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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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CM inaugurates Sapta Kanya Kalika Devi Mandir



Namchi, 11 Mar (IPR): Chief Minister PS Tamang inaugurated 'Sapta Kanya Kalika Devi Mandir' at Upper Yangang today. He was accompanied by his spouse, Krishna Kumari Rai, Minister Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, BS Panth, Minister for Energy and Power and Labour Department, MN Sherpa, dignitaries and devotees at large. The Chief Minister along with other dignitaries visited the mandir and offered their prayers for the well-being of the state. Chief Patron Puran committee cum Confidential Secretary, Bikash Basnett presented the history about the mandir and spoke about the great religious significance that this mandir holds particularly in Yangang.

He also added that eleven days Shri Shiva Maha Puran was also organized at the mandir focusing on spiritual matter. The puran hosted devotees from far and wide thereby bringing together individuals, families and communities in a peaceful manner.

Principal Chief Engineer, Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, Prakash Chettri shared the technical report of the mandir wherein he informed about the total build area and other integrated spaces such as prayer hall, walkway, office area, courtyard, parking space and more.

The CM and his spouse Krishna Kumari Rai attended the concluding day of the Shri Shiva Maha Puran. Moreover, they were also felicitated by the organising committee of the puran for their relentless support in uplifting the state.

20 withdraw candidature in East; 5/29 wards go uncontested

GANGTOK, 11 MAR (IPR):

Today, on the last day of withdrawal of nomination papers, 20 candidates withdrew their candidatures at the Office of Municipal Returning Officer, East.

The MRO East Ragul K. informs that 20 candidates of GMC, namely Menakshi Kanta Sharma who had filed his nomination from Daragaon- Lumsey ward and Smt Peden Bhutia who had filed her nomination from Tathangchen ward, Choden Bhutia of Chandmari ward, Damber Kumar Chettri, Digendra Gurung, Smt Deo Kumari Pradhan, Chiteez Thapa, Ram Prasad Basnet, Anal Gu-

rung, Md. Shafique who had filed their nominations from Arithang-II ward, Manju Rai who had filed her nomination from Lower Tadong-6th Mile ward, Hem Kumari Chettri from Upper Sichey ward, Smt Sara Gurung, Rameshwar Tamang and Gyamtso Tamang from Lower MG Marg-Lall Bazar ward, Smt Prerna Darnal and Smt Lachi Mangrati/Saruki from Diesel Power House ward, Ajay Kumar Agarwal from Upper Mg Marg ward, Udai Lama from Pani House ward and Pradeep Chettri from Burtuk ward and 5 candidates namely Badrudin Ansari, Meera Kumari, Chotey

Lall Prasad who had filed their nomination from Rangpo Upper Bazar ward, Rekha Gurung from Majhitar ward, Agam Kami from Mandi Bazar ward under Rangpo Nagar Panchayat have withdrawn their candidature today.

The withdrawal process was done in the presence of General Observer for all wards of Singtam Nagar Panchayat and Rangpo Nagar Panchayat Kuber Bhandari, Secretary Excise Department.

With the withdrawal of 26 candidates till today, a total of 102 are in the fray for the Municipal Elections 2021 from 24 wards of Urban Local Bodies of

East District.

Among them, 64 candidates will be contesting from 15 wards from Gangtok Municipal Corporation, 21 from 5 wards of Singtam Nagar Panchayat and 17 from 4 wards of Rangpo Nagar Panchayat.

The candidates from five different wards namely; Karma Tempo Rapgyal from Arithang-I ward, Sabita Pradhan from Deorali-Upper Syari ward, Rubina Gurung from Lower Tadong-6th Mile ward, Aruna Chettri from Upper Sichey ward under Gangtok Municipal Corporation and Larishna Tamang from Chanatar ward of Rangpo

Nagar Panchayat are declared uncontested.

It may be mentioned that a total of four candidatures were not accepted during the scrutiny process held on 09 March 2021.

Later, the MRO handed over form 35 to the 5 uncontested candidates. The Municipal Returning Officer East also allotted symbols to the contesting candidates.

The contesting candidates were also provided candidate Identity Cards for Municipal Elections 2021.

During the meeting, symbols were also allotted to the contesting candidates.

Six withdraw candidature in South

Namchi, 11 Mar (IPR):

The procedure of withdrawal of candidatures pertaining to the Municipal Election, 2021 for Namchi Municipal Council (NMC) and Nayabazaar Jorethang Nagar Panchayat (NJNP) under South District was carried out by Municipal

Returning Officer (MRO, South), M Bharani Kumar at District Administrative Centre, Namchi today.

The MRO informed that a total of six candidates who had filed their nomination withdrew their candidatures on the last and final day for withdrawal.

The details of six candidates who had withdrawn their candidatures are as follows:

01. Mrs. Pemu Bhutia and Mr. Phurba Tshering Bhutia from 03 upper Ghurpisey Ward under NMC.
02. Mr. Prem Raj Gurung from 06 Upper

Singhithang ward under NMC.

03. Mr. Ganesh Adhikari from 01 Shantinagar ward under NJNP.
04. Mr. Bandan Tamang from 04 Majhigoan ward under NJNP.

05. Mrs. Saroja Khathi from 05 Nayabazaar ward under NJNP.

Following the withdrawal of candidatures, the following candidates number are in the fray for Namchi Municipal Council:

01-Gangyap 6 candidates, 02-Dambudara 5 candidates, 03-Upper Ghurpisey 2 candidates, **turn to pg03**

Shivratri to be declared state holiday, announces CM

Gangtok, 11 Mar: Chief Minister, PS Tamang has announced that Shivratri will be made a gazetted holiday in the state.

Addressing a Shivratri program held today at the Brahmakumari centre at Development Area, where he was the chief guest, the Chief Minister said that since the Code of Conduct is in effect right now, the state government will issue a notification after the Code of Conduct ends sometime in April.



SRM UNIVERSITY
Sikkim

SHRI RAMASAMY MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY SIKKIM



Hon'ble Shri Ganga Prasad
Governor of Sikkim and
Visitor of SRM University Sikkim
will preside over the convocation



2nd Convocation

on 13th of March 2021, 11:00 am

Manan Bhavan, Gangtok, East Sikkim



Hon'ble Shri Kunga Nima Lepcha
Minister of Education,
Government of Sikkim
will be the Chief Guest

Dr. P. Sathyanarayanan
President, SRM University Sikkim
will deliver the Welcome Address



Alkem launches Mobile Health Care Unit

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 11 MAR:

Alkem Health Science Laboratories Limited, South Sikkim, launched a Mobile Health Care Unit Project under Alkem CSR Program on 09 March.

The project was launched by Minister Building & Housing Department cum Area MLA, Sanjeet Kharel.

Mr Kharel also inaugurated Alkem Health Center (shifted from Mamring location) which is like a primary health center where any patient can come and take free medical consultation and



free medicine.

A team consisting of a doctor, a nurse and office staff will run these centers. The objective of these projects is to take health care to the door steps of local population particularly rural, vulnerable and under-served areas. These Mobile units which consists of doctor, nurse and attendant will visit areas

far from the PHC.

In his address the Minister pointed to many activities where Alkem has done remarkable works through its CSR wing. He appreciated the work of Alkem in the last three years and he also gave valuable inputs for the company to use towards community development.

Final slab casting of Lingi Payong School building

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 11 MAR:

The third and final slab casting of eight roomed school building at Lingi Payong School was completed today, a press release informs. The final slab casting consists of 2 rooms.

School in charge and contractors were present during the slab casting work today. The building has been sanctioned by Department of Education Government of Sikkim through Samagra Shiksha.

The construction of the building got delayed owing to the lockdown imposed due to COVID-19 and shortage of labourers. Also, the frequent road blockage

and Rangla Khola disturbed the smooth flow of large vehicles for carrying construction materials.

"There have been some disturbances but now we have procured all the necessary finishing materials and we are hopeful that we will be able to hand over the school building two months from now," said contractors, Manorath Gautam and Raj Kumar Gautam.

The headmaster of the school expressed his satisfaction over the progress of construction of the building and expressed hope that it will be functional in a short span of time.

Sikkim Idol auditions to begin from Namchi next Monday

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 11 MAR:

Local media house, Hamro Varta Television, is set to start the audition rounds of the reality show being organized by it, 'Sikkim Idol', from Namchi on 15 March.

The organizers intend to cover all major towns in the month-long auditions.

Addressing a press conference here today, Hamro Vatra editor, Pradeep Lohagun, informed that all preparations have been put in place and that competition will be held in junior category for those aged upto 14 years and senior category for 15 years and above.

He stated that the competition will have senior folk singer and musician, Naren Gurung and singers Remanti Rai and



Manoj Rai as judges.

The Namchi audition is scheduled for 15 to 17 March followed by Gyalshing on 19 and 20 March.

The auditions at Soreng will be held on 22 and 23 March before moving to Pakyong on 25 and 26 March and Mangan on 08 April and finally at Gangtok on 10 and 11 April.

Mr Lohagun mentioned that shortlisted singers will compete again in the Mega Auditions to be held at Namchi for selected candidates from South and West Districts and at Gangtok for North and East Districts.

SSB 72nd Battalion HQ inaugurated at Melli-Aching

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 11 MAR:

The Headquarters of Sashastra Seema Bal 72 Battalion was formally inaugurated on Thursday by Dy. Inspector General SSB Gangtok, BK Pal, at 11th Mile, Melli Aching, Yuksam, West Sikkim on Thursday.

The 72 Bn SSB had been functioning from its



HQ at 8th Mile Gyalshing thus far and will move into its Melli-Aching address within the month, it is informed.

No withdrawals in Mangan

MANGAN, 11 MAR (IPR):

On the day of withdrawal of nominations for the upcoming Municipal Elections 2021, no candidate withdrew their nomination. The final number of candidates from 7 Mangan Nagar Panchayat is ten (10).

There are five (5) wards under 7 Mangan Nagar Panchayat

1. Upper Mangan Bazar - ST

2. Pentok - ST (W) UR
3. Power Colony - UR (W)
4. Rinzing Namgyal Marg - ST
5. Lower Mangan Bazar - UR (W)

It may be mentioned here that Pentok stands 'uncontested' as there was one nomination filed from the ward.

The Municipal Returning Officer (North) allotted the symbols to the ten contesting candidates today.



Six withdraw...

04-Lower Ghurpisey 1 candidate, 05-Upper Boomtar 3 candidates, 06-Upper Singithang 1 candidate, 07-Purano Namchi 1 candidate

Similarly, the final lists of candidates under Nayabazar Jorethang Nagar Panchayat are as follows:

01-Shantinagar 1 candidate, 02-Trikaleshwar 2 candidates, 03-Daragaon 4 candidates, 04-Majhigaon 3 candidates, 05-Nayabazar 2 candidates.

