



**PRIYANKA CHOPRA JONAS
ANNOUNCES SEQUEL OF
'WE CAN BE HEROES'**
pg 08

**THE RECENT APPEARANCE OF UNEX-
PLAINED MONOLITHS OFFERS CONNEX-
IONS TO THE ANCIENT PAST**
pg 04

**TANYA ROBERTS, BOND GIRL AND
'70S SHOW' STAR, HOSPITALIZED**
pg 08



SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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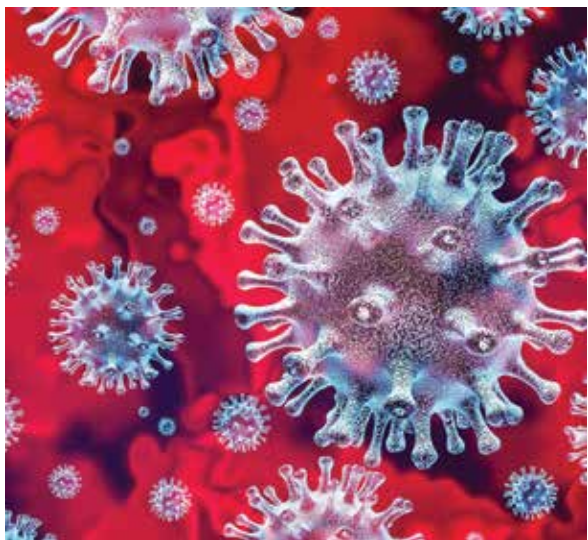
17 new Covid cases detected; Sikkim's active cases number 493

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 05 JAN:**
Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 reached 5,938 on Tuesday with the detection of 17 new cases of novel coronavirus in the last 24 hours.

In the meantime, the number of recovered cases further improved to 5,221 and the number of active cases now stands at 493, of whom three are currently in the ICU facility of the COVID-dedicated STNM Hospital.

In the daily health bulletin on Tuesday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia, informed that of the 17 new cases, nine were detected in East District, one in West District and seven in South Sikkim.

These 17 cases were picked up from the testing of 271 samples on Monday - 13 in RT-PCR testing of 228 samples,



two in TrueNat testing of 10 samples and two in rapid antigen testing of 33 samples.

Among the new cases are two persons from Upper Burtuk, one from Arithang, one from Chongay, one from Bhusuk, one from 5th Mile-Tadong and two patients already admitted in STNM Hospital.

The State IEC officer adds that a 32-year-old

lady from Shyari has tested positive for COVID-19 but could not be contacted on the phone number provided by her during testing.

Elsewhere in the State, one person from Manpur, one from Namchi, one from Sumbuk, four from Dalep in South District and one person from Gerethang in West District were found positive for COVID-19.

With inclusion of Majhis, number of left-out communities now 12

CM MEETS REPRESENTATIVES OF LEFT-OUT COMMUNITIES

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 05 JAN:**

The Majhi community in Sikkim has now been added to the list of communities left-out from the Scheduled Tribes list. Till now, there were 11 communities of the State vying for inclusion as STs.

This was informed in a press release from the Chief Minister's Office on a coordination meeting held today at Samman Bhawan with representatives of 11 ethnic left-out communities who were invited to put forth their thoughts and suggestions on the issue.

The meeting was carried out as per the direction of the Chief Minister, PS Tamang, the release mentions.

The Chief Minister, in



his address, expressed that the inclusion of the left out communities is one of the promises made in his party's manifesto and the government will leave no stone unturned

to deliver it.

The Chief Minister also informed about the visits to New Delhi, where the delegation had met a number of Union Ministers and prominent

personalities including the Prime Minister, Home Minister, Minister for Tribal Affairs, and other central leaders. He reiterated that the Lok Sabha MP, Indra Hang

Subba has also been dedicatedly working towards this cause.

The release states that it was the first time that the representatives

turn to pg02

India records lowest daily Covid cases in over six months

NEW DELHI, JAN 5 (PTI): India recorded 16,375 new cases of coronavirus, the lowest in over six months, taking the country's COVID-19 caseload to 1,03,56,844, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Tuesday.

The death toll increased to 1,49,850 with 201 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 99,75,958 pushing the national recovery rate to 96.32 per cent, while the COVID-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent.

The COVID-19 active caseload remained below 3 lakh for the 15th consecutive day.

There are 2,31,036 active coronavirus infections in the country

which comprises 2.23 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

According to the ICMR, 17,65,31,997 samples have been tested up to January 4 with 8,96,236 samples being tested on Monday.

The 201 new fatalities include 29 from Maharashtra, 25 from West Bengal, 24 from Punjab, 19 from Kerala and 12 each from Delhi and Chhattisgarh.

turn to pg02

Mahendra Dhakal elected joint secretary of AICF

**SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 05 JAN:**

Mahendra Dhakal has been elected as the joint secretary of All India Chess Federation [AICF] for 2020- 2023 tenure. The new body of the federation is led by Dr Sanjay Kapoor as president with Bharat Singh Chauhan as secretary among other office bearers.

Mr Dhakal was elected as joint secretary during the election of the federation held digitally online on Monday. He is also the general secretary of Sikkim Chess Association and the only international arbiter of chess from Sikkim.

He has played an important role in the pro-



motion and development of chess and has already produced lots of chess players from Sikkim including numerous FIDE rated players.

Speaking to Summit-TIMES over the phone from Delhi, Mr Dhakal expressed his happiness on being elected as the joint secretary of the national body of the chess federa-

tion after a close contest in the election. He added that it is a proud moment for the entire chess federation of the state.

"I will work with good coordination in the national body for further promotion and development of chess and to bring out many more rated players from Sikkim," he expressed.

Sales went down but books survived in 2020

**ZAFRI MUDASSER NOFIL
NEW DELHI, JAN 5 (PTI):** Publishing in India saw several challenges in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic but focus on online sales and making best use of various digital platforms helped in promotion of books and keep authors in the public eye, say publishers.

With zero sales for almost three months, many had to trim their publishing list drastically. However, publishers adapted and actively looked for trends to cater to the subjects their readers would find useful and engaging. New and innovative ways of marketing and selling books also became a part of the year gone by which saw people reading more.

Millie Ashwarya, publisher at Ebury Publishing and Vintage Groups, Penguin Random House India, says 2020 was also the year when the power of digital transformation was felt in publishing like in other

industries. "While some bookshops shut down, some new ones opened and online sales saw a surge. All in all, 2020 was full of learnings and got us more focused on our business," she told PTI.

HarperCollins India CEO Ananth Padmanabhan says 2020 was unprecedented in every way - and specifically to the business of publishing - one when in India printed books were declared non-essentials.

"The entire value chain had zero sales for almost three months. This did teach us all many valuable lessons about the way we conduct our business but even more importantly about the way readers will buy books in the future - formats, retail, genres and how often too," he says.

"We continued our publishing program - beginning with digital first, E-books through April and May and by late June our new books in print had also

started to go out - depending on how unlock rules impacted retail," he adds. According to Padmanabhan, sales in 2020 were at higher double digit rates over 2019, both by value and volume.

The single most impactful change, he says, has been innovative digital marketing that can bridge the discoverability gap, considering physical stores are shut.

Chiki Sarkar, publisher at Juggernaut, says its "list was cut drastically, so revenues fell but the books we did publish pretty much performed as they would on any year and a large number of our books have gone into reprint".

Westland publisher Karthika VK too says there was a direct impact at every level as "we couldn't publish at all for three months, apart from the sheer logistical difficulties of getting books to readers even after the lockdown had lifted, due to disruptions in the dis-

tribution and retail chain". According to Thomas Abraham, Managing Director, Hachette India, the publishing experience was fairly bad with the battering brick and mortar stores had to take and they're just about recovering slowly. "Online did really well in holding up lists, but new books and the lesser known title which needed the discoverability at curated stores lost out badly."

Hachette India editor-in-chief and publisher Poulomi Chatterjee adds they had to reschedule many key new releases in the local list keeping in mind a slow and erratic market.

"Physical bookstores, when they reopened, saw low footfall so offline visibility of new books too was affected. Releases of the select list of books that were published in 2020 were meticulously planned so they would get adequate attention and visibility," she says.

turn to pg02

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India readies roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines for 300 million people

NEW DELHI, 05 JAN (REUTERS): India is set to roll out a COVID-19 vaccination programme by next week, aiming to cover 300 million people by July, its top health official said in what would be one of the world's largest inoculation drives against the coronavirus.

Authorities have readied some 29,000 cold storage facilities across the country and large scale vaccination dry-runs have been conducted in 125 districts encompassing all states, federal health secretary Rajesh Bhushan said on Tuesday.

"A final call will be taken by the government," Bhushan told a press briefing when asked about a specific roll-out date.

India's drug regulator on Sunday approved two vaccines - including the one developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University - for emergency use, also drawing interest from other developing countries scouting for COVID-19 shots.

Bhushan said there was no ban on vaccine exports, clarifying media reports that the government had imposed restrictions to ensure domestic vaccine requirements are met first.

India is the world's biggest vaccine maker, and its pharmaceutical industry has been freeing up capacity and pushing ahead with investments to help support a global vaccination campaign.

But India's government has not announced any purchase agreement with either of the two approved vaccine makers: Bharat Biotech and Serum Institute of India, which will manufacture the AstraZeneca-Oxford shot.

Under the current plan, vaccines will be first delivered by manufacturers to four key storage facilities and then moved to 37 state-level stores, Bhushan said.

From there, the shots will be transported by road to hundreds of districts, where local officials will vaccinate pre-registered health-care workers at designated facilities.

In the eastern state of Odisha, for example, authorities have prepared a database of more than 300,000 healthcare workers who would be vaccinated across 3,898 facilities by five-member teams, according to a government document.

Sales went down...

As publishing schedules were drawn up well in advance, editors continued working on books as planned even while lockdown impacted sales quite severely in the early months.

"The early months were particularly difficult for everyone as we were trying to get used to working from home amid much uncertainty regarding what lay ahead," says Himanjali Sankar, Editorial Director at Simon and Schuster.

For Renuka Chatterjee, VP Publishing at Speaking Tiger, "Overall sales may have gone down but we survived. We focused on online sales and made best use of the various digital platforms that opened up to market and promote our books and keep our authors in the public eye."

The impact of the pandemic was strongly felt by Oxford University Press

India and the learning community, especially young learners who needed engagement and handholding in a remote learning environment.

"Responding with agility, we at OUP India added extensively to our vast repository of digital and online resources and combined them with our print books while constantly engaging with teachers on remote teaching methodologies," says its managing director Sivaramakrishnan Venkateswaran.

"Whether it was providing free access to resources on COVID-19 to researchers and medical professionals, offering free access to our education platforms, supporting professional development for teachers, or sharing guidance on home learning, we made our valuable content available to the widest audience during these challenging

times," he says.

Since the pandemic took the publishing industry by storm, at least during the complete lockdown in India, acquiring editors were compelled to be more selective than ever as publishing lists were tightened, says Rajdeep Mukherjee, managing director of Pan Macmillan India.

"Publicists adapted promotional campaigns to suit a world moved online as on-the-ground activities stood cancelled, sales representatives found it highly challenging to convince brick-and-mortar bookstores, already struggling due to the growing predominance of online retailers, to place significant orders," he says.

