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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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3 more Covid cases and 1,260 more vaccine shots in Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 26 MAR:**

Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 reached 6,215 TODAY with three new cases of coronavirus being recorded in the past 24 hours. All the three cases were reported from East District.

In the meanwhile, two more persons were discharged from isolation facilities to further improve the number of recovered cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim to 5,942. There are currently 41 active cases of novel coronavirus in Sikkim.

In his daily health bulletin on Friday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia, detailed that the three new cases were picked up in the testing of 189 samples on Thursday.

While one case was detected in RT-PCR screening of 154 samples, two more were found in the rapid antigen testing of 34 samples.

Samples of two persons from Nab Gaon, Pakyong, tested positive, while another person from 6th Mile-Tadong has also positive.

He added that the workplaces of these people have been contained for 48 hours and samples of the primary contacts sent for testing.

On the other hand, 1,751 more people received COVID-19 vaccines at different parts of Sikkim on Thursday.

While giving details of the vaccination carried out yesterday, Mr Bhutia informed that of the 1,751 persons, 1,609 received the first shot while 142 completed their vaccine schedule with the second dose.

In district-wise

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**SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 26 MAR:**

The fourth session [Part II] of the Tenth Assembly of Sikkim Legislative Assembly was convened here on Friday. The one-day session passed three amendment bills, the third supplementary demands for grants 2020-21, two Appropriation Bills and Vote on Account 2021-22.

During the Financial Business, Chief Minister PS Tamang, who is also the Minister In charge of Finance Department, presented the Third Sup-

plementary Demands for Grants for the Financial Year 2020-21.

The third batch of Supplementary Demands for Grants for FY 2020-21 includes eight grants, which includes gross additional expenditure of Rs 19,988.13 lakhs comprising of Rs 4,000.00 lakh on Revenue Account and Rs 15,988.13 lakh on Capital Account, involving a net cash outgo aggregate of Rs 16,299.34 lakh. The Supplementary Demands for Grants was put to vote and passed by

the House today itself.

The CM also presented the Sikkim Appropriation Bill, 2021 for the Third Supplementary Demands for Grants for the Financial Year 2020-21.

The Bill was introduced in pursuance of clause (i) of Article 204 read with Article 205 of the Constitution of India to provide for the appropriation from and out of the Consolidated Fund of the State of Sikkim of the money required to meet the expenditure charged in the Consolidated Fund



of the State of Sikkim and Supplementary Grants made by the Sikkim Legislative Assembly for the

expenditure of the Government of Sikkim for the remaining part of the Financial year 2020-21.

The CM has also presented the Vote on Account for the year 2021-22. The Vote on Account

for three months from April to June 2021 is intended for disbursement

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Mangan landslide mitigation gets stakeholder engagement

MANGAN, 26 MAR (IPR): Sikkim State Disaster Management Authority (SSDMA) organized the Stakeholders' Interaction and Awareness Programme of the 'Mitigation of Mangan Landslide' at the conference hall of the District Administrative Centre, Mangan today.

Present for the interaction were the District Collector (North), Tenzing T Kaleon, who is also the Chairman of the Monitoring Committee along with the Additional Director (SSDMA), Project Coordinator, SDPO (Mangan), Municipal Executive Officer, Divisional Engineers, Assistant Engineers and Junior Engineers of Roads & Bridges Department, Water Resources & River Development Department, Urban Development Department, Geologist from Mines & Geology Department, contractor of the project, stakeholders and the public.

The DC (North) ex-



plained that the objective of the meeting was to involve the stakeholders and members of the society in the project. He stated that it was important for them to know the details and hear their feedback and queries before putting the project into action. He succinctly clarified the technical details and asked the contractor and team involved to start the project immediately and to make sure that they lay out quality work with standard equipment and raw materials. He also took feedback from the stakeholders regarding safety precautions and noise pollution. It was decided that the drilling and heavy work would take place during the day while the night hours

would be left for lighter work. Safety measures and convenience for the public for day-to-day work was also assured. The DC (North) asked the team as well as the public to be proactive regarding the project.

The Project Coordinator provided a visual overview of the project and explained important details of the report.

The Additional Director (SSDMA) stated that this project is of priority and he thanked the stakeholders for their participation.

It may be mentioned that the project has been designed and detailed based on the study on recommendation of Expert Committee of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

NBT workshop for authors and illustrators ends with development of 30 children's books!

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 26 MAR:**

National Book Trust (NBT) organised an Author-Illustrator Workshop from 23-26 March here in Gangtok with the aim to develop good books in Nepali language (Silent

/ Picture Books and Story Books). The initiative was in line with NBT's intention to Nepali-Bangla and Nepali-English bilingual books on an experimental basis in the near future, an official press release informs.

What should also ex-

cite readers is the news that NBT has started a translation project under which 24 children's books will be developed in Nepali language in 2021-22.

The Author-Illustrator Workshop, mean-

while, provided a meeting place for creative minds and saw them sit together at the Tashi Namygal Senior Secondary School for four days, discuss story ideas, its text part, its pictorial aspect,

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Where is Sikkim's Civil Society?

JIWAN RAI

'Where is civil society in Sikkim?' 'What is civil society doing in Sikkim?' - these are questions that pop up once in a while. The fiasco of four students being expelled from Geyzing college made the Sikkimese people thirsty for civil society once again. The generally vibrant social media voices have been unusually and disturbingly silent. There was a faint voice here and an indistinct post there. The rarity of loud and clear voices was telling. Only when these four beleaguered boys were on the verge of losing a lifetime opportunity to write their exams did multiple organizations and individuals make a last-ditch effort to pressure the government to revoke their expulsion order. Too little, too late.

This unfortunate expulsion of four students from Geyzing College is not the first nor is it going to be the last incident of this kind. Significant will be the question, therefore - why is Sikkim civil society so weak and irredeemably laid back? There could be numerous

and highly intricate reasons. But here are some of my thoughts.

One, our festive mindset may be a major reason as it is naturally counter-conducive to confrontational engagement. Culturally, we are ever in a merry-making mood, always avoiding conflict. Kina taauko dukhaunu ('Why invite a headache?', as the saying goes)? In other words, why spoil the fun is our way of going about life. There is a flip side to such a mindset. If avoiding confrontation doesn't work, we tend to go to the other extreme of overreacting. For example, if our neighbor causes us irritation, we either totally ignore them or sever all ties. Seldom do we sit together and thrash out our misunderstandings. When our child demands an expensive phone, we either buy it (avoid confrontation) or give him a harsh lecture. In reality, such a demand requires an in-depth conversation and examples to explain to our children why a phone is not required till a certain age, why an expensive phone is not necessary and how it can even be harmful. But we don't have the courage to

spoil the fun of our life by engaging our children in an abiding conversation. When we can't have an enduring conversation in our family and neighbourhood, how can we engage in social conversation? Citizen engagement entails risking offending one another and we do not seem to have the courage to do that.

Two, the lack of civic space is a suffocating reality in Sikkim. We are too personally related to the government and administration. Almost every 6th family has a member working in the government. Maybe now, every family has a government employee thanks to One Family One Job scheme. What we speak or write in social space, if it involves any questioning of the government, can have shattering implications for the family. The 'Bura Okherbottey-Buri Borbottey' (husband up north and wife down south) fear is a horror for non-influential citizens. Why risk victimization is the abiding question in the hearts of those Sikkimese people who lack courage to face the government's ire.

turn to pg05

"Our Government has been steadfast in its efforts towards empowerment of our tribal communities and preservation of their traditions. We are working tirelessly to transform the tribal-rural economic system."

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

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Ball-Badminton training at TNSS

SUMMIT REPORT
NAMCHI, 26 MAR:

A 4-day long ball-badminton training and coaching camp is underway at Tashi Namgyal Senior Secondary School ground. The camp concludes on 27 March and is being taken by many students and local youth, a press release informs. Bihar ball-badminton coaches Bikash Kumar and Nikesh Kumar are the two main coaches for the camp being held to develop this sport in Sikkim by the Sikkim Ball Badminton Association.

Namchi SSS students briefed on online safety and cybercrimes

NAMCHI, 26 MAR [IPR]: A virtual interactive session was conducted for Namchi Senior Secondary School students, especially those from standards VII and VIII, today on "Online Safety and Cyber-crimes".

The session was chaired by Prerna Sharma and the main session conducted by Amit Gupta from Youth Online Learning Organisation (YOLO).

The session covered the following topics: Importance of being safe while using various social networkings sites/apps such as Watsapp, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or YouTube; If one is not careful then the user can be vulnerable to ; hacking, identity theft, phishing, system blocking, false information, e-mail bulking etc. Through these the user can become the victim of bank fraud, kidnapping, cyber bullying and extortion; The user can stay digitally safe if he/she has the knowledge to use safety settings of social networking sites/apps; Besides if a user falls victim of cybercrime then it could be reported to cybercrime helpline number: 155260.

Nasha Mukh Bharat session in Namchi

NAMCHI, 26 MAR [IPR]: An awareness program on Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyan was organized at Officers' Club here in collaboration with the District Administration. Sr SP South, ADC South and other officers attended the programme along with representatives from NGOs, Local Taxi and Truck Drivers' Associations, civil society, students, teachers and Health Deptt.. In addition to resource persons from Sikkim Police, concerned counsellors from DHN also put stress on issues related to drug abuse. Collective efforts were made to aware the gathering about getting rid of drug menace and related issues.

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Assembly clears three Amendment Bills

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 26 MAR:

Three amendment bills were passed in the fourth session [Part II] of Tenth Assembly of Sikkim Legislative Assembly here on Friday.

The Sikkim Manipal University of Health, Medical, Technological Sciences (Amendment) Bill 2021, the Sikkim Municipalities (Amendment) Bill 2021 and the Sikkim Regulation of Societies, Associations and Other Voluntary Organisation (Amendment) Bill 2021 were passed by the House.

The Sikkim Manipal University of Health, Medical, Technological Sciences (Amendment) Bill 2021 was introduced by Minister to Education Department, Kunga Nima Lepcha in the house.

In the statement of objects and reasons, the Minister said, "The Manipal Pai Foundation [a Trust] has been renamed

as Manipal Education Foundation with effect from 27 January, 2011. The President/ Chairman of the foundation of the Foundation is finding it increasingly difficult to perform the functions of Pro-Chancellor of the University in few of various other responsibilities."

Therefore, he added, the State government has deemed it expedient to amend sub-section (1) of section 8 of the Sikkim Manipal University of Health, Medical, Technological Sciences Act, 1995 (No 9 of 1995) Act to enable the President/ Chairman of the Manipal Education Foundation to appoint any other person as the Pro-Chancellor.

The Sikkim Municipalities (Amendment) Bill 2021 was introduced by the Minister to Urban Development Department, Arun Upreti. In the statement of objects and reasons, the Min-

ister states, "Whereas, considering the various factors determining the number of wards, such as, increase in dwelling pattern in the Gangtok Municipal Corporation, the State Government has deemed it necessary and expedient to review and increase the number of wards from the existing 17 to 19 wards. With this object in view, the Bill has been framed."

Another amendment bill, the Sikkim Regulation of Societies, Associations and Other Voluntary Organisation (Amendment) Bill 2021 was introduced by the Minister to Law Department, Kunga Nima Lepcha in the house.

In the statement of object and reasons, the Minister explains, "The State government has deemed it expedient to amend section 3 to insert a proviso to clause (d) of sub-section (2) and insert "Power to Relax

clause in the Sikkim Regulation of Societies, Associations and Other Voluntary Organisation Act, 2008 by way of insertion of new section 8A so as to remedy the technical difficulties encountered in certain extraordinary situations. With this object in view, the Bill has been proposed."