Therefore, a total of 4 wards under South District are declared uncontested, which are as follows; 04-Lower Ghurpisey, 06-Upper Singithang and 07-Purano Namchi under NMC. Likewise, under NJNP 01-Shantinagar ward stands uncontested. Today's process was overseen by Municipal Election Observer (South), C. K Chettri. Election symbols were also allotted to the contesting candidates.

RBI Gangtok holds workshop on fake currency notes

GANGTOK, 11 MAR (PIB):

RBI, Kolkata with the support of RBI, Gangtok and Bharatiya Reserve Bank Note Mudran Pvt Ltd (BRBN-MPL), Salboni organized a workshop on Identification, Impounding and Disposal of Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN) at Police Headquarters, Gangtok, East District, Sikkim on 09 Mar, 2021. The programme was conceived and executed by General Manager, Anindita Bhattacharya, RBI, Kolkata and SP, Tenzing Loden Lepcha, CID for enhancing the awareness of State Police personnel and bank officials in detecting FICN through special security features of genuine bank notes vis-à-vis impounding and reporting cases of Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN).

The workshop was inaugurated by Special DGP, A Sudhakar Rao, Sikkim Police along with Regional Director (RD), Susobhan Sinha, West Bengal and Sikkim. In his opening remarks, Shri Sinha underlined the importance of FICN detection, impounding and emphasised that it is also important that the bank officials should

remain alert and vigilant for detection and prompt reporting of FICNs while dealing over the counter. Special DGP, A Sudhakar Rao, Sikkim Police in his address advised all police officials to be aware of various security features of genuine notes, especially the notes of the new series. Coloured Posters displaying the security features of new series notes in both English and Nepali languages were also exhibited by CGM, Ravindra V Sangvai, RBI, Gangtok, which were earlier supplied to Police Department to disseminate awareness. GM, Chetan N Balwir, RBI Gangtok shared his experiences with the audience in dealing with FICN.

The workshop was also addressed by SP, Tenzing Loden Lepcha, CID, Sikkim Police. Mr Lepcha urged the banks to sensitise their staff to not return or destroy fake notes detected at counters and report the same promptly to the Police. This would help in recording the chain of evidence, apprehend criminals within reasonable time and correct identification of the source.

A team from Issue Department, Kolkata comprising DGM, Onsing Marchang, Manager, Aakash Vats and Assistant Manager. Dharmendra Prasad along with Manager, Sourav Shome, BRBNMPL, Salboni demonstrated the overt and the covert security features of the new series banknotes and easy identification of FICN with the help of handheld Note Authentication Machines, UV lamp and even in plain sight. A practical demonstration on detecting fake notes using Ultra Violet lamp was also done. The procedure to be followed by banks on detection of FICN and the reporting thereof which is of paramount importance was briefed by Manager, Aakash Vats, Issue Department, RBI Kolkata. Manager, Dhiraj Gupta and Satadroo Guha from RBI Gangtok provided the local support for arranging the program.

Around thirty-five Police Officials from Sikkim Police and ten Bank Officials attended the afore-said workshop. SP, Loden Lepcha, CID and other senior officers of Sikkim Police also attended the program.

Gerethang-Labing Panchayat honours senior citizens

PRITAM LAMA

YUKSAM, 11 MAR:

Gerethang-Labing Gram Panchayat Unit under Yuksam-Tashid Constituency of West district honoured senior citizens of the GPU by organising a day-long program at GPK hall today.

Advisor to Chief Minister, Rohit Raj Maharaj attended the event as chief guest.

It is to be mentioned here that the GPU has been honouring senior citizens of the GPU by or-

ganising such functions every year. The GPU also distributed blankets, flasks and other essentials to the senior most citizens on the occasion.

Panchayat member, S. K. Limboo informed that the GPU used to organise a special pilgrimage for senior citizens which is fully sponsored through the GPU's internal funds but this year due to the pandemic the pilgrimage was cancelled. Today's function is being held

to make up for this, he added.

He also informed that the GPU organizes this function on 07 Feb every year but due to the pandemic it had to be postponed this year.

The program also has spiritual discourse from Rohit Raj Maharaj for the senior citizens.

Ecclesiastical Department Advisor, R. S. Bhutia and Transport Department Chairman, Basant Tamang also addressed the gathering.

Two withdraw nomination in Gyalshing

GYALSHING, 11 MAR (IPR):

Withdrawal of nomination for Municipal Election 2021 under Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat took place at the Office of the Municipal Returning Officer, West, today.

Under Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat, a total of two candidates withdrew their nomination at the office of MRO in presence of Election Observer, M.T Sherpa.

Following are the details of candidates who had withdrawn their candidature under Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat: Indra Bahadur Karki from 05-New Gyalshing ward and Menuka Chhetri from 04-Central Gyalshing ward.

Following the withdrawal of candidatures, the final lists of candidates under Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat are as follows:

01. Kyongsa (ST) - 1 candidate
02. Byadong (SC) - 3 candidates
03. Nayabazar ST (W) - 3 candidates
04. Central Gyalshing UR (W) - 4 candidates
05. New Gyalshing OBC (S)

- 2 candidates
Meanwhile symbols were allotted to all the twelve candidates by the Municipal Returning Officer, (MRO, West) Karma R.Bonpo and Assistant Returning Officer, (ARO, West) Agawane Rohan Ramesh in the benign presence of Election Observer for West, M.T. Sherpa. One of the candidate from 01-Kyongsa ward stands uncontested and a total number of twelve candidates will contest the poll on 31st of March 2021.

Election Observer briefed about the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) to the present candidates and mentioned that MCC needs to be followed strictly by all the candidates, polling agents and election agents. He added, the election process will be conducted in free, fair and transparent manner and urged all the candidates to cooperate the election proceedings peacefully. He also highlighted the Do's and Don'ts of MCC in brief and for any confusion and queries he circulated his phone number and email ID.

Municipal Returning Officer suggested candidates not to modify the given symbols which may create confusion among the voters while casting their votes. He also informed that the ballot paper will be set in the same sequence according to Form- 23. Further, he also informed about the miking permission which needs to be taken from SP, West. He suggested not to entertain any activities that leads to MCC violation. He further suggested the candidates to appoint election agents for official works, so, candidates could do their campaigning freely. He assured that polling will be done in a transparent manner and stated that EVM (Electronic Voting Machines) will arranged in front of candidates and election agents. He further stated that there should not be any kind of interference in polling stations and total security will be there.

Later the copies of Model Code of Conduct and Form-24 were also distributed to all the candidates.

Waiting Shed inaugurated at Mangan, COVID warriors felicitated



Mangan, 11 Mar (IPR):

A waiting shed in the premises of District Hospital Mangan was inaugurated by the chief guest, Minister for Forest, Environment & Wildlife Department, Karma Loday Bhutia today.

The opening also had the presence of area MLA Dzongu and Advisor Power Department, Pintso Namgyal Lepcha and Additional Political Secretary (North) to the Chief Minister, Tshering Wangyal Bhutia. District Collector (North), Tenzing T Kaleon, SP (North) Ongmu Bhutia, CMO (DHM), DMS (DHM), Director North Sikkim Academy, Namgyal Phuntso Kazi, officers and staff of DHM, Forest department and the public were present for the event.

Minister expressed his delight in being able to contribute and be a part of a good cause. It may be mentioned here that the waiting shed has been constructed in the memory and to honour Auxillary Nursing Midwifery, Late Basanti Sundas, a frontline warrior who lost her life in the line of duty in September 2020. The waiting shed is of utmost need for the hospital as it often rains in the area and the patients waiting usually get wet or seek shelter inside, resulting into a crowd. Due to the pandemic, it is also necessary to follow social distancing in public places and the shed provides seating area with ample space for the patients to wait.

The Minister said

that Late Sundas is an example for all to follow, as her dedication to the service of people has been beyond exemplary. She put her duty before herself and a service as rare as that should be a shining example. He also advised everyone to reflect of the challenges and the changes that the pandemic has brought about into our daily lives and to channelize it towards something productive and positive like staying fit and healthy through regular exercises and yoga, eating healthy, having a disciplined lifestyle and building a good immune system.

He thanked Namgyal Phuntso Kazi for playing a very important role of an educator and a social worker. He stated that it was people like Mr. Kazi who took the responsibility of equipping children with education and exposure and thereby creating a future of literate, educated and confident children from the district. He urged the doctors and the people, both to develop a sense of brotherhood, be selfless towards those in need, take the example of Late Mrs. Sundas and serve the society with an altruistic spirit.

DHM presented the Forest Minister, Area MLA (Dzongu), Additional Political Secretary (North) to Chief Minister with a token of appreciation for providing and contributing during times of need and for their constant support and aid.

For their courageous and conscientious com-

bat against COVID 19, the following organizations and doctors were felicitated:

1. Namgyal Phuntso Kazi - Director, North Sikkim Academy
2. Himalaya Free Church, Mangan
3. North Sikkim Youth Welfare Organization
4. Dr Jigdel Wangdi Bhutia, MD
5. Dr Cheten Topgay Bhutia, MD
6. Dr Tenzing Chewang
7. Group 'D' employees of DHM
8. Insulation Staff- DHM
9. Naomi Lepcha - Auxillary Nursing Midwifery
10. Driver Association DHM.

The spouse of Late Sundas accepted the citation for her service and thanked the doctors and staff of DHM. He also thanked the government for celebrating her life and the support provided to him and his family. He stated that his wife has left a legacy for others to follow. He encouraged everyone to work towards community growth through diligence, just like his late wife did.

A coordination meeting with the CMO and doctors of DHM, Forest Minister, Area MLA (Dzongu), Additional Political Secretary (North) to Chief Minister, District Collector (North) took place after the programme where the immediate requirements and needs for DHM were discussed to bring about proper and quality treatment for the people of the district.

KUTSE SHEGU



The 49th days kutse Shegu of Lt. Tashi Doma Bhutia of Upper Ghurpisey, Namchi South Sikkim who left her heavenly abode on 26th January 2021 falls on 15th March 2021.

All relatives, friends and well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence Upper Ghurpisey, Namchi.

We also express our sincere gratitude to all those who extended their support during our time of bereavement.

Mr. Norden Bhutia (husband),
Mr. I Sonam Topgay Bhutia (son)
Ms. Tshering Denka Bhutia (daughter)
Ms. Pema Choden Bhutia (daughter).

Darj boy wins Online Spell Bee Competition by SRM Univ

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 11 MAR:
Spellbound 21, a Spelling Bee Competition, was successfully organised by the Department of English, SRM University Sikkim on 11 Mar, 2021, a press release informs.

Following the success of the first competition in 2019, the second edition of the event was organised in the online mode.

The programme started with a special address by Vice Chancellor Ch Satish Kumar who encouraged students to



come forward and participate in more activities to ensure their all-round development.

He further said, "Once we perfect the online model for spelling bee contests, we can extend the competition to not only Sikkim and surrounding areas but the entire northeastern region."

Carefully structured into three competitive rounds of increasing complexity, the contest registered participation from 13 schools from Sikkim and North Bengal. The spelling bee champion for 2021 was Apil Subba of St. Robert's School, Darjeeling. He received a trophy and a cash award.

