



HENRY CAVILL GETS INJURED ON THE WITCHER' SEASON 2 SETS
pg 08

DISASTER DRILLS HAVE TO BE MORE ABOUT RESPONSE THAN JUST EVACUATION
pg 04

'DARK KNIGHT,' 'GREASE' ADDED TO NATIONAL FILM REGISTRY
pg 08



SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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CHASOK TONGNAM TO BE A GOVT HOLIDAY FROM NEXT YEAR ONWARDS

Govt supportive of community orgs functioning without interference or pressure: CM



Chief Minister PS Tamang offers Chasok Tongnam prayers at the celebration organized by the Sukhim Yakthung Chasok Tongnam Lokchum at Saramsa on Monday. [foto courtesy the official Facebook page of the Chief Minister]

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 14 DEC:

Chief Minister PS Tamang today announced that Chasok Tongnam, an important festival of the Limboo community, will be included in the list of gazetted holidays of the State from 2021 onwards. He was speaking at the final day celebration of Chasok Tongnam here at Saramsa organized by the Sukhim Yakthung Chasok Tongnam Lokchum.

Impressed with the cultural celebration put together by the community, the CM, in a Facebook post on the experience, effused that he was "delighted

to witness such a lively and colourful program highlighting different cultures and traditions of Sikkim, especially the Limboo culture."

Addressing the gathering at Saramsa, he stressed the need to preserve and promote individual cultures and traditions since they provide the unique identity passed down from generations.

"...the onus lies on us to bear the torch and carry it forward," he emphasized.

Reiterating his government's commitment to respecting the individuality of all communities and religions and castes,

turn to pg03

OFOJ appointments challenged in High Court, notices issued



File foto of the Rojgar Mela held at Paljor Stadium on 13 January, 2019, by the then SDF Government kicking off the One Family-One Job scheme.

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 14 DEC:

Hearing a challenge filed in the form of a Public Interest Litigation against the One Family-One Job scheme undertaken by the previous Sikkim Democratic Front Government in the year 2019, the High Court of Sikkim, after hearing the opening arguments presented by senior counsel A Moulik for the petitioners, was prima facie satisfied that the information laid before the Court required

examination.

The High Court bench comprising of Justice Meenakshi Madan Rai and Justice Bhaskar Raj Pradhan, which took up the PIL for hearing on Monday, 14 December, directed that notice be issued to the respondents and set the next hearing for 20 March, 2021.


The Assistant Government Advocate was present in Court for the State-Respondents on advance notice and waived formal notice.

The High Court directed that

counter affidavit be filed within six weeks and a rejoinder, if so advised, be filed four weeks thereafter.


The constitutionality of appointments under OFOJ has been questioned in political circles for a while now and fears often raised that required official procedures had been ignored in the rush to make the appointments in an election year by the previous government. And now the matter has reached the High Court.

turn to pg03



There is no fixed way to save water. In different regions, different methods are being adopted with the single aim - To conserve every drop of water.

-Narendra Modi



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DAVP 45101/13/0001/2021



STATE BANK OF SIKKIM

(A Government of Sikkim Undertaking)

VERY IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The State Bank of Sikkim, being your and my Bank has adopted the policy of extending open minded approach to deal with all its customers including borrowers both regular and defaulters. The State Bank of Sikkim has its own loan recovery policy and process with option of flexible loan settlement scheme (One Time Settlement system (OTS)) based on practical matrix system which makes it easier for defaulters to repay their old loans on easy terms and get rid of stigma of defaulter.

However, despite availability of such facilities, many of our customers (defaulters) have not come forward to settle their old dues and hence the Bank is in the process of undertaking the below mentioned steps if the Bank see no sincere effort from our customers (**defaulters**). –

1. Based on the recent ruling of the State Information Commission, Sikkim the names, address, photographs and other details of the borrower (**defaulter**), his/her guarantors, sureties shall be published in print and electronic media.
2. The Bank will also start taking legal Criminal action before the concerned police station in cases of willful defaulters or the Bank finds its money was misused or are not repaying despite having sufficient income generation.
3. The Bank is also in the process of approaching all Registrars/Sub-Registrars forbidding its defaulter/guarantors from making any transaction of their immovable properties.
4. Filing of Recovery Suits.

The State Bank of Sikkim once again call upon all its valued customers (defaulters) to come forward and resolve their issue with the Bank on their defaulted loans and avoid the inconvenience of the above mentioned steps to be undertaken by the Bank. The Bank assures all its valued customers (defaulters) to extend full cooperation in settlement of their old dues.

December 14, 2020

sd/-
(P. Wangdi Bhutia)
MANAGING DIRECTOR

SETTLE YOUR OLD DUES AND BE A PART OF SIKKIM'S GROWTH STORY

SMDS concludes with presentation of RS Tolia Memorial Award to Dr Ajay Rawat

Summit Report

Gangtok, 14 Dec:

The Sustainable Mountain Development Summit, the annual event of the Integrated Mountain Initiative which is now in its ninth edition, concluded today with a valedictory function and the presentation of the RS Tolia Memorial Award recognizing efforts made by individuals and organizations that have had an impact in integrating and addressing issues of mountain communities.

The RS Tolia Memorial Award 2020 was presented to Dr Ajay Rawat, a scholar and environmental activist whose legal actions prevented ecological destruction of lakes and



forests in the Indian Himalayan Region.

The award carries a citation, a shawl and a cash award of Rs 1 lakh.

The award has been instituted in the memory of Dr Raghunandan Singh Tolia whom IMI remembers as its visionary leader, elder and guiding light.

The valedictory session saw the presentation of outcomes and recommendations of SMDS-IX, along with a presentation by State Chapter Actions post-SMDS IX.

The session was chaired by the Dr RS Rawal, Director, GBPNIHE.

The panel discussed the concerns of the Indian Himalayan Region covering land and habitat degradation, climate change, decrease in crop genetic research, illegal trade, human-wildlife concerns and lack of investment in the biodiversity sector.

They highlighted

the need to ecological restoration, boost regional and interstate cooperation, curb illegal trade, revive traditional farming practices, strengthen capital and awareness of the BMCs, impart quality environmental education and encourage rural unemployed youth to participate in environmental conservation and protection activities, an official press release informs.

The summit concluded with the baton being passed from Dehradun, which hosted this year's SMDS, to Darjeeling Hill Initiative which will host SMDS-X in the Darjeeling-Kalimpong Hills of West Bengal in 2021.

Markandeya Puran concludes at Gupteshwar Mahadev Mandir



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 14 DEC:

Markandeya Puran at Gupteshwar Mahadev Mandir at Upper Lingee concluded

today. The final day's prayers were attended by Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's area in-charge for Rangang Yangang constituent, Raj Kumar

Basnet, chairperson Tshering Lepcha, CLC vice president, Manoj Khanal, SKM's social Media in-charge, Hem Rizal and others.

SKM completes ward and block level committee formation for Barfung constituency



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 14 DEC:

The final round of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's WLC and BLC formation for Barfung constituency was held at Subuk, Sanganath GPU, today, a press release informs.

The meeting was chaired by SKM's CLC president, Bishnu Sharma, who was accompanied by a host of other party officer bearers.

Also on the day, 10 families formally quit their association

with SDF and joined SKM.

All the WLC and BLC office-bearers were introduced at the meeting and with the process completed for Sanganath GPU, SKM has completed the process for the constituency

10 years on, missing boy re-united with family by DARPAN

HYDERABAD, DEC 14 (PTI): A boy, who had gone missing from his house in 2010, has been traced with the help of the face recognition tool -- DARPAN -- and re-united with his family.

The boy from Madhya Pradesh was found at a children's home inHowrah, West Bengal, a press release said here.

He went missing on October 7, 2010 from Jabalpur in Madhya

Pradesh and was spotted by Hooghly police, who admitted him to the home on October 21, 2010.

Telangana police used the face recognition tool they had developed to match photographs of missing children with those of children found in children's homes across the country.

The boy was found in March this year, state Additional Director General of Police (ADGP),

Women Safety Wing, Swati Lakra said.

The Telangana police alerted their Jabalpur counterparts, who in turn informed the parents of the child.

They went to the home and identified their son, the release said.

In view of COVID-19 lockdown, the child has been handed over to his father only on December 12 by the West Bengal police.

Losoong and Namsoong greetings from CM

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 13 DEC:

Chief Minister PS Tamang today extended Losoong and Namsoong greetings to the people.

He has wished for the happiness, affluence and good health of all the people of Sikkim and hoped that the legacy of continued peace, goodwill and harmony will forever prevail among all the people of Sikkim.

No RTPCR Sunday delivers Sikkim only two new Covid cases

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 14 DEC:

Sikkim registered only two new cases of novel coronavirus in the last 24 hours taking the State's tally of confirmed cases reported so far to 5,340. This, primarily thanks to the fact that no RT-PCR tests were carried out in the State yesterday since the VRD Lab at STNM Hospital remains closed on Sundays.

On the other hand, 55 people were discharged from home isolation in the State [all in East



district], raising the number of so discharged Covid-19 patients to 4,825. The number of active cases in the State

has also accordingly come down to 303.

There are, however, four patients currently in the ICU facility of the

COVID-dedicated STNM Hospital.

In the daily health bulletin on Monday, Health Department

State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia, informed that both the new cases, one in East and one in South district, were detected in rapid antigen testing of 49 samples while all the six samples screened via TruNat returned negative for COVID-19.

One person from Metro Point, Tadong in East District and another from Rabongla in South District tested positive for COVID-19 in rapid antigen testing.

Daily new Covid infections dip below 30,000 again this month

NEW DELHI, DEC 13

(PTI): The daily new COVID-19 cases fell below 30,000 for the third time this month taking India's virus caseload to 98.84 lakh, while the number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 93.88 lakh, according to the

Union Health Ministry data updated on Monday.

The total coronavirus cases mounted to 98,84,100 with 27,071 infections being reported in a day. The death toll rose to 1,43,355 with 336 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 93,88,159 pushing the national recovery rate to 94.98 per cent, while the COVID-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent.

The COVID-19 active

caseload remained below 4 lakh for the eighth consecutive day.

There are 3,52,586 active coronavirus infections in the country which comprises 3.57 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

India's COVID-19

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

Protesting Kerala Christians burn church calendar with rape-accused Bishop's photo

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,

14 DEC [NDTV]:

The featuring of a rape-accused bishop on the official calendar issued by the Syro Malabar Diocese in Kerala's Thrissur district has angered a section of church-goers so much that some of them have resorted to burning of the material in some places in the state, seeking its immediate

withdrawal.

The new official calendar for 2021, released by the Syro Malabar Thrissur diocese recently, features the photograph of Bishop Franco Mulakkal, along with other Bishops, indicating his birthday. The priest is being tried for rape, misuse of authority, and wrongful confinement after a nun

accused him of sexually abusing her repeatedly between 2014 to 2016.

Angry with his photographs, members of the Kerala Catholic Reforms Movement resorted to burning of the calendars on Sunday.

"It's sad to see that the bishops of the Syro Malabar church are proving again and again that they do not

consider the feelings of the believers. We want the calendar withdrawn," said Shaiju Anthony, Convenor of Save Our Sisters, a forum that backed the nun who had accused Mulakkal of rape. The Kerala Catholic Reforms Movement is part of this forum.

