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MEMOIR JUST OUT, WAS
ACTIVE TO THE END**
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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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3 new cases, 2,051 total vaccinations and only one 'adverse event'



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 30 JAN:**

Sikkim's containment of Covid-19 is showing a promising downturn with only three new cases detected in the past 24 hours even as a total of 2,051 health workers have received their first dose of the Covishield vaccine. What is even more encouraging is that there has been only one case of AEFI [adverse event following vaccination].

Sikkim's tally of confirmed Covid cases now stands at 6,088 and with the discharge of six more patients on Friday, the number of recovered cases in Sikkim is 5,766. There are now 94 active cases of novel coronavi-

rus in the State and reassuringly, no one is in the ICU.

In his daily health bulletin on Saturday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia, informed that the three new cases were picked up from the testing of 168 samples on Friday. While in the RT-PCR testing of 114 samples, two persons returned positive, the third case was detected in rapid antigen testing of 35 samples.

Mr Bhutia also informed that a 28-year-old male, who had given his address as "STNM staff" has gone incommunicado ever since he was informed over phone that he has tested posi-

tive. He has reportedly not been responding to the contact tracing team ever since he was first informed about the test results. Mr Bhutia has appealed to the person to get in touch with the authorities failing which the Department will be forced to announce his name and other details to be able to establish contact with him.

As for the other two cases, there one person from Ben, South District and one from Tokal, Temi-Namphing.

On the COVID vaccination drive, Mr Bhutia informed that a total of 2,051 health workers have been vaccinated for COVID-19 in Sikkim thus far.

Sikkim has set aside four days a week for vaccination and hence there were no Covid-vaccinations on Saturday and there will be none on Sunday either.

Sunday meanwhile is for pulse polio immunization and he appealed to the people to bring all children below five years of age to the nearest health centre for their polio drops.

Shanti Rai feted by villagers on return from successful expedition to Ama Dablam

AARON RAI

GANGTOK, 30 JAN:

Shanti Rai, the Sikkimese mountaineer who recently completed an Ama Dablam summit in Nepal, was accorded a grand welcome felicitation by Akhil Kirant Rai BLC, Chemchey, South Sikkim, at Lakchithang Chemchey today.

Shanti had returned to Sikkim on 21 January from a successful expedition to the 6,812 metre high Ama Dablam peak in Nepal, a summit she attained on 09 Jan, 2021.

She was the only Indian mountaineer in the International Winter Expedition team which included mountaineers from Mexico, Oman, Turkey and Egypt. Shanti is also an instructor at the Indian Himalayan Center



Adventure Ecotourism at Chemchey.

It may be recalled that she was flagged off from Minokgang by Chief Minister PS Tamang on 22 December, 2020.

Shanti thanked all the villagers and IHCAE staff for supporting her and expressed gratitude to-



wards the Chief Minister for his encouragement and enthusiasm.

She shared that she feels fortunate for having succeeded in registering Sikkim's name in the mountaineering circuit and regaled the audience with stories from her experience on Ama Dablam.

Shanti is no novice to mountaineering and has climbed 21 famous peaks and also hoisted the country's flag atop another six unofficial expeditions.

Rajiv Rai, administrator, Indian Himalayan Center Adventure Ecotourism, wished Shanti

Rai well and suggested that more locals take full advantage of the training facility in their own midst. He pointed out many Everesters have trained at Chemchey.

Rai Silli and various other cultural dances were performed to make the program more colorful.

Ajay Pradhan retires from BCCI cricket, will continue in SICA club cricket



SAGAR CHHETRI

GANGTOK, 30 JAN:

Senior cricketer Ajay Pradhan today announced his retirement from all forms of the game organized by the Board of Control for Cricket in India [BCCI]. He will however continue with club cricket in tournaments affiliated to Sikkim Cricket Association [SICA] in the State.

Mr Pradhan, 42, is a left arm spin bowler and has played for Sikkim in different categories for nearly two decades.

Speaking to media persons here this afternoon, Mr Pradhan informed that he had recently returned after playing for Sikkim in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy.

"I was planning to retire last year but wanted to announce my retirement after playing for the State in some prestigious BCCI tournament. So, it is the right time for me to retire after playing in the prestigious Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy," he said.

However, he mentioned that he will continue working to support SICA in the development of cricket in the State and guide and support local cricketers.

Mr Pradhan is a member of Alpine Sporting Club. He made his debut against Bihar in Cuttack in U-19 cricket at the age of 17 in 2003.

He started his cricket career as left arm pace bowler but later turned

to spin on the suggestion of his coach, Sonam Palden Bhutia.

