are fully vaccinated.

Despite all the persuasion and campaigns, too few people have decided to get vaccinated, Schallenberg said, leaving the country no other choice but to introduce mandatory vaccinations in February. The chancellor said the details would be finalized in the coming weeks but those who continued to refuse to get vaccinated would have to expect to get fined.

Ethiopia's economy hit as major clothing maker closes shop

NAIROBI, KENYA (AP): Ethiopia's once rapidly growing economy is taking another hit because of its yearlong war as global clothing manufacturer PVH Corp. says it is closing its facility there because of the "speed and volatility of the escalating situation."

The company's statement, emailed to The Associated Press, comes two weeks after President Joe Biden announced he would cut Ethiopia from a U.S. trade program, the African Growth and Opportunity Act, because of "gross violations of internationally recognized human rights." The sanction goes into effect on Jan. 1.

PVH, whose brands include Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfger, has been a marquee occupant of Ethiopia's model industrial park in the city of Hawassa, where Africa's second-most populous country has made clear its aspirations of rapid, Chinese-style development. PVH in the past has said AGOA helped to convince it to set up in Ethiopia.

H&M, another high-profile occupant at the Hawassa park, did not respond to an AP request about its plans.

Ethiopia's war and the many reported atrocities on all sides have led some in the business world to press Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and his government for a cease-fire and humanitarian access to the blockaded Tigray region,



echoing ongoing efforts by envoys from both the U.S. and African Union.

Thousands of people have been killed as Ethiopian and allied forces fight the Tigray ones who long dominated the national government before Abiy came to power in 2018. The conflict has been marked by gang-rapes, forced expulsions and manmade famine.

"We continue to emphasize to the government of Ethiopia the need for all parties to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and supplies to those who need it, and see this as a first step toward the cessation of hostilities and a process that will result in lasting peace," Stephen Lamar, president of the American Apparel & Footwear Association, told the AP in an email.

"As the crisis spreads — and if Ethiopia does

lose AGOA eligibility — companies will increasingly be unable to source from Ethiopia. This will hurt Ethiopia's economy, particularly the women who comprise the bulk of the workforce in the country's apparel industry," Lamar added.

The harm to low-income workers far from the war is an argument that Ethiopia's government made as it openly lobbied against losing AGOA eligibility. Ethiopia's chief trade negotiator Mamo Mihretu has asserted that millions of workers would be affected.

But the Biden administration, which last week said it was not imposing sanctions on Ethiopia's government and rival Tigray forces "to allow time and space" to see if diplomatic efforts make progress, ran out of patience.

The AGOA announce-

ment "is making people in the business world especially anxious. It certainly makes it less economically smart to be there," Mike Posner, assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor in the Obama administration, told the AP.

"I'd say we have very limited time now to try to tamp down the rhetoric and find a way to the bargaining table," Posner said, addressing Ethiopia's leadership. "This could be disastrous for the economy."

Warnings about the economy have been growing as Ethiopia's government pours resources into the war. In its World Economic Outlook report last month, the International Monetary Fund said projections for 2022 to 2026 "are omitted due to an unusually high degree of uncertainty."

Businesses like PVH

had entered Ethiopia because of the government's push in recent years to build a network of industrial parks to make clothing and footwear for export, along with the country's large population of more than 110 million people and wages that are "significantly lower than even places like Bangladesh and Cambodia," Posner said.

But the instability has brought businesses' thinking to a tipping point, he said.

Chinese and other companies may continue to operate in the industrial parks, but Ethiopia is a tiny market in the global economy, Posner said. "If Ethiopia's government thinks it can make this work by shutting out the U.S. or Europe and only selling to Chinese or Indian customers, I think it's going to be disappointed."

Philippine church leader charged with child sex trafficking



LOS ANGELES (AP): The leader of a Philippines-based church was charged with having sex with women and underage girls who faced threats of abuse and "eternal damnation" unless they catered to the self-proclaimed "son of God," federal prosecutors announced Thursday.

Apollo Carreon Quiboloy and two of his top administrators are among nine people named in a superseding indictment returned by a federal grand jury last week and unsealed Thursday. The indictment includes three Los Angeles-based administrators of Quiboloy's church who were charged last year. The new indictment also names a church administrator in Hawaii.