Bhaskar Roy, CEO of Palimpsest Publishing House, says though publishing has suffered badly for close to a year

now and lockdown drastically reduced footfalls in bookshops, people read more as they remained in their homes.

"Also, now that outings are unfashionable, book ideas shelved for years are being dusted off and turned into texts. Some of them are sure to figure in publishers' lists in the New Year," he says.

Trisha De Niyogi of Niyogi Books thinks the year forced publishers to reinvent and innovate.

"During the lockdown, we realised more and more people were reading, which has always been music to our ears. The importance of ebooks and audiobooks cannot be ignored, more so now. The rollercoaster ride of 2020 is bound to continue into 2021, but we feel more prepared. I am confident that we will find a (or a few) way out," she says.



All Sikkim Scheduled Caste Ad-hoc Committee meets

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 05 JAN:

A Constituency Level meeting of All Sikkim Scheduled Caste Ad-hoc Committee for Rinchenpong was held in the Community Hall of Sribadam School today, a press release informs.

The meeting was attended by Sikkim Krantikari Morcha [SKM] SC Cell State Level president, Jagdish Cintury, Chief Ad-

visor, JS Maley, Hari Shankar, Constituency In-charge, Phurba Tshering Bhutia, CLC president along with other leaders cum members of the SKM party.

During the meeting, various speakers discussed the upliftment of the community and planning needed to make that possible. The elections for ASSCAC were also discussed during the meeting.

SKM SC Wing president, Jagdish Cin-

tury said that the government will extend all support for the upliftment of the Scheduled Caste community.

After the election, the new team of ASSCAC shall meet Chief Minister, PS Tamang and discuss the problems of the community, he informed.

A one-day health camp was also organized along with the meeting in association with Gyalshing Hospital.

Haryana issues advisory after 4 lakh poultry birds die in 10 days

CHANDIGARH, 05 JAN

[PTI]: The Haryana animal husbandry and dairy department has issued an advisory on poultry and related products amid reports over suspected spread of avian influenza virus.

The department spokesperson in a statement said four lakh poultry birds have died in unusual circumstances in the last 10 days in 20 poultry farms in some areas in Panchkula district.

Samples were collected and sent to the Regional Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (RDDL) in Jalandhar, from where a report is awaited, he said. The RDDL team has reached Barwala for re-sampling of the birds and there are no confirmed reports of avian influenza as yet, he added.

He said though mortality in poultry is higher compared to previous months, the department has a standard advisory on consumption of poultry in

case of avian influenza.

In areas free of the disease, poultry and poultry products can be cooked and consumed with no fear of acquiring infection of avian influenza virus, the department said. The spokesperson said the avian influenza virus is sensitive to heat, and normal temperature used for cooking can kill the virus.

"...When handling raw poultry or raw poultry products, persons involved in food preparation should wash their hands thoroughly and clean and disinfect surfaces in contact with the poultry products. Soap and hot water are sufficient for this purpose," the department said in the statement.

The spokesperson said that till date, no evidence indicates that any person has got infected after consuming properly cooked poultry or poultry products, even when these foods were contaminated with the avian influenza.

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With inclusion...

from 11 left-out communities had gathered under one roof and the CM encouraged all to work collectively. He urged them to form a committee to further strengthen the cause.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister also informed them about visiting New Delhi with a delegation which will include Ministers, MLAs, MP, and the representatives of the 12 communities.

On the occasion, Cabinet Ministers; Arun Upreti, Sanjeet Kharel, L.N. Sharma, B.S. Panth; MLA Rhenock Constituency, Bisnu Kr. Khatiwara; M P. Lok Sabha, Indira Hang Subba; Political Advisor to CM, T. N. Dhakal, Press Advisor to CM, C. P. Sharma, Chairperson OBC, Pavitra Bhandari along with other officers and executive members of various organizations were present on the occasion.

India records...

A total of 1,49,850 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 49,695 from Maharashtra followed by 12,166 from Tamil Nadu, 12,110 from Karnataka, 10,597 from Delhi, 9,817 from West Bengal, 8,413 from Uttar Pradesh, 7,118 from Andhra Pradesh and 5,400 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.

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ANTHYESTI KRIYA

The Anthyesti Kriya (13th day rites) of Late. DK Gajmer (IAS), former Principal Secretary and Chief Information Commissioner who left for heavenly abode on 26th December 2020 falls on 7th January 2021 (Thursday).

Prayers for the departed soul are being performed at our residence opposite State Bank of India (SBI) ATM, Development Area, Gangtok.

We would like to thank each and every one of you for being there for us at this time of bereavement.

At the same time, we would also like to request all to kindly adhere to the prescribed COVID-19 protocols please.

**Pamela Gajmer (Wife),
Vaishnav and Binita (Son and Daughter
-in-law), Deepkant (Son),
D.B. Gajmer (Brother) and the
entire Gajmer family.
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GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

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

BUILDING FOR SALE

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

Akashaditya Lama conferred Kumud Bhushan Kala Sanskriti Samman

SUMMIT REPORT

RANGPO, 05 JAN:

Sikkim Youth Foundation resource person, Akashaditya Lama from Mumbai, was conferred the Kumud Bhushan Kala Sanskriti Samman at the 28th annual ceremony of Etawah Hindi Seva Nidhi today.

The Kumud Bhushan Kala Sanskriti Samman is awarded in the memory of eminent theatre artist, Kumud Bhushan, the wife of lawyer and former Union Minister, Shanti Bhushan.

Akashaditya Lama



received the award from former Governor of West Bengal, Kesari Nath Tripathi, and Judge of Allahabad High Court who delivered the verdict of Ram Mandir, Sudhir Agarwal, at a ceremony held at North Central Zone Cultural Centre, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh today.

Aakashaditya Lama is a well-known writer and film director.

He has written more than 3,000 episodes for TV serials including many for hit shows like Kumkum, Pyar Ke Do

Naam Ek Radha Ek Shyam and Jhil Mil Sitaro ka Aangan Hoga. He is also the author of the well-known drama Mohenjodaro. In addition, he is the first writer-director to make films in the Naga language.

His Naga-language film, Nani Teri Morni, has gained fame at several international film festivals including The International Film Festival of India, Goa. His next commercial film "Tauba Tera Jalwa" is set for a theatrical release soon.

Avinam Mangar to take part in National Youth Parliament Fest 2021

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 05 JAN:

Avinam Mangar is all set to represent Sikkim in the National Youth Parliament Festival 2021 to be held at the Parliament, New Delhi on 11 and 12 January. He stood first in the State Youth Parliament 2021 held virtually here on Monday. He is a 3rd year English Honors student of Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College, Tadong.

District Youth Parliament was held virtually on 31 December where Avinam spoke on a flagship programme of the Centre, 'Unnat Bharat Abhiyan' and was shortlisted for the State Youth Parliament 2021.

It is informed that 42 participants from all four districts participated at the district-level and two participants from each district were shortlisted for the State Youth Parliament.

In the State Youth Par-



liament 2021 held virtually on 04 January, Avinam impressed judges by speaking on the topic 'Supercharging Youth for a New India' to finish on the first position and got an opportunity to speak in the Parliament by representing Sikkim in the National Youth Parliament Festival 2021.

He will also be accompanied by Swarnim Tamang and Tenzing Doma Lepcha, who came second and third respectively in the state-level, to Delhi as delegates in the National Youth Parliament Festival 2021.

Speaking to Summit Times, Avinam expressed his happiness and excitement on representing Sikkim in the National Youth Parliament Festival 2021.

"It is very rare for someone from the age group of 18 to 25 years to speak in the Parliament, so it is a huge opportunity for me to speak in the Parliament by representing my state," he said.

He is scheduled to speak on the topic 'Vocal for Local: Pathway to Transformational Change to make India an Economic Superpower'.

Music video 'Kavi' released



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 05 JAN:

"Kavi" a music video produced by 4Clef Studios was released in Gangtok

today. The video starring Doma Tamang and Anurag Baraily, is directed by Sabin Tamang. The music video has been

shot in Sikkim and has been edited and filmed by Prashant Thatal with music is composed by Aditya Pradhan.

Union Budget to be presented on Feb 1, say sources

NEW DELHI, 05 JAN

[NDTV]: The Union budget will be presented in parliament on February 1, sources said, adding President Ram Nath Kovind will address both the Houses - Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha - on January 29.

The budget session of parliament will be conducted in two parts. The first phase of the session will begin on January 29 with President Kovind's address and end on February 15. The second phase will run from March 8 to April 8, sources said.

The decision was taken by the Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs or CCPA.

The centre had last month cancelled the winter session of parliament because of the coronavirus pandemic. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi had said in a letter to the Congress's Lok Sabha leader that all political parties were in favour of scrapping the session to avoid any Covid spread.

"I have informally contacted floor leaders of various political parties and they have expressed their concerns about the ongoing

pandemic and opined of doing away with Winter Session. The government is willing to have the next session of Parliament at the earliest. It would be appropriate to have the Budget Session, 2021 in January, keeping in mind the unprecedented circumstances created by Covid-19 pandemic (sic)," the letter read.

The Congress had, however, said that it was not consulted and that the winter session was cancelled by the centre to avoid questions on the ongoing farmers' protest against three central laws.

"We wanted to raise the farmers' issues in parliament and wanted a solution. The way the farmers are protesting in the cold is not good for the country's image," Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chaudhary had told NDTV.

Seventeen members of the Lok Sabha and eight from the Upper House of parliament had tested positive in September last year, forcing the centre to curtail the monsoon session. Many MPs had contracted the virus in parliament despite strict anti-Covid measures.

"Republic Day Trailer": Farmers announce Tractor March on Thursday

NEW DELHI, 05 JAN

[NDTV]: A day after talks with the centre ended in a stalemate, the protesting farmers have announced that they will intensify their agitation against the three contentious agriculture laws for the next two weeks. Swaraj India's Yogenendra Yadav, who has been backing the protesters, said on Tuesday that a tractor march will be organised at four Delhi borders on January 7 to press for their demands -- repealing the laws and giving legal guarantee for the Minimum Support Price (MSP) system. The leader called the march a "trailer" before the massive Republic Day agitation.

"We have decided that on January 7, we will take out a tractor march at four borders of Delhi including Eastern and Western peripheral. This will be a trailer for what lies ahead on January 26," Mr Yadav said at a press conference at the Singhu border, the epicentre of the protests.

"From tomorrow, for 2 weeks, 'Desh Jagran Abhiyan' will be started and protests will be intensified throughout

the country," he added. Last week, farmers had warned that they would intensify their protests if their demands were not met in the January 4 meeting. They had also announced a tractor rally and nationwide protests on January 26.

"On January 26, we will hold a massive rally in Delhi with tricolours on tractors. We give a call for countrywide protests at all headquarters (of the unions)," the protesting farmers had said.

At the seventh round of the centre-farmer meeting yesterday, no breakthrough was made as both sides remained unmoved over their stance on the laws. Sources said the government proposed to discuss the farmers' demand for a legal guarantee for MSP, but the farmers' union leaders insisted on discussing the repeal of farm laws.

Agriculture Minister Narendra Kumar "clearly said that the laws will not be repealed. He even told us to approach the Supreme Court for repeal of the laws," said Sarwan Singh Pandher of the Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee, who attended the meeting.