A senior priest of the church, however, said the accused remains a

member of the diocese.

"This is a private calendar for the Thrissur diocese. Franco Mulakkal is a member of their diocese and still continues to be a Bishop, though he is not in charge of any diocese. So his details were added along with details of other Bishops," the priest, who did not want to be identified, told NDTV.

Another member of

the diocese said many others harbour concerns about the photograph but have avoided speaking out against it only out of fear.

"While the calendar has been distributed in some churches of the diocese, some others have not distributed the calendars yet, seeing the protests and responses," one diocese member said.

"...Because Shudras don't understand": BJP MP Pragya Thakur's shocker

SEHORE, 14 DEC [PTI]:

BJP MP Pragya Thakur on Sunday hit out at Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee over the attack on BJP president JP Nadda's convoy in West Bengal, and claimed the Trinamool Congress leader "has gone mad".

"She (Mamata Banerjee) has come to understand that this is India and not Pakistan. Hindus are prepared to protect India. They will give a befitting reply (to her). BJP will win the Assembly polls in that state and there will be a Hindu raj in West Bengal," Pragya Thakur told reporters in Sehere. "She is frustrated

because she has realised that her rule is about to end," the BJP MP said. "She has gone mad," Pragya Thakur added.

In other controversial remarks, the Lok Sabha member from Bhopal cited d h a r m a s h a s t r a s (religious texts), claiming a "shudra" (fourth and lowest of the traditional varnas as per these scriptures) feels bad for lack of understanding.

"A kshatriya doesn't feel bad if we call them kshatriya. A brahmin doesn't feel bad if we call them brahmin. A vaishya doesn't feel bad if we call them vaishya.

But a shudra feels bad if we call them shudra, what is the reason? Because they don't understand," Pragya Thakur said.

The BJP MP is no stranger to courting controversies. The 2008 Malegaon blast accused, who defeated former MP chief minister Digvijaya Singh by over 3.64 lakh votes in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, has often stayed in the news for her provocative statements.

Despite a reprimand in May last year by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Pragya Thakur continues make controversial remarks.



KUTSE SHERGU

We would like to inform all our friends, family and wellwishers that the 49th day Kutse Shergu of our beloved Mother, Mother in law, Grandmother, Great Grandmother, Lt Chedem Bhutia W/o Lt Pem Dorjee Bhutia R/o Rabong, South Sikkim who left for heavenly abode on 06/11/2020 falls on 24th December 2020.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank for your kind help and support in our time of grief and bereavement.

Diki Bhutia (Daughter)
Kado Tshering Namka (Son)
Hon'ble Advisor, Commerce & Industries, GoS
Yap Tshering Namka (Son)
Chumzey Bhutia (Daughter)
Fuchung Tshering Namka (son)
Sonom Namka (Son)
Dechen Phigu Bhutia (Son-in-law)
Honble Advisor SMPB, GoS
Karma Rinchen Bhutia (Daughter-in-law)
Lhaki Bhutia (Daughter-in-law)
Sonom Topgay Bhutia (Son-in-law)
Pem Kicho Bhutia (Daughter-in-law)
Doma Tshering Bhutia (Daughter-in-law)
Susangla Diki Bhutia (Grand Daughter)
Kesangla D Lhasungpa (Grandson)

~ SummitTIMES ~ CLASSIFIEDS

LAND FOR SALE

Two plots available – 30X40 sq ft and 50X30 sq ft
 Junkeri Dara, Samlik Marchak

Price negotiable
 Contact : 6296366498,
 9641878315, 9593262407

LAND FOR SALE

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

LAND FOR SALE

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

FOR RENT

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

GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

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

BUILDING FOR SALE

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

Brand Factory's Free Shopping Weekend gets underway

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 14 DEC:**

The most awaited sale of the year is here! Touted as 2020's biggest shopping bonanza, it brings you unbelievable offers that make your shopping quite literally FREE!

Yes, you heard it right! The 5th Season of Free Shopping Weekend brings you the best of fashion brands at a steal.

• Shop for MRP Rs. 5000/-, pay only Rs. 2100/- and get that back, with free apparel worth Rs. 500/-, gift vouchers worth Rs. 1200/- and also cash



back of Rs. 400/- in Future Pay Wallet; so you can enjoy absolutely FREE shopping, valid from 14th to 20th Dec, 2020 only!

The surprises don't end here... CLICK, SHARE & WIN by sharing this offer via

WhatsApp, getting a chance to win Rs. 1000/- unconditional voucher! Also, get additional 7.5% instant discount (up to Rs. 1000/- max.) when you shop using your HDFC Bank Debit/Credit Card or by availing easy

EMI option.

So what are you waiting for... Choose from a wide range of National & International fashion brands such as Zara, Wrangler, Spykar, Pepe, Lee, Jack & Jones, Lee Cooper, Jealous, Bare Denim, John Miller, SBPRC, Scullers, Bare Leisure, Indigo Nation, Umbro, Hey, Alice & May, Buffalo, The Privilege Club, Knighthood, Iktara, Morpankh, Nayan's, Imara, Recap, Colors, Arrow and Wrogn, and enjoy your free shopping weekend. It's the best time for bulk buying and huge savings!

SICA takes up master plan for development of cricket in Sikkim

**SUMMIT REOPORT
RANGPO, 13 DEC:**

Sikkim Cricket Association (SICA) president, Lobzang G Tenzing, convened a meeting today at the Sikkim Cricket Ground at Rangpo to discuss the master plan for short and long-term development of cricket in Sikkim.

The meeting, a SICA press release informs, was attended by Director of Coaching, Dr Atul Gaikwad, coaches, selectors, administrative staff, ground staff, district association representatives, and senior players (both men



and women).

The main agenda of the meeting was development and promotion of cricket in Sikkim, how players will get more exposure and experience and become role models for upcoming generations, how

coaches can contribute to increasing the number of players utilising available resources and create a common development language, talent-hunt programs, identifying new talent, establishing a transparent selection process,

development of district-wise infrastructure, encouragement of club-culture, generation of funds, etc.

The SICA president also informed the meeting about plans for mapping all the coaches, umpires, support staff, area wise on the SICA website so that it will be easier for interested players to get in touch with the respective personnel.

Dr Atul Gaikwad and Dichen Dolkar (MBA – IIM Ahmedabad) gave a presentation on how cricket can be taken forward in the State.

Govt supportive of community...

he shared that the SKM Government is committed at a policy-level to allow community and cultural organizations to function without any outside interference or pressure.

"It is not necessary and feasible to politicise every matter and we firmly believe in this principle," he has posted.

To underline his government's commitment to "honouring every religion, community and caste in Sikkim," he announced a Government holiday for Chasok Tongnam from next year onwards with the date being decided according to the traditional Limboo calendar.

He also assured that the State Government will continue to provide assistance to such organizations and committees so that they can continue working in the same spirit and "carry forward the legacy and heritage left behind by our forefathers."

The CM also announced that the Sirijunga Research Institute at Hee Patal in West Sikkim will be reconstructed with a proper plan and developed into a proper asset for the Limboo community.

He also assured that stalled projects like Iman Singh Chemjung memorial at Tikjek and Yuma Manghim at Darap would be revived soon.

Addressing other concerns of the Limboo community, he informed that during a recent visit to New Delhi, he updated and submitted official letters concerning the LT seat reservation issue, ST status for 11 left out communities of Sikkim and visit of the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorji to Sikkim to Union Ministers and other leading personalities at the Centre.

Lok Sabha MP, Indra Hang Subba, has been "dedicatedly pursuing these matters with the central Government," he added and has been working "proactively and tirelessly" to fulfill these long term aspirations of the people.

"I commend his efforts and encourage him to carry on with the same enthusiasm," he said.

Recognising the need to celebrate Sikkim's profusion of cultures and tradition through events, books and even movies for the benefit of the younger generation and the world at large, the CM shares that he was "honoured" to release two works of literature in Limboo language today and join in the felicitation of prominent personalities of the community at the celebration at Saramsa.

Tatas 'interested' in Air India

NEW DELHI, DEC 14 (PTI): Tata Group is seeking to board Air India again after nearly seven decades, with the salt-to-software conglomerate set to participate in the bidding process for the national carrier, sources said on Monday.

The last date for submission of Expression of Interest (EoI) for Air India is Monday.

At present, the Tata group is operating two airlines -- the full service carrier Visatara in association with Singapore and AirAsia India, for which it

has collaborated with Malaysian airlines group AirAsia.

The Narendra Modi government has already taken one attempt to privatise Air India in the last three years, which came a cropper. However, the government re-initiated the disinvestment process of Air India early this year.

Sources said Tata Sons is "interested" in acquiring Air India and will meet the government deadline for expressing the same.

The holding and promoter firm of the Tata

group companies has, however, not decided as yet whether it will go solo or bid through a partner, the sources said.

When contacted, Tata Sons spokesperson declined to comment.

An AirAsia India spokesperson, in response to a query sent to its Chief Executive Officer Sunil Bhaskaran, refused to comment.

"We would not be responding to the query," said the spokesperson.

A group representing as many as 209 Air India employees have also put in a bid for the national

carrier, the airline's Commercial Director Meenakshi Mallik said.

"We submitted the bids today (Monday) morning for acquiring the full (entire 100 per cent stake) company," Mallik, who initiated the employees' participation, told PTI.

Earlier, a section of Air India employees said that they were looking to bid for the airline in partnership with a private equity fund and each employee was asked to contribute Rs 1 lakh towards the bid.

In January this year, the government invited bids for selling 100 per cent of its holding in Air India and its international budget arm Air India Express Ltd and 50 per cent in ground handling joint venture

35 couples receives Rs 2 lakh each under Sikkim Grant of Award for Marriage with Disabled Persons scheme

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 14 DEC:**

Thirty-five couples received one-time grant of Rs 2 lakh each through the Sikkim Grant of Award for Marriage with Disabled

Persons scheme. The grant is released through the "Disability Section" of the Social Justice and Welfare Department, an official press release informs. The first token for

the said scheme was handed over by the Chief Minister on the occasion of International Day of Persons with Disabilities here on 03 Dec, 2020. The grant, it

is informed, is released as a joint-account demand draft made out to the couples who have been asked to open joint-accounts at a State Bank of Sikkim branch of their convenience.

Shuttlers from Soreng sweep district-level tournament

**RUDRA KAUSHIK
GYALSHING, 14 DEC:**

Shuttlers from Soreng Badminton Association continued their sterling performance, sweeping most of the matches in the final round of the district-level badminton tournament organized by Kyongsa Sarwa Sewa Sangathan [KSSS] in coordination with Badminton Association of Gyalshing [BAG] here at the badminton courtyard of Rural Development Department near Gyalshing bazar

Displaying keen gamesmanship skills, SBA players walked away with trophies in men's singles, mens' double and mixed-doubles, while veteran doubles



was won by players from Sombaria.

In men's single, NT Bhutia of SBA beat Prashant Gurung of Sombaria; in under-15 category, Siddhant Gurung of Dentam emerged victorious against Shahil Rai of

Salghari Zoom while the veterans' singles was won by Mohan Thapa.

The tournament had commenced on December 12 to commemorate Losoong/Namsung festival.

The final day had Sikkim Krantikari

Morcha's constituency-level committee president [Yangthang], Tshering Wangyal Bhutia, as the chief guest.

