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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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*Delhi's crowded festival markets raise Covid spike concerns*

**NEW DELHI, 31 OCT [NDTV]:** Chock-a-block scenes from Delhi markets ahead of Diwali have raised fears of a spike in Covid infections.

Visuals from major markets such as Lajpat Nagar and Sadar Bazar show shoppers crowding outside shops. Many of them are seen without masks and there is no physical distancing whatsoever.

Sadar Bazar Market Association president Devraj Baweja said it was "chaos". "Festivals generally attract a big crowd but the authorities should have made elaborate arrangements to ensure that people follow Covid-appropriate behaviour. No one was seen wearing a mask or observing social distancing," he told news agency PTI. Chandni Chowk Sarva Vyaapar Mandal president Sanjay Bhargava said the administration needs to step up vigil to check violations of Covid guidelines.

"We have issued strict guidelines to the shopkeepers that no one without a mask should be allowed inside the shops and their thermal screening should also be done. But we cannot do anything about the unauthorised vendors as they do not follow the Covid norms," he said.

The national capital, which saw horrifying scenes of people scrambling for beds and oxygen cylinders during the second wave, has been clocking double digit case counts for months now. However, experts have warned that dropping the guard at this point can lead to a spike.

Ahead of the festival season, the centre warned states and Union Territories to ensure that Covid protocols are followed.

## Bhaichung Stadium inaugurated; Sports' potential to promote unity celebrated

**BIKASH CHETTRI  
NAMCHI, 31 OCT:**

**B**haichung Stadium, a project besieged by construction delays and hiccups even on its final leg, was finally inaugurated here today amidst a galaxy of VIPs, sports enthusiasts and much color. The honour to inaugurate the stadium went to Governor Ganga Prasad who was present as chief guest accompanied by Chief Minister PS Tamang as guest of honour.

Bhaichung Bhutia, to celebrate whose legendary status as a footballer, Alley Ground was renamed "Bhaichung Stadium," was also mentioned fondly in speeches today. Mr Bhutia attended the ceremony accompanied by his sister.

Mr Bhutia, who entered politics after ending his career as a footballer, and whose Hamro Sikkim Party sit in the Opposition at present, has not enjoyed the most



congenial relationship with Sikkim Krantikari Morcha and its government in Sikkim and there was much speculation about whether or not he would be invited for the inauguration; and whether he would attend

even if invited. But he was there today "The inauguration coincides with Rashtriya Ekta Diwas 2021 and this underlines the fact that sports can be used as a tool for unity," the Chief Minister said in his

speech today. He added that the stadium was finished in 2021 at the cost of Rs 62 crore against its original projection of Rs 1 crore in 2009-10 when work on it had begun. Delays during the intervening

years not only escalated the project cost but also robbed sportspersons of an entire decade of access to a training and practise facility. While congratulating Bhaichung Bhutia and the people of Sikkim, the

Chief Minister regretted that politics had caused a 10-year delay in the project. Addressing the gathering, the Governor expressed jubilation over the historic event and shared his confi-

dence that the stadium will play a major role in grooming sporting talent in Sikkim.

Bhaichung Stadium is a FIFA-certified turf and will be under the Department of Sports and Youth Affairs, South District.

During the course of the program, the Governor and Chief Minister felicitated veterans of the 1971 Indo-Pak war and next of kin of soldiers martyred in the line of duty. The veterans and martyrs remembered today include Rifleman Bir Bahadur Rai of 5/11 GR, Havildar Laxmi Prasad Nepal, Artillery, Havildar Mani Das Rai, Artillery, Rifleman Bishal Gurung, 3/1 GR, and Rifleman Karma Tenzing Sherpa 2/5 GR.

Emergency Response Support System (ERSS) vehicles were also handed over to Sikkim Police today. ERSS vehicles can be alerted by dialling 112.

## Sikkim reports first death after five days

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 31 OCT:**

**A**fter sparing Sikkimese lives for an unbroken string of five days, Covid caused a fatality in the State yesterday with a patient passing away while under home isolation in West Sikkim. Sikkim had recorded no Covid deaths since 25 November and with the latest fatality, the Covid toll in Sikkim has climbed to 396. Thus far, 31,979 confirmed cases of Covid-19 have been reported in Sikkim, and with the latest death, the State records a case fatality rate of 1.24%.

As per Daily Report of COV-19-19 in India released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of Health Depart-

ment, 21 new cases were reported in the State in the past 24 hours. These new cases were picked up from the testing of 389 samples yesterday, giving Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 5.4%.

While 14 of the new cases were registered in East District, 03 were in West District, 03 in South District and 01 in North District.

Twelve of the new cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 215 samples and nine in rapid antigen testing of 171 samples.

Meanwhile, eight more COVID patients were discharged from home isolation on Saturday in the State after making full recoveries to further improve

the figure of recovered cases to 31,063. The state's recovery rate currently stands at 98.1%.

The number of active cases of Covid-19 has seen a slight bump to go up to 195, of whom 29 are with symptoms severe enough to require hospitalisation, six of whom are in ICU. Only two of these 29 Covid patients in hospital are under 18 years of age.

On the vaccination front, 3,244 doses of Covishield were administered on Saturday; while 3,062 people completed their vaccination schedules with the second dose yesterday, 182 received their first dose. 87.12% of the adult population of Sikkim is now fully vaccinated against Covid.

## Govt covering-up murky deals with lies and misdirection: Chamling

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 31 OCT:**

**T**he SKM Government was covering up its string of murky deals by resorting to outright lies and misdirection, Sikkim Democratic Front president, former Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, alleged today.

Mr Chamling, in his weekly Facebook post, presented more specific details about his allegations of the State Government selling prime assets of the State even as it was misusing State Bank of Sikkim to release massive loans to "outsiders." These allegations, which were teased by Mr Chamling last Sunday, have attracted sharp response

from the State Government, it may be recalled.

Today, responding to the public statements of the Chief Minister on the allegations, Mr Chamling wrote that he was "watching his [the CM's] growth as a liar."

Taking up the explanations offered on the allegations, Mr Chamling today claimed that unlike claimed by the CM, the previous government had planned to develop a Rs 82 crore project at the original STNM Hospital complex by itself under the Smart City Project and had not sold it to a private company as was now being claimed.

Where a central taxi stand, children's park and

open public park complex was planned, the SKM Government has sold the project to a private company to construct a shopping mall, Mr Chamling has countered.

As for the taxi stand at Old West Point School in the heart of Gangtok which is being demolished at present, Mr Chamling claims that this too has been sold to a business person from Siliguri. At this site, the SDF government had planned an upgraded Main Line Taxi stand, Mr Chamling claims, adding that what the SKM Government has done instead is make it "the private property of a Siliguri man."

*turn to pg 02*

## Virat Kohli blasts 'spineless, pathetic' trolls after Shami abuse

**NEW DELHI, 31 OCT [ALJAZEERA]:** India's cricket captain Virat Kohli has thrown his full support behind Mohammed Shami, the only Muslim player in the squad, after the fast bowler was abused on social media following the side's T20 World Cup cricket defeat against Pakistan.

Kohli launched a blistering attack on his team's critics, blasting them as "spineless" and "pathetic," reserving particular vitriol for the trolls who blamed Shami for the loss last week.

Pakistan sealed its first-ever win against India in a World Cup after they beat Kohli's side by 10 wickets last Sunday.

"There's a good reason



why we are playing on the field and not a bunch of spineless people on social media that have no courage to actually speak to any indi-

vidual in person," said Kohli.

"It has become a social pandemic in today's world, which is so unfortunate and so sad to see because this is

literally the lowest level of human potential that one can operate at. And that's how I look at these people."

Kohli was particularly an-

gry over the abuse aimed at Shami who played in the defeat. "Attacking someone over their religion is the most pathetic thing that a human being can do. They have no understanding of how much effort we put on the field. They have no understanding of the fact that someone like Shami has won India matches in the last few years.

"Honestly I don't even want to waste one minute of my life to give any attention to those people and neither does Shami and neither does anyone else on the team."

In an indication of the passion and controversy generated by the rivalry, Indian police arrested three Muslim students and a teacher for celebrating Pakistan's crush-

ing victory. The arrests came after police launched an investigation into several hundred students who burst into celebrations in Kashmir following last Sunday's match which was watched by millions across South Asia.

Anti-India sentiment is widespread and deep in Muslim-majority Kashmir; a Himalayan territory claimed in its entirety by both India and Pakistan.

A popular rebellion against Indian rule erupted in Indian-administered Kashmir in the 1990s, with the rebels demanding either a merger with Muslim-majority Pakistan or an independent state. Among those cheering Pakistan on Sunday were students from the region's top medical col-

leges: the Government Medical College and the Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences, both situated in the main city of Srinagar.

Videos of their celebration outside their residential hostels went viral on social media.

On Tuesday, a senior police official told Al Jazeera that two cases under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) have been filed against an unknown number of students for causing "insult to the national sentiment during the cricket match".

Prior to the start of their match against Pakistan, the India players took a knee in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and to stamp out racism.



## ZyduScadila agrees to reduce Covid vaccine price to Rs. 265 per dose

**NEW DELHI, 31 OCT [PTI]:** ZyduScadila has agreed to bring down the price of its COVID-19 vaccine to ₹ 265 a dose following persistent negotiations by the government but a final deal is yet to be reached, sources said on Sunday.

ZyduScadila's ZyCoV-D is the first vaccine cleared by India's drug regulator for inoculation of those aged 12 years and above.

To administer the needle-free vaccine, a disposable painless jet applicator costing ₹ 93 is required for each dose, which would take the price to ₹ 358 per dose.

The Ahmedabad-based pharma company earlier had proposed a price of ₹ 1,900 for its three-dose regimen, sources said.

"The company has brought down the price to ₹ 358 for each dose which includes ₹ 93, the cost of a disposable jet applicator, following repeated negotiations by the government.... A final decision in the matter is likely to be taken this week," a source in the know of developments said.

The three doses are to be administered 28 days apart, with each dose comprising a shot in both arms.

The indigenously developed world's first DNA-based needle-free COVID-19 vaccine ZyCoV-D received emergency use authorisation from the drug regulator on August 20.

Meanwhile, the government is still waiting for the recommendations from the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) for introducing ZyCoV-D in the inoculation drive for adults and children with co-morbidities.

NTAGI will provide the protocol and framework for the introduction of this vaccine in the COVID-19 immunisation drive.

Official sources earlier had said that the pricing of ZyCoV-D would be different from that of Covaxin and Covishield as apart from being a three-dose vaccine, it requires a special pharma jet injector that has to be used for administering the vaccine. That pharma jet injector can be used for administering around 20,000 doses.

"The jet applicator helps the vaccine fluid to penetrate the skin to enter cells of the recipient," the source said.

ZyduScadila can provide around two crore doses in November, a source had said.

The government is currently procuring two other vaccines - Covishield at ₹ 205 per dose and Covaxin at ₹ 215 per dose -- for the national COVID-19 immunisation programme. Covishield, Covaxin and Sputnik V are being given to only those above 18 years of age and unlike ZyCoV-D, these are two-dose regimens. India has administered more than 106 crore doses of COVID-19 vaccine so far.



## Rashtriya Ekta Diwas at Tek Youth Clubhouse

**BIKASHCHETTRI NAMTHANG, 31 OCT:**

Rashtriya Ekta Diwas was observed at Tek Youth Clubhouse by Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK) Namchi in collaboration

with Tek Youth Club. The day also marked the culmination of the Clean India mission initiatives in the area which had begun on 02 October. Panchayat Vice President, Namthang-Maneydara Gram Panchayat

Unit, MB [Stephen] Subba was present as chief guest accompanied by Kanam-Tek Ward Panchayat Shantimit Lepcha as special guest and Senior Accountant NYK Namchi Dilip Sharma as guest.

## "She told me, 'Don't cry'": Rahul Gandhi's video tribute for Indira Gandhi

**NEW DELHI, 31 OCT [NDTV]:** Congress MP Rahul Gandhi on Sunday posted an emotional video tribute to his grandmother and former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi - who was assassinated in Delhi on this day in 1984.

The three-minute video features heart-breaking visuals of Mr Gandhi (who was then only 14 years old) crying at the funeral - a day he calls "the second most difficult of my life", after the assassination of his father, former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, in May 1991, seven years later.