India gets its first women's team in disaster combat



New Delhi, Jan 5 (PTI): In yet another example of shattering of the proverbial glass ceiling, the first batch of over 100 women disaster combatants and rescuers has been inducted in the country's federal calamity force NDRF.

An all-woman team of freshly trained National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) personnel was recently deployed for contingency duties on the banks of the Ganga river in Uttar Pradesh's Garh Mukteshwar town, a senior force officer said.

"The first women rescuers' team is already on ground. Recently, the UP government requisitioned an NDRF team and they (women) went there (Garh Mukteshwar). The team handled the rescue boats and related equipments," NDRF director general S N Pradhan told PTI in an interview.

"These personnel have all the skills to be called complete rescuers," he said.

The move to include women personnel in the NDRF combat ranks was in the works for some time. The force, since it was raised over a decade ago, was till now an all-male affair.

More than 100 women personnel have joined the NDRF over the last few months and they are being deputed with its battalions across the

country as soon as they finish their pre-induction course and training, the DG said.

He said the numbers are expected to go over 200 women personnel in the near future.

The female personnel who are joining are in the constabulary and sub-officer (Sub Inspector and Inspector) ranks.

As per authorisation, each NDRF battalion of over 1,000 personnel can have 108 woman rescuers.

Pradhan, however, said as there are "pre-existing" vacancies in the feeder agencies or the paramilitary forces who send them to the disaster response force on deputation, it will take more time for the full strength of female combatants to join.

The DG said the women personnel will add to the strength and skills of the force in rescuing disaster victims and even in calamity mitigation.

"We can deploy both components of an all-woman NDRF team or a mix squad of male and female personnel for responding to a situation. We prefer the second because if there is complement of women personnel it makes a great difference on the ground where women, children and old persons are being rescued," Pradhan said.

"The skill sets of women are stronger in some aspects... so that can be leveraged especially in situations where women are victims," he said.

He further said the initial feedback to the first women's team in disaster combat has been good.

"They are performing well. From initial feedback, I think they will be a great efficiency multiplier and also a great symbol of pride, inclusion and gender sensitivity which is also part of the Prime Minister's ten-point agenda for disaster response," he said.

The DG added the force is continuously creating women-oriented infrastructure at its existing and futuristic bases across the country.

Every NDRF battalion has been seconded by a Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) like the CRPF or the ITBP and the parent force is responsible for feeding its manpower, who are sent on a time-bound deputation to the force.

The NDRF has 12 operational battalions at present located in various states.

It is a specialised unit that was raised in 2006 for specific tasks of relief and rescue during natural and man-made disasters or life threatening situations.

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV	Precautions to Prevent nCoV
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fever ● Difficulty in breathing ● Dry Cough ● Severe acute respiratory syndrome ● Pneumonia - like symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wash your hands often with soap. ● Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer ● Observe good personal hygiene. ● Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands. ● Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms. ● Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats. ● Avoid travel to nCoV affected places. ● Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome. and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.
Treatment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition. ● No vaccinations available as of now. ● Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected 	

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New STNM
AMS : 9434711402

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

Shed the Mediocrity

Get informed, and then demand better

The talk about developing Sikkim into a “knowledge-based” society has been around for a while. What it is being said in polite terms is that effort is required to draw Sikkim away from the mediocrity of its human resource that infiltrates just about every field of activity here. Take journalism for instance. No one will praise the media in Sikkim as outstanding. Promising, maybe, maybe even prolific, but not outstanding. Not quite yet. At best, we can be accepted as average. Of course, we in the media will never admit even to ourselves that we compete in mediocrity, but that is another discussion altogether.

But why is the fourth estate so mediocre in Sikkim? Not because there is a dearth of committed media-persons in the region, but simply because no demands are made of them for excellence by the readers. Mediocrity flourishes in the absence of pressure. Much the same holds true for every other aspect of life here. Take governance for example. The bureaucracy remains somnambulant, because the public representatives don’t shake them up often enough. Take a look around, administrative basics and even etiquette remain ignored until too late. And then a situation explodes into a dharna and issues get resolved, leading one to wonder why it takes public demonstrations to get heard. It is obvious that all of these situations arrived with enough advance warning, but remained unaddressed until only excuses and shifting of blame could be offered where simple outreach and consultations could have worked. That said, even public representatives don’t get pro-active. This, primarily because the people don’t demand delivery or even action from them and appear satisfied with securing favours instead of claiming their rights.

It’s a vicious cycle, but not one that is impossible to break. All it requires is involvement.

No one will strive for excellence if it is not demanded of them. Also, no one will strive for excellence if it is not recognized either. And recognition is possible only if the people differentiate between what is downright puerile, what is average and what sets the bar of performance higher. And that brings us back to the need of having a “knowledge-based” society. Simply put, only a society that is “knowledgeable” will be able to demand that its intelligence is respected. This knowledge should not be confused with literacy [Sikkim does quite well on that front]. Knowledge here is about being informed. People who are aware of what is happening around them can take intelligent decisions and once the people think intelligently, then those who serve them [from the media, to the public servant, to the public representative] will have to improve their performance too. The pressure for survival [as professionals] will itself pull Sikkim out of the mediocrity it wallows in at present.

But how does one go about it? It is not really as complicated as it sounds. For people to become more aware, all they have to do is get more involved, ask more questions, demand better answers. The government can contribute towards this transition by making information accessible. It is only after the people have been provided with information that they can mull over it and debate it. Although the debates might be immature initially, they will get better eventually. Once that happens, the people themselves will shape the knowledge-based society that Sikkim needs to grow into now.

WRITE US:

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The Need to Say it Nicer: The language we choose when we talk about substance use matters

KARA FLETCHER
theconversation.com

When Hunter Biden, son of President-elect Joe Biden, was recently interviewed by Amy Robach at ABC News, Robach brought up Hunter’s substance use issues, noting that he had been “in and out of rehab seven, eight times.”

Hunter responded, “Say it nicer to me.” He went on to correct Robach’s language, saying that he had “sought treatment for an issue, like most people” and noted that the interviewer was “insensitive.”

What was surprising about this exchange was sadly not what Robach said, but that Hunter Biden challenged it.

As a researcher who studies the lived experiences of individuals with substance use issues, I am frequently disheartened by the words chosen to talk about substance use treatment and people who use drugs.

The language used when talking to or about people who use substances is often hurtful. Instead of recognizing and understanding the chronic relapsing nature of addiction, this language regards individuals who struggle with substance use as morally reprehensible.

NEGATIVE LANGUAGE

Terminology such as, “addict,” “junkie” and “abuser” continue to be commonplace. In Hunter Biden’s case, the interviewer’s characterization was that his multiple episodes of treatment indicated a personal failure.

Negative language about individuals who use substances contributes to how society views these individuals. For example, one study had clinicians read case vignettes that either used the term “substance abuser” or “substance use disorder.” The clinicians who read the “substance abuser” vignettes were more likely to conclude that the character in the vignette was personally culpable, and were more likely to support punitive treatment for the

character.

I recently completed a study for which I interviewed 10 individuals attending outpatient treatment for substance use and 10 clinicians providing outpatient counselling.

I asked all of the participants how they perceived language around substance use, particularly as it related to relapse and recovery. I heard multiple stories of how disempowering the language around substance use can be, and how many of the participants who struggled with substance addictions felt judged and misunderstood by broader society.

RECOVERY AND RELAPSE

Relapse has become a negative word that is equated with failure instead of as a normal part of an individual’s treatment trajectory. One participant identified:

“The reality is one day something is going to happen in your life that is going to be so overwhelming that you’re going to reach for that bottle or that drug, and it just depends what you do with it afterward.”

Another participant shared a similar view:

“I’ve been trying since I was 23. So, if I didn’t understand relapse, there’s not a chance I’d still be alive talking to you today. Because, um, I would just figure that I’ve failed at recovery and that’s it.”

Treating relapse as personal failure, is another example of how language around substance use continues to stigmatise the individual, and ignore the complex realities of substance addiction.

As another participant described, individuals who are no longer using substances are described as “clean.” From his perspective, the implication is that if you are not “clean,” you are somehow “dirty.” This participant shared how his parents use this language when talking to him about his own experience:

“Well, especially my mother’s husband, which is a trigger. Like, ‘are you still clean? Have you made

a mistake yet?’ You know they’re asking me if I’ve slipped up.”

AVOIDING WORDS THAT PERPETUATE BIAS

There continues to be an ingrained hierarchy of social acceptability when it comes to drugs. Caffeine and alcohol are seen to be socially acceptable, whereas other drugs such as crack cocaine, methamphetamine and opiates are considered unacceptable and the individuals who use these drugs are viewed as social outcasts.

Community members, academics and researchers continue to call for a change in the language we use to talk about substance use and addictions. For example, in 2014 the editorial team of the journal Substance Abuse, called for an increased consideration of the language used to describe the experiences of substance use disorders, including incorporating people-first language, promoting the recovery process and avoiding slang that perpetuates stereotypes and biases.

As we leave behind the holiday season, when imbibing and celebrating are socially normalized, it is important to consider the internalized judgment placed on individuals who use substances and struggle with their use. The words we choose to talk to and about individuals who use substances are critical, as they contribute to how drug policy, substance use treatment and societal understanding are framed.

As a study participant concluded:

“I certainly didn’t intend for this to happen to me. Nobody does. Yeah, I wish society would understand. But how can you understand when you have not been there yourself, right? Some do, some do. But in general, I don’t think so.”

Individuals who live this experience, like Hunter Biden, continue to highlight that we need to learn to “say it nicer,” to speak without judgment, and a willingness to learn to understand.

[the writer is Assistant Professor, Faculty of Social Work, University of Regina]

The Recent Appearance of Unexplained Monoliths Offers Connections to the Ancient Past

ANDREW RODDICK & ANNA GUENGERICH
theconversation.com

In November, news outlets reported the puzzling appearance of several peculiar, highly polished metal monoliths in remote landscapes around the world.

Some, naturally, blamed aliens. Others saw similarities with Stanley Kubrick’s iconic metal monolith of 2001: A Space Odyssey.

As archeologists, we watched these events with some amusement. Imposing, isolated standing stones have been important in many historical cultures of the world, from Mongolia to the British Isles.

Our expertise lies in the monoliths of the South American Andes: monumental, human-like figures carved of single blocks of stone that are remarkable not only in their form and style, but also in the stories they tell.

THE ARCHEOLOGY OF BOLIVIA’S MONOLITHS

The monoliths of highland Bolivia served as the focal point of public religious rituals as far back as 800 BCE and have remained a source of fascination ever since. When Inca armies conquered this area in the 15th century, they saw them as leftovers from the world’s creation.

In the 16th century, the next set of invaders — Spanish conquistadors — were told that they were the work of giants. Over the next centuries, they were dynamited to build railroads, stolen by foreign collectors and even

used as target practice by the Bolivian army.

Since the early 20th century, however, a number of new monoliths have come to light during excavations by Bolivian and foreign archeologists, and by local residents during the course of everyday activities such as farming fields and building houses. Many dating to over 2,000 years ago, some quite elaborately carved, have been found throughout the region.