Also on the day, KSSS felicitated senior citizens of the society who have supported KSSS in their respective capacities.

OFOJ appointments challenged...

The PIL has been filed by three currently unemployed post-graduates who claim to be "public-spirited persons," interested in the "development of society so that educated unemployed youth are not exploited."

They have petitioned the High Court convinced that the OFOJ policy of the previous government "fails to comply with any statutory provision" and that not only statutory provisions of Service Rules, but even provisions of the Constitution of India have been sidestepped in how OFOJ was implemented.

The three petitioners, all residents of East district, and post graduates in disciplines ranging from Sociology to Bio-Chemistry.

The petitioners have prayed that all appointments made under the One Family-One Job scheme so far be deemed "illegal, set-aside, quashed and cancelled."

Notice has now been issued to the State of Sikkim and the Department of Personnel, Administrative Reforms and Training to file a counter-affidavit within six weeks.

The OFOJ scheme was launched on 12 January, 2019 and as many as 18,000 youth are reported to have been appointed in various positions across the State.

Credit Loan Mela for East dist on 24 Dec

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 14 DEC:**

The credit loan mela for farmers of East Sikkim is scheduled to be held at Rangpo on 24 December, it is informed.

The event is also expected to include exhibition stalls and display and sale of special breeds of livestock.

The State Government expects the credit loan mela to benefit at least 1,200 farmers.

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV

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

Precautions to Prevent nCoV

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

Treatment

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

If you seek help, you may call :

-Toll free no. 104
District surveillance Officer
EAST : 7029372100
WEST : 9593297809
NORTH : 9641957468
SOUTH : 7407691463
New STNM
AMS : 9434711402

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM**

Disaster Preparedness

Disaster drills have to be more about response than just evacuation

Just when it felt like Sikkim was forgetting the fright of the 18 September 2011 temblor, Nepal was hammered by a 7.8 strong earthquake on 25 April 2015, the ripples of which coursed through Sikkim as well, scary more in their duration than intensity. And now, even that moment is more than five years in the past and the fear of plate tectonics appears to have worn off. Lessons on Himalayan plate tectonics and the earthquakes they can trigger should however never be forgotten, and the State, its people and its authorities constantly reminded that they live in a seismically active zone.

Disaster preparedness is not an extravagant indulgence for the government and people here, but a dire necessity. It is thus bewildering that disaster management here is just a fund-driven, Delhi-dictated token undertaking when it should have been an instinctive and informed choice of the people, which, if also supported by the government, would have become even more robust. Funds for disaster management became abundant after the Tsunami of 2004, unfortunately, this has not translated into improvements in preparedness. Disaster Management is part of a full-fledged government department now, but for it to be of any consequence in a region as natural disaster-prone as Sikkim, it has to become part of the psyche of the people here, aimed to ensure that panic, which can be the most debilitating emotion in the wake of a catastrophe, does not take over the streets.

While disaster drills have to begin with safe evacuation protocols, they cannot be allowed to end there [as is currently happening] and need to be developed more effectively for the scenario after a disaster has struck; it is after all the aftermath which is the more difficult period to manage. No amount of evacuation drills and exercises can prepare one for the moment when disaster actually strikes – that response is driven by fear and shock - but after a disaster has passed, training and drills can help people deliver the right responses. This phase, however, is not adequately addressed in disaster management plans.

The 2011 earthquake is not so distant in the past that its lessons should be forgotten, and yet, people, even though aware of what an earthquake can do, are still not building earthquake-resistant houses even though the technology exists, and weak structures are still allowed to stand without retrofitting. Earthquakes cannot be predicted to any exactness, but scientists and history inform us of which areas are at risk, so planning for the aftermath should have been a refined drill by now. That has not happened in Nepal and has shown no signs of being attempted in Sikkim either. Look at Nepal, within three days of the disaster which has affected a majority of the population, people are accusing the government of not reaching aid to them, painting pictures of preying politicians looking to profit from the calamity. In most cases, these are emotional and poorly informed responses. Every victim believes his to be the worst privation and sees institutional failure in every minutes delay in being serviced with official assistance. Victims invariably know only their own suffering and in their shock, lose sight of the real scale of devastation. One saw this in Sikkim as well when cut-off Chungthang was seething with anger because the “government” did not reach them sooner, completely losing sight of the fact that government officers stationed there had been working extremely hard at reaching rescue and rehabilitation. Maybe people require visible and ostentatious signs of government intervention, and maybe such expressions need to be worked into disaster mitigation plans, at least people’s frustrations can then be kept in check. And keeping frustrations and panic in check is important because anarchy is only a step away. In Nepal, within hours of people going on TV accusing their leaders of having failed them, there were reports of people having ransacked aid trucks – not necessarily because they had run out of food, but more because they feared that they will eventually run out of provisions and the government won’t deliver.

The people are not without reason to suspect their governments because they have seen corruption, indifference and incompetence from very close quarters in their leaders and officers. In times of loss, their lack of trust gets amplified and will require much improved official responses to assuage.

As in Sikkim, so in Nepal, there was no lack of aid, but there were delays, as much because of lack of proper information and information sharing, as due to the babudom not having clear orders on how to manage aid. Clear guidelines need to be in place of how relaxations need to be extended in the wake of a disaster. More importantly, clear channels of communication need to be opened to collect data and share information. Every locality needs to have a disaster cell made up of residents who come together after a disaster. They should know whom to report their requirements of aid and supplies to and all this data should be centrally managed so that aid is more effectively directed. There is never a dearth of aid, but too much time is lost because it is not regulated properly. Reliable and durable channels have to thus be institutionalised for this. The same channels can also be used to deliver proper updates so that misinformation and scare-mongering does not worsen an already fragile scenario. These are only some of the aspects that disaster management plans need to take into account, and only after planners take the real stakeholders into confidence, can a reasonably reliable plan be drawn up. Keep talking down to the people, telling them what to do instead of working out with them on what should be done, and these hierarchies will unravel the moment disaster strikes, after which confusion and panic will reign...

It Will Take Lot More Than Free Period Products to End Stigma Around Menstruation

SARAH ZIPP & CAMILLA MØRK RØSTVIK
THECONVERSATION.COM

Pad by pad, efforts to challenge the stigma of menstruation are putting periods in the spotlight. The latest move comes from the Scottish parliament, which just passed a landmark bill to combat “period poverty”. Led by Labour MSP Monica Lennon, lawmakers unanimously voted to provide free menstrual products for all people who menstruate.

Just two years after becoming the first to provide period products in all schools, colleges and universities, Scotland is the first nation in the world to guarantee access to menstrual products. Although this is the first time menstrual products have been provided universally, Scotland follows in the footsteps of other pioneering efforts. Most notably, Kenya has provided free products in schools for years.

The Scottish bill emphasises the importance of menstrual health education in schools and promotes efforts to dismantle taboos around periods. Yet the importance of education and challenging stigma is often overshadowed by product rollouts.

BEYOND PRODUCTS

For decades, activists have been campaigning for better menstrual health education, tax-free products and more. Yet governmental and media interest in the provision of period products is only recently gaining momentum.

Since around 2015, the movement has become increasingly visible. Campaigns and initiatives run the gamut. The common theme across most of these efforts, however, is that they are product-focused. By placing

the pad, tampon, cup, or pants at the centre of attention, we may be missing the larger problem: stigma.

Initiatives featuring products and period poverty span from Netflix’s *Period. End of Sentence.*, an Oscar-winning documentary about reducing period stigma in India, to the *On the Ball* campaign in professional football (an effort to provide period products on football grounds).

Other taboo-smashing campaigns and commercials include *HelloFlo* (sponsored by Kotex), *Bodyform’s Real Blood* campaign and Indian cricket’s *Rajasthan Royals* campaign. Additionally, an explosion in new menstrual management technologies, aka “FemTech”, has transformed the commercial landscape in menstrual health. Sustainable period product companies like *Hey Girls* and *THINXare* flooding the market, along with period-tracking apps. In the UK, charity groups such as *Bloody Good Period* and *Big Red Boxare* busy distributing products.

But people need more than pads, they need knowledge and support. Access to products is enormously important, no doubt. But upon deeper reflection, it is (in part) a continuation of the same old taboo. As women’s, gender and sexuality studies professor *Chris Bobel* observes in her recent book, the good period is the period we don’t see or know about. Cover it up, conceal it and get on with life. What lies beneath is a messy reality that we rarely deal with or see.

PERIOD SHAME

Navigating period woes can be daunting. From excessive bleeding and pain to hormonal changes and period poverty, many suffer in silence due to menstrual stigma. Dangerous

traditions, such as menstrual huts in Nepal are abusive and sometimes deadly. Globally, harmful myths and restrictions prevent many from participating in important activities, from sport to school to cooking.

We know that strong taboos often prevent people from asking for help and support, including asking for free products. A *Plan International* UK study found that nearly half of girls between 14 and 21 were embarrassed by their periods. The shame persists into adulthood: about 20% of UK women surveyed by *ActionAid* also felt uncomfortable talking about their periods and whether they had a difficult or easy cycle.

The experience of non-binary and trans people is less clear, but recent research shows that they face these challenges with additional distress over using public toilets, gender dysphoria, and discrimination.

SMASHING STIGMA

The broader menstruation movement seeks to fill the gaps that products cannot fill. Creative approaches to educating about menstruation include work from artists, comic book writers and zine makers. Advocacy groups such as *Days for Girls*, *The Women Win Foundation* and *Menstrupedia* have developed education resources.

Research groups in the UK and USA are collaborating with international partners to better understand the lived-experiences of menstruation around the world. The *Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies* is a first-of-its kind global, open-access collection of research on menstruation.

So, where do we go from here? There are several key things that will help reduce menstruation

stigma, including:

“Better, more inclusive, menstrual cycle and health education for all, beginning in primary school and including boys. This education should continue throughout secondary school, as teens progress through puberty and have evolving needs. Educating teachers and coaches is also key.”

Access to adequate, safe and environmentally sustainable products that are freely available to all people who menstruate, and include a range of technological options to fit all body types and needs.

Support in terms of coping with pain, emotional and physical changes and more. Normalising menstruation is key to helping people feel comfortable and shedding the shame of periods. Here, research can support our understanding. A *Sport England* study highlighted barriers for participation in sport and PE amongst adolescents, with period-related issues being one of them. There may be some fairly easy fixes, such as not requiring white shorts for sport teams. Other strategies for coping, from nutrition to pain medicine, could also make a big difference. Including diverse perspectives from the LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities and people from varied cultural/ethnic backgrounds is key.

Above all, we need to talk about menstruation more freely, and work towards shedding the shame that has kept people in the dark about their own bodies for generations.

[Sarah Zipp is Lecturer, Faculty of Health Science and Sport, University of Stirling; Camilla Mørk Røstvik is Research Fellow, University of St Andrews]

The Year Sports Got Canned: Lessons From the Two Oceans Marathon in South Africa

KAMILLA SWART
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The global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly apparent in sports events. In an attempt to limit the spread of the virus, the world has witnessed the cancellation, postponement or rescheduling of major events: Wimbledon tennis, Euro 2020 football, the Tour De France cycling and the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games to mention a few.

In a recent study I conducted with David Maralack of the University of Cape Town, we looked at the 2020 cancellation of the popular Two Oceans Marathon in Cape Town, on the south-western coast of South Africa. We wanted to see what lessons about risk and reputational management could be learned from this and the consequent impacts on its many stakeholders.