"This was my dad's funeral... the most difficult, well, second most difficult, day of my life. She told me 'don't cry'... you can see I'm hiding my face (at the funeral). Before she died, she told me 'don't cry if something happens to me...' I didn't understand what she meant," Mr Gandhi says in the video.

"Two-three hours later she was dead. It was... she sort of sensed she would be killed. I think everyone in the house also sensed it. She once said to me, to all of us, at the dining table, that the biggest curse would be to die of a disease. From her perspective, this was probably the best way to die... for her country... defending the idea she loved. Today I understand (but) then I didn't," he says.

Mr Gandhi's remembrances and observa-

tions play out to scenes from Mrs Gandhi's funeral and images of his father, Rajiv Gandhi, and himself standing in a corridor full of pictures of both.

"In my house my father was strict... and I essentially had two mothers, including a 'super' mother who was my grandmother, who would defend me when my father got angry," he reminisced.

Mr Gandhi's sister, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, also shared her tributes, tweeting a nostalgic photo of herself (as a little girl) playing with her grandmother. Both Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Indira Gandhi sport care-free grins in the candid black-and-white image.

"Your life is a message of courage, fearlessness, and patriotism. Your life is a message to keep fighting for justice by following the path of ideals," Ms Gandhi Vadra wrote. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also paid tributes; he posted a brief tweet saying as much.

Indira Gandhi, the country's first and, so far, only woman to be elected Prime Minister, was shot dead on October 23, 1984, by her Sikh bodyguards.

Nearly 3,000 were killed in the riots that broke out afterwards, with groups of armed men targeting Sikhs across the city, and attacking and vandalising homes, shops, and gurdwaras.

## Syrians face deportation from Turkey over banana videos

**ANKARA, 31 OCT [AL-JAZEERA]:** Several Syrians face deportation from Turkey after posting videos of themselves eating bananas as part of a "provocation" while "inciting hatred" following tensions between the host community and refugees over their financial wellbeing.

Eight Syrians, including one minor, were detained in the western city of Izmir, Turkish news agency Demiroren said on Saturday. The Turkish migration authority said earlier this week another seven foreign nationals were to be processed for deportation for related reasons. Videos of people purporting to

be Syrians eating bananas have sprung up since October 17, when an online news outlet filmed an argument between a young Syrian woman and a group of Turks on an Istanbul street.

In the video, a middle-aged man is heard complaining: "You're living comfortably. I can't eat a banana, you're buying kilos of bananas." A woman also criticised Syrians for not fighting in the country's war but returning for religious festivals. One TikTok video posted in response showed a group of young men laughing while munching on bananas in a barber shop as the soundtrack of the street interview played in the background.

## SRM IS&T holds 17th convocation with Union Education Minister as chief guest

**KATTANKULATHUR, 31 OCT:** The 17th Annual Convocation of SRM Institute of Science & Technology was held here on Saturday. Rank Holders and Ph.D. degree awardees were given their degrees in person at DrTPGanesan Auditorium, Main Campus, Kattankulathur, while the other graduating students joined online, a press release informs.

15,154 students, including 176 Ph.D. scholars, received their

degrees in various disciplines.

"Quality education will lead to massive transformation," said chief guest Dharmendra Pradhan, the Union Minister of Education. "To suit this, our education sector is developing and changing to meet the demand. This is done through the New Education Policy 2020," he added.

In his convocation address, Dr. G. Sathesh Reddy, Secretary, Depart-

ment of Defence R&D and Chairperson, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) said, "The Institution has given you knowledge, now you must work hard and make your institution proud."

Dr. T. R. Paarivendhar, Founder Chancellor of SRM Institute of Science & Technology and Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha preside over the convocation and presented the medals to winners.

## "Hate won, but till when?" Munawar Faruqui after Mumbai shows called off

Mumbai, 31 Oct [NDTV]: If the country's youth can decide who to vote, they can also decide what to watch, stand-up comedian Munawar Faruqui told NDTV days after three shows in Mumbai featuring him were cancelled following threats from Bajrang Dal.

Mr Faruqui, who was in jail for a month earlier this year in a case accusing him of "insulting Hindu gods and goddesses", said he is not being allowed to work even after the Supreme Court granted him bail.

"I get 50 threat calls daily, I had to change my SIM card thrice. When my number gets leaked, people call up and abuse me," he said.

The Mumbai shows were cancelled after members of the right-wing group reportedly threatened to burn down the venues. Announcing the cancellations, Mr Faruqui had tweeted that safety of the audience matters the most to him.

"What is happening is unfortunate. Lots of wrongs are happening in this country. The bigger issue is that for these three shows, a total of 1,500 people bought tickets a month ago. I feel bad for them. This is a sad reality with which many people in this country are living," he said.

"I used to think sometimes that maybe I am wrong, but after what has happened, I have understood that some people are trying to gain political advantage out of this," he said.

The comic said "everyone is targeted". "In my case, they use religion. That scares me," he said.

Mr Faruqui said that following his arrest and bail, he has performed in 50 shows and in 90 per cent of them, he got a standing ovation. "The audience doesn't care who belongs to which religion or caste. There are no comments on any religion in my shows," he

said.

The stand-up artiste said Bajrang Dal members are targeting him by circulating a 10-seconds clip from a two-hour show.

"You show the clip out of context and say I have insulted (Hindu gods)," he said.

Mr Faruqui said 80 people earn a livelihood from a single show, including drivers, volunteers and guards. "These are people who have been jobless for the past one-and-a-half years. I feel bad for them," he said,

The comic said he told venue owners that there is nothing problematic in his content and they need not be afraid. "But if someone threatens that he will burn the place down, vandalise it, he will think. This is wrong, this is a free country."

"Hate won, so the shows got cancelled. But till when? We will win," he said, adding that he will "continue to spread smiles".

## Active COVID-19 cases in country lowest in 247 days

**NEW DELHI, OCT 31 (PTI):** With 12,830 people testing positive for coronavirus infection in a day, India's total tally of COVID-19 cases rose to 3,42,73,300, while the active cases declined to 1,59,272, the lowest in 247 days, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Sunday.

The death toll climbed to 4,58,186 with 446 fresh fatalities, according to the data updated at 8 am.

The daily rise in new

coronavirus infections has been below 20,000 for 23 straight days and less than 50,000 daily new cases have been reported for 126 consecutive days now.

The active cases comprise 0.46 per cent of the total infections, the lowest since March 2020, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate was recorded at 98.20 per cent, the ministry said.

A decline of 2,283 cases has been recorded in the active COVID-19

caseload in a span of 24 hours. India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 2020, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19. India crossed the grim milestone of two crore on May 4 and three crore on June 23.

## Priyanka Gandhi's farm loan waiver promise at Yogi Adityanath's home turf

Gorakhpur, 31 Oct [PTI]: Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Sunday targeted Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in his home turf of Gorakhpur and made a flurry of poll promises, including farm loan waiver and purchasing wheat and paddy at ₹ 2500 per quintal.

"Things have happened against the 'vaani' (views) of Guru Gorakhnath. Bulldozers were used, threats were made to put people in jail," she alleged at a rally, taking a swipe at Mr Adityanath, who is also the head of the prominent Mutt here named after saint Gorakhnath.

The Congress general secretary also reached out to farmers and members of the fishing community.

"If the Congress is voted to power, then fisheries will be given the status of agriculture, and it will get all the facilities like agriculture. The rights of people of the Nishad community will be restored in sand mining and fisheries. Apart from this, a university named after Guru Machendra Nath will also be set up," she said.

"The entire loans of the farmers will be waived. Wheat and paddy will be purchased at ₹ 2,500 per quintal, while sugarcane will be purchased at ₹ 400 per quintal. The problem of stray cattle will be resolved on the lines of Chhattisgarh, and a complete solution will be evolved," she said.

Earlier this month, the Congress general secretary held a rally in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Varanasi Lok Sabha constituency.

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### Govt covering up...

"Only 25% of the total space will be used as a car park and 75% of the space will be used for his five star hotel and mall. He [the CM] is saying that the property will be returned to the Sikkim government after 26 years. He doesn't seem to know the fundamental difference between PPP (Public-Private-partnership) and BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer). Why does he not show the MoU and agreement to the people for them to see and decide," Mr Chamling writes.

Taking up the hydel projects issue, Mr Chamling has demanded proof that State's equity has not been sold.

He has also branded "shocking," the SKM government to build a Centre for Excellence, a private educational institute, with 90% funding by the Sikkim government.

Mr Chamling has also rejected justifications being offered for the sale of government land at Karfektar for a cancer hospital. "I challenge him to show the MoU and the agreement to the Sikkimese people. What will be the direct benefits for Sikkim? Let me remind you that the cancer hospital in Karfektar is a corporate house," he writes.

His Facebook post also claims that SBS has given a Rs 70 crore loan to a resident of Siliguri.

### KUTSE SHEGU

Kutse Shegu (49th day puja) of Namna Dorjee, who passed away on 27 Sept, 2021 falls on 14 Nov, 2021. We therefore, humbly request our relatives, friends and well-wishers to join us in offering prayers at our residence at Arithang, Gangtok on the aforementioned date, duly following the Covid-19 protocol in place.

We also take this opportunity to thank everyone who stood by us during the time of bereavement. Your support and assistance was indeed a great solace to us. It means a lot and we are truly indebted to each and every one of you.

**Chumzey Doma (Chum Maili) - wife,**  
**Karma Doma Youtso - daughter,**  
**Yangchuk Den Youtso - daughter,**  
**Chopel Lepcha - son-in-law &**  
**Jigme Norbu - son.**



# Sikkim Runs for better tomorrow

**SAGAR CHETTRI  
GANGTOK, 31 OCT:**

More than 400 runners participated in the 6th edition of Sikkim Run: Run for Better Tomorrow which took off from MG Marg here on Sunday.

The event was organized by a local event management group, Service to Mankind, in association with the Office of Chief Electoral Officer on the theme, 'No Voter to be Left Behind'. Runners from different parts of Sikkim, neighbouring hills and Siliguri and other parts of the country and Nepal participated.

Sikkim Lokayukta, Justice AP Subba, was present as chief guest accompanied by Sikkim DivyangSahayataSamiti president DroupadiGhimiray, retired technocrat KiranRasaily.

Sikkim Run was held in four categories - Half Marathon of 21 KMs, Great Run of 10 KMs, Veterans' Run and Run for Theme of 5 KMs.

The half marathon followed the route from MG Marg to Zero Point, Bojoghari, Tashi View Point, Plant Conservatory, Ganesh Tok, 3rd Mile Check Post and then back to Enchey School, Chandmari, Mintokgang, Palace



Gate, Dukit Pan Dokan, Kazi Road, State Assembly and finishing point at Old Star Hall in New Market.

Likewise, the route for great run and veterans was from MG Marg to Zero Point, Bakthang Falls and back to Zero Point, Sikkim Guest House, Dukit Pan Dokan, Kazi Road, State Assembly and finishing point at Old Star Hall.

BikashBhujel from Kalimpong finished first in the half marathon [Men] followed by Neeraj Kumar Maurya from Uttar Pradesh on second position and PuranRai from Kalimpong on third.

In the half marathon for women, Savita

Pal from Ranchi stood first, while SamjanaSubba from Darjeeling and ArpitaSaini from Uttar Pradesh finished second and third respectively.

In Great Run Men, Sachin from Haryana came first and SangamRai from Kalimpong and Mohamad Majarudin again from Kalimpong stood on second and third positions.

BinitaGurjar from Uttar Pradesh finished Great Run Women on first position by leaving behind SamjanaRaiNischal from Bagdogra and SushmitaLimboo from BermiokDareng on second and third positions respectively.

In veteran's men,

SubarnaSubba from West Bengal stood on the first position, while SherBahadurChettri from Sikkim and Karma Tshering Bhutia from Darjeeling finished the run on second and third positions respectively.

TashiLhamu from Sikkim came first in veteran's women category and TsheringZangmu Rufus from Sikkim and Binita Manger from Sikkim stood on second and third positions respectively.

In his address, Justice Subbacongratulated all participants for successfully completing their run for a cause.

Likewise, Joint Chief Electoral Officer, Pema

Laden Lama stated that the Office of the CEO, Sikkim collaborated in the event to take forward its ongoing campaign to reach out to every eligible voter to get enrolled. She also briefly speaks about the special summary revision to be taken up from 01 to 30 November.