The best known monoliths are those of the UNESCO site of Tiwanaku in Bolivia, a place that was famous in its heyday (400-1000) for attracting pilgrims from across the Andes despite its lung-crushing setting at 3,800 metres above sea level. Many of these volcanic stone monoliths are intricately carved. The largest of these, the Bennett Monolith — recently returned to its original site — stands a staggering seven metres high. Other smaller monoliths are found scattered around the site, but also in house patios in the modern town.

ANIMATE STONES

The opportunity to interact with monoliths may have been the main attraction of Tiwanaku for its religious devotees. For many Indigenous Peoples of the Andes, stones and mountains are understood as powerful beings that can intervene in human lives.

And like the mysterious metal monoliths, the importance of the monoliths is associated with their natural environments. Chemical analyses confirm that the stone for Tiwa-

naku monoliths comes from mountains that the Aymara people see as sacred, living beings with distinct personalities. In the past, devotees likely sought to interact with these beings in their form as monoliths under altered states of consciousness through drugs, alcohol or musically induced trance.

The principal monoliths of Tiwanaku hold in one hand a drinking vessel — similar to a modern pilsner glass — and in the other a flat tablet for inhaling hallucinogenic snuff. Archeologists have found both types of artifacts, and even psychotropic drugs, at Tiwanaku and other sites in Bolivia, Chile and Peru.

When Tiwanaku’s government collapsed around 1000, monoliths appear to have borne the brunt of people’s anger. Many were decapitated, defaced or broken apart. One broken monolith was united in the late 1970s with its other half: the 998-kilogram upper portion was found 220 kilometres away, across Lake Titicaca, and identified via microscopic analysis. Other monoliths survived, only to suffer under later Spanish invaders, who pried off gold plating and, in some cases, inscribed them with crosses and dates, and ceremoniously buried them.

For many Bolivian Aymara, stone monoliths continue to live in the present. Current residents of the town near Tiwanaku have told our collaborators of monoliths coming to life at night, wandering the streets. In 2006, Evo Morales — Bolivia’s first Indigenous president — was sworn

in at Tiwanaku under the watchful eye of the Ponce Monolith.

MONOLITHS FOR THIS CENTURY

Elsewhere, new monoliths are still being born.

In 2007, sculptor Ruben Herrera signed a contract with the municipality of Guaqui to chisel a replica of the Bennett Monolith. He extracted a 20-tonne rock from a nearby hill using traditional techniques. Despite working for 20 months, he was never paid. The monolith remains in its place of production, but is now incorporated into a property wall.

Villagers told the press that Herrera had a sickness caused by the stone entering his body, and he could only be healed by local shamans (or yatiris). Today, people place candles and flowers at the foot of the replica, and yatiris pour grain alcohol on his work.

In our current moment, we are becoming ever more reliant on new and remote technologies. It seems incredible that we still find ourselves entranced by monoliths of metal and stone and the qualities of objects that seem to emerge magically out of the earth.

As archeologists, however, we don’t find this mystifying at all. Artifacts and art like the animate Andean monoliths possess an extraordinary power to capture our attention even as civilizations rise and fall, and remind us of our connections to the places we inhabit.

[Andrew Roddick is Associate Professor of Anthropology, McMaster University; Anna Guengerich is Assistant professor, Eckerd College]

Air pollution emergency in Kathmandu



KATHMANDU, JAN 5 [MYREPUBLICA]: With increasing pollution and decreasing mercury levels, Kathmandu on Tuesday made a record of having the worst air quality in the world.

With fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) standing at 401.67 micrograms per cubic meter (µg/m³) midnight today, the air quality of the Valley has been ranked as the worst in the world.

The data maintained by Drishti Kathmandu shows that the PM_{2.5} levels of Kathmandu has been hovering in between 233 (µg/m³) and

401.67 (µg/m³) today. The PM_{2.5} levels of more than 150µg/m³ is considered extremely dangerous for human health, and people are recommended to stay indoors.

The overall air quality index of the Valley today stood at 437µg/m³ -- a Swiss air quality technology company.

As the air quality has deteriorated to the worst levels, scientists and public health experts recommend to the public to stay indoors and avoid outdoor exercises such as jogging in the

morning.

"With decreasing temperature and increasing pollution, the air quality of the Valley has become worse. It will still take a few days for the weather to improve," said Ram Charitra Shah, an environmental scientist.

"As the Valley is surrounded by hills, the polluted air stays stagnant on the surface for a longer period of time. This is the reason behind the worsening air quality in the Valley. If the Valley sees rainfall, then it will wash away the pollution from the air, or it will

take a few days for improved air quality," said Shah, adding that other countries would have already declared air pollution emergency if air quality deteriorated to our levels.

There is a provision that the authorities concerned should declare an air pollution emergency if the air quality index goes above 300 (µg/m³). However, the Ministry of Forests and Environment said that there has been no preparation to declare an emergency.

"The ministry is holding discussions with stakeholders to make

the people aware about the health hazards of the deteriorating air quality. The polluted air in Kathmandu will stay for a few days," said Prakash Lamsal, a joint secretary at the ministry, adding that there has been no discussion to declare an emergency.

"If the air quality remains the same for the next few days, the government will impose odd-even rules for vehicles in the Valley," added Lamsal.

According to environmentalist Bhusan Tuladhar, air quality has deteriorated in the Valley largely due to the increasing pollution and decline in the mercury levels. "Air quality has always been the worst in the first week of January. Having said that, people need to follow precautionary measures to avoid health hazards of pollution," said Tuladhar, adding that people need to wear masks while coming out of their homes.

"People need to change their habits in situations like these to stay safe. We need to avoid doing outdoor exercise in the morning, and should come out of home only when absolutely necessary," he added.

MP: 155 dead crows detected with bird flu in Indore



INDORE, JAN 5 (PTI): A total of 155 dead crows in Indore in Madhya Pradesh have been found with the H5N8 bird flu virus since the pathogen was first detected here a week back, an official said on Tuesday.

Veterinary Department Deputy Director Pramod Sharma said 155 crows were detected with the H5N8 virus (a strain of avian influenza) in the Residency area here in the last eight days. The deadly avian influenza had not been found in any other bird species apart from crows here so far, he said.

"Samples from 120 live hens and roosters from the area and 30 migratory birds from Sirpur Lake have been sent to a laboratory in Bhopal to check for bird flu. The reports are awaited," he informed.

He said the presence of bird flu was first detected in the city on December 29, when about 50 crows were found dead in Daly College campus of the Residency area, and tests run on two of the carcasses confirmed the presence of the pathogen.

Meanwhile, a health department official said a survey is being car-

ried out in the Residency area to check people with symptoms like cold, cough and fever, though he added that no case of the H5N8 infection had been found in humans.

On Monday, an MP Public Relations Department official said from December 23 to January 3, the state witnessed deaths of 142 crows in Indore, 100 in Mandasaur, 112 in Agar-Malwa, 13 in Khargone and nine in Sehore district.

Their samples have been sent to a laboratory in Bhopal for analysis and to determine the cause of death.

WB minister Laxmi Ratan Shukla resigns

KOLKATA, JAN 5 (PTI): West Bengal Minister of State for Youth Services and Sports Laxmi Ratan Shukla resigned from his post on Tuesday, sources in the state secretariat said.

Shukla sent his resignation letter to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and a copy of it to Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar, they said.

The former cricketer's resignation came almost a fortnight after state transport minister Suvendu Adhikari

had left the party and joined BJP.

Former captain of the Bengal Ranji team, 39-year-old Shukla, MLA of Howrah (Uttar), in his resignation letter to Banerjee expressed his willingness to "retire" from politics, the officials said.

Shukla, who was looking after the TMC affairs in Howrah district, however, has not given up his post as an MLA, they added.

Repeated calls to Shukla's mobile number went unanswered.

For the first time in Nepal, a woman gets recommended as an amicus curiae

KATHMANDU, JAN 5 [MYREPUBLICA]: Nepal's Supreme Court Bar Association has recommended the name of senior advocate Geeta Pathak as an amicus curiae with an objective of making the bench inclusive before beginning the hearing on the over a dozen writ petitions filed against the dissolution of House of Representatives.

A working committee meeting of the Supreme Court Bar held on Monday recommended Pathak's name for the same, said Vice-Chairperson of the Bar, Raju Khadka. The Supreme Court Bar on Friday recommended the names of incumbent president of Bar, senior advocate Khagendra Prasad Adhikari, and recently elected president, senior advocate Purna Man Shakya,

for the same. Pathak was recommended for the same as Bar president Adhikari is in isolation after being infected with the coronavirus.

The Supreme Court had issued an order to appoint two senior advocates from the Supreme Court Bar for amicus curiae to decide the HoR dissolution case. However, Nepal Bar Association on Thursday recommended senior advocates Badri Bahadur Karki, Satish Krishna Kharel and Bijay Kant Mainali to the amicus curiae.

Written responses of the President, Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers and Speaker of HoR have already been submitted as per the order of the Supreme Court. The SC is conducting the hearing on the case from January 6.

11 new cases take Mizoram's COVID-19 tally to 4,234



AIZAWL, JAN 5 (PTI): At least 11 people, including two Border Security Force personnel, have tested positive for COVID-19 in Mizoram, taking the tally in the state to 4,234, a health department official said on Tuesday.

Of the fresh cases, eight were reported from Aizawl district, two from Lunglei and one from Kolasib, he said.

Ten new patients have travel history, and it is yet to be ascertained how the remaining one person contracted the disease, the official said.

At least 4,147 people have been cured of the disease in the state, and the recovery rate currently stands at 97.95 per cent.

Mizoram now has 79 active cases, and eight patients have died so far.

Aizawl has the maximum number of active cases at 43, followed by Lunglei at 19 and Lawngtlai at eight.

The northeastern state has so far conducted 1,82,272 sample tests for COVID-19, including 921 on Monday, and the positivity rate is at 2.32 per cent.

Mamata stands in queue to collect health scheme card



KOLKATA, JAN 5 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday stood in a queue along with other locals in Kalighat area here to collect her 'Swasthya Sathi' smart card from a Kolkata Municipal Corporation distribution centre.

State BJP president Dilip Ghosh, however, dubbed the move as "pure drama".

The TMC chief, accompanied by urban development minister Firhad Hakim and other government officials, arrived at Joy Hind Bhavan, close to her residence on

Harish Chatterjee Street, around 11.45 am, to collect the card.

Swasthya Sathi, a flagship scheme launched by the TMC government, provides health cover of up to Rs 5 lakh per annum to a family for secondary and tertiary care.

Hakim, while talking to reporters, said that the chief minister stood in the queue like any ordinary person to collect the card.

It goes on to show that she is one among the people of the state, he stated.

The CM had on Monday urged all ministers

of her government to collect the card.

"I will keep this card in my archive. I urge other ministers, too, to join the scheme," she had said.

The state government has been providing 'Swasthya Sathi' smart cards to people, as part of her 'Duare Sarkar' initiative -- a mass outreach programme for doorstep delivery of welfare scheme benefits.

State chief secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay had said that over one crore people have enrolled themselves for the scheme so far.

67 died of drug abuse in Mizoram in 2020: Official

AIZAWL, JAN 5 (PTI): At least 67 people, including six women, have died due to substance abuse in Mizoram in 2020 with heroin being the main killer drug, an official said on Tuesday.