Quiboloy, 71, is head of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ church, founded in 1985. The church claims to have 6 million members in about 200 countries. Its United States headquarters is in the Van Nuys area of Los Angeles.

The church backed the 2016 candidacy of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, a close friend of Quiboloy. Duterte used the group's radio and TV program in southern Davao city to express his views on issues way back when he was mayor of the southern port city.

Quiboloy claims to be "the appointed son of God" and in 2019 claimed he stopped a major earthquake from hitting the southern Philippines.

The superseding indictment contains a raft of charges, including conspiracy, sex trafficking of children, sex trafficking by force, fraud and coercion, marriage fraud, money laundering, cash smuggling and visa fraud.

Quiboloy is believed to be in the Philippines. Emails seeking comment

from Israelito Torreón, the church's attorney in that country, weren't immediately returned.

The indictment accuses Quiboloy and others of recruiting women and girls, typically 12 to 25 years old, as "pastors" who cooked his meals, cleaned his houses, massaged him and traveled with him around the world. Some also had sex with Quiboloy on scheduled "night duty," including some minors such as a 15-year-old girl, according to the indictment.

They were coerced into "night duty" under "the threat of physical and verbal abuse and eternal damnation," according to the indictment.

Quiboloy and the others also are accused of bringing church members to the U.S. with fraudulently obtained student visas or sham marriages to solicit donations for the church's charity, based in the Los Angeles suburb of Glendale.

Workers who managed to escape from the church told the FBI that they worked year-round and were beaten and psychologically abused if they didn't make daily quotas, according to court documents from the previous indictment. Some described having to live in cars at truck stops.

The money for the nonprofit Children's Joy Foundation USA was supposed to benefit poor children in the Philippines. But prosecutors said most of it financed church operations and the lavish lifestyle of Quiboloy and other church leaders.

At least \$20 million was sent back to the church in the Philippines between 2014 and 2019, according to an FBI affidavit filed with the previous indictment.

Malaysian state poll tests ruling alliance as allies split

KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA (AP): A Malaysian southern state will hold elections Saturday in a test for Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob's ethnic Malay party as it faces off against allies in the government for the first time amid a widening rift.

While the outcome of the Malacca state poll will not affect the federal administration, analysts said it could deepen tensions between the two key Malay parties in the national government and shape how alliances are formed in the next general election.

The Malacca election will see a three-way fight between a camp led by Ismail's United Malays National Organization, or UMNO, another by ally parties Bersatu and the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, or PAS, and the opposition alliance led by Anwar Ibrahim.

UMNO and Bersatu, the two biggest parties in the ruling alliance, are at loggerheads but have agreed to share power until the next national polls, which are not due until 2023 but are widely expected to be called next year.

"The state elections pit allies at the national level against each other. The outcome could put pressure on the national governing alliance



and have a spillover effect on other state governments," said Bridget Welsh, a Southeast Asia expert at Malaysia's Nottingham University.

The Malacca polls were called after the UMNO-led state government collapsed when four assemblymen pulled their support. A victory would be a boost for UMNO, which had led Malaysia since independence from Britain in 1957 but was ousted in 2018 elections by Anwar's reformist alliance amid a multi-billion-dollar financial scandal.

Anwar's alliance, however, crumbled last year after Muhyiddin Yassin withdrew his Bersatu party and formed a new government with UMNO, PAS and several other parties. But Muhyiddin was forced to resign in August after

infighting cost him majority support.

Ismail, who was Muhyiddin's deputy, then took office, bringing back UMNO's rule.

Ismail has kept a low-profile in the Malacca polls as he sought to maintain an uneasy truce between the feuding camps in his alliance. UMNO's campaign is led by former Prime Minister Najib Razak, who remains influential despite a conviction and 12-year jail sentence last year for corruption. He is appealing his conviction and also faces several other graft trials.

Campaigning in Malacca, which is around a two-hour drive from Kuala Lumpur, has so far been lackluster amid strict rules as the country emerged from a virus lockdown last month after a successful vaccina-

tion roll-out.

Blue and red flags, posters and bunting of the contesting parties are the only visible signs of the election, which will see 112 candidates fighting for 28 seats in the state assembly. Political rallies, walkabouts and house visits are banned, taking the campaigning into social media and making results more unpredictable.

