



**FURIOUS WITH DIVISION
BEING CREATED ON THE
BASIS OF RELIGION, SAYS
NASEERUDDIN SHAH**
pg 08

**ACCEPT IT, POLITICS OF AL-
LEGATIONS AND DEFENSIVE
STRATEGIES DO NOT INSPIRE**
pg 04

**GARTH BROOKS JOINS
LINEUP OF ENTERTAINERS
AT BIDEN INAUGURAL**
pg 0 8



SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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COVID-19 vaccination launched in South Sikkim

**BIKASH CHETTRI
NAMCHI, 19 JAN:**

COVID-19 vaccination began in South Sikkim today with 84 health workers of District Hospital Namchi receiving the Covishield vaccine. The vaccination began in the Tuberculosis ward of the District Hospital with the slogan 'When we are safe, nation is safe'.

While the target was to vaccinate 100 health workers on the first day, 84 were vaccinated. On the second day of the vaccination on 20 Jan, the aim is to cover 100 health workers.

Health workers of District Hospital, Namchi including paramedics, ASHA workers and anganwadi workers were vaccinated today.

The chief guest for the launch of COVID-19 vaccination in South Sikkim was South District Zilla Adhakshya, Tshering Dem Bhutia, while the guest of honor was SKM area in-charge, Ganesh Rai, and DC South, M Bharani was present as the special guest.

Before the vaccination began, District Reproductive and Child Health Officer, Dr.



Junita Yonzon addressed the registered vaccine beneficiaries in the conference hall of TB ward of Namchi Hospital. She talked about the 'three room concept' wherein she informed about the waiting room before the vaccination, vaccination room, and the observation room where the vaccinated medical personnel would wait for half an hour after the vaccination.

The record of registered medical staff and their vaccination process will be

uploaded on the COWIN portal, an online database for the program. The health officials informed that 100 more beneficiaries will receive the vaccination on 20 Jan, for which a five-member medical core team has been constituted.

The vaccination team today had senior auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM), Durga Deni Gurung, multipurpose health worker (MPHW) of NDH, Hissey D Sherpa, and ANM, Aruna Rai. The

observation room had DHEO, Tenzing Chettri and Sanjay Rai. The waiting room had PHNO, Bijay Laxmi Rai and Jayanti Sharma. While in the entrance were security guards, Naren Pradhan and Hem Kumar Pradhan for the verification of beneficiaries.

Observers from the World Health Organization, Dr. Hiral Raval from Consultant Health Emergencies, New Delhi was also present to support and monitor the program today.

Cong and 5 parties team up against BJP for Assam polls

GUWAHATI, 19 JAN [PTI]: The Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) on Monday said it will contest the upcoming Assam assembly polls in alliance with five parties to oust the ruling BJP from power in the state.

APCC president Ripun Bora said following discussions with various parties, it has been decided that the Congress will join hands with the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), the CPI, CPI(M), CPI(ML) and the Anchalik Gana Morcha.

"Our doors are open for all anti-BJP parties and we invite the regional parties to join hands with us against our fight to remove the ruling party from power," the Rajya Sabha MP said.

The Congress has taken the lead to oust all communal forces in the best interest of the nation, he said.

One more Covid-related fatality takes Sikkim's toll to 131

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 19 JAN:**

After several days without any Covid-related mortality, Sikkim reported its 131st death due to Novel Coronavirus when a 73-year-old male from Sichey, Gangtok, passed away here at STNM Hospital on Monday night. The death has been registered as a COVID death with comorbidities as the patient was suffering from various ailments.

In his daily health bulletin on Tuesday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia, informed that the 73-year-old passed away at 11:55 PM last night due to a cardiac arrest.

The patient was admitted to STNM Hospital after testing positive for COVID-19 in rapid antigen testing earlier the same day. The patient was suffering from the chronic kidney disease and was on dialysis and also had diabetes and other ailments, it is informed.

Meanwhile, Sikkim registered 14 fresh cases of novel coronavirus in the last 24 hours taking the tally of confirmed cases in the State to 6,052 on Tuesday.

On the other hand, the number of recovered cases of COVID-19 here has further improved to 5,670 with nine more patients recovering on Monday. The number of active cases in the State now stands at 156, of whom two are currently in the ICU facility of the COVID-dedicated STNM Hospital.

Mr Bhutia informed that of the 14 new cases, 12 were reported from East District and two from South Sikkim.



These cases were found during the testing of 247 samples on Monday, of which 12 were picked up in RT-PCR testing of 194 samples and two from rapid antigen testing of 36 samples.

Among the new cases reported from in and around the capital area are three persons from Development Area, three from Sichey, one from Gairi Gaon-Tadong and one from Maney Gaon, Lower Shyari.

Likewise, two persons from Marchak, one from Aho and one from Sumin Lingzey in East District and one from Melli Dara and one from Sumbuk in South District were also found positive for COVID-19, it is informed.

Mr Bhutia further informed that after Aayush Hospital at the STNM hospital complex, COVID vaccination was also launched at Namchi District Hospital in South District and at Singtam District Hospital in East District on Tuesday.

He informs that a total of 238 health workers, including 85 health workers at Namchi District Hospital and 75 health workers at Singtam District Hospital were vaccinated today.

Thus far, 358 health workers have been vaccinated in the State.

Assam Orders Probe After Covid Vaccine Found Frozen In Storage

GUWAHATI, 19 JAN [NDTV]:

The Assam Health Department has decided to send a batch of 100 vials of Covishield containing 1,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to a laboratory after this batch was found frozen in the vaccine storage unit of Silchar Medical College in the state's Cahchar district.

A notice has been sent to the medical college over alleged improper storage of the vaccine made by the

Serum Institute of India, an official said.

The Health Department has not said this batch of vaccine has been wasted as it will wait for the report of the laboratory to check its potential efficacy.

The incident happened on Saturday, the first day of the vaccination drive across India.

According to the guidelines of the Pune-based Serum Institute, the vaccine needs to be



kept at a temperature between 2 and 8 degree Celsius.

According to Assam's cold chain system, the vaccines are being transported

and kept stored in ice-lined refrigerators as specified by the universal immunisation programme for transporting and storing any vaccine.

These refrigerators, due to an extra lining of dry ice, continue to maintain the required temperature even if there is no power supply for a long time.

"An investigation has been initiated to see where the lapse had taken place. There are chances of the vaccine getting frozen while being carried to the hospital or while kept stored in the hospital," a senior health department official said.

Employees protest at Thiruvananthapuram Airport against takeover by Adani Group

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 19 JAN [PTI]: Employees of the Thiruvananthapuram international airport raised slogans and protested in front of the office of the Director today against the takeover of the airport by the Adani Group.

The protest was held hours after the Adani Group signed concession agreements in Delhi today with the Airports Authority of India (AAI) for the management, operations and development of the Thiruvananthapuram, Guwahati, Jaipur airports.

The employees said their Special Leave Petition is pending in the Supreme court and wanted to know the reason for the rush in signing the agreement by the AAI.

"Now the government has decided to handover the airport to Adani. Now, what about the employees? Will they be sold to Adani as well? What if the employees, who were recruited by the Airports Authority of India are asked to work under Adani and they refuse?" they asked.

"There is no reason to sell this airport, but just to help the businessman. AAI has been giving crores of tax to the Government of India (GoI)," they said.

Delhi and Mumbai are the major source of income for the AAI.

"However, the private management there, with the backing of a court order, are not sharing their income with the GoI, citing COVID-19 pandemic. What if other airports also do the same?" they asked.

Besides the three airports, the Centre had in February 2019 privatised the Lucknow, Ahmedabad and Mangaluru airports.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan had written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi asking the Centre to reconsider its decision.

Centre urges frontline workers not to refuse vaccines as targets missed

NEW DELHI/ BHUBANESWAR, 18 JAN (REUTERS): India appealed to frontline workers on Tuesday not to refuse vaccines for COVID-19, after almost all states failed to meet their targets in the first few days of one of the world's biggest immunisation campaigns.

The country has so far vaccinated 631,417 frontline workers with two shots manufactured locally, one developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca, and another developed at home by Bharat Biotech in partnership with the state-run India Council of Medical Research.

The programme started on Saturday, with 30 million healthcare and other front-line workers first in the queue.

The health ministry said India inoculated more people on its first day than the United States, Britain and France did. But it said it expected a greater number of volunteers to come forward, especially in major states like Tamil Nadu and Punjab that are lagging behind other states.

Vinod K. Paul, who heads a government committee on vaccine strategy, told a news conference that health workers who failed to take vaccine doses that had been set aside for them were not fulfilling their "societal responsibility".

"Please understand the whole world is clamouring for vaccines," he said. "If our healthcare workers, our doctors

and nurses, if they are declining to take it, I feel sorry," he said. "I plead with them, on behalf of the government, because we don't know what shape this pandemic will take going forward."

Some doctors have expressed doubt about the Bharat Biotech vaccine, which was given approval for emergency use without efficacy data from late-stage clinical trials. The government says it is safe and effective. Paul said he had received his own shot of it on the first day.

India, the world's biggest vaccine maker, plans to start exporting shots as early as Wednesday.

Cases have come down in recent months. On Tuesday India reported 10,064 infections, the lowest in seven months, taking the total to 10.58 million. Deaths rose by an eight-month low figure of 137, taking the overall tally to 152,556.



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Fresh lot of rapid information

Eco-friendly waiting shed inaugurated at Kameray



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 19 JAN:

An eco-friendly waiting shed built in the village of Kameray under BudangKameray GPU in Rhenock Constituency in East Sikkim was inaugurated by Cultural Affairs Minister, Samdup Lepcha, today, a press release informs. The foundation stone of the welcome gate was also laid on the occasion.

Chairman of STCS cum Area MLA, Bishnu Kumar Khatiwadawas present as special guest of the program. Chairman, Santosh Kumar Pradhan, SDM Rangpo, Himmat Rai, Sunrise Academy Director, DB Chhetri, Head of School, Kailash Sharma, Ward Panchayat member, CP Bhattacharai, among others were specially present in this

one-day function.

It is informed that the eco-friendly waiting shed has been constructed by BhupalBaraily while welcome gate is going to be constructed by SKM Scheduled Caste Wing State Level president, JagdishCinturi.

On the day, the officials along with the Minister visited the bee keeping training centre of Khem Kumar Bhattacharai. Minister Lepcha assured to extend all possible support on behalf of the department for this centre.

The Minister also visited CP Bhattacharai's Organic Farm.

Like in Gangtok, Kameray village will also install sound system along the road. The Minister also assured to fulfil all the demands placed by the villagers in a phased manner.

Taloja prison hospital lacks infra to treat Varavara Rao, activist's lawyer tells court

MUMBAI, 19 JAN [PTI]: The counsel for poet-activist Varavara Rao, who is an accused in the Elgar Parishad case and is currently admitted in a private hospital in Mumbai, today requested the Bombay High Court to grant him bail on medical grounds, saying the Taloja Prison hospital in Navi Mumbai lacks adequate infrastructure to treat him.

Senior advocate Anand Grover told a bench of Justices SS Shinde and Manish Pitale that the Taloja prison where Varavara Rao was lodged as an undertrial does not have the necessary infrastructure to provide proper medical care to him.

Mr Rao, 81, is currently admitted in Nanavati Hospital in Mumbai. His latest medical report from the hospital says that he is "hemodynamically stable and fit for discharge", Anand Grover told the high court.

"However, once discharged and shifted to the Taloja prison, Mr Rao will require constant monitoring and medical attention, for which the infrastructure at the Taloja prison hospital will be inadequate," Mr Grover said.

Anand Grover said Varavara Rao was suffering from kidney failure and other ailments for which he was being administered around 20 different medicines a day when he was admitted at the Taloja prison hospital.

These medicines were for serious health issues like heart ailments, blood pressure, and recurring delirium with dementia-like symptoms, he said, adding they included blood thinner and anti-depressants.

