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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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India records 15,158 fresh COVID-19 cases, 175 more deaths



NEW DELHI, JAN 16 (PTI): India's COVID-19 caseload climbed to 1,05,42,841 on Saturday with 15,158 more people testing positive for the disease while recoveries surged to 1,01,79,715, according to the Union health ministry data.

The country's death toll increased to 1,52,093 with 175 more fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,01,79,715, pushing the national COVID-19 recovery rate to 96.56 per cent. The country's COVID-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.44 per cent.

The country's active caseload remained below 3 lakh on Saturday.

There are 2,11,033 active coronavirus infections in the country which constitute 2 per cent of the total caseload, the data showed.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 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, 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20

and crossed the one crore-mark on December 19.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), 18,57,65,491 samples had been tested up to January 15, with 8,03,090 tested on Friday alone.

The 175 new fatalities include 45 from Maharashtra, 23 from Kerala, 16 from West Bengal, 15 from Uttar Pradesh, 12 from Punjab and 10 from Delhi.

A total of 1,52,093 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 50,336 from Maharashtra, 12,251 from Tamil Nadu, 12,158 from Karnataka, 10,732 from Delhi, 10,026 from West Bengal, 8,558 from Uttar Pradesh, 7,139 from Andhra Pradesh and 5,485 from Punjab.

The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

been inoculated, it said.

Government sources said there was considerable hesitation among people about getting the vaccines, explaining the shortfall in numbers. Officials stressed that the drive was successful, there were no post-vaccine hospitalisations and the only glitches involved the "CoWin" software platform.

"Many of them (staff) were scared. So, I went to my seniors and said I should be given the vaccine first. I wanted to prove to my colleagues that there is no need to be scared. My wife even asked me not to take the vaccine. I told her it is just an injection. After taking the dose, I asked my mother to tell my wife that I am safe," Mr Kumar said.

Giving India a new motto - "Dawai bhi, Kadai bhi (yes to Vaccine, yes to discipline)" - PM Modi also cautioned that even after vaccination, citizens must stay vigilant and maintain all precautions against the virus, including masks and distancing.

India's drive is one of the world's biggest vaccination programmes, aimed at inoculating 3 crore health and other frontline workers to start with. Two shots manufactured in India, the Covishield developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca, and Covaxin produced by Bharat Biotech, are being used. The drive was remote launched by the Prime Minister with the chanting of a Sanskrit shloka that meant

"let all be happy, let all be healthy".

With the highest number of coronavirus infections after the United States, India plans to vaccinate around 30 crore people with two doses in the first six to eight months of the year. Frontline workers will be followed by about 27 crore people older than 50 or deemed high-risk because of pre-existing medical conditions.

"I want to remind people of the country that two doses of the Corona vaccine are very important. Don't commit the mistake that you take one dose and forget the second one. As experts have been saying, there will be a gap of about one month between the two doses," PM Modi said.

COVID-19 VACCINATION BEGINS IN SIKKIM 120 health workers get Covishield shots on first day

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 JAN:

Sikkim joined the nation in the launch of COVID-19 vaccination on Saturday with 120 health workers of the state receiving their first dose of the Covishield shots. Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the pan-India rollout of COVID-19 vaccination drive through video conferencing from New Delhi this morning, which was also attended by the Chief Minister PS Tamang at Ayush Hospital of STNM hospital complex.

The CM was accompanied by Health Minister, Dr MK Sharma, Health Department Principal Secretary, K Srinivasulu and Health Department DG-cum-Secretary, Dr Pempa T Bhutia among other dignitaries.

After the Prime Minister launched the vaccine, the Chief Minister launched COVID vaccination drive for Sikkim from a vaccination room set up at Ayush Hospital, STNM Hospital complex. Head of Department, Medicine of STNM hospital, Dr Suresh M Rasaily was the first health worker to receive the COVID vaccine in the State.

It is informed that two vaccination sites have been set up for COVID vaccination in the State; Ayush Hospital in STNM hospital in East District and Gyalshing District Hospital in West District.

As per official sources, 100 were registered for vaccination at STNM hospital, of whom 90 were vaccinated on the first day: Doctors- 23, Nursing and paramedic staffs- 48, Sanitary Attendants- 07, Drivers-07, Medical Attended - 03 and Security Guards - 02.

Meanwhile 30 out of the 40 registered at Gyalshing District Hospital were vaccinated today [Doctors- 11, Nurses - 04, Paramedical Staffs - 05, Drivers - 04, Medical & Sanitary Attendants - 02 and Field workers (ASHA) - 04].

Speaking to media persons after the launch of the COVID vaccination process, the CM expressed his wishes to the people



of Sikkim and the nation on the launch of the COVID vaccination.

Responding to media queries on the vaccination of Ministers and legislators, the CM

expressed that health workers and frontline workers of Sikkim would be covered first in the vaccination drive as they are directly exposed to the COVID-19 threat. *...turn Pg2*

Sikkim on its way to being COVID free: CM

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 JAN:

Chief Minister. PS Tamang today said that the launch of COVID vaccination drive in the nation on Saturday marks the start of the fight against COVID-19 and the journey towards being a COVID free nation.

On his official Facebook page, the CM further said, "I assure everyone on behalf of the Government on the safety of the vaccine and also inform that Dr Suresh Madan Rasaily is the first person in the State to be vaccinated and I express my appreciation towards him for opting to be the first person in the State to be vaccinated. Lately, there has been a decrease in the number of COVID cases in Sikkim and with the vaccine, I believe we are on the right course towards being a COVID free State once again."

He congratulated everyone involved in the creation of the vaccine and also applauded the Prime Minister's decision to reserve the first phase for health workers, frontline warriors who have been tirelessly carrying out their duties.

The CM stated that Sikkim was well-equipped and has trained personnel who will be in charge of the vaccination process.

With only 5 new cases, Sikkim's active Covid count drops to 158

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 JAN:

Five more people tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 24 hours taking Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases to 6,029. With this, Sikkim's daily infection count continues to remain low, having stayed under-20 for the past three weeks and having many days with barely single-digit infections per day.

Meanwhile, a total of 5,646 Covid-positive people have been discharged from home and facility isolation thus far, 10 such discharges

taking place on Friday, giving Sikkim an active case count of 158.

That said, two of the Covid-positive patients are currently in the ICU facility of the COVID-dedicated STNM Hospital at present.

In his daily health bulletin on Saturday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia, informed that of the five new cases, four were reported from East District and one from West Sikkim.

These five cases were picked up from the

testing of 206 samples, of which three were picked up in RT-PCR screening of 143 samples and two in rapid antigen testing of 58 samples.

While providing details of the new cases reported from in and around Gangtok, Mr

Bhutia informed that one person from Kazi Road, one from Decheling and one from Chandmari. Likewise, one person from Gangyap, West District, has also tested positive for COVID-19.

He mentioned that a 22-year-old lady from

Hee-Gyathang, North Sikkim, who tested positive at the Flu Clinic of STNM Hospital, could not be contacted over phone and has been urged to immediately contact the concerned authorities.



**Auditions
for
Magazine shoot**

Ansu fashion hub is a brand which manufactures hand made fashion products and also it's also provides platforms for all youngsters who are interested in modeling and fashion. Founded by Mrs Anusha Subba (C. E. O) and Team creating a platform. Ansu fashion hub has started a face of the month contest from October 2020. ten percent of our is being donated to orphan and old age homes. For the first time Ansu Fashion Hub presents magazine shoot of 2021. This revenue will be donated to charity.

Get your self registered.

Day-long workshop on Birding held at Yuksam

PRITAM LAMA

GYALSHING, 16 JAN:

A day-long workshop on birding was organized at Yuksam, West Sikkim, by Birdwatchers Society and Bird Count India jointly in association with Khangchendzonga Conservation Society.

Secretary of Birdwatchers Society Kolkata, Sujan Chatterjee, said that they have been organising such workshops in various states with an aim to make people aware about conservation and promotion of birding activity in tourism without harming or disturbing the natural habitat for birds.

"An eBird mobile application has been developed by one American University to promote birdwatching as a hobby and the information shared in



the app will reach the global community and help to monitor the migration status of birds, said Mr Chatterjee.

The workshop was attended by students and local tourism stakeholders as well as well-known birding guides of the area.

The participants were sensitised on conservation of natural habitat for birds. The workshop urged participants to share and upload pictures of birds taken in their respective

areas which will help the organisation to monitor and record the activity of birds in the region.

Birding tourism is booming in Sikkim along with other states of India and the participants were sensitised on the importance of conserving the natural habitat of birds.

The workshop stressed on bringing awareness among people on conservation and promotion of Birding Tourism without harming and disturbing

the natural habitat for birds in the state.

Birding experts also talked about negative impacts of birding and how it should be practiced without harming birds and their habitat.

Experts from Bird Count India and Birdwatchers Society explained the need for documentation and the benefits of uploading records to eBird Mobile application. The experts gave details about using the eBird data for a

variety of reasons, from making the birding experience richer to conservation of areas and patches dear to these birders.

This was followed by a walkthrough on how to use eBird mobile application and its various web-based features. The walkthrough included a tutorial on how to submit lists, what birding protocols on eBird may mean, using the Explore Data tab, etc to the participants.

A tourism entrepreneur from Yuksam, DS Limboo said, "Such workshops are required for those who are engaged in tourism sector. I hope it will help us to conserve and promote tourism without harming nature."

All the participants were given certificates during the workshop.

Sanitary pad distribution camp by Lions Club



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 JAN:

Lions Club of Siliguri Uday organised a mega sanitary pad

distribution camp at the village of Padmashri Karimul Haque today wherein the club distributed more than

25,000 sanitary pads, a press release informs. More than 350 women were present during the event.

Namchi Traders Assoc becomes South branch of ASTHA



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 JAN:

Namchi Traders Association has now come under the umbrella of All Sikkim Traders and Hawkers Association [ASTHA]. NTA had been functioning as an independent body so far and has now decided to become the South District branch of ASTHA. At a function held at Namchi, ASTHA vice-

president, Lakpa Sherpa, handed over the No Objection Certificate to NTA president, Bhawani Ranpal, to allow them to function under ASTHA.

The function was also attended by vice-president, Purnima Gurung and other members of NTA along with traders and hawkers of Namchi. In his address, the

ASTHA vice president highlighted the importance of the association for traders and hawkers and assured to always guide and support traders and hawkers of Namchi.

Likewise, NTA president thanked ASTHA for adopting Namchi Traders Association as its sister organization.

CM ONE MILE GOLDEN RUN AT GYALSHING

Chief Minister's One Mile Golden Run was held by Gyalshing BAC in collaboration with Sporting Club Gyalshing in West District on Saturday. The run was flagged off by Sikkim's Marathon Man, Amar Subba, who thanked everyone participating in the run for making the initiative a success.



Bengal paves way for viable rooftop solar energy with net metering

KOLKATA, JAN 16 (PTI): To make solar energy viable for households in Bengal, WBERC has relaxed rooftop solar regulations by allowing net metering starting from capacity of 1 KW against 5 KW capacity criteria required earlier and that too for restricted categories of consumers, an official said.

Earlier no individual or housing complexes except co-operatives, were permitted the benefit of net metering a key driver for rooftop solar adoption. Without net metering rooftop solar projects are not very economically feasible, the official said.

According to earlier regulations, only institutions, commercial, industrial and cooperative housings were allowed net metering benefit but that was from 5KW onwards.

The West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission (WBERC) in

its recent amendments to the Cogeneration and Electricity Generation from Renewable Sources Regulations 2013 had allowed net metering from 1 KW but had restricted it to 5 KW, a top official told PTI.