"It was really a great journey in cricket and I got opportunities to play along with many national and state cricketers during this nearly two-decade long journey. I would like to thank my coaches, players and well-wishers for their constant support and encouragement," Mr Pradhan said.

He also thanked his coach and mentor Sonam Palden Bhutia for all his guidance and support.

Responding to media queries, he pointed out that Sikkim used to be just an associate member of the BCCI but now it has

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SpiceJet to add flights on Kolkata-Pakyong route

NEW DELHI, JAN 30 (PTI): SpiceJet on Saturday said it will start 20 new domestic flights, including four on the Kolkata-Pakyong and Delhi-Dehradun route. It is not clear how many more Spicejet

flights will be added to Pakyong's kitty.

Jaipur has received a lion's share with 16 services connecting it to various cities of the country.

All the 20 new flights will start in February.

Novel stresses on need to understand mental illnesses

NEW DELHI, JAN 30 (PTI)

A new novel by Bengaluru-based writer Shefali Tripathi Mehta stresses on the need to understand mental illnesses and see those suffering from them with greater empathy, without censure or stigma.

"People on Our Roof" is about the struggles of 23-year-old Naina, her undying loyalty to her schizophrenic mother Naintara and autistic sister Tara.

Published by Niyogi Books imprint Olive Turtle, it follows a semi-arranged plot, with childhood memory fragmentations and flashbacks alternating with the present and emphasises on Naina's thoughts and feelings.

Naina is the sole

bread-winner of the family. Her grandparents, who raised her after her father abandoned the family, left for her an old house in a posh south Delhi colony which is eyed constantly by greedy relatives.

As a child, Naina resented her mother and younger sister, and wished they were a "normal" family. In one instance, she even asks for another mother but as an adult Naina has learnt to care for them and understands that they cannot always control their actions.

Desperately trying to maintain some modicum of normalcy, she makes friends, falls in love, gets loved in return, and occasionally tries to look for her long lost father.

turn to pg02

Parliament body welcomes revised definition of children, parent, relative

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN [PTI]: Expanding the definition of children, parent and relative in a draft bill will leave no scope for any legal ambiguity, a parliamentary standing committee report said.

The bill aims to expand the definition of children to include son-in-law, daughter-in-law, biological or adoptive or step son and daughter, minors through legal guardian, parent to include father-in-law, mother-in-law and grandparents, whether or not a senior citizen and relatives to include minor through legal guardian.

The standing committee evaluated the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens (Amendment) Bill, 2019.

"The committee deem it to be a significant measure as maintenance may now be claimed from all admissible relatives/legal heirs of parents and senior citizens. Further, the above change in the defini-

tion of "children" has also been concomitantly reflected in the definition of "parent" in the Amendment Bill," it said. They also noted that with the revised definition of "relative" in the Bill, wherein minors have been included in the category of "relative", senior citizens would now be able to claim maintenance from minors, too, through their legal guardians.

"The Committee further note that the definition of "welfare" in the Amendment Bill has been expanded to include provision for food, clothing, housing, safety and security, medical attendance, healthcare, treatment, recreation and other amenities necessary for physical and mental well-being of parents and senior citizens which has given welfare oriented impetus to it in actual sense," it said.

"Overall the Committee opine that the modified definitions in the Amendment

Bill will impart a practical, holistic and broader orientation to the MWPSA Act, 2007, thus leaving no scope for any legal ambiguity," it said. The Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry told the committee that the expansion of the existing definition will enable parents/senior citizens to claim maintenance allowance from all admissible relatives.

The bill also proposes removal of a ceiling of ₹ 10,000 as maximum maintenance amount to be awarded to parents/senior citizens which the government told the standing committee will ensure that it is fixed according to the needs of parent and senior citizens and capability of children or legal heirs to pay the maintenance allowance based on their earnings. "This will help parent/senior citizens to lead a life of dignity which is commensurate with their normal standard of living,"

the ministry told the standing committee.

The committee is happy that the government has finally acknowledged that maintenance includes more than a mere sum of money. The concept of maintenance has been rendered complete and holistic now, by the above amendment, the report said. Another noteworthy aspect of the amendment is that the tribunal may now take into consideration the standard of living and earning of the parent/senior citizens or of the children or relative, while determining the maintenance, it said.

The committee also welcomed the substitution of another important subsection pertaining to the publicity of the maintenance order. It is convinced that the pasting of this order on the notice board of the tribunal and its availability on the website of the department con-

cerned will encourage other harassed parents/senior citizens to seek legal redress of their grievances. "Fearing social disgrace, it could also act as a deterrent for children and relatives to properly attend to the needs of the older persons in their respective families," it said.