Anand Grover urged the high court to let Varavara Rao be with his family to recover fully

and be fit to face trial in the case.

"The Taloja prison hospital is not equipped to monitor him. There are structural problems. And we do not want the public exchequer to be used for this (Mr Rao's treatment) always, especially when there are two doctors in his house. His daughter and son-in-law are doctors," Mr Grover told the court.

He said when Mr Rao was admitted to the government-run JJ hospital in Mumbai last year, he was not taken care of "properly", and hence he had to be admitted to Nanavati Hospital.

The bench, however, intervened saying state-run JJ Hospital and St. George Hospital are considered to be among "the best hospitals" with competent doctors.

"However with the influx of patients amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the hospital must have been overwhelmed," the bench said. "Many citizens, including a former Chief Justice of this court, preferred state and civic run hospitals like JJ and St George over private hospitals," the high court said.

Anand Grover further submitted that Mr Rao was accused in 24 cases, and that he was acquitted in all of them.

"He is willing to stand trial tomorrow (in the present case). But that will not be fair. He suffers from a neurological problem. If he is allowed to be with his family, he will be in a position to stand for trial," he said.

National Investigation Agency's (NIA) counsel Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Anil Singh told the bench that Mr Rao has recovered enough to be discharged from the private hospital and be shifted to the Taloja prison.

Pakki Gaon residents face water shortage

RUDRA KAUSHIK

GVALSHING, 19 JAN:

Some residents of Pakki Gaon under Malbasey GPU of Soreng Chyakhung constituency in West Sikkim have complained of acute shortage in drinking water supply, something that has reportedly affected them for the past two weeks.

As per the villagers, there is shortage in water supply provided through the Rural Development Department to 08-10 households of Pakki

Gaon.

They have also alleged ineptitude and even ill-treatment by the concerned department.

The villagers further shared that they were using water supplied from Gumba Dara but that dried up following which they were using water leaking or overflowing from the tank of Chumbung supply line but that has been repaired cutting them off from the only source of water.

The villagers said

that they have placed their grievances several times to the concerned department and Block Administrative Centre but the grievances are yet to be redressed.

Sapana Rai, panchayat president of Malbasey GPU confirmed that 8 to 10 households of Pakki Gaon are facing acute water supply shortage and added that the tank supplying water to Pakki Gaon had dried up and the villagers were dependent upon water

leaking from the tank of Chumbung line.

She added that the leakage in the tank of Chumbung line was repaired stopping the water supply to the villagers who were using that water.

Ms Rai further informs that a few households that have water tanks installed are using stored water but those who don't are compelled to borrow water from neighbours.

"Shortage of water

being faced by villagers should be resolved so that their suffering ends at the earliest," she said.

The villagers have requested the concerned department to direct the employees tasked to look after water supply to do their job responsibly and devoid of any partiality. They have further demanded that drinking water crisis being faced by them be resolved within a week to stop further escalation of the problem.

NTL Sr Sec School participates in inter-school food stall contest

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 JAN:

NayanTshering Lepcha Senior Secondary School, Vok, South Sikkim participated in a three-day inter school food stall competition held from 15-17 Jan. The competition is being held as part of the "AatmaNirbhar Sikkim" program, a joint initiative of District Administration, Namchi and Nehru Yuva Kendra.

A press release informs that the main focus of the school while looking at the menu was to promote traditional food with the motto "Healthy Food For Healthy Life" during the competition. The menu included Wachipa,



Khurukhu (buckwheat roll filled with saag and churpi), Fried Simaltarul with achar), Herbal tea/Walnut Tea, Aloodum etc.

The ten students were guided by two nodal teachers of the

school Preeti Gupta and PempaPhuti Bhutia and worked under the support of their staff and School In-charge, Abel Targain.

The initial investment required to set up the food stall is completely

borne by the students with each student contributing Rs 500 and thus each team having initial capital of Rs.5000. The school operated the food stalls at Namchi Central Park for three days to generate revenue

so as to learn the concept of running a business.

The students have been instructed to maintain proper account books, revenue & expenditure statements and purchase receipts so that they learn the basics of accounting also in the process.

These statements and receipts would also be used by the jury to verify the profit calculation of each team and reconfirm it with the actual cash balance.

Proper COVID-19 protocol was followed so as to inculcate a sense of cleanliness and hygiene among them.

The result is to be announced on 26Jan, 2021.

116 more test positive for COVID-19 in Uttarakhand

DEHRADUN, JAN 19 (PTI):

Uttarakhand's COVID-19 caseload rose to 95,039 on Tuesday with 116 more people testing positive for coronavirus, while two more infected patients died, taking the toll to 1,619, officials said.

Of the new infections, Dehradun district reported the highest number of 55 cases, Nainital 28, Almora 11, Uttarkashi 8, Haridwar 7, Pithoragarh 4, while Rudraprayag, Udham Singh Nagar and Bageshwar witnessed one each, a state health department bulletin here said.

No positive cases were detected in four districts of Chamoli, Champawat, Pauri and Tehri.

A total of 90,133 infected people have recuperated so far, 1,295 have migrated out of the state and 1,992 are under treatment, it said. Meanwhile, 1,882 healthcare workers were administered Covishield shots on Tuesday taking the total number of people vaccinated in the state so far to 6,119.

Tribhuvan International Airport sees lowest passenger traffic since 2003

SANGAM PRASAIN

KATHMANDU, 19 JAN

[KATHMANDUPOST]: International passenger traffic at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport in 2020 fell to its lowest level since 2003, illustrating Covid-19's devastating impact on air travel.

According to airport statistics, 1.10 million international travellers passed through Tribhuvan International, a 73.29 percent plunge from the previous year. This translates into a loss of 3.03 million passengers in one year.

Aircraft movements also dropped to a 17-year low of 10,247 takeoffs and landings, representing a steep 68.41 percent fall from the year before.

On March 12 last year, one day after the World Health Organisation declared the Covid-19 outbreak a pandemic and urged countries to take precautionary measures, the Nepal government decided to temporarily stop issuing on-arrival tourist visas to nationals of all countries.

It also barred all spring mountaineering expeditions, including attempts on Everest. On March 24, Nepal imposed a complete lockdown.

Passenger flow in 2020 was close to the 2003 figure when 1 million people travelled through TIA, according to the statistics of the airport.

Traffic has dropped only twice since 2003—in 2015 when the country was struck by a killer earthquake, and

again in 2019 when airport operating hours were shortened for runway and taxiway maintenance during the peak travel season.

From April to August 2019, the runway was closed for renovation for 10 hours daily from 10 pm to 8 am the next day. The renovation of the 3,050-metre runway was done in the middle of the tourist high season in Nepal.

Again, from September to December, the second peak season, the airport was closed for 7 hours daily—from 11:30 pm to 6:30 am the next day.

In 2020 when the coronavirus paralysed the country along with the rest of the world, TIA was completely shut down from March to July, except for repatriation and emergency flights.

Officials said the airport incurred a loss of Rs4.50 billion due to reduced passenger numbers in the last fiscal year ended mid-July 2020.

"In the previous fiscal year 2018-19, the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal earned revenues totalling Rs9 billion from TIA. In the last fiscal year 2019-20, revenues dropped 50 percent to Rs4.50 billion," said Jagannath Niraula, finance director at the civil aviation body.

The airport had anticipated revenues to climb to Rs10.50 billion this fiscal year following the launch of the Visit Nepal 2020 promotional campaign

and resultant higher passenger traffic.

"But losses this fiscal year are expected to be bigger than in the last fiscal year," said Niraula.

The entire tourism industry took a direct hit from virus-triggered flight and passenger restrictions. The Nepal Tourism Board saw its revenues evaporate as visitors stopped coming.

The country's tourism promotional body collects a tourist service fee of Rs1,130 from each departing foreign passenger at TIA, which piles up to around Rs1.30 billion annually.

"It was a historic slump in passenger numbers last year. We don't see passengers returning to pre-Covid levels this year," said Pratap Babu Tiwari, general manager at Tribhuvan International Airport.

An average of 11,338 international travellers used to pass through the airport daily before Covid-19. "The daily average passenger numbers have dropped to 3,000 now," said Tiwari.

"There are few inbound tourists and outbound students and migrant workers," he said. "However, we are hoping that traveller movement will increase slightly in mid-2021 when enough people have been vaccinated."

A breakdown by airline shows that Nepal Airlines saw the highest passenger carriage in 2019. The national flag carrier,

however, witnessed a 62.77 percent drop in passenger numbers last year when it flew 273,905 passengers.

Doha-based Qatar Airways took the second spot, flying 150,982 passengers, down 67.32 percent from 2019.

Nepali private carrier Himalaya Airlines jumped to the third place from the seventh place with 90,044 passengers, despite recording a 48.95 percent fall in passenger numbers.

Dubai-based low-cost carrier saw its passenger carriage drop 73.63 percent, but still managed to retain its spot among the top four. The airline flew 72,422 passengers in 2020.

Another low-cost carrier Air Arabia flew 68,238 passengers last year, down 70.19 percent. India's low-cost carrier Indigo Air saw its passenger number drop by 70.78 percent. It flew 46,926 passengers.

India's flag carrier Air India saw the strongest passenger drop. The airline flew 43,610 passengers in 2020, down 82.90 percent.

On December 17, flights between Kathmandu and New Delhi, India resumed under the air bubble agreement after a nine-month break.

China Southern Airlines had made it to the top five in terms of passenger carriage to Nepal for the first time in 2019 by flying 200,003 passengers. But in 2020, the figure dropped 90 percent to 20,776 passengers.

ANTHYESTI KRIYA



The Anthyesthi Kriya of late Shri Man Bahadur Chhettri (Roka) who left for heavenly abode on 10th January 2021 falls on 22nd January 2021 (Friday).

All relatives, family, friends and well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence Lower Samdur, Ranipool, East Sikkim. We also express our gratitude to all those who stood by us during our time of bereavement.

Bereaved Families:

Bishnu Maya Chhettri Roka (wife)

Hem Bdr Chhettri (son), Srijana Chhettri (daughter-in-law),

Pratima Chhettri (daughter), Suraj Sapkota (son-in-law),

Sony Chhettri (daughter), Bhakta Bdr Roka (brother), Kharka Bdr Roka (brother), Tara Bdr Roka (brother), Indra Bdr Roka (brother)

and entire Roka family.

Contact- 9609906181, 9775445161, 8670765399

ANTHEYSTHI KRIYA



The 13 day Anthyesthi Kriya of Late DK Khati (Dil Kumar Khati) ex Chairman, S/o Lt. Padam Singh Khati, R/o Pavitra Bhawan.Opposite Daffodils School, Development Area, Gangtok, East Sikkim. DOB - 5th June 1937 left for his heavenly abode on 13th

January 2021 falls on 25th January 2021 at our residence Pavitra Bhawan, opposite Daffodils school at Development area. All family friends and well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the deceased. We also take this opportunity to thank all those who stood by us during our time of bereavement.

Karuna Khati (Daughter).

Roshan Khati (Son).

Dhiraj Khati (Son).

Srijana Khati (Daughter)

Phone: 9434137305/9734009999

JUS to publish bilingual magazine

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 19 JAN:

Executive members of the Journalist Union of Sikkim (JUS) convened a review meeting today at its office at DPH road to discuss details of a bilingual (Nepali & English) magazine which will be published by JUS. The meeting was presided by president JUS, BhimRawat.

A press release informs that the meeting constituted an editorial board headed by Senior Journalist BijoyGurung for English language and BhimRawat/PradeepLohagun for Nepali language. The meeting also decided that the magazine will



highlight the problems faced by reporters during the Covid-19 pandemic.

It was also decided that the magazine will be a compilation of articles

from reporters sharing their experiences while reporting during the pandemic. There will also be guest columns by eminent writers and

senior journalists.

Further, the meeting also decided that JUS will organise mega poetry event in order to understand and

appreciate the world around us through poetry.