The new amendment mandates "gross metering" facilities for solar system installation capacities above 5 KW.

The commercial benefit for a consumer is far less in case of gross-metering compared to net-metering thus making adoption less commercially attractive. A simple implication is, now a small installation up to 5 KW gets a boost but it deprives larger installations between 5 KW and 10 KW.

"To boost renewable energy use, we have allowed net-metering of solar power installation from 1 KW to 5 KW. Now there is no restriction and anyone can install rooftop solar.

Earlier regulations did not allow net metering for common households," a WBERC official said.

However, a consumer cannot install solar panels more than its own load. That means if a household has an existing electricity load of 2 KW then his installation cannot be higher than 2 KW even if he has space and interest, a WBERC official explained.

The Union Power ministry in its model regulation had provided gross metering over 10 KW solar installations. The net metering concept allows to set-off the number of units produced from the total consumption and he pays electricity charges only what he had derived from the grid or distribution company.

The regulation allows set-off of up to 90 per cent of his solar power generation for any month.

"Will prefer Covishield over Covaxin": Delhi hospital doctors concerned

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN [NDTV]: Resident doctors at one of Delhi's biggest healthcare hubs, the Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital, today demanded they be administered Covishield vaccine and not Covaxin since the former has completed all three stages of trials as required under protocol. The second one, produced by Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech, is still only undergoing stage-III trials. The central government has, however, sought to underplay such apprehensions saying "a lot of work" had gone into the development of both products.

The resident doctors

of Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital have even said they might not participate in huge numbers if Covaxin is used.

"Covaxin is manufactured by Bharat Biotech is being preferred over Covishield manufactured by Serum Institute in our hospital... We would like to bring to your notice that the residents are a bit apprehensive about the lack of complete trial in the case of Covaxin and might not participate in huge numbers thus defeating the purpose of the vaccination," the Resident Doctors Association of the hospital said today in a letter

to the medical superintendent of the facility.

"We request you to vaccinate us with Covishield which has completed all stages of the trial before its rollout," the letter said.

The letter written by the RML resident doctors.

Dr Nirmalaya Mohapatra, Vice-President of the hospital's Resident Doctors Association, said a lot of doctors have not given their names for the countrywide drive launched today.

"We are apprehensive regarding Covaxin. Trials are yet to be completed. We will prefer Covishield over Covaxin," Dr Mohapatra told NDTV.

"In case of adverse events...": What the Covaxin Consent Form says

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN [NDTV]: As India's vaccination drive began today with Covid shots to health workers, those receiving Bharat Biotech's Covaxin were asked to sign consent forms that assured compensation if any adverse effect was found linked to the vaccine.

Only recipients of Covaxin have to sign a consent form before being vaccinated because its use has been allowed by the government in "clinical trial mode". Among those who received the shot after signing the form were AIIMS chief Dr Randeep Guleria, vaccine committee chief and NITI Aayog member Dr VK Paul and his wife Dr Shashi Paul, a scientist.

The first person in India to receive the vaccine, Manish Kumar, was also given Covaxin.

The consent form says "COVAXINTM" is being offered under restricted use in an emergency situation and has been permitted in "public interest" as an abundant precaution. It also explains that the clinical efficacy of the vaccine is yet to be established and it is still in Phase 3 trials.

"The Bharat Biotech COVID-19 Vaccine (COVAXINTM) is a vaccine with approval for restricted use in emergency situation that may prevent COVID-19. In phase 1 and phase 2 clinical trials, COVAXINTM has demonstrated the ability to produce antibodies against COVID-19. However, the clinical efficacy of COVAXIN is yet to be established and it is still being studied in phase 3 clinical trial. Hence, it is important to appreciate that receiving the vaccine does not mean that other precautions related to Covid-19 need not be followed," the form states.

"In case of any adverse events or serious adverse events, you will be provided medically recognized standard of care in the government designated and authorized centers/hospitals. The compensation for serious adverse event will be paid by sponsor (BBIL) if the (adverse effect) is proven to be causally related to the vaccine." The declaration says: "I further emphasize that any information provided by me prior to taking the vaccine will be archived in the database maintained by the immunization program of the government and privacy as well as confidentiality of the information provided by

you will be maintained."

The recipients are being handed a factsheet and a form to report adverse effects, in which they have to note down symptoms like fever, pain within seven days.

Two-dose vaccines Covaxin and Serum Institute of India (SII)'s Covishield - developed by Oxford-AstraZeneca -- were cleared for emergency use earlier this month and are being administered to crores beginning today.

The clearance to Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, even though it has yet to clear final-stage trials, has been criticized by opposition parties and a section of scientists. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, launching the vaccine drive in the morning, said: "Our scientists and experts were assured about the safety and efficacy of the two Made-in-India vaccines, only then did they allow the emergency use authorization. So stay away from propaganda, rumours, or misinformation."

Recipients will not get to choose which vaccine to take.

In Delhi, for example, six central government hospitals will administer only Covaxin -- AIIMS, Safdarjung, Ram Manohar Lohia (RML) hospital, Kalawati Saran Children Hospital, ESI Hospital Basaidarapur and ESI Hospital Rohini. The remaining 75 Sites, which include Delhi government and private hospitals, will receive Covishield shots.

Resident doctors at RML demanded they be administered Covishield and not Covaxin since the Serum vaccine has completed all three stages of trials as required. "Covaxin manufactured by Bharat Biotech is being preferred over Covishield manufactured by Serum Institute in our hospital... We would like to bring to your notice that the residents are a bit apprehensive about the lack of complete trial in the case of Covaxin and might not participate in huge numbers thus defeating the purpose of the vaccination," the Resident Doctors Association of the hospital said in a letter to the medical superintendent of the facility.

Use of regional languages in Rajya Sabha rises five-fold

NEW DELHI, JAN 16

(PTI): The use of regional languages in the proceedings of Rajya Sabha has increased manifold times during 2018-2020 with Sanskrit emerging as the fifth widely used among the 22 scheduled languages after Hindi, Telugu, Urdu and Tamil.

Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu has been regularly urging the members of the House on use of regional languages during the proceedings.

According to a research done by the Rajya Sabha secretariat, while Hindi and English are the widely used languages during the proceedings of the House, the use of 21 other scheduled Indian languages (other than Hindi) has increased to over five times (512

per cent) per sitting in 2020 over that of the 14-year period between 2004 and 2017.

During this period, four languages - Dogri, Kashmiri, Konkani and Sonthali - have been used for the first time since the Rajya Sabha came into being in 1952 and another six languages - Assamese, Bodo, Gujarati, Maithili, Manipuri and Nepali - have been used after a long gap.

Rajya Sabha members spoke in 10 scheduled languages (other than Hindi) in the House on 269 occasions during 923 sittings between 2004 and 2017 at the rate of 0.291 per sitting, the Rajya Sabha secretariat said.

In 2020, 49 interventions in regional languages were made during 33 sittings at the rate of 1.49 per sitting, marking an increase to

512 per cent.

During 2013 to 2017 spanning over 329 sittings, members spoke only in 10 regional languages (other than Hindi) on 96 times, all limited to debates. However, during 2018-20 with 163 sittings, regional languages were used 135 times including 66 interventions in debates, 62 Zero Hour and seven special mentions.

After becoming the Chairman of Rajya Sabha in August 2017, Naidu has been urging the members of the House to speak in their respective mother tongue in the spirit of the federal nature of the House.

While announcing the availability of simultaneous interpretation facilities in all the 22 scheduled languages in July 2018, he himself spoke in 10 languages in the House.

COVID-19 VACCINATION BEGINS IN SIKKIM

"Health and frontline workers have been working hard day and night in this pandemic situation by staying away from their families and dedicating their life in the service to the people so the first phase of vaccination will cover them," he said.

He added that even in the next phase, only legislators above the age of 50 years and those below 50 years with comorbidities will be vaccinated.

On allegations by the opposition that the government was tardy in COVID management, the CM said that Sikkim has done exemplary work in COVID management. Number of mortalities in the state is low since most of those who died had comorbidities, he added.

The opposition only wants to criticize the government and ignore the good work it has done, said the CM.

Responding to another query, the CM said that if the centre took the decision that the State government should buy vaccines for other phases the State would buy the vaccines for every person in the State. The first batch of 12,500 doses of Covishield was provided free of cost by the centre.

He also appealed to the people of Sikkim not to get misguided by rumours and misinformation on COVID vaccination.



Cops clean up a different kind of filth from Central Park

A cleanliness drive was carried out Saturday morning by Namchi Police Station at Namchi's Central Park in coordination with Namchi Municipal Council and the Bazaar committee.

WhatsApp delays policy update rollout to May 15

NEW DELHI, JAN 16 (PTI): WhatsApp has decided to delay the rollout of its new policy update to May 15 after massive criticism from users globally, including India, over concerns that data was being shared with its parent company Facebook. The move assumes significance for users in India given that the country is among the biggest markets for WhatsApp with over 400 million users.

In a blog post, WhatsApp said it is moving back the date on which people will be asked to review and accept the terms.

"No one will have their account suspended or deleted on February 8. We're also going to do a lot more to clear up the misinformation around how privacy and security works on WhatsApp. We'll then go to people gradually to review the policy at their own pace before new business options are available on May 15," it said in the blog post.

A raging debate ensued after WhatsApp said it will update its terms of service and privacy policy around

how it processes user data and partners with Facebook to offer integrations across the social media giant's products.

Concerned about the privacy of their data, many users have thronged to rival messaging platforms such as Signal and Telegram that have seen millions of downloads in the past few days.

"We've heard from so many people how much confusion there is around our recent update. There's been a lot of misinformation causing concern and we want to help everyone understand our principles and the facts," WhatsApp said.

It maintained that messages on the platform are end-to-end encrypted and that neither WhatsApp nor Facebook can see the private messages on WhatsApp's platform.

It added that it doesn't keep logs of who users are messaging or calling, can't see users' shared location and that it doesn't share contacts with Facebook.

"Instead, the update includes new options people will have to

message a business on WhatsApp, and provides further transparency about how we collect and use data. While not everyone shops with a business on WhatsApp today, we think that more people will choose to do so in the future and it's important people are aware of these services. This update does not expand our ability to share data with Facebook," the blog post said.

In the FAQ section, WhatsApp emphasised that "the recent terms and privacy policy update do not affect personal messages".

"The changes are related to optional business features on WhatsApp, and provides further transparency about how we collect and use data...The updates related to optional business features are a part of our broader efforts to make communicating with a business secure, better, and easier for everyone," it added.

WhatsApp had informed users about the changes in its terms of service and public policy, through an in-app notification last week.

Users had till February 8 to agree to the new terms in order to continue using the platform.

This led to a user backlash and triggered memes on the internet over WhatsApp's alleged sharing of user information with Facebook.

According to sources earlier, the Indian government is also examining and evaluating the recent privacy policy update announced by WhatsApp and discussions are on within the IT Ministry over the implications of the recent move by the messaging platform.

WhatsApp, on its part, has said it is open to answering any questions from the government on the issue and that it remains committed to the privacy and security of users across India and will continue to explain to users that their messages are end-to-end encrypted.

It also sought to assuage user concerns through its blog post, tweets by its Global Head Will Cathcart and even full-page ads in leading dailies in India.

India remains a critical market for

Internet companies like Facebook with its large population base and burgeoning Internet adoption. The country is the world's second-largest telecom market and the biggest consumer of data. As on October 30, 2020, the total telephone connections stood at 117 crore, of which 115 crore were mobile connections.