Earlier, the assembly started with the Obituary Reference on the passing away of the former member of State Legislative Assembly, late Phetook Tshering Bhutia, which was participated by the Speaker LB Das, the Chief Minister PS Tamang, Minister Sonam Lama and Member KS Lepcha. The house has observed two minutes silence as a mark of respect.

Late Phetook Tshering Bhutia passed away on 20th February, 2021 at his residence in Gumpa Ghurpisey, Namchi, South Sikkim. He was

suffering with kidney and liver related illness. He was born to parents Sonam Zigdor Bhutia and Chunki Bhutia on 3 June in 1944 and survived by his wife, three daughters and a son.

Late Bhutia started his schooling from Namchi Senior Secondary School, went on to continue his monastic studies at Ngadak Gumpa, Namchi. He served the State Government in various capacities. After his retirement from Government service in 2002, he involved himself in active social work and in 2009 he was elected from the Sangha seat as Member of Sikkim Legislative Assembly and served as Chairman, Scheduled Tribe Welfare Board till 2014. Late Bhutia contributed as an active member of the Committee of Monasteries namely Samdruptse and Ngadak Gumpa, and various social organizations.

National Productivity Council holds training for effective Office Administration & Financial Management in govt deptts

Gangtok, 24 Mar (PIB): In an effort to upgrade the skills of various officials from Central & State Government Departments, Academic Institutions, PSUs, etc., National Productivity Council (NPC), a national level organization under Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India is organizing various Residential Training Program in different locations throughout the country. Economic Services Group of NPC has organized a Residential Training Program on "Effective Office Administration & Financial Management" in Gangtok, Sikkim, from 22-26 Mar, 2021.

Additional Chief Secretary, GP Upadhyaya, Education Department was the Chief Guest during opening ceremony held on 23 Mar, 2021.

He shared his professional and personal experiences with the participants. He mentioned the importance of positive attitude, continuous encouragement of juniors and effective communication in any organization.

Mr Upadhyaya emphasized on the value of keeping good health for improving productivity and significance of preserving family val-

ues. He also shared with participants the changes bought by him in education department and how he approached various problems and resolved them following different mechanisms on day to day basis.

There are 11 participants from various government organisations. Director (Economic Services), Rajesh Sund, NPC, who is coordinator of the program and also faculty for Financial Management, has specified that the sessions on financial decisions and financial risk management tools will help in learning, developing and implementation of financial targets.

Different sessions at this programme are based on conceptual deliberations, case studies, role plays and group exercises/discussions.

The participants would learn Trends and Challenges in Office Management, Organizational Communication and Team Performance, Roles & Responsibilities for improving efficiency.

This program has provided an interactive forum for the officials of various organisations to share, explore and discuss concepts and issues related to Office Administration & Financial Management.

NJNP Sector Magistrate and Sector Police Officer visit polling booths

JORETHANG, 24 MAR (IPR): Sector Magistrate (Naya-Bazar) Jorethang Nagar Panchayat, (NJNP), CB. Sapkota and Sector Police Officer (NJNP), Roshan Gurung visited the polling booths at NJNP today.

There are five Polling Stations in NJNP, two Polling Stations are at Jorethang Government Senior Secondary School another two polling stations are at Jorethang New SNT complex.

Similarly, one poll-

ing station is located at Government Junior High School, Nayabazar.

The visit was done to ensure the basic minimum facilities were provided in all the polling booths which were found to be adequate. Furthermore, all the Booth Level Officers under Nayabazar Jorethang Nagar Panchayat were briefed regarding their duties and responsibilities about the ensuing Municipal Elections, 2021.

Ayush principles and practices for eradication of Malnutrition programme

WANGCHUK BHUTIA MANGAN, 24 MAR:

An awareness programme on use of Ayush principles and practices for eradication of malnutrition was organised at the Chungthang Aganwadi Centre on 22 March.

The programme saw the participation of community members, Angawadi workers, District coordinator (Poshan Abhiyan-North), Poshan Assistants, supervisors, etc.

Resource person for the day was MO-Ayush, Dr Dikila Bhutia, District hospital, North. Also a rally was held wherein Angawadi workers and members of different Self Help Groups participated.

Umbrellas with poshan logo and message were distributed to all as a part of IEC campaign.

CDPO Chungthang, Sonam Laden Bhutia highlighted on the five sutras of Poshan Abhiyan.

EVMs commissioned for municipal polls in East dist

GANGTOK, 26 MAR [IPR]: The commissioning of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), including reserved, to be used for the upcoming Municipal Elections 2021 for Urban Local Bodies of East District was held at the Conference Hall of District Administrative Centre, East, today.

The commissioning was conducted under the supervision of Municipal Returning Officer (MRO), Ragul K., in the presence of the Election Observers Secretary, Social Justice and Welfare Department Tshewang Gyachho, and Secretary Excise Department Kuber Bhandari.

Commissioning was done by four teams lead by Tushar G. Nikhare ADC East, Hemant Rai ADC (HQ) Samdup Bhutia SDM (Rongli) and Sonam Ongmu Tamang, Sr. PS to DC.

The strong room was opened at around 9:00am and the EVMs

were shifted to conference hall for commissioning process.

A team of engineers from Bharat Electronic Limited (BEL) were present to supervise and assist the commissioning process of the EVMs that was carried out by four teams and the entire procedure were video recorded.

It may be mentioned that the randomization of the EVMs was held on 25th March 2021 at the Office of MRO East in the presence of Election Observers.

After commissioning process, the EVMs were stored and sealed in the Strong Room located at District Administrative Centre, East guarded by Sikkim Armed Police and under 24x7 CCTV surveillance. The opening and sealing of Strong Room was done in presence of the Observers, MRO and candidates and their designated agents.

Norbu Sir releases manifesto for Upper Ghurpisey ward



SUMMIT REPORT
NAMCHI, 26 MAR:

Pema Norbu Bhutia, contesting from Ward-03, Upper Ghurpisey, of Namchi Municipal Council, released his 10-point Election manifesto among supporters and well-wishers at Upper Ghurpisey here today.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr Bhutia, popularly known here as 'Norbu Sir', assured that he will work for the betterment of his ward to the best of his abilities, a press re-

lease informs.

Among the highlights of his manifesto are a commitment to construct a community hall, bring in development & welfare schemes, encourage sports and cultural activities, improve roads, CC footpaths, cellular network, ensure hassle-free distribution of public amenities, installation of surveillance cameras for better security and a host of other schemes to make Upper Ghurpisey a role-model for the rest.

SANSINGMA YAMBOK/ ANTHYESTHI KRIYA

Sansingma Yambok/ Anthyesthi Kriya of our beloved brother Late Yalamber Subba, s/o Mrs Kamala Subba, who left us for the heavenly abode on 18th March 2021 afternoon, falls on 27th March 2021 [Saturday]. Sansingma Yambok/ Anthyesthi Kriya for the departed soul will be held at Chokasum Hall, Namnang, Gangtok and we request all our relatives, family, friends and well-wishers to kindly join us to offer prayers for the young soul who left us early.

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all our well-wishers who stood by us during our time of bereavement.

Amar, Lanam, Manghang, Yehang, Todi Young (Brothers)

Amrita, Anita, Sangita, Ningwa (Sisters), Sonam Doma Bhutia (sister-in-law)

Kalka Rai (sister-in-law)

Mecal O. Lepcha (sister-in-law) & family



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Awareness prog on SC- & ST Prevention of Atrocities Act



GANGTOK, 26 MAR (IPR): An awareness and sensitization programme on Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 was held at Janta Bhawan, Gangtok today.

Organized by the Social Justice and Welfare

Department, the programme was chaired by Chairperson, SC Commission, Khangendra Mohra, as chief guest and was attended by Panchayats from all over the State, Resource Persons, representatives of various organizations and associations, students and officials from

the Social Justice and Welfare Department.

The programme started with a welcome address by Deputy Secretary SJ&WD, Sabindra Rai followed by Joint Director/ SJ&WD, Neeta Gazmer who presented a brief highlight about the awareness programme

and mentioned the various steps undertaken by the State Government with regard to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

The programme was also addressed by Additional Director SJ&WD, KS Bhutia who stressed

on the importance of conducting such awareness programmes and asked the attendees to spread the word for increased awareness.

The one-day awareness programme saw lectures and presentations by Resource Persons - General Manager SABCCO, Kishore Shrestha, Deputy Director SJ&WD, Tshering Dorjee Bhutia, Advocate Tashi Raptan Barfungpa and Assistant Director KVIC (GoI), BN Roy.

The programme also saw an open interaction on a variety of topics coming under the ambit of the Act such as offences of atrocities and the punishments, features of the act, relief, rehabilitation and the special officers in all the four districts appointed under the rules of the Act.

EVMs commissioned for Mangan Nagar Panchayat polls



MANGAN, 26 MAR (IPR): The commissioning of EVMs was conducted at Zilla Bhawan, Mangan today in the presence of ADM (North) cum Nodal Officer, Sonam Lepcha, SDM (Mangan) cum Sector Magistrate, Karma T Bhutia, DPO (Zilla), RO (Mangan) and other

officials of the Election Department, North District. Debmalya Paul (Technical Officer) demonstrated the EVMs to the candidates of 7 Nagar Panchayat Mangan and checked all the EVMs in the presence of the candidates and the officials. All 10 can-

didates from 7 Nagar Panchayat Mangan took part in a mock poll as well. The EVMs were then sealed and stored in the strong room. The strong room is under 24x7 CCTV Surveillance and is sealed and guarded by the Armed Police Personnel.

Workshop held for Sheep and Angora farmers

SUMMIT REPORT

NAMTHANG, 25 MARCH:

The second awareness programme on "Workshop on Value added products from Angora rabbit and Sheep based fiber towards doubling the farmer's income" was organised by Krishi Vigyan Kendra South Sikkim in collaboration with ICAR-National Institute of Natural Fibre Engineering and Technology (NINFET) Kolkata under the NEH programme of ICAR-NINFET for farmers of South and North Sikkim from 24-25 Mar, 2021.

The two-day programme was mainly conducted for the progressive sheep and angora

farmers of Chuba Perbing village adopted and promoted by KVK South Sikkim and Rabum in North Sikkim where the Angora rabbit farming in Sikkim started in the year 2000.

During the inaugural session, Senior Scientist and Head, IP Shivakoti welcomed all the dignitaries, officials and farmers present in the programme. Principal Scientist Nodal Officer NEH, DR Sanjoy Deb-nath, ICAR-NINFET gave his lecture through power-point presentation on "Processing of fibre and spinning of blended yarn of German Angora rabbit and Bonpala sheep".

Subject Matter Spe-

cialist (Animal Science), Dr Chewang Norbu Bhutia gave a brief insight of the programme and an overview on the start of Angora farming in the adopted village through a pilot project sanctioned by NABARD in 2018 and the success journey thereafter.

The farmers were also given technical guidance on cage making, housing structures, care and management of Angora rabbit to the farmers by Dr Chewang Norbu Bhutia. The programme concluded with the distribution of inputs where in the farmers were benefitted with Angora rabbits, feed, medicines, and caging materials.

Sikkim lad wins Curiosity 2021

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK,

Rishal Pandey Chettri, a resident of Gangtok who is currently studying at Delhi Public School, Siliguri, has won Curiosity-2021, an international quiz competition organised by Sikkim Manipal Institute of Technology.

Rishal won a laptop along with other goodies and a certificate from SMIT on his victory.

The quiz competition had students from all across the country and even international participants, it is informed.

Arsalan Ashraf from Ranchi won the 2nd position.

The quiz competition was hosted by Quizmaster Dr Bibeth Sharma and preliminary rounds held between 15-18 Mar, semifinals on 19 and 20 Mar, and the finals on 22 March.

Scientific Advisory Committee meets, deliberates new tech for farms

GANGTOK, 26 MAR (PIB): ICAR-Krishi Vigyan Kendra, East Sikkim, Ranipool organized a Scientific Advisory Committee Meeting 2020-21 at Conference Hall of KVK East Sikkim, Ranipool on 25 Mar.