Culture Department to begin Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav with skit on Dandi March today

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 11 MAR:
The 75th anniversary of India's Freedom - 'Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav' - is being celebrated all over the country and festivities are set to begin 75 weeks prior to 15 August, 2022, a press communiqué from Culture Department informs.

Celebrations will begin on 12 March, Friday, from Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad with the flagging off of a group of marchers by the Prime Minister.

In Sikkim, the Culture Department will be staging a skit on the 'Dandi March' in the Mini Hall at Manan Bhawan from 10AM onwards.

The performance

will include artistes from the department and school children from in and around Gangtok.

The Archives section of the Department will also curate a photo exhibition on the Dandi March at level-III of Manan Bhawan on the day.

The Culture Department has also chalked out a series of events as part of the anniversary celebrations ranging from quiz competitions, to online quiz, poetry recitals at all district libraries, painting competitions, storytelling sessions, yoga, cycling, exhibition and sports activities with a strong focus on youth participation and digital intervention.

227 athletes test their mettle at Jr Olympics for East dist

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 11 MAR:
A total of 227 athletes from the eleven blocks of East District are participating in the athletic events held under the district-level 1st Inter School Junior Olympic Games 2020-21 for East District at Khel Gaon, Reshithang in East District.

The event is being organised under the 'Sports for Peace and Development' Vertical of Khelo India by the Department of Sports & Youth Affairs.

The athletic event has races in 100 meters, 400 meters, 1500 meters, 3000 meters and 1 Mile CM Run categories and shot-put and long jump for U-17 boys & girls and 60 mts, 600 mts, 1500



mts and 3000 mts and long jump and long jump for U-14 boys & girls.

State Athletic Coach, Basant Pradhan, who is the technical incharge of the event, is supervising the athletics segment of the Junior Olympics.

Assistant Director to

Sports & Youth Affairs Department, Chungay Lepcha, who is also venue incharge, informs that 24 shortlisted athletes from this event will proceed to the upcoming state-level 1st Inter School Junior Olympic Games 2020-21 to be held at month-end.

Sikkim women beat Arunachal by 4 wickets

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 11 MAR:
Senior Women's One Day Cricket League starts today and Sikkim will be facing Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Puducherry, Bihar, Mizoram and Manipur in the Plate Group of the tournament that will be played at Bengaluru, a press release informs.

In the inaugural match of the league today, Sikkim faced Arunachal Pradesh at Alur Cricket Stadium, Bengaluru. Arunachal won the toss

and chose to bat first. In the first innings, they scored 123 runs in 50 overs with the loss of 5 wickets. Sikkim's tight bowling restricted the opponent for a bigger target. Nabam Yapu was the highest scorer for the side with 31 runs, followed by B Ritu with 17 runs. Mariam Subba, Tabita Subba, Sarika Koli and Pranita Chettri took one wicket each.

In the second innings, Sikkim struggled a bit with the opening pair but later they got hold of the

match and achieved the target in 35.1 overs. Rin-ki Rajak was the highest scorer for the side where she scored 56 runs and remained not-out. Songkit Lhamu Lepcha 18 runs, Tshering Ongmu Lepcha 16 runs, Sarika Koli 13 runs, and Purni Maya Gurung 1 run.

Sikkim will be playing against Jammu & Kashmir in the next match of the tournament on 13 Mar, 2021. Sikkim Cricket Association has wished them luck for the tournament.

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

email us: news@summittimes.com

CAEPHT organizes training on remote sensing and GIS application

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 11 MAR:
A three-day training on "Remote Sensing and Geographical Information System Application in Irrigation Water Management" was conducted at College of Agriculture Engineering and Post-harvest Technology (CAEPHT) here at Ranipool from 08 to 10 March.

The training program was organized by the Department of

Irrigation and Drainage Engineering, and at the inaugural program, Dr GT Patle welcomed the participants and Dr Shivam, Assistant Professor and Coordinator of the training, described the topics to be covered in the training.

During different sessions of the training, various aspects of remote sensing and GIS applications in irrigation water management and water

resources management, especially in the hilly terrain of the Sikkim region, were discussed by CAEPHT faculty members.

Dr J Panda discussed the basic principles of remote sensing and GIS.

Different applications of RS and GIS in water resources management were explained through case studies by Prof BC Kusre and Dr SR Yadav and popular methods

and computer-based models used for irrigation scheduling and crop water requirement were demonstrated through relevant software by Dr Shivam and Dr Patle.

The training was attended by 13 engineers and other officials from the Water Resources Department, Agriculture Department, Krishi Vigyan Kendras of South and West Sikkim.

Only one new case and 3,879 more vaccinated

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 11 MAR:
Sikkim recorded only one new case of novel coronavirus in the last 24 hours taking the state's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 to 6,179. No new recovery was reported in the State during the same 24 hours and the number of active cases thus stands at 50.

In his daily health bulletin on Thursday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia informed that one person from 5th Mile, Tadong, tested positive for COVID-19 in RT-PCR testing of 117 samples on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, on the vaccination front, he mentioned that 3,879 persons received their COVID vaccination on Thursday at 38 vaccination sites across the State.

Of these, 3,083 people received their first dose of the vaccine while 796 completed their COVID vaccination with the second dose received today.

Among those vaccinated today are 888 healthcare workers [248 first dose and 640 second dose], 454 frontline workers [298 first dose and 156 second dose], 270 persons in the age-group of 45 to 59 with comorbidities and 2,267 above 60 years of age.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
GANGTOK

Sikkim Teacher Eligibility Test

The postponed STET will be conducted on 27th march 2021 (Saturday) at different centres. Only those candidates whose application got approved and submitted in hard copies later along with the proof of fee payment will receive the Admit Card in their email id.

Updates will be posted on : <http://sikkimhrdd.org>.

Additional Director
Exams, Scholarship & Text Book Section, Education Dept.
Joint Director / Examinations

R.O. No. 266/IPR/Pub/Classi./20-21 Date: 11.03.2021

RUCHI DIAGNOSTIC CLINIC
Behind telephone Exchange Near Old STNM Hospital. Gangtok
PH: 03592-203333, 204876, 8509373970

EXISTING FACILITIES:

- ULTRASOUND
- DIGITAL X-RAY
- ECHOCARDIOGRAPHY
- COLOR DOPPLER
- PATHOLOGY
- MICROBIOLOGY
- BIOCHEMISTRY
- ENDOSCOPY
- B M D
- E C G
- DENTAL O P G
- GASTRO CLINIC
- PAEDIATRIC CLINIC
- MEDICAL CLINIC
- ORTHO CLINIC
- E N T CLINIC
- GYNEA CLINIC
- PHYSIOTHERAPY
- SPECIALISED TESTS

BLOOD COLLECTION CENTRES AT :

- Sushruta Medical, Ranipool.
- Arihant Medical, Opp. CRH gate, 5th Mile.

COMPLETE E N T FACILITIES UNDER ONE ROOF

ENT O P D Monday to Friday
10.00 am to 2.30 pm

1. ENT OPD CLINIC
2. ENT ENDOSCOPIES
3. MICROSCOPIC PROCEDURES
4. MINOR O T PROCEDURES
5. VERTIGO MANAGEMENT
6. AUDIOMETRY, TYMPANOMETRY AND HEARING AIDS.

CONSULTANT ENT SURGEON
DR. ONGDEN GYATSO, MS (AIIMS)

GASTRO CLINIC & O P D
8.00 am to 9.00 am
MEDICAL CLINIC & O P D
9.30 am
ORTHO AND GYNEA CLINICS & O P D
3.00 pm
PAEDIATRIC CLINIC & O P D
8.00 am And 6.00 pm
VACCINATION CLINIC

GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
RURAL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

No.279/RDD/E-TEN

Dated: 05.03.2021

INVITATION FOR BIDS

1. The Rural Development Department, Government of Sikkim, on behalf of the Governor of Sikkim invites percentage from tender under single cover system from the eligible class of contractors (Class II B with District) enlisted with the SPWD for execution of work as detailed below:

Sl.No.	Name of work	Cost of Bidding documents	Bid security 2.5% of the bid value	Bid Value.
1	2	3	4	5
1.	Construction of Rurban Rurban Community Complex and Training Centre cum Cafeteria at Pegha Goan at Soreng in West Sikkim Under Shyam Parsad Mukharji Rurban Mission.	Rs. 50,000.00	Rs. 12,63,430.00	Rs. 5,05,37,227.00

The date and time of tender and submission of completed bid document are as under.

i) Uploading of bidding documents in e-procurement portal by the Department: 12/03/2021.
ii) Last date for submission of bids online by the Bidders: 15/04/2021, 1600 hours.
iii) Last Date of submission of hard copy of bid security: 16/04/2021.
iv) Date of opening of bids: After the lifting of Code of Conduct for Municipal Election.

2. Eligible Contractors having experience in the construction of building works may download the details and bidding documents from the e-procurement portal i.e. www.sikkimtender.gov.in w.e.f 12.03.2021.

3. The completed tender documents must be uploaded in the e-procurement portal on or before 15/04/2021, 1600 hours. All the relevant papers as per the bidding documents along with the cost of tender document and Earnest Money Deposit (EMC) in the form of challan / demand draft and TDR respectively drawn in favour Additional Director (Accounts), Rural Development Department, Government of Sikkim, should be upload in the portal.

4. The department reserves the right to accept or reject and bid without assigning any reason thereof.

IMPORTANT EVENTS

NAME OF WORK	1	Construction of Rurban Rurban Community Complex and Training Centre cum Cafeteria at Pegha Goan at Soreng in West Sikkim Under Shyam Parsad Mukharji Rurban Mission.
DATE OF UPLOADING OF BIDDING DOCUMENTS AND OTHER IMPORTANT EVENTS IN E-PROCUREMENT PORTAL	12/03/2021	
LAST DATE AND TIME FOR UPLOADING OF BIDS IN E-PROCUREMENT PORTAL	15/04/2021, 1600 hours	
DATE AND TIME OF OPENING OF BIDS	After the lifting of Code of Conduct for Mincipal Election.	
PLACE OF OPENING OF BIDS	Office of the Assistant Engineer (P), Rural Development Department, Government of Sikkim, Gangtok.	
APPROVAL OF BID	After the lifting of Code of Conduct for Mincipal Election	
COMMUNICATION OF APPROVAL	After the lifting of Code of Conduct for Mincipal Election	

Sd/-
Additioanl Chief Engineer (P)
RDD

RO. No. 262/IPR/Pub/Classi./20-21
Dated: 08.03.2021

Our Inherent Racisms

Because we are also victims of prejudices, let us resolve to be better ourselves

Remember the moment a few years back when the High Court of Delhi asked the Central Bureau of Investigation to ascertain whether “Chinki,” the term universally understood as a racist term used against people with Mongoloid features, had been notified as a casteist remark in laws and rules framed for the protection of scheduled tribes.