A report by Ericsson had stated that Indians used about 12 GB data per month on an average in 2019, the highest consumption globally, and this is expected to rise even further to about 25 GB (gigabytes) per month by 2025.

WhatsApp rival Telegram has added 25 million new users in the last few days and while it did not specify India-specific user numbers, it said 38 per cent of the new users are from Asia, followed by Europe (27 per cent), Latin America (21 per cent) and MENA (the Middle East and North Africa at 8 per cent).

Signal too is hoping to capitalise on the opportunities in India with its "simple and straightforward" terms of service and privacy policy.

CM's One Mile Golden Run in Rakdong-Tintek

WANGCHUK BHUTIA MANGAN, 16 JAN:

The finals of the under-14 block level CM's One Mile Golden Run under Rakdong-Tintek block, East Sikkim was held today at BAC Tintek organized by Department of Sports & Youth Affairs, BAC Rakdong-Tintek.

The function was attended by Zilla member,

BB Gurung, BDO Tintek, TsheringNorgyalTheeng, panchayat members, AD Sports, YN Sapkota, B h a n u C h a p l a g a i, NSS volunteers from Samdong SSS and other officials.

The winner of the first two positions will be sent for the district level competition in Gangtok, it is informed.

In men's category,

ArunLuitel came first followed by DananjayLuitel in second place. In women's category, Uma Pandeycame first while Geetanjali Sharma came in second.

Earlier, the run was held in different blocks and the selected runners were selected to participate in today's final run.

2 CBI officers suspended for taking bribe from bank fraud accused

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN [PTI]: The CBI has

suspended its Inspector Kapil Dhankad and Stenographer Sameer Kumar Singh for allegedly receiving bribes to give away probe-related information and compromise on investigation into two cases of bank fraud totalling Rs. 4,300 crore, days after it booked them and two officers.

Officials said on Saturday that the agency has recommended to the Department of Personnel and Training to initiate administrative action against the two officers -- deputy superintendents of police RK Rishi and RK Sangwan.

The CBI has accused Dhankad, a State Bank of India manager who joined the agency on deputation as Inspector, for allegedly receiving bribes of at least Rs 25 lakh to compromise on investigation into a number of cases and passing on crucial information to the accused DSPs who were understood to have been working on behalf of Shree Shyam Pulp and Board Mills and Frost International.

Shree Shyam Pulp and Board Mills is accused in a Rs. 700-crore bank fraud case, while Frost International is accused

in a ₹ 3,600-crore bank fraud case.

"The CBI has a zero tolerance policy towards corruption, be it other departments or within the organisation. The case is a result of strict vigil and action on any input which indicates involvement of our officials in corrupt practice," an official said.

The agency has alleged that Dhankad posted in the banking, securities and fraud unit of the agency, in collusion with the DSPs, was receiving kickbacks to pass on crucial information and compromise on investigation, they said.

According to the charges levelled in the eight-page FIR, made public on Friday after the completion of a search operation by the agency, Inspector Dhankad received at least ₹ 10 lakh each from Sangwan and Rishi, who were soliciting favours for Shree Shyam Pulp and Board Mills and Frost International.

The embarrassing tale of corruption in the FIR says Sangwan, Rishi, Dhankad and Stenographer Singh, in conspiracy with advocates Arvind Kumar Gupta and Manohar Malik and certain other

accused, "have been compromising the integrity of investigation of certain cases on extraneous pecuniary considerations".

The CBI after registering the case had carried out searches on Thursday in its headquarters where some accused officers are posted, its academy where Rishi is posted and 12 other locations across the country, officials said.

DSP Rishi received Rs. 30 lakh in two equal instalments through two advocates having their office in Defence Colony here -- Manohar Malik and Arvind Gupta -- to extend favours to a Chandigarh-based company against which a corruption case was being investigated by the CBI, the FIR alleged.

It alleged Dhankad twice received Rs. 2.5 lakh from Gupta for having brokered the deal through Rishi.

"It has also been reliably learnt that the details of the investigation of many other cases including confidential notes and directions have been communicated by Sameer Kumar Singh to Sangwan and Rishi on pecuniary considerations to protect interests of the accused," the FIR alleged.

IGNOU extends December TEE 2020 Assignment submission deadline

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN [PTI]: The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has extended the last date to submit the assignments, project reports, field work journals, dissertation, and internships till January 31, 2021 for the December term-end examinations 2020 (TEE). Students enrolled for the December TEE can submit their

assignments till the end of this month in online and physical mode at the respective study centres.

"Submission of Assignments for the Term End Exam, December, 2020- both online and physical submission, extended upto 31st January, 2021," read an IGNOU statement.

It further stated: "Submission of Project Report, Field Work

Journals, Dissertation, Internship etc., for the Term-end Examination, December, 2020- both for online submission and physical submission extended upto 31st January, 2021."

Due to the coronavirus induced lockdown and its associated social distancing norms, IGNOU has been using social media, FM radio and television channels

like Gyan Vani and Gyan Darshan to provide support services to the students. The university is also conducting online classes apart from providing self learning material in printed and digital forms, multimedia material and offering online certificate courses.

The university on Friday, January 15, has decided to extend the last date of IGNOU re-

registration for January session till January 31. The students can register for the January session online at 'Samarth' platform. This is applicable to students studying for undergraduate, postgraduate or semester-based courses of two or three-year duration. Students can register at the official website of IGNOU -- ignou.samarth.edu.in -- for the online courses.

Bird flu: Over 2,000 birds to be culled in 2 districts in Maha

AURANGABAD, JAN 16 (PTI): Samples of dead hens found in two villages in Parbhani and Beed districts, both in Marathwada region, of Maharashtra have tested positive for bird flu, following which culling of over 2,000 birds is being carried out on Saturday, officials said.

These samples were taken from Kupta village in Selu tehsil of Parbhani district and from Lokhandi Sawargaon village in Beed district.

"These spots have been declared as a prohibitory area and culling process has begun there," officials told PTI.

They said transportation of poultry products has been stopped in these areas.

Culling is basically

the mass slaughter of domestic poultry birds, such as chickens and ducks, to contain the spread of bird flu. During the culling process, all domestic birds in an infected area, where cases of bird flu have been reported, are slaughtered and their remains are buried.

"Earlier, samples of hens found dead in Kupta and Lokhandi Sawargaon were sent for testing. Their results confirming bird flu returned on Friday night," officials told.

"In Kupta, culling process will be undertaken on Saturday, and around 468 birds will be culled," Collector Deepak Muglikar said.

In Lokhandi Sawargaon village, about



1,600 birds are expected to be culled, said Dr Ravi Surewad of the Animal Husbandry department.

"We have formed two teams to carry out culling of birds in Lokhandi Sawargaon village. As the birds to be culled are not from poultries, it will take time to carry out the process. A 2-metre pit is ready. Calcium Carbonate is spread on the bed of this pit. Cervical

dislocation of hens is done by our teams and they are placed in this pit," he said.

In Maharashtra, 3,949 birds have been found dead since January 8, officials said on Friday.

Earlier, more than 3,400 poultry birds were culled at Murumba village in Parbhani district after bird flu was confirmed as the cause of death

of hundreds of hens there.

In Kendrewadi and Sukni villages of Latur district, also in Marathwada region, over 11,000 birds were culled earlier to stop the spread of bird flu infection.

Cases of the avian influenza have been reported from Mumbai, Thane, Parbhani, Latur, Beed and Dapoli (Ratnagiri).

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Good Rules Need Better Implementation

Regulations are required, but try building confidence first

It is not rare to find road signs even in Gangtok announcing a speed limit. In fact, a few years ago, the government had specified speed-limits for Sikkim's roads. Welcome move, most would say, while adding that good rules need better implementation to be of any consequence. Given that governments are known to announce rules much beyond the state capacity to implement, this regulation was also only superficially thought out, and even if implemented, done so only for nuisance value for some time and then forgotten. To begin with, no one worked out how speed-limits will be checked consistently and everywhere, and how the breaking of speed limits is to be penalized? Okay, now the Traffic Police has a fleet of Enfields, but it's unlikely that a chase was ever on the cards. Talking about state capacity, what all will the traffic cops on the prowl check more diligently against, unauthorized/ irresponsible parking, dangerous driving, over-speeding, VIP movement or face masks? Was the speed regulation ever applied to all vehicles? Couldn't be, because parking rules don't appear to be universally applicable and VIPs treated to empty slots kept empty in anticipation of their arrival even in areas like MG Marg where private citizens are allowed only 10-minute pauses.

One wonders why the speed limit was formalized. Again, most people would think that it was to make the roads safer. But, if it is only the private citizens who need to observe the speed limits while the VIPs and their officers can ignore it, then one would be forced to surmise that private vehicles are being intentionally slowed down so that those who consider themselves "very important" can move very fast. If that is not the case, then the speed regulation should be extended to every vehicle on the roads. And this brings one back to the need for improved implementation to ensure that well intentioned moves deliver on their promise.

Some years ago, the Motor Vehicle Rules were marked for an amendment to deliver a stronger commitment to making vehicular traffic safer in Sikkim. The proposed amendment required a driver to produce a driving license issued from hill regions or procure such a special permit from Sikkim before being allowed to ferry passengers as a taxi driver in the State. The idea was sound. At one level it ensured that those hired as taxi drivers in Sikkim were tried hands on hill roads and not landing jobs despite suspect driving skills only because they have managed to buy a driving license elsewhere. The requirement to get these permits renewed and the powers given to the licensing authorities here to verify the antecedents of the applicants ensured that drivers took their jobs more seriously and the authorities have a paper trail to follow in case someone absconds after a mishap (a common response). One wonders where this rule sits nowadays because it sure does not appear to be in practical practice. Agreed, this one was complicated and presented many genuine complications, but in the many years that have passed, these could have been ironed out to guarantee that drivers of passenger vehicles in Sikkim had tested driving skills. That is a substantial assurance to receive for passengers nowadays.

The point being reiterated is that 'good rules' need good implementation to deliver 'good results.' After all, there is no dearth of either good rules or good intentions in the country, but it is in the delivery that everything goes wrong. The more stringent stipulations to keep the roads safe are welcome, but almost immediately raise the fear of more complicated red tape, more powerful officials, more dugdi. In fact, it would not be a bad idea to first win back the trust of the people before issuing any more rules. There is too much disconnect nowadays between the janta and their janardhans, too much distrust. Let's work at repair this faith first.

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Does 'Deplatforming' Work to Curb Hate Speech and Calls For Violence?

THECONVERSATION.COM

In the wake of the assault on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, Twitter permanently suspended Donald Trump's personal account, and Google, Apple and Amazon shunned Parler, which at least temporarily shut down the social media platform favored by the far right.

Dubbed "deplatforming," these actions restrict the ability of individuals and communities to communicate with each other and the public. Deplatforming raises ethical and legal questions, but foremost is the question of whether it's an effective strategy to reduce hate speech and calls for violence on social media.

The Conversation U.S. asked three experts in online communications whether deplatforming works and what happens when technology companies attempt it.

SORT OF, BUT IT'S NOT A LONG-TERM SOLUTION

JEREMY BLACKBURN, assistant professor of computer science, Binghamton University

The question of how effective deplatforming is can be looked at from two different angles: Does it work from a technical standpoint, and does it have an effect on worrisome communities themselves?

Does deplatforming work from a technical perspective?

Gab was the first "major" platform subject to deplatforming efforts, first with removal from app stores and, after the Tree of Life shooting, the withdrawal of cloud infrastructure providers, domain name providers and other Web-related services. Before the shooting, my colleagues and I showed in a study that Gab was an alt-right echo chamber with worrisome trends of hateful content. Although Gab was deplatformed, it managed to survive by shifting to decentralized technologies and has shown a degree of innovation – for example, developing the moderation-circumventing Dissenter browser.