The meeting was chaired by Joint Director, Dr RK Avasthe, ICAR Research Complex for NEH Region, Sikkim Centre, Tadong. More than 22 statutory SAC members from different line Departments such as CAE&PHT, CAU, Ranipool; NRC on Orchid, Pakyong, Dept of Agriculture, ATMA East, Department of Fisheries, Govt of Sikkim, All Indian Radio, NABARD, Gangtok, SIMFED, Sr Scientist & Head, KVK South Sikkim and Scientists from ICAR-Sikkim Centre attended the meeting.

The Chairman of the SAC Joint Director, Dr RK Avasthe, welcomed the members and stressed upon reducing the gap between the research organization, developing new technologies/varieties and its implementation in the farmers' field. He urged the scientific community to disseminate the successful technologies for assessment at farmers' field to suit the requirements at the different altitudes. The Chairman stressed for enhancing cropping intensity through crop diversification utilizing the residual soil moisture after harvesting rice. He strongly advocated the multiplication of organic seeds of the newly released varieties of different crops to meet the seed requirement of the state.

The Head (I/C), Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Dr JK Singh presented the Action Taken Report of the last SAC meeting held in 2020. The Progress Reports of 2020-21 and Action Plans for 2021-22 were presented individually by respective Subject Matter Specialists and Programme Assistant of KVK, East Sikkim.

Dean, Dr PP Dabral, CAEPHT, CAU, Ranipool offered to collaborate for implementation of farm mechanization

and improved agricultural tools for the betterment of the farming community.

Principal Scientist, Dr Ram Pal, ICAR-NRC Orchid suggested to integrate the floriculture-based farming system to generate more income for livelihood improvement as orchid can be grown in a small piece of unused agriculture land.

General Manager and OIC, Dr Diwakar Hedge, NABARD, Sikkim explained about their funding patterns for implementation of different agricultural activities in farmer's field, exposure visits, training of farmers etc. He also stated that the NABARD is ready to finance action-oriented research projects for research organizations as well as KVK for the upliftment of the farming community of Sikkim. GM, Jiwan Sharma, SIMPEF offered support and cooperation in value addition of niche crops and marketing of organic value-added products. All the members gave constructive suggestions for the development and livelihood security for the farming community in the state. Progressive farmer members from different villages of East Sikkim appreciated the efforts of KVK, East Sikkim for their enduring efforts for the farming community towards their livelihood improvement.

The Chairman of the Committee appreciated the work done by the KVK, East Sikkim and called for more close linkages with the line Departments to reach the farmers' doorstep. In his closing remarks, he strongly advocated upon organic seed production to meet the seed requirement of the state. He also stressed that value chain development of mushroom through production, value addition and marketing and collaborative programmes must be initiated with NABARD and SIMFED.

The meeting ended with vote of thanks by Dr. Manoj Kumar, SMS (Agronomy), KVK, East Sikkim.

Bharat-ko-Jaano chain yatra brings Indians closer

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 MAR:

Culture Department, Government of Sikkim, in collaboration with the North East Zone Cultural Centre (NEZCC), Ministry of Culture, Dimapur (Nagaland) conducted a three-day Chain Yatra, "Bharat ko Jano," at Ranka Senior Secondary School, Syari Secondary School and Sang Martam Secondary School from 22 to 24 March.

The main aim of the programme is to exchange and understand the rich cultural diversity of India.

The programme was joined by artistes from Ma-

harastra, Manipur, Assam, Meghalaya and Sikkim.

Advisor of the Culture Department, Bhim Kumari Sharma, was present as the chief guest on the first and last days while Cultural Heritage and Communal Harmony Board chairperson Sonam Sherpa was the chief guest on 23 March.

The programme was also attended by the Principals, Headmasters, teachers and students of the above schools as audience. The participation of the students these respective schools for performing cultural programme added flavour to the programme.

Women's safety and empowerment discussed at national seminar

New Delhi, 24 Mar (IPR): The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India organised a seminar with the National Commission for Women and State Commissions for Women on safety and empowerment of women at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi on 23 Mar, 2021.

Union Minister for Women and Child Development, Smriti Zubin Irani chaired the seminar.

The meeting was also attended by the Chairperson, Rekha Sharma-NCW, Secretary-Ram Mohan Mishra MWCD, Additional Secretary-Ashish Shrivastava, Joint Secretary-Pallavi Agraw-

al and Chairpersons of all the State Commissions.

The Minister highlighted the objective of the seminar and urged for convergence of various stake holders for the implementation of Mission shakti for safety and empowerment of women.

Various issues relating to the implementation of the sexual harassment of women at workplace and one stop centre were discussed. Chairperson Sikkim State Commission for Women, Chungkiku Lepcha, along with the Member Secretary, Yousa Lachenpa attended the said programme.

Plantation drive of medicinal plants for Nutrition Fortnight



SUMMIT REPORT

RANGPO, 26 MAR:

A district-level plantation drive of medicinal plants under Poshan Pakhawada was organised by District Task Force, East District (Poshan Abhiyaan), SJ&WD, at the SDM Office premises, Pakyong, today.

Addressing nutritional challenges through Food Forestry and orga-

nizing Poshan Panchayats are key focus areas for Poshan Pakhawada 2021.

Medicinal plants issued from Karthok Nursery, Pakyong Forest Range, and NTFP, Forest Department were planted during the drive. Programme was attended by SDM Pakyong, Milan Rai, BDO Pakyong, Nilkhanta Bhandari, SDPO Pakyong, AE, Pakyong, Yamini

Pradhan, DPO (Poshan) SJ&WD, DPO/CDPO Pakyong, Samdup Bhutia, Officials from Forest Department, Supervisors and AWWs of Pakyong Rural Project and all converging line Departments of SDM Office participated in the plantation drive. Objectives of Poshan Pakhawada were highlighted by DPO, SJ&WD and Poshan pledge was administered.

Customs SP Imphal booked by CBI in DA case

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 26 MAR:

The Central Bureau of Investigation has registered a case against a Superintendent of Customs, Imphal on the allegations of possession of disproportionate assets to the tune of Rs. 56.75 lakh (approx.). It was alleged that the accused during the period

01 Jan, 2018 to 31 Dec, 2020, had acquired huge assets both movable and immovable in his name and in the name of his family members which were disproportionate to his known sources of income.

Searches were conducted at the premises of the accused and his relative at Imphal on 25 Mar,

2021 which led to recovery of cash of Rs.10.59 Lakh (approx.); gold ornaments worth Rs. 15 lakh (approx.), 04 Bank Accounts; 15 LIC Policies and other incriminating documents including purchase of various properties including (homestead land/paddy lands) and investments in Financial Institutions, etc.

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Sure, All of India Should Say Jai Shri Ram

And also Allahu-Akbar, Jai Masi, Lha Gyalo, Aachuley

So, in these times of competing obnoxiousness, or is it just a race to noxiousness, the running assertion of the bhakts is to insist that everyone in the country say “Jai Shri Ram”. The issue had also almost become a poll issue in neighbouring West Bengal but appears to have faded in the background somewhat. That said, sure, as commanded we will chant “Jai Shri Ram” ...after we are done with standing in attention in the prescribed posture to the national anthem before the screening of “Private Teacher”, rested our legs after a liquor shop hunt, beaten up some Gujjars herding their animals to the next pasture, posted on Facebook that farmers are aatankwadis, tweeted about the loud azaan which distracted us from finishing the 2GB playlist for Ganesh Chaturthi, picketed the “African” embassy because they called us racist some years back, counseled the gay cousin to try yoga as treatment...

There is really so much to get through to earn the credentials of becoming a patriot that while we are getting processed, people like the West Bengal BJP chief who believes that those opposing the chants of “Bharat Mata ki Jai” and “Jai Sri Ram” in the country will become history, who have clearly already earned the nationalist ribbons can carry forward the responsibilities of good Indians and continue raising more slogans, starting with Allahu-Akbar, moving to Jai Masi and then also remembering the margins and also saving breath for Lha Gyalo and Aachuley. And while he is at it, he could also try wrapping his tongue around Sewaney and Phyafulo.

Because, isn’t that what our definition of secular is? Not, no special treatment for any religion, but special treatment for all faiths? Why, even Sunny Deol knew this in 1947 when he chased after his wife into Pakistan and agreed to zindabad a different faith and different country, but drew the line when he was asked to run down his own desh. The hand-pump moment followed. So you know what happens when you push people beyond a breaking point. Yes, we rip out hand pumps. Wait, what did you say, that was just a movie? So he did not actually pull out that hand-pump and smash all those heads? That was all bakwaas, you say? And what you are peddling is not?

Why India is Banking on Health Diplomacy to Grow African Footprint

DAN BANIK & RENU MODI
theconversation.com

India has stepped up its global ambitions and foreign policy re-engagement with African countries in recent years. Its bilateral trade increased from \$7.2 billion in 2001 to \$63 billion in 2017/18. India is now the third largest export destination and the fifth largest investor on the continent.

While it plays catch-up with China’s commanding presence in Africa, India has signed numerous new bilateral agreements. It has also strengthened its diplomatic presence and is actively furthering trade, infrastructure and private sector investments.

In our research under a multi-year project, we found that New Delhi promotes an alternative model of development. It showcases the successes of its Green Revolution and advances in information, communication and technology. But it also highlights its ability to develop “Triple A” technology – affordable, appropriate, adaptable.

India’s expertise in affordable healthcare has assumed increased significance during the ongoing pandemic. New Delhi is already reaping the benefits of an ambitious diplomatic initiative to deliver Made-in-India vaccines to developing countries.

India is one the largest producers of drugs globally. It manufactures 60% of the world’s vaccines. Many African countries have purchased or received these as gifts.

New Delhi’s capacity and willingness to produce and share COVID-19 vaccines have further boosted the country’s diplomatic heft and recognition as a global power.

INDIA’S AFRICA POLICY

India’s historical footprint in Africa differs from that of other powers. New Delhi offered support for African countries in their struggle against colonial rule. Indo-African partnership followed in the post-colonial period. This was cemented by solidarity with and support for the Non-Aligned Movement and the fight against racism.

India also offered support for South Africa in its struggle against apartheid. In addition, New Delhi points to the presence of a sizeable Indian diaspora and their economic and philanthropic contributions on the continent.

Since the early 1990s, India has moved from idealism to pragmatism and the explicit pursuit of commercial interests. The change was driven by robust economic growth at home and the need to access raw materials and new markets.

India’s push for South-South cooperation relies on three broad elements. The first is a shared identity as part of the “Third World”. Second is expertise in cost-effective development technologies. Third is a recurrent articulation of the principles of mutual respect and solidarity.

Its long history of being democratic and its successes in reducing poverty and preventing famines have also bolstered the legitimacy of its develop-

mental approach in the Global South.

Since 2018, the India-Africa partnership has been based on a set of principles. These have emphasised “local priorities”. They call for joint efforts to reform global institutions, combat climate change and fight global terrorism. They also highlight capacity building for agriculture, education, digital technology and cooperation on peacekeeping and maritime issues.

How and to what extent might Africa benefit from India’s growing interest? We identify three broad sets of health-related opportunities and benefits that may shape the future of India-Africa relations.



THREE MAJOR AREAS OF COLLABORATION

The first relates to India’s formidable reputation as the “pharmacy of the world”. It has actively contributed to meeting global demand for vaccines, over the counter medicines and low-cost generic drugs. The relatively low manufacturing costs make Indian products affordable throughout the world.

Almost 20% of India’s pharmaceutical exports, valued at US\$ 17 billion, are to Africa. Southern and western regions of Africa are the largest importers of Indian medicines. These include antiretroviral (ARV) drugs that cost only a fraction of those produced by Western companies.