It is unlikely that the word has been officially registered as a derogatory or racist term even if that is how it is universally used. In fact it is unlikely that there is any updated list of racist or demeaning terms because even though the term Chinki has been derogatorily used for a long time now, babus move even slower it can be safely vouched that Chinki has still not made it into the list of such terms, i.e. if such a list even exists. That said, there is no doubting the fact that this moniker is almost always hurled to hurt and since everyone knows that, it should not matter whether it is officially listed as a slur-word or not and its use should be recognised as a racist attack. It is interesting that this judicial query arrives in April, must be the tomfoolery that we associate with the beginning of this month that silliness like the one which visited us at this time last year now play in a cycle. So, at almost exactly this time two years back, a spokesperson of a majoritarian party claimed that Indians were not racist. As evidence, he had argued that “we” continue to live with South Indians who are also black (like the Africans who suffer a string of attacks and prejudicial arrests in our country)!

After we are done laughing at such artless dodges claiming sensitivity, and wondering in which alternate reality clear everyday evidence of bigotry can be used to claim openness, we need to stare deep into the mirror and confront the monster that gets reflected back.

We need to begin by accepting that we all carry our prejudices around with us. Much of it, we have imbibed subconsciously through stray comments and smart quips which are thrown around in casual conversations. This conditioning, we share with the rest of humanity, because that is essentially how we engage with others – by pigeonholing them, caricaturizing them, even demonizing them. Eventually though, people grow up. They recognize the shallowness of their prejudices as they meet more people, more different people and get exposed to more diversity. Some also grow more confident, and as they grow in confidence, they stop being fearful of others. As for the prejudices we grow up with, most of these are harmless generalizations and misconceptions which even the first flush of education can correct, but when they remain the only introductions one is exposed to, they harden into beliefs and convictions. These convictions become a dangerous liability when the minds which hold them need to negotiate with the others. Africans in India are suffering what the Northeasterners face in the mainland and what the “Indians” experience in the North-East. Most of Delhi had remained an island of North Indianess until a few decades ago when the number of Chinkies arriving in the capital increased substantially. Neither the northeasterners, nor the North Indians were eased into each other’s company nor were they really informed in any detail about each other. We all brought along our prejudices though, so we began engaging with each other through these prisms. We remained ignorant and blundered about poorly informed and preferred to find our own communes even if it was possible to become cosmopolitan.

Our collective prejudices, our internalized instincts, often congealed into racist moments which primarily were to our detriment because they kept us ignorant, and often, when it found violent expressions pulled others into its blinkered vortex as well. The degrees and magnitude of this violence might differ from place to place, but they have happened everywhere – in Sikkim, in Nagaland, in Manipur, in Assam, in Maharastra, in Bengaluru, in Delhi, Mumbai... [do you get my point?]

We cannot, not as Indians, not as Northeasterners (whatever that means), not as Biharis, claim that we cannot be racist because we are and have been victims of racism ourselves. We have to instead resolve that because we have suffered prejudice, we need to be better – better informed, better behaved... better humans.

View Point

A Deeper Look at Political Conversion in Sikkim

JIWAN RAI

India had probably never seen political conversions of such proportions as we see today. The number of top ranking leaders hopping from one pole to the other in blatant defiance of ideological polarity is staggering. There is nothing wrong with political conversion as politics essentially is a game of converting people to a particular political worldview. The changing of people’s minds, therefore, ideally is an indication of a vibrant political interaction. However, that is strangely not always the case. The massive public reaction, some of which are vehement, to the political conversion of some Sikkimese leaders was compelling enough for me to think hard. This article is the conclusion of my thoughts.

Let me begin with a story. Years ago in a small kothey meeting in a village in East Sikkim a supporter put his leader on the spot, “Sir, this was the third time you jumped ship to join a new party. What makes you such a compulsive party hopper? Are you not ashamed to always be seen joining the party that is in government?”

The politician didn’t flinch one bit, grinned from ear to ear, looked in the eye of the questioner and said, “Is your memory so short to have forgotten that I had landed you a job of a school peon when I was in my first party. Then your son and daughter-in-law got jobs. When I joined the second party, you were promoted to primary school teacher. Do you really want to stay outside this new ruling party? Don’t you have anyone needing a job in your family?”

This is based on a true story and it partially explains the political wonkiness and utter lack of ideological allegiance in a huge chunk of leadership in the state. However, the underlying reasons are far more varied and some of them are disturbing.

We have inherited a ‘political culture of convenience’. Our political superstructure is founded on the substructure of the surrender of our sovereignty. Undoubtedly, for the sake of democracy, the merger was inevitably the most viable option. With China in the north drooling over Sikkim, we couldn’t have found a third option to pull through. However, post-merger Sikkim, in general, is more guilty of using its merger history as a source of wrong inspiration than of the merger itself. Post-merger Sikkimese politics is rarely conviction based and the majority of politicians are merely creatures of convenience. Here are my reasons to think so.

One, a deeper look at the track record of many of our party hopping leaders will show that their political conversion is always to the party in power. They have never sat outside the ruling party and they seem to lack the spine to stand outside of it. One could write a book on his/her conversion, crafting the most compelling argument in their defense, but their obsessive leaning to the party in power demolishes that argument.

Two, there is an acute dearth of ideological defense of their conversion/party hopping. Has any leader convinced you as to why he parted ways from his former party? Their argument is purely “ad hominem” meaning their defense is ridiculously personal and not ideological. The mischaracterization of their former party leaders and sometimes even assassination of their character is the only form of argumentation in favour of changing party that is often heard. Such ad hominem forms of argument spread personal hatred, resentment and even violence and banishes intellectual engagement to irrelevance. It looks like honing the skills to slander and denigrate one’s former leaders and colleagues is the only capability of leadership. Reading, thinking

and articulating is too boring. Why can’t they tell their leaders/ colleagues of their shortcomings straight in their face? Isn’t it less than courage to change the party and slander? Isn’t that disturbing?

Three, silent conversion another disturbing reality in Sikkim politics. Imagine a member of a family suddenly going to live with another family and not saying a word. Silence doesn’t settle issues. People in responsible positions of public leadership owe an explanation to the people for all their decisions.

Everyone is entitled to his personal choice of political, religious and philosophical worldview. That is our fundamental right. However, our choices should and can never be justified by our resentment of certain individuals or people. Even if that is the case, I have no right to verbalize my personal resentment and hatred in public. Washing dirty linen in public doesn’t make me cleaner than the dirty person that I abhor. We watch western movies, listen to western music, play western sports, wear western clothes and sometimes eat western food. How about watching western political debates (except those involving Trump, Bolsonaro and their ilk). There are umpteen flaws in western political debates and they are no better humans than us. However, the civility and dignity that generally mark their political debate and speeches in general needs a closer look and nuanced imitation.

I totally condemn hateful posts and slogans against a few leaders that have changed their political allegiance recently. People have the right to support and oppose their leaders but lowering politics to such a level is detrimental to the founding of a humane and livable human society. Such hatred, if not restrained now, can spill into our homes and lives - if not today, surely tomorrow.

Going Down the ‘Rabbit Hole’ to Debunk Misinformation

ELI GOTTLIEB

THECONVERSATION.COM

Big Ben was stolen from Palestine. So claimed an elderly woman, in Arabic, in a retweeted clip I received recently.

Yes, that Big Ben: the great bell in the iconic clock tower of London’s Palace of Westminster. The British took it, she said, from a tower they demolished at Hebron Gate in Jerusalem in 1922.

The claim pulled me up short. It seemed so outlandish. Who would invent something so easy to refute? And why? The woman spoke with great conviction, but could she really believe what she was saying? And if this was a hoax, then who was perpetrating it on whom?

These questions sent me down a Big Ben rabbit hole.

A MATTER OF SECONDS

Before I share what I discovered, let’s pause here for a moment, where many would have shrugged and moved on.

You’d have to have some prior interest in the Arab-Israeli conflict or the history of British colonialism to give the claim even a moment’s thought. And even then, you’d most likely judge it fact or fake, depending on your prior allegiances.

Palestinians and their allies would likely see it as further evidence of colonialist dispossession; their opponents would see a Palestinian lie to garner sympathy and incite resentment. In neither case would viewers have felt any need to investigate further. In this age of information overload, it’s a matter of seconds before the next incoming message pings for our attention.

From my perspective, as a cognitive psychologist who researches how people justify their beliefs and assess the credibility of sources, it seems that this is where misinformation causes most damage – less by convincing people of specific untruths than by reducing the motivation to distinguish fact from fiction.

Relentless bombardment by incoming stories on social media makes our attention an increasingly scarce resource. And, as technologies of fabrication proliferate, the chance increases that any given story we encounter is fake. Worse still, research suggests that fake stories travel six times faster and farther on social media than do factual ones.

The net effect is general pollution of the information environment.

Long before the invention of the smartphone and the rise of social media, trust was declining in institutions and those who lead them. New communication technologies are accelerating and intensifying these processes. People are becoming less



trusting in general and more likely to place an exaggerated level of trust in sources whose views echo their own.

If these trends continue, reasoned debate with those whose views differ from our own will become rarer and more difficult. There will be a shrinking pool of facts on which those at the ideological extremes will be prepared to agree and a growing sense among the skeptical that debate is pointless because everything is ultimately a matter of opinion.

So, when do facts matter? And how can we distinguish them from fabrications?

DOWN THE BIG BEN RABBIT HOLE

In my case, the clip hit a nerve. I was born in London and emigrated to Israel 25 years ago. I’m familiar enough with London, Jerusalem and Middle Eastern geopolitics to have smelled a rat. So, I had motive to investigate.

But, were it not for recent research, I might not have had the means. In a recent series of pioneering studies, Stanford cognitive psychologist Sam Wineburg and his History Education Group have shown how bad people are at assessing the credibility of what they read online. With the notable exception of professional fact checkers, we’re all bad at it: professors no less than schoolkids; digital natives no less than digital immigrants.

Based on what fact checkers did differently, Wineburg’s group developed online lessons to teach “lateral reading” – which involves quick comparison across sites and sources rather than close reading of the target source. This enables readers to “determine where information is coming from before they read it.”

So, going lateral, I went straight to Wikipedia to look up Big Ben. Contrary to snobbish dismissals by

some academics, Wikipedia is perhaps the most robust engine of peer review ever created. Although it can be edited by anyone, and entries on controversial topics are occasionally inaccurate, Wikipedia’s processes of editorial oversight and control, including insistence on accurate citations to substantiate claims, make it a useful first stop on any fact-checking journey.

I discovered (well, duh!) that the bell was cast at Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London and installed in the Palace of Westminster, with much pomp and circumstance, in 1858.

Next, I checked the Wikipedia entry on the clock tower at Hebron Gate in Jerusalem and discovered that it was not built until 1908 – a full half-century after Big Ben’s installation in London.

Next, I tracked down the Twitter account from which the clip had been forwarded. It belonged to a pro-Israel satirical site, TheMossadIL, which masquerades as the official Twitter feed of Israel’s secret service.