From a technical perspective, deplatforming just makes things a bit harder. Amazon's cloud services make it easy to manage computing infrastructure but are ultimately built on open source technologies available

to anyone. A deplatformed company or people sympathetic to it could build their own hosting infrastructure. The research community has also built censorship-resistant tools that, if all else fails, harmful online communities can use to persist.

Does deplatforming have an effect on worrisome communities themselves?

Whether or not deplatforming has a social effect is a nuanced question just now beginning to be addressed by the research community. There is evidence that a platform banning communities and content – for example, QAnon or certain politicians – can have a positive effect. Platform banning can reduce growth of new users over time, and there is less content produced overall. On the other hand, migrations do happen, and this is often a response to real world events – for example, a deplatformed personality who migrates to a new platform can trigger an influx of new users.

Another consequence of deplatforming can be users in the migrated community showing signs of becoming more radicalized over time. While Reddit or Twitter might improve with the loss of problematic users, deplatforming can have unintended consequences that can accelerate the problematic behavior that led to deplatforming in the first place.

Ultimately, it's unlikely that deplatforming, while certainly easy to implement and effective to some extent, will be a long-term solution in and of itself. Moving forward, effective approaches will need to take into account the complicated technological and social consequences of addressing the root problem of extremist and violent Web communities.

YES, BUT DRIVING PEOPLE INTO THE SHADOWS CAN BE RISKY

UGOCHUKWU ETUDO, assistant professor of operations and information management, University of Connecticut

Does the deplatforming of prominent figures and movement leaders who command large followings online work? That depends on the criteria for the success of the policy intervention. If it means punishing the target of the deplatforming so

they pay some price, then without a doubt it works. For example, right-wing provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos was banned from Twitter in 2016 and Facebook in 2019, and subsequently complained about financial hardship.

If it means dampening the odds of undesirable social outcomes and unrest, then in the short term, yes. But it is not at all certain in the long term. In the short term, deplatforming serves as a shock or disorienting perturbation to a network of people who are being influenced by the target of the deplatforming. This disorientation can weaken the movement, at least initially.

However, there is a risk that deplatforming can delegitimize authoritative sources of information in the eyes of a movement's followers, and remaining adherents can become even more ardent. Movement leaders can reframe deplatforming as censorship and further proof of a mainstream bias.

There is reason to be concerned about the possibility that driving people who engage in harmful online behavior into the shadows further entrenches them in online environments that affirm their biases. Far-right groups and personalities have established a considerable presence on privacy-focused online platforms, including the messaging platform Telegram. This migration is concerning because researchers have known for some time that complete online anonymity is associated with increased harmful behavior online.

In deplatforming policymaking, among other considerations, there should be an emphasis on justice, harm reduction and rehabilitation. Policy objectives should be defined transparently and with reasonable expectations in order to avoid some of these negative unintended consequences.

YES, BUT THE PROCESS NEEDS TO BE TRANSPARENT AND DEMOCRATIC

ROBERT GEHL, associate professor of communication and media studies, Louisiana Tech University

Deplatforming not only works, I believe it needs to be built into the system. Social media should have mechanisms by which racist, fascist, misogynist or transphobic speakers are removed, where misinformation is removed, and

where there is no way to pay to have your messages amplified. And the decision to deplatform someone should be decided as close to democratically as is possible, rather than in some closed boardroom or opaque content moderation committee like Facebook's "Supreme Court."

In other words, the answer is alternative social media like Mastodon. As a federated system, Mastodon is specifically designed to give users and administrators the ability to mute, block or even remove not just misbehaving users but entire parts of the network.

For example, despite fears that the alt-right network Gab would somehow take over the Mastodon federation, Mastodon administrators quickly marginalized Gab. The same thing is happening as I write with new racist and misogynistic networks forming to fill the potential void left by Parler. And Mastodon nodes have also prevented spam and advertising from spreading across the network.

Moreover, the decision to block parts of the network aren't made in secret. They're done by local administrators, who announce their decisions publicly and are answerable to the members of their node in the network. I'm on scholar.social, an academic-oriented Mastodon node, and if I don't like a decision the local administrator makes, I can contact the administrator directly and discuss it. There are other distributed social media system, as well, including Diaspora and Twister.

The danger of mainstream, corporate social media is that it was built to do exactly the opposite of what alternatives like Mastodon do: grow at all costs, including the cost of harming democratic deliberation. It's not just cute cats that draw attention but conspiracy theories, misinformation and the stoking of bigotry. Corporate social media tolerates these things as long as they're profitable – and, it turns out, that tolerance has lasted far too long.

Why You Should Consider Adding Classical Music to Your Exercise Playlist

ELIAS MOUCHLIANITIS

THECONVERSATION.COM

For many people, an essential part of any exercise regime is the music that accompanies it. Whether you're a runner, a rower or a bodybuilder, there's a good chance you have a favourite selection of tunes and some headphones to help you through.

The right choice of music can inspire, energise and provide much needed distraction. Elite athletes of every discipline are often seen deep in thought, their ears covered by snazzy headphones, in the moments ahead of a big match or race. So what is it about music that helps us to push our bodies towards or through physical discomfort?

We have been exploring this question using a variety of scientific methods. So far, most of our focus has been on various forms of popular music, including rock, dance, hip-hop and R&B, but recently we have been considering the benefits of classical music as an auditory aid to exercise.

As a genre, it is easy to see why classical music appears to be overlooked in terms of people's choice of workout soundtrack. It often lacks a rhythmic "groove", and when there are lyrics, they are not easy to sing along with.

Yet there is an inherent and timeless beauty attached to many pieces from the classical repertoire, which might justify their use. Think of the scintillating majesty of Beethoven's Eroica Symphony or the poignancy of Puccini's Madame Butterfly.

So how can we tap into the beauty of such music and use the sonic peaks and troughs to our advantage during a workout? First, we must understand what the benefits of any music might be in the context of physical exercise.

The role of any workout music is to dull the pain, raise the spirits and possibly make time pass a little faster. Scientists refer to the "dissociative effects" of music, meaning that it helps to distract the mind from internal, fatigue-related symptoms. Recent neuroimaging work by our group has shown the propensity for music to reduce exercise consciousness – essentially, the parts of the brain that communicate fatigue – communicate less when music is playing.

And although music cannot reduce exercisers' perceptions of exertion at very high work intensity, it can influence the mood-related areas of the brain

right up until the point of voluntary exhaustion. So an aesthetically pleasing piece, such as the finale of the William Tell Overture, won't affect what you feel when your lungs are burning on the treadmill, but might influence how you feel it. In essence, pleasant music can colour one's interpretation of fatigue and enhance the exercise experience.

It doesn't stop at feelings and perceptions though. Music can also have an "ergogenic" or work-enhancing effect. The psychologist Mária Rendi used slow and fast movements from Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 in A major (op. 92) to examine how music tempo influenced sprint rowing performance over 500 metres. Her findings indicated that both kinds of music led to faster sprint times compared to a no-music control, with the faster tempo (144 beats per minute) leading to a 2.0% performance improvement, and the slower one (76bpm), a 0.6% improvement.

CLASSICALLY TRAINED

Some members of our team often listen to classical music during a daily run. We find that classical music fires the imagination and generally augments the running experience, particularly when enjoyed in tandem with an inspiring landscape.

But perhaps classical music has the most potent effect when used either before or immediately after exercise. Pre-exercise, its central function is to build energy, conjure positive imagery and inspire movement. Pieces such as Vangelis's Chariots of Fire, the title track of the eponymous movie, with its pulsating underlying rhythm and familiar cinematic link to glory, can work particularly well.

For a post-workout application, the music needs to be calming and revitalising in order to expedite the body's return to a resting state. An archetypal piece for this is Erik Satie's Gymnopédie No. 1, a timeless piano solo that envelops the listener and treats tired muscles to a sonic massage.

To optimise your choice of classical music for exercise, it is important to think of the energy that will be expended during different segments of a workout. The warm-up and stretching will be at a relatively low intensity and the session then builds gradually towards its heart-pumping zenith, with a period of warm-down and revitalisation to end.

Music selection – of any genre – should ideally follow the path of energy expenditure in a workout session (see the list below for some suggestions). Likewise, a particular piece could be saved for those segments that the exerciser finds most arduous, like high-intensity cardio.

Overall, whether or not classical music and exercise are a good match is something each of us needs to decide – musical taste is very personal. But why not mix it up a little? Variety in exercise keeps us fresh and invigorated, so consider a switch in musical accompaniment to keep yourself moving. Swap the rave music for Ravel and substitute breakbeat with a glorious blast of Beethoven.

And if you want some inspiration, here is a playlist compiled by Brunel University London research assistant Luke Howard:

1. Boléro, by Maurice Ravel, with an average tempo of 70bpm, is excellent for mental preparation before you move. The gentle start, with a tempo close to resting heart rate, belies the transcendent power of this classic.

2. Juba Dance, from Symphony No. 1 in E minor, by Florence Price, is an engaging symphonic piece that will gently elevate the heart rate during a warm-up phase. It ends with an exhilarating crescendo, leaving you suitably ready for what's to come.

3. Part IV. Finale, Allegro Assai, Symphony No. 40 in G minor, by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, is a rousing musical work for low-to-moderate intensity segments of your workout. It features what is known as a "Mannheim rocket", a rollercoaster of a melody, which will get the heart and lungs pumping.

4. Prélude to Act 1 of Carmen by Georges Bizet, has a rip-roaring tempo (128bpm) that whisks you through any demanding high-intensity segments of your workout. The exquisite melodic and harmonic features of this piece enable you to dissociate from the pain.

5. Concerto No. 1 in E Major, Op. 8, 'La Primavera' by Antonio Vivaldi, is great for a warm-down, and keeping a spring in your stride as you gradually return towards a resting state. The beautifully orchestrated strings give this opus a pronounced recuperative quality.

[the writer is Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Brunel University London]

Dolphin population in Odisha's Chilika Lake rises to 156

BHUBANESWAR, JAN 16 (PTI): After emerging as the favourite destination of migratory birds, the Chilika lake in Odisha has also turned out to be a safe haven for rare Irrawaddy dolphins.

This came to the light after the Chilika Development Authority (CDA) conducted an annual survey on the biodiversity of the lagoon, which is the largest lake along the east-coast of India. The population of dolphins has increased to 156 in 2020 against 150 in 2019, an official said.

The Irrawaddy dolphin is the flagship species inhabiting the Chilika Lake. The CDA in a statement said that the present distribution range of this species is only in Asia, from Chilika to Indonesia. Irrawaddy dolphins in India are protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, CITES (Appendix-I) and IUCN Red List.

The CDA has initiated many conservation measures for the protection and conservation of Irrawaddy dolphins in the past in close coordination with the Wildlife Wing of state



Forest Department, CDA chief executive Susanta Nanda said.

He said that in the past there had been survey and identification of dolphin habitat in the lake for proper management, dolphin watching protocol was formulated, sensitization training of tourist boat operators was conducted, widening and deepening of Magarmukha channel was undertaken for free movement of dolphin from outer channel to the main lake.

The annual population estimation survey of Irrawaddy dolphin has been conducted by CDA since

2003. The annual survey conducted on January 15, 2021 by "Transact Survey Method", followed worldwide for population of aquatic mammals.

Each survey team was equipped with binoculars, GPS, Range finder and data recording sheets.

The movement has been facilitated by clearing of gherries (illegal embankments) at places. One significant population of dolphin is now observed in southern sector, by moving from other sectors, the official said.