Journalist Union of Sikkim (JUS) is an independent body for working journalists of Sikkim. The JUS will fight to safeguard the freedom of the press, defeating attacks on journalists and free speech; and work for the welfare of journalists. JUS is empanelled with the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) which is the apex body and only representative organisation of journalists in India. It has its affiliates in almost all the States and Union Territories.

CBI seizes Rs 2.04 Cr from Delhi hotel in railway bribery case



NEW DELHI, 19 JAN [PTI]: The CBI has seized an additional Rs. 2.04 crore hidden in a private hotel in South Delhi by the executives of ABCI Infrastructure Pvt Ltd, accused in a bribery case involving senior officials of Northeast Frontier Railways, officials said Tuesday.

In its biggest trap case, the agency had arrested Chief Administrative Officer Mahender Singh Chauhan of NFR on Sunday and other senior officials in the case involving a bribe of Rs. one crore, they said.

So far, Rs. 4.43 crore (approx) have been recovered, the CBI said.

"It was found during further searches at the premises of a private firm (allegedly involved in the said case) located at Kailash Colony, New Delhi that certain items were removed and concealed at another place in Delhi.

"After a thorough search, Rs. 2.04 crore (approx.) cash along with other items were seized from the said place for further investigation," CBI Spokesperson RC Joshi said in a statement.

During earlier searches at 26 locations, including Delhi,

Uttarakhand, Assam, Tripura and West Bengal, a total amount of Rs. 2.39 crore (approx) was recovered, he said.

"This includes an alleged bribe of Rs. one crore, which exchanged hands and is stated to be one of the biggest bribe money trapped.

"Besides this, jewellery and property documents were recovered from the locations of the accused. Thus, so far, Rs. 4.43 crore (approx.) have been recovered," the statement said.

The case pertains to Rs. one crore allegedly sought by 58-year old Chauhan to extend favours to ABCI Infrastructure in awarding the contracts, processing of subsequent bills, release of payments etc. by the public functionaries.

The director of the accused company, Pawan Baid, had allegedly sent the bribe money to one of his employees Bhupendra Rawat in Delhi through a hawala racket. It was allegedly taken by Rawat to Dehradun where Chauhan's brother-in-law Indra Singh received it.

The agency had caught Rawat and Singh while bribe was being

exchanged, they said.

The CBI has alleged that the accused railway officials were regularly getting huge payouts for favouring the company.

"It was also alleged that some senior public functionaries of North East Frontier Railways were involved in corrupt practices with private contractors for the ongoing projects in the North East Frontier Railways," Mr Joshi said in a statement.

Baid was in connection with various ongoing projects in the Northeast Frontier region.

The agency has arrested Chauhan, Singh, Deputy Chief Engineer Hem Chand Borah, Assistant Executive Engineer Laxmi Kant Verma and Rawat.

The agency will bring all the arrested accused to Delhi for questioning, Mr Joshi said.

Besides the arrested accused, the CBI has also booked the company and its director Baid in the case under the IPC section related to criminal conspiracy and provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act pertaining to bribery.

Chief Justice responds to criticism of Farm Laws committee

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN [NDTV]: The Chief Justice of India, SA Bobde, today responded to criticism of the Supreme Court committee to negotiate a solution to the farmer protests and noted what he called a "peculiar lack of comprehension" about the constitution of such panels.

In a case related to guidelines on removing inadequacies in criminal trials, the Chief Justice said: "There is a misunderstanding we are noticing. If you appoint a committee and if they had taken a view it does not mean they should not

be in the committee."

Justice Bobde questioned why views expressed in the past disqualified any member.

"It is okay you have taken a view and you are entitled to change your view. How is this a disqualification? Just because a person has expressed a view on the matter, that is not a disqualification to be a member of committee. Generally, there is a peculiar lack of comprehension about constitution of a committee. They are not judges," said the Chief Justice.

This is the first reaction from the Supreme Court on the controversy over its committee of experts to negotiate with thousands of farmers protesting outside Delhi against three central laws.

Last week, the Supreme Court paused the implementation of the laws and said the committee would try and tackle the farmers' demands, given that the Centre had failed to resolve the crisis after several meetings.

All four names suggested for the

panel were opposed by farmers' unions - and even opposition parties like the Congress -- who said the members had expressed views that favoured the farm laws and were pro-government.

One of the members, Bhupinder Singh Mann of the Bharatiya Kisan Union, opted out saying he did not wish to "compromise farmers' interests".

"As a farmer myself and a Union leader, in view of the prevailing sentiments and apprehensions amongst farm unions and the

public in general, I am ready to sacrifice any position offered or given to me so as not to compromise the interests of Punjab and farmers of the country," Mr Mann said.

Besides Mr Mann, the committee included Pramod Kumar Joshi, an agricultural economist; Ashok Gulati, agricultural economist and former chairman of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices and Anil Ghanwat, the chief of Shetkari Sanghatana.

India plans foreign investment rule changes that could hit Amazon

ADITYA KALRA & KRISHNA N DAS NEW DELHI, 19 JAN (REUTERS): India is considering revising its foreign investment rules for e-commerce, three sources and a government spokesman told Reuters, a move that could compel players, including Amazon.com Inc, to restructure their ties with some major sellers.

The government discussions coincide with a growing number of complaints from India's bricks-and-mortar retailers, which have for years accused Amazon and Walmart Inc-controlled Flipkart of creating complex structures to bypass federal rules, allegations the U.S. companies deny.

India only allows foreign e-commerce players to operate as a marketplace to connect buyers and sellers. It prohibits them from holding inventories of goods and directly selling them on their platforms.

Amazon and Walmart's Flipkart were last hit in Dec. 2018 by investment rule changes that barred foreign e-commerce players from offering products from sellers in which they have an equity stake.

Now, the government is considering adjusting some provisions to prevent those arrangements, even if the e-commerce firm holds an indirect stake in a seller through its parent, three sources said. The sources asked not to be named because the discussions are private.

The changes could hurt Amazon as it holds indirect equity stakes in two of its biggest online sellers in India.

Amazon said e-commerce created "huge job opportunities" and is a significant contributor to economic growth. "Any major alterations" to the policy will adversely impact small- and medium-sized businesses, it said in an emailed statement.

Walmart and Flipkart did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Yogesh Baweja, the spokesman for the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, which is working on the issue, confirmed to Reuters any changes will be announced through a so-called "press note," which contains foreign direct investment rules. He did not give details.

"It's a work in progress," Baweja said,

adding an internal meeting on the subject last took place about a month ago.

"Of course Amazon's a big player so whatever advice, whatever suggestions, whatever recommendations they make, they are also given due consideration."

FRAYED TIES
The 2018 rules forced Amazon and Flipkart to rework their business structures and soured relations between India and the United States, as Washington said the policy change favoured local e-tailers over U.S. ones.

India's e-commerce retail market is seen growing to \$200 billion a year by 2026, from \$30 billion in 2019, the country's investment promotion agency Invest India estimates.

Domestic traders have been unhappy about the growth. They see foreign e-commerce businesses as a threat to their livelihoods and accuse them of unfair business practices that use steep discounts to target rapid growth. The companies deny they are acting unfairly.

"The way the government is thinking is that marketplaces are not doing what they

are supposed to do. The government wants to tinker with the nuts and bolts of the policy," said one of the sources who is familiar with the talks on the policy changes.

L I M I T I N G WHOLESALE TIES

India's trade minister Piyush Goyal has been critical of e-commerce companies in private meetings and told them to follow all laws in letter and spirit, Reuters has previously reported.

In the face of growing trader complaints and an antitrust investigation, Goyal last year said Amazon was not doing "a great favour to India" by making fresh investments.

Among other changes, the government is considering changes that would effectively prohibit online sales by a seller who purchases goods from the e-commerce entity or its group firm, and then sells them on the entity's websites, two of the sources said.

Under existing rules, a seller is free to buy up to 25% of its inventory from the e-commerce entity's wholesale or another unit and then sell them on the e-commerce website.

A boom in e-commerce in India

accelerated last year when the COVID-19 pandemic drove more shoppers online. Flipkart, in which Walmart invested \$16 billion in 2018, and Amazon are among the top two players.

"E-commerce has already made its mark for itself in the country, particularly during COVID-19," Commerce Ministry's Baweja said. "They are bound to grow and a conducive environment should be there, which is good for the brick-and-mortar as well as e-commerce."

Rahul Gandhi attacks PM on reports of Chinese village in Arunachal

NEW DELHI, JAN 19 (PTI): Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the issue of national security after reports that China has built a village in Arunachal Pradesh.

"Remember his promise - '??? ??? ????? ????? ?????' (Will not let the country bow)," Gandhi said on Twitter as he posted a link of a news report about

the alleged "Chinese village".

Congress leader Randeep Surjewala also slammed the prime minister on the matter.

"Modiji where is that 56-inch chest," he asked on Twitter.

In a cautious reaction to the reports, India had on Monday said it keeps a constant watch on all developments having a bearing on the country's security,

and takes necessary measures to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Congress leader P Chidambaram had on Monday demanded answers from the government on the issue, alleging that BJP MP Tapir Gao has claimed that China has built a 100-house village in the "disputed area" deep into Arunachal Pradesh.

He said if the

allegation made out by the BJP MP is true, will the government again give a clean chit to China or will blame the previous governments for it.

"Mr Tapir Gao MP, belonging to BJP, has alleged that deep into Arunachal Pradesh, in a 'disputed area' within Indian territory, the Chinese have built a 100-house village, a bazaar and a two-lane road in the last year.

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Build Organisational Muscle

Accept it, politics of allegations and defensive strategies do not inspire

There has been a noticeable spike in the activities of political parties in the State. This is a healthy sign since one suspected that parties would go into a slump in the wake of elections and the pandemic. What is not so encouraging though is that there does not appear to be any change in the manner in how ‘politics’ is approached. All parties, from the ruling to those in the Opposition, continue to preach among the converted or remaining limited to tokenisms, leading one to surmise that the ‘meetings’ are aimed more to put together a press release and remain in news or get noticed than promote an ideology or, most importantly, expand constituencies. Sikkim has consistently proven that political ambitions cannot come to fruition with this approach. Only lazy politicians convince themselves that they can ride into relevance on the wings of anti-incumbency, refusing to realize that people have seen through such opportunism. Similarly, the ruling segment too cannot rest easy on the lack of viable alternatives because Sikkim has evolved and not set a new precedence of actually voting a party out of office.

While politicians, their parties and their sidekicks can pursue whatever strategy catches their whim, it would serve the people well if their leaders and parties changed track to engage with ideology instead of just echoing claims and allegations. People deserve to know future plans, not past glories or past hurts. Lose the people’s interest, and it will not take much to steal away their votes and loyalties too; at least this possibility should serve as a motivator for parties to get earnest about their outreach programmes.

For further confirmation, take a look at what’s happening around the world. The rise of right-wing nationalists in the wake of capitalism’s hiccups should have made us wonder at the incongruity of the switch that transpired. Yes, when globalization failed, those who promoted parochial politics suddenly found themselves becoming more relevant. But it would not have been such a cakewalk for them had the established players and the other alternative – the Left – not become so distanced from the people. They had lost their grassroots organizational presence, and when resentment grew, the vacuum was filled by right-wing ideologues who had been working tirelessly through the years, fanning fears and stoking insecurities even as they were being ridiculed or demonized. Take Trump’s arrival [and now thankfully, departure as well] in USA, it is not as simplistic as people wanting an outlier, and obviously owes a lot to the belligerence of the Tea-Party caucus which had set up the frustrations which he cashed in on. At the Centre, Modi’s performance in 2014 and staggering success in 2019 are obviously not only because the people were fed-up with UPA-II, but thanks also largely to the nearly a decade of work put in by RSS shakhas across the country. Bengal’s Mamata is another example of years of work on the field setting her up to seize the moment when one was offered.

All of the changes mentioned above were made possible by the organizational muscles which were exercised through the lean (non-election) years to be able to flex with such impressive results when required.