The draft bill also includes the appointment of nodal police officers for senior citizens at every police station and district-level special police unit with a helpline for senior citizens.

The committee view it as a landmark change to ensure that senior citizens can easily approach the police in abuse/abandonment cases, provided this clause is implemented by all states promptly. They feel that the police should be the first point of contact for grievance redressal in such cases, much before the courts or tribunals come into picture, the report said.

B.Ed. College admissions an example of State Govt's "ramro le haina, hamro le paun" ideology

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 30 JAN:

Sikkim Democratic Front has alleged that the recent episode of admissions at the Govt B. Ed. College at Soreng has "exposed" the SKM government's complete disregard for established procedures and transparency.

An SDF press release issued by the partys students' cell general secretary, Tashi Gyatso Bhutia, contends that the episode was another example of "absolute lack of transparency" in the SKM government and rampant favoritism and corruption in government decisions.

It may be recalled that the merit list for the new batch at Govt B.Ed. College mentioned only the application number of the successful applicants. When this list was released on 13 Jan, a section of the students who did not get admission protested and demanded transparency. They wanted the department to mention the marks secured by selected candidates in the qualifying course.

The SDF released claims that the said merit list included 117 seats for Certificate of Identification holders among others.

Eventually, on 29 Jan, a big section of the protesting students withdrew their protest after the Additional Chief Secretary, Education Department, informed them that the selection included "government quota" and "management quota". The admission list was also reportedly expanded to include the names of protesting students.

Now, the SDF is demanding that the State Government explain what it means by "government quota" and how these are selected.

The party is convinced that this was "just a euphemism for 'ramro le haina, hamro le paun', as phrased by one of the student representatives."

SDF insists that the new list released on 29 January "showed that 50 seats had been allotted illegally earlier in the first list."

The release goes on to

draw attention to a video making the rounds on social media purportedly by a student who secured a seat as per the first list and had even begun classes and has now lost admission "because of the negligence of the SKM Government."

"Not only has the SKM Government denied the right to admission of many students on the basis of merit in the first list, but they have also failed those already admitted to the college who now have to forgo their seat because of ineptitude and practice of favouritism of the SKM Government," the release alleges.

In recent days, the media in Sikkim has been abuzz with the news of the illegal admission of students in the Soreng B.Ed College by the HRDD, Government of Sikkim. This issue has shed light on the absolute lack of transparency in government functioning as well as corrupt practice of the SKM government, favouring a few at the expense of the many. On 13th Jan, the list of admitted students was released by the

department which created an uproar amongst the aspiring Soreng B.Ed College students, who alleged that the admissions had been done on the basis of favouritism, with complete injustice to those who should've received admission on the basis of merit. The list which included 117 seats for COI holders among others, was released with just the application numbers without names or percentages.

After several unfruitful meetings, finally on the 20th of Jan, the student representatives met with the ACS, HRDD who informed the students that the selection was done on the basis of "government quota" and "management quota". The SKM government must explain what a government quota is and whether or not it is just a euphemism for "ramro le haina, hamro le paun", as phrased by one of the student representatives. Catching the SKM government red handed, the new list released on the 29th of Jan showed that 50 seats had been allotted illegal-

ly earlier in the first list.

Today, a new video was released by the students who had been given admission according to the first list and who have already begun their classes, expressing discontent for having suddenly lost their admission at the college because of the negligence of the SKM Government.

Not only has the SKM Government denied the right to admission of many students on the basis of merit in the first list, but they have also failed those already admitted to the college who now have to forgo their seat because of ineptitude and practice of favouritism of the SKM Government.

This issue which has been going on for more than half a month has exposed the SKM Government completely in its ineffectiveness and corruption and the SDF Party strongly condemns the disastrous handling of admissions of those who now have to give up their seat at Soreng B.Ed College and demands that they too must get admission without fail.

FCAS is now Consumer Federation of Sikkim

NITESH PRADHAN
GANGTOK, 29 JAN:

Federation of Consumer Associations of Sikkim which had convened its general meeting yesterday and elected a new executive body has re-christened itself "Consumer Federation of Sikkim," a switch, which the organisation explains, is for "better understanding of the public at large."

Established in 1997,

FCAS, now CFS, claims to be the "sole consumer body in the State to actively and aggressively trying to spread the rights and responsibilities of a Consumer in the entire state by organising consumer awareness programmes and such allied consumer activities in the state in order to safeguard and protect the interest of a Consumer."