The second relates to capacity building and collaboration in the health sector. Leading Indian healthcare providers are collaborating with African partners. Some have opened or plan to open speciality hospitals across Africa.

Since 2009, the Pan-African E-Network supported by India has offered tele-medicine services. This also connects Indian hospitals and educational centres with their counterparts in Africa. With its state-of-the-art medical facilities, which offer services at competitive costs, India has also emerged as an attractive destination for “medical tourism”.

The third relates to India’s active “medical diplomacy”. Africa’s reliance on a cheap supply of essential medicines in addition to an affordable COVID-19 vac-

cine is only likely to increase in the near future.

But Africa’s success in containing pandemics such as Ebola offers lessons to India, too. An illustrative example is Senegal, which has adapted its experiences from the 2014 Ebola outbreak to fight COVID-19. Numerous additional lessons on disease control from African countries can also be scaled up to improve India’s health sector.

FUTURE COLLABORATION ON HEALTH

India appears well-poised to share its digital capabilities for improved and affordable access to universal healthcare. New Delhi has revamped its tele-medicine and online video consultation infra-

structure on the continent. This offers a cost effective and safe option for treating contagious diseases.

In the near future, India’s partners may benefit from its online and mobile applications to improve accessibility and affordability of healthcare. Online platforms can be used to access information on blood banks, public hospitals, and organ donation. Mobile applications can help track the vaccine status of children and disease awareness.

But there are also some challenges that must be resolved. Combating the menace of counterfeit medicines on the African continent is one. In addition to existing measures to curb criminal activity, mobile apps can verify medicines to tackle the problem.

A major challenge is improving access to generic medicines through negotiated intellectual property rights waivers. At the World Trade Organisation, India and South Africa have taken a moral stance against “vaccine nationalism”. Their joint proposal in October 2020 for a temporary waiver on drugs and COVID-19 vaccines was nevertheless rejected by the organisation.

Since then, however, mainly African countries have shown growing support for the proposal.

[Dan Banik is Professor of political science, Director of the Oslo SDG Initiative, Host of "In Pursuit of Development" podcast, University of Oslo; Renu Modi is Professor in African Studies, University of Mumbai]

Nawal El Saadawi: Egypt’s grand novelist, physician and global activist

ADELE NEWSON-HORST
theconversation.com

Egyptian novelist, physician, sociologist and global activist Nawal El Saadawi died on 21 March 2021 at the age of 89. The author of more than 50 books, she told me in one of our many interviews, in 2007, that she self-identified as

an African from Egypt, not from the Middle East ... I am not from the third world. There is one world, that is a racist, capitalist economic world. I became a feminist when I was a child – when I started to ask questions to become aware that women are oppressed and feel discrimination.

Although her autobiography A Daughter of Isis (1986) is among the best known of her publications world-wide, she identified her vocation as that of a novelist: “I am mainly a novelist. Most of my books are novels.”

THE NOVELIST

In fact, she was always writing a novel. Her 2004 work titled The Novel begins: “The novel caused tremendous outrage ... Her life became her first novel.”

Arguably, the place to start in the evaluation of her works is what she deemed the function and perimeters of the novel. She wrote all her novels in Arabic. When asked about the translations of her works, she responded:

Can you translate music? So you can’t translate novels. At least 30% of the spirit of the work goes. Language is body, spirit, mind ... You dream in your (native) language.

Yet she conceded that she wrote essays in English.

El Saadawi was a global iconoclast in the best sense of the

phrase. In a world that has become compartmentalised, tribal, overtly racist, anti-science and unashamedly sexist, her novels espoused truths that made her unpopular with many in government and in the so-called establishment. Asked if there was one politician she respected, she explained, “In a system based on oppression, an angel will be corrupted. I don’t have in mind anyone who kept his promise.”

Her penchant for looking at a situation and calling out its components – even though they were shrouded in deceptive marketing – was remarkable. She once confessed to me, “If I don’t tell the truth, I don’t deserve to be called a writer.” She admitted in her autobiography:

Memory is never complete. There are always parts of it that time has amputated. Writing is a way of retrieving them, of bringing the missing parts back to it, or making it more holistic. If memory involves the recall of the things that happened, then the way to render a thing is to draw on creative thoughts.

A SCIENTIST AND AN ARTIST

El Saadawi believed that to be whole – to recover the missing parts – one must embrace the science as well as the artistic and creative. She said:

I am a medical doctor ... immersed in blood. I’d rather be with healthy people. I wanted to be a dancer. My father said, ‘Dancing means prostitution.’

Learning from such contradictions early on, El Saadawi became subversive in life and distinctly political in her writings. People have identified her works as political fiction and biographical fiction. To do so is to ignore the art or creativity of her writing. A more prudent

evaluation would rest with the marriage of the politics of her life and the creativity that inspired her soul.

There is a clinical aspect to her writings. She relentlessly focuses on the issues without the trappings of romantic love and sentimentality. That is the key to evaluating and enjoying her works.



She admitted that she had been nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature a couple of times, “but people don’t like my politics”. In a 2012 interview in Baltimore, El Saadawi told me:

I’m proud of myself. Not because I did fantastic things, but because I never changed. People usually compromise. I’m proud because I didn’t compromise.

This insistence on sharing her view of the truth on the condition of women, religion and politics is the key to the continued interest in her works. She never compromised because in many ways the condition of women globally has not much changed and because there is an ethos that persistently governs women, that, she believed,

demanding unequivocal attention.

THE LIFE

El Saadawi was born in 1931 in a village outside of Cairo. She refused to accept the limitations imposed on her by the religious, gender and colonial oppression most women of rural origin experienced.

She attended the University of

FAME AND JAIL

From 1973 to 1976 El Saadawi researched women and neurosis. In 1977, she published her most famous work The Hidden Face of Eve, which covered a host of topics relative to Arab women such as aggression against female children and genital mutilation,

Even after her release from prison, El Saadawi’s life was threatened by those who opposed her work, mainly Islamic fundamentalists. Armed guards were stationed outside her home in Giza for several years until she left the country to be a visiting professor at European and North American universities.

prostitution, sexual relationships, marriage and divorce and Islamic fundamentalism.

From 1979 to 1980 she was the United Nations’ advisor for the women’s program in North Africa and the Middle East. Later in 1980, as a culmination of the long war she had fought for Egyptian women’s social and intellectual freedom, she was imprisoned under the Anwar Sadat regime. She was released in 1982 and in 1983 she published Memoirs from the Women’s Prison in which she continued her bold attacks on the repressive Egyptian government. The year 1983 also marked the year that the English version of Woman at Point Zero was published after appearing in Arabic in 1975.

She devoted her time to being a writer, journalist and world-wide speaker on women’s issues. In 2002, officials tried to forcefully divorce her from her husband, but international solidarity helped her to win her case. In 2004 she presented herself as a candidate for presidential election in Egypt. Then in 2007, the controversy of her play God Resigns at the Summit Meeting erupted. She said that those who condemned her hadn’t even read the play.

This was the power of Nawal El Saadawi, that her books – coldly scientific and endlessly creative – were seen as weapons in a war that is still to be won.

[the writer is Professor, Morgan State University]

Nepal becomes self-sufficient in egg and meat production

SANGAM PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, 26 MAR
[KATHMANDUPOST]: Nepal on Thursday announced it had become self-sufficient in the production of egg and meat, and was progressing towards achieving self-sufficiency in milk too.

In the context of food security, this means the country relies fully on domestic production to meet its food needs.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), a specialised agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger, has set the per capita per year requirement of egg in the developing countries at 48 units. The meat requirement for a person, a source of protein, is 14 kg per year while the milk requirement is 91 litres.

As per the new data released by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli on Thursday, a Nepali eats 18.1 kg of meat and 61 eggs annually, well above the benchmark set by the UN body. The consumption of milk currently stands at 79 litres, still short by 12 litres.

Per capita meat consumption was 9.8 kg per year in 2008 and 9.7 kg in 2000.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development said that the country produces 2.3



million tonnes of milk, 548,000 tonnes of meat, 91,000 tonnes of fish and 1.61 billion eggs annually.

The ministry said that based on current market prices, Nepal's annual meat, egg, fish and milk output is valued at Rs450 billion. The country produces meat worth Rs275 billion, milk worth Rs122 billion, fish worth Rs37 million and eggs worth Rs17 billion per year.

"Commercial production is the key reason why Nepal has achieved self-sufficiency in meat and egg," said Yogendra Kumar Karki, secretary at the ministry. "We are also making progress

towards making Nepal self-sufficient in milk."

The ministry said that Nepal, which used to import 600,000 goats annually, has been able to slash this by 97 percent. Buffalo imports have come down to zero in the last two years.

The import of goats, according to experts, plunged due to Covid-19 related restrictions. "It also reflects a drop in imports during the Dashain festival when a large number of the animals are slaughtered. Last year, the celebrations were subdued, consequently demand fell," said a ministry official.

According to the FAO, meat demand continues to increase as income keeps on growing in the developing countries, where per capita consumption is projected to rise further and per capita growth rates to be equivalent to those in the developed countries, when compared to the base period.

In the developed countries, changes in meat consumption reflect a decline in the influence of factors such as income and price, and many of these countries have reached saturation in their meat consumption levels. Historically,

lower prices have contributed to making poultry the meat of choice for consumers in the developing countries. With slow growth in income over the projection period, this will continue to be the case, and poultry will constitute the largest share of additional per capita consumption at the global level.

The proliferation of the poultry industry has helped the country to achieve self-sufficiency in meat, said Secretary Karki. "The industry is expected to grow further due to the rise in income."

The Nepal Commercial Poultry Survey 2014-15 prepared by the Central Bureau of Statistics showed that the commercial production of eggs amounts to 1.20 billion units annually.

Chickens are produced commercially in 64 of the country's 77 districts, and 55,871 people are engaged in the business. Commercial chicken production began in 1974. Between 2004 and 2013, a large number of farmers shifted to poultry. The average global meat consumption was 41.3 kg per person in 2015, according to the FAO.

In the South Asian region, per capita meat consumption was 7.6 kg per person per year.

3 more Covid...

break-up of vaccination, 1260 persons [1170 first dose & 90 second dose] in East District, 270 persons [254 first dose & 16 second dose] in West District, 59 persons [36 first dose & 23 second dose] in North District and 162 persons [149 first dose & 13 second dose] in South District received vaccine shots for COVID-19.

Likewise, 97 healthcare workers [74 first dose & 23 second dose], 217 frontline workers [98 first dose & 119 second dose], 354 persons in age group of 45 to 59 years with comorbidities and 1083 persons in age group of 60 years & above were vaccinated in the State.

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Assembly passes...

of salaries, wages etc and shall not be used for incurring expenditure or new items or new services. The total fund requirement is of the order of Rs 2,32,148.06 lakh comprising of Rs 1,86,862.97 lakh on Revenue Account and Rs 45,285.09 lakh on Capital Account. The Vote on Account was put to vote and passed by the House.

The CM also introduced the Sikkim Appropriation (Vote on Account) Bill, 2021.

As per the Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill, the Bill is introduced in pursuance of clause (1) of Article 204 of the Constitution of India read with Article 206 thereof, to provide for the appropriation from and out of the Consolidated Fund of the State of Sikkim, of the moneys required to meet the expenditure charged on the Consolidated Fund of the State of Sikkim and Grants made in advance by the Sikkim Legislative Assembly for the expenditure of the Government of Sikkim for the part of the Financial Year 2021-22. The Appropriation Bill was also considered and passed by the House.

During the session, Speaker, LB Das took the consensus of the House to continue with the same elected/ nominated Members for the Assembly Committees and Panel of Chairpersons for the financial year 2021-22 until new Committees are constituted.

The consensus was taken under the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly.

The CM, who is also the Minister in Charge of Finance Department, also presented the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on Performance Audit of Select District Hospitals in Sikkim for the year ended March, 2019 and half yearly Report 2020-21 on Review of Trends in Receipt and Expenditure in relation to budget 2020-21.