Grassroots organization should hence be the main focus of all parties in Sikkim. They need to accept that defensive fears and strategies based on allegations will not work because these are not approaches which motivate people, and if anything, deflate optimism. To motivate, one needs to share a vision, and for a vision to inspire, it needs to reach a wider audience, something that only a strong organizational set-up can deliver.

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Trump Sees Power as Private Property – a Habit Shared by Autocrats Throughout the Ages

FERNANDA G NICOLA & GÜNTHER FRANKENBERG
THECONVERSATION.COM

Shortly before crowds of his supporters stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6, Donald Trump implored them to “take back our country.” His words echoed a long history of authoritarians who have attempted to privatize power and turn it into personal property.

Taking back what is yours would not, by this logic, be trespassing, terrorism or treason. Instead, it is merely setting things right. By inciting a predominantly white crowd to lay siege to an institution that was ratifying what they had been told was a “stolen” election, Trump was trying to preserve his presidency as if it were private property – his to keep, or give away.

TURNING POWER INTO PROPERTY

As scholars of comparative authoritarianism, we have come to learn that this is nothing new. History offers plenty of egregious examples of autocrats who treated their office and powers as their private property. Louis XIV, king of France, did not know how to distinguish between himself and the state. According to the legend, the “Sun King” said that he was the state or, modified in property terms, that the state belonged to him.

Whether autocrats come to office by chance of birth, are elected or usurp the leadership of the state, they almost habitually succumb to the temptation to regard their position not as a temporary loan, but as capital they can dispose like landlords. The way autocrats deal with tenure, succession and state assets reveals how they treat political power as private property.

Once elected, fairly or after manipulation, autocrats tend to wrench power from a legitimate government and, if necessary,

remove the time limits on their term of office.

In the case of China’s Xi Jinping, this was achieved through cosmetic constitutional changes handled by compliant party cadres. Referendums, marred by intimidation and violence, had the same result of extending the tenures of Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus, Abdelaziz Bouteflika in Algeria and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela.

Brazen despots, such as Uzbekistan’s former leader Islam Karimov, simply disregard a constitutional term limit. Vladimir Putin sidestepped it by first setting up a stooge, Dmitry Medvedev, before faking a fresh start after manipulating the constitution.

When it comes to Trump, he dealt with the looming end of his term of power through denial. The lost election forced him to deny it happened, instead claiming a landslide victory. Against all evidence, Trump decried what he claimed was electoral fraud, insisted on repeated recounts and filed a flurry of lawsuits without merit.

But even Trump-appointed Supreme Court justices could not defend his claims to what he believed to be his own: the presidency. Trump’s last call to manufacture facts that supported his denial went out to Georgia’s secretary of state to find over 11,780 votes.

INHERITANCE OF POWER

Following the example of hereditary monarchies, autocrats have a penchant for controlling the transfer of political office as property. Acting as if they “own” the power justifies the selection and anointing of an heir. It also ensures the tacit amnesty of any crime they may have committed by putting in place someone likely to absolve them and the gentle continuity of authoritarian rule to continue their legacy.

Hardcore versions of this include the Kim dynasty in North Korea and the Assad family clan in Syria, in which the authoritarians guarantee continuity through their offspring. Elsewhere, it is wives – for instance Eva Perón in Argentina and Imelda Marcos in the Philippines, who became powerful national figures utilizing the base of support that their spouses had amassed.

Meanwhile for others it is friends, such as Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela, who was a Chavez loyalist, or personal physicians, such as the murderous François “Papa Doc” Duvalier in Haiti, who become confidants to ruling strongman leaders and then heirs to the throne.

Under Soviet-style communism, the party first takes the place of power as the legitimate heir to ensure unbroken continuity.

Succession tends to be more difficult where reasonably reliable elections carry the risk of expropriating the holder of power.

Trump may have intended to eliminate this risk by combining denial of the results with court action, the spread of false narratives and the incitement to insurrection of his followers.

APPROPRIATION OF PUBLIC PROPERTY

Political authoritarianism pays off, history has shown, especially for those who ruthlessly commercialize their position of power. They assume that by virtue of their office they are entitled to the assets of the state, or rather society, for private use.

Authoritarian leaders have tended to disdain generating a regular income, so their hidden balance sheets read much like those of operational networks of organized crime specializing in theft, embezzlement, fraud and bribery. Latter-day autocrats conceal, as best they can, the sources of their

wealth or refuse to pay taxes. Hitler had his tax debt waved in 1935 and then declared that paying taxes was incompatible with the political office of the Führer. Putin’s declared income compares to that of a mid-level Russian bureaucrat, while in reality, by conservative estimate, his assets amount to over US\$200 billion. It has remained unclear until today how former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi increased his already considerable wealth during his four terms. He was convicted of tax evasion and balance-sheet fraud. Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet spread his and his family’s ill-gotten liquid assets in over 100 accounts in the U.S. alone.

Trump broke with the practice of presidential candidates and presidents by persistently refusing to disclose his tax returns, a refusal his lawyers justified before the Supreme Court on the grounds of “irreparable harm.” Trump also took advantage of his office to enrich family members by providing them with business opportunities. At a cost to U.S. taxpayers, the Trump company charged the Secret Service for rooms at Trump properties. The entrepreneur-entertainer has seemingly glorified in the monetary benefits of his presidency with notions that he embodies “the Great” America.

It remains to be seen whether U.S. democracy will have the strength to expropriate ex-President Trump, take away from him the perks – honor, trust and profit – of the presidency and teach whoever may follow the difference between private and public property.

[Fernanda G Nicola is Professor of Law, American University;

Günter Frankenberg is Professor of Public Law, Legal Philosophy and Comparative Law, Goethe University Frankfurt am Main]

Joggers and cyclists should wear masks – here’s why

TRISH GREENHALGH
THECONVERSATION.COM

England is deep into its third lockdown, yet the daily tally of new COVID cases and deaths remains sickeningly high. As Chris Whitty, the country’s chief medical officer, said recently, more needs to be done to bring the pandemic under control.

Masks, which when worn correctly are highly effective in reducing transmission, are already compulsory in indoor public places in the UK. There is talk of making them mandatory in some outdoor settings, as is currently the case in Spain. Perhaps the UK should follow France and require people who are jogging or cycling to wear masks if they are unable to maintain a physical distance from pedestrians.

There are many arguments against such a measure. The risk of transmitting coronavirus outdoors is an order of magnitude less than indoors, according to a study that has yet to be published in a scientific journal. Exercising outdoors is one of the few freedoms people in England still have. When jogging or cycling, contacts tend to be rare and fleeting, so would not meet the UK’s official definition of a “close contact” for which one needs to spend 15 minutes closer than two metres – though this time period can now be notched up in a series of shorter encounters throughout a day.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is adamant that: “People should NOT wear masks when exercising, as masks may reduce the ability to breathe comfortably”; and “Sweat can make the mask become wet more quickly which makes it difficult to breathe and promotes the growth of microorganisms.” The WHO recommendation is to maintain at least one-metre physical distance from others.

But there are also strong arguments for challenging the WHO’s advice. The main one being that the NHS is truly overwhelmed for the first time in its 70-year history because of the rise in COVID hospital admissions. All possible measures must be taken to reduce these numbers.

Over half of all cases of COVID are acquired from people who have no symptoms at the time they pass it on. The 15-minute rule for close contact is arbitrary (based on custom and practice rather than empirical evidence). One-metre or two-metre distancing rules (which are derived as much from economic models of lost productivity as from scientific evidence of protection) do not mean that if people keep within these distances, they are safe. The rules mean only that people



farther apart are less likely to infect one another.

ETHICAL ARGUMENT

Masks work mainly by protecting other people. Pedestrians passed by a relatively young and fit jogger or cyclist include people who are elderly or otherwise more vulnerable to COVID and its complications. If there is a risk of transmission, there is surely an ethical argument to mask up.

The exhaled breath of someone who is exercising vigorously has a different composition and different aerodynamic properties to that of someone who is not. As we all know, a passing jogger breathes heavily, generating exhalations with much higher momentum than occurs with resting breathing.

In cold weather, clouds of moisture-laden air become visible as the jogger exhales – and these clouds spread much farther than those exhaled by walkers. Formal studies of the aerodynamics of breathing confirm that heavy breathers emit turbulent gas clouds in which are suspended droplets and microdroplets of different sizes, some of which are carried considerably farther than two metres.

Several coronavirus variants have been shown to be more transmissible than the original virus. Because each infected person is now likely to infect between 30%-60% more people than previously, an unlucky inhalation in the vicinity of a passing jogger – itself a rare possibility – is now much more likely to lead to an escalating series of secondary cases, one or more of which could be fatal.

Contrary to some information sources, there is no evidence that casual jogging in a mask (as

opposed to vigorous exercise undertaken in a tight-fitting respirator with the specific goal of pushing one’s physiology to extremes) leads to significant metabolic harm. And in particular, blood oxygen levels are not reduced when exercising in a cloth or medical mask.

The WHO is correct that masks may reduce the ability to breathe comfortably, though masks made of materials (such as multi-layer muslin or a muslin-flannel combination) that have low resistance but high filtration capacity will reduce this problem. Varying your exercising route may allow the mask to be safely removed for some sections – for instance, on reaching a park. A wet mask can be replaced with a spare dry one carried for the purpose.

A final reason for wearing masks when exercising near others is the message of social solidarity it conveys. The masked jogger or cyclist is saying both “the pandemic is still very serious” and “your safety is more important than my comfort or my lap time”. Instead of aggressive stand-offs between maskless exercisers and fearful walkers (which sometimes involves the potentially contagious act of shouting at close quarters), we could look forward to both parties exchanging a silent wave as they pass peacefully.

Almost all the research on masks and exercise has been undertaken in specialised laboratories. My own team is about to undertake a more pragmatic randomised controlled trial of the impact of different kinds of masks on exercise capacity, comfort and physiological markers in people taking outdoor exercise. We hope to report the results of that study later this year.

[the writer is Professor of Primary Care Health Sciences, University of Oxford]

Amartya Sen asks Visva-Bharati to withdraw allegation that he is illegally holding land

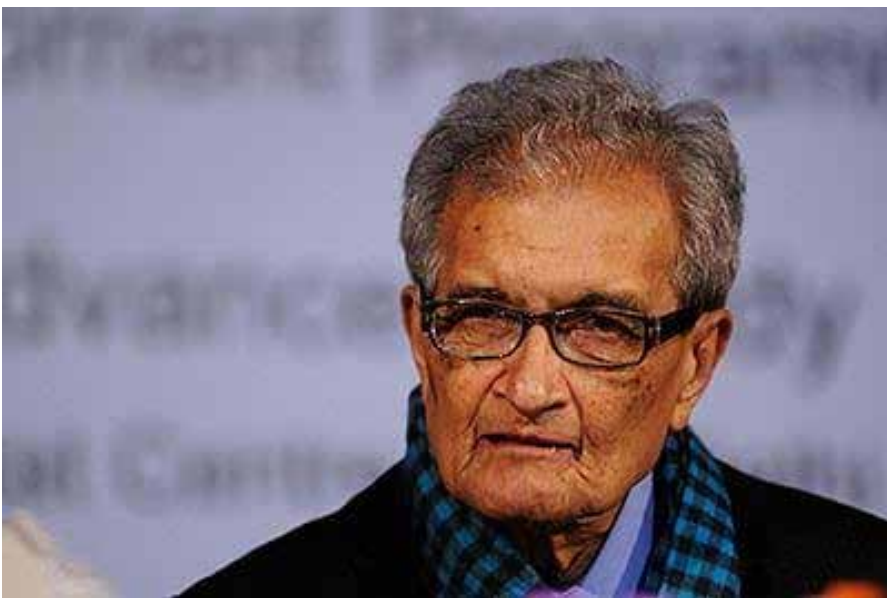
KOLKATA, JAN 19 (PTI): Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen has written to Visva-Bharati demanding that the university authorities withdraw the allegation that his family is in “illegal” possession of land in its Santiniketan campus and alleged that the accusations are a crude attempt at harassment.