With a focus on sports management, we interviewed the race director, previous board members and other stakeholders, including members of regional and provincial athletics bodies and provincial government.

The cancellation was managed well under the circumstances, but it also highlighted some areas that could be improved on. It became clear that events that communicate effectively with their community of participants and audiences stand the best chance of weathering a storm.

THE MARATHON

Marathon running is very popular in South Africa and people from all walks of life participate in the many races on offer. An ultramarathon is longer than a traditional 42km marathon. In the case of the Two Oceans, it is 56km. It’s considered one of the most scenic ultramarathons in the world, taking in Table Mountain and the Indian and Atlantic oceans.

What started out in 1970 as a training run for the country’s other premier ultramarathon, the 90km Comrades Marathon, the Two Oceans is now a festival Easter weekend of races. In 2019, the event turned 50 and hosted 34,000 participants, from ultra-marathon to family fun run.

The value of the event to the Cape Town and Western Cape economy is estimated at R672 million. Before the races, a running expo at the Cape Town International Convention Centre receives more than 55,000 visitors over three days. The race costs R30 million to stage and attracts significant media coverage.

However, the 51st Two Oceans, to be held from 8-11 April 2020 was the first marathon to be cancelled in South Africa due to the rapid spread of COVID-19 worldwide. It was also one of the first marathons to be impacted on the global marathon stage.

THE CANCELLATION

The decision to cancel an event is not an easy one. This was also not a popular one as it was

made by the marathon’s board just three weeks before the event was to start. Significant funding was already spent as the bulk of the planning, logistics and preparation were complete.

The board had to weigh up costs and economic benefits versus massive health-related risks. Also at stake was the event’s reputation, concerns about its sustainability, as well as the athletes not getting refunded.

With 3,000 international participants expected and half the participants coming from outside Cape Town, a key concern was the negative economic impact from the loss of these sports tourists.

Friends and relatives who come to support the runners spend between three and six days in the region – and some up to three weeks in the country. A sport tourism event like this is a key economic driver that also serves to market Cape Town as a destination.

MANY STAKEHOLDERS

Data was analysed for key themes emerging from our interviews. There were many lessons to be learned. The decision to cancel was complex, given all the stakeholders involved.

Organisers monitored global advisories and engaged with other events in a similar situation. They consulted with government departments, approvals agencies, health institutions and universities. Particularly important stakeholders included the race medical team, the city’s events office and the provincial authorities. Sponsors and event partners were consulted ahead of the decision to cancel.

The medical team strongly advised that the marathon couldn’t guarantee the safety of participants. The University of Cape Town, hosting the race finish village, advised they would be closed and not accessible for the event. The university provides professional services as the official race medical team and had a critical voice in responding to the crisis.

Western Province Athletics also played an important role through the national athletics body, Athletics South Africa, liaising with the sports ministry. The sports minister formed part of a national COVID-19 command council. And consideration had to be given to the tourism and investment agencies, sponsors and service providers who had much to lose. These inputs were vital for the board to make the dreaded decision to cancel.

Even before South Africa declared a COVID-19-related state of disaster, Two Oceans felt the risk of continuing far outweighed the benefits. The race was cancelled on 15 March, 12 days after the first case was detected in South Africa.

From an organisational perspective, the cancellation underscores the significance of brand reputation and that the event is only

as good as it is because of the support of stakeholders such as runners, clubs, sponsors, suppliers and approvals agencies.

LESSONS LEARNED

Management of the cancellation was largely successful in its main aims of protecting people’s health, honouring legal obligations and protecting the brand. Although the final decision was accepted, the organisation recognised that its decision-making and communication needs to be more responsive and agile.

The cancellation drew significant levels of criticism on social media platforms, with runners demanding refunds or that entry fees be deferred. This was not possible as funding had been contractually committed to suppliers. Stakeholders underscored the importance of the marathon being more runner-centric in its communication.

One of the most significant organisational impacts was recognising that the race was not sufficiently safeguarded against disasters, beyond financial considerations only. These would include general advisories on travel and health that could supplement security and race operations.

Due to global health and safety concerns, cancelling was inevitable and the outcomes the best that could have been reached under the circumstances. However, race managers and stakeholders deliberated on what could’ve been done differently.

LOOKING AHEAD

Of particular importance is consideration of its primary stakeholder, the runner, and strategic partnership with provincial government and sponsors. Refunds were not possible, but a more reflexive and flexible budgetary process may be necessary to limit negative impacts.

The pandemic has also confronted organisers to consider alternatives, such as virtual races – and consequently to review their traditional approaches to marketing and sponsorships. Consideration of the digital space beyond COVID-19 opens huge possibilities for brands to engage with 35,000 runners over the course of a year instead of just race weekend.

Enhanced health protocols accompanied by effective communication plans will be required from stakeholders. It is also critical that the event works closely with the governing body to enhance information flow and decision-making.

The timeframe for planning the 2021 event is already counting down. In this post-COVID-19 period of uncertainty, various contingencies and permutations need to be considered – driven by a consultative process where all stakeholders have mutual responsibility to ensure the event’s sustainability.

[the writer is Associate professor, Hamad Bin Khalifa University]

Tripura teachers continue indefinite stir braving cold, reject govt offer

AGARTALA, 14 DEC: Braving the cold weather, the indefinite protest by thousands of Tripura government school teachers, who had lost their jobs following court's ruling, continued for the sixth day on Saturday even as they rejected the BJP-led government's offer to apply for the vacant posts.

Accompanied by their children and family members, thousands of retrenched teachers under the banner of the Joint Movement Committee (JMC) continued their protests throughout the day and vowed to continue their agitation until the government reinstated their jobs.

After Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb, state Education and Law Minister Ratan Lal Nath has urged the agitated teachers to compete for the vacant 9,000 posts in various departments, including the Education department, for which the state government recently issued recruitment notifications.

These vacant posts notified by the government comprise "Group C" and "Group D" posts even as most government teachers are



equivalent to "Group C" category employees.

"Instead of agitations, these teachers must get ready and apply for their alternative government jobs as the BJP government is sympathetic to their cause and that's why recently published a necessary notification to recruit people against 9,000 vacant government posts," Nath told the media.

Accusing the previous Left Front government, Nath said due to the mistakes and wrong decisions of the erstwhile Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led government, 10,323 government teachers had lost their jobs.

"Even the Left government headed by former Chief Minister Manik Sarkar did not follow the single bench order given by the

Tripura High Court in 2011," Nath added.

The current Opposition leader Sarkar told the media that after the Tripura HC and the Supreme Court had terminated the jobs of 10,323 government teachers in 2011, 2014 and 2017, the then Left Front government had created 13,000 posts to accommodate these teachers alternatively.

"The BJP leaders before the 2018 Assembly polls conspired against these 10,323 government teachers and filed petitions before the Supreme Court and promised to regularise their jobs if they come to power. But nothing has been done for these hapless teachers," said Sarkar, who was the Chief Minister for 20 years till the BJP-led government came to power in Tripura in March 2018.

The BJP-led Tripura government had earlier given a lump-sum financial aid of Rs 35,000 to the residual numbers of 8,882 government school teachers, who lost their jobs from March 31 this year, following SC and Tripura HC verdicts which had cited "discrepancies in recruitments".

Of the 10,323 former government teachers, 1,365 people got alternative jobs and availed different income avenues while 76 people died with many of them committing suicide.

JMC's Joint Convener Dalia Das said the teachers already completed their government service for many years and several of them crossed their stipulated age limit while the state government's offer is "impractical" and against the interest of the

teachers.

"We had called off our agitation after CM Biplab Deb on October 3 assured to take steps to solve our problems permanently within two months. The two months have already lapsed but Deb and his government are yet to take any step when the teachers are suffering a lot after losing their jobs in March this year," Das told the media.

Another JMC's Joint Convener Bimal Saha said thousands of teachers, including their family members, are facing hardships for the past nine months while 76 retrenched teachers have already died with some committing suicide. The teachers were inducted into the state government schools in different phases from 2010 when the CPI(M)-led Left government was in power.

The Tripura HC in 2011 and 2014 directed termination of services of all 10,323 teachers, saying the selection criteria had "discrepancies" and subsequently, the SC upheld the HC's decision. After separate appeals by the previous Left and the incumbent BJP governments', the SC, however, extended their services up to March 2020.

8 months after 1st casualty, Assam's Covid toll rises to 1K

GUWAHATI, 14 DEC: Assam's Covid-19 death toll has climbed to 1,000 after the first death caused by the dreaded virus was reported in the state eight months ago, officials said on Saturday, adding that the total number of Covid cases in the state has gone up to 2,14,432 till date.

According to the data issued by the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry on Saturday, Assam's recovery rate is second highest among the eight northeastern states at 97.90 per cent, while Arunachal Pradesh

topped the list at 97.98 per cent.

According to the officials of the Health and family Welfare Department of Assam, the state had reported its first death due to coronavirus on April 10. The first death in the state, as well as in the northeastern region, was reported from Hailakandi district in southern Assam where a middle aged man, who had visited abroad, succumbed to Covid-19 at the Silchar Medical College and Hospital.

Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that the overall coronavirus caseload has gone up to 2,14,432, of which 2,09,936 have recovered from the disease, and the number of active cases in the state presently stands at 3,493.

Of the total Covid-19 cases across Assam, 53,137 cases have been reported from the state capital alone. Sarma in a tweet said that the state's present fatality rate is 0.46 per cent, while the overall positivity rate stood at 3.84 per cent against a total testing of 55,83,981 samples so far.

Odisha logs 332 new COVID-19 cases, four more deaths

BHUBANESWAR, DEC 14 (PTI): Odisha on Monday registered 332 new COVID-19 cases, which raised the state's caseload to 3,24,089, while four fresh fatalities pushed the toll to 1,811, a health department official said.

Of the 332 new cases, 189 were reported from various quarantine centres and the rest detected during contact tracing, he said.

Sundergarh recorded the highest number of new cases at 51, followed

by Angul at 35 and Khurda at 29.

Three districts -- Boudh, Kandhamal and Malkangiri -- did not record any new case since Sunday.

Taking to Twitter, the Health and Family Welfare department said, "Regret to inform about the demise of four Covid positive patients while under treatment in hospitals."

One each died in Khurda, Dhenkanal, Ganjam and Jharsuguda districts.

Odisha currently has 3,156 active cases, while as many as 3,19,069 COVID-19 patients have so far recovered from the highly infectious disease, the official said.

Fifty three COVID-19 patients have died due to comorbidities. The state's positivity rate now stands at 5.06 per cent.

Over 64 lakh samples have been examined so far, including 30,891 on Sunday, the official added.

Mizoram reports 5 new COVID-19 cases

AIZAWL, DEC 14 (PTI): Mizoram on Monday reported five new COVID-19 cases, pushing the state's tally to 4,040, an official said.

The five new cases were detected through Rapid Antigen Test and were reported from Aizawl district, he said.

All the patients aged between 25 and 62 were diagnosed with COVID-19 during contact tracing.

While four patients, including a staff nurse of Zoram Medical College (ZMC), have developed symptoms of COVID-19, one patient was asymptomatic, he said.

According to him, the number of active



COVID-19 in the state now is 186, while 3,847 people have already recovered from the virus.