A total of 18 teams had conducted the

annual count of the dolphin population for around six hours. While 10 teams of experts conducted the counting in Balugaon area and 8 teams were engaged for the counting in Satapada area, he said, adding that restriction on the visit of the tourists to the lake was also imposed during the counting period.

A bird census conducted on January 5, 2021 also revealed that a total of 12,42,000 individuals of 105 water bird species and 26,405 individuals of 76 wetland dependent species, were counted from the entire lagoon.

"This year, more birds are found in Central

and Southern sectors of Chilika. An increase in the population of open water preferring diving ducks was noticed during the current season, particularly in the prawn gherries evicted areas clearly indicating the beneficial impact of eviction for migratory birds," Nanda said.

The bird survey also brought to light the number of waderer have increased across the lake compared to the census date. Lesser Flamingo, Ferruginous Pochard and common Shelduck were encountered after a long gap, Nanda said.

During the Flora and Fauna Monitoring of Chilika Lake on January 15, 2021, five species of seagrasses were recorded.

Seagrass species such as Holodule uninervis, Holodule pinifolia, Halophila ovalis, Halophila ovata and Halophila beccarii were recorded during the survey, he said.

This occurs over an area of 155 sq km, an increase from 152 sq km of last year. Chilika now has 22 per cent of India's seagrass area, the official said.

Odisha reports 178 new COVID-19 cases, 1 more death

BHUBANESWAR, JAN 16 (PTI): Odisha reported 178 new COVID-19 cases on Saturday, taking its tally to 3,33,127, a health department official said.

One more person died of the disease, following which the toll rose to 1,899, he said.

Of the new cases, 103 were reported from different quarantine centres.

Sundergarh reported the highest 30 new cases, followed by Sambalpur (24) and Jharsuguda (23).

Eight districts--Boudh, Dhenkanal, Jagatsinghpur, Kandhamal, Kendrapara, Keonjhar, Nayagarh and Nabarangpur -- did not register any new cases since Friday, the official said.

The latest death

was reported from the Sundergarh district.

Odisha has 2,087 active cases at present, while 3,29,088 patients have recovered.

The state has so far tested over 73.46 lakh samples for COVID-19, including 26,490 on Friday.

Odisha's positivity rate stands at 4.53 per cent.

Fire breaks out in Kestopur

KOLKATA, JAN 16 (PTI): A fire broke out at a market in Kestopur area of neighbouring North 24 Parganas district on Saturday, police said.

Two fire tenders were pressed into service to douse the blaze which broke out at two shanties in Kestopur's Mission Bazar, they said.

Nobody is injured in the blaze, they said.



"Our firefighters are fighting the blaze. Hopefully, it will be under control in some time. The

reason behind the fire is yet to be ascertained," an officer of the fire department said.

Anthology features tales from Indian subcontinent

NEW DELHI, JAN 16 (PTI): A short fiction anthology showcases both young and established writers from every part of South Asia and its diaspora.

The stories in this selection titled "The Banyan and Her Roots" were originally published in the "The Equator Line" magazine over the past eight-nine years.

Writer Jad Adams, who has chosen the stories and edited them, says these are tales of anxious women and confused men, of relationships which start in the glow of love but end in a baffling clash of contradictory cultures; oppressive family relationships with overwhelming obligations; travellers feeling out of place in a new culture, but also being liberated in a new environment.

Of the 23 writers in the volume, 13 are

women. Seven Pakistani writers have also made it to the book, published by Palimpsest.

There is a commonality of tone in the work of women writers from across the borders. They all stand up to patriarchy and reject war as a way for the neighbours to dominate each other. They are more concerned about the war going on for hundreds of years inside their homes. Meghna Pant's "The Oleander Girl", in particular, sheds light on this area.

The book, unlike any other in the recent past, captures authentically the malaise and aspirations of South Asian societies. Commending Adams' work, writer Namita Gokhale says, "This selection of 25 sparkling stories bookmarks both the unity and the diversity of 'this part of the world'. The range and

sweep of this short fiction anthology memorably document the dilemmas, the hopes and hurts, the teeming narratives of South Asia."

Reading the stories from India and its neighbourhood, one recognises their identical concerns; a realisation sets in that the division is only political, culturally they are the same people.

This collection is a celebration of a rich literary tradition that distinguishes South Asia.

Seeking to put the book in a historical perspective, writer Bevis Hillier says, "Not since Rudyard Kipling has here been such a collection of stories about India (and its neighbours) of such quality and insight Many of the stories are deeply moving; several involve a clash of cultures. Some deal with subjects forbidden to Kipling - porn films and gay sex among them.

Gyawali returning home after three-day Delhi visit; no talks with Modi

SURESH RAJ NEUPANE NEW DELHI, 16 JAN [KATHMANDUPOST]: Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali is returning to Kathmandu after completing his three-day visit to India. Though it was expected that he would be meeting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it could not materialise.

According to sources, the Nepali side had tried to seek time with Modi for a meeting.

On the last day of his visit, Gyawali on Saturday morning held a meeting with India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

The Nepali side was expecting a meeting with Modi even until Saturday before Gyawali's scheduled flight at 2pm.

The Nepali embassy in New Delhi too had been trying to fix up a meeting between Gyawali and Modi long before Gyawali landed in India.

Nepal's Ambassador to India Nilamber Acharya refused to comment.

Gyawali visited India also on the heels of Prime Minister KP Sharma's House dissolution move, which has created political uncertainty in Nepal. Oli has called snap polls for April 30 and May 10. But since the House dissolution decision has been challenged in the court, there is uncertainty if elections will happen.

As Gyawali was embarking on the visit, there were expectations that he would meet with the

Indian leadership and apprise them of the developing political situation in Nepal and try to justify Oli's House dissolution move.

On Friday, addressing a function in Delhi, Gyawali said that the House was dissolved so as to seek a fresh mandate to "make the people of Nepal sovereign."

D i p l o m a t i c sources told the Post that Gyawali's meeting with Modi could not materialise because of the latter's busy schedule on Saturday.

Modi on Saturday launched India's Covid-19 vaccination drive, the world's largest inoculation exercise against the coronavirus.

Political situation in Nepal has also been viewed as one of the reasons why there was no meeting between Gyawali and Modi.

Oli's move of dissolving the House has divided the political spectrum in Nepal, according to sources.

Political parties in Nepal have been protesting against Oli's House dissolution move, calling it unconstitutional.

[Modi] Meeting with the foreign minister of a caretaker government when the political situation is fluid in Nepal could have sent a wrong message in Nepal, according to analysts.

New Delhi appears to show it is taking a hands-off approach, giving a message that

it is staying away from Nepal's internal political affairs.

Gyawali arrived in Delhi on Thursday to participate in the Sixth Meeting of the Nepal-India Joint Commission, the highest level mechanism that deals with the entire gamut of bilateral relations between the two countries.

On Friday, Gyawali and his Indian counterpart S Jaishaker co-chaired the Sixth Meeting of Joint Commission, where Nepal-India relations, cooperation on Covid-19 vaccine and other issues like trade, commerce, connectivity, status of India-funded projects in Nepal among others were discussed.

Despite the Nepali side raising the boundary row, the Indian side showed reluctance to get into the matter, saying the issue should be left for the foreign secretary level mechanism and the Boundary Working Group to deal with.

Nepal-India ties, which started to sour in November 2019 after Delhi published a new political map of India placing Kalpani within Indian borders, hit a rock bottom in May last year.

In the first week of May, Singh virtually inaugurated a road link via Lipulekh to Kailash Mansarovar in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China, sparking furore in Nepal. In response, Kathmandu got a new Nepal map

endorsed from the Parliament, depicting Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura as Nepali territories.

Delhi objected to the move, calling Nepal's action cartographic assertions.

Nepal, however, has maintained that the territories belong to Nepal and the KP Sharma Oli government made claims that it would bring the land back.

During his address to the upper house last week, Oli said that Gyawali was travelling to New Delhi and would take up the boundary issue with India.

However, as soon as Gyawali landed in Delhi on Thursday, India hinted boundary talks were unlikely.

"Our position on the boundary issue is well known," Anurag Srivastava, spokesperson for India's Ministry of External Affairs, said during a regular press briefing on Thursday. "The joint commission and boundary talks are two different mechanisms."

Gyawali's is the first visit to India at the highest level from Kathmandu in over a year. His trip to Delhi follows a flurry of visits from India in October and November, when the southern neighbour sent its foreign spy chief, the army chief and foreign secretary, in signs of rapprochement.

No details were immediately available on the meeting between Gyawali

and Singh, except the latter taking to Twitter to hail Nepal-India ties.

"Had a wonderful meeting with the Foreign Minister of Nepal, today," Singh wrote on Twitter after the meeting. "India's relations with Nepal are not limited to governments in both the countries but it is driven by the people of both the nations. India-Nepal relations offer limitless potential."

VIDEO NEWS SECTION

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Top but capable of more: Manchester United upbeat for trip to Liverpool

JAMIE JACKSON
LONDON, 16 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: When Ole Gunnar Solskjær says Manchester United have “not really set the world alight” this season, the manager’s true sense might be read as: “You ain’t seen nothing yet – just wait until we do catch fire.”

United arrive at Anfield on Sunday to play Liverpool as Premier League leaders, three points ahead of the champions while not at their best. That is a rosy place to be for United because they possess the quality to perform far better.

For a glimpse of how, rewind to last season’s post-lockdown resumption when United burned through the opposition. During a nine-match unbeaten run, which included victories over Sheffield United, Brighton and Aston Villa (all 3-0), Bournemouth (5-2), and Crystal Palace and Leicester (2-0), they were a relentless proposition that collected 23 of a possible 27 points.

Such stellar form has been viewed only in flashes this term, yet they kick off against Jürgen Klopp’s formidable side vying with their neighbours Manchester City to be the contenders most likely – at this juncture – to take their Premier League crown.

Last season ended in a third-place finish thanks to the final-day win at Leicester. Mason Greenwood did not score that day but the United teenager had already contributed five goals in the nine-game sequence, his billing as the club’s finest finisher – according to Solskjær – terrifying defences and adding fresh menace to their attack.

Greenwood’s 17 goals in 2019-20 placed him alongside George Best, Brian Kidd and Wayne Rooney as the club’s highest-scoring teenager. This season the 19-year-old has yet to approach the same level: he has featured in 11 of United’s 17 league games and scored once, with three goals in 21 appearances overall. If his form in the second half of this campaign can mirror last term’s, United will have a potent weapon.

Solskjær can also call on others who could still help decorate a title push. If Anthony Martial, for one, can rediscover how to finish United will only benefit. He has gone from the 23-goal top scorer of

last season to a paltry return so far of five in 21 outings. Hidden here is how the Frenchman has become a more muscular centre-forward, his mazy runs often scattering defenders around him.

The manager can also expect more from his three new signings once they settle in fully at Old Trafford. Alex Telles offers a fresh attacking threat from left-back, while Edinson Cavani can be Solskjær’s Zlatan Ibrahimovic, a senior centre-forward whose drive at 33 to extract the maximum from the autumn of his career is inspiring Martial, Greenwood and others to greater heights, as the Swede did when José Mourinho recruited him in 2016.

The last of Solskjær’s summer acquisitions is Donny van de Beek. The 23-year-old is a midfielder of the Ajax school who is first-choice in the position for the Netherlands. An impressive pedigree but he cannot get in the manager’s strongest XI. Van de Beek’s brief appearances, though, suggest a technical ability and slick style that may prove another telling asset should Solskjær introduce him more regularly.