Sen had on Monday written the letter to Visva-Bharati Vice-Chancellor Prof Bidyut Chakraborty two days after the authorities of the central university asked the West Bengal government to measure the plot owned by him at Santiniketan as soon as possible to permanently resolve the dispute.

The noted economist said in the letter that his father had purchased free-hold land from the market and not from Visva-Bharati - to add to their homestead and he has been paying taxes for them.

Sen had also sent a legal notice earlier this year to the VC asking him to withdraw “false” allegation made to the news agencies that a plot of land owned by Visva-Bharati is unlawfully occupied by the economist.

While the university was not able to provide any justification for the allegation, it has requested the West Bengal government “to measure the area of our homestead, Pratchi, to



compare with the long term lease of land taken by my father in 1940 from Visva-Bharati”, Sen said in the letter.

“This sudden abuse of an 80-year-old document is clearly a crude attempt at harassment or worse,” he said.

“Among other errors it ignores the big fact, which I have stated many times (even in the context of this dispute), that a substantial amount of free-hold land was purchased by my father (in the market -- not from Visva-Bharati) to add to our homestead on which khajna and Panchayat taxes are paid by me yearly,” the letter said.

Hence the officiating registrar’s threat of legal action if the official discovers any additional land beyond the leased land seems hugely mischievous, Sen said.

Stating that he is tired of the VC’s repeated claims despite emphatic

denials on his part about his phone call to Chakraborty in 2019, Sen said that the VC insisted that the call was made either on June 2 or June 14.

“On being informed that I was abroad for the entire month of June 2019 and came back to India only in July, the story was promptly altered by the VC’s office to assert that I had called in June or July but said the same things,” the letter said.

“Rather than inventing new falsities and adding to their culpability, Visva-Bharati should withdraw the false allegations made by them, as my lawyer has asked,” Sen said.

A controversy had erupted on December 24 last year, the day Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the centenary celebrations of Visva-Bharati, when media reported that the

university has written to the West Bengal government alleging dozens of land parcels owned by it were wrongfully recorded in the names of private parties including Sen.

Sen, who now lives in the US, has said that the land, on which his house stands is on a long-term lease, which is nowhere near its expiry.

Stating that the Visva-Bharati authorities had never complained to him or his family about any irregularity in holding the land, Sen has accused the VC of acting at the behest of the Centre “with its growing control over Bengal”.

Visva-Bharati officials were not available for comment on the letter.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and several prominent intellectuals of the state have expressed their supports to the economist on the row.

One new COVID-19 case in Arunachal, tally at 16,812

ITANAGAR, JAN 19 (PTI): The COVID-19 tally of Arunachal Pradesh rose to 16,812 on Tuesday as one more person tested positive for the infection in the northeastern state, a health department official said.

The fresh case from East Siang district was detected through rapid antigen test, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Dr Lobsang Jampa said.

A total of 1,075 health workers have received shots of COVID-19 vaccine in the first couple of days of inoculation in the state.

Jampa said 891 people were vaccinated on January 16, the opening day of the nationwide inoculation programme, and 184 received the jabs on Monday.

The state has received a total of 32,000 doses of Covishield vaccine from the Centre till now.

Two more persons were cured of the disease on Monday, taking the total number of recoveries to 16,699.

The recovery rate among coronavirus patients in the state currently stands at 99.32

per cent, Jampa said.

Arunachal Pradesh now has 57 active cases, and 56 people have succumbed to the infection so far.

West Kameng district has the highest number of active cases at 25, while Tawang and Changlang have five each.

The Capital Complex region, comprising Itanagar, Naharlagun, Nirjuli and Banderdewa areas, has 13 active cases.

The state has so far conducted 3,87,691 sample tests, including 400 on Monday, the official said, adding that

the positivity ratio is at 0.33 per cent.

A list of 23,505 healthcare professionals, including 3,867 vaccinators and 483 health workers from Indo-Tibetan Border Police, has been uploaded on CoWin, a digital platform for monitoring the inoculation exercise, he said.

Around 28,000 frontline workers also registered their names on the portal.

The state has 195 cold chain points for storage of COVID-19 vaccines, the official added.

5 new COVID-19 cases push Nagaland’s tally to 12,066

KOHIMA, JAN 19 (PTI): Nagaland on Tuesday reported five new COVID-19 cases, pushing the tally in the state to 12,066, a senior Health Department official said. The number of active COVID-19 cases in the state now is 112, the official said.

Seven more patients recuperated from the disease, taking the total number of recoveries in the state to 11,724, he said.

“5 COVID-19 positive

cases 3 in Dimapur and 2 in Kohima were reported today, while 7 patients 5 in Dimapur and 2 in Kohima also recovered during the last 24 hours”, said Director of Health and Family Welfare, Dr Denis Hangsing in the daily COVID-19 bulletin.

The recovery rate in the state is 97.16 per cent while the active cases are merely 0.93 per cent of the total caseload, the bulletin said.

Altogether 88 people have succumbed to the

disease, of which 78 are due to contagion and 10 had comorbidities, while another 142 patients have migrated to other states, he said.

Dimapur district has the highest number of COVID-19 cases at 6,458, followed by Kohima (3,775), Mon (605), Peren (504), Tuensang (245), Mokokchung (191), Zunheboto (142), Phek (47), Kiphire (41), Wokha (39) and Longleng (19).

Of the total 12,066 COVID-19 cases in the state, 4,973 are traced contacts, 4,665 are armed forces or security personnel, 1,856 returnees from other states and 572 frontline workers, he said.

A total of 1,23,359 samples have been tested in Nagaland for COVID-19 so far, including 72,895 on RT-PCR, 37,006 on TrueNat and 13,449 on Rapid Antigen Test, the bulletin said.

West Bengal, he said.

At least 28 Adverse Event Following Immunisation (AEFI) cases were reported from different parts of the state.

Asked about the health condition of the three women who have been hospitalised after receiving the vaccine, the official said, “They are under observation and responding well to the treatment. Our doctors are monitoring them”.

Indefinite prohibitory order imposed in Nepal’s Rukum following political clashes

HARI GAUTAM

RUKUM, 19 JAN [KATHMANDUPOST]: The District Administration Office in Rukum (West) imposed an indefinite prohibitory order in Radi Bazaar of Aathbiskot Municipality in the district starting from 5 pm on Tuesday following clashes between cadres of Nepal Communist Party and Nepali Congress throughout the day.

According to Chief District Officer Badri Nath Gairhe, the entry to Radi Bazaar has been prohibited until further notice from Dhari Khola in the east, Thuli Bheri in the west, Sim Bazaar in the south and Danje in the north.

The restrictions were placed as some groups were trying to disturb peace and order at the bazaar in Aathbiskot Municipality ward No. 9, according to the district administration office.

“The order was imposed as per the Local Administration Act, 1971,” said Gairhe. “Gatherings of more than five persons will be prohibited in the area and there will also be restrictions on all public and private vehicles except ambulances and those carrying food materials, health workers and security personnel.”

Earlier in the day, police fired several rounds of bullets following the clashes between cadres of the two parties.

According to District Police Office Chief DSP Dhruva Kumar Shrestha, two rounds of bullets from SLR Rifle and seven rounds of bullets from .303 rifles were fired in the air while one teargas was lobbed to disperse the mobs.

“Security personnel tried to take the situation under control and more

police personnel were deployed in the area,” said Shrestha on Tuesday late afternoon.

According to Shrestha, members of the two parties had had a confrontation on Monday night in Radi bazaar area. The police were called in to prevent untoward incidents. “We had dispersed some 8-10 NCP cadres and 10-15 cadres of the Nepali Congress on Monday after being informed of a conflict,” he said.

On Tuesday morning, members of both parties reached the Area Police Office. “That’s when the situation turned tense and a fight broke out.” The situation went out of hands and spilt onto the streets of Radi bazaar provoking clashes between the party members throughout the day.

A a t h b i s k o t Municipality ward no 9 Chairman Tarak Bahadur

Shahi, a Nepali Congress member, sustained minor injuries during Tuesday’s clash, said police.

Shrestha informed that the District Police Office has not received any information regarding arrests of any individuals in relation to the incident and that no injuries have been reported yet, he said.

The police had sent a team of 12 Nepal Police personnel and seven Armed Police Force personnel under the command of a Nepal Police Inspector to keep the situation under control.

Shrestha informed that 15 personnel each from Nepal Police and Armed Police Force from District Police Office, 11 Nepal Police personnel from Area Police Office, Dalli, Jajarkot and 15 police from the Riot Control Unit of the Chaurhajari Municipality have been deployed in the clash affected area.

Jharkhand reports 100 new COVID-19 cases, 4 more deaths

RANCHI, JAN 19 (PTI): Jharkhand’s COVID-19 tally mounted to 1,17,786 on Tuesday as 100 more people tested positive for the infection, a health official said.

The state’s coronavirus death toll rose to 1,054 after four more patients succumbed to the infection, he said.

Ranchi district

registered the highest number of fresh cases at 44, followed by East Singhbhum (17) and Dhanbad (eight).

Jharkhand now has 1,190 active cases, while 1,15,542 people have been cured of the disease so far, the official said.

The state has tested 10,484 samples for COVID-19 in the last 24

hours, he added.

Meanwhile, 2,964 health workers were vaccinated at 48 centres in the state on Monday, another health official said.

Eight of them exhibited symptoms of Adverse Effect Flowing Immunisation (AEFI) but none required hospitalisation, he said.

A total of 3,200 health workers were vaccinated on the first day of the nationwide immunisation drive on Saturday.

Principal Secretary of Health Department, Nitin Kulkarni, said that 1.4 lakh health workers who have been registered on the Co-Win application will be vaccinated.

COVID-19 cases shoot up in Lakshadweep islands

KOCHI, JAN 19 (PTI): The number of COVID-19 cases soared to 14 in Lakshadweep islands, which remained insulated from the attack of deadly virus till Monday, since the outbreak of the pandemic in the country nearly a year ago.

A day after the first coronavirus case was reported in the islands, official sources said 13 people, who were his primary contacts, tested positive for the virus on Tuesday, taking the test positivity rate to 42.4 per cent.

The man belonging to the India Reserve Battalion (IRB), had left for Kavaratti by ship from Kochi on 3 January and tested positive on Monday, official sources said.

He had reached the islands on January 4.

Sources said his 31 primary contacts were traced and tested of which 13 were infected.

All of the positive people belonged to IRB, they said.

While four of them are having symptoms, the remaining are

asymptomatic.

The authorities have started tracing and isolating their primary and secondary contacts.

The IRB cook, who is the first COVID-19 case in islands, was admitted to a COVID hospital in Kavaratti.

The case was reported two weeks after the Lakshadweep administration revised Standard Operating Procedures by doing away with mandatory quarantine guidelines for those arriving from Kochi.

Till Monday, the islands had not reported a single positive COVID-19 case.

Taking measures to prevent the spread of the virus, the administration had directed all those who had come in contact with him to go on quarantine, they said.

According to sources, risk communication activities started and disinfection process are on.

The administration also suspended all the inter island movements, including ships from Tuesday.

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NEWS & ANALYSIS

Ibrahimovic scores 2 as Milan beats Cagliari 2-0 to go clear

CAGLIARI (ITALY), JAN 19 (AP): Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored twice to help 10-man AC Milan win 2-0 at Cagliari and reclaim first place outright in Serie A.

Ibrahimovic converted a first-half penalty and doubled his tally early in the second period. They were his first goals since his recent return from injury, taking his tally to 12 in eight league matches.

Milan substitute Alexis Saelemaekers was sent off after picking up two yellow cards in quick succession shortly after coming off the bench.

Milan moved three points clear of second-place Inter Milan. The two play each other in the league on Feb. 21.

Ibrahimovic had played the final few minutes of Milan's last league match in his first appearance since Nov.

22 and also started last week's cup match both against Torino.