But the clip hadn’t originated there – it had been reposted by that account as an object of ridicule. I noticed that the clip had a TikTok “watermark” – a stamp that appears automatically at the top and bottom of every downloaded TikTok video, comprising the TikTok logo and video creator’s username – which identified the clip’s author as @aliarisheq. So, that’s where I went next.

The feed, seemingly curated by a young Arabic-speaking woman, contained additional clips featuring the woman in the Big Ben clip and advertisements for jewelry.

Using the View Page Source (Ctrl + U) function in my Chrome browser, I learned that the clip in question was uploaded at 17:12 on Dec. 19, 2019. The woman claiming that “Big Ben” was stolen in 1922

looked like she was in her 70s. To have witnessed the alleged theft, she would have to be a centenarian. So she wasn’t a witness: What we had here was an oral tradition, of which she was, at best, a second- or third-hand bearer.

PROTECTING FROM POLLUTION

All of which means that unless the many corroborating sources cited in Wikipedia’s Big Ben entry are an elaborate hoax of QAnon proportions, her claim doesn’t have a leg to stand on.

Big Ben was not stolen from Palestine and has no place on lists of controversial cultural artifacts like the Parthenon Marbles that former colonial powers are being asked to return to their countries of origin.

I emerged from this rabbit hole reassured about my ability to ferret out fakery when it matters. But it had taken hours. And I could think of few people to whom the outcome of my investigation would matter.

For me, the moral of the tale is threefold.

First, the idea that a person can, on any given day, sift through every incoming story, sorting fact from fiction, is increasingly implausible. There’s just too much of both.

Second, this doesn’t mean that the fact-versus-opinion distinction should be retired as a quaint idea from a bygone era. When it matters, there’s little we can’t eventually figure out.

Third, the greatest challenge fake news poses may be an ecological one: namely, how to protect precious natural resources – our time and attention – from its pollution.

Disproving fake news is time-consuming. But ignoring it corrodes trust.

[the writer is Senior Visiting Scholar, George Washington University]

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Nepal Police develop school curriculum in Kapilvastu to raise awareness on cybercrimes

MANOJ PAUDEL KATHMANDU, 11 MAR [KATHMANDUPOST]: Supriya Mishra, a 10th grader at Aniruddha Public Secondary School in Kapilvastu, is learning how to use social media safely. "I am understanding about cyber crime and have started to differentiate criminal and non-criminal activities in cyberspace," said Mishra from Baidoli in Yashodhara Rural Municipality.

Keeping in view the rise in cybercrime cases of late, the District Police Office in Kapilvastu has started developing a new curriculum to aware students about cyber crime and safe internet use. The student-targeted curriculum has been launched in 80 schools of Kapilvastu Municipality and Yashodhara Rural Municipality, police said. Anita Chaudhary, a 10th grader at Kanakmuni Secondary School in Ward No. 9 of Kapilvastu Municipality, says she has learnt from the curriculum about safe internet usage. "I have even learnt how to find educational materials from the internet. This has been very helpful," Chaudhary said. According to the Dis-

trict Police Office, this School Police Partnership Programme will help children be aware of risks associated with the use of the internet and protect them from such crimes. "This will eventually help the children grow into responsible citizens," said Superintendent of Police in Kapilvastu Nawaraj Adhikari. The District Police Office has distributed textbooks to the schools. The book aims to educate students on various issues like drug abuse, smoking, alcohol consumption, cyber crime and the use of social me-

dia in a safe way. Several social issues like child marriage, witchcraft accusation, dowry system, crimes incurred on children and sexual misbehavior on children have been included in the text book. Similarly, the book gives information about legal punishment on rape conviction, criminal record system, retaliation against gender violence, drug addiction, human trafficking, cyber crime and traffic rule awareness. The safety measures to protect from snake bite and fire inci-

dents are also incorporated in the book along with the positive and negative aspects of using social media. The book will be distributed among the students from grade 5 to grade 12. The District Police Office is planning to launch the book in all 10 local units of Kapilvastu district. "We will expand the book distribution programme to all the local units within a month. Police officers will take classes as a guest teacher if need be," said Superintendent of Police Nabaraj Adhikari. Ramesh Pandey, prin-

cipal at Aniruddha Secondary School in Baidoli, expressed his hope that the book would be helpful to make a responsible citizen out of the students. "The book will be helpful in maintaining peace and security in the society," said Pandey. "Students can prevent themselves from being a victim of various social crimes with the help of the course." At present, the book distribution scheme is a pilot project of the police administration. The administration says the book will be further revised and distributed widely in the future.

Itahari takes initiatives to end gender, sexual violence in community schools

PRADEEP MENYANGBO KATHMANDU, 11 MAR [KATHMANDUPOST]: Itahari Sub-metropolitan City in Sunsari district has taken initiatives to keep in check the rising incidents of sexual violence in community schools. The sub-metropolis has arranged for a gender focal person in each community school whose primary responsibility is to raise awareness about sexual violence among students, help them identify inappropriate behaviour and show them the legal course of action in case they fall victim to sexual harassment. "The sub-metropolitan city has come up with a yearly work plan to appoint a gender focal person in each community school. We expect that the plan will help control gender and sexual violence in schools and the community," said Laxmi Gautam, deputy mayor of Itahari Sub-metropolis.

There are a total of 36 community schools in Itahari Sub-metropolitan City. A teacher, preferably a woman, will be appointed as the gender focal person. The designated persons, according to Gautam, are responsible to get information about incidents related to gender and sexual violence and proceed to take legal action against the perpetrators. The focal persons will study the reported incidents and inform the ward office, sub-metropolis office or police as per the nature of the incident. "All gender focal persons have been provided with the necessary training so that they can provide counselling to the victims, teach children to protect themselves from such violence, launch awareness classes and inform the authorities in case of any incidents," said Gautam. The sub-metropolis last week provided a two-day training to the teachers appointed as gender focal persons. The focal persons appointed in schools have committed to play an active role in keeping in check the incidents of gender and sexual violence. "I will actively work to end gender violence in our school and community. We will also be launching an awareness campaign against such forms of violence and harassment," said Srijana Basnet, a teacher who has been appointed as the gender focal person at Madan-Ashrit Basic School in Itahari-13.

Assam polls: Over Rs 4 lakh cash seized in Cachar

SILCHAR, MAR 11 (PTI): Ahead of the assembly elections in Assam, unaccounted cash of over Rs 4 lakh was seized by a flying squad from two places in Cachar district, according to a release issued by the local administration on Thursday. During a search operation in Silchar on Wednesday, the flying squad personnel recovered unaccounted cash of Rs 2,63,850, it said. The surveillance team also seized Rs 1,36,960 during raids in the Katigorah area, the release said.

Elections to the 126 assembly seats in the northeastern state will be held in three phases between March 27 and April 6. Votes will be counted on May 2. The flying squad has been formed in the Cachar district of central Assam for the ensuing assembly elections and will operate in all the constituencies there.

One new COVID-19 case in Arunachal, tally at 16,840

ITANAGAR, MAR 11 (PTI): Arunachal Pradesh reported just one new COVID-19 case, which took the state's tally to 16,840, a senior health department official said on Thursday. The fresh case from Changlang district was detected through a rapid antigen test, he said. "The new patient is a gym instructor," State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Dr Lobsang Jampa said. Arunachal Pradesh now has four active cases, while 16,780 people have recovered from the disease and 56 died so far, he said.

The recovery rate among coronavirus patients in the state stands at 99.64 per cent. Altogether, 4,09,168 samples have been tested for COVID-19, including 440 on Wednesday, and the positivity rate is at 0.024 per cent, Jampa said. State Immunisation Officer Dr Dimong Padung said 48,752 people have been inoculated in the state so far. The health department has been carrying out the inoculation drive four days a week - Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

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Cong makes ex-BJP minister its candidate from Diphu seat

GUWAHATI, MAR 11 (PTI): Four days after BJP minister Sum Ronghang joined the Congress after denied ticket, the opposition party on Thursday nominated him to contest the forthcoming Assam Assembly polls from his Diphu constituency. All India Congress Committee General Secretary Mukul Wasnik issued the fourth list for Assam containing two names, including Ronghang for the Diphu seat in Karbi Anglong district. The other candidate is Raton Engti for the Bokajan constituency in the same district. Unhappy over denial of ticket, Ronghang, holding the portfolios of Hill Areas Development and Mines and Minerals, on Sunday joined the opposition Congress



Ronghang is currently a BJP MLA from the Diphu constituency, which will go on polls in the second phase on April 1. On Wednesday night, AICC released names for 26 constituencies that are going to polls during the second phase. The principal opposition party has named 71 candidates out of 86 constituencies in the first

and second phase of polling. The Congress, which was in power for 15 years in Assam since 2001, has formed a Grand Alliance with AIUDEF, Bodoland

People's Front (BPF), CPI, CPI(M), CPI(ML), Anchalik Gana Morcha (AGM) and RJD to fight the upcoming Assembly election against the BJP-led NDA.

No new COVID-19 case in Andaman and Nicobar Islands

PORT BLAIR, MAR 11 (PTI): Andaman and Nicobar Islands did not report any new COVID-19 case in the last 24 hours, while two more patients recovered from the disease during the period, a health department official said on Thursday. The coronavirus tally in the archipelago remained at 5,028, he said. The Union Territory now has six active cases, and 4,960 people have recovered from the disease so far. The death toll stood at 62 as no new fatality due to the infection was reported on Wednesday, the official said. Altogether, 10,474 health and frontline workers have been inoc-

ulated, while 1,416 people above 45 years of age have received the vaccine shots so far, he said. Despite an inflow of tourists into the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the overall coronavirus situation is under control in the archipelago, the official said. The local administration has been strict to ensure that health safety protocols are followed to contain the spread of the disease, he said. A total of 2,85,087 sample tests for COVID-19 have been conducted so far in the Union Territory, and the positivity rate stands at 1.76 per cent. People arriving here by flights or reaching by

ships from Kolkata or Chennai are mandatorily required to show a negative coronavirus report before the authorities allow them to enter the islands. The tourism industry, which was severely hit due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has started witnessing a steady inflow of travellers into the archipelago as all the major tourist destinations in the islands have been opened, the official said. The islands remained coronavirus-free till the first week of June last year. The first case in the Union Territory was detected on June 10, 2020. Andaman and Nicobar Islands reported its first COVID-19 death on July 27 last year.