Nearly half a million voters will cast ballots from 8 a.m. (0000 GMT) until 5 p.m. (0900 GMT).

Most observers believe the main fight is between UMNO and Anwar's opposition alliance. Bersatu lacks grassroots strength and is likely to take on a "spoiler role" by splitting votes among ethnic Malays and reducing the majority for either side, said Oh Ei

Sun, senior fellow with the Singapore Institute of International Affairs.

A big win for UMNO could potentially lead to challenges in ruling party states that are helmed by Bersatu, both Welsh and Oh said. It could also accelerate plans to call for early general elections and may prompt PAS and other parties supporting Bersatu to review their alliance, Oh said.

The polls come as Malaysia gradually reopens its borders to vaccinated travelers. The country has vaccinated more than 76% of its population, including most adults. Daily infections have dropped dramatically to around 6,000 from its peak of more than 20,000 in August. The country has recorded 2.56 million cases and nearly 30,000 deaths.

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Felt robbed of our privacy: Tom Holland on viral photos with Zendaya

LOS ANGELES, Nov 18 (PTI): Tom Holland says the downside of being a popular actor is the lack of privacy he gets in the public as the British star opened up about his relationship with "Spider-Man" movies co-star Zendaya.

In July, the two stars, who have for a long time denied dating each other, were photographed kissing in a car in the Silver Lake neighbourhood of Los Angeles.

The photos spread like a wildfire on social media and news websites in the US, fuelling speculation about their relationship.

In a profile interview with GQ magazine, Holland broke his silence on the matter and talked about the struggles he and Zendaya face keeping that part of their life together private.

"One of the downsides of our fame is that privacy isn't really in our control anymore, and a moment that you think is between two people that love each other very much is now a moment that is shared with the entire world," Holland said.

The 25-year-old actor added that he remains adamant in keeping his personal life private.

"I've always been really adamant to keep my private life private, because I share so much of my life with the world anyway. We sort of felt robbed of our privacy," Holland said.



The actor said that the decision to speak about his relationship with Zendaya is not his alone.

"I don't think it's about not being ready. It's just that we didn't want to. It's not a conversation that I can have without her. You know, I respect her too much to say This isn't my story. It's our story. And we'll talk about what it is when we're ready to talk about it together," Holland added.

For the profile interview, Zendaya was also interviewed over a phone call and she said it was "quite strange and weird and confusing and invasive".

"The equal sentiment (we both share) is just that when you really love and care about somebody, some moments or things, you wish were your

own... "I think loving someone is a sacred thing and a special thing and something that you want to deal with and go through and experience and enjoy amongst the two people that love each other," the 25-year-old actor said.

Holland also talked about the impact Zendaya has had on his life over the years.

"Having her in my life was so instrumental to my sanity. She is so good at being the role model for young guys and girls. When anyone comes up, like, Can I have a picture?, it's never a bad time. Whereas my initial reaction was: Why are you talking to me? Leave me alone," he added.

Holland and Zendaya are currently gearing up for "Spider-Man: No Way Home", their third film after 2017's

"Spider-Man: Homecoming" and "Spider-Man: Far From Home", which released in 2019. Holland, who also played Spider-Man in "Captain America: Civil War", "Avengers: Infinity War" and "Avengers: Endgame", said "Spider-Man: No Way Home" might be his last as the iconic web-slinger. "Maybe it is time for me to move on. Maybe what's best for Spider-Man is that they do a Miles Morales film. I have to take Peter Parker into account as well, because he is an important part of my life. If I'm playing Spider-Man after I'm 30, I've done something wrong," the actor said.

Also starring Benedict Cumberbatch as Doctor Strange, "Spider-Man: No Way Home" will be released worldwide in December.

Filmmaker Vinod Nair revisits historical events in debut book

NEW DELHI, Nov 19 (PTI): Filmmaker Vinod Raman Nair has always been drawn towards history and in his debut book, he weaves an adventure around ninth century Middle East through Tunisia to Armenia and Azerbaijan, and then to Turkey, Iran and Iraq.

"3 & The Emerald Stone of Irene" seeks to perceive medieval Islamic history with a fictional narrative and unravel the mystery of what is regarded as the Golden Age of the Islamic Empire.