The Speaker also informed the House on the presentation of Annual Reports of various Departments.

In his valedictory remarks, the CM thanked all Members of the State As-

NBT workshop for...

page design, layout planning and at the end of the workshop, around 30 illustrated books were developed.

These books, NBT believes, will nurture the child's imagination and creative aptitude.

The workshop was organized in collaboration with Sikkim Akademi, Culture Department and saw the participation of authors Arjun Rai "Yava", Pravin Rai "Jumeli", Dr Kavita Lama, Meena Subba, Tulshi Ghimirey, Ananthbandhu Chatterjee, Dipanwita Roy and Dr Swati Guha.

The authors worked with illustrators Diwakar Lamichaney, Sagar Subba, Deepa Rai, Dhiraj Pradhan, Budhi Kr Subba, Debashis Saha, Kalicharan Hembram, and Debabrata Ghosh.

NBT is an autonomous body established by the Ministry of Education, GOI, in the year 1957 engaged in promoting and publishing books in all Indian languages.

Among NBT's objectives are to produce and encourage the production of good literature in all Indian languages and to make such literature available at moderate prices to the public and to bring out book catalogues, arrange book fairs/exhibitions and seminars, workshops and take all necessary steps to make the people book minded.

The Trust has decided to strengthen the Nepali language and literature through various measures like publishing good books in Nepali, promoting young Nepali authors, organising programmes on National Education Policy and bringing out translations, bilingual books, which will enrich the Nepali language tradition and its heritage, an official release states.

Thus far, the Trust has published 31 books in Nepali language.

What also inspired participants at the workshop was that Director and Chairperson of National Book Trust, Col

sembly for their support on passing the three amendment bills, third supplementary demands for Grants 2020-21 and appropriation bills and Vote on Account 2021-22 in the interest of people of Sikkim. He also thanked the Speaker, Deputy Speaker and Members of the house and everyone for their participation in the assembly session.

The CM also appealed to the people of Sikkim to strictly follow all safety protocols of COVID-19. He expressed that although the State has now very few coronavirus cases, the threat of COVID-19 has still not gone completely and urged everyone to stay alert and safe.

He informed that the vaccination drive for COVID-19 has been progressing in an aggressive manner across the State to cover every person in Sikkim.

On a suggestion placed by a Member of the house, DR Thapa, during his vote of thanks address, he mentioned that a case related to the expulsion of four students from Gyalshing College was presently in the High Court so the matter was sub-judice to comment on.

While participating in the valedictory remarks, MLA DR Thapa urged the CM to extend his personal intervention in the matter of termination of the four students. He said that if the students had committed a crime they should be booked and punished, otherwise they should be allowed to at least take their examinations.

He urged the CM to look into the matter and give justice to the students.

In his valedictory remarks, LB Das thanked the CM and all Members of the house for their participation in the proceedings of the House.

He stated that the Session had to be limited to one day as the Covid-19 safety protocols are still in effect. He added that due to the Model Code of Conduct enforced for the Election to the Urban Local Bodies in the State, the Assembly could not meet timely for the regular Budget Session, and hence the one-day Session was urgently convened for Vote on Account 2021-22 under Article 206 of the Constitution of India.

Yuvraj Malik and Prof Govind Prasad Sharma. came over from Delhi to take part in the workshop.

The State Project Director, Sikkim, Bhim Thatal attended the inaugural session as chief guest accompanied by Sikkim Akademi president, SR Subba.

A book exhibition by NBT was also organised on the side-lines of the Workshop and was handsomely visited, including by students.

Col Malik, in his inaugural speech, remarked, "One book, one day will change your life, it will change your entire life perspective."

Mr Thatal, in turn, spoke elaborately on the newly implemented Education Policy 2020 and the need for reading habit and age-appropriate books. He sought NBT's help and support in future endeavours.

President, Sikkim Akademi, Mr Subba, said that they are welcoming all such activities which promote Nepali language, literature and cultural heritage. He added that NBT India was truly dedicated in its mission to promote Nepali language and literature.

Prof Sharma expressed happiness with the workshop and expressed confidence that it will create content enriched with local tales, culture and ethos.

He emphasised the rich cultural heritage and its reflection on literature and how it was needed to get in touch with one's roots.

He remarked that children's literature was the backbone of all civilisations and stressed that its growth should be given paramount importance.

The Project In-Charge, Asstt Editor of NBT, Bratin Dey said that suitable and quality reading materials are getting developed to enrich Nepali language and literature which will be published after editorial quality checks and process.

Where is Sikkim's...

There are contractors and suppliers of all kinds. They have a direct stake in the government. In a small state with such a meager population, a man in Machong knows what a man in Sombarey is saying and writing on Facebook. Most of these political party workers have only one gift for their leaders - namely 'pol' (gossip, title-tattle) with the sole intention of wining the leader's favour by reporting ill of others and thus proving their own loyalty.

A huge chunk of the population is directly related by blood or linked by political affiliation to the powers that be. We do not want to be on the wrong side of the administration by questioning them.

Three, there is apparently an easy opportunity to rise higher in life. No Indian state has witnessed such massive social mobility in recent times as Sikkim has seen. Doctors, engineers, lawyers, assistant professors, police officers, bureaucrats, technocrats, entrepreneurs, contractor and suppliers are coming up from every nook and cranny of Sikkim. Now there are media personalities and journalists mushrooming at a lightning speed. A large number of farming parents have abandoned farming as their government employee children want them to 'enjoy' a workless life. Small huts in villages are growing into multistoried concrete buildings. Cowsheds and other animal-sheds are being replaced by garages. Farmlands are being converted into 'sites for sale'. When there are such opportunities galore, why waste time in lobbying for human rights, crying for environment conservation, holding the government to account, demanding transparency and so on! Why miss the bus of prosperity by engaging in such boring enterprises?

Apparently, most of those who raise their voices are those who are in politics. How many of those who were angry and concerned voices against the last government are now in the new government? Sikkim's total dependence on politics is not helpful. The Sikkimese who can think, write and speak cannot afford to hide behind lame excuses. I have been told that there is a group of overeducated, highly sophisticated, ultra-refined and super elite Sikkimese who criticize in private and think it below their 'dignity' (what dignity- only they know) to write and speak in public. We don't have time to wait for this stuck-up group to speak. Now the ball is in our court. Expressing our concern is one of the easiest things we can do to repay society for the privileges of the rights we enjoy.

Kathmandu authorities to make masks mandatory in public vehicles



SHUVAN DHUNGANA
KATHMANDU, 26 MAR
[KATHMANDUPOST]: Authorities in Nepal appear to have suddenly woken up after a year.

A year since the country imposed a nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of the coronavirus, officials for the past two days have been scrambling to enforce measures to control the virus spread.

On Friday, a meeting between Kathmandu Chief District Officer Kali Prasad Parajuli and officials from the Department of Transport Management, Metropolitan Traffic Police Office and transport operators decided to make masks compulsory for all those using public vehicles.

The decision follows an announcement by chief district officers of Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur to initiate action against those not wearing masks in public.

On Sunday, the Ministry of Health in a statement urged all to avoid rallies, social gatherings and places that see large gatherings of people.

Parajuli, chief dis-

trict officer of Kathmandu, said the decision to strictly enforce masks in public vehicles was taken because commuters were not doing so.

After a resurgence in Covid-19 cases in India, Nepali officials have expedited discussions to adopt protective measures to prevent and control the possible transmission of the virus.

Parajuli said in the initial phase, people would be made aware why they should wear masks in public places and vehicles.

"Nepal Police, traffic police and officials of the District Administration Office will monitor if the decisions are being properly followed or not," Parajuli told the Post. "We are planning to provide hand wash facilities at bus stops as well."

After seeing a steady decline in coronavirus cases, Nepal is reporting a gradual rise in the number of infections of late.

A sudden spike in daily count of coronavirus cases in India too has come as a cause for concern in Nepal.

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Italy beats Northern Ireland 2-0 at start of WCup qualifying

ROME, MAR 26 (AP): Italy started its World Cup qualifying campaign with a comfortable 2-0 win over Northern Ireland as the Azzurri set out to rectify their failures from four years ago.

Italy didn't qualify the 2018 World Cup in Russia missing the tournament for the first time in six decades but cemented its status as the Group C favorite as Domenico Berardi and Ciro Immobile scored in the first half in Parma on Thursday.

"The first half was excellent and we should've scored more goals," Italy coach Roberto Mancini said. The ball was moving quickly, it was perfect. We scored two goals and we could have scored another two at least.

"We'll have to review the second half because we must do better than that. Perhaps we started to take a few too many touches and the ball moved slowly. It can happen after five months of not seeing each other."

Italy next has two away matches, against Bulgaria on Sunday and Lithuania three days later. Northern Ireland hosts Bulgaria next Wednesday.

Switzerland won 3-1 in Bulgaria in the other Group C match.

Italy had only lost once to Northern Ireland, in nine meetings, although that defeat saw it fail to qualify for the 1958 World Cup.

Berardi opened the scoring with the first real chance as he ran onto a ball over the top from Alessandro Florenzi, burst down the right and cut inside before firing into the roof of the net from a tight angle.

It was Berardi's fourth goals in his past five Italy matches.

Italy almost doubled its lead moments later, following another dangerous ball over the top, but Northern Ireland goalkeeper Bailey Peacock-Farrell saved Immobile's shot. Immobile did get on the scoresheet six minutes from halftime, running onto Lorenzo Insigne's through ball and firing into the bottom left corner. It was a Immobile's first Italy goal since 2019 and the Lazio forward who won the European Golden Shoe last year celebrated by punching and kicking the corner flag.

"I felt a weight off my shoulders, I hadn't scored for a year and a half for Italy," Immobile said. "It was a release, an important goal for me and for the team, seeing as the match was a bit complicated."

There was a scare for Italy 10 minutes after the break as a poor backpass from Azzurri midfielder Manuel Locatelli set clear Gavin Whyte but goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma parried with his feet and then made a second save to deny Michael Smith. It was another clean sheet for Italy, which has now conceded just three goals in 13 matches.

In Sofia, Switzerland scored all its goals in the first 13 minutes on its way to a comfortable win.

New Zealand wins 3rd ODI by 164 runs, sweeps series 3-0

WELLINGTON, MAR 26 (AP): Maiden centuries to Devon Conway and allrounder Daryl Mitchell lifted New Zealand to a 164-run win over Bangladesh in the third one-day cricket international Friday and a 3-0 sweep of the series.

South Africa-born Conway made 126, including a century from 95 balls, and shared a record 159-run partnership with Mitchell as New Zealand made 318-6 batting first after winning the toss. Mitchell took 17 runs from the 50th over to complete his century, in 92 balls, from the last delivery of the innings.

Matt Henry then crashed through the Bangladesh top order, taking 3-13 from his first four overs to undermine the tourists' reply.

Bangladesh slumped to 26-3 when Trent Boult pulled off a spectacular catch at third man to dismiss Litton Das, and eventually was all out for 154 in the 43rd over.

Mahmudullah prolonged the innings with an unbeaten 76 for Bangladesh, and Jimmy Neesham returned career-best ODI figures of 5-27 for New Zealand.

Earlier, Conway's steady 110-ball innings led New Zealand's rally after it had been 57-3 in the 11th over.

Mitchell provided the drama at the end with his race against time to reach his hundred.

He came to the last over on 83 and hit three fours from the first three balls from Mustafizur Rahman, the third from a no ball, to go to 95.

Mitchell and Mitchell Santner



scrambled two runs from the ensuing free hit but Mitchell managed only a single to be 98 and off strike with two balls remaining.

Santner hit the next ball deep into the outfield and, taking advantage of the ground's broad boundaries, the pair sprinted through for three runs to bring Mitchell back on strike.