Mizoram has so far reported seven COVID-19 deaths, all from Aizawl district.

Of the total 4,040 COVID-19 cases, Aizawl

district reported the highest cases at 2,675, which is 66.22 per cent of the total cases, followed by Lunglei district, which reported 351 cases.

Mizoram has tested 1,64,535 samples so far, including 299 samples on Sunday.

FinMin renders Rs 200 cr balm to Meghalaya

SHILLONG, DEC 12 [SHILLONGTIMES]: At a time when the state is reeling under financial adversity, the Union Finance Ministry has alleviated the COVID-triggered woe by announcing Rs 200 crore for Meghalaya as part of 'Special Assistance to States for Capital Expenditure'.

A statement from the Finance Ministry on Saturday said that the states, barring Tamil Nadu, have availed benefits of the newly-announced scheme for 'Special Assistance to States for Capital Expenditure', which was

announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman as a part of the AatmaNirbhar Bharat package on October 12.

The scheme has three parts.

Part-I of the scheme covers the North East. Under this part, Rs 200 crore has been allocated to Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

However, due to high population and geographical area, Assam has been allocated Rs 450 crore.

The second part includes states barring the ones in Part I,

under which over Rs 7,500 crore has been earmarked.

The amount has been allocated among these states in proportion to their share of central tax as per the interim award of the 15th Finance Commission for 2020-21.

Part-III of the scheme is aimed at pushing various citizen-centric reforms in the states. Under this part, an amount of Rs 2,000 crore is earmarked. This amount will be available only to those states that carry out

at least 3 out of the 4 reforms specified by the Finance Ministry in its letter dated May 17, 2020, regarding reform linked additional borrowing permissions.

For Meghalaya, an amount of Rs 200 has been allocated and approved out of which, an amount of Rs 100 crore has been released.

The scheme is aimed at boosting capital expenditure by the state governments who are subjected to financial hardships due to the shortfall in tax revenue arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It may be mentioned

that the scheme has got very warm response from the state governments.

So far, capital expenditure proposals of Rs 9,879.61 crore of 27 states have been approved by the Ministry of Finance. An amount of Rs 4,939.81 crore has already been doled out to the states as the first instalment under the scheme.

The capital expenditure projects have been approved in diverse sectors of economy like health, rural development, water supply, irrigation, power, transport, education and urban development.

Fractured mandate in Assam tribal council polls, BJP big gainer

GUWAHATI, 14 Dec: The results of the 40-member Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) elections in Assam, dubbed as the semifinal ahead of the Assembly polls next year, are likely to throw up a fractured mandate even as the BJP emerged as the biggest gainer.

Assam's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and BTC's two main contenders, Bodoland People's Front (BPF) and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), could not secure the magic figures of 21 as the counting of votes are in still in progress at the time of filing this report.

The BJP and its junior ally BPF separately fought the BTC polls which were held in two phases on December 7 and 10.

According to the results and trends till late on Saturday night, the BJP and UPPL have won and are leading in 10 seats each while the BPF has an edge in 16 seats.

The Congress is leading in one seat while

the Independents are ahead in three other seats.

This is the first election in the BTC after the Centre had signed the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) peace accord with the All Bodo Students' Union and some factions of the insurgent group National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) in January this year.

The BTC administers four districts — Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri — in northwest Assam bordering West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutan, and all of them are called BTR.

The BJP, which heads Assam's ruling coalition, is likely to emerge as the major winner as the party has won/leading in 10 seats. It had managed just one seat in the 2015 BTC polls.

Despite the BJP having an alliance with the BPF in running the Assam government, in this politically important BTC polls, the saffron party has ditched its



junior partner.

Relations between the BJP and the BPF started souring after the BTC was placed under Governor's rule earlier this year. Political observers felt that the BJP might forge an alliance with the UPPL to govern the tribal autonomous body.

The BPF has ruled the BTC ever since 2005 after the tribal autonomous body was constituted in 2003 as a political solution to the Bodo agitation for a separate state.

The BTC elections

were scheduled on April 4 but were postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The politically significant BTC elections witnessed a multi cornered contest.

Besides BJP, BPF and UPPL, the Congress and its ally All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) and Gana Suraksha Party (GSP) had also put up candidates.

The BJP-led North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) Convenor and Assam's Finance and Health Minister Himanta

Biswa Sarma carried out a hectic campaign in the electioneering while Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal had also addressed several election rallies.

The BTC election is considered as a semifinal before the 126-member Assam Assembly goes to the polls in March-April next year.

The tribal council polls were the first election in Assam since the Covid-19 pandemic started and the entire process of balloting was conducted maintaining all safety protocols.

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Spurs and Liverpool held, Leicester close in

MARTYN HERMAN
LONDON, 14 DEC (REUTERS): Joint-leaders Tottenham Hotspur and Liverpool both dropped points on a busy day of Premier League action as Leicester City and Southampton narrowed the gap in what is shaping up to be one of the most open title races for years on Sunday.

Arsenal look extremely unlikely to be part of it, however, as they lost 1-0 at home to Burnley -- a fourth successive home league defeat for the first time since 1959 leaving the Gunners languishing down in 15th spot.

After Chelsea's defeat by Everton on Saturday and a boring 0-0 draw in the Manchester derby, Tottenham had the chance to cement their place at the top of the table and looked set for a fifth away win of the season when Harry Kane put them ahead in the 23rd minute at Crystal Palace.

But Jeffrey Schlupp's late equaliser and some inspired goalkeeping by Palace's Vicente Guaita meant Tottenham had to be content with a 1-1 draw.

It gave Liverpool the chance at Fulham to leapfrog Spurs to the top of the table but they were way below their best as they were also held to a 1-1 draw by Scott Parker's side.

Liverpool trailed to Bobby Decordova-Reid's superb opener and needed fine saves by returning keeper Alisson to avoid further damage before Mohamed Salah's late penalty meant they avoided defeat at a soggy Craven Cottage.

"I think in the first half an hour we could have lost the game, in the last 60 minutes we should have won it. In the end we get a point and that's it," manager Jurgen Klopp said.

It left Tottenham and Liverpool both on 25 points from 12 games above Leicester on 24, Southampton on 23, Chelsea on 22, three clubs on 20 and Manchester

City on 19, in ninth place with a game in hand over all the teams above them apart from Manchester United in eighth.

Six points separate the top nine, a stark contrast to last season when, after 12 games, Liverpool had 34 points and Bournemouth, in ninth spot, were 18 points behind.

S E R I O U S CHALLENGE

Leicester appear to be mounting a serious challenge after a commanding 3-0 win at Brighton and Hove Albion on Sunday -- James Maddison scoring twice and Jamie Vardy once.

Southampton eased to a 3-0 win over Sheffield United as they welcomed 2,000 fans back to St Mary's.

Only once have they managed more than 23 points from 12 games in the Premier League, in 2014 when they amassed 26.

Sheffield United are only the fourth side in English Football League history to have no more than one point from their opening 12 league games of a season, leaving manager Chris Wilder under mounting pressure.

"I have a shower every day, I wash my face, I look in the mirror and try to come in bright and positive. I try to do my work, always, to the best of my ability," Wilder, who was given backing by the club's Saudi owner, said.

Wilder is not the only manager in peril.

Arsenal's Mikel Arteta watched his side lose 1-0 at home to Burnley with some of the 2,000 fans present leaving early and some staying to boo after another dispiriting display.

Granit Khaka was sent off in the second half and things went from bad to worse as Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang scored an own goal to condemn Arsenal to defeat.

Burnley's first win at Arsenal since 1974 lifted them above Fulham and out of the relegation zone, to 17th with nine points.

We are in far better place than what we were in 2018: Lyon

SYDNEY, DEC 14 (PTI): Injury-ravaged it might be but senior off-spinner Nathan Lyon feels that the current Australian team is the "tightest group" that he has been a part of and is certainly in a much better space than what it was two years back, when India triumphed 1-2 in Tests.

The veteran of 96 Test matches is expected to play a key role for Australia in the upcoming four Tests against India, starting with the Day-Night game in Adelaide from December 17.

"We obviously know what happened in the last series against India and how well they played. We have spoken about that and come up with few different plans," Lyon said during a virtual media conference.

While Lyon didn't reveal his gamelan but did mention that the whole team is in a better head space even though it will be missing key players like David Warner due to injury.

"I can't reveal my plans for Indians to read about but there is a great

vibe in this Australian team and we are in far better place than we were two years ago. It's exciting and the tightest Aussie team that I have been a part of," Lyon said.

"We have done a bit of homework and ready to go. It's disappointing when you lose guys to injuries and we all know what quality of player Warner is," he added.

He is happy that one of his close friends, Mitchell Starc, is back in the mix for the first Test and revealed how he intends to trouble the Indian right-handers.

"Obviously, I will try to get edges on both sides, catches around the bat. I love footmarks created by Starc. He (Starc) is pretty pumped up and not only a quality player but also a quality bloke," said Lyon.

He is also not unduly worried about Starc not having a lot of preparation due to the break he got on compassionate ground due to an illness in the family.

Messi helps Barcelona end losing skid with 1-0 win vs Levante

BARCELONA, DEC 14 (AP): Facing another setback in an already difficult season, Lionel Messi found his finishing touch to save Barcelona from falling further behind in the Spanish league.

Messi's late goal secured a hard-fought 1-0 home victory over Levante on Sunday to end a two-game losing skid for Barcelona.

Messi fired a left-footed shot off the far post and into the net to get Barcelona's breakthrough in the 76th minute after Levante had withstood the hosts with tenacious defending.

"Teams focus on defending Messi, marking him with several players, but today he proved decisive," Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman said.

The victory for Barcelona came after last round's upset loss to C diz and a 3-0 home defeat to Juventus in the Champions League.

Barcelona still has a long way to go to get back in the title race, but

it was able to claw back some ground after front-runners Real Sociedad and Atl tico Madrid both dropped points this weekend. Barcelona is in eighth place at nine points behind the leaders. Barcelona and Atl tico have played two fewer games than Sociedad.

Koeman hopes the win will solidify a team that he is struggling to rebuild on the fly this season, ahead of its crucial game on Wednesday when Sociedad comes to Camp Nou.

"Our situation in the league made it necessary to win to reduce the difference," Koeman said.

"Today it was very, very important to win this game. Hopefully it will give us a boost of confidence for Wednesday's game."

Levante goalkeeper Aitor Fernandez kept Levante in the match with multiple stops to deny Messi, Martin Braithwaite, Antoine Griezmann and Jordi



Alba.

Messi finally beat Fernandez with his 10th shot of the match. He was set up by Frenkie de Jong after the Netherlands midfielder and Braithwaite stole possession from Mickael Malsa inside Levante's half.

Fernandez got his hands to Messi's powerful strike, but not enough to keep it out.

"It was too bad I couldn't get more of a touch on his strike, said Fernandez, whose team stayed in the relegation zone. We

made one mistake and that led to their goal."

SOCIEDAD BACK ON TOP

Sociedad returned to the top of the standings after drawing 1-1 at home with Eibar.

The San Sebastian-based club pulled level with Atl tico on points and moved into first place on total goals scored with the two teams having the same goal difference.

Atl tico had its first loss of the season on Saturday when it fell 2-0 at city rival Real Madrid.