The 39-year-old Swede won and converted a penalty in the seventh minute in Sardinia after being barged over by Cagliari defender Charalampos Lykogiannis. Ibrahimovic had missed three of his last seven spot kicks.

Davide Calabria hit the post before setting up Milan's second, seven minutes into the second half, with a long ball over the top for Ibrahimovic to run onto and place into the bottom far corner.

The only negative note was the dismissal of Saelemaekers. The 21-year-old Belgian was brought on in the 66th minute, booked two minutes later and shown another yellow card six minutes after that.

'This will go down in history': India coach Shastri hails 'unimaginable' win

BRISBANE, 19 JAN [PA MEDIA]: An injury-ravaged India's 2-1 triumph in Australia under a stand-in captain will go down as one of the greatest series ever played, coach Ravi Shastri said on Tuesday.

India were bundled out for a record low of 36 in Adelaide and regular captain Virat Kohli left a demoralised team behind him as he returned home to attend the birth of his daughter.

Under Ajinkya Rahane, India levelled the series in Melbourne and drew in Sydney but had lost their entire frontline bowling attack to injuries by the time they arrived in Brisbane. Washington Sundar and T Natarajan, retained as net bowlers, made their Test debuts, helping India pull off a series victory for the ages after prevailing by three wickets in the decider.

"I'm not someone who really has tears in my eyes but I had real tears because this is unreal," Shastri said. "The penny has still not dropped, and it will take a long time to drop. Unreal."

Rishabh Pant then smashed an unbeaten 89 to complete a memorable series victory for the tourists. "What these guys have pulled off will go down in history as one of the greatest series ever played," Shastri said. "When you



take the Covid situation and the spate of injuries into account, showing stomach for a fight after being bowled out for 36 is unimaginable."

The challenges of living in a biosecure bubble and the spate of injuries made it the toughest tour he could remember, said the former Test player. "This is the toughest tour ever. We're playing in Covid times, quarantine times and with the multiple injuries – nothing comes close. It surpasses all."

Rahane inspired India's comeback with a captain's century in Melbourne and the Mumbaikar was his modest best after the win. "I was emotional too. I still don't know what happened and don't know how to describe this," said Rahane, who gifted a signed India jersey to Australia's Nathan Lyon on the spinner's 100th test after

the match.

Pant labelled his series-winning innings "one of the biggest moments" of his life after India inflicted a first defeat on Australia at the Gabba since 1988. "This is one of the biggest moments of my life now," Pant said, quoted by espncricinfo.com. "It's been a dream series. The team management always back me and tells me 'you are a match-winner' and I keep thinking every day that I want to win matches for India and I did it today."

Kohli took to Twitter to hail his teammates, posting: "WHAT A WIN!!! Yessssss. To everyone who doubted us after Adelaide, stand up and take notice. Exemplary performance but the grit and determination was the standout for us the whole way. Well done to all the boys and the management. Enjoy this historic feat lads.

Cheers."

Defeat for Australia and their captain Tim Paine added to the disappointment of the third Test, where they failed to bowl out India for victory on day five. After another final day to forget, the wicketkeeper conceded they need to review how they handle the pressure.

Paine said: "Absolutely disappointed. We came here to win the Test and win the series. It's been a bit of a trend that we were found wanting in the key moments and completely outplayed by a tough Indian side that fully deserves the win. I think there's lots of things we'll look back at, but what's done is done. We need to look forward now. There's a big series in South Africa coming up. We've been outplayed by the better side in this series."

Fifa dismisses Atlético's appeal against Kieran Trippier's 10-week suspension

PARIS, 18 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Fifa has dismissed Atlético Madrid's appeal against Kieran Trippier's ban for breaching Football Association betting rules, but there is still hope he could be able to continue playing.

The 30-year-old Atlético Madrid and England full-back was hit with a 10-week suspension last month

after advising a friend by text message to "lump on" his move to Madrid from Tottenham in 2019.

Atlético appealed against the suspension but football's world governing body announced on Monday it had been dismissed.

"The Fifa appeal committee has dismissed the appeal lodged by the club Atlético Madrid in

a case concerning the player Kieran Trippier," a statement read.

"As a consequence, the decision of the Fifa disciplinary committee passed on 23 December 2020 is confirmed, extending sanctions imposed on the player by the English FA to have worldwide effect."

However, the FA failed in its attempt to revise

the dates of Trippier's ban, which would mean if the club now appealed to the court of arbitration for sport he would be free to continue playing.

The FA had wanted to revise the effective dates of the ban, which ends on 28 February, but its own independent regulatory commission has dismissed the application.

Lionel Messi's red mist shows player lauded as deity is only human after all

JONATHAN LIEW LONDON, 19 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Exactly 90 seconds before the act of violence that will earn Lionel Messi his first red card for Barcelona, he's standing just inside the halfway line, waiting to receive a pass.

He's seen a gap. The sort of gap Messi has seen thousands of times before.

And most of the time we know what happens: a little burst of speed, and in an instant he's 15 yards further up the field, the ball still magically glued to his feet. But here, the gap closes around him. Iker Muniain wins the ball with a slide tackle. And as Athletic Bilbao move it unhurriedly up the field, Messi's arms drop sadly to his sides.

Moments later, Messi feels the crunching shoulder of Asier Villalibre smack the side of his head as he plays a pass. Messi sprints towards the area.

Villalibre impedes his path. And so Messi swings an arm at the back of his head: the act of a desperate man, a hopeless man. The sheer illogic of it seems to drain Messi entirely. He leans over to see if Villalibre is OK. He accepts his red card without complaint. As he leaves the field, he hands the captain's armband to Jordi Alba.

The first thing to say about Messi's first red card in 753 Barcelona first-team games is that it probably shouldn't have been. After all, this is hardly the first time Messi has lost his temper on the pitch. Nor should this be entirely surprising. Messi has been getting kicked, clipped, blocked, barged, tugged, tripped and tag-teamed ever since he learned to dribble a football. Indeed, Messi has played a large part of his career against

a backdrop of people specifically trying to make him angry.

Most of the time, Messi anger is quite amusing. There are the numerous tiffs with Sergio Ramos and Pepe from clasicos past, a duelling-stags clash with João Félix at last year's Supercopa, the time he chided a third-tier defender in a pre-season friendly with the words: "Do you want to stop kicking me, asshole?" The time he celebrated a last-minute penalty against Valencia by running over to their fans and screaming: "La concha de sus madres! Hijos de puta!" Such grace! Such elegance! And yet even in this context there was something singular and shocking about the haymaker Messi threw on Sunday night.

Confrontation, handbags, the heat of battle: these are the common and established tropes of footballing anger. But Messi isn't trying to win the ball. He isn't reacting to a studs-up tackle or challenging a refereeing decision or defending a teammate's honour. In a sense, this isn't a footballing act at all. It's pure human malice, a volcano of rage and vindictiveness that has probably been accumulating for years.

Perhaps the closest parallel is Zinedine Zidane's headbutt in the 2006 World Cup final: an act triggered by Marco Materazzi's insult but fuelled by a toxic brew of circumstances: the state of the game, the size of the occasion, the guilt-edged chance that he had put straight at Gigi Buffon just a few minutes earlier. And above all, that sense of desolation and loss, of a curtain coming down, of a game that could no longer be bent to his will.

Klete Keller: why did an Olympic champion invade the US Capitol?

TOM DART

NEW YORK, 19 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Klete Keller was somebody, a two-time Olympic gold medalist who swam in three Games. Then he was nobody, aimless, penniless and reduced to sleeping in his car. Now he is "Person 1" in court documents, identified by the FBI as a participant in the storming of the US Capitol and charged with federal crimes.

Amid the militia gear and Maga paraphernalia on display during the 6 January riot at the heart of American government, footage shows a bearded man in the Rotunda who stands out for his height and his clothes. He wears an officially-branded jacket with a United States Olympic Team patch and USA on the left sleeve and the back.

The choice of apparel, with the Olympic rings logo and Stars and Stripes flag, seemed to symbolise the perversion of patriotism among insurrectionists loyal to Donald Trump who hold the warped belief that it is their duty to agitate for the overturning of a legitimate democratic election. Aspirational emblems appropriated and debased as the president, his enablers and his acolytes crumpled a set of ideals to fit a dishonest and deranged narrative.

Then the tall man was identified by the website SwimSwam as Keller, a 38-year-old who grew up in Arizona and won gold in the 4x200m freestyle relays in Athens and Beijing. A sense of bafflement has not receded since.

Keller, who lives 1,700 miles away from Washington in Colorado Springs, was arrested last week on charges of disorderly conduct, obstructing law enforcement and illegally entering a restricted area. He was

released after an initial appearance in federal court in Denver.

He has not commented in public, so the reason for his actions during the deadly demonstration-turned insurrection on the day Congress met to certify Joe Biden's election victory are unclear. What is certain is that, like many athletes before him, he found it hard to adjust to ordinary life after an extraordinary sporting career.

His marriage collapsed, he was unable to hold down a series of sales jobs and he struggled to afford a place to live while paying child support for his three kids. He felt bitter and angry, losing motivation and gaining weight as he ate and drank to excess. He said his money problems prompted him to live in his Ford Fusion after his divorce in 2014. He would squeeze his 6ft 6in frame into the car and try to grab some sleep in Walmart parking lots.

"I found the real-world pressure much more intimidating and much more difficult to deal with because I went from swimming to having three kids and a wife within a year and so the consequences of not succeeding were very, very real and if I didn't make a sale or if my manager was ticked off with me, or if I got fired - oh shoot, you have no health insurance. It's very concrete," he told an Olympic Channel podcast.

"I felt when I failed a much more acute sense of pain and frustration and failure than I did with swimming. With swimming it was just me. All those years of success I had with swimming really gave me an inaccurate expectation of the world and so it was much harder to cope with the mini-failures I'd experience on any given day."

He added: "I think I became a real lazy,

spoiled, entitled person, just because I didn't have the coping skills. You would think all the lessons I'd learnt in swimming would immediately transfer but it really takes a lot of work to figure out exactly how to transfer athletic lessons into real life lessons - how to put a bad day behind you in the working world."

There were not too many rough times in the pool for Keller, whose finest moment came when he swam the anchor leg of the relay in 2004, holding off the great Australian Olympian, Ian Thorpe.

He finished fourth behind Thorpe, Pieter van den Hoogenband and Michael Phelps but ahead of Grant Hackett in the 200m freestyle in Athens, an event dubbed the "race of the century". He also won bronze medals in the individual 400m freestyle in the 2000 and 2004 Games and a silver in the 4x200m freestyle relay in Sydney.

"To find something else that is that important, to move on to the next rung of life that you find as compelling and worth working as hard for, it's just not an easy transition for anybody," said Nancy Hogshhead-Makar, a three-time Olympic swimming gold medalist, lawyer and founder of Champion Women, an equality and accountability advocacy group.

She believes that Keller's fall underscores the need for greater assistance for athletes from all backgrounds. Especially in a sport such as swimming they might become famous for a couple of weeks every four years and be lionised as national heroes, but risk slipping back into the shadows and suffering in obscurity with scant financial security or emotional support.

"What would cause them to have

mental health issues and what can we do? How can we change governance and structure so that this person can get the help that we need?" The attention on Keller, she said, could help act as a catalyst for change, "a big 'ah!' opportunity moment".

Eli Bremer, who competed for the US in the modern pentathlon in Beijing, knows Keller but has not spoken with his fellow Colorado Springs resident since the incident. "I don't want to say that the history that Klete's been quite open about and the struggles he's had led into what happened in Washington DC because I don't know," he said.

"However, I think that his overall story does shine a light on saying: these athletes are American heroes and then a lot of them do struggle afterwards with learning how to find jobs, learning how to cope with the emotional side of retiring from sports and oftentimes being a decade behind your peers. That can cause issues with your personal life, with your family, it can cause professional issues, it can cause a lot of psychological issues."

Keller had fond memories of training in Colorado Springs, which styles itself "Olympic City USA", and moved there after his marriage ended, attracted by the idea of riding dirt bikes in the mountains.