Speaking to media persons, Service to Mankind secretary, BikashPradhan mentioned that Sikkim Run had begun in 2013 and seeks to promote tourism apart from encouraging health and fitness among the people. This year, their was the added effort to promote voter enrolment.

## NIC-Gangtok's Dr Sharma conferred Education Icon Award

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 31 OCT:**

DrLPSharma, a technology scientist and Senior Technical Director at NIC Gangtok, has been conferred Education Icon Award 2021 by Kites Craft Production, a press release informs.

The recognition comes DrSharma'sway for his initiatives to bolster learning during the



pandemic. He connected with school principals and joined WhatsApp groups of to impart tools

and techniques to facilitate virtual classes.

Besides helping teachers with online classes, he also framed a student counseling syllabus for them, it is informed.

Later, when the Education Department organized online training for teachers on taking virtual classes, Dr Sharma was the main resource person.

## VIT-AP felicitates Campus Placement Achievers



**GANGTOK, 31 OCT:** VIT-AP University felicitated campus placement achievers on Saturday at Taj Gateway Hotel in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, with District Collector J. Nivas as chief guest, a press release informs. 535 students were placed against 917 total offers, including 193 super dream offers and 219 dream offers, this year, the release adds. The highest domestic package offered at VIT-AP increased by 166.45% to Rs 33.29 LPA as compared to last year's

Rs 20 LPA and the average salary of the batch went up to Rs 6.77 LPA from 6.28 LPA (Lakhs per Annum). More than 121 recruiters had participated in VIT Placements 2020-21 including core companies Viz. intel, Xilinx, Robert Bosch, ALSTOM. IT companies VISA, Microsoft, Walmart, Adobe, Amazon, JP Morgan Chase & Co, SAP Labs, Goldman Sachs, Phillips, IBM, Commvault, DELOITTE, Pharmeasy, PEPSI CO Global Business Services, VM ware etc.,

## BJD launches protests against price rise

**BHUBANESWAR, OCT 31 (PTI):** Members of the women's wing of the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Odisha on Sunday cooked on clay chulhas (ovens) on the streets here as a mark of protest against LPG price hike.

Youth workers of the ruling party in Odisha rode bicycles and bullock carts to the dharna' site near the Raj Bhavan to highlight spiralling fuel prices that are causing hardships to the common people.

Leaders and supporters of the ruling party, led by Bhubaneswar (North) MLA Susant Kumar Rout, staged a sit-in near the Raj Bhavan here protesting the price rise of fuel, cooking gas and essential items.

BJD party leaders, including ministers, MLAs, leaders of all frontal wings, came down heavily on the BJP-led government and blamed its faulty economic management for the unabated rise in the prices of essential commodities.

The party also submitted a memorandum at the Raj Bhavan addressed to the President of India, Ram Nath Kovind. As Governor Ganeshi Lal is not present in the state, his office received the memorandum, said a senior BJD leader Sanjay Das Burma.

Addressing the gathering, Das Verma, who is also the vice-chairman of the State Planning Board, attacked the Centre for its complete mismanagement of the economy.

BJD vice-president Debi Prasad Mishra said if the Centre did not take steps to bring down the skyrocketing prices, the BJD would be forced to take the protests to every village of Odisha and even to the national capital.

Before the beginning of the sit-in-dharna near Raj Bhavan, hundreds of youths of the ruling party

hit the streets with bullock carts, bicycles and trolleys, demanding rollback of fuel prices.

Rout said petrol price in Bhubaneswar has crossed the Rs 110-mark on Sunday after a 35 paise per litre hike for the fifth consecutive day.

Government Chief Whip Pramila Mallick said the BJD would no more tolerate the further rise in the price of fuel and demanded immediate rollback of the prices of petrol, diesel and cooking gas.

She said the BJD will organise similar protest meetings in all the 147 assembly constituencies of the state.

The BJD leaders said it is unfortunate that the BJP government has no concern for the people who have been struggling due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Odisha's culture minister Ashok Chandra Panda said that the prices of petrol and diesel have reached a record high in the past two years and the BJD will never remain silent over this issue and raise its voice in the public interest.

The opposition BJP and Congress, however, criticised the BJD and claimed that it was a ploy to divert the attention of the people from the kidnap and murder case of a woman teacher in Kalahandi district.

Pushed to a corner due to the state-wide furor over the teacher's killing and a state minister's alleged link with the prime accused, the ruling party has resorted to diversionary tactic with this protest, BJP state general secretary Prithviraj Harichandan said.

Senior Congress MLA Suresh Routray also slammed the BJD for remaining silent for a long time and highlighting the matter only after the opposition parties staged protests across the state over the teacher's killing.

## Exhibition matches and Ekta Diwas awards ceremony at Bhaichung Stadium



**NAMCHI, 31 OCT [IPR]:** The newly inaugurated Bhaichung Stadium witnessed two exciting football exhibition matches as a part of the Rashtriya Ekta Diwas celebrations today.

The two exhibition match was played between Chief Minister XI vs Chief Secretary XI and Jhapa XI vs Sikkim XI.

The event had the presence of the Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang, SLA Speaker LB Das along with cabinet ministers, other dignitaries, department officials and the public.

The first exhibition match was played between CM XI and CS XI wherein, the latter team scored two goals against one to register a victory.

In the second match, Sikkim XI won against Jhapa XI 1-0.

As part of the Rashtriya Ekta Diwas celebrations, various activities and competitions were organised wherein cash prizes along with certificates were awarded.

The Chief Minister extended financial support to 16 football clubs of Sikkim: Sumbuk Sporting Club (Boys), Mangan Sporting Club (Boys), Mangalbaria Sporting Club (Boys), Gyalshing Sporting Club (Boys), Dentam Sporting Club (Girls), Tashiding Sporting Club (Girls), Yangang Sporting Club (Boys), Yangang Sporting Club (Girls), Pakyong Sporting Club (Boys), Pakyong Sporting

Club (Girls), Namthang Sporting Club (Girls), Dzongu Sporting Club (Boys), Dzongu Sporting Club (Girls), United Bojoghari Sporting Club (Girls), United Bojoghari Sporting Club (Girls), and Chungthang Sporting Club (Girls).

In Half Marathon (21km), Men's Category Mr. Bikash Bhujel stood in the first position while Mr. Puran Rai and Mr. Niraj Kumar Maurya took the second and third position respectively.

In the women category (21km), Ms. Sonika stood in the first position and Ms. Arpita Sahini and Ms. Badho took the second and third place respectively.

In 40km cyclathon Men category Mr. Suraj Rana Magar, Mr. Kiran Limboo and Ashin Sharma stood in the first second and third position respectively.

In women category, Ms. Indra Kala Nimbang stood in the first position while Ms. Anita Rai took the second and Ms. Bibisha Chawdary came in the third position.

The winners of State Level Inter-Club Under-16 Boys and Girls were Mangan Sporting Club (Boys) and Dentam Sporting Club (Girls).

In the parade competition, Sikkim Police Female Contingent was adjudged as the first position and the second position was taken by Sikkim Armed Force. While the Third Position was grabbed by 2nd Indian Reserve Battalion tying with 3rd Indian Reserve Battalion.

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## Sudan's anti-coup protesters back on Khartoum's streets

**KHARTOUM, 31 OCT [AL-JAZEERA]:** Anti-coup protesters have manned barricades in Sudan's capital Khartoum, a day after a deadly crackdown on mass rallies, as a defiant civil disobedience campaign against the military takeover entered its seventh day.

Tens of thousands turned out across the country for Saturday's demonstrations, marching against the army's October 25 power grab, when top General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan dissolved the government, declared a state of emergency and detained Sudan's civilian leadership.

The move sparked a chorus of international condemnation, with world powers demanding a swift return to civilian rule and calling for the military to show "restraint" against protesters.

At least three people were shot dead and more than 100 people wounded during Saturday's demonstrations, according to medics, who reported those killed had bullet wounds in their head, chest or stomach. It takes the death toll since protests began to at least 11.

Police forces denied the killings or using live bullets.

"No to military rule," protesters carrying Sudanese flags chanted as they marched around the capital and other cities,

as forces fired tear gas to break them up.

Demonstrations on Saturday rocked many cities across Sudan, including in the eastern states of Gedaref and Kassala, as well as in North Kordofan and White Nile.

As the night fell, many protests in Khartoum and the capital's twin city of Omdurman thinned out. But on Sunday morning, protesters were back on the streets, again using rocks and tyres to block roads.

Soldiers from the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces were seen on many streets in Khartoum and Omdurman.

Security forces set up random checkpoints on the streets, frisking passers-by and randomly searching cars.

Phone lines, which were largely down on Saturday, were back apart from intermittent disruptions. But internet access has remained cut off since the army's takeover.

Al Jazeera's Hiba Morgan, reporting from Khartoum, said there are calls for more protests.

"Following yesterday's attack by security forces using live ammunition, the resistance committee has advised protesters to stay in their neighbourhoods, barricade the roads leading to those neighbourhoods and residential areas and continue with the civil

disobedience," Morgan said.

"Many of the shops that are normally opened around this time of the day are closed. Very few cars are out on the roads. The streets that are normally busy are almost empty. Many of the protesters are saying they will continue with the protests despite being targeted by the security forces." Since August 2019, Sudan had been ruled by a joint civilian-military council, alongside Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok's government, as part of the now derailed transition to full civilian rule.

Hamdok and other top civilian leaders have been under military guard since the coup, either in detention or effective house arrest.

US President Joe Biden has called the coup a "grave setback", while the African Union has suspended Sudan's membership for the "unconstitutional" takeover.

The World Bank and the US froze aid, a move that will hit hard in a country already mired in a dire economic crisis.

On Sunday, the UN secretary-general urged Sudan's generals to reverse their takeover of the country, saying they should "take heed" of Saturday's protests. "Time to go back to the legitimate constitutional arrangements," Antonio Guterres said in a tweet.

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## Resolve to Make Amends

*The Sankalp has be to learn from mistakes, not refine past machinisations*

The nation observed Sankalp Diwas on Sunday; a day when officials at official functions made officious resolutions towards national integration... unity. India is an integrated nation in that it has only grown in size since Independence, not disintegrated, but regions still remain fractured, the people still segregated; yes the nation and its people could use some integration especially in the current environment of excessive pigeonholing, easy villianisations and quick chauvinism. For the past more than three decades, 31 October used to be observed as Rashtiya Sankalp Diwas (National Resolve Day), and since 2014, it is also observed as Rashtriya Ekta Diwas (National Unity Day). While the former marks the death anniversary of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984, the latter is in observation of the first Home Minister of India, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's birth anniversary. Both are significant leaders and both the emotions being promoted – Sanklap and Ekta – are important sentiments. One cannot help wonder though whether one is being leveraged to overshadow the other. Such are the times we find ourselves in.

If one was to ignore questioning the intent behind the two days bundled into one and took the resolve for unity at face value, some necessary meditations and introspections need to be undertaken. The people need to demand that events that followed the day we now observe as Sankalp Diwas are never repeated. That is a wish that every Indian [and when we say Indian we mean "Indian", not political party goons and muscle who live by misplaced notions of what makes an India] harboured in 1984, and yet, more than thirty years on, the wish remains unachieved. Politicians still manage to cleave the country, set the stage for every spark to become a conflagration and push integration further away. They find willing allies in the media which routinely loses focus, pushes tokenism and celebrates sensationalism (in fact, now may in the media even openly instigate spite with the sensational jingoism). They operate on simplistic constructs. The Gujarat Riots, an indefensible scar on the country's secular claims, hogs the media space when one speaks of communal hatred, although now we have other episodes vying for such insular infamy as well. This still, is a valid criticism and should be addressed. Victims of the post-Godhra carnage need justice, but can it be expected in a country where a worse pogrom of two decades earlier remains unpunished? Government records on Gujarat put the death toll to riots at 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus. Human Rights groups believe up to 2000 were killed. Official records on the 1984 anti-Sikh riots put the number of Sikhs slaughtered at 2,733. The number of people convicted for 1984 – thirteen; For Gujarat – 11 convicted and eight sentenced to life imprisonment. This is not an attempt to justify the sluggishness that inflicts the Gujarat inquisition, these are not things that can be justified, but an attempt to put things in perspective. As a nation, we have not learnt anything since 1984 [taken as a watershed because it was with this year that State machineries really started getting compromised for communal and political settling of scores].