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No new COVID-19 case in Nagaland for second day

KOHIMA, MAR 11 (PTI): Nagaland did not report any new COVID-19 case for the second day on Thursday, Health minister S Pangnyu Phom said. The COVID-19 tally in the state remained at 12,217. "No +ve case & No recoveries of COVID-19 reported today," the Health minister said in a tweet. The state currently has 10 active COVID-19 cases, while 11,963 people have recovered from the disease, Director of Health and Family Welfare, Dr Denis Hangsing said in the daily COVID-19 up-

date. The coronavirus recovery rate in the state is 97.92 per cent, he said. Altogether 91 people including 10 with comorbidities have succumbed to the infection so far and 153 have migrated to other states, he said. Kohima district is the only district in the state which has active COVID-19 cases. The other 11 districts do not have any active COVID-19 case, he said. Nagaland has so far tested a total of 1,33,252 samples for COVID-19, including 75,192 on RT-PCR, 37,473 on TrueNat and 20,587 on Rapid Anti-

gen Test, he said. Meanwhile, Nagaland has so far administered COVID-19 vaccines to 42,490 persons including 2,912 senior citizens and 465 people above 45 years with specified comorbidities, said State Immunization Officer Dr Ritu Thurr. Thurr said that out of the total doses administered in the state 28,194 are frontline workers and 10,919 are healthcare professionals. A total of 6,359 healthcare workers and 1,311 front line workers have received the second shots of COVID-19 vaccine, he said.

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Kyle Lowry: Future uncertain, but 'I will retire as a Toronto Raptors'

Toronto Raptors guard Kyle Lowry doesn't know where his future lies after this season or even after this year's trade deadline. But he is sure of one thing: Whenever his career comes to an end, he will be retiring in a Raptors uniform.

"Let me say this: I will retire as a Toronto Raptor," Lowry said after the team practiced Wednesday night ahead of the start of the second half of the season in Tampa, Florida, against the Atlanta Hawks.

What Lowry wasn't willing to commit to, however, was returning to Toronto as a free agent when his contract expires this summer, or even to say definitively that he will be with the team past the trade deadline in two weeks.

"What I would like to see is to finish this season out as strong as possible," Lowry said.

"At the end of the day, myself, my agent, the organization, everyone has to do what's best for them, right? Everyone has to do what's best for them, and that situation.

"Who knows what that is, right? Who knows what that's going to be, who knows what that



time is going to tell? For me, I know I'm still playing at a good enough level where I can help a team, I can help us, and get better."

Lowry's name has repeatedly surfaced in recent weeks as a potential trade target for teams. The Raptors are sitting two games under .500 after being among the best teams in the East the past several years, and the trade market itself is sparse after so many star players have either changed teams or signed extensions with their current ones in recent seasons. He could be

the biggest impact player available.

That is, if Lowry is actually available. Lowry, as he has done repeatedly, praised the team's young core of Fred VanVleet, Pascal Siakam, OG Anunoby and Norman Powell for their growth.

But he didn't expand much on his future, besides pointedly taking aim at a recent report that he had told people he was leaving Toronto, something he said wasn't true.

"I don't really get into that stuff, and it doesn't bother me because rumors are rumors and

they will always be," Lowry said. "But when something is said that doesn't verbally come from me and I haven't said anything, that's when it gets to the point of, 'Did you have me on record saying that? I want to know who the source is, because the source is me.'

"That stuff is where you kind of defend yourself. I don't really care about it. It's just to defend myself for a quick second."

Lowry, who is averaging 18 points, 5.5 rebounds and 7 assists this season, is still playing at a high enough level to

both be a swing piece for a contending team at the deadline if he's traded and to command a hefty salary as a free agent this summer whether he's traded or not.

Ultimately, though, he insisted he doesn't know what will happen on either front.

"For me, personally, whatever happens, we'll see," Lowry said. "I don't know. We don't know. Like, honestly, I don't know. If I could tell you, if I could look at a crystal ball, I would tell you, but I don't know what the crystal ball says. I don't know what is going to happen. I don't know what they're thinking, I'm thinking. We'll just kind of get to that point and figure it out from there."

While the Raptors will remain without several players -- VanVleet, Siakam, Anunoby, Patrick McCaw and Malachi Flynn -- because of the NBA's health and safety protocols, they will get back head coach Nick Nurse, who has been out since before the All-Star Break.

Nurse said that while he will definitely be coaching against the Hawks, the five assistant coaches who had also

been in protocol with him were still possibly not going to be able to join him for that game.

Nurse took time Wednesday to defend himself and his coaching staff after a report came out last week saying they were at fault for not following the protocols.

"I don't think anybody would have any idea what they're talking about saying that," Nurse said. "That is a really unfair, very speculative thing to say, unless you have video evidence of it, because I don't think it's very cool to say that."

"I think that our coaching staff has worked their asses off and abided by the rules as best as possible. It's not easy ... the players have a tough job to do, but they're not wearing masks. The referees have a tough job to do -- they're not wearing masks. The coaches have a tough job to do, and they are wearing masks. It's a little harder."

"But I think that we've come into an unfortunate run. It was certainly not that we're not really trying to adhere to the protocols as best as possible."

NBA announces return of its junior program in India



NEW DELHI, MAR 11 (PTI): The National Basketball Association (NBA), in collaboration with Reliance Foundation, on Thursday announced the return of its junior program for boys and girls across India.

The 12-week live series, which will be conducted via Zoom and is free to anyone who wants to attend, tipped off on March 6 with a clinic hosted by Chicago Sky guard Sydney Colson of the WNBA.

"The series will feature NBA, WNBA and NBA G League players, legends and coaches engaging participants in skill development, leadership and life skills

sessions every Saturday morning IST," said the NBA in a statement.

Two-time NBA All-Star Roy Hibbert will host the clinic on Saturday.

Returning for the eighth consecutive year, the Reliance Foundation Jr. NBA program is a youth development initiative that aims to develop the game at the grassroots level.

"Since its launch in 2013, the program has reached more than 11 million youth from more than 13,000 schools across 34 cities and has trained more than 13,000 physical education instructors nationwide," the statement added.

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Popovich announces Aldridge will be moving on from Spurs

DALLAS (AP): LaMarcus Aldridge has played his final game for the San Antonio Spurs, with coach Gregg Popovich announcing Wednesday night that the team and the seven-time All-Star have mutually agreed to seek opportunities for him elsewhere.

The Spurs will try to trade Aldridge before the March 25 deadline. If no trades are worked out, the team could simply buy Aldridge out and let him sign elsewhere as a free agent.

"LaMarcus is not with the team," Popovich said before the Spurs played the Dallas Mavericks. "He's healthy, in that respect, but we've mutually agreed to work out some opportunities for him and that'll be elsewhere. So, he won't be with the team moving forward."



The 35-year-old Aldridge was in his sixth season with the Spurs after playing his first nine NBA seasons with the Portland Trail Blazers.

The No. 2 overall pick in the 2006 draft played in 21 games this season, averaging 13.7 points and 4.5 rebounds in 25.9 minutes — a career low in rebounds and his fewest points and minutes since he was a rookie.

Popovich insisted that the decision to part

ways was best for both sides, and spoke highly of Aldridge.

"There was no problem there. We just think this is a win-win for both LaMarcus and for the club," Popovich said. "So, when an opportunity arises, that'll be up to management, his agent, you know, that sort of thing. We'll all move forward."

In Aldridge's last three appearances before the All-Star break,

Popovich moved him to the bench. Prior to that, he missed six games over three weeks with a hip injury and then sat out the last two games before the break with a stomach ailment.

"He's been a great teammate," Popovich said. "He's done everything we've asked. And at this point, we'd just like to do something that will work for him as much as for our club, because he deserves that."

Tokyo Will be My Final Olympic Appearance, Says Mary Kom

Ace Indian boxer Mary Kom has said that the Tokyo Games will be her final appearance at the Olympics.

Ace Indian boxer Mary Kom has said that the Tokyo Games will be her final appearance at the Olympics. She also said that she takes solace about the fact that her bronze medal in 2012 has inspired young girls in the country to take up the sport.

Six-times world champion Kom has been

competing for two decades but had to wait for the London Games in 2012 for a shot at an Olympic medal when women were allowed to compete for the first time.

"Tokyo will be my last Olympics, age matters here. I'm 38 now, going on 39," Kom told the Olympic Channel.

"Four (three) more years is a long time. Pretty sure I won't be allowed to even if I'm

willing to carry on till Paris 2024. The age limit for boxers is set at 40 but was extended to 41 for the Tokyo Games which were pushed back by a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kom, who failed to make the cut for the Rio Games in 2016, won the opportunity to qualify for Tokyo 2020 after beating a younger challenger in a trial in 2019.

"Olympics is huge. For any sportsper-

son, participating and winning a medal at the Games is a dream, it changes lives," she added.

"Becoming an Olympian and winning the bronze changed my life too. It also inspired many women to take up sport, especially boxing."

"I feel proud. I want more girls to come out and fight. I hope there are no restrictions on them to come out and fight for themselves and their country," she added.

Mississippi governor set to sign transgender sports limit

JACKSON, Miss (AP): Mississippi Republican Gov. Tate Reeves is scheduled to sign a bill Thursday to ban transgender athletes from competing on girls or women's sports teams.

Mississippi will become the first state this year to enact such a ban, after a federal court blocked a similar Idaho law last year. Mississippi's Senate Bill 2536 is set to become law July 1, although a legal challenge is possible.

More than 20 states



are proposing restrictions on athletics or gender-confirming health care for transgender minors this year. Conservative

lawmakers are responding to an executive order by Democratic President Joe Biden that bans discrimination based

on gender identity in school sports and elsewhere. Biden signed it Jan. 20, the day he took office.

Alphonso David, president of the LGBTQ civil rights group Human Rights Campaign, condemned the Mississippi bill.

"There is simply no justification for banning transgender girls and women from participating in athletics other than discrimination," David said after the House passed it March 3.

Rossi "felt like a real rider" on first day of second Qatar MotoGP test

Petronas SRT's Valentino Rossi says he "felt like a real rider" again following the opening day of the second Qatar MotoGP pre-season test.

The nine-time grand prix motorcycle world champion made his SRT debut in last weekend's test, but ended it 1.6 seconds off the pace in 19th having been unimpressed by Yamaha's 2021 chassis.

Rossi made a gain of almost a second in lap time in Wednesday's running in Qatar and felt the 2021 chassis to be better at turning than its predecessor.

He also tested a new aerodynamic fairing, which he feels has im-

proved Yamaha's straight-line speed -- even if he's still some 10km/h down on the fastest Ducati.

"Today is a lot better day for me," he said on Wednesday.

"In the end I am P13, so it's nothing great for sure, but I improve my lap time a lot by [almost] one second."

"I improved my pace, I improved the feeling with the bike and we work a lot with all the team."

"I'm happy about the work because my pace is not at the level of the top [riders], but I am close."

"Today I felt like a real rider, I ride quite well, we tried new stuff, we continued to test the new chassis

and it was positive."

"At the end of the day, it was not bad even if I miss something but it's just the first day, so it's a good start."

"The new chassis is better; we have better turning."

"Unfortunately, with the 2020 chassis, we lose some turning. This one from this point of view is better."

"It's not the same feeling of 2019, but anyway it's closer and also has some other good points."

"During the day I also tried something on the aerodynamics, like the new cowlings and is beautiful. "We improved a lot the top speed, and this is pos-

itive because even if the Ducati are still 10km/h faster we improved a lot."