He grew more interested in right-wing politics in recent years but was not known as especially radical. His reputation among friends was as more of a mild-mannered goofball than a committed extremist, though one told the Washington Post Keller was "infatuated" with guns and he was increasingly supportive of Trump on social media.

He was in Washington for a pro-Trump rally last November after Biden's election and wrote on his now-deleted Facebook page that the result was a "brazen assault on our republic and our way of life," according to the New York Times.

No evidence has emerged to suggest he was involved in fighting or looting at the Capitol. "I don't think he went there with any malicious intent. I hope there's a more sophisticated story there," Bremer said.

"When an Olympian has bad judgment of course there will be consequences but I also hope people understand, sometimes these athletes have sacrificed their body and their future for our pride as a nation when they compete in the Olympics. In my experience Klete's a kind person, well-intentioned, laid-back, patriotic, and I think that while he made a mistake I doubt he had any intentions of doing anything harmful to our nation."

Keller appeared on local television news in 2018 (his Olympic status unmentioned) after he became the unwitting victim of a bizarre episode with shirtless men and a dog-sitter. Still, he appeared to have turned his life around: getting engaged, finding work with a commercial real estate firm and launching a personal website, The Olympic Agent. It pledges "Gold Medal Service" to help clients "navigate the waters of real estate".

Now he has lost his job and potentially faces a long prison sentence. "There's really no limit to how bad things can get, I learnt that. It can always get worse," he reflected on the podcast. "You have to maintain discipline throughout life in order to stay afloat."

After seeing floods, Indonesian leader visits quake zone

MAMUJU, INDONESIA (AP): Relief workers struggled Tuesday to clear the rubble of collapsed buildings on an Indonesian island where a strong earthquake killed at least 90 people and left thousands homeless.

The 6.2 magnitude earthquake on Friday was one of a series of recent disasters to hit Indonesia.

President JokoWidodo, who traveled to a flood-hit region of Borneo island on Monday, visited the quake-hit areas of West Sulawesi province on Tuesday to reassure people that the government's response is reaching those in need.

He pledged to rebuild government buildings that collapsed and help people repair their damaged houses with aid of up to 50 million rupiah (\$3,560) as he toured the hard-hit city of Mamuju, the provincial capital.

"We hope that the assistance from the central government can hasten a rebuilding of collapsed houses and the economy," he said in a speech after visiting survivors staying in shelters on a soccer field.

Disaster Task Force Commander FirmanDahlan said at least 12,900 people are in shelters in Mamuju and the neighboring district of Majene in West Sulawesi. He said the figure has decreased since Monday, when evacuees stood



at 20,000 as many fled for safety in the neighboring provinces of Makassar, Pare Pare and Palu.

Four days after the disaster, the streets of Mamuju were still covered in debris and most people were sleeping outdoors, fearful that their homes would crumble if strong aftershocks come. Sniffer dogs were being used to search for bodies and possible survivors.

Dahlan said rescuers, helped by excavators, pulled more bodies from the rubble. A total of 79 people died in Mamuju and 11 in Majene, he said at a news conference on Tuesday.

A military field hospital will be set up soon and a naval hospital ship is heading to a port on the Mamuju coast to help overwhelmed hospitals, he said.

The president traveled Monday to flooded areas of South Kalimantan province on

Borneo, an island known for rainforests and orangutans where floods since last week inundated several regions. The floods killed several people and forced tens thousands of others from their homes. Floods were also reported in many other provinces in the vast archipelago nation.

Widodo said heavy rainfall caused the flooding in South Kalimantan, but environmentalists blame deforestation by mining, palm oil and agricultural industries.

The quake and flood disasters followed a landslide in West Java on Jan. 9 that left 40 people buried in tons of mud. On the same day, a Sriwijaya Air jet nosedived into the Java Sea, killing all 62 people on board.

And on Saturday, Mount Semeru, the highest volcano on Indonesia's most densely

populated island of Java, spewed hot clouds as far away as 4.5 kilometers (nearly 3 miles). The eruption caused panic but no casualties.

Indonesia last week began vaccinating health workers for the coronavirus in a campaign that aims to immunize two-thirds of the population in the world's fourth most populous country. Indonesia has confirmed more than 927,000 infections and 26,590 deaths from the pandemic, the most in Southeast Asia.

Indonesia, home to more than 260 million people, is lined with seismic faults and is frequently hit by earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis. Annual monsoon flooding also causes problems, and its transit infrastructure is weak and stretched beyond capacity.

Tokyo Olympics Q&A: 6 months out and murmurs of cancellation

TOKYO (AP): The Tokyo Olympics are to open in six months on July 23 and organizers have no public program planned to mark the milestone.

There is too much uncertainty for that right now.

Tokyo and other parts of Japan are under an emergency order because of surging coronavirus cases with about 4,500 deaths attributed to COVID-19.

Instead of a countdown celebration, the focus is on the virus and speculation around the Olympics being canceled. Should they take place during a spreading pandemic — vaccine or no vaccine? Organizers say they will with exact details yet to be revealed.

It's been this way since the Olympics were postponed almost 10 months ago. There are always more questions than answers.

Q: When will a final decision be announced about holding the Olympics?

A: The International Olympic Committee and local organizers are adamant they will happen. Mark the date — March 25. That's when the torch relay, heavily sponsored by Coca-Cola and Toyota, begins from northern Japan, crisscrossing the country for four months with 10,000 runners headed to Tokyo. It's hard to imagine the relay going ahead, but the Olympics being canceled. Remember, it was in late March last year that the Olympics were postponed.

Q: Recent polls show 80% in Japan want the Olympics canceled or postponed. So why is Japan and the International Olympic Committee pushing ahead?

A: A key is the billions already "sunk" into the event, and the income Tokyo will generate for the IOC. The IOC gets almost three-quarters of

its income from selling TV rights. Another 18% is from sponsors. Unlike other sports businesses like the NBA or English soccer, the IOC has only two major events — every four years — to rely on.

Only five Olympics have ever been canceled, all during wartime: the 1916, 1940 and 1944 Summer Olympics, and Winter Games in 1940 and 1944. But that was before big money was involved.

Japan must also save face. It has spent at least \$25 billion preparing for the Olympics. In addition, China will host the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. Japan would hate to cede the stage to China.

Japanese Prime Minister YoshihideSuga is framing the Olympics as "a proof of human victory against the coronavirus."

Q: Will these Olympics look different?

A: Almost certainly. First, athletes will be told to arrive later than usual, and leave early. The idea is to keep the Athletes Village sparsely populated. It's hard to imagine much interaction between athletes, the public and the media. Fewer athletes than usual are likely to appear in the opening ceremony. Japanese media are reporting only 6,000 Olympic athletes will take part. The Olympics involve 11,000 athletes.

However, from the perspective of the television viewer, everything may look similar to previous Olympics. The venues are basically TV stages, and they look the same from one Olympics to the next. Fans are now accustomed to viewing sports events in empty stadiums.

One caveat. Ticket sales account for \$800 million in income for local organizers. No fans means lost revenue and more costs. Those costs

must be absorbed by Japanese government entities. Several Japanese government audits have estimated Olympic spending at \$25 billion or more. All but \$6.7 billion is public money. Local sponsors have also poured in \$3.5 billion. Will they get much "bang for their buck?"

Q: Why all the skeptical comments recently from several insiders — mainly senior IOC member Dick Pound and Japanese minister Taro Kono.

A: Pound and Kono both answered the questions they were asked.

Pound was asked about the Olympics taking place. "I can't be certain because the ongoing elephant in the room would be the surges in the virus." He also suggested athletes should be a high priority for a vaccine because they serve as "role models." That contradicted IOC President Thomas Bach, who has said athletes should not be a priority.

Kono, a member of Suga's cabinet, acknowledged in an interview that the Olympics are in doubt.

"I should say anything is possible," Kono said.

Kono is the former defense minister and is now the minister for administrative and regulatory reform. On Monday, he was put in charge of Japan's vaccine program.

"It could go either way," he added of the Olympics.

Keith Mills, who was deputy chair of the organizing committee for the 2012 London Olympics, said he is sure plans have been drawn up for a cancellation.

"But I think they'll leave it until absolutely the last minute in case the situation improves dramatically, in case the vaccinations roll out faster than we all hope," Mills told the BBC on Tuesday. "It's a tough call, I wouldn't like to be in their shoes."

Dubai, party haven amid pandemic, faces its biggest surge

DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (AP):

Masks off the minute you step inside. Bars packed and pulsing like it's 2019. Social media stars waving bottles of champagne. DJs spinning party tunes through multi-hour brunches. Since becoming one of the world's first destinations to open up for tourism, Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, has promoted itself as the ideal pandemic vacation spot. It cannot afford otherwise, analysts say, as the virus shakes the foundations of the city-state's economy.

With its cavernous malls, frenetic construction and legions of foreign workers, Dubai was built on the promise of globalization, drawing largely from the aviation, hospitality and retail sectors — all hard hit by the virus.

Now reality is catching up to the big-dreaming emirate. With peak tourism season in full swing, coronavirus infections are surging to unprecedented heights. Daily case counts have nearly tripled in the past month, forcing Britain to slam shut its travel corridor with Dubai last week. But in the face of a growing economic crisis, the city won't lock down.

"Dubai's economy is a house of cards," said Matthew Page, a nonresident scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Its competitive advantage is being a place where rules don't apply."

While most countries banned tourists from the U.K. over fears of the fast-spreading virus variant found there, Dubai, home to some 240,000 British expats, kept its doors open for the holidays. Emirates flew five daily flights to London's Heathrow Airport.

Within days, the new virus strain had arrived in the emirates, but that didn't stop reality TV and soccer stars from fleeing Britain's lockdown and wintry weather for Dubai's bars and beaches — without taking a coronavirus test before boarding. Scenes of pre-pandemic revelry were splattered across British tabloids. Facing backlash, Instagram influencers spotted at raucous yacht parties were quick to proclaim their travel "essential."

Dubai was glad of the influx. Hotel occupancy rates surged to 71% in December, according to data provider STR. The London-Dubai air route ranked busiest in the world over the first week of January, said OAG, an aviation data analysis firm.

"People have had enough of this pandemic already," said Iris Sabellano from Dubai's Al Arabi Travel Agency, adding that many of her clients have been forced to quarantine after testing positive for the virus on arrival or before departure. Travelers coming from a select list of countries don't need to get tests before their trips but all must at Dubai's airport.

"With vaccines coming out, they feel it's not the end of the world, they're not going to die," she said.

For those who do die of COVID-19, long-haul airline Emirates offers to pay \$1,800 to help cover funeral costs.

As the outbreak worsens, it seems the stampede will slow. Israeli tourists, who were coming in the tens of thousands following a normalization deal between the countries, have vanished due to new quarantine rules. A decision to suspend visa waivers for Israelis to

the UAE until July took effect Monday. Britain's move to mandate a 10-day quarantine for those returning from Dubai threatens to clobber what's left of the tourism sector.

"Brits make up such an important proportion of tourists and investors in Dubai," said David Tarsh, spokesman for ForwardKeys, a travel data-analysis company. "Cutting that pipeline ... is a complete disaster for the city."

British Transport Secretary Grant Shapps tweeted that the government's decision was prompted by the UAE's latest virus data. Beyond daily infections, however, the data is scant. The UAE does not make public information about disease clusters or hospitalizations.

Amid an aggressive testing campaign, the country has reported more than 256,000 cases and 751 deaths. Analysts speculate the UAE's unique demographics — 90% expatriate, comprising mostly healthy, young laborers — have prevented well-staffed hospitals from becoming overwhelmed and kept the death rate low, at 0.3%.

But that hasn't assuaged Abu Dhabi, Dubai's more conservative neighbor and the country's capital. Without explanation, Abu Dhabi has kept its border with freewheeling Dubai shut, despite promises to reopen by Christmas. Anyone crossing into Abu Dhabi must present a negative coronavirus test.