Governments might have changed, but attitudes have not. As a result, a Nation that was born to the wails of communal bloodletting still does not have either the resolve or the wherewithal to avoid them. The media and the civil society need to ask why situations and incidents are still allowed to deny the people their instinctive desire for communal amity. Had the policy-makers realised their failings back in 1984, the Modi-led BJP Government in Gujarat would never have gotten the chance to allow, or as many are convinced, assist, the killings in 2002. Gujarat happened because 1984 remains ignored. 1984 receives only token mention because the media and the civil society shy away from it because it complicates the superficial analysis they have developed of what and who are communal in our country. The post-Godhra riots were a result of the powers-that-be subverting the power-to-serve to become power-that-colludes in pushing political agendas. As a people, we continue to pay the price because the people who occupy the public domain do not ask the right questions, do not address the malfunction in the system. Yes the country and its people need to rededicate themselves to the idea of India, an India that was imagined to be secular but today actively segregates its people; an India that was to have public servants but they mutated into masters of the people; an India that was to be run by people's representative has been usurped by autocrats; an India which started democratic is now foisting dynasties.

The nation needs to resolve to rediscover the idea that it was imagined as. History needs to be remembered and understood so that we are not condemned to repeat past mistakes. The shames need to be accepted because then we can resolve them. Then, leaders who survive by keeping past nightmares alive in public minds will have to make way for visionaries who deliver dreams for the nation to collectively aspire towards and achieve.

# Facebook relaunches itself as 'Meta' in a clear bid to dominate the metaverse

MARCUS CARTER & BEN EGLISTON  
*theconversation.com*

Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg has announced the company will change its name to Meta, saying the move reflects the fact the company is now much broader than just the social media platform (which will still be called Facebook).

The rebrand follows several months of intensifying discourse by Zuckerberg and the company more broadly on the metaverse – the idea of integrating real and digital worlds ever more seamlessly, using technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR).

Zuckerberg said he hoped the metaverse will be a new ecosystem that will create millions of jobs for content creators.

But is this just a shallow PR exercise, with Zuckerberg trying to reset the Facebook brand after several scandal-ridden years, or is it a genuine bid to set the company on course for what he sees as the future of computing?

FACEBOOK'S JOURNEY INTO THE METAVERSE

What's not in contention is that this is the culmination of seven years of corporate acquisitions, investments and research that kicked off with Facebook's acquisition of VR headset company Oculus for US\$2 billion in 2014.

Oculus had risen to prominence with a lucrative Kickstarter campaign, and many of its backers were angry that their support for the "future of gaming" had been co-opted by Silicon Valley.

While gamers fretted that Facebook would give them VR versions of Farmville rather than the hardcore content they envisioned, cynics viewed the purchase as part of a spending spree after Facebook's US\$16 billion stock market launch, or simply Zuckerberg indulging a personal interest in gaming.

Under Facebook, Oculus has gone on to dominate the VR market with over 60% market share. That's thanks to heavy cross-subsidisation from Facebook's advertising business and a console-like approach with the mobile "Quest" VR headset.

Beyond Oculus, Facebook has invested heavily in VR and AR. Organised under the umbrella of Facebook Reality Labs, there are nearly 10,000 people working on these technologies – almost

20% of Facebook's workforce. Last week, Facebook announced plans to hire another 10,000 developers in the European Union to work on its metaverse computing platform.

While much of its work remains behind closed doors, Facebook Reality Labs' publicised projects include Project Aria, which seeks to create live 3D maps of public spaces, and the recently released Ray-Ban Stories – Facebook-integrated sunglasses with 5-megapixel cameras and voice control.

All these investments and projects are steps towards the infrastructure for Zuckerberg's vision of the metaverse. As he said earlier in the year:

"I think it really makes sense for us to invest deeply to help shape what I think is going to be the next major computing platform."

WHY DOES FACEBOOK WANT TO RULE THE METAVERSE?

The metaverse may eventually come to define how we work, learn and socialise. This means VR and AR would move beyond their current niche uses, and become everyday technologies on which we will all depend.

We can guess at Facebook's vision for the metaverse by looking to its existing approach to social media. It has moulded our online lives into a gigantic revenue stream based on power, control and surveillance, fuelled by our data.

VR and AR headsets collect enormous amounts of data about the user and their environment. This is one of the key ethical issues around these emerging technologies, and presumably one of the chief attractions for Facebook in owning and developing them.

What makes this particularly concerning is that the way you move your body is so unique that VR data can be used to identify you, rather like a fingerprint. That means everything you do in VR could potentially be traced back to your individual identity. For Facebook – a digital advertising empire built on tracking our data – it's a tantalising prospect.

Alongside Project Aria, Facebook launched its Responsible Innovation Principles, and recently pledged US\$50 million to "build the metaverse responsibly".

But, as Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein

note in their book Data Feminism, responsible innovation is often focused on individualised concepts of harm, rather than addressing the structural power imbalances baked into technologies such as social media.

In our studies of Facebook's Oculus Imaginary (Facebook's vision for how it will use Oculus technology) and its changes over time to Oculus' privacy and data policies, we suggest Facebook publicly frames privacy in VR as a question of individual privacy (over which users can have control) versus surveillance and data harvesting (over which we don't).

Critics have derided Facebook's announcements as "privacy theatre" and corporate spin. Digital rights advocacy group Access Now, which participated in a Facebook AR privacy "design jam" in 2020 and urged Facebook to prioritise alerting bystanders they were being recorded by Ray-Ban Stories, says its recommendation was ignored.

IS THE INTERNET A BLUEPRINT FOR AN OPEN METAVERSE?

Appropriately enough, the metaverse under Facebook is likely to resemble the term's literary origins, coined in Neal Stephenson's 1992 novel Snow Crash to describe an exploitative, corporatised, hierarchical virtual space.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Tony Parisi, one of the early pioneers of VR, argues we already have a blueprint for a non-dystopian metaverse. He says we should look back to the original, pre-corporatised vision of the internet, which embodied "an open, collaborative and consensus-driven way to develop technologies and tools".

Facebook's rebrand, its dominance in the VR market, its seeming desire to hire every VR and AR developer in Europe, and its dozens of corporate acquisitions – all this sounds less like true collaboration and consensus, and more like an attempt to control the next frontier of computing.

We let Facebook rule the world of social media. We shouldn't let it rule the metaverse.

*[Marcus Carter is Senior Lecturer in Digital Cultures, SOAR Fellow, University of Sydney; Ben Egliston is Postdoctoral research fellow, Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology]*

## BBC: why enhancing the public broadcaster's fact-checking would strengthen its impartiality

STEPHEN CUSHION  
*theconversation.com*

From the 1926 General Strike, through the 1956 Suez Canal crisis, to the more recent Brexit debate and the COVID-19 pandemic, how the BBC tries to ensure impartiality in its journalism has always generated fierce debates about its independence. Every director-general since its foundation nearly 100 years ago has had to contend with criticism of perceived BBC bias during high-profile political events and issues.

These days, the BBC also has to navigate new "culture wars" over questions of cultural sensitivity, free speech and censorship. No surprise, then, that the current director-general, Tim Davie, believes impartiality is central to the BBC's long-term survival. To that end he has announced new plans to strengthen the corporation's political independence by, for example, enhancing its use of fact-checking and appointing new external impartiality investigators to monitor all BBC content.

In a post-truth world rife with political disinformation, how broadcaster's challenge false or misleading information while maintaining high standards of impartiality has become increasingly challenging. This has been exacerbated in the social media age, with routine BBC news reporting and journalists subject to forensic surveillance about their editorial decisions.

Having been commissioned to carry out five BBC impartiality reviews, as well as leading a large-scale research study about how journalistic legitimacy can be enhanced by public service broadcasters, I welcome Davie's new plans. But, given the struggles the BBC has had with implementing previous commitments to beef up its impartiality credentials, it remains to be seen how far new editorial practices such as more prominently fact-checking claims can inform its journalism.

POLITICAL PRESSURE

Despite the public service broadcaster's independence, it is important to acknowledge the political pressure

BBC editors operate under. This is not to say BBC journalists dutifully follow the script of the government of the day. Far from it.

But, to some degree, the political environment must inevitably influence BBC editorial decision making. And, in the febrile political climate,

guarding impartiality in the BBC's plan is a renewed commitment to fact-checking. This is not an entirely new.

Writing in defence of its impartiality in the middle of a heated general election campaign in 2019, the BBC's head of news, Fran Unsworth,



the BBC's impartiality is under intense political attack. This is just one reason why the appointment of a successor to outgoing political editor, Laura Kuenssberg, is attracting so much attention.

Not long after being appointed secretary of state for digital, culture, media and sport (DCMS), Nadine Dorries claimed the BBC had a "lack of impartiality" and questioned whether it would survive another decade. Meanwhile, the chair of the DCMS parliamentary committee, Julian Knight, said he believed the BBC's new political editor should be pro-Brexit. This served to reinforce recurrent allegations by Conservative MPs that the public service broadcaster had been biased in its coverage of the UK's relationship with the European Union.

The BBC new impartiality plans have been informed by the recent review of editorial processes governance and culture led by Arts Council chair and BBC board member, Nicholas Serota. It produced a ten-point plan on impartiality, editorial standards and whistleblowing.

A central commitment to safe-

claimed that the broadcaster had "ramped up" its Reality Check service to ensure campaign claims were being rigorously checked. Meanwhile, after a 2016 report into the BBC use of statistics there was a recommendation to make Reality Check a permanent fixture in BBC news.

WHY FACT-CHECKING SHOULD BE ENHANCED

And yet, the ongoing research in which I'm involved has found that while the BBC's Reality Check routinely fact-checks claims on its website, this does not regularly inform wider BBC news output, including the flagship BBC bulletin, the News at Ten. Put simply, fact-checking does exist at the BBC, but it could be ramped up much more and inform BBC journalism more widely.

In 2019, I contributed to an Ofcom study on the Range and Depth of BBC News that examined BBC journalism and its audiences. The study concluded that the BBC "should feel able to challenge controversial viewpoints that have little support or are not backed up by facts, making this clear to viewers, listeners and readers". It went on to say that, since audi-

ences largely respect BBC journalism, "This should give the BBC confidence to be bolder in its approach."

My research into television news coverage of the COVID pandemic found, with the exception of Channel 4 News, most broadcasters did not routinely challenge claims made by

journalists during a critical moment in the health crisis. And yet the Ofcom study of audiences recommended more robust forms of journalistic scrutiny and welcomed more prominent fact-checking and the questioning of dubious or misleading political statements. Contrary to the view of a former senior BBC editor, research suggests enhancing fact-checking in broadcast programming would not undermine trust in journalism.

After all, despite the BBC's impartiality being under constant attack, it remains one of the most used widely used and trusted information sources in the UK and around the world. While the BBC understandably wants to maintain a trustworthy relationship with its audiences, our research suggests a bolder approach to impartiality would not compromise it.

If the BBC's new impartiality plans are to work in practice, in my view countering misinformation and using fact-checking must become a more prominent part of its news output.

*[the writer is Chair Professor, Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University]*



# In Trinamoolvs Tripura cops, Court's go ahead to Mamata Banerjee's nephew's rally

**AGARTALA, 31 OCT [PTI]:** The High Court of Tripura late Saturday night gave permission to the Trinamool Congress to hold its planned rally for party's national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee after the local police cancelled its earlier permission.

After the police rescinded its permission to hold the rally in front of RabindraShatabarshikiBhawan (Tagore Centenary Hall) here on Sunday and asked for the meeting venue to be shifted, the TMC filed an urgent case before the high court.

Justice SubhashishTalapatra, who heard the case, permitted the TMC to organise its rally after the party gave an undertaking that it would not allow more than 500 people at the venue.

The Trinamool Congress also gave an undertaking before the high court that there would be no gathering at all in other places, a promise they had made earlier in a letter addressed to the local police chief on October 29.

TMC RajyaSabha MP SushmitaDev thanked the High court of Tripura for



"allowing the party to hold a meeting before the RabindraSatabarshikiBhavan on Sunday" with certain conditions due to COVID-19.

Mr Banerjee, who will be the main speaker at the rally, promptly retweeted Ms Dev's social media post.