The state had reported 55 drug-related fatalities in 2019.

"All the 67 people, who died of drug abuse last year, were addicted to heroin. The state government has been taking several measures to curb the menace," the excise and narcotics department official said.

Most of the drugs, especially heroin, have

been smuggled from Myanmar, he said.

Mizoram, which is sandwiched between Myanmar and Bangladesh, has been grappling with drug abuse since 1984 when the death of a heroin user was reported for the first time in the state.

The hilly state shares 722 km of the international border with these two countries.

Until 2015, spasmoxon, which is used as a pain-killer, had caused maximum drug-related deaths in the state.

With an increasing

supply of heroin from Myanmar and neighbouring states, it has become the main killer drug, the official said.

The excise and narcotics department's data showed that at least 1,646 people, including 193 women, have died of drug abuse in Mizoram since 1984.

In a bid to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease, the international border with the two countries have been sealed since March 2020, which has considerably reduced smuggling of drug and alcohol last year, he added.

England faces lockdown that will last at least six weeks

LONDON (AP): England is facing a third national lockdown that will last at least six weeks, as authorities struggle to stem a surge in COVID-19 infections that threatens to overwhelm hospitals around the U.K.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Monday announced a tough new stay-at-home order for England that won't be reviewed until at least mid-February to combat a fast-spreading variant of the coronavirus. It takes effect at midnight Tuesday. Scottish leader Nicola Sturgeon imposed a lockdown that began Tuesday.

Johnson and Sturgeon said the lockdowns were needed to protect the National Health

Service as a new, more contagious variant of COVID-19 sweeps across Britain. On Monday, hospitals in England were treating 26,626 coronavirus patients, 40% more than during the first pandemic peak in April.

Many U.K. hospitals have already been forced to cancel elective surgery, and the strain of the pandemic may soon delay cancer surgery and limit intensive care services for patients without COVID-19, Professor Neil Mortenson, president of the Royal College of Surgeons, told Times Radio.

"Over the weekend we talked about a slow-motion car crash, but I think it's getting much worse than that

now," he said.

Beginning Tuesday, primary and secondary schools and colleges in England will be closed for in-person learning except for the children of key workers and vulnerable pupils. University students will not be returning until at least mid-February. People were told to work from home unless it's impossible to do so, and to leave home only for essential trips.

All nonessential shops and personal care services like hairdressers will be closed, and restaurants can only operate takeout.

Britain has reported over 75,500 virus-related deaths, one of the highest tallies in Europe.

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Sudeva Delhi FC aim high ahead of maiden I-League season

NEW DELHI, JAN 5 (PTI): First-timers Sudeva Delhi FC are aiming to win as many matches as possible in the upcoming I-League and make a statement in their maiden season in the country's second tier football league.

Head coach Chencho Dorji said that he would want his players to be at the best of their abilities while maintaining a healthy win/loss ratio.

Speaking at the club's virtual media day, Dorji said, "We have to give our cent per cent in each and every match. We would want to fight for the title and learn from our defeats. If possible we want to win all of our matches and make a statement."

"It will be a challenge for everyone involved but there could be no bigger platform for young Indian talent than playing in the Hero I-League."

"I want my players to enjoy every second on the field and play with a desire to win," he added.

The first club from the national capital to play in the I-League, Sudeva Delhi FC have opted for an all-Indian squad in their first season.

"The message was always clear that we will go with an all-Indian squad," said Dorji.

"Playing in the I-League is a privilege and we want to give as many opportunities as possible to Indian talent."

For midfielder Ansh Gupta, a season in the I-League means living his dream. "It is every Indian player's dream to play in the Hero I-league and it will be a dream come true for me. All of us are very hungry to play football and more than that we are raring to win matches."

"Being an all-Indian side, everyone gets game time and everyone gets an equal opportunity to perform. During the course of the season we have to take baby steps and keep working and learning from our mistakes," he said. Sudeva FC face Mohammedan SC in their opening clash and coach Dorji wants to start the season on a winning note.

"Starting the season with a win will tell us where we are heading and where we have to put in more hard work. It would boost our hopes for a good debut season."

"We have a possession-based style of playing football and we want to start the season on a positive note. The players have the capability of doing so, hence we are very excited to be finally playing in the Hero I-League," Dorji stated.

Speaking on the challenge of pre-season because of the COVID pandemic, Dorji said, "We have fitness sessions with all of our players on zoom calls and we derived ways of keeping them busy."

"The challenge is to keep them mentally and physically as fit as possible ahead of the season because in the bio-bubble, you have very limited options. We made the best of what we had and the team is raring to go."

Lampard to be given time at Chelsea despite concern over recent results

JACOB STEINBERG

LONDON, 05 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Frank Lampard is to be given time to prove he deserves to stay in his post as Chelsea's manager despite growing alarm behind the scenes about performances and the club's board being alerted to Thomas Tuchel's interest in the job if it becomes available.

Chelsea's faltering title challenge suffered another setback when they lost 3-1 at home against Manchester City on Sunday, putting Lampard in danger of being sacked before the end of his second season in charge. Although the humiliating defeat by City is unlikely to result in the 42-year-old being dismissed, he is under mounting pressure and the hierarchy could be forced to act if they fear Champions League qualification slipping from their grasp.

Tuchel, who led Paris Saint-Germain to the Champions League final last season before being sacked by the French champions last month, has been put forward as a potential replacement.

The pressure on Lampard has grown following a run of four defeats in six games, leaving the board increasingly concerned about the team's lack of progress this season. Roman Abramovich, the owner, gave Lampard over £200m to spend on signings last summer but Chelsea lie in eighth place after 17 games. They are seven points behind Liverpool in first place and, unless their



form improves, face a fight to finish in the top four.

It is believed Lampard, whose contract runs out in the summer of 2022, retains Chelsea's backing for now. Conscious of his legendary status at Stamford Bridge, the club would prefer not to act hastily with their former midfielder. Lampard fared well after replacing Maurizio Sarri in the summer of 2019, overcoming a transfer ban to qualify for the Champions League and reach the FA Cup final. He also earned plaudits for promoting Chelsea's young players.

Chelsea are prepared to

give Lampard an opportunity to reverse the slide, especially with the top half of the Premier League table so cramped. They are due to host Morecambe in the third round of the FA Cup on Sunday, though the tie could be postponed as a result of a Covid-19 outbreak at the League Two club, before a trip to Fulham on Friday week offers a chance to return to winning ways in the league.

Yet expectations are higher this season. Although there is an acceptance that injuries to key players have made the task harder, Lampard's inexperience has shown at times.

He is in only his third season of management – he had a year with Derby in the Championship before returning to Chelsea – and although he still enjoys support from the dressing room his approach has been questioned privately by some players.

There is concern that Lampard is yet to hit upon his best starting XI and has struggled to integrate Kai Havertz and Timo Werner following their big-money moves from the Bundesliga. Havertz, who has found it hard since testing positive for coronavirus in November, started on the bench against City, who led

3-0 at half-time, while eyebrows were raised at Lampard's decision to start Werner at centre-forward instead of Olivier Giroud or Tammy Abraham.

Werner has gone 13 games without a goal and rarely troubled City's defence, while Lampard's use of Callum Hudson-Odoi was also called into question. There was surprise when Christian Pulisic and Hakim Ziyech, who has just returned from a hamstring injury, started on the flanks instead of Hudson-Odoi, who had impressed in recent outings and scored Chelsea's consolation after coming off

the bench. Chelsea's approach was exposed by City and it is understood that some within the dressing room believe the team do not have a clear identity under Lampard, who criticised his players in public after the Boxing Day defeat against Arsenal.

However, the lack of clear alternatives could buy Lampard time. It is believed Chelsea's top choice was Mauricio Pochettino before the former Tottenham manager replaced Tuchel at PSG.

Tuchel boasts a stronger pedigree than Lampard and took PSG to the edge of European glory before losing August's Champions League final against Bayern Munich 1-0. Yet while the German has a reputation for playing attacking football, he struggled to cope with the internal politics at PSG.

Julian Nagelsmann is another option, though the 33-year-old German is unlikely to want to leave RB Leipzig until the summer. Max Allegri, the former Juventus manager, is also out of work and has been linked with the job.

The picture will become clearer in the coming weeks. After facing Morecambe and Fulham, Chelsea will want to see how Lampard fares in league games against Leicester, Burnley, Wolves and Tottenham. The first leg of Chelsea's last-16 tie against Atlético Madrid in the Champions League next month could also be pivotal in deciding his future.

Liverpool loses at Southampton 1-0 to extend blip in EPL

SOUTHAMPTON, JAN 5 (AP): Southampton manager Ralph Hasenhuttl slumped to the ground, pulled down the bill of his cap, and wept after another big win for his team in the English Premier League.

On the receiving end this time was Liverpool, which also appears to be on its knees in what is shaping up to be the most open title races in years. Danny Ings, a former Liverpool player, scored in the second minute to lead Southampton to a 1-0 win over the champion at an empty St. Mary's Stadium on Monday.

Liverpool has gone three games without a win after back-to-back draws against West Bromwich Albion and Newcastle and leads on only goal difference from great rival Manchester United, which has played one game fewer.

United isn't the only team in striking distance of the lead approaching the halfway point of the league. Four points separate Liverpool from seventh-placed Everton, with 10th-placed West Ham only seven points off the lead in what was always going to be a disjointed season amid the pandemic.

Southampton is in the mix, its latest win lifting Hasenhuttl's team to sixth place in a season when it has been in first place albeit briefly for the first time since 1988. It all



proved too much for the emotional Hasenhuttl at the final whistle. Few could have foreseen this sudden drop-off by Liverpool, which has failed to score in successive games for only the second time in Jurgen Klopp's five-year tenure.

Indeed, such has been Liverpool's lack of cutting edge of late that Klopp's team has managed just seven shots on target in the past three games.

Southampton was depleted for the game, missing the spine of its team with first-choice goalkeeper Alex McCarthy (coronavirus), central midfielder Oriol Romeu (ham-

string) and striker Che Adams (concussion) joining giant center back Jannik Vestergaard on the sidelines. But the Saints still had Ings, who latched onto a free kick by James Ward-Prowse and lifted a bouncing ball over goalkeeper Alisson Becker and into the far corner.

It was attack vs. defense from then on but Southampton held firm, with center backs Jack Stephens and Jan Bednarek, in particular, outstanding.

You know exactly what you are going to get from them," Klopp said of Southampton. "You cannot be surprised but we looked surprised."

'No excuses' for Manchester United in derby semi-final, says Solkskjær

JAMIE JACKSON

LONDON, 05 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Ole Gunnar Solkskjær is adamant Manchester United have "no excuses" not to perform against Manchester City in Wednesday's Carabao Cup semi-final given his side's impressive form.

United are level on 33 points with Liverpool at the top of the Premier League with a game in hand, Friday's 2-1 win over Aston Villa taking their unbeaten run in the competition to 10.

United host City in the single-leg semi-final, having been eliminated by Pep Guardiola's team at the same stage a year ago. After also being knocked out in last season's FA Cup and Europa League semi-finals, Solkskjær was asked the importance of finally reaching a final at the fourth attempt.

"We are confident," the manager said. "We're going into the game in good form so there's no excuses. The next game is always important but of course the semi-final is a chance to get to a final and get your hands on a trophy and for this team it would be a very big step."