Sonam Malik Beats Sakshi Malik To Win Gold At Senior Wrestling Nationals

New Delhi, 30 Jan [PTI]: Talented grappler Sonam Malik stunned Rio Olympics bronze medalist Sakshi Malik 7-5 in the finals, to claim the Gold medal in the senior women's national wrestling championships on Saturday.

The 19-year-old from Haryana displayed great determination to outwit Sakshi, representing Railways, in the 62 kg weight category.

This was Sakshi's third loss to Sonam. Madhya Pradesh's Pushpa and Haryana's Manisha bagged the bronze medal. In 50 kg weight category, Haryana's Minakshi claimed the gold, while state mate Henny Kumari won the silver and Maharashtra's Swati Shinde and Delhi's Kirti won the bronze.

Haryana wrestler Anju also claimed the top honours in the 55 kg weight category with Delhi's Buntty settling for Silver, and Indu Tomar of Uttar Pradesh and Delhi's Sushma Shokin winning the Bronze.

In 57 kg weight category, Haryana once again dominated with Anshu pocketing the Gold medal and Mansi claiming the Bronze. RSPB's Lalita won the Silver, while MP's Raman Yadav won the other Bronze.

The Gold in 72kg went to RSPB's Pinki, while Haryana's Naina took the Silver and Priyanka of UP and Kavita of RSPB settled for Bronze. The bouts in the remaining five weight categories -- 53 kg, 59 kg, 65 kg, 68 kg and 76 kg -- will be held on Sunday.

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Ajay Pradhan retires...

become a full-fledged member of the BCCI, a development which will help further development of cricket in Sikkim and for the betterment of local cricketers.

He said SICA has been working outstandingly well under the leadership of its president, Lobzang Tenzing and is adding top-class infrastructure and facilities for the betterment and welfare of local cricketers.

"Sikkim now has a top-class cricket ground and stadium and other facilities are also coming up soon and this will definitely help local cricketers secure a place in the national team and IPL," he said.

A senior cricketer and NCA level-B coach, Sonam Palden Bhutia, conveyed his best wishes to Mr Pradhan on his retirement and urged him to continue working for the development of cricket in the State. Other senior and current cricketers of Sikkim also wished him well today.

Novel stresses on...

Running as a leitmotif throughout the book is her attempt to piece together the shards of her broken childhood, and find out why her father left and, more importantly, who he left with.

"People on Our Roof" is the fifth book by Mehta, who works with the Azim Premji University and writes on social issues, travel, parenting and disability awareness, and curates Gond art to support tribal artists.

Cell for welfare of migrant labourers set up in Goa



PANAJI, JAN 30 (PTI):

A dedicated cell has been set up in Goa to resolve the issues being faced by migrants labourers in the state as part of a central government initiative, an official said on Saturday.

The state's Migration Cell was recently launched by Union Minister of Tribal Affairs Arjun Munda during the launch of ShramShakti, a national migration support portal through video conference.

Munda said during the programme that the lack of real-time data of migrants was the biggest challenge for the Centre and the state governments in formulating effective strategies and policy decisions for the

welfare of migrant workers at both source and destination states.

"Migrants all over the country had to face difficulties during lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic and we are aware of their difficulties," he said.

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said on the occasion that his state was the first one in the country to set up a dedicated migration cell to address the issues of migrant workers.

"The cell would address multiple needs of the migrants legal support, skill development, job linkages, access to public services, health, insurance and financial inclusion," he said.

BKU digs its heels in at Ghazipur border, more supporters pouring in

GHAZIABAD, JAN 30 (PTI): Support for the farmers' protest swelled on Saturday, as more villagers poured in at a key protest site on the Delhi-Meerut highway in Ghazipur on the border with Uttar Pradesh.

The Bharatiya Kisan Union-led protest against the Centre's new farm laws here looked like it was going slim on Thursday but more protestors have joined the stir, following a mahapanchayat of farmers on Saturday in Muzaffarnagar, while supporters also joined in from Haryana and Rajasthan districts.

"The movement was and is strong," BKU's Meerut Zone president Pawan Khatana told PTI.

Khatana, who is at the demonstration site with BKU leader Rakesh Tikait, said there has been continuous support for the "peaceful protest" against the farmers' demand for removal of the

new agri laws.

"This is not a political protest. Anybody who shares the ideology of the BKU and Rakesh Tikait are welcome here. But it is our appeal to those who do not wish to support the movement till the end that please do not come only to leave in between," he said.