"The petitioners have undertaken before this court that the assembly will not be formed of more than 500 people and leaders of the petitioner shall aid the police in order to ensure that not more than 500 people enter the venue ... This undertaking shall

strictly be observed by the petitioners. The police may put Nakas at the appropriate places to regulate the inflow of the supporters of the petitioner", the court said in its order.

Mr Banerjee also shared a poster on his Facebook page, which said that "BadlaNoy, Badal Chai (No revenge but want change), and appealed to party workers to attend his meeting.

Amid a spike in coronavirus cases in parts of the country, the BJP-led state government had on Saturday issued fresh guidelines, making CO-

VID-19 tests mandatory for people entering Tripura from several states including West Bengal.

The TMC had promptly reacted to it and called this a political move.

"The BJP is scared of Abhishek. They are using coronavirus as a shield to stop him from addressing the people of Tripura. This shows they know well that the people of Tripura are no longer with the BJP," TMC leader ParthaChatterjee had claimed.

The TMC is trying to gain foothold in the northeastern state ahead of assembly

elections in 2023. The party had on Saturday accused the Biplab Deb government in Tripura of making every effort to stop the party from expanding its base in the northeastern state, dubbing the move to make COVID-19 tests mandatory for certain travellers a tactic to stonewall its campaigns.

Responding to the taunts, BJP national vice-president DilipGhosh had claimed that the TMC was trying to "import the politics of violence" in Tripura from Bengal. PTI JOY SUS JRC

# Emma Raducanu taps into 'Cluj vibe' as Romanian tennis flourishes

Cluj-Napoca, 31 Oct [theGuardian]: Last Sunday afternoon in Cluj-Napoca, the final day before new Covid-19 restrictions forced the Transylvania Open's sold-out sessions to be played behind closed doors, Emma Raducanu and a group of Romanian players bade farewell to the crowd with individual, emotional speeches. As the players cheered each other on, it was the first indication of how enthusiastically Raducanu has been welcomed into the Romanian tennis fold.

Raducanu's US Open victory generated intense media coverage and her paternal Romanian roots were an immediate source of pride for many, but also led to a debate over her identity.

"As well as Bianca Andreescu's case, it was on social media," says Adrian Toca, founder of Romanian tennis publication Treizecizero. "All this talk, that talk. Some people were saying: 'Why should we root for her? She's not Romanian.' Others that she has Romanian origins."

The past week has been a thorough victory for the latter view. During her time in Cluj, where she reached her first WTA tour quarter-final before a 6-2, 6-1 defeat by Marta Kostyuk, Raducanu has been welcomed by all, and it was notable how the Romanian players beckoned her into their group.

Elena-Gabriela Ruse, who trained with Raducanu on consecutive days before the tournament and went out to dinner with her team, says Raducanu first came on to their radar during the 2018 Wimbledon qualifying tournament. Another Romanian player alerted her to the presence of an unknown British girl with a Romanian name, so she went to watch.

Three years later, in Nottingham, Ruse and her partner, Monica Niculescu, another of Raducanu's new Romanian friends, had missed out on a Wimbledon doubles wildcard. They began to talk. "Unfortunately we didn't get it, so I asked Emma if she wants to play doubles with me," Ruse says. "She was really funny and she told me: 'I'm sorry Gabi, I can't play doubles.'"

"We started to be friends, she's a nice person. I enjoy the time with her so much. She is speaking really good Romanian but she's so shy to do it."

That so many older players have been willing to put an arm around Raducanu is particularly valuable given her inexperience on the tour. When young players attain enormous success and celebrity, the locker room can be a lonely and sometimes even hostile place. In Raducanu's case, she now has players from Great Britain, Romania and China looking out for her.

"We talk to her in Romanian in the locker room and we're talking about this and she understands almost everything," says Alexandra Dulgheru, a player who has been conducting on-court interviews in Cluj during an injury layoff. "She's trying to give interviews in Romanian, which helps. [Players and fans] admire her even more and

they embrace her like one of their own, treating her like part of the family."

As Dulgheru described Raducanu as shy and modest, the Transylvania Open tournament director, Patrick Ciorcila, expressed satisfaction at her presence. "I also had the chance to talk a lot with her father for the past few days. He's very well connected with Romania," he says. "He loves the country and he loves the fact she's here. He would like her to be here for future editions."

On Tuesday, Raducanu recovered from the brink of defeat in the first round against the Slovenian Polona Hercog. In her interview with Dulgheru, she cited her treatment in Cluj as a source of motivation. "I was thinking: 'I don't want to leave here,'" she said.

Toca, who also works on the Transylvania Open digital team, says her comments went down extremely well. "It was a very nice moment for the tournament because after all those shocks with no crowd, they were a bit sad. That is how I felt it from the inside. The moment she won, everybody got the vibe back again; the Cluj vibe. Everybody was feeling good again."

On Thursday, after reaching the quarter-final, Raducanu said her US Open trophy will be put on display at the LTA National Tennis Centre. It is a thoughtful gesture, one that took the LTA by surprise, but also a reminder of the privilege of developing as a player in a grand-slam nation with the support of a rich federation. Not even Simona Halep, a former junior No 1, can relate to that.

Over the past decade, women's tennis in Romania has quietly grown into one of the most unlikely success stories. They not only have one of the greatest players of the generation in Halep, but also a slew of successful players beneath her. Romania has eight players in the top 150, double that of Great Britain and behind only Russia, the US and the Czech Republic.

Such depth seems like a miracle given the negligible presence of their federation or an organised system in their careers, with each of them thriving on completely distinct paths. "It's unexpected because there were never funds pumped into this," says Toca.

"Also, a system – they don't have, at the young level, coaches and all that apparatus to push you and to prepare you. Everything was done individually and it's just the quality of players they had to succeed, the talent and the luck to meet someone to [guide them]."

Having been frequently asked to explain how all of this has happened, Dulgheru has come to see numerous factors, from the competition between players to a vast amount of talent in Romania. "We grow a lot on clay. We grow with a lot of variation in our game. And it's our grit; we're really feisty. We have that fighting spirit, that really is a trend for Romania. That, together with the support of the family, makes us really quite strong inside."

# No new COVID-19 case in Andamans

**PORT BLAIR, OCT 31 (PTI):** For the second consecutive day the union territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands did not record any new COVID-19 case, a health department official said on Sunday.

The COVID-19 tally in the archipelago remained at 7,651.

The union territory had recorded zero COVID-19 cases on Monday and Tuesday, two cases on Wednesday and one case on Thursday.

The archipelago now has only four active COVID-19 cases and all the patients are in the South Andaman district while the other two districts - North and Middle Andaman and Nicobar - are

coronavirus free, the official said.

One more patient recovered from COVID-19, taking the total number of recoveries to 7,518.

The COVID-19 death toll remained at 129 as no fresh fatality was reported in the last 24 hours.

The administration has far tested 5,96,657 samples for COVID-19 and the cumulative test positivity rate is 1.28 per cent.

A total of 4,91,419 beneficiaries have been inoculated with COVID-19 vaccine so far, of which 2,93,676 have received the first dose of the vaccine and 1,97,743 both doses of the vaccine, the official added.

# Arunachal Pradesh reports 11 new COVID-19 cases



**ITANAGAR, OCT 31 (PTI):** Arunachal Pradesh reported 11 new COVID-19 cases, two more than the previous day, pushing the coronavirus tally to 55,154, a senior health department official said here on Sunday.

Ten more people recuperated from COVID-19, taking the total number of recoveries in the north-eastern state to 54,765, the official said. The COVID-19 recovery rate in the state remained at 99.29 per cent while the active percentage dipped to 0.20 per cent, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Dr Lobsang Jampa said.

The coronavirus death toll in the frontier state remained at 280

as no new fatality was reported in the last 24 hours, he said.

Arunachal Pradesh currently has 109 active COVID-19 cases.

Tawang district has the highest number of active cases at 24, followed by Lower Dibang Valley (18), East Siang (16) and West Kameng (15).

As many as 11,85,102 samples have been tested for COVID-19 in the state so far, including 608 on Saturday, Jampa said, adding that the positivity rate stands at 1.80 per cent.

According to State Immunisation Officer Dr Dimong Padung a total of 13,12,429 people have been administered COVID-19 vaccine so far.

# Bypolls to RS seats in Kerala, West Bengal on Nov 29



**NEW DELHI, OCT 31 (PTI):** Bypolls to one Rajya Sabha seat each from Kerala and West Bengal will be held on November 29, the Election Commission said on Sunday.

The bypolls were necessitated following the resignation of Kerala Congress (M) leader Jose K Mani and Arpita Ghosh of the Trinamool Congress from the upper house earlier this year.

The notification would be issued on November 9 and the poll will be held on November 29, the EC said in a statement. The counting of votes, as per established practice, will be held one hour after the voting concludes at 4 pm on November 29.

Mani had resigned in January this year. His term as a Rajya Sabha member

was to otherwise end in July, 2024. Ghosh had resigned in September this year and her term was to end in April, 2026.

During the second wave of COVID-19, the Commission had decided against holding the Kerala RS bypoll till the situation improves.

The Commission also announced biennial elections to six legislative council seats in Telangana and three in Andhra Pradesh which fell vacant earlier this year.

While six Telangana legislative council seats fell vacant in June, the three legislative council seats in Andhra Pradesh fell vacant in May following retirement of sitting members.

In May, the Commission had decided that due to outbreak of

the second wave of COVID-19 in the country, it would not be appropriate to hold biennial election to the Andhra Pradesh and Telangana legislative councils till the pandemic situation significantly improves.

Now, after reassessment, the EC decided to hold the biennial elections on November 29. The counting will take place one hour after the completion of polling.

The EC also announced holding of bypoll to a legislative council seat in Maharashtra which fell vacant due to the death of the sitting member Sharad Namdeo Ranpise in September this year.

The legislative council bypoll will also be held on November 29, the EC said.

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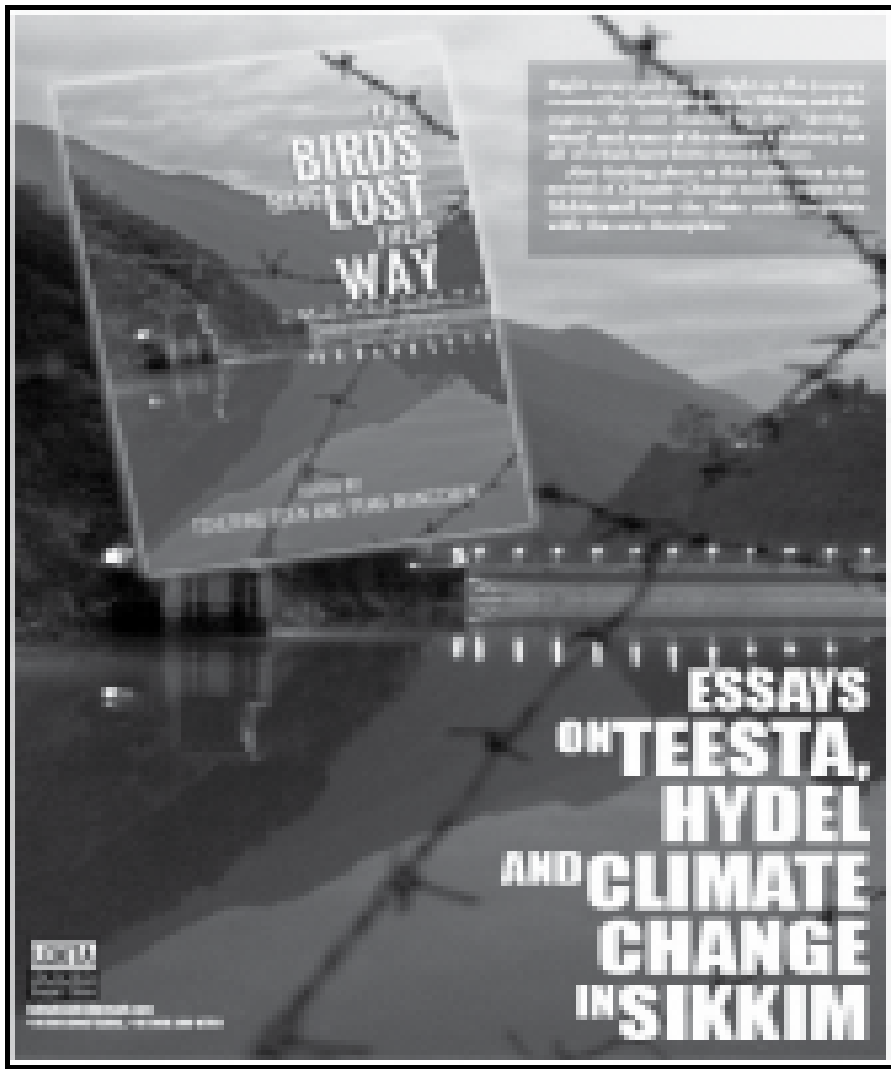
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# Low-key Ronaldo theatre gives way to second act of beautiful precision

**BARNEY RONAY**

**LONDON, 31 OCT [THEGUARDIAN]:** Money won't make you happy. Money won't solve all your problems. But it certainly helps. Or at least, it does when that weekly debit comes in exchange for talent on the Cristiano Ronaldo scale.