Ander Barrenetxea put Sociedad ahead in

Eddie Hearn expects Anthony Joshua-Tyson Fury to be confirmed in days

ANTHONY JOSHUA
LAS VEGAS, 14 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]:

Eddie Hearn has said he "can't see any obstacles" which could block a world heavyweight unification title fight between Anthony Joshua and Tyson Fury next year. "Everyone is saying we need to get this done," Joshua's promoter said, while adding he expects the details to be resolved in a "couple of days".

Soon after Joshua knocked out Kubrat Pulev on Saturday night, Fury went on Instagram to claim he would dispatch his fellow world champion in three rounds. Joshua, in contrast, chose not to call out Fury during an interview he did with



some reluctance on Sky Sports after his most impressive performance in years.

"He [Joshua] learnt his lesson and just got sick and tired of people talking shit," Hearn said. "It's not about Tyson Fury. We talked for ages about [Deontay] Wilder, and Wilder tried to make AJ look like he didn't want to fight. AJ is saying

he will fight whoever you put in front of him."

Even when reminded that nothing is certain in boxing's chaotic business, Hearn said: "The only hitch I can think of is Wilder. If the court orders a rematch [after Fury knocked out Wilder last February], and it doesn't sound as though they will, then it's out of our hands. That's

Pep Guardiola's turn to pragmatism leaves Manchester City's aura fading

JONATHAN WILSON
LONDON, 14 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]:

Afamiliar trope of the classic ghost story involves an encounter with a stranger that appears entirely normal until it's suddenly realised that while the protagonist has made distinct footprints in the sand or dust or snow, the stranger has left no trace at all.

Saturday's Manchester derby felt similar. A lot of people will feel they watched it, although none of them were actually there. Some will even claim to have played in it. Many newspapers carried the score, along with vague, slightly hallucinatory reports, paragraph upon paragraph about nothing. And yet go back, examine the scene, and it turns out it left no trace whatsoever.

Often those who have witnessed apparently supernatural events, feeling threatened by the scepticism of others, exaggerate, adding corroboratory details to shore up their recollection against the

doubts. "In my time against Manchester City that's the best performance we have had," said Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. Perhaps it was even true, at least from a defensive point of view.

United were disciplined. Their two banks of four stayed narrow, and City rarely looked like having the wit to break through. Only very occasionally, when they switched play quickly, did they look as if they might find a winner. There was a half-chance for Raheem Sterling, although he was surrounded by five United players by the time a shot was possible, and a very good chance, created by a sumptuous first-time Kevin De Bruyne pass that Riyad Mahrez dithered over. And that was it.

But even those occasional flickerings of menace had gone by the second half. City were flat, their passing sloppy, and, perhaps most remarkably, they were apparently

content with that. Pep Guardiola made one substitution in the whole game. Phil Foden and Bernardo Silva remained on the bench. There was no attempt to change the shape, no attempt to increase the pace. In part, perhaps, the issue is personnel: had Sergio Agüero been fit and had Leroy Sané not been sold to Bayern, it might have been different. But there also seemed here to be a change of attitude.

It has been remarkable this season how quickly the outlook has changed. After a decade or so in which meetings of the big sides were all about high presses smashing into each other, thrilling affairs of attacking abandon, within two months they have retreated to what they were 15 years ago, dominated by caution and the fear of defeat. This was the same pattern as United against Chelsea, or Chelsea against Tottenham, or the final stages of City against

Liverpool.

In context, it makes sense: when it required 95 points or more to win the title, draws were not much better than defeats. Now it looks as if the league could be won with a total in the 80s (Tottenham, the leaders, are on course for 83), so a hard-fought point regains some of its value. Plus, as we keep being reminded, the curtailed pre-season and the lack of time between games makes it more difficult for those sides who favour a hard press to prepare.

But still, from City it remains a surprise to see them quite so flat, and quite so unbothered by the fact. They have not been at their best. They did lose three times to United last season (albeit one of those in a Carabao Cup semi-final second leg by a margin insufficient to overturn their first-leg lead), each time undone on the counter. Guardiola, understandably, was determined that should

job is, I am under instructions to make that fight. AJ will not shout: 'You big dosser' and do Instagram posts because it is not his style."

Hearn was equally optimistic there would be no problems with television rights for a fight that should generate more than £200m. "It's quite easy because the worst-case scenario is everyone shares it. Everyone will do that anyway as we need to maximise the revenue for the fighters," he said.

"In the UK, AJ has an exclusive deal with Sky, Fury a matching deal with BT. In America, Fury has an exclusive deal with ESPN and AJ a matching deal with DAZN. I can't

not happen again. His attitude of "Guys, I am sorry: this is how I play" has been replaced by something more pragmatic. And there is an irony to that.

For years the criticism of Guardiola was that he had no plan B, that he never compromised no matter the opposition. Yet often it has been precisely his attempts to close off the opposition counter that have undone him – selecting Ilkay Gundogan rather than Sterling for the Champions League quarter-final at Anfield in 2018, switching to a back three against Lyon last season, fielding two holding midfielders against Leicester in September.

It may be that this is a necessary stage for City, something they have to go through as part of their redevelopment. Building a second great team isn't easy, but if Guardiola is to do it, it probably makes sense for him, from the start, to try to ensure they aren't as vulnerable on the counter as his first great team proved in key European ties.

Alguacil wants his team to keep its outsider status in the title race.

"I hope that they keep quiet about us and that in a few months we are still at the top," Alguacil said.

VILLARREAL STALLS

Villarreal remained in fourth place, one point behind third-place Madrid, after it was held 1-1 at Real Betis.

Spain defender Pau Torres headed Villarreal in front five minutes after kickoff, but the visitors lost several players to injury and were unable to build on a strong start. Betis' Aitor Ruibal equalized in the 51st.

Villarreal's Pervis Estupinan, Vicente Iborra and Francis Coquelin all left the game injured.

It was a fourth consecutive draw for Unai Emery's side.

GRANADA WINS

Colombian striker Luis Suarez scored for a third straight league match to help Granada beat Elche 1-0.

Granada ended its five-round winless streak.

talk on behalf of Sky but they probably feel comfortable they will get the majority of buys."

Asked how long it may take to confirm the fight, Hearn said: "Couple of days. There's no reason we cannot complete the deal. We're all in and what we should be doing is finalising it. The only thing that needs to be resolved is where it is going to be and a couple of TV issues. That is it.

"Everyone is completely in on the finances. We need to write to the governing bodies and say we have a deal and we will now talk to the various sites and confirm the dates shortly for what I suppose will be the end of May."

But watching City plod around on Saturday, mustering only 54% possession against a team that were quite happy to let them have the ball, even knowing that this is a side in transition, was still a real jolt. This is a City that are rapidly losing their aura. They don't really look like a Guardiola team any more. They've already dropped as many points this season as they did in the whole of 2017-18. And yet it may not matter: they're certainly not out of the title race.

The genius of the best ghost stories often lies in the fact that almost nothing happens, that there is a sense of something going on, somewhere, that we can't quite perceive, that leaves behind no clear evidence. Each passing moment imperceptibly ratchets up the tension.

Saturday ended with City ninth in the table, yet only five points off the top. These may be ghost games in a ghost championship, but the denouement could be extraordinary.

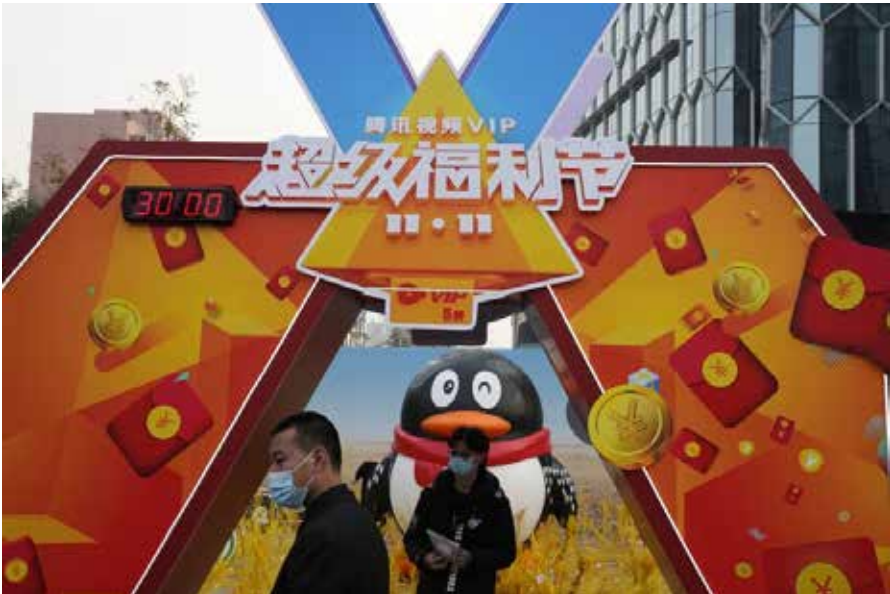
China's Alibaba, Tencent unit fined under anti-monopoly law

HONG KONG (AP): China's market regulator on Monday said it fined Alibaba Group and a Tencent Holdings-backed company for failing to seek approval before proceeding with some acquisitions.

It also is launching a review of a merger of two online streaming platforms in the latest tightening of controls over the internet sector.

In a statement, China's State Administration for Market Regulation said Monday that it fined Alibaba 500,000 yuan (\$76,500) for increasing its stake in department store company Intime Retail Group to 73.79% in 2017 without seeking approval.

China Literature, an online publisher and e-book company spun off by Tencent, was fined the same amount for also not seeking approval for its acquisition of New Classics Media. Separately, Shenzhen Hive Box, backed by



Chinese courier firm SF Express, was censured over its acquisition of China Post Smart Logistics.

China's market regulator is also reviewing the merger of two major Chinese game streaming platforms, DouYu International Holdings and Huya Inc. Tencent, the world's largest gaming company that owns stakes in both firms, is leading

the deal and would have controlled 67.5% of voting shares in the merged business.

The moves come amid stepped up scrutiny of monopolistic behavior by internet companies. Last month, China released draft regulations to clamp down on anti-competitive practices in the industry, such as signing exclusive agreements with merchants and the use of

subsidies to squeeze out competitors.

"We hope that operators realize that the anti-monopoly law applies to all entities," the regulator said in a separate statement.

"Platform companies are not outside the anti-monopoly law. Internet platform companies should strictly abide by anti-monopoly laws and regulations and maintain fair market competition,"

it said.

Stock prices for Alibaba and Tencent both fell about 2.6% on Monday.

Alibaba had acquired InTime Retail as it sought to combine e-commerce and offline retail, while China Literature bought New Classics Media to expand its content offerings.

Both companies did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

China's tightening control of internet companies mirrors a similar focus on technology companies in the U.S., where lawmakers and regulators are probing companies like Facebook and Google over anti-competitive practices. Earlier this month, the Federal Trade Commission accused Facebook of buying up its rivals to quash them and wipe out competition. The FTC called for Facebook's acquisitions of WhatsApp and Instagram to be unwound.

Italy surpasses UK for worst COVID-19 death toll in Europe



ROME (AP): Italy on Sunday eclipsed Britain to become the nation with the worst official coronavirus death toll in Europe.

Italy, where the continent's pandemic began, registered 484 COVID-19 deaths in one day, one of its lowest one-day death counts in about a month.