Asked about estimated crowd size at the site, the farmer leader from western Uttar Pradesh said, "Farmers are coming in to show solidarity and leaving. It is not a stagnant crowd."

On Saturday night, the BKU office-bearers had estimated a crowd of around 10,000 people at Ghazipur while the Ghaziabad police officials pegged it around 5,000 to 6,000.

Heavy security deployment, including personnel of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), Rapid Action Force (RAF) in anti-riot

gears and civil police, was made at the protest site.

Meanwhile, the Delhi Traffic Police said to and fro movement on the National Highway 24 (Delhi-Meerut Expressway) has been closed.

Thousands of farmers have been protesting at Delhi's borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, demanding a rollback of the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

The protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that these laws would pave the way for the dismantling of the minimum support price (MSP) system, leaving them at the "mercy" of big corporations.

More than half-a-million vaccinated in last 24 hrs: Centre

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN [PTI]:

Over 35 lakh beneficiaries have been vaccinated against COVID-19 in the country till now with over 5,70,000 vaccinations (more than half a million) conducted in the last 24 hours, the health ministry said today.

Of the 35,00,027 (3.5 million) beneficiaries, the highest number of 4,63,793 people were vaccinated in Uttar Pradesh, followed by 3,24,973 in Rajasthan, 3,07,891 in Karnataka and 2,61,320 in Maharashtra.

In a statement, the ministry said in the last 24 hours, 5,71,974 people were vaccinated across 10,809 sessions, while a total of 63,687 sessions have been conducted so far.

"India's total active caseload has dropped to less than 1.7 lakh (1,69,824). The active caseload now consists of less than 1.6 per cent (just 1.58 per cent) of India's total positive cases," it said. Nine states and Union territories have a higher weekly positivity rate than the national average. Kerala has recorded the highest weekly positivity rate at 12.20 per cent, followed by Chhattisgarh (7.30 per cent), the ministry said.

Indian economy and the possible trinity of resilience

TULSIPRIYA RAJKUMARI
& SANJANA KADYAN

From a phoenix burnt to ashes rises another, renewed and reborn. 2020 has been the year of the phoenix for India, a year of deep suffering brought by an unexampled pandemic, a year that locked humanity's mental energies into a fire spiral of uncertainty and despair but also a year that unlocked new levers of human resolve and economic resilience.

The spread and intensity of COVID-19 induced twin demand and supply shock revealed startling levels of socio-economic vulnerabilities across sectors of the economy and geographies. While non-essential sectors predominantly catering to discretionary consumption bore the unpreventable brunt of a full throttle output shock, essential ones like agriculture underwent a dampened shock primarily emanating from the indirect impact of restricted activities in non-essential sectors. As demonstrated in Economic Survey 2020-21, disruptions in domestic and global supply chains triggered a supply shock of import-intensive agricul-

ture inputs like fertilizers and pesticides, as also agricultural exports like rice, poultry products and spices. Spiralling and broad-based food inflation witnessed in the first quarter of FY21 was, hence, inescapable. However, timely and proactive exemptions from COVID-19 induced restrictions provided by Government of India facilitated uninterrupted cropping activities and largely insulated agriculture. Manufacturing sector endured a ubiquitous demand

cement and steel had a debilitating effect on mining operations despite being exempted from lockdown restrictions.

The geographical spread of the pandemic induced shock in India was intertwined with the pre-existing economic vulnerabilities of the states. The Economic Survey 2020-21 attempts to interpret this vulnerability as a combination of Gross Value Added (GVA) shock and labour shock. The highest output contributing state and the

agricultural sector, experienced severe labour shocks with 62 per cent of its non-agricultural sector being informal. Services led informal sector shocks also made states like Delhi and Telangana vulnerable. The ubiquity of construction led informal sector shocks was most severely felt in Uttar Pradesh.

While the full impact of the pandemic on the India economy is still unravelling, the economy has gained macro-resilience at three levels. Firstly, instantaneous resilience to limit immediate damage was imparted by timely and pro-active support of Government of India to vulnerable households and businesses. Secondly, calibrated fiscal and monetary policy-pivoting offered dynamic resilience to sectors to adapt to new challenges and recover. The third and the most important of all is the health system resilience that Centre, State and local Governments built in response to the pandemic, a critical growth engine for the fledgling flight of the new-born phoenix. At the core of this trinity of resilience lies an irrepressible human spirit that strives to find its way back to wholeness!