Ronaldo was sensational here, producing a performance that seemed to step outside the doom-laden tides of the last week, most notably in a startling finish for Manchester United's opening goal.

One of the criticisms of Ole Gunnar Solskjær's time as United manager is that this has been an era of moments, of disconnected flickers. Well, whatever the ultimate fate of Solskjær's team, this was a moment that will stand in its own distinct space, a little breath of sporting divinity.

As Spurs and Manchester United kicked off Ronaldo had gone five weeks, or £2.5m in salary payments, since his last Premier League goal. At times the Ronaldo presence has seemed to weigh heavily around Solskjær's efforts to re-gear his team. And really, how do you solve a problem like Cristiano? What is the managerial calculus that can make sense of a static 36-year-old superstar centre-forward?

It felt significant that Solskjær went back to something familiar in north London, seeking out the muscular solidity of his best period as Manchester United manager. Perhaps he was blessed a little by the absence of Paul Pogba, who has, if we believe his advertising, "reinvented" the role of midfielder; although not, it would seem, in a good way.

At the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium Solskjær ripped out the pages of last week's playbook ("front foot", press high, We Are Manchester United).



The back four became a three. The front four gave way to a front two plus floating Bruno Fernandes. Against better opponents there is a danger this formation might become "split". But they were more than enough for a horribly flaccid Tottenham. Served by that hard working rump, Ronaldo and Edinson Cavani were irresistible at times.

It took a while. In a battle of two teams struggling vaguely to become something, Ronaldo looked like another dissonant element for the opening half an hour. He walked urgently. He maintained that concerned, slightly pitying facial expression. Around the half hour mark there were moments of low-key CR7 theatre as a flick close to goal went astray and Ronaldo threw his arms in the air, dropped his head, and stood for a moment, a wonderfully tender tableau of misery.

And yet, just as this United team seemed once again to be

drifting, passing with purpose but without incision, Ronaldo produced a moment of startling purity.

It was one of those interventions that seems to come from a different game, a different day, like the hand of some minor sporting deity reaching down on to this muddled chess board and chucking a bolt of clear blue light through it.

The goal wasn't just about Ronaldo. It was also about Spurs, who had been shuffling from side to side long enough to become a little sleepy on their feet. Sensing that slackness, Fernandes had time to produce his own spark of magic, looking up to see the first shiver of movement from Ronaldo, and getting a little flicker of what was about to happen before anyone else inside the stadium.

The pass from Fernandes was a delicious thing, nudged and floated and back spun just enough to tease Ben Davies

into dithering and then pedalling back, never at any stage reading its arc.

In that moment you got a glimpse of basic human difference. Those yellow boots were already snapping at the turf, the Ronaldo brain crunching the numbers on drop and drift and flight. As the pass fell Ronaldo was already springing off his left foot, body angled, taking the ball flush as it appeared late in his vision and spanking it – so delicate, so severe – back across and into the far corner.

It was a stunning moment of craft and third-eye vision, the kind of intervention that draws gasps and gurgles, and a sense in that little flicker of what it must be like to see the game with the benefit of that two-second delay button, to find those streams intersecting with such beautiful precision.

Spurs looked a little stunned. In truth they had all

afternoon. Ronaldo has been criticised for a lack of urgency. But Harry Kane was barely present on the material plane here, glimpsed only in patches like some vanishing Victorian garden sprite.

With 64 minutes gone United's three attackers made the second goal. Again it was sublime, Fernandes took the ball and fed Ronaldo, who Ronaldo-chopped his way inside then produced a lovely nudged through-pass that put Cavani in on goal. That was only ever ending one way. The finish was pure high-spec calf-leather turbo-engineered luxury.

And so Solskjær's Manchester United takes another turn on its picaresque journey. A team of this quality really should expect to swat aside these impoverished Spurs. But there was at least a sense of clarity here, moments of light that might yet become a spark.

## Chelsea extend lead as Liverpool held, Manchester City beaten

**LONDON, 31 OCT [AFP]:** Chelsea extended their lead at the top of the Premier League to three points as Reece James scored twice in a 3-0 win at Newcastle as Liverpool and Manchester City stumbled at home in the title race on Saturday.

Liverpool blew a 2-0 lead at Anfield as Brighton battled back to earn a deserved 2-2 draw. City are now five points off the top after Pep Guardiola's 10 men were beaten 2-0 by Crystal Palace at the Etihad. Newcastle are hoping to follow in the footsteps of Chelsea and City's success following huge investment from foreign owners.

However, the Saudi-owned Magpies have a battle just to remain in the top flight as they remain rooted in the bottom three without a league win this season.

Chelsea were without the injured Romelu Lukaku, Timo Werner and Mason Mount, but the European champions still had far too much class at St James' Park.

James produced two stunning finishes from right wing-back before Jorginho's penalty rounded off the scoring.

Liverpool stretched their unbeaten run to 24 games in all competitions, but will feel two points slipped away after another flying start.

Mohamed Salah's scoring streak came to an end at 10 games, but the Egyptian set up the opener as his pass was swept into the far corner by Jordan Henderson.

Sadio Mane doubled the home side's advantage with a back post header before the Senegalese had another goal ruled out for handball after he caught Brighton goalkeeper Robert Sanchez in possession.

The Seagulls grabbed a lifeline before half-time when Enock Mwepu's cross flew over the stranded Alisson Becker.

And Brighton snatched a point after the break when Leandro Trossard rounded off a

brilliant team move 25 minutes from time.

City's first home defeat of the season rounded off a perfect day for the Chelsea in the title race.

Wilfried Zaha punished slack defending from Ruben Dias and Aymeric Laporte to fire into the far corner after six minutes.

Laporte was then sent-off for pulling down Zaha as the last man in first-half stoppage time.

Gabriel Jesus thought he had equalised midway through the second-half only for the goal to be ruled out for offside against Phil Foden.

The 10-men were then caught out two minutes from time when Connor Gallagher smashed high past Ederson.

Arsenal are up to fifth after a fast start and some inspired goalkeeping from Aaron Ramsdale earned the Gunners a 2-0 win at Leicester.

Gabriel and Emile Smith Rowe struck inside the opening 18 minutes for the visitors at the King Power.

But they relied on Ramsdale thereafter as the England international made a miraculous save from James Maddison among a string of impressive stops.

"When I saw the ball leaving Maddison's foot, I said, 'Goal'. So I don't know how it happened," said Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta.

"It was incredible - and the moment and the timing of it as well was crucial." Burnley registered their first win of the season in style with a 3-1 victory over Brentford to move out of the bottom three.

Chris Wood, Matt Lowton and Maxwell Cornet all struck in the first 36 minutes as Burnley led a Premier League game 3-0 at half-time for the first time.

Southampton opened up a four-point cushion over the relegation zone thanks to Che Adams' strike to win 1-0 at Watford.

## Bhubaneswar gets rail museum

**BHUBANESWAR, OCT 31 (PTI):** A railway museum was inaugurated in Bhubaneswar to showcase the rich heritage of the East Coast Railway.

The Kalinga Rail Heritage Museum at Chandrasekharpur was inaugurated by ECoR General Manager Vidya Bhushan on Saturday.

Efforts have been made to preserve the long and vibrant history of the railways, along with the rich heritage of the ECoR, an official statement said.

The aim of establishing the museum includes preserving the old railway equipment and boosting tourism, the ECoR said. Old equipment, instruments, technology devices and models have also been preserved in this museum through an impressive display of artefacts, models and photographs.

In the indoor section, various documents, old manuals, railway maps, equipment and photographs from the early days of the railways have been put on display. Various documentaries, postage stamps and logos have also been displayed.

## Barcelona held by Alaves in first game after Ronald Koeman dismissal

**BARCELONA, 31 OCT [AFP]:** Barcelona dropped more points in La Liga after failing to beat Alaves on Saturday as their first game since the sacking of Ronald Koeman ended in a disappointing 1-1 draw at Camp Nou. Sergio Agüero had to be taken to hospital for tests after suffering breathing problems during the first half of the game. Agüero was able to walk off the pitch and Barca's interim manager Sergi Barjuan said afterwards: "I asked him and he told me he was dizzy. I was told he went to hospital. I don't know anything else."

Gerard Piqué was also taken off with a calf strain and, along with Agüero, will now be a doubt for Tuesday's crunch Champions League game away at Dynamo Kiev.

Xavi Hernandez is expected to be appointed Koeman's successor this week but with the details of his move still to be agreed with Qatari side Al Sadd, Barca B coach Barjuan has been put in temporary charge.

Yet the removal of Koeman, and even the prospect of Xavi, produced no obvious uplift as a superb second-half strike from Memphis Depay was quickly cancelled out by an equally impressive run and finish from Alaves' Luis Rioja.

"What I have to do



is win over the players, make them believe in themselves," said Barjuan.

After three league games without a win, Barcelona stay ninth, eight points adrift of leaders Real Madrid, who earlier defeated Elche 2-1 thanks to two goals from Vinicius Junior and aided by a red card for Elche's Raul Guti.

Even more worrying for Barca will be the gap behind the top four is five points while attendances suggest the team's form is creating a sense of apathy amongst supporters, with only 37,238 inside the 99,000 Camp Nou.

Club president Joan Laporta has suggested Barjuan will still be in charge for the trip to

Kiev, with Xavi, or the next coach, arriving in time for next weekend's game against Celta Vigo or during the international break.

Barjuan admitted on Friday that it is "difficult to change things in a short time" but also said the team's style, a key factor in Koeman's dismissal, is "non-negotiable".

But while the first half an hour was slightly more purposeful from Barcelona, they still struggled for chances and the defence was beaten too easily for Rioja's equaliser.

For all the talk about style and possession, Depay's opener was a thunderbolt out of the blue. Jordi Alba played inside and Depay opened up his

body before curling the ball into the top right-hand corner.

But Barca's lead lasted less than three minutes as Alaves equalised with another superb goal, Rioja dancing past three Barca defenders, latching onto a sublime flick from Joselu, before rounding Marc-Andre ter Stegen and finishing.

Depay was slipped through by Gavi and Nico Gonzalez but hit the post and then Antonio Sivera as Alaves held on for a hard-fought point.

Earlier, Vinicius' sensational start to the season continued as he scored twice in Madrid's victory over Elche to ensure the rested Karim Benzema was not missed.

Vinicius had already given Madrid the lead when Elche's Guti was sent off in the 63rd minute and he added a second soon after with a superb chipped finish into the corner.

Madrid made life difficult for themselves late on when a Casemiro mistake allowed Pere Milla to pull a goal back but Elche's brief hope of a comeback came to nothing.

"We were very practical," said Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti. "After only two days rest it's not possible to play with intensity and energy."

Benzema's resurgence for France means Madrid no longer have their chief goalscorer all to themselves and after 17 games played already this term, Ancelotti opted to leave the striker at home.

It meant a surprise start for Mariano Diaz but it was Vinicius who filled the void, scoring his eighth and ninth goals of the season to continue an excellent run of form.

The 21-year-old Brazilian has long been circled as one of Madrid's most exciting talents but he has found a different level under Ancelotti.

"I haven't done anything," Ancelotti said. "I just try to give him confidence. I am not a magician."