Relations between service-heavy Dubai and oil-rich Abu Dhabi can get tense. During the 2009 financial crisis, Abu Dhabi needed to rescue Dubai with a \$20 billion bailout. This time, it's

unclear whether Dubai can count on another cash infusion, given the crash in global oil prices.

Even pre-pandemic, Dubai's economy was heading toward another downturn thanks to a shaky real estate market, which has plunged 30% in value since 2014 peaks. The emirate and its web of government-linked entities face billions of dollars in debt repayments. Already the government has stepped in to help carrier Emirates, which received \$2 billion in aid last year. Other indebted firms invested in hospitality and tourism may need help, especially with events like World Expo pushed back a year. S&P Global, a ratings agency, estimates Dubai's debt burden to be some 148% of gross domestic product if state-linked industries are included.

Under pressure, authorities have seized on vaccines as the only way to contain the outbreak. Plastered across front pages of state-linked newspapers are stories touting the mass inoculation drive, which officials claim to be the world's second-fastest after Israel, with 19 doses distributed for every 100 people as of Tuesday.

The UAE is offering the Chinese coronavirus vaccine Sinopharm to everyone, even as its announcement about the shot's efficacy lacks data and details. Demand has overwhelmed supply for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in Dubai, where hotline operators say thousands of high-risk residents remain on a waiting list.

With the country shattering its infection record for seven

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THUMBS UP! Gorgeous gal Gigi Hadid is seen checking out a promo truck for Zayn's new single, "Nobody is Listening," in New York City.

Garth Brooks joins lineup of entertainers at Biden inaugural

NEW YORK (AP): Add Garth Brooks to the lineup of entertainers at the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden.

"This is a great day in our household," the country music superstar said during a virtual press conference Monday, two days before Biden is to be sworn in. "This is not a political statement. This is a statement of unity."

Brooks, who joins Lady Gaga and Jennifer Lopez among others, performed during the inaugural celebration of President Barack Obama in 2009. He turned down a chance to play for President Donald Trump in 2017, citing a scheduling conflict.

Invited by incoming first lady Jill Biden, Brooks has known the Bidens for more than a decade, when Joe Biden was Obama's vice president.



Brooks said that for this week's inaugural, he will perform solo doing "broken down, bare-bones stuff," and hinted at covering material by songwriters from outside the U.S.

He does not plan to sing his socially conscious "We Shall Be Free," which he performed at the Obama inaugural.

Brooks praised the Bidens for being "hellbent on making things good" and said he welcomed the chance to help the country heal.

"I want to spend the next 10 years of my life not divided. I'm so tired of being divided," he said.

things settle down, it's easier to adopt 'go with the flow' as your mantra and keep doing what you came here to do. The cards are reiterating that you are on the right track. So don't give up now. Instead, challenge yourself to stay on top of your game, no matter what. By October 2021, you will be ready to witness magnificent rewards.

Leo: That infectious laughter is telling us everything we need to know about where you are, Leo. You are surrounded by the people you love—the people who are helping you rise higher and fulfil your sacred purpose here on earth. You've also got that big manifestation energy about you and it's giving your dreams and desires a tangible form. **PS:** Something wonderful is about to take place now!

Virgo: "2021 is my year, baby! I'm going to live it large." Tuesday find you saying your affirmations out loud and getting ready to take over the world. You are joy. You are bliss. You are abundant. You deserve all the good things in the world. So, consciously shift your vibration to what you want to create/attract and watch your reality transform.

Libra: Like your opposite sign, Aries, you're being encouraged to practice a certain amount of restraint when it comes to your diet. No, we're not asking you to cut the good stuff out. We're asking you to exercise moderation and up the fruits and veggies quotient. Following the

circadian rhythm diet will serve you well at a time like this. When in doubt, remember the mantra 'when you feel good, you look good.'

Scorpio: When an idea emerges from deep within you, it's your soul's way of nudging you in the direction of what you're meant to create in this lifetime. Don't dismiss this friendly nudge as a random impulse. Instead, think about ways in which you can give this idea tangible form. Your angels and guides are with you, helping you take a leap of faith in the right direction. It's time to express your talents and abilities fully. You won't regret a thing—we promise!

Sagittarius: Think about the last time you wanted something—really, really wanted something—and the Universe rearranged itself for you. What does that tell you about your own power, Sagittarius? That you are a master manifestor capable of creating miracles in collaboration with Spirit. Today, you're being asked to keep this in mind and focus your intention on finding creative solutions to surmount the given challenge. The key is to keep going, even when you're most tempted to give up. **PS:** There is a breakthrough on the other side of this journey, one that will help you realign with your sense of purpose.

Capricorn: You're not being honest here, Capricorn, and your

Furious with division being created on the basis of religion, says Naseeruddin Shah

MUMBAI, JAN 19 (PTI): Veteran actor Naseeruddin Shah has expressed concerns over the divide being created in the country between Hindus and Muslims in the name of love jihad.

The 70-year-old actor made the comments in a video interview with Karwan-e-Mohabbat India, shared on its YouTube channel on Sunday.

"I am really furious with the way divisions are being created, like the love jihad tamasha in UP. Firstly, the people who coined this phrase don't know the meaning of the word jihad.

"I don't think that anyone would be so stupid to actually believe that Muslims will overtake the Hindu population, it is unimaginable. For that, Muslims will have to have so many babies. So, this whole notion is unreal, Shah said in the interview.

Last year in November, Uttar Pradesh became the first state in India to pass an ordinance against forcible or "dishonest" religious conversions.

In the last few months, states like Haryana and Madhya Pradesh have also revealed plans to enact laws to counter alleged attempts to convert Hindu women to Islam in the guise of marriage, which political leaders often refer to as love jihad.

The "Bandish Bandits" actor believes the term "love jihad" stems from the idea of stigmatising inter-faith marriages and stop social interactions between Hindus and Muslims.

They not only want to discourage inter-faith marriages but also curtail social interactions between Hindus and Muslims, he added.

Shah, who is married to theatre-film actor RatnaPathak Shah, said he always believed that his marriage to a Hindu woman would set a "healthy precedent".

We have taught our children about every religion. But we have never told them that they belong to any particular religion. I always believed that these differences would slowly fade away. I believed that my marriage to a Hindu woman would set a healthy



precedent. I don't think this is wrong, he said.

The actor said when he was about to tie the knot with the RatnaPathak Shah, his mother had asked if he would want his would-be wife to convert to his religion and his answer was no.

Shah said even though his mother was uneducated and was brought up in an orthodox household, she was completely against the idea of changing one's religion.

"My mother who was uneducated, brought up in an orthodox household, prayed five times a day, observed Roza all her life, went for the Haj pilgrimage, she said, 'The things that have been taught to you in your childhood how can that change? It is not right to change one's religion,'" he said.

The critically-acclaimed performer said he feels saddened to see the harassment young couples are facing these days in the name of "love jihad".

"This is not the world I had dreamt of, he added.

In a 2018 interview with Karwan-e-Mohabbat, Shah had said that at many places the death of a cow is being given more importance than the killing of a policeman.

The veteran actor had also expressed anxiety over the well-being of his children, who he said have not

been brought up as followers of any particular religion.

Soon after the interview was released online, the actor's remark evoked outrage among some social media users.

In the new interview, Shah said he failed to understand the reason behind such an adverse reaction to his statement.

All I had said was that the death of a cow had taken precedence over the death of a person and it makes me very angry. This was misinterpreted that I was expressing fear, when in fact I never used the word fear.

"I have repeatedly said that I am not afraid. I am angry. Why should I be afraid? I am in my own country; I am at my own home. Five generations of my family are buried in this land. My ancestors have been living here for the last three hundred years. If this doesn't make me a Hindustani, then what does? he asked.

The actor said it has become difficult for a person to share their views publicly due to fear of instant backlash.

"The difficult part is there is no possibility of (freely) exchanging ideas anymore. If you say anything, even in support of the nation, you are accused instantly, Shah added.

Meghan seeks court ruling over 'serious breach' of privacy

LONDON (AP): Lawyers for the Duchess of Sussex asked a British judge on Tuesday to settle her lawsuit against a newspaper before it goes to trial by ruling that its publication of a "deeply personal" letter to her estranged father was "a plain and a serious breach of her rights of privacy."

The duchess, 39, is suing Associated Newspapers for invasion of privacy and copyright infringement over five February 2019 articles in the Mail on Sunday and on the MailOnline website that published portions of a handwritten letter to her father, Thomas Markle, after her marriage to Britain's Prince Harry in 2018.

Associated Newspapers is contesting the claim, and the full trial is due to be held in the autumn at the High Court in London.

The duchess is seeking a summary judgment that would find in her favor and dismiss the newspaper's defense case. Her lawyer Justin Rushbrooke argued that the publisher had "no real prospect" of winning the case.

"At its heart it's a very straightforward case about the unlawful publication of a private letter," he said Tuesday at the start of a two-day hearing, held remotely because of coronavirus restrictions.

Rushbrooke said Meghan had every expectation that "a heartfelt plea from an anguished daughter to her father" would remain private.

In open letter to Dr. King, Stevie Wonder calls for equality



NEW YORK (AP): Stevie Wonder, whose advocacy helped make the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday a national holiday, is urging the incoming Biden administration to form a national commission on equality.

Wonder released a video message Monday in the form of an open letter to King, who was assassinated in 1968 and whose birthday was made a federal holiday late in 1983. Wonder met King when he was a teenager and later wrote the tribute song "Happy Birthday," which urged that the government formally establish a Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

King was born Jan. 15, 1929, and his birthday celebrated on the third Monday in January. "For 36 years, we've had a national holiday honoring your birthday and principles, and you would not believe the lack of progress. It makes me physically sick," Wonder said in his message. "It is time for all to take the only stand. We can not be afraid to confront a lie and a liar. Those in leadership who won't or don't acknowledge the truth should be held accountable. Dr. King, these times require courage, as they did when you lived and paid the ultimate price."

tactfulness isn't serving you in any way. It's time to lay the facts down. To speak your truth, no matter how intimidating this may feel in the beginning. Remember, your angels and guides are with you, giving you the shot of courage you need at this moment. Some of you are being asked to practice vulnerability in your interpersonal relationships too. There's a good chance you're closing yourself off to the love that is being sent your way.

Aquarius: You're not alone, Aquarius, even though you may feel like you are at certain times. Beware of isolating yourself at a time like this. Instead, make a conscious effort to reach out. You don't have to attend every social gathering you're invited to, but you can make time for those who are closest to you. Remember, they'd be happy to hold space for you just like you would for them. **PS:** If the cross is too heavy to bear, you could even consider therapy.

Pisces: So what if you failed the first time around, and then the second and third time too? Your failures have taught you more than your victories ever will. So be proud of each one of those falls as you march ahead. Bigger and better things await you, Pisces. The onset of spring promises to bring with itself a big breakthrough moment that will help you remember that you are where you need to be.

Aries: This week, you're in the mood to channel your inner Gwyneth Paltrow and adopt a holistic lifestyle with newfound fervour. Remember the quote 'you are what you eat' as you begin to make certain changes in the right direction. It's a good idea to follow the circadian rhythm cycle, which encourages us to consume our meals while the sun is still out. **PS:** If you've been thinking about adopting a plant-based diet, now is the time.

Taurus: The last leg of war is usually the hardest. That's why you need to motivate yourself to keep going further and further. Do what it takes this time, Taurus. Remember, it would be a shame to give up now. If the cosmic cues are anything to go by, you will witness a big breakthrough on this front before the end of the spring.

Gemini: How much tact is too much tact? Gemini, you're not being honest with yourself here. This chapter of your life requires you to lay the facts down as they are. Nothing will free you like speaking your truth will. Remember, you cannot control the actions of other people. You cannot control their responses either. A certain amount of detachment will serve you well at a time like this.

Cancer: The first step can often be the hardest. There is so much you're yet to figure out about the road ahead. But once