He clipped the final ball into the leg side and the pair stretched a single into two, helped by a loose throw from the field.

"There was obviously a bit of running there and I was blowing a bit," Mitchell said.

"It was nice to get the job done

and Dev (Conway) batted awesomely to get a score for us. For me it was just about being positive, trying to pick your moments to put pressure on them and try to get a bit of luck along the way."

Conway's century, his first for New Zealand in any format, followed his unbeaten 99 in a Twenty20 international against Australia in February. There is nothing showy about Conway's style; he accentuates technical correctness over any kind of flourish.

But he has become a relentless run-maker in both domestic and international cricket since transferring his allegiance from Gauteng and

South Africa to Wellington and New Zealand in 2017. Conway has been a fund of runs for New Zealand in white ball cricket since his debut in November, making 366 runs in 11 T20 internationals at an average of 52.2 and now 225 runs in three one-day internationals at 75.

"I think for me it's about trying to keep it nice and simple, keeping a positive mindset," he said. "Credit to Daryl, he came in and played his natural, positive game."

Conway went to the crease on the sun-drenched Basin Reserve with New Zealand 44-1 in the eighth over after a sound opening partnership between Martin Guptill and Henry

Nicholls (18). Guptill (26) was out soon afterwards and Ross Taylor's return to the New Zealand team after missing the first two matches of the series with a hamstring strain wasn't fruitful.

He was out for 7 in the 11th over when New Zealand 57-3.

Conway began rebuilding the New Zealand innings in a 63-run fourth wicket partnership with stand-in captain Tom Latham, who made 18 before falling to the first ball from Soumya Sarkar.

Mitchell took time to establish himself, taking only nine runs from his first 23 balls before launching a ball from Mehidy Hasan Miraz over mid-wicket for six. Mitchell and Conway forged an ideal partnership in which Conway provided solidity and steady accumulation and Mitchell was able to hit out judiciously, reaching his half century from 63 balls.

Conway went to his century with an elevated cut shot off Taskin Ahmed and his partnership with Mitchell became New Zealand's highest for the fifth wicket against Bangladesh, and the highest for any wicket in a one-day international on the Basin Reserve.

"The two guys (Conway and Mitchell) batted beautifully," Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal said. "They didn't give us any chances."

"But sometimes the small things hurt you more, the dropped catches and run-out chances. New Zealand was exceptional throughout the series. We were just not good enough.

McIlroy outlines new coaching arrangement with Cowen



AUSTIN (TEXAS), MAR 26 (AP): Rory McIlroy is turning to noted English swing coach Pete Cowen to shore up issues at the top of his swing without any kind of an overhaul, and he hopes to pick up other "little nuggets" that can only help.

McIlroy spoke for the first time Thursday about his decision to bring Cowen into his stable, adding that longtime coach Michael Bannon will still be involved.

One reason for the change is travel.

McIlroy said he hasn't been able to see his coach from Northern Ireland as frequently since the COVID-19 pandemic and continuity has been lacking.

"Every time we saw each other it was almost like we were trying to do too much," McIlroy said. "Where I think Pete is out on tour enough to sort of give me maybe feels that I can play with and then stuff that I can work on the range."

"As everyone knows, it's so hard to go out on the golf course and think so much about your golf swing," he said.

"You need to be able to let that go and just be able to play shots. But if you have a couple little

feels in there, it can help, and that's sort of the reason that I've went down this road."

McIlroy has not won since the HSBC Champions in Shanghai in the fall of 2019, though he was playing as well as anyone up until the pandemic shut down golf. Since the return in June, he has had only six top 10s in 20 starts worldwide as his world ranking has gone from No. 1 to No. 11.

The Dell Technologies Match Play is his final event before he goes to the Masters with another shot at completing the career Grand Slam.

McIlroy stayed alive at Austin Country Club with a 4-and-3 win over Lanto Griffin. He would need to win Friday and have Griffin beat Ian Poulter for any chance of advancing to the weekend. But this is more about the long haul.

McIlroy emphasized that he is not starting anything new with Cowen, whom he has known since he was 13.

"He's seen me grow up swinging the golf club," McIlroy said.

"With what I'm struggling with in my swing at the minute, I think his coaching philosophy puts an emphasis on that

in terms of getting structure in the right arm and getting that supported at the top, and I just felt like he maybe had some ideas and had maybe a little more knowledge on that part of the golf swing than what I currently had."

McIlroy said Cowen also is renowned for his work on the short game.

"I think just picking up those little nuggets from him is only going to help in the long run," he said. McIlroy said the relationship and the agreement he has with Bannon is "still the same."

McIlroy dug himself a hole at the Match Play with a 6-and-5 loss to Poulter in the opening round, his worst loss in this event in 10 years. He went through 11 bags of balls on the practice range after his loss.

"It's a very difficult game at times, and I feel like it's testing me a little more than it has done in the last few years," McIlroy said.

"I feel the only way to get through it is to put your head down and work on the right things. ... There's going to be some good days, there's going to be some bad, but I feel like I'm on the right path."

Spain held by Greece; Ibrahimovic returns with Sweden

MADRID, MAR 26 (AP): Spain's newcomers couldn't add the spark "La Roja" needed in its World Cup qualifying opener.

Youngsters Bryan Gil and Pedri Gonz lez came off the bench to make their national team debut on Thursday but couldn't keep Spain from being held to a 1-1 home draw against Greece.

In the other Group B match, Sweden defeated Georgia 1-0 as Zlatan Ibrahimovic set up the winning goal on his return to international soccer after almost five years.

The 39-year-old AC Milan striker came out of international retirement ahead of this summer's European Championship, having last played for Sweden at Euro 2016. He set up the goal after receiving a pass on his chest and scooping the ball into the middle of the area for Viktor Claesson's close-range shot in the 35th minute.

In Granada, Ivaro Morata put Spain ahead in the first half but the visitors equalized with a penalty

converted by Anastasios Bakasetas early in the second period in one of the team's few scoring chances.

Spain coach Luis Enrique brought Pedri and Gil on to improve the team's attack but they couldn't do much to change the game's outcome.

"Bryan played well, he created some chances," Luis Enrique said. "Pedri was unlucky because they put a man just to defend against him, but he will have more opportunities."

Spain entered the match heavily favored after routing Germany 6-0 in the Nations League in its previous match. It hadn't conceded at home in seven matches, since a 2-1 win over Norway more than two years ago in European qualifying.

"We obviously didn't expect this result," Luis Enrique said. "We lacked finesse in front of the goal. It's my job to make sure that we improve in that area." Greece's players celebrated loudly after holding on to the draw at the Nue-

vo Los Carmenes Stadium. Morata found the net in the 33rd after controlling the ball with his chest and hitting the top of the net without letting the ball fall after a nice lob pass by Koke Resurreccion.

Spain looked in control but defender Igo Mart nez's foul inside the area led to Bakasetas' equalizer from the penalty spot in the 57th.

Spain loudly complained about the penalty call, which could not be reviewed as there is no VAR at this stage of qualifying.

Luis Enrique took captain Sergio Ramos off at halftime. The Real Madrid defender is coming off a knee injury that kept him sidelined for a long time.

Spain visits Georgia on Sunday and hosts Kosovo on Wednesday.

Greece's next qualifier is against Georgia at home on Wednesday. It has a friendly against Honduras on Sunday.

Only the group winners automatically qualify for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

US to play Honduras for berth in men's Olympic soccer

WASHINGTON, MAR 26

(AP): The United States will play Honduras for a berth in the Olympic men's soccer tournament in a doubleheader opener Sunday night at Guadalajara, and host Mexico will play Canada for a spot at the Tokyo Games.

The U.S.-Honduras game is a rematch of the October 2015 qualification game, won by Honduras 2-0. That year's format saw the semifinal loser go to a playoff for another berth, and the U.S. lost a home-and-home series against Colombia on 3-2 aggregate and missed its second straight Olympics.

This year's format does not include a playoff, and Sunday's two winners will complete the 16-nation field for the Olympic tournament, to be played from July 21 to August 7 in Tokyo, Kashima, Miyagi, Saitama, Sapporo and Yokohama.

Olympic men's soccer qualify-



ing is limited to players born Jan. 1, 2007, or later, though each team can add three wild-card players over the age limit for the tournament in Japan.

Clubs are not required to release players for qualifying or the Olympics. Honduras rallied to tie Canada 1-1 on Thursday and finish first in Group B.

The U.S. finished second in Group A with a 1-0 loss to Mexico

on Wednesday night. Derek Cornelius of the Vancouver Whitecaps put Canada ahead in the 28th minute, and Denil Maldonado of Chile's Everton tied the score in the 30th, with both scoring on headers.

Midfielder Kervin Arriaga received his second yellow card of the tournament in the 67th minute and will be suspended for the semifinal.

Australia endures droughts, fires, floods and marauding mice

WELLINGTON, MAR 26 (AP): Rob Costigan bought a rugged farm in rural Australia three years ago with the dream of building it into something he could leave to his kids.

One year later, he was needing to truck in water to battle an extreme drought. Then Australia's deadly wildfires raged perilously close in late 2019, forcing Costigan to spend day after day stamping out embers and running sprinklers on his roof to save his home, in an eerie atmosphere he likens to Armageddon.

Then last week, on the day his daughter Eva was supposed to be celebrating her 11th birthday, came the floods. Thankfully, the family had already left to stay at his brother's home.

The water roared through with such force it lifted both Costigan's farmhouse and a second home where his father-in-law lived from their foundations, destroying both. The family is still picking up toys and clothes strewn far and wide they even found their gas barbecue bottle stuck in a tree.

Just disbelief, said Costigan.

It feels like the world's against us. You work your guts out and then to have it all just washed away in the blink of an eye.

Costigan, 40, a road maintenance worker whose farm is in the Hollisdale community about a five-hour drive north of Sydney, said he's thankful that so far he's managed to avoid yet another disaster the plague of mice that is affecting some farms in the region. Maybe, he hopes, the floods will help wash



them away. Australia has always been a land of harsh weather, where droughts and fires form part of the nation's psyche. But experts say that global warming is likely making recent weather events more extreme. The raging wildfires that burned through until early last year killed at least 33 people and destroyed more than 3,000 homes.

These events are expected, said Sarah Perkins-Kirkpatrick, a climate scientist at the University of New South Wales. But climate change has put them on steroids.

She explained that, paradoxically, a warming atmosphere can worsen both droughts and floods. The extra heat can suck more moisture from the ground during droughts. But warmer air can also hold more moisture, she said, so that when it does rain, it pours.

Some towns in New South Wales have set 50- or 100-year records for rainfall over the past week. The floods have killed two men in separate incidents, both

of whom were trapped in their cars, and have forced more than 20,000 people from their homes.

Dale Ward this week was trying to clean out the rental apartment she owns, and where her daughter and their family live, in the town of Windsor. She said she was mopping up sludge after about 1 foot (30 centimeters) of water coursed through, destroying a box of photos and other memorabilia.

It's like someone dropped three tons of dirt in your house, and then dropped a bucket of water over the top, she said.

Ward estimates it will take at least a month to get the place habitable again, with plumbers and electricians needed to get everything fixed.

Elsewhere, people are still dealing with the plague of mice. Last year in eastern Australia, months of rain doused wildfires and ended a drought that had crippled the region for more than two years. That led to bumper crops on many farms, and an explosion

in the mouse population.

Pompy Singh, the manager of the Spar supermarket in the town of Gulargambone, said they started to notice the number of mice increasing before Christmas. They used to set one or two traps a day, he said. They started buying much larger traps and setting many more of them until they had 20 set all the time.

Suddenly they were catching 100 or 200 mice each day. The critters began eating through everything, getting into the lettuce, the potato chips, the dog food, even the tobacco. Singh said they started storing everything in refrigerators or sealed containers.