"We've developed a lot in the 12 months since the last semi-final in the Carabao Cup. But it's not just learning to win semis, we've also earned the right to feel we can go all the way with our performances. You play football to win trophies, to get your hands on a trophy, even though when you win that trophy you just move on to the next one. But it gives you hunger to get more. The squad is focused, we're ready to give it a go and I think we've prepared well for this game."

Solkskjær believes United will benefit from extra recovery time. "We've had four days now after Villa so hopefully we've got more fresh legs," he said. "You could see with City against Chelsea [their 3-1 win, on Sunday]: the freshness and sharpness and intensity they played with after the break they had [since Boxing Day], it showed."

"That was a quality game and physically one of the more intense games there has been in the league this season and I don't think there's any surprise there because they had a few extra days to prepare for that one."

We should be mentally prepared for several challenges on way to Olympics: Manpreet

NEW DELHI, JAN 4 (PTI)

Keeping the fast-evolving COVID-19 situation in mind, Indian men's hockey team captain Manpreet Singh says his side will need to be "mentally prepared" for the several obstacles it might face on its way to the Tokyo Olympics.

Pushed back by a year due to the pandemic, the quadrennial sporting extravaganza is slated to be held in July-August.

"The biggest learning from last year was to not let external factors affect our goal. There could be many uncertainties but we need to only worry about what's within our control and that is to work towards being our best."

"There could be several challenges leading up to the Olympic Games

this year and we need to be mentally prepared for it," Manpreet said, putting things into perspective.

With only 200 days to go for the Olympics, Manpreet and Rani, the women's team skipper, believe the players in respective core groups will have to give their 100 per cent to be able to achieve their goals in Tokyo.

"The next 200 days is going to be the most important period of our lives. Each one of us have to give our 100 per cent in training and in competition if we want to see ourselves make the Indian Team for Tokyo," stated the midfielder.

Rani agreed that in the next few months the players will need to up their game in all aspects. "In the previous na-

tional camp which lasted over four months, we have really worked hard to reach the level we were previously at. In the next few months, our focus will be on improving further in all aspects of the game. "Our competitions this year will show us where we stand and what needs to be improved. From here on, each one of us have to work on being the best," said Rani, a Khel Ratna awardee.

She stated that players should not take their place in the team for granted and they will have to showcase that they are indeed the best to make the cut.

"I look forward to good competition within the team as it brings out the best in us."

Australian Open players to be shifted to new quarantine hotel

IAN RANSOM

MELBOURNE, 05 JAN (REUTERS): Australian Open organisers have been forced to tear up a quarantine accommodation plan for international players a month before the Grand Slam following a threat of legal action from apartment owners at a luxury hotel in Melbourne.

Tennis Australia and government authorities had arranged for players to serve a 14-day mandatory quarantine at the Westin Melbourne ahead of the Feb. 8-21 Australian Open.

On Tuesday, the plan was scrapped after apartment owners at the Westin complained they had not been properly consulted and would seek an injunction against

it. "Following consultation between the owners of The Westin Melbourne, the hotel's existing residents and COVID-19 Quarantine Victoria the decision has been made to accommodate players and their support teams arriving in Melbourne for the upcoming ATP at an alternate hotel location," the Westin said in a statement.

Graeme Efron, a lawyer representing the owners, told Reuters the quarantine plan was "never going to get through".

"It was the epitome of hubris that they thought people would go along with it without being consulted," he said.

International players at the Australian Open are expect-

ed to arrive in Melbourne from mid-January.

Victoria state Police Minister Lisa Neville told reporters on Tuesday an alternative quarantine hotel had been secured for the players, which would be "stood up today or tomorrow".

Many of the world's top players are planning to compete at tournaments at Melbourne Park in the week before the Grand Slam.

World number one Novak Djokovic and second-ranked Rafa Nadal are scheduled to play at the team-based ATP Cup, meaning they would need to arrive in Melbourne at least two weeks before the Feb. 1-5 tournament to complete quarantine in time.

South Korean tanker was boarded by armed Iran Guard forces

SEOUL (AP): Armed Iranian Revolutionary Guard troops stormed a South Korean tanker and forced the ship to change course and travel to Iran, the vessel's owner said Tuesday, the latest maritime seizure by Tehran amid heightened tensions with the West over its nuclear program.

The military raid on Monday on the MT Hankuk Chemi was at odds with Iranian explanations that they stopped the vessel for polluting the waters of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. Instead, it appeared the Islamic Republic sought to increase its leverage over Seoul ahead of negotiations over billions of dollars in Iranian assets frozen in South Korean banks amid a U.S. pressure campaign targeting Iran.

An Iranian government spokesman, when asked on Tuesday about the seizure, offered Tehran's bluntest acknowledgement yet of a link with the frozen assets.

"If anybody is to be called a hostage taker, it is the South Korean government that has taken our more than \$7 billion hostage under a futile pretext," spokesman Ali Rabiei said.

Iran on Monday also began enriching uranium up to 20%, a small technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%, at its underground Fordo facility. That move appeared aimed at pressuring the U.S. in the final days of President Donald Trump's administration, which unilaterally withdrew from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers, and ahead of the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden, who has said he'd be willing to re-enter the accord.

An official at DM Shipping Co. Ltd. of Busan, South Korea, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity as he wasn't authorized to talk to jour-



nalists, offered details of the Hankuk Chemi's seizure. The vessel had been traveling from Jubail, Saudi Arabia, to Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates when Iranian forces reached the ship and said they would board it.

Initially, Iranian forces said they wanted to run an unspecified check on the ship, the official said. As the vessel's captain spoke to company security officials back in South Korea, armed Iranian troops stormed the tanker as an Iranian helicopter flew overhead, the official said. The troops demanded the captain sail the tanker into Iranian waters over an unspecified investigation and refused to explain themselves, the official added.

The company has since been unable to reach the captain, the official said. Security cameras installed on the ship that initially relayed footage on the scene on the deck to the company are now turned off, the official said.

After the company lost contact with the captain, the company received an anti-piracy security alert notice, suggesting the captain activated an onboard warning system, the official said. It remains unclear if the ship tried to call for outside assistance.

The U.S. Navy's Mid-east-based 5th Fleet

routinely patrols the area along with an American-led coalition monitoring the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which 20% of the world's oil passes. A separate European-led effort also operates there as well.

The official denied the vessel had been polluting the waters.

In past months Iran has sought to escalate pressure on South Korea to unlock some \$7 billion in frozen assets from oil sales earned before the Trump administration tightened sanctions on the country's oil exports.

The head of Iran's central bank recently announced that the country was seeking to use funds tied up in a South Korean bank to purchase coronavirus vaccines through COVAX, an international program designed to distribute COVID-19 vaccines to participating countries.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry said Tuesday it plans to dispatch a delegation of officials to Iran for talks on securing the early release of the ship and its crew members. The crew included sailors from Indonesia, Myanmar, South Korea and Vietnam, according to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. South Korea's Defense Ministry said it was sending its anti-piracy unit to near

the Strait of Hormuz — a 4,400-ton-class destroyer with about 300 troops.

Foreign Ministry's spokesman Choi Youngsam said Iranian officials have assured South Korea that the ship's crew were all safe. He said an Iran-based South Korean diplomat has been dispatched to the location of the detained ship.

The U.S. State Department joined South Korea in calling for the tanker's immediate release, accusing Iran of threatening "navigational rights and freedoms" in the Persian Gulf in order to "extort the international community into relieving the pressure of sanctions."

Last year, Iran similarly seized a British-flagged oil tanker and held it for months after one of its tankers was held off Gibraltar.

Also Tuesday, the Iranian military began a wide-ranging, two-day aerial drill in the country's north, state media reported, featuring combat and surveillance unmanned aircraft, as well as naval drones dispatched from vessels in Iran's southern waters. State TV broadcast footage of scores of drones on a runway in the northern province of Semnan near the vast Kavir Desert.

Iran has previously conducted drills with military drones; it routinely releases footage

from surveillance drones of U.S. aircraft carriers passing through the Persian Gulf. This week's drill also incorporates modern "suicide drones" that hover over a battlefield before diving down to a target, the TV report said.

The latest tense episodes between Iran and the West coincide with the anniversary of the U.S. drone strike that killed Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad last January. Iran responded by launching ballistic missiles at U.S. bases in Iraq, injuring dozens of U.S. troops. Tehran also accidentally shot down a Ukrainian passenger jet that same night, killing all 176 people on board.

As the anniversary approached and fears grew of possible Iranian retaliation, the U.S. dispatched B-52 bombers over the region and ordered a nuclear-powered submarine into the Persian Gulf.

Acting U.S. Defense Secretary Christopher Miller said late Sunday that he changed his mind about sending the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz home from the Middle East and instead will keep the vessel on duty. He cited Iranian threats against Trump and other U.S. government officials as the reason for the re-deployment, without elaborating.

China state news agency urges end to long work hours in tech

BEIJING (AP): China's official Xinhua News Agency is calling for shorter work hours in the country's tech sector following the sudden death last week of a young employee at a leading e-commerce platform.

Last month's tragedy refused attention on "the pain of an abnormal culture of overtime," Xinhua said in a brief editorial posted Tuesday on its Twitter-like Weibo account.

Dreams should be pursued through striving, but workers' legitimate rights and interests should not be sacrificed and employers may be breaking the law in encouraging health-sapping overwork, Xinhua said.

"Strengthening the protection of legal rights and interests for workers, letting those chasing their dreams run along in a healthy manner and introducing more warmth

into the development of enterprises — that's the form striving should take," the news agency said.

The editorial follows the Dec. 29 death of a 22-year-old employee of Pinduoduo as she was walking home with a colleague at 1:30 a.m. Few details have been released, other than that the woman apparently suffered stomach pains before collapsing, but internet users have seized on the case as an example of the health impacts of long working days.

Grueling hours have long been a hallmark of China's tech industry, heralded by business luminaries such as Alibaba's Jack Ma, one of China's richest and most prominent entrepreneurs. Ma drew controversy in 2019 by endorsing the "996" week, entailing working from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday, with

many arguing that would further discourage young people from marrying and having children.

The ruling Communist Party's flagship People's Daily newspaper even weighed in at the time, saying it was unfair of dictatorial managers to demand excessive overtime.

Worldwide, the tech sector is known for demanding long hours spent designing, coding and processing customer requests. While Chinese labor law limits the work week to five days and no more than 44 hours, increasing numbers of people work outside the state sector or in the informal economy where such regulations tend not to be adhered to as closely.

China also outlaws independent labor organizing, allowing only one union, the tightly party-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions.

Germany set to extend hard lockdown as daily deaths mount

BERLIN (AP): Germany's disease control center on Tuesday reported 944 more COVID-19 deaths, fueling expectations that Chancellor Angela Merkel and the country's 16 state governors will extend the country's lockdown until the end of the month.

Germany's latest lockdown took effect Dec. 16 after a partial shutdown starting in early November failed to reduce the number of daily new coronavirus infections. It was initially set to expire Jan. 10.

Merkel's meeting with the governors on Tuesday will decide how long the lockdown should go on and to what extent schools will reopen. Another topic high on the agenda will be addressing criticism of the country's vaccination program amid frustrations over its gradual start.