Van de Beek’s situation illustrates how competition has been key in United’s rise and should continue to enhance quality. Even the erratic Paul Pogba has found a high gear, scoring the winner in Tuesday’s victory at Burnley. Still, he recognises Solskjær could drop him for the Anfield showdown. “Results have been good so it’s always difficult – he has to make some changes, some decisions and, you never know, I could be on the bench or play the next game,” says Pogba. “I just need to be ready and take my chance to play and help the team as much as they [others] have been doing.

“Every time you play, you are on your toes and you want to do great because the guys next to you give everything as well. That’s building a team – it’s about the team and it shows that we have each other’s backs and we push each other to the limit to do great.”

Solskjær’s aim is for United to occupy the rarefied air of league champions. They have the potential, now they have to realise it, starting on Sunday on Merseyside.

Rooney-mania had many ages but his defining moment remains the first

JONATHAN LIEW
LONDON, 16 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: In a way, it was the perfect understated ending: with a short, sober statement on the Derby County website. New manager appointed at struggling Championship club. Signs a two-and-a-half-year deal after a cautiously successful stint in caretaker charge. Liam Rosenior to be his assistant.

Meanwhile – buried in the seventh paragraph, as if an entirely incidental detail – England and Manchester United’s all-time leading goalscorer has decided to retire as a footballer.

Wayne Rooney. Remember the name? Perhaps the vague whiff of anticlimax owes itself largely to the fact that Rooney has – on some level – been retiring for most of the last decade. There was the emotional departure from Manchester United in 2017. The following year, he said his goodbyes to the Premier League. There was the first international retirement. The one-off comeback, after which he went back into retirement again. And now, the final curtain. The discussion of his legacy and place in the game will continue to bubble away, and rightly so. It should be possible both to acclaim Rooney for what he achieved in the game and wonder whether he could have done even more.

Five Premier League titles and one Champions League triumph – the same as John O’Shea – do not settle the debate on their own. His goal records – 253 for United, 53 for England: gargantuan feats that will one day be broken.

When the dust settles,



what does Rooney leave us beyond lists and chunks of metal? This is, perhaps, the basic paradox of Rooney: that a player of such emotional heft will ultimately be judged largely on numbers and records, that a player who seemed purpose-built to generate unforgettable era-defining moments generated surprisingly few of them. What are the defining Rooney moments? The big performances in finals? The reality-bending wonder-goals? What is Rooney’s Istanbul 2005, his Villa Park 1999, his Euro 96, his Hand of God? Of course there was the bicycle kick against Manchester City in 2011, a heartwarming last-minute chase and tackle and assist for DC United in 2018, a couple of eye-catching goals from the halfway line. But really, the defining Rooney moment comes right at the beginning: that scene-setting goal for Everton against Arsenal in 2002 as a 16-year-old child.

Even to watch it back now is to realise

how the memory plays tricks on you. The chance was created not by a barrelling run but a neat control and shuffle. The finish itself was not smashed into the top corner, but curled with the utmost guile and precision. But it was too late. Wazza – England’s slalom, all-conquering comic book hero, a new hero for the WKD age – was born.

And so began the first age of Rooney-mania: the teenage tearaway. It took in that big-money transfer to United, a breakthrough tournament at Euro 2004 and probably ended in 2006 when Chelsea’s Paulo Ferreira fatefully broke his metatarsal, ushering in the second age: Rooney as national fixation. Yet while English football still expected Rooney to win international tournaments all on his own, and chided him when he failed to supply the required miracles, at club level he was increasingly becoming folded into a different player entirely.

The emergence

of Cristiano Ronaldo at United led Alex Ferguson to wedge him into an unfamiliar wide role. He still scored 38 goals in the 2006-09 seasons, won most of the silverware he was ever going to win. But in retrospect it feels like the great leap not made, the point at which the door to the immortals slowly began to creak shut.

Into the third age, then: the long retreat. The congealment had already begun before Ferguson retired in 2013, but it was around that point when we all collectively realised that Rooney was never quite going to fulfil the white-hot promise of his early years. Successive United and England managers puzzled over how to incorporate a player who seemed both increasingly influential and increasingly tangential.

His finishing, link play and attitude were as good as ever. But did he actually help your team win? Derby felt like the logical conclusion of this process: a genius

midfielder essentially spraying gorgeous passes from his armchair in the centre circle. Meanwhile, his outrun team languish in the bottom three.

It’s useful, as a thought exercise, to wonder how he might have fared had he been born Spanish or German: whether his taste for the heroic might have been chiselled into something more collective, more useful, more durable.

And yet, for all the talk of atrophy, right to the very end Rooney remained a fabulous player to watch: intuitive, eloquent and zealous, a player whose pure love of the sport was evident in every nourished touch.

He is unlikely to be as great a manager as he was a player. This is no slight on his coaching ability; simply a bald statement of probability. For every Cruyff there are a dozen Van Bastens; for every Beckenbauer a dozen Maradonas. Genius rarely photocopies itself. Rooney’s name and fame may have earned him this chance. But from here on in, he will have to survive on his wits alone.

How good can Bruno Fernandes make Manchester United? Anfield may tell

BARNEY RONAY
LONDON, 16 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: This is not the beginning of the title run-in. This is not the start of the middle, or the beginning of the end. Let’s face it, nobody really knows what’s going on up there in this jetlagged oddity of a Premier League season, when points have been scattered with luxurious abandon, and none of these teams seem ready to find a sustained higher gear.

Not that it makes much difference. There will, as ever, be an urge to portray Manchester United’s trip to Liverpool on Sunday as something more decisive, a make-or-breaker, a full-on Super Sunday Judgment Day-style Showdown.

There is some logic to this. Title-winning teams have tended to drop very few points in recent years. In a non-Covid version of the current timeline, a January meeting of champions and league leaders would carry real jeopardy. Last season Liverpool’s most decisive league victory came as early as November.

That game was also at Anfield, the day Fabinho scored, the home crowd

became an irresistible noise and Pep Guardiola capered about whirling his fists at the sky, King Lear in a grey knitted cardigan. That was pretty much a wrap.

Back in the current hungover version of reality, the top of the Premier League has been a slow bicycle race so far. Nothing will be settled at Anfield, no decisive stage win achieved. And yet Liverpool v Manchester United does still feel like a hugely significant occasion for both of these teams.

For United in particular this is a timely test. That recent fine run of form will face a genuine stress-test. And on a more micro-level Anfield will also offer an examination of the outer limits, right now, of Bruno Fernandes’s influence.

It is another small note of regret in a season-long symphony that Fernandes won’t get to play in front of an Anfield full house. Aged 26, this will be his first game for United against Liverpool. That strut, that air of command, the badge on the shirt: Fernandes v the Anfield crowd feels, in the best possible sense, like a pantomime waiting

to happen.

For now he has been that rare thing, a genuinely transformative signing. United have lost three times in the league since he arrived in January last year. Fernandes has racked up 27 goals and 17 assists and gone from a mid-20s star of the Portuguese league to next off the rank for a spot in the Fifpro midfield of the year.

In the process he has been garlanded with expectation, with some jazzed-up talk of a decisive Cantona-style ignition. There are, though, levels to this, and one very obvious next step. Time to start nailing it in the big games.

This United team are more fluent than the version that sat deep and played counterattack against stronger opponents in the first half of last season. But they have also become less effective in those games, with Fernandes struggling to assert his influence.

Since the summer resumption last June United have played seven matches against the stronger Premier League teams plus two against Paris Saint-Germain, a

nine-game run that has brought five defeats, three draws and one win.

In those games Fernandes has scored five goals, all penalties. More recently he has been notably ineffective against PSG, Manchester City, Arsenal and Tottenham.

This being football, it will be tempting for some to see a player reaching the end of his scale of influence, some kind of flat-track, empty-stadium penalty-fraud. The reality is of course something else.

All players are less effective against stronger opponents: this is what makes them stronger opponents. And United are still learning to play around Fernandes.

Recently there has been a sense this team have found their own way of winning, entering a kind of surge-period either side of half-time, like a 400m runner relaxing into the straight, when the players just seem to settle and find their rhythms. Perhaps there is a lot to be gained at a time like this from having a manager who seems indecently calm, beaming on from the sidelines like a supportive uncle.

But that style might also offer the odd point of weakness. It is often said a key part of Fernandes’s impact is his invigorating swagger, a player entirely unbowed by the shirt. And he is fearless, one of those athletes who seems to play on every stage the same way, entirely lost in the moment.

But his real impact is tactical. His key skill is an obsession with finding space between the lines, taking the ball from any angle and passing it forwards with one or two touches. In those moments Fernandes is a kind of footballing WD40, greasing every attacking phase with his touch and movement, and wanting constantly to be involved.

Five minutes before half-time against Burnley on Tuesday he could be seen haring off into the six-yard box in pursuit of an overhit cross. Sixty seconds later he was at right-back stifling a break. In the second half he played deeper, spreading the ball wide as United found their surge. His instant pass to Marcus Rashford made the time that made the cross that made Paul Pogba’s volleyed winner.

Rohit’s dismissal puts India on backfoot after rookie attack restricts Australia to 369

BRISBANE, JAN 16 (PTI): Rohit Sharma’s indiscreet shot selection pegged India back after rookie bowling attack restricted Australia to 369 on a rain-curtailed second day of the fourth Test on Saturday.

With heavy thunder showers preventing any play in the post tea session, India ended the day at 62 for two.

Rohit was elegant as ever in his 44 off 74 balls before Nathan Lyon in his 100th Test enticed him to come down the track but the half-chip-half-loft was safely pouched by Mitchell Starc in the deep.

India also lost Shubman Gill (7) who edged one off Pat Cummins to Steve Smith.

Cheteshwar Pujara (8) and Ajinkya Rahane (2) added only two runs in the 6.1 overs before the break.

There were six boundaries from Rohit but he did not fiddle at deliveries in and around the off-stump channel even as Cummins and Josh Hazlewood bowled a testing spell under overcast conditions.

The shot of the session was an on-drive off Cummins which came after a streaky boundary through the slips in the same over. Another delightful stroke was an off-drive off Cameron Green as 49 runs were added for the second wicket.

There wasn’t much swing on offer but the pace off the track has increased compared to the first day and it only helped that the Australian pace attack is a more well built one with average speed being at least 6-7 kmph more than their Indian counterparts.

Pujara, at the other end was playing his usual ‘grinding out’ game but it didn’t look too arduous till Rohit kept the scoreboard ticking at the other end.

It wouldn’t be an over statement to say that among all top order batsman across both sides, Rohit looked the most comfortable and till his dismissal never looked like being troubled by the four-pronged attack.

However as has been his wont in SENA countries, Rohit just before the tea break went after Lyon when the situation demanded that he could have played for session-end.

It was very similar to his dismissal off Moeen Ali at the stroke of tea during the 2014 series and that was also after being set in the middle-order.

India, who have been forced to field a depleted side won’t mind an inclement weather which effectively makes the home team more jittery as a draw would be enough for Ajinkya Rahane to lift the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

In the first session, India’s rookie bowling line-up did put up a lion-hearted effort, getting the last five wickets for 95 runs.

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China strips license of lawyer FOR HONG KONG ACTIVIST

TAIPEI, TAIWAN (AP): A Chinese lawyer who represented a Hong Kong pro-democracy activist was stripped of his license amid efforts by Beijing to crush opposition to its tighter control over the territory.

Lu Siwei, who represented one of 12 Hong Kong activists who tried to flee to Taiwan, had his license revoked by the Sichuan Provincial Justice Department in a formal notice given Friday.