Still, he said, the mice kept coming. Some days, they were catching up to 600. Even the fridges kept breaking down as the mice chewed through the wiring. Singh said the numbers of mice seem to have decreased somewhat since the floods hit, although they're still catching plenty.

And Australia's troubles may not yet be over.

Some experts have been warning people to check their shoes and clothes for deadly spiders, as swarms of them seek refuge from the floodwaters by moving into residential homes.

Meanwhile, Costigan said he intends to rebuild. He's spent too much time putting up fences on his farm many of which survived the flooding and making other improvements to give up now. He adds that he moved his small herd of cattle to higher ground before the floods hit and they all survived.

Costigan said he feels lucky his farmhouse is insured and is also thankful to family members and neighbours who have contributed to an online fund to help his family rebuild. He said these kind of troubles all come with living in Australia, and even perhaps explain why the British initially treated the continent as a place to send their prisoners.

They thought it was hell on earth," he said. What they didn't realise is that it's a beautiful part of the world.

China sanctions Britons after UK joins EU move on Xinjiang

BEIJING (AP): China announced sanctions on British individuals and entities Friday following the U.K. joining the EU and others in sanctioning Chinese officials accused of human rights abuses in the Xinjiang region. The move was the opening salvo in its latest full-bore response to criticism and sanctions from the West.

A statement from the Chinese Foreign Ministry said the move by the Western bloc was based on "nothing but lies and disinformation, flagrantly breaches international law and basic norms governing international relations, grossly interferes in China's internal affairs, and severely undermines China-U.K. relations."

Britain's ambassador to China had been summoned for a diplomatic protest, the statement said. Sanctioned individuals and groups would be barred from visiting Chinese territory and banned from having financial transactions with Chinese citizens and institutions.

At a daily news briefing, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying unleashed a string of accusations against the U.S., the U.K., allied nations and portions of the Western media, saying they had been collaborating to subvert China's unity and development.

Sanctions against Chinese officials over Xinjiang are part of an elaborate plot to destabilize the region and do not reflect any real concern for the rights of Muslims, Hu said, saying Beijing's response was necessary to "defend China's interests and dignity."

"For a lengthy period of time, the U.S., U.K and others have felt free to say whatever they like without allowing others to do the same," Hua said. Those days are over and the West will "have to gradually get used to it," Hua said.

The latest sanctions and the harsh tone of Hua's comments reflect China's increasingly tough diplomacy under nationalist leader Xi Jinping, who has pledged to uphold China's interests at any cost. Over recent days, China has blocked already highly limited BBC broadcasts into the country and put two Canadians on trial in apparent retribution for that country's detention of an executive of Chinese telecoms giant Huawei.

China has rejected all criticism over its policies in Xinjiang, along with its crackdown on opposition figures in Hong Kong and threats against Taiwan, the self-governing island democracy China claims as its own territory. It has shrugged off U.S. sanctions against officials accused of squelching democracy in Hong Kong and angrily denounced a British plan to offer a path to residency and citizenship to millions of citizens of its former colony.

Hua opened her briefing with a video clip of a former aide to retired U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell saying the American military presence in Afghanistan, which shares a narrow border with China, was partly an effort to thwart Beijing's rise. She also named the National Endowment for Democracy and the Central Intelligence Agency

as working covertly to sow instability. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab denounced the sanctions and urged Chinese authorities to allow representatives from the U.N. into Xinjiang to "verify facts" if it wants to "credibly rebut claims of human rights abuses." China says diplomats are welcome in the region but only under Beijing-imposed conditions.

China "sanctions its critics," in contrast to the U.K. and the rest of the international community who "sanction human rights abuses," Raab said.

Nine British individuals and four institutions were placed on the sanctions list, including member of Parliament Iain Duncan Smith and the Conservative Party's Human Rights Commission. Duncan Smith is a former leader of the Conservatives.

China's sanctions are the latest move in an increasingly bitter row over Xinjiang, where Beijing is accused of detaining more than 1 million members of Uyghur and other Muslim minority groups, using forced labor and imposing coercive birth control measures.

Chinese state TV called Thursday for a boycott of Swedish retail chain H&M as Beijing lashed out at foreign clothing and footwear brands following Monday's decision by the 27-nation European Union, the United States, Britain and Canada to impose travel and financial sanctions on four Chinese officials blamed for abuses in Xinjiang. Cotton and other agricultural products form a major component of the local economy in vast but thinly populated Xinjiang.

Companies ranging from Nike to Burberry that have well-established presences in China were also targeted online, with some Chinese celebrities saying they were severing endorsement deals.

"China is firmly determined to safeguard its national sovereignty, security and development interests, and warns the U.K. side not go further down the wrong path. Otherwise, China will resolutely make further reactions," the Foreign Ministry said.

Others on the Foreign Ministry sanctions list included politicians, scholars and human rights activists Tom Tugendhat, Neil O'Brien, David Alton, Tim Loughton, Nusrat Ghani, Helena Kennedy, Geoffrey Nice and Joanne Nicola Smith Finley. The China Research Group, established by a group of Conservative MPs, independent research group Uyghur Tribunal and the Essex Court Chambers, a law firm that also described Chinese policies toward minorities in Xinjiang as crimes against humanity and genocide, were also listed. Ghani, a member of Parliament who is of Muslim heritage, said she "won't be intimidated" by Beijing's "extraordinary" move.

"This is a wakeup call for all democratic countries and lawmakers that we will not be able to conduct our day-to-day business without China sanctioning us for just attempting to expose what's happening in Xinjiang and the abuse against the Uyghurs," she told BBC radio.

Egypt races to free giant vessel blocking Suez Canal

ISMAILIA (EGYPT), MAR 26 (AP): A giant container ship remained stuck sideways Friday in Egypt's Suez Canal, as authorities race to free the vessel and reopen traffic in a crucial East-West waterway for global shipping.

The Ever Given, a Panama-flagged ship that carries cargo between Asia and Europe, ran aground Tuesday in the narrow, man-made canal dividing continental Africa from the Sinai Peninsula.

The ship, owned by Japanese firm Shoen Kisen KK, has blocked traffic in the canal, leaving dozens of smaller ships stranded in the Mediterranean and Red Seas.

The vessel's bow was touching the eastern wall, while its stern appeared lodged against the western wall an extraordinary event that experts said they had never heard of happening before in the canal's 150-year history.

The ship ran aground some 6 kilometres (3.7 miles) north of the southernly mouth of the canal, near the city of Suez, an area of the canal that's a single lane.

The Suez Canal Authority, which operates the waterway, has deployed several tugboats in efforts to refloat the massive vessel, including a specialised suction dredger that is able to shift 2,000 cubic metres of material every hour.

As of Friday morning, the vessel remained grounded in the same position, with tugboats and dredgers still working to free it, according to Canal service provider Leth Agencies. It reminded unclear when the route would reopen.

An Egyptian canal authority official called the refloating a very sensitive and complicated operation which needs to be



handled very carefully". They want to avoid "any complications" that could extend the canal closure. The official spoke on condition of anonymity as he wasn't authorized to talk to journalists.

A team from Boskalis, a Dutch firm specialised in salvaging, started working with the canal authority Thursday. The rescue efforts have focused on dredging to remove sand and mud from around the port side of the vessel's bow.

The canal authority said late Thursday that they would need to remove between 15,000 to 20,000 cubic metres (530,000 to 706,000 cubic feet) of sand to reach a depth of 12 to 16 metres (39 to 52 feet). That depth is likely to allow the ship to float freely again, it said.

It wasn't immediately clear what caused the Ever Given to become wedged on Tuesday. GAC, a global shipping and logistics company, said the ship had experienced a blackout without elaborating.

Evergreen Marine Corp, a major Taiwan-based shipping company that operates the ship, said in a statement that the Ever Given had been overcome by strong winds

as it entered the canal from the Red Sea, but that none of its containers had sunk.

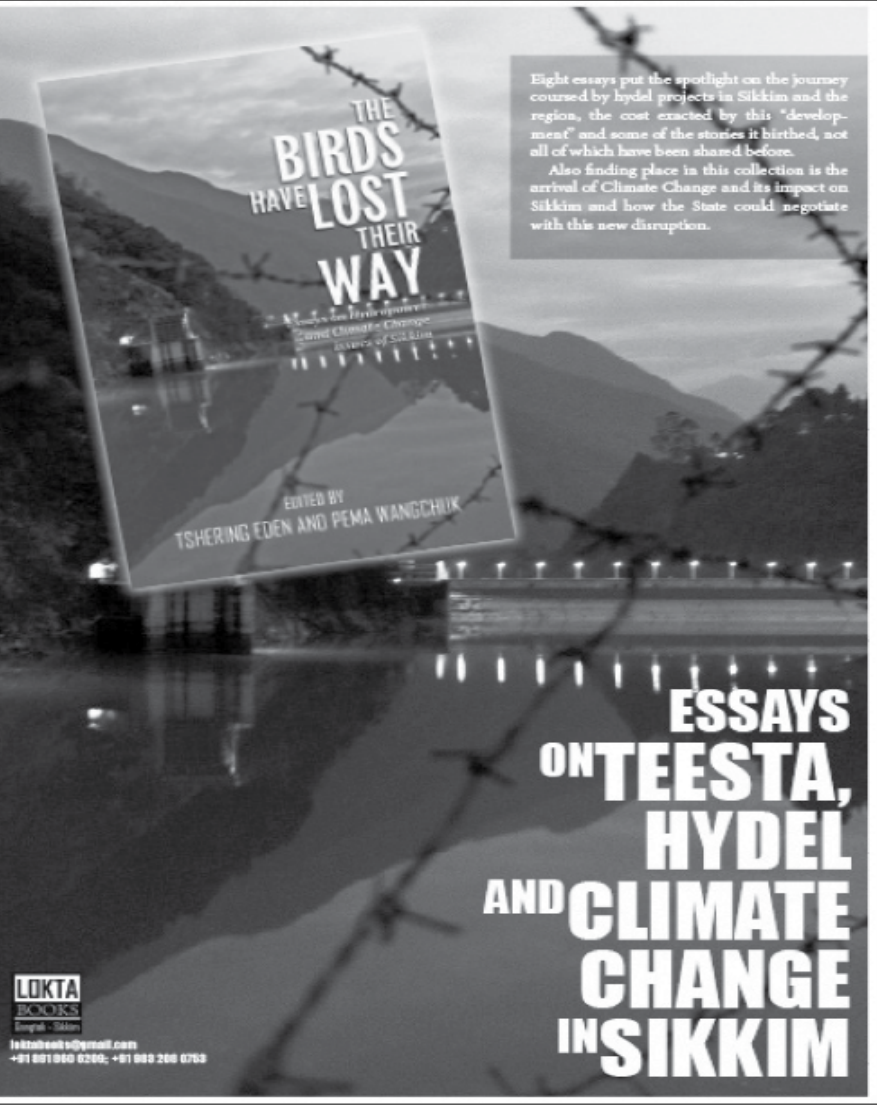
The Suez Canal also blamed bad weather for the incident.

The blockage has caused headaches for global trade. Around 10% of world trade flows through the canal, which is particularly crucial for the transport of oil. The closure also could affect oil and gas shipments to Europe from the Mideast.

At least 150 ships were waiting for the Ever Given to be cleared, including vessels near Port Said on the Mediterranean Sea, Port Suez on the Red Sea and those already stuck in the canal system on Egypt's Great Bitter Lake, Leth Agencies said.

Using data from Automatic Identification System trackers on ships at sea, data firm Refinitiv shared an analysis with the AP showing over 300 ships remained en route to the waterway over the next two weeks.

Some vessels could still change course, but the crush of ships listing the Suez Canal as their destination shows that an even-greater backlog looms for shippers already under pressure amid the coronavirus pandemic.