Vaccinations in Germany and the rest of

the 27-nation European Union started over a week ago. In Germany, a nation of 83 million, nearly 265,000 vaccinations had been reported by Monday, the Robert Koch Institute said.

Opposition politicians and even some within Germany's governing coalition have criticized the EU's cautious advance ordering of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine — the only one so far cleared for use in EU nations. The EU's medical regulator is also evaluating a vaccine by Moderna.

The country's health minister has repeatedly said that the vaccinations are progressing as expected and that the slow start is because mobile teams are first going to nursing homes to vaccinate the most vulnerable, which takes more time than inviting people to mass vaccination centers.

Still, in a nod to the

heavy pressure, Health Minister Jens Spahn said he has asked the country's agency in charge of vaccinations if the second shot of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine could be delayed in order to be able to vaccinate more people right away with a first shot. Britain has embraced such a plan with its vaccinations, but the move is being hotly debated by scientists and governments around the world.

Germany's new infections remain at more than twice the level of 50 per 100,000 residents over seven days, which the government wants to reach. In part because of lower testing and delayed reporting, it's not yet clear what effect the Christmas holidays will have on Germany's new coronavirus infections, hospitalizations and deaths.

Germany has reported 35,518 virus-related deaths overall.

Zimbabwean teen teaches taekwondo to fight child marriage

HARARE, ZIMBABWE (AP): In Zimbabwe, where girls as young as 10 are forced to marry due to poverty or traditional and religious practices, a teenage taekwondo enthusiast is using the sport to give girls in an impoverished community a fighting chance at life. "Not many people do taekwondo here, so it's fascinating for the girls, both married and single. I use it to get their attention," said 17-year-old Natsiraishe Maritsa, a martial arts fan since the age of 5 who is now using taekwondo to rally young girls and mothers to join hands and fight child marriage.

Children as young as four and some of Natsiraishe's former schoolmates who are now married, line up on the tiny, dusty yard outside her parents' home in the poor Epworth settlement, about 15 kilometers (9 miles) southeast of the capital, Harare.

They enthusiastically follow her instructions to stretch, kick, strike, punch and spar. After class, they talk about the dangers of child marriage. Holding their babies, the recently married girls took the lead.

One after the other, they narrated how their marriages have turned into bondage, including verbal and physical abuse, marital rape, pregnancy-related health complications, and being hungry.

"We are not ready for this thing called marriage. We are just too young for it," Maritsa told The Associated Press after the session, which she said is "a safe space" for the girls to share ideas.

"The role of teen mothers is usually ignored when people campaign against child marriages. Here, I use their voices, their challenges, to discourage those young girls not yet married to stay off early sexual activity and marriage," said Maritsa. Neither boys

nor girls may legally marry until the age of 18, according to Zimbabwean law enacted after the Constitutional Court in 2016 struck down earlier legislation that allowed girls to marry at 16.

Nonetheless, the practice remains widespread in the economically struggling southern African nation, where an estimated 30% of girls are married before reaching 18, according to the United Nations Children's Fund. For some poor families in Zimbabwe, marrying off a young daughter means one less burden, and the bride price paid by the husband is often "used by families as a means of survival," according to Girls Not Brides, an organization that campaigns to end child marriages.

Some religious sects encourage girls as young as 10 to marry much older men for "spiritual guidance," while some families, to avoid "shame," force girls who engage in pre-marital sex to marry their boyfriends, according to the organization.

Maritsa, through her association called Vulnerable Underaged People's Auditorium, is hoping to increase the confidence of both the married and single girls through the martial arts lessons and the discussions that follow.

Zimbabwe's ban on public gatherings imposed as part of strict lockdown measures last week to try to slow an unprecedented surge in new COVID-19 infections have forced Maritsa to suspend the sessions, but she hopes to resume as soon as the lockdown is lifted.

"From being hopeless, the young mothers feel empowered ... being able to use their stories to dissuade other girls from falling into the same trap," said Maritsa, who said

she started the project in 2018 after seeing her friends leave school for marriage. Some, such as her best friend, 21-year-old Pruzmay Mandaza, are now planning on returning to school, although her husband forced her to step down as vice-chair of the association and stopped her from participating in the taekwondo training.

Inside the neatly decorated small house adorned with Maritsa's medals and pictures, her parents prepare fruit juice and some cookies for the girls — their sacrifice to help their daughter's efforts.

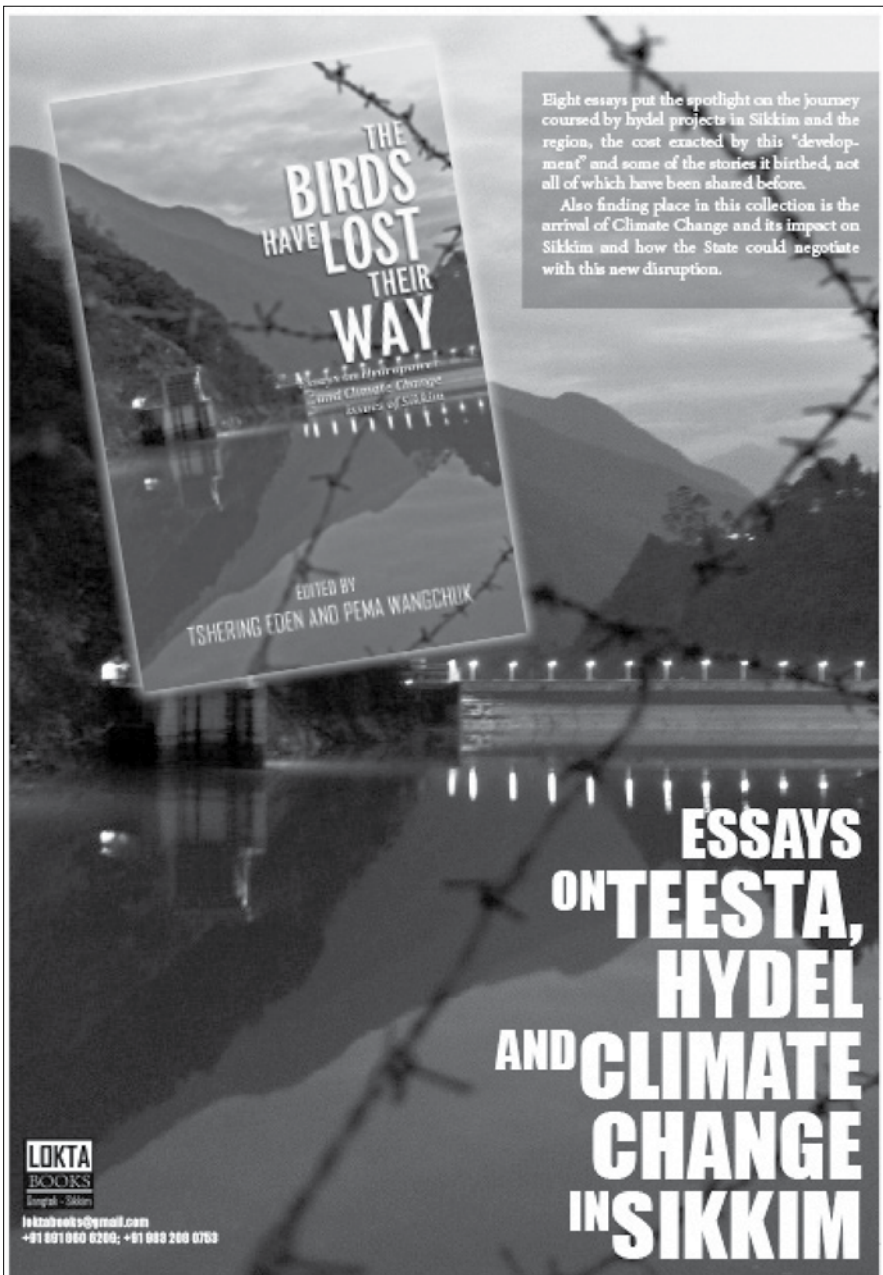
"I can only take 15 people per session because the only support I get is from my parents," said Maritsa. "My father is a small-scale farmer, my mother is a full-time housewife but they sacrifice the little they have toward what I want to achieve," she said. "He is my jogging partner," she added, referring to her father.

Taekwondo is not very popular in soccer-mad Zimbabwe, but there are pockets of professional and backyard training schools.

Despite her limited resources, Maritsa is committed to her mission. Early marriages could be increasing as COVID-19 keeps children away from school and deepens poverty, warn women's groups. Even some of those attending Maritsa's home sessions seem to have different priorities.

"We need to know how to keep our husbands happy, that's what's important," Privilege Chimombe, a 17-year-old mother of two who had her first child at 13 and has been abandoned by her husband, said after a recent session.

"These are the perceptions we have to fight," responded Maritsa. "It's tough, but it has to be done."



Tanya Roberts, Bond girl and '70s Show' star, hospitalized

LOS ANGELES (AP): Tanya Roberts, who captivated James Bond in "A View to a Kill" and later played Midge Pinciotti in the sitcom "That '70s Show," has been hospitalized after falling at her home. The actor had mistakenly been reported dead by her publicist earlier Monday.

Roberts' publicist Mike Pingel later told The Associated Press Monday afternoon that Roberts, 65, was still alive as of 10 a.m. PST but was in a poor condition. He had said earlier Monday that Roberts collapsed in her home on Dec. 24 and was admitted to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, where she was believed to have died on Sunday.

Pingel said Robert's partner, Lance O'Brien, told him that he held his wife and she "seemed for him to slip away."

O'Brien, who'd been unable to see Roberts in the hospital because of COVID-19 restrictions, was allowed to visit Sunday for a last goodbye, Pingel said. The actor does not have the virus, he said.

The publicist said he is awaiting further updates on Roberts' condition.

Multiple media outlets, including the AP, reported Roberts' death. The AP removed its

obituary and sent an advisory noting that the actor was still alive.

One of Roberts highest profile roles was playing geologist Stacey Sutton opposite Roger Moore in 1985's "A View to a Kill."



Roberts also appeared in such fantasy adventure films as "The Beastmaster" and "Hearts and Armour." She replaced Shelley Hack in "Charlie's Angels," joining Jaclyn Smith and Cheryl Ladd as third Angel Julie. She also played comic book heroine Sheena — a female version of the Tarzan story — in a 1984 film.

A new generation of fans saw her on "That '70s Show," playing Midge, mother to Laura Prepon's character Donna.

Priyanka Chopra Jonas announces sequel of 'We Can Be Heroes'

LONDON, JAN 5 (PTI): Actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas on Tuesday announced the sequel of her recently released superhero film "We Can Be Heroes".

Written and directed by Robert Rodriguez, the film is a spin-off of his "The Adventures of Sharkboy and Lavagirl in 3-D" and the "Spy Kids" franchise. It released on Netflix on Christmas Day 2020 in the US.

The streamer said 44 million households viewed "We Can Be Heroes" in the movie's first 28 days on the service.

Chopra Jonas said a follow-up to the movie is in development at Netflix, with Rodriguez set to return.

"Heroics Headquarters projection: 44 MILLION FAMILIES will have suited up for 'WE CAN BE HEROES' in its first 4 weeks!! And... BREAKING NEWS: The Heroics are coming back for round two. Sequel is in development with @rodriguez and @Netflix! #WeCanBeHeroes," she wrote.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, Netflix counts viewership based on just two minutes of viewing time by a subscriber.