Nair is of the view that history for many children turns boring as parents often push them to mathematics and other science subjects.

It took him a while when he stepped into his youth that he realised that "history was the most misrepresented topic to a child".

In his case, he developed a liking for the subject by reading books related to history and watching films.

"History having so many dimensions, I envisaged weaving stories of these great civilisations, their glory, and their fall," he says about the idea behind his book, adding this story is a blend of history and contemporary adventure with fictional characters.

"Today, viewing history through timelines and personalities leads to wars. History should be understood as stories of great civilisations that existed on this planet and events that shaped the world," Nair says.

Nair, who has worked with personalities like Korean director Kwon Taek, producer-director Stanley Huntsman and British actor Alex Goldwin, shot across war-torn Gaza Strip for a German film, which entered the 2004 Berlin Film Festival.

Legend has it that Empress Irene, the ruler of Eastern Roman Empire, had to part with an occult stone with the power of fortune that helped Caesar rule the world.

She gave it to Harun, the 19-year-old son of Al Mhadi - the Caliph during his conquest of Byzantium in 782 AD. The stone was lost during the crumbling of the Islamic Caliphate in the 13th century. It is believed to be buried in the lost city of Al Rafika.

In the novel, published by Notion Press, the quest to find the emerald stone reaches a breaking point. There have been three high-profile assassinations (connected by a mysterious golden arrow found next to each body) and the kidnapping of a veteran archaeologist.

A world forum of peacemakers summons an archaeologist, a spy and a historian to take charge. The '3' come together to unearth a deadly macabre of events, which lead to "The Order of the 9 Angels", a neo-Nazi Satanic organisation led by dark lord Nergal.

The '3' set into the mission to stop the stone falling into the hands of the dangerous Nergal.

Want to be around honest people: Kartik Aaryan



NEW DELHI, Nov 19 (PTI): It's been a decade for Kartik Aaryan in the movies and the actor believes it is important for those working in the film industry to have "an eye for honest people".

The Gwalior-born actor, who is considered a rising star in Hindi cinema, made his debut with the buddy comedy "Pyaar Ka PUNCHAMA" in 2011.

"I want to be around honest people who can call me out when I am wrong... people without any agenda. It is important to have an eye for honest people. I'm glad I have friends like that. But I would be wary of the 'gadbad' (shady) people in my life," the 30-year-old actor told PTI in an interview.

For someone who almost got stereotyped courtesy string of rom-coms like "Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweetie", "Luka Chhupi" and "Pati, Patrick Aur Woh", the actor said he has made a "conscious decision" to choose diverse projects.

His latest film "Dhamaka", a Netflix thriller directed by Ram Madhvani, is a step in that direction. "It has been a conscious decision bring something new to the table. I want to work on those films about whom I'll feel good working on when I go back to my house. I would think I really worked hard today, and its result will be good and different from what I've done before," he said.

Be it a horror comedy like "Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2", an action-packed family musical "Shehzada" or romantic thriller "Freddy", his other upcoming films are uniquely different from each other, Aaryan promised.

"I'm blessed that I have all these titles with great filmmakers, who are showing their belief in me. There's so much excitement. I'm thrilled to go from one set to the other."

Working with Madhvani was a dream come true moment for the actor who is a fan of the director, known for films like "Neeraj" and web series "Aarya".

The duo was trying to collaborate for a really long time and finally zeroed in on "Dhamaka", the Hindi adaptation of the 2013 South Korean film "The Terror Live".

"We had a lot of meetings and shared many ideas about the kind of film we'd want to work together on. Both of us liked the film ("The Terror Live") and one day I said let's try this one out," he said.

"I was a fan so I wanted to work with him and fortunately, he also wanted to work with me. It was a mutual thing and that's how 'Dhamaka' happened," he added.

In "Dhamaka", Aaryan plays Arjun Pathak, a cynical ex-TV news anchor, who gets an alarming call on his radio show and sees it as a chance for a career comeback which may cost him his conscience.



GAME DAY! The friends, Cara Delevingne & Selena Gomez enjoy a night out at courtside seating for the Orlando Magic vs. New York Knicks game at Madison Square Garden.