STOPPING TRAFFIC! Actress Jenny McCarthy hit the streets to film promos for The Masked Singer in Los Angeles.

Chad Stahelski to tackle 'Ghost of Tsushima' adaptation for Sony

LOS ANGELES, MAR 26 (PTI): Sony has hired "John Wick" series director Chad Stahelski to helm its live-action feature film based on action adventure game "Ghost of Tsushima".

The game, developed by Sucker Punch Productions, was released for the PlayStation 4 in July 2020, and became an instant hit, selling more than 6.5 million copies, according to The Hollywood Reporter.

"Ghost of Tsushima" follows the samurai warrior Jin Sakai, the last remaining member of his clan. He must abandon the traditions that guided him as a warrior to protect the Japanese island of Tsushima during a Mongol invasion.

Stahelski, Alex Young and Jason Spitz are producing through their company 87Eleven Entertainment.

Asad Qizilbash and Carter Swan will produce on behalf of PlayStation Productions.

"We're excited to be partnering with Chad and 87Eleven Entertainment, to bring their vision of Jin's story to the big screen.

"We love working with creative partners

like Chad, who have a passion for our games, ensuring we can create rich adaptations that will excite our fans and new audiences," Qizilbash, Head of PlayStation Productions, said.

"Ghost of Tsushima" will be the second film to come out of the partnership between Sony Pictures and PlayStation Productions as the two studios are currently working on



"Uncharted" adaptation, led by actor Tom Holland. Sony Pictures Television and PlayStation Productions are also developing a HBO series based on video game "The Last of Us" with "Chernobyl" creator Craig Mazin.

It's terrifying and sad: Radhike Apte on scrutiny of OTT platforms

MUMBAI, MAR 26 (PTI): Streamers have been a new source of employment for the entertainment industry, says actor Radhika Apte, who believes the digital space is a medium that can thrive under the freedom of expression.

Apte, whose series "Sacred Games", "Ghoul" and films "Lust Stories" and "Raat Akeli Hai" have released on the streaming service Netflix, said it is "terrifying" that the over-the-top (OTT) platforms are facing government scrutiny.

"I hope we understand that there has to be freedom of expression and people need to be far more tolerant about the fact that there will be disagreement in life, that is the way of life. I find it terrifying and sad that this is where we are headed," Apte told PTI in an interview when asked to comment on the intervention of the authorities in the OTT space.

Following the controversy over Amazon Prime Video's web series "Tandav", the streaming platforms have come under the scanner.

Last month, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting announced that a "code of ethics" and three-tier grievance redressal mechanism would be applicable for OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Disney+ Hotstar, news publishers and digital media.

Apte said apart from providing diverse content to the audience, the OTT platforms serve as a bridge between artistes and makers, both domestic and international.

"The platform has given a lot of opportunities and employment. The platform is too new. What OTT has offered is the viewership and it is brilliant.

"We will have to wait and see how things pan out in the next four to five years, whether it makes actors internationally viable, we mix up actors or

projects, or more collaborations. Things don't happen overnight," the 35-year-old actor, who divides her time between Mumbai and London, added.

Apte is excited about her next digital platform release with producer Anand Gandhi's upcoming sci-fi comedy series "OK Computer", which is currently streaming on Disney+ Hotstar VIP.

Created and directed by Pooja Shetty and Neil Pagedar, the show imagines a

"Storytelling in all these films have been unique. 'Cargo' and 'OK Computer' are the most technologically advanced projects (in the genre). Just because the genre is similar, it doesn't mean they can be compared," Apte said, adding some of her favourite sci-fi films are "2001: A Space Odyssey", "The Fly", 1982's "Blade Runner".

"People are ready to see good work. We underestimate our audiences con-



near future where, for the first time, the Homo-Sapiens meet the Robo-Sapiens.

As sci-fi continues to be a lesser tapped genre, the actor said, working on the series was a "refreshing" experience.

"What I liked is that it was a mockumentary and that was the most exciting part about it. There is a risk involved because it is a new experiment. I surrendered to the vision of the directors," she added.

In the past, India has seen a few titles in the sci-fi genre like Satyajit Ray's 1969 film "Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne" and Shekhar Kapur's "Mr India", the 1988 film starring Anil Kapoor, Sridevi and Amrish Puri.

Arati Kadav's "Cargo", which released last year on Netflix, is the most recent offering in this space.

stantly. If the content is engaging they will watch it. If it's not, they won't watch it (irrespective of the genre)," she noted.

The caricaturist absurd comedy in "OK Computer" is the brainchild of directors Shetty and Pagedar, Apte said.

Playing the role of Laxmi Suri, an artificial intelligence (AI) scientist in the series, was a "risk".

"It is not in my comfort zone at all so it was exciting to take that risk and see how it works. I feel that this comedy is very original. It is something new for audience and actors as well. If it is successful, the credit entirely goes to them but if it fails then we did not do our job very well," she added.

"OK Computer" also stars Vijay Varma, Jackie Shroff, Kani Kusruti, and Rasiqa Dugal.

O'Farrell's 'Hamnet' wins book critics award for fiction

NEW YORK (AP): Maggie O'Farrell's "Hamnet," an imagined take on the death of Shakespeare's son from the bubonic plague, has won the National Book Critics Circle prize for fiction. "Hamnet," an unfortunately well timed story for the current pandemic, explores the impact of the boy's illness and death on his family. He was Shakespeare's only son, and scholars have long speculated about his influence — if any — on "Hamlet," which Shakespeare worked on in the years following Hamnet's death.

Tom Zoellner's "Island on Fire: The Revolt That Ended Slavery in the British Empire" won for nonfiction, and Amy Stanley's "Stranger in the Shogun's City: A Japanese Woman and Her World" was the winner in biography.

The autobiography award went to Cathy Park Hong for "Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning." Other winners announced during Thursday night's virtual ceremony included Francine J. Harris' "Here Is the Sweet Hand" for poetry and Nicole Fleetwood's "Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration" for criticism. Raven Leilani received the John Leonard Prize for best first book for her novel "Luster."

Career achievement awards were presented to New Republic writer Jo Living-

stone for "excellence in reviewing" and to the Feminist Press for its long history of championing women's equality, publishing authors ranging from Grace Paley to Anita Hill to Pussy Riot.

The book critics circle was founded



in 1974 and has hundreds of members around the country. This year's awards are the first since the departure of numerous NBCC board members last summer in the wake of a dispute over the organization's response to the killing of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matters protests. The leadership brought in several new members and convinced some who had resigned to stay on, resulting, according to the critics circle, in "the most diverse board in NBCC history and one of the most experienced."

Nadine Labaki to direct 'Les Invisibles' remake for Netflix

LOS ANGELES, MAR 26 (PTI): Netflix has roped in filmmaker Nadine Labaki to tackle the English-language remake of French movie "Les Invisibles". Labaki is best known for "Capernaum", the Lebanese drama which was nominated in the best international feature film category at 2019 Oscars. Titled "The Invisibles", the new movie will take place at a day shelter where homeless people congregate for food, warmth, and connection.

"When local officers decide to close the shelter, social workers have three months to reintegrate the women they care for at any cost," the official plotline read.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, the movie will be produced by Graham Broadbent and Pete Czernin through their Blueprint banner with Labaki. Diarmuid McKeown and Ben Knight will serve as executive producers.

The 2018 original French film was directed by Louis-Julien Petit and based on the novel "Sur la route des invisibles: Femmes dans la rue" by Claire Lajeunie.

Aries:

We live in a hyper-yang world, Aries. A world where time is considered money. A world where our worth is dependent on our productivity. Word for the wise: get out of the matrix. Deprogram yourself gently. Allow yourself to breathe, be in this moment and recuperate from all the changes you have gone through recently. The full moon in Libra is going to a major reset and you're being asked to prepare for it in your own special way.

Tip: Deprogram yourself gently.

Taurus:

We tend to believe that 'clairvoyance' is a one way stream, but, the trust is that this channel works both ways, that the Universe plants images in our subconscious that indicate what is yet to come. At the same time, we, as individuals, have the power to project visuals into the cosmos that we want mirrored back into our reality.

Tip: Remember the Hermetic principle: "As above, so below; as below, so above. As within, so without; as without, so within."

Gemini:

Letting go is a big theme this weekend, and letting go isn't (unfortunately!) a one time process. Gemini, you are likely to have flashbacks of what went wrong or

how you could have salvaged the given situation. Try not to get too attached to these memories, though. Challenge yourself to step into the role of the observer, to watch what's resurfacing in a detached manner. This will help you let go of the old story and begin a new chapter.

Tip: Let go with love.

Cancer:

This weekend, you're going to have to break up with your inner control freak. Expecting everybody and everything to work in accordance with your rules isn't going to work in your favour. Word for the wise: give flexibility a shot. Those who are in committed relationships will find that this is an especially challenging time.

Tip: Give flexibility a shot.

Leo:

A great change is on the cards, Leo. A great change that is likely to turn everything around you upside down. When in doubt, remember that destruction is an integral part of the creation process. So, let things come undone as they must. The cards are also urging you to keep the cliché 'all that glitters...' in mind. Not all opportunities that are coming your way promise to deliver. Instead of seeking counsel from others, trust what your inner wisdom is telling you.

Tip: This is a time of great change.

Virgo:

The initial stages of a project or venture are seldom easy. There's so much you need to figure out at this stage. Not to mention, taking your finances into consideration. What the cards want you to remember now and for the rest of the year is that abundance is a mindset. So, loosen your purse strings a little. Invest in things that are important for the growth of your business.

Tip: Invest in things that are important for the growth of your business.

Libra:

Modern yoga practitioners tend to glorify the 'asana' aspect of the ancient science, making us believe that the only way to experience union with the divine is by contorting our body into pretzel-like postures. But that is far from the truth. Pranayama, or breathwork, is an integral part of yoga, and this is the aspect that you're being asked to pay special attention to today. Observe the flow of prana through the body as you inhale and exhale. Trust that this simple ritual will not only alleviate the stress and tension that's been weighing you down, but also help you experience mind, body, and soul integration.

Tip: Just breathe.

Scorpio:

We, as a collective, tend to glorify the fast life, without realising that magic takes form behind the scenes. This is especially true for your journey, Scorpio. You're in that in-between phase where the old chapter hasn't quite ended, and the new is yet to begin. Instead of pushing against the flow, welcome this as a time of massive revelations. An opportunity to dream a new world into being.

Tip: Get comfortable with being in yin mode.

Sagittarius:

There will always be more subjects to research about. There will always be more aspects to work on before you're ready to unveil the final product. Break up with the idea of perfection immediately, and allow the currents of creativity to take you where they must. The time for you to share your gifts with the world has finally come! When in doubt, remember to keep it real. This will help your audience connect with you on a deeper level.

Tip: The time for you to share your gifts with the world has come!

Capricorn:

Don't let the sudden changes throw you off. This is a time of drastic transformation in your world. Be rest assured that your higher self has personally orches-

trated these circumstances in order to help you level up. The wisest thing to do at this point is be to 'allow'. Allow things to unfold as they must. Trust that this cleanse and purge is helping you get in alignment with what is truly yours.

Tip: The winds of change are blowing in your favour.

Aquarius:

It doesn't matter who did or said what. The only thing that matters is the love that binds you together—the love that will see you through all of your troubles. So, rise above the pettiness, Aquarius. Make peace where there has been war. Remember, forgiveness is never about the other person. It's about your ability to let go of the past and make a fresh start.

Tip: Breathe out the pain. Breathe in the love.

Pisces:

When you're smack in the middle of the chaos, it's easy to feel like everything is closing in on you. Word for the wise: step away. Get some distance. This will help you become an observer of your circumstances and remember that those around you are merely acting from a space of fear. A good way to keep your head above water is to deepen your meditation practice. The more centred you are in your being, the less you will be affected by your external circumstances. Tip: Stay centred within your being.