The 2020 Christmas week -- running from December 25 to December 31 -- was the service's biggest on record for the same week, year-over-year, as measured by both total view hours and average view hours per subscriber across

films like Mexico trilogy -- "El Mariachi", "Desaparoado" and "Once Upon a Time in Mexico" -- and "Alita: Battle Angel", has produced the film as well.

Apart from Chopra Jonas, the film also features Pedro Pascal, Christian



each period. Billed as an action-adventure, "We Can Be Heroes" features Chopra Jonas as a nemesis to a group of children who team up to save the planet and their superhero parents who are kidnapped by the aliens.

Rodriguez, also known for directing

Slater, Boyd Holbrook, Sung Kang and veteran actor Christopher McDonald.

Child stars Akira Akbar, Nathan Blair, Andrew Diaz, Andy Walken and Hala Finley are also part of the cast.

Chopra Jonas is currently filming for "Text For You" here.

Emma Stone expecting first child

LOS ANGELES, JAN 5 (PTI): Oscar winner Emma Stone is expecting her first child with husband and "Saturday Night Live" scribe Dave McCary.

A source confirmed the news of Stone's pregnancy to E! News.

Stone, 32, was photographed last week here sporting athleisure and revealing her baby bump.

"Emma is pregnant and just loves married life," the insider told the outlet.

The actor and the 35-year-old writer tied the knot last year, People magazine confirmed in September 2020.

The couple became engaged in December 2019 after dating for two years. They met when Stone hosted the NBC variety sketch series near the end of 2016.

Stone's representative could not be reached for comment on her pregnancy news.

Kapil Sharma to make Netflix debut

MUMBAI, JAN 5 (PTI): Popular comic and TV show host Kapil Sharma is heading to Netflix for his digital debut.

Though it is unclear whether the project is a comedy special, series or film, it will premiere on the streamer in 2021 across 190 countries.

Sharma said he is looking forward to his first-ever association with Netflix.

"2020 has been a bumpy

ride for everyone around the world and my motive is to make people forget their worries and welcome this new year with love, laughter and positivity," the 39-year-old comic said in a statement.

"I always wanted to be on Netflix but I didn't have their number," he quipped.

Sharma said the project is close to his heart, adding "I cannot wait to share more details with my fans soon."

Larry King, hospitalized with COVID, moved out of ICU

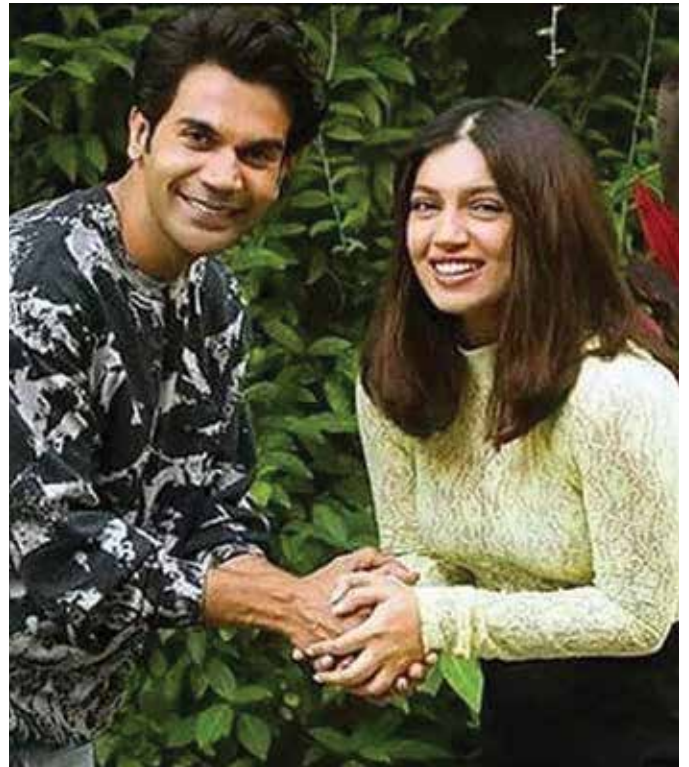
LOS ANGELES (AP): Veteran talk show host Larry King, suffering from COVID-19, has been moved out of the intensive care unit at a Los Angeles hospital and is breathing on his own, a spokesman said on Monday.

King was moved to the ICU on New Year's Eve and was receiving oxygen but is now breathing on his own, said David Theall, a spokes-

man for Ora Media, a production company formed by King. The 87-year-old broadcasting legend shared a video phone call with his three sons, Theall said.

King, who spent many years as an overnight radio DJ, is best known as host of the "Larry King Live" interview show that ran in prime time on CNN from 1985 to 2010.

Rajkumar Rao, Bhumi Pednekar begin shooting for 'Badhaai Do'



MUMBAI, JAN 5 (PTI): "Badhaai Do", a comedy drama starring Rajkumar Rao and Bhumi Pednekar, went on floors on Tuesday.

The film is a sequel to the National Award winning hit, "Badhaai Ho".

Pednekar took to Instagram and shared an image from the first day of the shoot in Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

"Poori team ko #BadhaaiDo (Congratulate the entire team). To new beginnings!" the 31-year-old actor wrote.

"Badhaai Do" is directed by Harshvardhan Kulkarni, who helmed the Gulshan Devaiah-starrer comedy "Hunt-errr" (2015).

The upcoming film is written by Suman Adhikary and Akshat Ghildial, who had

co-written "Badhaai Ho". "Badhaai Do" marks the first collaboration between Rao and Pednekar, who reportedly play a cop and a PT teacher, respectively. "Badhaai Ho", the original movie, chronicled the story of a middle age couple, played by Neena Gupta and Gajraj Rao, facing unexpected pregnancy.

The 2018 film, also featuring Ayushmann Khurrana, Surekha Sikri, and Sanya Malhotra, was directed by Amit Ravindernath Sharma.

It won two National Awards: best popular film providing wholesome entertainment and best supporting actress for Sikri for her role as the cantankerous matriarch who has a change of heart.



ALL DOLLED UP! Actress Jenna Dewan celebrated American Girl's 2021 Girl of the Year, Kira Bailey, wearing Made By Mary Hera Chain in Los Angeles.

Aries:

There comes a point in everybody's life when they can continue to live a mundane existence or follow their true path. Three words, Aries: Answer the call. Answer the call even if it scares the living daylight out of you. Answer the call even if the path you're choosing to tread is largely unknown. Answer the call even if you'll be walking alone. Trust that the Great Spirit is with you and that the guidance you need at each stage will be provided to you.

Tip: A whole new pathway is about to open up for you.

Taurus:

Maybe you weren't loved and nurtured in the way you would have liked. But, that doesn't mean you are incapable of loving and nurturing yourself. So adopt a gentle approach, Taurus. Ask your inner being what it is that he/she really needs at this moment. Without bringing guilt or shame into the equation, see how you can provide yourself with the warmth you sometimes seek on the outside. PS: Self-care rituals like a hot oil massage or flow-yoga session are good ways to activate those feel-good hormones.

Tip: It's time to give yourself the love and nurturing you deserve.

Gemini:

Here's the thing, Gemini: The answers you seek are already within you, and there are no wrong an-

swers. So, instead of looking outside for validation, trust what your inner oracle is telling you. Know that you are being led in the right direction. Connecting deeper with your spiritual side is also going to be a big theme for you. Practices such as vipassana and breathwork will come in handy.

Tip: Listen to the oracle within.

Cancer:

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? Cancer, you are a multidimensional being and you are just becoming aware of your multidimensional nature. So, if the task at hand feels familiar, it's because you have excelled at it in another life, or in another time and space dimension. Word for the wise: Uncover your hidden gifts and see how you can add them to your existing repertoire.

Tip: It's time to tap into your hidden gifts.

Leo:

Leo, take a moment. Breathe. Where do you feel your sense of frustration is stemming from? Are you feeling cut off from the stream of creativity, with which you share an inherent connection? When in doubt, turn to nature, which has been known to be the best medicine. Go for a walk in the wilderness or simply dedicate yourself to gardening. You'll be amazed by how much just being in the presence of Gaia can change for you.

Tip: Mother Nature beckons.

Virgo:

We didn't come here to worry about what tomorrow might bring. We came here to experience joy and pleasure in every form. That doesn't mean that pain is not—or will not be—a part of our repertoire. It will. However, the experiences that trigger pain have been chosen by us in order to master certain soul lessons. In other words, the tools required to triumph over them are also within us. So take the next step with awareness and call upon your guides as you do. Their love and support will take you through the troubled times, Virgo.

Tip: Your guides are working closely with you to help you get through this.

Libra:

Libra, you're a witch. A priest(ess). A magician. One who is well-versed with the mysteries and possesses the capabilities to look beyond the veil. How can you turn your knowledge into wisdom, wild one? How can you lead by example and help those around you in a real and practical way? Take some time to reflect upon this and act in the manner you're being guided to. PS: The help and assistance you need from the beyond is available to you in this moment.

Tip: How can you guide those around you in a real and practical way?

Scorpio:

There comes a point in every journey when things refuse to go your way, when pain and trauma is triggered

again, making you question your choices. Here's the thing, Scorpio: Your presence here is no coincidence. Your higher self came through and helped you choose this path for a reason—and it is your higher self again that will help you navigate the tricky territory you have found yourself in. Pause. Breathe. Reconnect. You've got this!

Tip: You are on the right path. Keep going.

Sagittarius:

Leo Tolstoy once said, "Everybody thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself." This is a truth you resonate with deeply, Sagittarius, one that is inspiring you to dedicate yourself to the inner work. You understand that you are a multidimensional being and that the secret to unlocking the door to a parallel reality lies in raising your own vibrations. This is the Great Ascension. Remember, it all comes down to what you choose.

Tip: There are parallel realities available to you, right now and in this moment.

Capricorn:

The trouble is, we spend too much time making excuses and saying 'no' when the Universe wants us to say 'yes'. But, you have the opportunity to turn all of that around, Capricorn. To let your hair down. To take life by the horns. So, just for today, forget about the rules. Forget about what is right and wrong. Know that as long as you're following your heart, you'll have little to regret when you look back at this moment a few

years from now.

Tip: Let your hair down.

Aquarius:

To quote a popular Instagram meme, awakening looks a lot more like 'the tower' card (in Tarot) than 'the sun', which depicts a naked baby running wild and free on the back of a horse. However, in order to get to that point of absolute freedom, the seeker has to go through a series of challenging experiences that shatter his ego, break the shackles of conditioning, and bring him face to face with his true self. So, accept what the game of life is revealing to you at this point, Aquarius, and remember that the darkest of nights makes way for the brightest of days.

Tip: You are in the midst of a massive awakening, water bearer.

Pisces:

It is said the experiences we call in are a result of our vibration, and that our vibration determines our external reality and all of our interactions. Today, you're being asked to pay attention to these interactions. Which of these are sitting right with you? Which of these are triggering unpleasant emotions? Instead of operating from a space of hurt, step back. Shift your gaze a little and reassess the situation. This will help you realise that the aspect of the other person that's causing discomfort within you is one that needs to be healed in your psyche as well.

Tip: Watch your triggers.