VIEWPOINT

and supply shock penetrating almost all sub sectors including textiles and fabrics, consumer goods, computer hardware, machinery and equipment. However, a surge in health services boosted the pharmaceuticals sector, exemplifying the case of heightened opportunity in a crisis. Construction and contact intensive services sector, particularly trade, tourism and transport were afflicted the most due to the pandemic induced requirements of social distancing. Suppressed demand in down-stream industries like

COVID-19 epicentre of the country i.e. Maharashtra grappled with contact-sensitive services sector shock and labour market stresses with 56 per cent of its output coming from the services and 7.5 per cent of the country's Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) located in the state. While Tamil Nadu and Kerala were relatively more exposed to the construction sector shock, a manufacturing slowdown lent risks to economic recovery in Gujarat and Jammu & Kashmir. Punjab, though sheltered by the relatively resilient

ADVISORY

We would like to draw your kind attention to the number of cases related to girls/ women befriending strangers on Facebook/social media and leaving their homes and going to far-off places like Delhi, Karnataka and Punjab, etc. to meet their so-called friends.

It is often seen that people with fake credentials prowl social media platforms solely with the intention of luring innocent womenfolk with false promises of a lucrative employment or marriage.

In light of the above cases, the State Women's Commission requests all to crosscheck the credentials of strangers befriended on social media platforms before trusting them blindly and leaving your homes to meet them. Your safety is our main priority and you are advised to contact the following numbers for any kind of help or in case of distress.

181 women's helpline

9883833188

8900576356

9547999722

9775484447

Chairperson
Sikkim State Commission for Women

Funny but as expected: Sena on Hazare's fast U-turn

MUMBAI, JAN 30 (PTI): The Shiv Sena on Saturday slammed activist Anna Hazare for first announcing a hunger strike over farmers' issues and then calling it off within hours, saying this was "on expected lines".

Hazare on Friday announced an indefinite fast in support of farmers who are agitating on Delhi borders against the new farm laws, but later changed the decision after discussions with BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis and Union Minister of State for Agriculture Kailash Chaudhary.

"The developments were funny but on expected lines," the editorial in the Sena mouthpiece 'Saamana' said, adding it was unclear what was Hazare's stand on the controversial farm laws of the Union government. "Protesting farmers are being targeted and the way they are being treated is shocking," it said.

During the UPA regime led by Manmohan Singh, Hazare went to Delhi twice and staged massive agitations (against corruption) and the BJP had supported those agitations, the Sena said.

"But in the last few years, he has not taken a stand on demonetization, lockdown (for coronavirus)," it said.

The party also alleged that the Union government is doing everything to crush the farmers' agitation, and 'look-out notices' have been issued against their leaders at airports as if they were international fugitives.

When asked by reporters about the Saamana editorial, Hazare said at Ralegan Siddhi, his village in Maharashtra's Ahmednagar district, that society and the country's interest mattered to him and not the party in power.

"When I see anything wrong happening, something which is against the country and society, I take a stand. I have protested against the land acquisition bill during the Narendra Modi government's tenure," he said.

On Friday, Hazare, 84, had said he won't be proceeding with the indefinite fast as the Central government has agreed to some of his demands and set up a high-level committee.

Stakeholders from 3 GPUs receive training on rural dev through tourism



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 30 JAN:

Stakeholders from three GPUs - Melli-Aching, Timbrung-Rimbik and Thingling-Khichuperi - today completed a three-day training on Rural Development through Tourism organized by SIRD&PR at

the Ecotourism Conference Hall at Lower Kitam.

The participants shared plans of forming groups in their respective localities and start community-based tourism shortly and expressed their gratitude towards Director SIRD&PR for bringing such a "won-

derful field-based training" to them, a press release informs.

The valedictory function was presided over by Savitri Chettri, Pan-chayat President of Kitam-Manpur GPU.

Over the course of the three days, resource

persons covered topics like homestay operations, community-based tourism, bird guiding and nature interpretive guiding, overall homestay management with provided practical hands-on training on birding, zero waste picnics and welcoming guests.

Cleanliness drive at Turung Mamaring GPU



SUMMIT REPORT RANGPO, 30 JAN:

A daylong cleanliness drive was organized at Upper Mamring ward of Turung Mamaring Gram Panchayat Unit under Rateypani Namthang constituency in South Sikkim today. Ward Panchayat mem-

ber Poonam Pradhan informs that police personnel stationed at the outpost, employees of micro-labs and Godrej units, power department personnel and village guards jointly carried out a comprehensive cleanliness drive in the entire area.