## CSK felicitates Neeraj Chopra, presents him Rs 1 crore

**NEW DELHI, OCT 31 (PTI):** Three-time Indian Premier League champions Chennai Super Kings on Sunday honoured Olympic gold medallist Neeraj Chopra by presenting him Rs one crore in recognition of his historic feat at the Tokyo Games.

A cheque of Rs one crore on behalf of Chennai Super Kings Cricket Limited was presented to the Olympic champion javelin thrower here. CSK also presented a special jersey with the number 8758 (highlighting his gold medal-winning effort of 87.58m) as a mark of respect to Chopra, who joined Abhinav Bindra as only the second Indian individual gold medallist in the Olympics, a press release said.

The entire nation is proud of Neeraj for his stupendous achievement. By becoming the first Indian to win a medal (gold) in track and field, he has set a benchmark," CSK CEO K

S Viswanathan said. "He is an inspiration for the next generation. 87.58 is a number that will forever be etched in Indian sporting history and it's an honour for us to present this special jersey to Neeraj. We wish he brings more glory to the nation.

After receiving the award and special jersey, the 23-year old Chopra said that the past two months have been an opportunity for him to experience new things and also thanked the CSK management for the support.

Thank you so much for your support and for the prize. It feels good. I never thought that I'll get so much love after winning gold. It was completely unexpected and it feels good. Hopefully I'll work hard and get good results, he said.

With a throw of 87.58m On August 7 in Tokyo, Chopra became the first Indian to win a gold medal in athletics at the Olympic games.

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## Japan votes in election seen as test for Fumio Kishida

TOKYO, 31 OCT [AL-JAZEERA]: Voters in Japan are casting ballots in a general election seen as a test for Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and his long-ruling conservative party, which has been battered by its perceived mishandling of the coronavirus pandemic.

Up for grabs in Sunday's vote are 465 seats in the lower house, the more powerful of the two-chamber Japanese Diet, or parliament.

Kishida, who replaced the unpopular Yoshihide Suga, called the election soon after taking the top post earlier this month.

The 64-year-old has pledged to issue a fresh stimulus package worth tens of trillions of yen to counter the effect of the pandemic and promised to distribute wealth more fairly under a so-called "new capitalism".

But with his lacklustre image failing to inspire voters, the LDP is on the brink of losing its sole majority in the lower house of parliament for the first time since 2009, according to opinion polls.

Still, the LDP is forecast to remain in control with support from its junior partner Komeito.

The campaign has largely centred on COVID-19 response measures and revitalising the economy, and many voters in Tokyo said that the virus crisis was an important factor in their decision.

"The economy is suffering because of the coronavirus, so I compared the politicians' responses," said Chihiro Sato, 38, a housewife and mother of a toddler.

Teruyo Kaneko, a 76-year-old retiree, said she was "focused on virus policies, and also wanted to say something to the long-running government about its arbitrary way of decision-making".

But engineer Hiroyasu Onishi, 79, said he was more concerned by "the military threat from China". Turnout will be crucial, since higher turnout tends to favour the opposition. As of 10am, three hours after polls opened, turnout stood at 6.32 percent, down 0.83 points from the previous lower house poll – but 16.6 million voted in advance, the internal affairs ministry said.

The biggest opposition group, the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP), which has formed a united front with four other parties, is expected to gain seats but not come near toppling Kishida's coalition.

But even if the LDP wins, a poor showing could lead to party infighting, returning Japan to an era of short-lived administrations that diminished its global stature, until Shinzo Abe helmed the country for a record eight years to September 2020. The dovish Komeito could also gain more clout within the coalition.

Uncertainty is high, with the Nikkei newspaper estimating 40 percent of single-seat districts have close races and recent polls showing some 40 percent of voters undecided.

# Time running out for LGBTQ+ Afghans hiding from Taliban, warn charities

MIKE TOWNSEND LONDON, 31 OCT [THEGUARDIAN]: Calls for the government to speed up the evacuation of gay, lesbian and transgender Afghans intensified on Saturday after the first LGBTQ+ group arrived safely in Britain but left many behind to face an uncertain fate.

The group of 29 is "hoped to be the first of many" in the coming months, the Foreign Office said, hours after the Taliban announced LGBTQ+ rights would not be respected.

The move has left large numbers of LGBTQ+ individuals linked to the previous administration stranded in Afghanistan, with calls growing for the UK to broker a rapid mass evacuation from Kabul.

One of the 29, who did not wish to be named, told the BBC on Saturday that he felt "like a human being" for the first time in his life. "Everything collapsed after the fall of Kabul. I was very depressed. I was counting my days to die."

He said Britain was now his home. "Everything is new to me here. A new lifestyle, a new language and culture. I am a bit nervous about my future, and I am trying to figure out where to start my new life, but man, I feel safe and free! This is amazing."



Gianluca Di Caro, chief executive of the British and Irish Boxing Authority (Biba), said the organisation had 250 boxers and their families still trapped in Afghanistan, a significant proportion of them LGBTQ+.

Di Caro told the Observer: "We need to get them out quickly. We've already had female boxers who have been assaulted by the Taliban. In some cases Taliban have gone

into some of the girls' houses."

Biba has been in contact with Home Office officials since the Taliban's return to power on 15 August, but fears time is running out.

Previously, a Taliban judge said there were only two punishments for homosexuality – stoning or being crushed under a wall. During the Taliban's last period in power there were reports of gay men being stoned to death in offi-

cially sanctioned executions.

The UK foreign secretary, Liz Truss, said in a statement on Saturday: "We played a key role getting these people out and will continue to do all we can to help at-risk Afghans leave the country." She added Britain would defend "the right of all people to be themselves and love who they want".

Among the group are activists who had stood up for

LGBTQ+ rights in Afghanistan, Foreign Office officials said. The arrivals will stay in "bridging accommodation", they added, although their legal status is unclear.

No details were given on how the group were able to leave Afghanistan, with officials stressing the need to safeguard the route. Yet the fact they were allowed to depart suggests a possible diplomatic agreement. Truss's

predecessor, Dominic Raab, previously stated the need to engage with the Taliban. Officials said the foreign secretary, along with British LGBTQ+ group Stonewall and Canadian organisation Rainbow Railroad, had intervened to ensure the Afghan group gained safe passage to the UK.

Nancy Kelley, Stonewall's chief executive, said her organisation had been campaigning to bring vulnerable Afghans to the UK for a few months. She vowed to continue to push for international support to help those still in the country.

"The situation is likely to remain extremely dangerous for some time," Kelley said.

LGBTQ+ people have previously described hiding in small rooms and basements for weeks after the Taliban takeover. Others are being hidden by friends, who are helping to keep watch and bringing them food and supplies. The UK has evacuated more than 8,000 Afghans who worked for the UK and their families, as well as many other highly vulnerable people, since the Taliban seized power.

The government said that the Afghan citizens' resettlement scheme would remain open to provide protection for people at risk.

## Saudi Arabia bans Lebanese imports, expels Ambassador over war comment

BEIRUT, 31 OCT [AFP]: Financially crippled Lebanon finds itself in a new tug-of-war between regional kingpins Saudi Arabia and Iran after Riyadh and other wealthy Gulf states expelled the Lebanese envoy, analysts say.

The crisis erupted Friday when Saudi Arabia gave Lebanon's ambassador 48 hours to leave the country, recalled its envoy from Beirut and suspended all imports from Lebanon.

The Saudi foreign ministry said the measures were taken after "insulting" remarks made by a Lebanese minister on the Yemen war, but also due to the influence of Lebanon's Iran-backed Shiite movement Hezbollah.

The group, it said, controls Lebanese ports and "hijacks" the government's decision-making in Beirut.

The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Kuwait were quick to follow suit.

The crisis is a fresh blow to Lebanon, a country in financial and political turmoil where a fragile government is struggling to secure international aid, namely from wealthy Arab neighbours.

But remarks by Information Minister Georges Kordahi, in an interview recorded back in August aired on Monday, slamming the Saudi-led military intervention against Iran-backed Huthi rebels in Yemen, undermined these efforts.

Kordahi said the Huthis were "defending themselves... against an external aggression", sparking angry rebukes from Saudi Arabia and its allies and calls in Lebanon for his resignation.



Analyst Karim Bitar said Kordahi's remarks were just a trigger for a looming geopolitical showdown.

The escalation "has very little to do with what this mediocre minister of information said... (and) everything to do with the Saudi-Iranian tug-of-war that has been ongoing for the past few years".

"Kordahi was only a pretext for something that was long in the making," he said.

Lebanon is "one of the battlefields between Iran and Saudi Arabia" along with Syria, Yemen and Iraq, where the two regional rivals support opposing sides, Bitar added.

Riyadh's move also reflects the kingdom's determination to push Lebanon "to take a harsher line on Hezbollah", he said.

Hezbollah wields considerable influence in Lebanon, where it holds seats in parliament, and

has been designated as a terrorist group by Saudi Arabia and much of the West.

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati has said he "regrets" the Saudi decision, and urged Riyadh to reconsider its move.

He did not explicitly call for Kordahi's resignation, but said he did not speak in the name of the government.

He urged the minister to "take into consideration Lebanon's national interest... in order to appease ties with Gulf countries".

Kordahi was nominated by the Marada Movement, a Christian party allied to Hezbollah and led by Suleiman Franjeh.

The minister has refused to apologise -- as both Hezbollah and Franjeh rejected calls for his dismissal.

With Lebanon in middle of an economic and financial crisis -- seen by the World Bank as one of

the world's worst since the 1850s -- the diplomatic row becomes all the more damaging.

It comes as Sunni kingpin Saudi Arabia and Shiite-majority Iran have been holding talks for months to ease tensions after a five-year rift.

The arch-rivals broke diplomatic ties in 2016 after protesters attacked Saudi diplomatic missions in the Islamic republic following the kingdom's execution of a revered Shiite cleric.

Bitar said the latest crisis is also linked to these negotiations between Riyadh and Tehran, with Lebanon "paying the price".

"When two elephants fight, it's the grass that suffers and Lebanon for the umpteenth time in its history is the grass that is suffering when these proxy wars become more intense," he said.

Lebanon's diplomatic fallout with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and

Kuwait also comes at a critical time for the small Mediterranean country.

Mikati's fragile government has not met for three weeks amid a campaign spearheaded by Hezbollah to remove a judge investigating last year's devastating blast at Beirut port, accusing him of political bias.

"Lebanon needs a cabinet and gains nothing by shooting itself in the foot as it finds itself in the midst of a regional clash," said Michael Young, an analyst with the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Centre.

"Since the Saudis regard Lebanon as an Iranian card, they feel it makes sense to behave toward the country" in its current manner, he added on Twitter.

But he warned that "by isolating Lebanon, they will only ensure that Iran and its local proxies tighten their control" over the country.

## Joe Biden meets Turkey's Erdogan amid tension over defence, human rights

ROME, 31 OCT [REUTERS]: U.S. President Joe Biden held talks with Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on the sidelines of the G20 meeting in Rome on Sunday amid a request from Turkey for F-16 fighter jets and tension over human rights.

A U.S. administration official said on Saturday that Biden would warn his Turkish counterpart that any "precipitous" actions would not benefit U.S.-Turkish relations and that crises should be avoided after Erdogan threatened to throw out the U.S. ambassador to Turkey and other foreign

envoys for seeking the release of jailed philanthropist Osman Kavala.

Erdogan later withdrew his threat to expel the envoys.

Biden was expected to discuss Turkey's request to purchase F-16 fighter jets, which U.S. lawmakers have opposed on the grounds that Turkey purchased Russian missile defence systems.

Biden and Erdogan posed for photos before their talks on Sunday. Asked if he planned to give Turkey F-16s, Biden said they were "planning to have a good conversation".





## FarhanAkhtar, Swara Bhasker and others hail ViratKohli's comments on trolls attacking Mohammed Shami: 'Captain has spoken'

Several Bollywood celebrities have hailed ViratKohli's comments supporting his colleague in the Indian cricket team Mohammed Shami amid attacks targetting him for his religion after the country's defeat against Pakistan.

FarhanAkhtar shared the comments and wrote on Twitter "Well said captain" with thumbs-up emojis.

SwaraBhasker used clapping emojis while sharing the comments.

Director Sudhir Mishra, behind acclaimed movies like HazaaronKhwaisheinAisi, quote-tweeted a tweet about the statement and wrote: "The captain has spoken!"