Rossi explained his negative feeling with the 2021 chassis last weekend was down to a lack of grip from the tyres.

"For me, the second day in the test I had a lot of problems with the tyres because I don't have good grip," he added.

"I suffered very much. Today looks like the tyres were better, and the chassis is good and makes me improve the pace and I improved also my riding style, because I had some corners where I was not strong enough, especially in entry."

Nets star Kevin Durant to undergo further testing on injured hamstring

MARCH 11 (UPI): Brooklyn Nets star forward Kevin Durant, who has been sidelined for nearly a month because of a left hamstring strain, will have more imaging done on the injury next week, head coach Steve Nash said.

Nash added that even if the scan shows progress, Durant won't return to the court immediately.

"He hasn't played in a month," Nash told reporters Wednesday. "So no matter

what the scan says, there will still be an appropriate ramp-up time to make sure we put him in a position to finish the season strong."

Nash said Durant has been able to do half-court work and shooting drills, but the 11-time NBA All-Star selection is still not doing any 5-on-5 during practice or "full-court, high-speed running."

The Nets already ruled out Durant for Thursday's game against the Boston

Celtics. It will be the 10th consecutive game Durant has missed.

"He's doing really well right now, and we all feel really positive about the direction he is going," Nash said. "But we just need to be very cautious because he's a really important player for us."

Durant last played for the Nets on Feb. 13 against the Golden State Warriors. He is averaging 29 points, 7.3 rebounds and 5.3 assists this season.

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Cambodia reports first COVID-19 death, 1 year into pandemic

PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA (AP): Cambodia on Thursday confirmed its first death from COVID-19 since the pandemic began more than a year ago as it battles a new local outbreak that has infected hundreds of people.

The 50-year-old man was confirmed infected last month while working as a driver for a Chinese company in coastal Sihanoukville and died at the Khmer-Soviet friendship hospital Thursday morning, the Health Ministry said in a statement.

Cambodia has confirmed only 1,163 cases of infection with the coronavirus since the pandemic began, but it is battling a new local outbreak that has infected several hundred people.

According to the Health Ministry, the new outbreak was traced to a foreign resident who broke quarantine in a hotel and went to a nightclub in early February. That caused a slew of infections and led the government on Feb. 20 to announce a two-week closure of all public schools, cinemas, bars and entertainment areas in Phnom Penh.

The government has since extended the closures for more two weeks for schools, gyms, concert halls, museums and other entertainment venues in Phnom Penh, nearby Kandal province and the coastal province of Sihanoukville.

On Thursday, the Health Ministry said 39 cases were reported from local transmission.

As the outbreak grows, a defunct luxury hotel in the capital has been converted into a 500-room coronavirus hospital, and authorities are enforcing a new law imposing criminal punishments for violating health rules.

The country began its vaccination campaign in February with 600,000 doses of the Chinese-produced Sinopharm vaccine. It also received 324,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine this month that were donated by and produced in India.

Brazil hospitals buckle in absence of national virus plan



RIO DE JANEIRO (AP): Brazil's hospitals are faltering as a highly contagious coronavirus variant tears through the country, the president insists on unproven treatments and the only attempt to create a national plan to contain COVID-19 has just fallen short.

For the last week, Brazilian governors sought to do something President Jair Bolsonaro obstinately rejects: cobble together a proposal for states to help curb the nation's deadliest COVID-19 outbreak yet. The effort was expected to include a curfew, prohibition of crowded events and limits on the hours non-essential services can operate.

The final product, presented Wednesday, was a one-page document that included general support for restricting activity but without any specific measures. Six governors, evidently still wary of antagonizing Bolsonaro, declined to sign on.

Piaui state's Gov. Wellington Dias told The Associated Press that, unless pressure on hospitals is eased, growing numbers of patients will have to endure the disease without a hospital bed or any hope of treatment in an intensive care unit.

"We have reached the limit across Brazil; rare are the exceptions," Dias, who leads the governors' forum, said. "The chance of dying without assistance is real."

Those deaths have already started. In Brazil's wealthiest state, Sao Paulo, at least 30 patients died this month while waiting for ICU beds, according to a tally published Wednesday by the news site G1. In southern Santa Catarina state, 419 people are waiting for

transfer to ICU beds. In neighboring Rio Grande do Sul, ICU capacity is at 106%.

Alexandre Zavascki, a doctor in Rio Grande do Sul's capital Porto Alegre, described a constant arrival of hospital patients who struggle to breathe.

"I have a lot of colleagues who, at times, stop to cry. This isn't medicine we're used to performing routinely. This is medicine adapted for a war scenario," said Zavascki, who oversees infectious disease treatment at a private hospital. "We see a good part of the population refusing to see what's happening, resisting the facts. Those people could be next to step inside the hospital and will want beds. But there won't be one."

The country, he added, needs "more rigid measures" from local authorities.

Over the president's objections, the Supreme Court last year upheld cities' and states' jurisdiction to impose restrictions on activity. Even so, Bolsonaro consistently condemned their moves, saying the economy needed to keep churning and that isolation would cause depression. Measures were relaxed toward the end of 2020, as COVID-19 cases and deaths ebbed, municipal election campaigns kicked off and homebound Brazilians grew fatigued by quarantine.

The most recent

surge is driven by the P1 variant, which Brazil's health minister said last month is three times as transmissible as the original strain. It first became dominant in the Amazonian city Manaus and in January forced the airlift of hundreds of patients to other states.

Brazil's failure to arrest the virus' spread since then is increasingly seen as a concern not just for Latin American neighbors, but also as a warning to the world, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director of the World Health Organization, said in a March 5 press briefing.

"In the whole country, aggressive use of the public health measures, social measures, will be very, very crucial," he said. "Without doing things to impact transmission or suppress the virus, I don't think we will be able in Brazil to have the declining trend."

Last week's tally of more than 10,000 deaths was Brazil's highest since the pandemic began, and this week's toll is on track to be even greater after the country posted nearly 2,300 deaths on Wednesday — blowing away the prior day's total that was also a record.

"Governors, like a lot of the population, are getting fed up with all this inaction," said Margaret Dalcolmo, a prominent pulmonologist at the state-run Fiocruz Institute. She added that

their proposed pact is vague and will remain symbolic unless it becomes far-reaching and confronts the federal government.

Brazil's national council of state health secretaries last week called for the establishment of a national curfew and lockdown in regions that are approaching maximum hospital capacity. Bolsonaro again demurred.

"I won't decree it," Bolsonaro said Monday at an event. "And you can be sure of one thing: My army will not go to the street to oblige the people to stay home."

Restrictions can already be found just outside the presidential palace after the Federal District's governor, Ibaneis Rocha, implemented a curfew and partial lockdown. Rocha warned Tuesday that he could clamp down harder, sparing only pharmacies and hospitals, if people keep disregarding rules. Currently, 213 people in the district are on the wait list for an ICU bed.

Bolsonaro told reporters Monday that the curfew is "an affront, inadmissible," and said that even the WHO believes lockdowns are inadequate because they disproportionately hurt the poor. While the WHO acknowledges "profound negative effects," it says some countries have had no choice but to impose

heavy-handed measures to slow transmission, and that governments must make the most of the extra time provided to test and trace cases, while caring for patients.

Such nuance was lost on Bolsonaro. His government continues its search for silver-bullet solutions that so far has served only to stoke false hopes. Any idea appears to warrant consideration, except the ones from public health experts.

Bolsonaro's government spent millions producing and distributing malaria pills, which have shown no benefit in rigorous studies. Still, Bolsonaro endorsed the drugs. He has also supported treatment with two drugs for fighting parasites, neither of which have shown effectiveness. He again touted their capacity to prevent hospitalizations during a Wednesday event in the presidential palace.

Bolsonaro also dispatched a committee to Israel this week to assess an unproven nasal spray that he has called "a miraculous product." Fiocruz's Dalcolmo, whose younger sister is currently in an ICU, called the trip "really pathetic."

Camila Romano, a researcher at the University of Sao Paulo's Institute of Tropical Medicine, hopes a test her lab developed to identify worrisome variants, including P1, will help monitor and control their spread. She also wants to see stricter government measures, and citizens doing their part.

"Every day is a new surprise, a new variant, a city whose health system enters collapse," Romano said. "We're now in the worst phase. Whether this will be the worst phase of all, unfortunately we don't know what's yet to come."

Still recovering, Japan marks 10th disaster anniversary

TOKYO (AP): Japan on Thursday marked the 10th anniversary of the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster that hit its northeastern region, where many survivors' lives are still on hold.

Carrying bouquets, many walked to the coast or visited graves to pray for relatives and friends washed away by the tsunami. Emperor Naruhito and Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga were among those observing a moment of silence at 2:46 p.m. — the minute the shaking started — at a memorial in Tokyo.

The magnitude 9.0 quake that struck on March 11, 2011, was one of the biggest on record and set off a massive tsunami that swept far inland, destroying towns and causing meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. More than 18,000 people died, mostly in the tsunami, and nearly half a million people were displaced.

Additionally, the government recognized about 3,700 others — majority of them from Fukushima — who died of causes linked to the disaster.

Ten years later, more than 40,000 people are still unable to return home in and around Fukushima, where areas near the wrecked plant are still off-limits due to radioactive contamination.

"Reconstruction in disaster-hit areas has moved forward significantly, but recovery of the survivors' hearts is not making as much progress as we wish," said Makoto Saito, a teacher at an elementary school in Minamisoma, a town hit by the triple disaster where he lost his 5-year-old son Shota in the tsunami.

Saito, representing Fukushima survivors, said in his speech at the ceremony that he is afraid memories are fading outside the disaster zone and he is committed to keep telling the lessons from the disaster and stories of his son.

Naruhito said "my heart aches" when he thinks of those who have struggled with hardships, drastic changes to their lives, lost their loved ones, jobs and

communities. He especially noted the suffering of many Fukushima residents who cannot go back.

"I also consider it important to heal emotional scars and watch over the mental and physical health of those afflicted, including the elderly and children," he said. He stressed that it's important for people to stand by them and help reconstruct their lives "without leaving even a single soul behind in this difficult situation."

Rebuilding roads, train lines, and other key infrastructure and housing has mostly been completed at the cost of more than 30 trillion yen (\$280 billion), but a lot of empty land remains empty in coastal towns farther north in Miyagi and Iwate prefectures, where existing population losses were accelerated by the disaster.

In Otsuchi town in Iwate prefecture, where the tsunami destroyed the town hall, killing about 40 employees, families in dark suits gathered on a piece of empty land where the building used to stand. In Ishinomaki, Miyagi prefecture, dozens of residents prayed at a cenotaph carrying the names of more than 3,000 victims.

No deaths have been confirmed directly from the radiation, but Fukushima has fallen behind in the recovery efforts, with 2.4% of land classified as no-go zones near the nuclear plant. The decommissioning of the melted reactors is an unprecedented challenge, with some questioning after 10 years of work whether it can be done at all.