Still, those latest deaths pushed Italy's official toll up to 64,520, while Britain's stood at 64,267, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

Both numbers understate the true toll of the pandemic. Counting criteria differ in the two countries, and many coronavirus deaths, especially early in the pandemic, are believed to have gone undetected, including those of elderly

people in nursing homes who were not tested for COVID-19.

Among the reasons cited for Italy's high death toll was it that was the first country in Europe to be slammed in the pandemic, leaving health workers to grapple with a largely unknown virus. Italy also has a lower ratio of medical staff to patients compared to other European nations.

Germany, a nation much bigger than Italy, has a death toll one-third of Italy's or Britain's.

A little more than half of Italy's known COVID-19 deaths were registered in the first surge.

On Sunday, Italy reported another 17,938 coronavirus infections to raise its official tally to 1.84 million.

By far, the region

registering the highest number of new infections was the northern region of Veneto. Italy's Lombardy region has the highest number of cases and deaths overall.

Largely heeding the advice of medical experts, Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte has tightened travel rules for the period straddling Christmas, New Year's and Epiphany Day holidays. Starting on Dec. 21 and running through Jan. 6, people in Italy won't be able to travel between regions except for work or urgent reasons such as health problems.

On the holidays themselves, under the nationwide restrictions, Italians can't leave their towns, as the government seeks to discourage families and friends from gathering in large numbers indoors.

EU chief negotiator still sees hope to clinch EU-UK deal

BRUSSELS (AP): European Union chief negotiator Michel Barnier said Monday he still has the firm belief that a Brexit trade agreement is possible, and whittled the outstanding disputes to be settled ahead of the New Year to just two.

Barnier said that the nine-month negotiations had come down to finding settlements on fair-competition rules and fishing rights, no longer mentioning the issue of legal mechanisms for resolving future disputes that also long dogged the negotiations.

"Two conditions are not met yet," he said as he entered a meeting to brief the 27 EU nations on progress in the talks. He is expected to continue negotiations with his U.K. counterpart David Frost later on Monday. "This deal, it is still possible," he added.

Both sides are teetering on the brink of a no-deal Brexit departure, but have committed to a final push ahead of Jan. 1, when a transitional period following Britain's Jan. 31 departure from the bloc is to end.

On Sunday, British



Prime Minister Boris Johnson and EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen ditched a self-imposed deadline and promised to "go the extra mile" to clinch a post-Brexit trade agreement that would avert New Year's chaos and costs for cross-border commerce.

Barnier is willing to accept British trade with no tariffs or quotas, but only if the U.K. respects the rules and regulations that have made the EU's single market of almost 500 million consumers so successful. "Free and fair competition, fair and free, equitable and open, the two go together," Barnier said.

Johnson, however,

says he does not want British business to be hemmed in by EU restrictions, especially if those restrictions would have to be progressively adapted to mainland standards in the future.

On fisheries, Barnier demanded "an agreement that guarantees a reciprocal, I insist, reciprocal access to markets and waters." It highlighted that just as EU fishermen crave to continue working in British waters, the U.K. seafood industry is extremely dependent on exports into the 27-nation bloc.

Johnson has made fisheries and U.K. control over its waters a key

demand in the long saga of leaving the EU. It has been four-and-a-half years since Britons voted narrowly to leave the EU and — in the words of the Brexiters' slogan — "take back control" of the U.K.'s borders and laws.

Johnson said over the weekend that the "most likely" outcome was that the two sides wouldn't reach a deal and would trade on World Trade Organization terms, with the tariffs and barriers that would bring.

After Barnier briefed the ambassadors of the EU nations, however, one EU diplomat said that "there might now be a narrow path to an agreement visible — if

negotiators can clear the remaining hurdles in the next few days. There has been some progress in the negotiations over the last few days." The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the talks were still ongoing.

Exporters and importers face customs declarations, goods checks and other obstacles. EU citizens will no longer be able to live and work in Britain without a visa — though that doesn't apply to the more than 3 million already there — and Britons can no longer automatically work or retire in the EU.

Without a deal, the disruption would be far greater. The U.K. government has acknowledged a chaotic exit is likely to bring gridlock at Britain's ports, temporary shortages of some goods and price increases for staple foods. Tariffs will be applied to many U.K. goods, including 10% on cars and more than 40% on lamb, hurting the U.K. economy as it struggles to rebound from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

First shipments of Pfizer vaccine leave Michigan manufacturing facility

WASHINGTON, DEC 14 (PTI): US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer has begun shipping the first batches of its long-awaited and newly-authorised coronavirus vaccine out of a Michigan warehouse, setting in motion the biggest vaccination drive in American history at a time when the pandemic has killed nearly 300,000 people in the country.

The first trucks carrying the COVID-19 vaccine for widespread use in the US pulled out of a Pfizer manufacturing plant in Michigan on Sunday, en route to 636 predetermined locations, amid a botched government response that has made the US the worst-hit country in the world.

The US Food and Drug Administration granted emergency use

authorisation to the vaccine on Friday, and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) voted on Saturday to recommend it for people age 16 and older in the US.

The vaccine arrives at a critical moment for the US. Hospitalisations due to COVID-19 hit record highs for the seventh day in a row on Saturday.

With the winter holidays still ahead, experts warn that the pandemic could continue to get worse before the larger public receives the vaccination.

Under Operation Warp Speed, a total of 636 hospitals and clinics across the states will receive the vaccine this upcoming week.

According to CNN, freight trucks carrying

about 184,275 vials of vaccine departed the plant, and the combined 189 boxes of vaccine vials are expected to arrive in all 50 states on Monday.

Another 3,900 vials are expected to ship later Sunday to United States territories, and 400 boxes packed with about 390,000 vials will ship Monday to arrive on Tuesday.

There are five doses of vaccine per vial, according to Pfizer, the news channel reported on Sunday.

Operation Warp Speed chief advisor Dr Moncef Slaoui told Fox News in an interview that they plan to have about 14 million doses of vaccine available and distributed in the US by the end of this year.

Those would be both Pfizer vaccine and the Moderna vaccine.

"And the next month, we will have about 50 million to 80 million doses distributed in January, and another same number in February. So, all in all, we hope to have immunized 100 million people, which would be the long-term care facility people, the elderly people with comorbidities, the first-line workers, the health care workers, he said.

Slaoui said that they need to have immunised about 75 or 80 per cent of the US population before herd immunity can really be established.

"We hope to reach that point between the month of May and the month of June," he said.

Shipments of the Pfizer vaccine will set in motion the biggest vaccination effort in American history at a

critical juncture of the pandemic that has killed 1.6 million and infected 71 million people worldwide.

The vaccine is offering hope in the fight against the pandemic that has killed nearly 300,000 Americans and infected 16 million people across the country.

Pfizer is expected to deliver an estimated 2.9 million doses this week via UPS and FedEx, Gen. Gustave Perna, chief operating officer of Operation Warp Speed, said Saturday.

The vaccines leaving Portage a city just south of Kalamazoo have US marshal protection to ensure they arrive safely at the hospital systems selected to receive the doses, some as early as Monday, NBC News reported.

Japan 'tankan' business survey shows optimism over recovery

TOKYO (AP): A quarterly survey by the Bank of Japan shows business sentiment has improved sharply with expectations that the economy is recovering from a year-long recession.

The BOJ's "tankan" released Monday reported rebounds in all categories, both manufacturing and non-manufacturing companies, large and small. It was a marked improvement from the past several quarterly reports as Japan battled the coronavirus pandemic.

The main measure of business conditions of large manufacturers rose to minus 10 from minus 27, while

business sentiment among large non-manufacturers such as service industries rose to minus 5 from minus 12. The actual results were better than forecast.

The tankan measures corporate sentiment by subtracting the number of companies saying business conditions are negative from those responding they are positive.

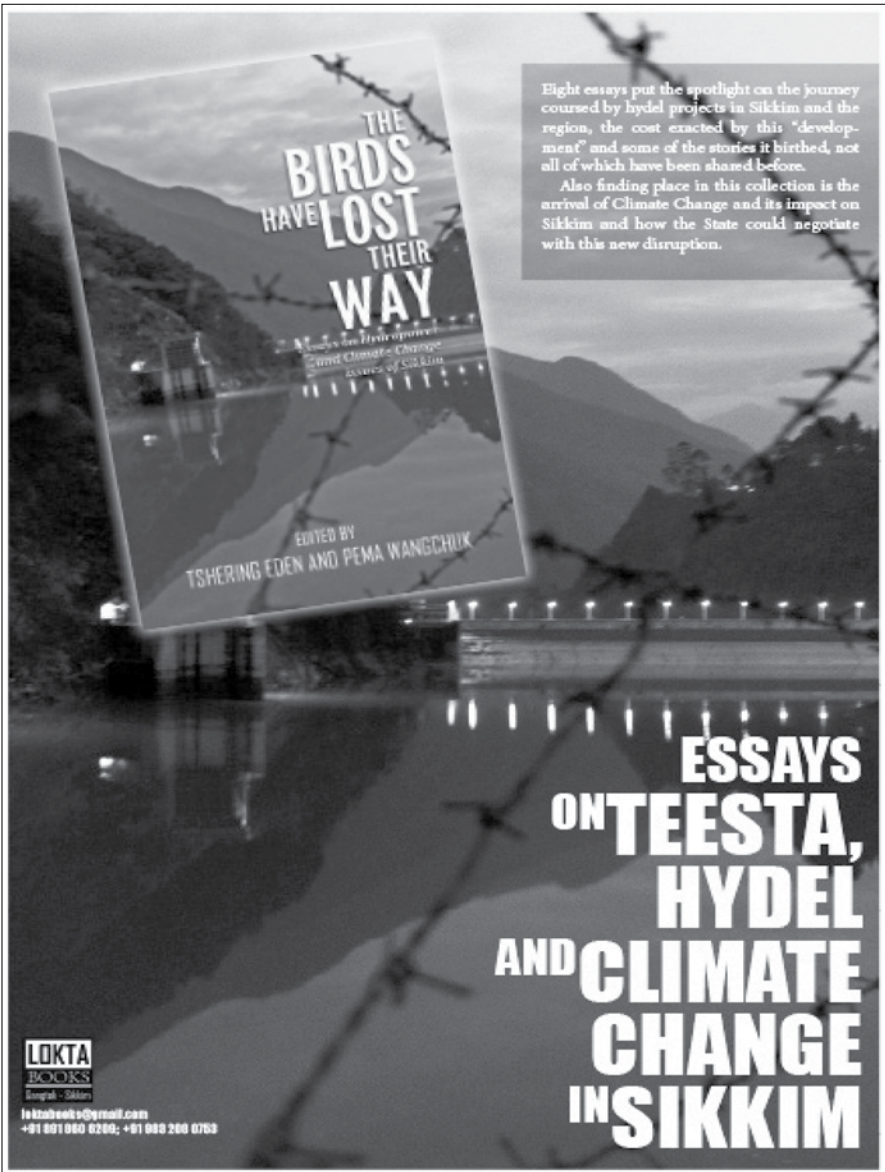
In the summer, sentiment plunged to its lowest level in more than a decade as the pandemic crushed exports and tourism, mainstays for the world's third largest economy.

October's report showed the first improvement in three years after six straight

quarters of decline to an 11-year low.

Japan's economy expanded at a 22.9% annual rate in the last quarter, as businesses and personal spending recovered from the pandemic-related shocks in the spring and early summer that worsened a recession that started in late 2019, even before coronavirus outbreaks hit.