Swachhta at Padamchen



SUMMIT REPORT RANGPO, 30 JAN:

A three-day Swachhta awareness along with Shramdan program on the theme, "clean village-green village" began at Padamchen in East Sikkim today. The program was supported by Nehru

Yuva Kendra, Gangtok, in association with Lupin Foundation and Young Mind's Club and residents of the area. A cleanliness drive was carried out in and around the school, PHSC, Horticulture office and Panchayat Bhawan premises today.

What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV

- Fatigue
- Coughing or Sore throat
- Runny Nose
- Loss of taste/smell
- Headache
- Diarrhoea
- Stomach pain
- Joint pain
- Shortness of breath

Precautions to Prevent nCoV

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

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Call free on: 184

District surveillance Officer:

EAST: 963021200

WEST: 963020700

NORTH: 964305700

SOUTH: 964305100

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AMS: 963211402

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Health & Family Welfare Department Government of Sikkim

Bajwa urges CM to use resources to find missing farmers

CHANDIGARH, JAN 30 (PTI): Congress MP Partap Singh Bajwa on Saturday urged Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh to use all available sources to trace over 100 farmers who have been missing since January 26 tractor rally in Delhi.

Citing some media reports, Bajwa wrote to Amarinder Singh, saying over 100 farmers from the state have been missing since the incidents that occurred on January 26 in Delhi. There

has been no word to the families regarding their status or present conditions, claimed the Rajya Sabha MP.

I urge you to use all resources available to the government of Punjab to trace these farmers and ensure their return, wrote Bajwa. It is extremely worrying that Punjabi farmers have been detained with no information being shared with their families or lawyers, he added in his letter. Citing the stone-pelt-

ing incident at Delhi's Singhu border on Friday, Bajwa, in a statement here, also urged the CM to deploy the Punjab police personnel for the safety of protesting farmers at protest sites.

We all witnessed the violence that was unleashed against protesting farmers at the Singhu border. It is quite clear that our farmers are under threat from various groups who wish to malign their peaceful protests, he claimed.



Request for Bids (Two-Envelope Bidding Process)

Employer: Gangtok Smart City Development Limited (GSCDL)

Project: SIK-GAN-073 Construction of Link Road from Paljor Stadium to Indira Bye Pass.

Bid Value: Rs 4,76,71,920.00 Rupees Four Crore Seventy Six Lakhs Seventy One Thousand Nine Hundred Twenty only

RFB No: 005/GSCDL/2020, Project identification No: SIK-GAN-0073.

Issued on: 29th January 2021.

- The GSCDL is to receive financing under the Smart City Mission, and intends to apply part of the proceeds toward payments under the contract "For this contract, the GSCDL shall process the payments as per the Company policy, terms and conditions laid in this Standard Procurement Document, subject to availability of funds.
- The GSCDL now invites sealed Bids from eligible Bidders for the work "Construction of Link Road from Paljor Stadium to Indira Bye Pass" Gangtok, to be completed within a period of eighteen months, subject to providing the land free from encumbrances by the administrative Department.
- Bidding will be conducted through competitive procurement using Request for Bids (RFB) as specified herein and is open to all eligible Bidders as defined in the given criteria.
- Interested eligible Bidders may obtain further information from the office of the Chief Technical Officer, GSCDL; email id - ctosmartcity.gangtok@gmail.com document during office hours between 11:00 hrs to 15:00 hrs from Date: 01/02/2021 to 08/02/2021 at the address indicated below. Complete details may be seen in the websites indicated below.
- The bidding document in English may be purchased by interested eligible Bidders during working days between 11:00 hrs to 15:00hrs 15/02/2021 to 18/02/2021 at the address indicated below, upon the submission of a written application to the address below and upon payment of a non-refundable fee of Rs. 30,000 (Rupees Thirty Thousand only). The method of payment will be through demand draft payable to Gangtok Smart City Development Limited. The DD should be issued by a Nationalised Bank and payable at Gangtok.
- Bids must be delivered to the address indicated below, on or before 1300 hours on 01/03/2021. Late Bids will be rejected. The outer Bid envelopes marked "ORIGINAL BID", and the inner envelopes marked "TECHNICAL PART" will be publicly opened in the presence of the Bidders' designated representatives and anyone who chooses to attend, at the address below at 1500 hrs on 01/03/2021. All envelopes marked "FINANCIAL PART" shall remain unopened and will be held in safe custody of the Employer until the second public Bid opening.
- All Bids must be accompanied by a Bid Security of Rs. 11,92,000/- (Rupees Eleven Lakh Ninety Two Thousand only).
- The address(es) referred to above is (are):

Chief Technical Officer
Gangtok Smart City Development Limited, Sokaythang, -
737102 Gangtok, Sikkim, India
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The people should be important

Politicians in our country, as also in Sikkim, have lived in the make-believe world of sycophants and appearances for far too long to be able to see realities unless strained through the reassuring filters that suit and surround them. In their defence, it is not just politicians who take on such imagined sense of power, significance and influence, and one sees such attitudes among government officials, social and religious organisations, and yes, even in the media. It is however only the politicians who need to routinely lobby for direct endorsement of the people to remain of consequence and also stand a chance of deciding policy, hence it becomes important for their priorities to be aligned properly and political-speak nuanced with a better sense of proportions and pragmatism.