Thursday's ceremony is the last national commemoration for the 2011 disaster organized by the government. It comes just two weeks before the Olympic torch run begins from Fukushima for the delayed Tokyo Summer Games in July.

Suga has said the Olympics will showcase Japan's recovery from the disaster and will be proof of human victory over the coronavirus pandemic. Some disaster survivors, however, say their job is still only half done.

Chinese lawmakers endorse tighter control over Hong Kong

BEIJING (AP): China's ceremonial legislature on Thursday endorsed the ruling Communist Party's move to tighten control over Hong Kong by reducing the role of its public in picking the territory's leaders.

The measure adds to a crackdown against a protest movement in Hong Kong calling for greater democracy. The crackdown has prompted accusations Beijing is eroding the autonomy it promised when the former British colony was returned to China in 1997 and is hurting its status as a global financial center.

Beijing's crackdown on Hong Kong has added to irritants in relations with Washington, Europe and other governments that also include trade, technology and the party's treatment of ethnic minorities.

The National People's Congress voted 2,895-0, with one abstention, in support of the plan to give a pro-Beijing committee power to appoint more of Hong Kong's lawmakers, reducing the number elected by the public. NPC members, who are appointed by the party, routinely

endorse party plans by unanimous vote or overwhelming majorities.

President Xi Jinping and other leaders sat on stage in front of delegates as they cast votes electronically in the cavernous Great Hall of the People. The NPC has no real powers but the party uses its annual meeting, the year's highest-profile political event, to showcase government plans and major decisions.

The NPC also endorsed the ruling party's latest five-year development blueprint, which calls for stepping up efforts to transform China into a more self-reliant technology creator. That threatens to worsen strains with Washington and Europe over trade and market access.

The NPC focuses on domestic issues but increasingly is overshadowed by geopolitics as Xi's government pursues more assertive trade and strategic policies and feuds with Washington, Australia and others over the coronavirus, conflicting claims to the South China Sea and accusations of spying and

technology theft.

Also Thursday, the country's No. 2 leader, Premier Li Keqiang, said economic growth might be faster than this year's official target of "above 6%" he announced last week, which surprised forecasters who expect an expansion of at least 8%. But he said Beijing is more concerned about firming up its recovery from the coronavirus and keeping growth steady.

China was the only major economy to grow last year while the United States, Europe and Japan struggled with renewed coronavirus outbreaks. Chinese growth accelerated to 6.5% over a year earlier in the final quarter of 2020.

"There may be even faster growth," Li said at a news conference. However, he said, "we must avert wild swings in economic performance."

As an anti-virus measure, the premier sat in the Great Hall and talked by video link with reporters at a media center 6.5 kilometers (4 miles) away. Reporters were required to arrive nine hours in advance to be tested for the coronavirus and wait in hotel rooms for the results.

Under the changes in Hong Kong, a 1,500-member Election Committee will pick the territory's chief executive and an unspecified "relatively large" number of members of its 90-seat legislature.

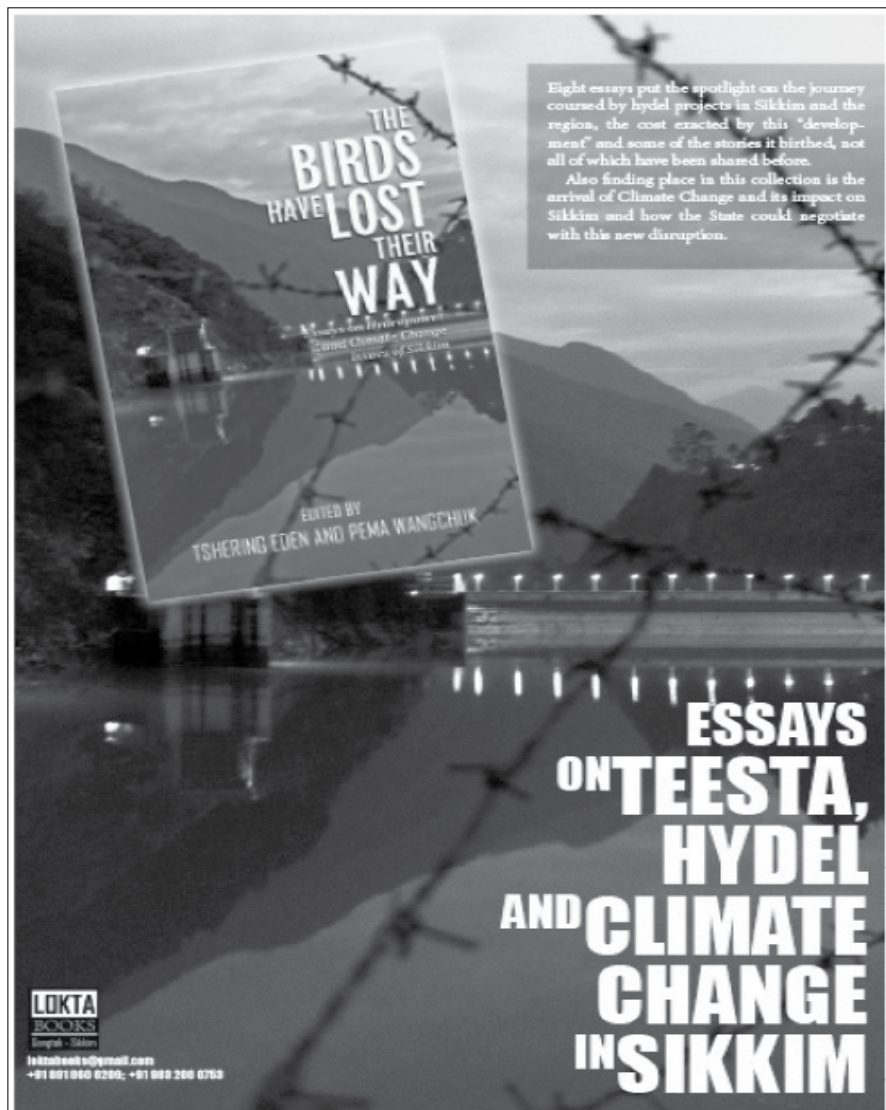
Committee members would come from five segments of society, including business and political figures. That would give pro-Beijing forces more influence than a popular vote would. Hong Kong news reports said earlier the committee will pick one-third of the members of the Legislative Council, or LegCo.

Beijing wants to see "patriots ruling Hong Kong," the premier said. He said the changes would "safeguard national security" in the territory and support "prosperity and stability."

Britain's foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, said the move is "contrary to the promises made by China itself" about Hong Kong. He said Beijing is trying to "hollow out" space for democratic debate.

"This can only further undermine confidence and trust in China living

up to its international responsibilities and legal obligations, as a leading member of the international community," Raab said in a statement.



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TOO COOL FOR SCHOOL! Gossip Girl stars: Emily Alyn Lind, Jordan Alexander, Savannah Smith and Zion Moreno filmed the Gossip Girl reboot in New York City.

Joint custody of son, no spousal support in Adele divorce

LOS ANGELES (AP): Adele will share custody of her 8-year-old son and won't be paying child support to her now-ex-husband Simon Konecki, according to divorce documents obtained Wednesday by The Associated Press.

The couple separated in August of 2019, and Adele filed for divorce the following month. A Los Angeles judge finalized the divorce last week.

According to the documents, the 32-year-old Adele and the 46-year-old Konecki used mediation to amicably reach the terms of the split. Both waived the right to seek spousal support, and both

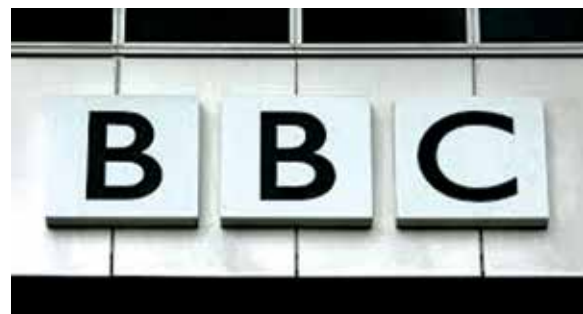
agreed to joint legal and physical custody of son Angelo, who was born in 2012. The papers say they will seek to resolve any issues without litigation.

Adele kept her original legal name, Adele Adkins, during her marriage.

The British singing superstar married Konecki, co-founder of Life Water, an eco-friendly brand of bottled water, in May of 2018, according to court documents. But she referred to him as "my husband" during a Grammy acceptance speech in 2017, and the two had been a couple for several years when they wed.



China blasts BBC report after summoning UK ambassador



BEIJING (AP): China is complaining anew about recent reporting by the BBC, days after summoning the British ambassador to Beijing to register displeasure over a recent article she penned defending press freedom.

The Chinese Embassy in London posted a statement on its website Thursday saying it had written to the BBC expressing "strong dissatisfaction" and urging the broadcaster to "abandon bias, correct its mistake and report China in a objective, fair and balanced manner."

On Tuesday, China's Foreign Ministry summoned Ambassador Caroline Wilson over her article posted on the embassy's Chinese microblog in which she said critical reporting of China did not imply hatred or disrespect for the country itself. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian on Wednesday said Wilson's article reflected her "deep-rooted ideological prejudices."

The criticism reflects deep Chinese anger both over the BBC's reporting on sensitive issues such as the coronavirus outbreak and abuses against Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, and the British governments decision to open a pathway for residency and eventual citizenship for millions of Hong Kong residents.

China last month banned the BBC from the small number of hotels, residential compounds and offices where it had been shown, in apparent retaliation for its reporting on China and Britain's revocation of the license of state-owned Chinese broadcaster CGTN.

Britain has condemned a Chinese crackdown on civil liberties in the former British colony of Hong Kong that has gathered pace with the imposition last year of a

sweeping national security law and the Chinese parliament's moves to eliminate even the possibility of government critics running for office in the semi-autonomous city.

Scores of activists have been rounded up and accused of violating the law, while free speech and assembly have been severely curtailed, seemingly betraying China's commitment to allow Hong Kong to retain its own social, political and legal systems for 50 years following the 1997 handover to Chinese rule.

In its letter, the Chinese Embassy singled out a BBC Radio 4 report titled "The Disinformation Dragon" that aired on Tuesday. The report made "groundless accusations against China on issues related to, among others, information, COVID-19 and diplomacy."

"China has always been a country of propriety and deeply values harmony. We have never been the one that starts provocations and have no intention to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries. It is the others who keep meddling in our domestic affairs and smearing China," the letter said.

In his criticism of Wilson's article, Zhao said China had stated to her its "solemn position on the relevant issue."

"Ambassador Wilson's article, with a confused logic, avoids all the facts, including the British media's disinformation and false reporting on China," Zhao said.

He accused Wilson of ignoring the alleged suppression of Chinese media in the West and of praising "the so-called Western experience in an arrogant tone" and making "irresponsible remarks about China's system and media."

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