ARIES:

The full moon in Taurus is all kinds of positive for you. We're talking hope and infinite possibilities, as well as new beginnings on both the personal and professional front. Through your passion and perseverance you have reached a certain stage in your life, and it's now time to move to the next level. So, what do you envision for the rest of your life? Think of the next six months as an important period of laying down a solid foundation.

TAURUS:

The full moon and eclipse are in your sign, Taurus, which means you need to be a little more cautious than the others. Everything is likely to be heightened at this time, and ecstasy could make way for melancholy within seconds. It's important that you stay centred at this time; that you become an observer of the ebb and flow that's arising from deep within you. Spending time in solitude is the best way to cope with all the melodrama that is synonymous with la luna's stages.

GEMINI:

Today you're being asked to meditate on the Hermetic principle "As above, so below", which signifies that the mind and the world are merely reflections of another. With the

power vested in you by the Universe, send out an intention about the life you want to create and use your resources to begin taking a step in the right direction. Nothing too drastic, though.

CANCER:

Don't you love how everything just comes together in the end? This holds true for where you are, Cancer. The full moon is bringing with it hope, optimism and positivity. Not to mention, revealing your true path. Yes, this is the opening you have been praying for all along! So, receive what the Universe has in store with openness and surrender.

LEO:

Today, you're being asked to contemplate on Buddhist teacher and nun Pema Chödrön's words, "Letting there be room for not knowing is the most important thing of all. When there's a big disappointment, we don't know if that's the end of the story. It may just be the beginning of a great adventure." That eclipses are synonymous with mayhem is not news to you, Leo. It's just that you didn't expect Satan to play mischief today. The good thing is, you are prepared. You are prepared to become the eye of

the storm and receive major downloads on where it is that you need to go next.

VIRGO:

Yesterday is a thing of the past. Tomorrow is yet to come. Today is all you have. So make it count, Virgo. The full moon is bringing with it new beginnings in the realm of your career and finances. But it is not something that will be handed to you on a silver platter. You will have to hustle hard for what you want and hustle even harder once you've made the opportunity yours.

LIBRA:

There are all kinds of love, Libra. From holiday romances to summer flings, and while you see the allure in all of them you are looking for something long-lasting. So, set your intentions with clarity, wild one, and let the Universe meet you where you are. Something tells you are going to be pleasantly surprised in the weeks to come. There's just one catch, though: you will have to leave your judgments at the door.

SCORPIO:

An aggressive show of strength may make your ego feel good, but it won't help you achieve anything in the real world. Coupled with the full moon energy, it is 100 percent

likely to lead to chaos. So, take a step. Watch both your words and your actions. Most importantly, watch your triggers, Scorpio.

SAGITTARIUS:

This weekend is all about you and your good vibe tribe. For some of you, a birthday, an anniversary, baby shower or a celebration may be on the cards. Others may be planning something more intimate, like a dinner and movie night with your closest crew. On the professional front, it's a time of completion. A grand finale, if you must! The work that you have dedicated to has now reached its final stage and is ready to be shared with the world.

CAPRICORN:

Is the gift of creativity limited to the canvas or is the canvas of our life the true test of our creativity? Something to think about as you sip and swirl your favourite vintage wine. Today, you're being asked to harness your artistic juices to visualise in HD the life you see for yourself and begin to act like you have already achieved the desired intention. Walk like you've made it! Take like you've made it! Begin to embody the changes you're on your way to manifesting. Something tells us, your physical existence

will soon begin to reflect this reality.

AQUARIUS:

Psychologist Carl Jung once said "Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves." Uh-oh! The tea has been spilled, Aquarius. Instead of shying from those feeling of anger and distrust, sit down with them. See what they have to say. When you let go of your resistance, newer layers of your being begin to reveal themselves to. What the full moon is urging you to focus on: book an appointment with your therapist and get down and dirty with the shadow work.

PISCES:

This is the last leg of a very tiring yet fulfilling journey. The hardest part is over, Pisces, and you have successfully overcome all obstacles. While this is a time to reap the rewards of your efforts, it is also a sign of a lot more responsibilities coming your way because you have proved yourself. What the Universe wants you to master at this moment: the art and craft of prioritising. Knowing what can and cannot be outsourcing *and* allowing yourself to ask for the help that is required will help you reach greater heights.