Ten of the 12 activists caught at sea in August were sentenced by a Shenzhen court in December to prison terms ranging from seven months to three years for illegally crossing the border and organizing illegal border crossings.

They are part of an exodus of Hong Kong residents following Beijing's imposition of a tough new security law they say is destroying the territory's Western-style civil liberties. Since the law was introduced in response to anti-government protests that began in 2019, dozens of pro-democracy activists have been arrested or detained.

The law has been denounced by European nations, the U.S. and others.

Beijing says the legislation allows Hong Kong to "enjoy more social stability, economic development and greater freedom." Foreign



Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying called the 12 activists "elements attempting to separate Hong Kong from China," not democratic activists.

Beijing, which requires lawyers to swear an oath of loyalty to the ruling Communist Party, has tightened control over the profession. Other lawyers have been stripped of their licenses for representing defendants in politically sensitive cases. Some have been imprisoned.

In a notice last week, the Chengdu office of the Sichuan Justice Department said Lu had violated laws on professional legal conduct. It accused him of making comments online that had a "negative impact on society."

Also last week, Ren Quanni, another lawyer for one of the 12 activists, was notified by the Zhengzhou office of the Henan Justice

Department that he could lose his license. He was told that comments he made in court had caused a "negative impact on society." His hearing is still pending, but is seen as a formality.

On Wednesday, Ren and a small group of supporters showed up at the hearing for Lu's license in Chengdu to back him. They were forcibly separated by police and Lu was taken inside alone, Ren said.

Both Lu and Ren were hired by families of the activists, but were blocked from seeing their clients throughout the legal process.

"They wouldn't even let me in the front door, much less the door to the administrative area where you deal with the paperwork," Ren said of his attempted first visit to a police station in Shenzhen, where the Hong Kong activists were taken by authorities.

On his second visit, he was told that his client had already agreed to a court-appointed lawyer.

Throughout the case, families of the activists protested that they should be able to use lawyers they selected instead of the court-appointed lawyers.

Lu has been summoned often by the local bureau of the Justice Department in Chengdu for meetings in which the bureau officials told him to leave the case.

Neither Lu or Ren backed down. "Why should I quit when there's no legal reason for me to quit? How can I explain myself to the family?" Ren told The Associated Press.

A person at the local Justice Department office in Chengdu initially told the AP to call back. Later calls went unanswered. Phone calls to the Justice Department's office

in Zhengzhou went unanswered.

The two lawyers both have a history of taking on sensitive cases, and of navigating the fraught and murky waters of defending people who are deemed to be political targets by authorities.

Ren has handled cases related to the Falun Gong, a spiritual movement which China has labeled a cult and is the subject of persecution after its followers protested in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1999. Most recently, he represented citizen journalist Zhang Zhan, who was sentenced to four years in prison for attempting to report on the situation in the city of Wuhan during the onset of the coronavirus pandemic early last year.

Lu, an insurance lawyer by trade, has handled cases in a crackdown on human rights lawyers and activists led by President Xi Jinping which began in 2015. Lu defended prominent human rights lawyer Yu Wensheng, who had criticized Xi.

Still, neither was prepared for how sensitive the case of the 12 activists would be.

"They can't punish anyone else. Can they punish the European media? Can they punish Pompeo? They can only take it out on us because we are lawyers in the mainland," Lu said.

China builds hospital in 5 days after surge in virus cases



BEIJING (AP): China on Saturday finished building a 1,500-room hospital for COVID-19 patients to fight a surge in infections the government said are harder to contain and that it blamed on infected people or goods from abroad.

The hospital is one of six with a total of 6,500 rooms being built in Nangong, south of Beijing in Hebei province, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

China had largely contained the coronavirus that first was detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019 but has suffered a surge of cases since December.

A total of 645 people are being treated in Nangong and the Hebei provincial capital, Shijiazhuang, Xinhua said. A 3,000-room hospital is under construction in Shijiazhuang.

Virus clusters also have been found in Beijing and the provinces of Heilongjiang and Liaoning in the northeast and Sichuan in the southwest.

The latest infections spread unusually fast, the National Health Commission said.

"It is harder to handle," a Commission statement said. "Community transmission already has happened when the

epidemic is found, so it is difficult to prevent."

The Commission blamed the latest cases on people or goods arriving from abroad. It blamed "abnormal management" and "inadequate protection of workers" involved in imports but gave no details.

"They are all imported from abroad. It was caused by entry personnel or contaminated cold chain imported goods," said the statement.

The Chinese government has suggested the disease might have originated abroad and publicized what it says is the discovery of the virus on imported food, mostly frozen fish, though foreign scientists are skeptical.

Also Saturday, the city government of Beijing said travelers arriving in the Chinese capital from abroad would be required to undergo an additional week of "medical monitoring" after a 14-day quarantine but gave no details.

Nationwide, the Health Commission reported 130 new confirmed cases in the 24 hours through midnight Friday. It said 90 of those were in Hebei.

On Saturday, the Hebei government reported 32 additional cases since midnight, the Shanghai news outlet The Paper reported.

In Shijiazhuang, authorities have finished construction of 1,000 rooms of the planned hospital, state TV said Saturday. Xinhua said all the facilities are due to be completed within a week.

A similar program of rapid hospital construction was launched by the ruling Communist Party at the start of the outbreak last year in Wuhan.

More than 10 million people in Shijiazhuang underwent virus tests by late Friday, Xinhua said, citing a deputy mayor, Meng Xianghong. It said 247 locally transmitted cases were found.

Meanwhile, researchers sent by the World Health Organization were in Wuhan preparing to investigate the origins of the virus. The team, which arrived Thursday, was under a two-week quarantine but was due to talk with Chinese experts by video link.

The team's arrival was held up for months by diplomatic wrangling that prompted a rare public complaint by the head of the WHO.

That delay, and the secretive ruling party's orders to scientists not to talk publicly about the disease, have raised questions about whether Beijing might try to block discoveries that would hurt its self-proclaimed status as a leader in the anti-virus battle.

Diary shows how quest for love landed Navy vet in Iran jail

WASHINGTON (AP): Michael White's long-anticipated trip to Iran was already a disappointment. The love interest he'd gone to visit had stopped seeing him and he'd idled away hours in his hotel room by himself.

Then it got much worse.

On his final day, the car he and his tour guide were in was abruptly cut off by another vehicle with a passenger frantically waving his hands at them. He recalls three men getting out, one with a video camera, forcing him into their car and driving him to an office for questioning. From there, it was on to jail, where orange-tinted water spewed from the sink and shower and prison-issued dirty sandals proved useful in shoving sewer roaches in the bathroom into the toilet.

A handwritten journal he wrote behind bars — a copy of which was provided exclusively to The Associated Press — offers new details about his ordeal in Iran, which ended last June when the State Department secured the Navy veteran's release. In it, he catalogues physical abuse from his jailers and taunts from fellow inmates while held on dubious allegations. He writes tenderly of the woman he visited even while likening himself to a mouse lured into a trap. And he brands himself a "political hostage," held on pretextual charges to secure concessions from the U.S.

Seven months after his release, White is trying to reassemble his

life in Mexico, unsure what comes next but eager to share his story.

"I don't want the government of Iran to think that, 'Oh, Mike White's out of here, he's going away, he's going to be quiet,'" he said in a recent interview. "That's not going to happen. Believe me, if only you understood the fear and anger inside of me as a result of what they did."

The peculiar saga began in July 2018 when White flew to Iran to visit a woman he'd met years earlier in a Yahoo chat room and with whom he hoped to rekindle an on-off relationship that included two prior visits to the country. But the bond turned sour on the most recent trip when the woman stopped seeing him and encouraged him to return home earlier than he'd planned.

His 156-page manuscript is told from his own perspective with details that are vivid though sometimes difficult to corroborate. Iran's mission to the United Nations did not respond to a request for comment. But according to the document, the men who arrested him pulled him into their car and drove him, blindfolded and handcuffed, to a building for questioning. His interrogator asked about his relationship with the woman, seeming to know details of her family, and telling White, vaguely, that some in Iran were concerned about his intentions there.

He was taken to what he calls the "intel jail," where he says he was

given no food for days, nor blanket or pillow even as the vent blew frigid air. The conditions were compounded, he says, by his cancer diagnosis that had resulted in chemotherapy treatment and hospital stays in the months before he left for Iran.

He was repeatedly interrogated over several months about why he'd come to Iran, as officials suspicious that he may be a spy handed him questionnaires focused on his military background and any intelligence service connections. At one point, he writes, he fabricated a tale about being tasked to gather intelligence by an acquaintance he said was with the National Security Agency, figuring that interrogators wanted to hear something like that before setting him free.

"I was just saying something out of desperation, doing whatever to hopefully get them to just cut me loose," he said in the interview. "It turned out it wasn't really helpful at all."

The truth was more mundane, he says, albeit more difficult to comprehend: He was a "dumb American" pursuing love.

White's decisions were undoubtedly risky: His Iran visits came despite that country's hostile relationship with the U.S. He says he and his girlfriend got together in 2014 in Iran's Kish Island, even though retired FBI agent Robert Levinson vanished from there years earlier.

But White, 48, who grew up in Southern California and was honorably discharged from the Navy, says he's long been drawn to Iran's culture and people and had felt safe there, connecting through social media to a network of acquaintances. He'd once thought of law school or entering politics, but at the time of a 2018 trip he hoped would recharge his life, he was working as a Job Corps resident adviser.

He struggles to reconcile his affection for the woman he perceived as his girlfriend — "Her voice melts me with its softness and tenderness. My heart flutters when I see her," he writes — with the suspicion that he was somehow set up during his visit. His Instagram page reflects that ambivalence, with photos posted this year of them together.

"Yet, sadly, I was lured into a trap, like a mouse trap. I was the mouse," he writes. "I followed my heart instead of my head and missed signs."

In jail, he writes, he was once awakened by a guard dumping a bucket of cold water on him. Another time, an interrogator snapped a whip on his toes as he completed a questionnaire. After White tossed water on a surveillance camera to get the guards' attention, they pummeled him in the ribs and threw him to the floor, he writes.

He was relocated to another prison where some inmates tauntingly referred to him as "The

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MAYBELLINE MOMENT! Model Josephine Skriver filmed a commercial for Maybelline in Brooklyn, New York.

South star Vijay's 'Master' to get Hindi remake

MUMBAI, JAN 15 (PTI): Endemol Shine India, Cine1 Studios and 7 Screens on Friday announced they have acquired the rights to adapt Tamil film "Master" in Hindi.

Starring Vijay Thalapathy and Vijay Sethupathi, the Lokesh Kanagaraj-directed film released on Thursday in Tamil. The movie's Hindi dubbed version hit the screens on Friday.

Produced and distributed by 7 Screens, "Master" revolves around a professor (Thalapathy) who tries to reform a juvenile school system, where he clashes with a gangster (Sethupathy).

Abhishek Rege, CEO Endemol Shine India, said "Master" is laced with masterful performances and powerful narrative that resonates with audiences across the country.

He said the film will also be remembered as turning the box office tide in the pandemic.

"Master" is the first major film from the Tamil industry to release in the pandemic and have received overwhelming response from the audience.

"We are incredibly proud to have acquired the rights to such a hot property; We look forward to recreating the magic of this film to captivate the Hindi audience," Rege said in a statement.

Murad Khetani of Cine1 Studios said his company aims to support and deliver content driven cinema.

"We are proud to present the film to the audiences in Hindi language," Khetani said.

The makers will start casting for the Hindi remake soon.