Kohli had earlier stated in no uncertain terms that attacking Mohammed Shami for his religion was the "most pathetic thing" that a human can do.

"To me, attacking someone over their religion is the most pathetic thing that a human being can do. Everyone has the right to voice their opinion over

what they feel about a certain situation, but I personally have never even thought of discriminating (against) any

as individuals. They have no understanding of how much effort we put on the field. They have no understanding

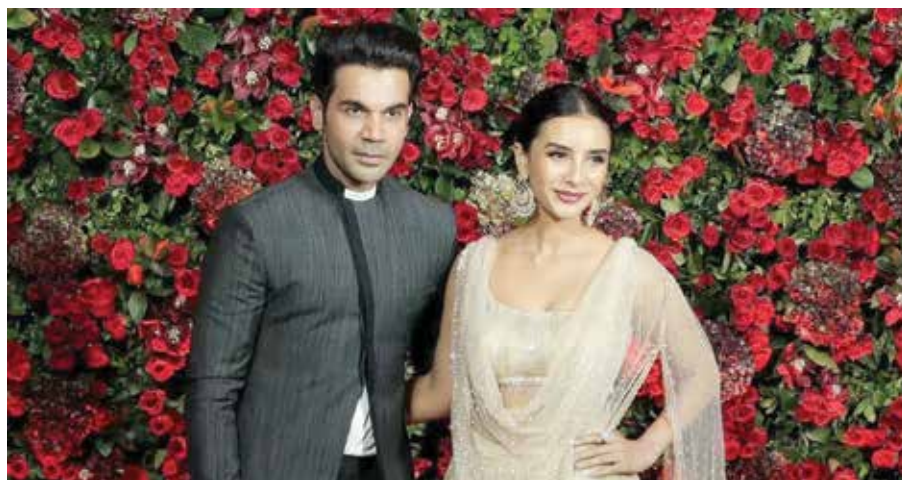


one over their religion. That's a very sacred and personal thing to every human being."

He added, "People take out their frustrations because they obviously have no understanding of what we do

of the fact that someone like Mohammad Shami has won India a number of matches in the last few years and he has been our primary bowler with Jasprit Bumrah, when it comes to making an impact in games."

## Rajkummar Rao and Patralekhaa to get married in November



Rajkummar Rao and Patralekhaa occupied a spot on the list of trends all of Sunday morning after reports of the couple's rumoured wedding started surfacing online. As per a report published in ETimes, the couple will get married in November this year and it will be a low-key affair. "The dates in question being rumoured are November 10-11-12.

We also hear that certain celebrities close to the couple have already been informed. Of course, there'll be non-industry friends and relatives too. As per sources, it's going to be a close-knit ceremony," stated the ETimes report. As of now, the couple hasn't confirmed or denied the wedding rumours.

The couple have been dating for over 6 years. The couple often shares happy pictures of each other on social media. This year, on Valentine's Day, Patralekhaa shared a black and white image of the couple posing in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Rajkummar too shared a mushy post and wrote: "Happy Valentine's Day my love Patralekhaa. My

life would not be complete without you. Thank you for completing me. Thank you for always pushing me to do better. Thank you for always making me laugh like crazy."

Patralekhaa made her debut in Bollywood opposite Rajkummar Rao in the film CityLights. The actress has also starred in films such as Love Games, Badnaam Gali and Nanu Ki Jaanu, to name a few.

Rajkummar Rao made his Bollywood debut with Love, Sex Aur Dhokha. His breakout role was in the 2013 film Kai Po Che! Rajkummar has also featured in critically-acclaimed films like CityLights, Shahid, Omerta, Newton and Aligarh. The actor recently starred in Hum Do Hamare Do. His upcoming projects include Badhaai Do and Monica, O My Darling.

Earlier this year, Rajkummar Rao was seen alongside Priyanka Chopra in The White Tiger. He was also a part of horror-comedy Roohi, co-starring Janhvi Kapoor and Varun Sharma.

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## Olympian's widow welcomes baby girl 15 months after his death

Ellidy Pullin, the widow of Alex 'Chumpy' Pullin, has given birth to their daughter 15 months after the Australian Olympic snowboarder died in a spearfishing accident. The baby has been named Minnie Alex Pullin, Ellidy Pullin announced on Instagram.

Alex Pullin, a two-time world champion snowboarder, was 32 when he was killed in the fishing accident off the Gold Coast of Australia in July 2020.

The couple's baby was conceived via IVF or in vitro fertilisation. "We did that sperm retrieval process, of course, because Chump passed away, to get his sperm. The doctor did hand select the best viable sperm out of the millions and popped it straight into the egg," Ellidy Pullin was quoted as saying by CNN.

The baby girl was born on October 25, Ellidy revealed in her Instagram post shared Thursday. Ellidy Pullin had announced her pregnancy back in June, saying that she and her late husband had been "dreaming" for years about having a baby. The couple had been trying for a baby when the Olympian died in the tragic accident.

"When my love had his accident, we all held onto hope that I'd be pregnant that month," Ellidy Pullin had revealed in her pregnancy announcement on Instagram. "We'd been trying for a baby. IVF was on our cards but it wasn't something I ever imagined I'd be tackling on my own," she said, describing the experience as bittersweet.

Her pregnancy was well-documented on Instagram. In one post, Ellidy wrote: "I will continue to carry the torch of our future, and soon a little piece of Chumpy will be back in my arms again."

Before his death, Alex 'Chumpy' Pullin is believed to have been spearfishing alone at an artificial reef. He was found unconscious on the bottom of the ocean without his oxygen mask by another diver. Lifeguards attempted to resuscitate him on the beach but were unsuccessful in their attempts.



**NAVY BLUE MOMENT!** Model Bella Hadid is spotted leaving a photoshoot in New York wearing a blue Bjork sweater and Brain Dead sweatpants.

## BTS fan seeks Jimin's help as her family thinks they are in a relationship

BTS leader RM reacted when he found out that a fan's family thought that she was dating his band member Jimin. The fan wrote on WeVerse that though she doesn't have a boyfriend, her family is under the impression that she and Jimin are dating.

She wrote, "Jimin I don't have a boyfriend. but my whole family knows you're my boyfriend. what should I do? (sic)" RM replied, "Wow." The comment caught further traction, as the fan had initially written, 'I don't have a girlfriend', whereas the fan meant that she didn't have a boyfriend. She penned a note to clarify her post as well.

The BTS members have received innumerable proposals from ARMY. While fans eagerly wait for relationship updates from the members, they've preferred to keep mum about it, or dodge the question altogether.

In 2015, RM (Kim Namjoon) appeared on the popular South Korean television show, Problematic Men, where he was asked about his past relationship. He confessed that they were different people and were not compatible.

"There was a girl that I dated in high school, 4-5 years ago. A relationship is some-

thing that you can't really define. But, to put it into perspective, it is as if a circle and a triangle are trying to become a square and we didn't match well in that process," he said.

RM added, "She had a lot of guy friends. To



be honest, having a lot of guy friends isn't a problem. But, in my circumstances and from my point of view, she did things that were unacceptable as a girlfriend. And, so we continued to argue. And if things continue like this, I figured this would have an effect on my pure feelings for her. So we ended things."

The septet is on a high right now, as their singles have been raging through the billboard. They've hosted their first online concert in over a year, and are preparing for another one in LA at the end of November.

Aries:

If we all thought and acted similarly, there would be nothing to learn from one another. We would almost never be challenged to think differently or widen our world view. So, honour the polarity between you and your partner (or loved ones) as this is what is helping you evolve on a soul level, Aries. Remember, the energy we put into the Universe "always" finds its way back to us. So, plant the seeds of acceptance, beautiful, and know that you too will be treated with gentleness by those around.

Tip: Plant the seeds of acceptance.

Taurus:

You've gone to hell and back, Taurus. But, wearing you're not the sort to wear your bruises like badges of honour. This chapter of your life is about bravely facing your past, including the feelings you have suppressed, and releasing what needs to be released to the Universe. Holistic forms of therapy such as Reiki, sound baths, and aromatherapy promise to assist you in this process. I

Tip: The waning moon is holding space for you to release what no longer serves you.

Gemini:

Dear Gemini, visualise this: a source of bright, radiant white light pouring downward from the heavens and entering your body through the crown. As it makes its way to your root through the length of the spine, it energises

every cell and releases blockages and frees stagnant energy. Feel the pulse of this bright, radiant energy. Feel it restoring you back to life. It's time to feel safe in the knowing that the Universe is supporting your healing journey and that you will be back on your feet in no time.

Tip: The Universe is sending healing energy your way. Allow yourself to receive.

Cancer:

Some relationships are purely karmic in nature. You come into each other's life in order to accelerate the process of awakening. What you're dealing with right now is one such relationship, Cancer. So, instead of complaining about the challenges you are being faced with, take them in your stride. Be grateful for the lessons you're being given the opportunity to learn at this time. Come March, you will find a resolution to the given problem.

Tip: Accept each challenge as a soul lesson, beautiful.

Leo:

This relationship has been anything but easy, Leo. You've had to face all kinds of demons, within and without in the process. Have you considered that 'the other' is not the culprit, though? Simply the mirror through which you are being given the opportunity to rid the old patterns that keep you chained to the matrix. So, honour this as a period of growth. A time of looking inwards and plucking the weeds out of your garden. The more you bring the gift acceptance to the table,

the deeper sense of harmony you will experience in your relationship.

Tip: Your relationship is providing you with the opportunity to the inner work.

Virgo:

Those walking the path of liberation, tend to look at desires as 'the bad guy'. But, have you ever considered that our desires are not only sacred but essential to the harmony of the Divine Matrix? So, honour what you're being called to create. Honour what you're being asked to harvest. Honour what you're being guided to let go. Now is the time to follow the path of least resistance knowing that the Universe is always supporting you.

Tip: Your desires are sacred and essential to the harmony of the Divine Matrix.

Libra:

We're all partaking in leela, Libra, or as some would call "the divine play". The hero in your story could be the villain in somebody else's narrative, and vice versa. It's time to look at your circumstances from a higher perspective. To acknowledge your hurt and pain, but also understand the other person was simply playing the role of a catalyst. The catalyst who is meant to awaken you from a deep slumber and inspire you to bring light to those dark crevices.

Tip: Understanding that the other is merely a catalyst in your awakening will help you forgive and let go of the old story.

Scorpio:

The fear of rejection makes us do things that we're not proud of—dim our light, for instance, or play it small in the company of those who might be threatened by our presence. But this is a form of self-betrayal, Scorpio. By doing, you will be dishonouring both yourself and others. So, act with awareness, beautiful. Stand in your truth like you never have before. Know that embracing yourself fully is a part of the sacred vow you took before you took on a physical form.

Tip: Stand in your truth like you never have before.

Sagittarius:

Those who want to exit will never run out of excuses and those who want to stay will always find a reason. So, what is your physical reality mirroring back at you, Sagittarius? Are you refusing to read the signs that are continually being shown to you? Word for the wise: it may be time to let a certain somebody (or something) go. On the upside, the opportunity to travel and explore the unexplored could show up for some of you. When in doubt, allow your spontaneous side to take the reins.

Tip: Say yes to the opportunity to explore the unexplored.

Capricorn:

You are not alone—never alone, Capricorn. You have an army of angels and guides on the other side who are holding space for you in each moment. So, whatever it is that you're working through or working towards, surrender it to

them. Know that it is only by loosening the grip that you will allow for Divine assistance to come through. Remembering that you are not the "doer", simply the medium, will help you open yourself to miracles.

Tip: Allow Spirit to come through, beautiful.

Aquarius:

Take a moment to assess where you are, beautiful. Take a moment to assess where you were when you first embarked upon this healing journey. This is a good way to notice how far you have come since then and the wounds that you have transformed into wisdom. PS: The Universe is giving you a gold star for showing up for yourself even when it was hard to.

Tip: Here's to all the wounds that you have transformed into wisdom.

Pisces:

It takes all kinds of people to make this world, and that's what makes this world so beautiful. Today, you're being asked to honour both the similarities and the dissimilarities between you and your beloved. The similarities that make you feel one and the dissimilarities that challenge you to grow on a soul level. The gift of acceptance will transform your relationship in more ways than you can imagine and help restore the balance that has recently gone astray.

Tip: Honour both the similarities and the dissimilarities, Pisces.