As is true for most major economies, the setback dealt by the pandemic has left Japan still at a lower level of economic output, 3.9% below the level of the last quarter of 2019, according to Capital Economics.



Morena Baccarin, Ben McKenzie expecting second child

LOS ANGELES, DEC 14 (PTI): "Gotham" co-stars Morena Baccarin and Ben McKenzie are set to welcome their second child together.

The couple, who were paired opposite each other on the Fox series as Dr Leslie Thompkins and commissioner James Gordon, are already parents to four-year-old daughter Frances.

Baccarin, also known for "Deadpool" films and political thriller television series "Homeland", shared the news on "The Talk" show.

"What we now call date night is really honestly being able to take a walk outside together, but it heightens anxiety in the kids because we're around all the time, so when we take a little time



to ourselves, they're like, 'Where are you going?'

"Ben very cleverly found a way to get them involved and asked Frances to

get him ready for the date. I don't think he was expecting blue nail polish and bracelets and everything, but I think it looks good on him," she said.

When the hosts of "The Talk" asked how the date went, Baccarin, 41, stood up to show off her baby bump and quipped, "I think that date was pretty successful!"

Baccarin and McKenzie, 42, met in 2014 on the set of "Gotham", which ended last year after five seasons.

They tied the knot at the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens in New York City in 2017, one year after Frances was born.

Baccarin also has seven-year-old son, Julian, with former husband, director Austin Chick.

Pak actor Mahira Khan tests positive for COVID-19

KARACHI, DEC 14 (PTI): Pakistani star Mahira Khan on Sunday said she has tested positive for coronavirus and is currently in isolation.

The 35-year-old actor, popular for shows like "Humsafar" and "Sadqay Tumhare", and films "Bol" and "Bin Roye", said getting diagnosed with COVID-19 has been "rough" but she hopes to recover soon. "I have tested positive for COVID-19. I'm isolating and have also informed all those who were in close contact with me over the last few days. It's been rough but it will be ok soon, InshAllah," Mahira Khan wrote.

She also urged people to

wear a mask and follow all other safety guidelines "for your sake and others".

"PS: Prayers and movie recommendations are more than welcome," the actor further said.

She recently wrapped her upcoming film "Neelofar" in Lahore.

"Neelofar" reunites Mahira Khan with her "Humsafar" co-star Fawad Khan. It is the duo's third collaboration, after the yet-to-be released feature film "The Legend of Maula Jatt".

Mahira Khan made her Bollywood debut opposite superstar Shah Rukh Khan in the 2017 action-thriller, "Raees".

Jaimie Alexander returning for 'Thor: Love and Thunder'

LOS ANGELES, DEC 14 (PTI): Actor Jaimie Alexander is returning to the Marvel Cinematic Universe as Lady Sif in "Thor: Love And Thunder", the next installment in the Thor series. Sources told Deadline, the actor will reprise her role of the Asgardian warrior and childhood friend of Chris Hemsworth's Thor in the Taika Waititi-directed movie.

Alexander made her first appearance as Sif in 2011's "Thor" and followed it up with its 2013 sequel "Thor: The Dark World".

She, however, skipped "Thor: Ragnarok", the 2017 hit, also directed by Waititi.

Marvel had no comment on Alexander's casting.

According to insiders, the actor could also star in a guest appearance on the Disney Plus series "Loki", headlined by Tom Hiddleston who played the Asgardian God of Mischief in the MCU.

Marvel Studios boss Kevin Feige revealed the studio's Phase IV slate during Disney's Investor Day presentation on Thursday. Feige also officially confirmed that Hollywood star Christian Bale will be playing the villain Gorr the Godbutcher in "Thor: Love and Thunder".

The film, slated to be released on May 6, 2022, also features franchise stars Natalie Portman and Tessa Thompson.

Production on "Thor: Love and Thunder" is expected to begin next month.

'Dark Knight,' 'Grease' added to National Film Registry



LOS ANGELES (AP): This year's inductees into the National Film Registry include a record number of female directors and filmmakers of color as well as a new crop of movies ranging from a silent short film thriller, classic musicals and an acclaimed Batman film.

The Library of Congress announced Monday that films including "The Dark Knight," "Suspense," musicals "Grease" and "The Blues Brothers" along with Sidney Poitier's Oscar-winning performance in "Lilies of the Field" are among the 25 movies tapped for preservation this year.

The national library said this year's selections include a record nine films directed by women and filmmakers of color.

"With the inclusion of diverse filmmakers, we are not trying to set records but rather to set the record straight by spotlighting the astonishing contributions women and people of color have made to American cinema, despite facing often-overwhelming hurdles," Carla Hayden, the Librarian of Congress, said in a statement.

Hayden and film historian Jacqueline Stewart will discuss the new selections in a television special on Turner Classic Movies on Tuesday at 8 p.m. EST.

The library has selected movies for preservation because of their cultural, historic and artist importance since the registry began in 1988. This year's picks bring the total number of films in the registry to 800.

Music was featured in this year's selection including the film adaptation of Broadway musicals "Cabin in the Sky" in 1943 and "Grease," which starred John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John in 1978.

"The Blue Brothers" director John Landis called the film's selection into the registry a "delightful surprise."

"The film is the result of Dan Aykroyd and John Belushi's genuine passion for rhythm and blues and our mutual love for these great African American artists and the city of Chicago," said Landis, who has two projects in the registry including "Animal House" and Michael Jackson's "Thriller."

The library chose a few more memorable titles such as Kathryn Bigelow's "The Hurt Locker," the animated film "Shrek" and "The Joy Luck Club," a movie based on Amy Tan's bestselling book that told the saga of two generations of Asian American women. The 2010 documentary "Freedom Riders," also making its way into the registry, told an inspiring story about civil rights activists who fought against racial segregation on buses and trains in the 1960s.

Christopher Nolan's 2008 Batman film "The Dark Knight" was a blockbuster and the top public vote-getter.

The other films directed by women include Lois Weber's "Suspense," Ida May Park's "Bread," Aloha Wanderwell's "With Car and Camera Around the World," Ida Lupino's "Outrage," Kathleen Collins' "Losing Ground," Julie Dash's "Illusions," Lourdes Portillo's "The Devil Never Sleeps" and "Mauna Kea: Temple Under Siege" by Joan Lander.

Additional films on the list include "Kid Auto Races at Venice" (1914), "The Battle of the Century" (1927), "The Man with the Golden Arm" (1955), "A Clockwork Orange" (1971), "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song" (1971), "Wattstax" (1973), "Buena Vista Social Club" (1999) and "The Ground" (1993-2001).

Henry Cavill gets injured on 'The Witcher' season 2 sets

LOS ANGELES, DEC 14 (PTI): Hollywood star Henry Cavill has injured his leg while shooting for the second season of his hit Netflix series The Witcher in the UK.

According to Entertainment Weekly, the British actor has suffered a minor leg muscle injury and will be off the production for some time.

The Witcher is based on the series of novels by Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski.

It follows the story of the intertwined destinies of three individuals in the vast world of The Continent, where humans, elves, witches, gnomes, and monsters battle to survive and thrive, and where good and evil is not



easily identified.

Cavill leads the cast as Geralt of Rivia, alongside Anya Chalotra as Yennefer and Freya Allan as Ciri.

The first season of the series premiered in

November 2019 and the streaming platform renewed the show for a sophomore run in December same year.

The eight-episode season two is expected to arrive sometime in 2021.



AB-TASTIC! Actress Brooke Burke showed off her toned body during a shoot in Malibu for her BrookeBurkeBody app celebrating 12 Days to FITmas.

ARIES:

You've spent months agonising over how somebody else has a better job or better partner than you, or how they're getting promoted while you're still stuck in a loop. But here's what you need to keep in mind, Aries: not everything is as it appears. Just because somebody hit the jackpot, does not necessarily mean they're happy, and vice-versa. So, take a moment to be grateful for where you are, and recognise the blessings that are pouring in from every corner. The Universe has a plan in place for you. Step back in order to allow things to unfold as per the natural order.

TAURUS:

There are times when we tempt fate, throw caution to the wind, and move forward with courage despite the risk fearlessness entails. And then there are times when we examine the plan of action carefully, calculate each move precisely, and play our cards safely. Finding a middle ground between the two will serve you well today. Remember, you could do everything on your own at this

point, but there's no fun in that. The cards are urging you to garner the support of your team members. There is great strength in numbers, after all!

GEMINI:

You could do everything on your own, but where's the fun in that? Today, you're being asked to turn to your soul crew for all kinds of advice—whether it's personal, professional or spiritual. Their 'no BS' take on how and where you can improve may feel harsh at first, but it will ultimately help you get your A-game on. PS: You know who your well-wishers are, Gemini!

CANCER:

It's time for a quick check in. What are you giving your time and energy to, and are these activities holding space for you to grow? Learning that 'no' is a complete sentence will change the game for you—permanently. Single Cancerians are being reminded of the importance of following their hearts. You've been going back and forth on this decision for a while, even though you know exactly what it is that you want to take a chance on.

Let the energy of this eclipse inspire you to do something you have never done before.

LEO:

Here's the thing: everything you put out there will find its way back into your Universe. This includes the good, the bad, and the ugly, Leo. So, if anybody is being shady with you, be rest assured that they will be taken care of. It's not for you to try and retaliate, which will only lead to taking on bad karma. So continue to act conscientiously and plant the seeds of goodness. Trust that you are being looked out for, now and in every moment.

VIRGO:

Virgo, you're being blessed with the kind of opportunities that you could have only dreamed of before. Opportunities that help you expand your business and take your work to the next level. Let 'carpe diem' be your mantra, starting now and for the rest of this moon cycle. For some of you, the opportunity to travel or relocate may also open up. Listen to what your heart is telling you about this one—this is your decision to make.

LIBRA:

Libra, you're being indecisive by letting your head get in the way. What if you kept things simple? What if you allowed your heart to make this decision for you? There's no need to complicate matters further. Follow your inner guidance and do what needs to be done here. While you're at it, let go of the need to please those around you.

SCORPIO:

The warrior never gives up, Scorpio. The warrior picks up their arms and continues to trudge along, despite the bruises and the scars. So channel this invincible spirit within you, pick up the pieces, and fix your gaze upon the desired destination. It's true that you have faltered many times before and that you could falter a few times tomorrow. But, you will ultimately learn to hold your head high and emerge as the winner. PS: Spirit has got your back!

SAGITTARIUS:

All the world's a stage, Sagittarius. All the world's a stage. So quit taking everything so seriously. Stop chasing the grey clouds

when you have the option to bask in the sun.

Coming out of the shadows and owning your place in this world is going to be a big theme for you in the days to come. The energy of the solar eclipse is also inspiring you to take all kinds of chances in love. Something tells us you're tired of playing the 'mysterious game', and you want to show them who you really are.

CAPRICORN:

There was time you shied away from expressing your true self. There was a time you found immense comfort in the shadows. But the new you doesn't resonate with the idea of playing it small anymore. You know who you are and you know what you are worth. If there's anything the energy of the eclipse is inspiring within you, it's reclamation of your own power.

AQUARIUS:

Do the emotions we shy away from expressing disappear into a galaxy far away, or do they continue to haunt us from the depths of our unconscious? You already know the answer to this one, Aquarius. Today, instead of