Taapsee Pannu heads to Bhuj for 'Rashmi Rocket'

MUMBAI, JAN 16 (PTI): Actor Taapsee Pannu on Saturday said the last schedule of her upcoming film "Rashmi Rocket" will be shot in Bhuj.

Set in Kutch, Gujarat, "Rashmi Rocket" stars Pannu in the title role of a gifted athlete and is directed by Akarsh Khurana, who helmed Irrfan Khan's "Karwaan".

The actor started filming for the sports drama from November last year.

Pannu took to Instagram and shared a picture of herself on a race track, with Bhuj written on the back of her jersey.

"Next stop.... #LastSchedule #RashmiRocket," the 33-year-old actor wrote.

The film, written by Nanda Periyasamy, Aniruddha Guha and Kanika Dhillon, also



features "Pataal Lok" actor Abhishek Banerjee and Priyanshu Painyuli of "Mirzapur" fame.

Pannu also shared a selfie on her Instagram stories, in which she is joined by her co-stars Banerjee and Painyuli on the flight.

"Rashmi Rocket", produced by Ronnie Screwvala along with Neha Anand and Pranjali Khandhdiya, is set to release next year.

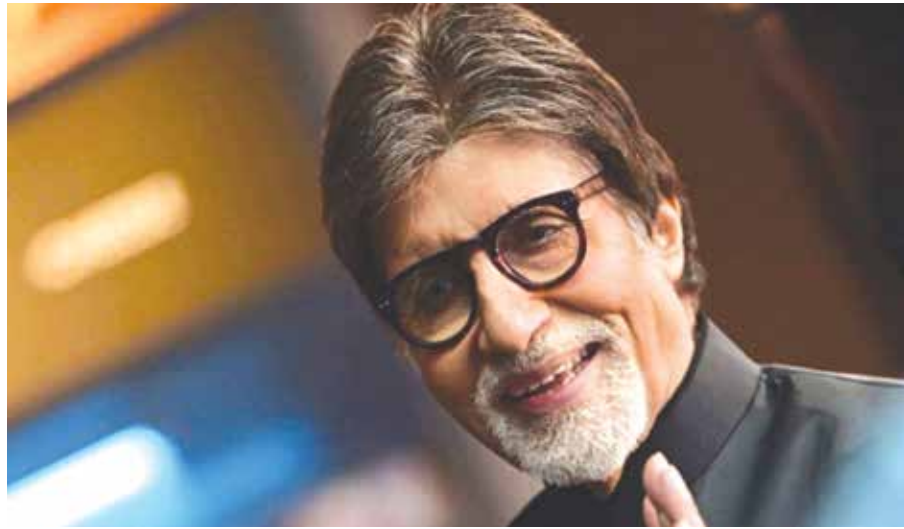
Amitabh Bachchan to host reality show to promote Uttarakhand tourism

DEHRADUN, JAN 16 (PTI): Bollywood star Amitabh Bachchan will soon host a reality show to promote Uttarakhand tourism.

A decision in this regard was taken by the Uttarakhand Cabinet at a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat late on Friday night.

The show named '100 Days in Heaven', to be hosted by the veteran Bollywood actor, will be telecast on several TV news and entertainment channels, Cabinet Minister and state government spokesperson Madan Kaushik said.

"The programme will be a sort of an ad campaign to promote Uttarakhand tourism made on the lines of the one the Bollywood actor has been doing for Gujarat,"



he said.

Film production company Messers Jumping Tomato Marketing

Private Limited would make the show for which the state government will pay it Rs 12.81 crore, Kaushik said.

'Animal Kingdom' to end with season six at TNT

LOS ANGELES, JAN 16 (PTI): TNT Network has renewed its popular series "Animal Kingdom" for a sixth and final season.

The renewal comes ahead of the premiere on the show's fifth season, which will debut later this year.

Developed by Jonathan Lisco, the

show is based on David Michod's 2010 Australian film of the same name, reported Deadline.

It follows a 17-year-old boy, who, after the death of his mother, moves in with his estranged relatives, the Codys, a criminal family clan governed by matriarch Smurf.

Shawn Hatossy, Ben Robson, Jake

Weary, and Finn Cole stars as members of the Cody crime family.

In the upcoming fifth season, Pope (Hatossy), Craig (Robson), Deran (Weary) and J (Cole) are "still dealing with the fallout from the events surrounding Smurf's death, including family members out for revenge".

News to me: Chris Evans reacts to rumours of him returning as Captain America

LOS ANGELES, JAN 15 (PTI): Hollywood star Chris Evans has seemingly denied reports that he might be returning as fan-favourite superhero Captain America in a future Marvel Cinematic Universe project.

There were reports earlier in the day that Evans, who bade adieu to the part with 2019 blockbuster "Avengers: Endgame", was planning a comeback in a new movie.

But his most recent post on Twitter has put an end to all speculation and also dashing hopes of many MCU fans.

"News to me," he wrote in a post, indicating that he has no plans to return as Captain America in future.

Evans had said goodbye to Captain America, one of his most memorable on-screen characters, when he wrapped up the filming for "Avengers: Endgame" in 2018.

In an emotional post on Twitter, Evans had said, "Officially wrapped on



'Avengers 4'. It was an emotional day to say the least. Playing this role over the last eight years has been an honour."

"To everyone in front of the camera, behind the camera, and in the audience, thank you for the memories! Eternally grateful," he wrote.

Marvel fans first saw Evans as Steve Rogers aka Captain America in 2011 film "Captain America: The First Avenger."

Since then, he appeared in six Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) movies as Cap, besides making guest appearances in a couple of other films.

'Parasite's' Bong Joon Ho to head Venice Film Festival jury

"Parasite" director Bong Joon Ho has been selected as jury president of the 78th Venice International Film Festival, organizers said Friday. The Oscar-winner will preside over seven jurors to hand out the festival's top awards, including the prestigious Golden Lion. He'll be the first South Korean to hold the post.

In a statement, the director said he is, "Honored to be woven into its beautiful cinematic tradition. As president of the jury — and more importantly as a perpetual cinephile —

I'm ready to admire and applaud all the great films selected by the festival. I'm filled with genuine hope and excitement."

Festival director Alberto Barbera remarked upon the historic nature of the selection.

"We are immensely grateful to him for having agreed to put his passion as a cinephile attentive, inquisitive and unprejudiced, at the service of our festival," Barbera said. "The decision to entrust the Jury to a Korean filmmaker, for the first time in the festival's history, is also confirmation that the



Venetian event embraces the cinema of the entire world, and that directors from every country know they can consider Venice their second home."

The Venice Film Festival was one of the only major film festivals to proceed in person last year amid the pandemic. The 78th edition is set to run from Sept. 1-11.

ARIES:

This year is all about you, you, you! Transformation is going to be a big theme, Aries, and you plan to dedicate yourself to the inner work required to be the most magnificent version of yourself. Just keep in mind that all work and no play will make Jane a dull girl. So, be present to what each moment is offering you—not just the joy, but the sadness, the loneliness, and the melancholy too. It is by embracing the human experience in its entirety that you will be able to create heaven on earth.

TAURUS:

Do you remember what happened the last time you decided to ignore your intuition? The cards are warning you against repeating old mistakes, Taurus. Trust your connection with the Divine. Trust the messages that are being brought to your attention by your higher self. Taking the steps that you are being guided towards will help prevent colossal damage. You're also being encouraged to play the role of secret keeper. There are some things that are not meant to be revealed yet, and you are in awareness of what these things are.

GEMINI:

It is said, when you feel good, you look good. Your mood exactly, Gemini. Sunday sees you prioritising health and wellness. Punishing workouts, however, are so 2000-and-late. You want to put on your Aladdin pants and choreograph your own belly dance routine. A bhanga session in your living room—preferably with your soul crew—is another idea you could be flirting with. PS: Let those feel good hormones remind you that movement meditation is the best way to get out of a funk.

CANCER:

What if we're all just living in a simulation? What if the things we

give so much importance to are not the things that will matter in the end? Pay attention to what you are giving all your time and attention to, Cancer. By looking at the flaws of others through a microscope, you could be magnifying them beyond measure. Today, the cards are urging you to adopt 'acceptance' as your magic word and hold space for the people in your life to be exactly who they are. In doing so, you will watch the negative emotions associated with this situation transmute into something higher.

LEO:

Have you walked into an unfamiliar room and felt as if you've been here before, or met somebody for the first time and been overwhelmed with a sense of familiarity? Leo, you are a multidimensional being who is becoming aware of their multidimensional nature. So, pay attention to the tasks that are beginning to feel familiar despite their unfamiliarity. There's a good chance you may have excelled at the same in another lifetime, or another time and space dimension. PS: It's time to uncover your hidden gifts and consciously integrate them into your existing repertoire.

VIRGO:

Maybe you're not exhausted because you're doing too much. Maybe you're exhausted because you're doing too little of what sets your soul on fire. Today, the cards are urging you to be mindful of what you are saying yes to. Every time you say yes to something that doesn't feel right, you end up saying no to something that is right for you. Word for the wise: let go of the need to please everybody, and focus on what you have come here to do. Some of you could be struggling with the unrealistic demands of your family too. In such a case, it's best to communicate your boundaries in a firm, but gentle manner.

LIBRA:

It's time to bring your A-game when it comes to social media. No, we're not talking about taking your VSCO cam skills up a notch. We're talking about truth, authenticity and vulnerability—about telling your story as it is meant to be told. You are who you are, Libra, and you have nothing to apologise for. Some of you could be thinking about taking the publishing world by storm, working on a script or starting your own podcast. Consider this as a green flag from the Universe, wild one!

SCORPIO:

You're spending too much time worrying about 'the how' and 'the why'. You're spending too much time thinking about the ways in which the given project is unlikely to work out. The truth is, you are where you are because you are meant to be here. Giving this idea a concrete form is a part of your soul's mission. So, don't waste time going back and forth on your decision. Simply take a giant leap towards the future you have envisioned for yourself and know that you are held and supported.

SAGITTARIUS:

Sometimes life feels like an uphill trek. No matter what we do, the fruits of our labour seem to evade us. At other times, life shows us the true meaning of benevolence by opening significant doors, as if magically, for our evolution and growth. The latter holds true for you, Sagittarius. So, open your eyes to all the ways in which you are being loved and supported. When things work out seamlessly for you, take it as a sign that you are on the right path and that the Universe wants you to claim what's truly yours.

CAPRICORN:

Matters of the heart are taking centre stage, Capricorn. Your

tribe is showing up for you in a whole new way. Allow yourself to receive the love you have been giving others, and know that you deserve every bit of the goodness you have attracted into your experience. Life may not be perfect, but it is flawsome in every way and you know that you'll get through this. PS: your angels and guides are also offering you the health and support you need at this moment.

AQUARIUS:

Sometimes, you've just got to put binaural beats on and surround yourself with those amethyst rocks as you put your phone on flight mode. It's a 'World, hold on!' kind of day, and you're learning to prioritise the most important person in your life, aka yourself! Remember, the world works inside out and that the microcosm affects the macrocosm. Therefore, being in a space of fullness allows us to hold space for others in the best possible way. Meditation and mindfulness are also going to be on your agenda today. You don't have to be a yogi to experience transcendence. Close your eyes and allow the mysterious forces above to guide you. Oh, the things you will see and hear when you tune out the chatter of your monkey mind!

PISCES:

Just because your ancestors suffered the consequences of being a certain way, does not mean you have to. Free yourself from the old story, Pisces, as you write a brand new one for yourself. You are deserving of love, you are deserving of material wealth, and you are deserving of success. You are worthy of living a life that's full of abundance and grace. So, allow yourself to receive what the Universe is offering you and know that you are loved and protected in every way.