One could argue that selective perceptions would affect only individual fates and political careers, but it becomes important to marshal the debate on the right course when these impressions begin hogging public engagement. Take for instance the trend of claiming turncoats, a gimmick which gains currency after every election. These are fine as campaign-trail rewards, but rankle when they become the centrepiece of announcements. One speaks here of the frequent claims and counterclaims of the number of supporters gained and weaned away that compete for headlines on pg02 nowadays. While these displays may be necessary to send out a signal of increasing popularity, they are not ladders on which political futures can be reached. To begin with, commitments so fickle that the confirmation of power can signal an ideological shift can hardly be considered endorsement strong enough to power change. Anyone who has followed campaign politics in Sikkim long enough will know how these inductions are managed and of how routinely such claims are announced; ditto for the year in the wake of an election. At best, these are interesting sideshows to the circus of politics, not the essence of the beast itself. Agreed, there are some cross-overs which are politically significant in that they help open some unreached pockets or occupy some beyond reach seats, but to believe these to have the potency of changing political fortunes is misplaced and in fact demeaning to the intelligence of the electorate.

To believe that the electorate cannot see through the political opportunism at the root of such fluctuations in allegiance because these reflect an inexcusable disconnect with how and what the people think or want. The media might play along and ignore the obvious sour grapes/ bountiful opportunities syndrome which defines a bulk of political positions in Sikkim, but that does not mean that the people do not see through things. Induction ceremonies and claims of winning new members, hence, are at best stepping stones to catch the attention of the people, an attention span that should then be held with policy and ideological commitments to make the people take them seriously.

At the end of the day, it is for the political parties and the leaders to decide where their priorities stand – whether it is to believe their own PR or work along with and among the people to reinforce their locus standi to take positions. The Opposition has often made the mistake of buying into the anti-incumbency fiction and the silent wave hallucination because anti-incumbency does not translate into votes by itself and the ruling segment would be mistaken to believe that anti-incumbency is not a factor at all in Sikkim.

Also, given how small Sikkim is, all parties and leaders need to approach the people as a starting-from-scratch effort; past experience has shown that only those groups which reach out in earnest, and not on the crutches of past record or existing fatigue, win favour with the people. For those watching “politics” from the sidelines, it is important to notice how leaders leverage their power or adjust to the absence of it. For the people, they should speak loud and often enough to catch the ears of leaders to make them listen; that is when the people also get to ‘play’ some ‘politics’ of their own; and why shouldn’t they? It is not rare in Sikkim to find groups of 10 or even less come together and claim to speak for all the people of their constituency or community or section of society. They can be scoffed away, but most of the times they are cajoled and pampered or instigated and approached and placated. Counter groups are sponsored to offset the embarrassment that these groups have caused and either way, it’s the people who get played when they lease out their right to speak.

This is a democracy, and people should be able to talk down to elected leaders and leaders and speak at least as equals with the babus. In a setting where hierarchical protocols continue to be obsessively observed, this is a change whose time has come.

WRITE US:

Readers are invited to comment on, criticise, run down, even appreciate if they like something in this paper. Letters carrying abusive/ indecorous language and personal attacks, except when against people responsible in this newspaper (who are fair game), will have to be ignored. Letters which carry forward a conversation or initiate a dialogue will command immediate attention and receive prominence. Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

GameStop: Hedge Fund Attacks Have Opened Up Powerful New Front Against Wall Street

JAMES BOWDEN & EDWARD THOMAS JONES
theconversation.com

In the dying days of 2009, Rage Against the Machine achieved the unlikelyst of Christmas number ones with a re-release of their anti-establishment anthem Killing in the Name. This was driven by an online campaign to give a great festive bloody nose to Simon Cowell, whose latest X-Factor winner was denied their routine annual spot at the top of the charts.

That protest against a creatively bankrupt mainstream pop media became a case study in the power of an online crowd with a strong narrative. It finds echoes today in a very different arena: the current attack on Wall Street hedge funds by retail traders via the Reddit forum r/WallStreetBets.

When exchanges opened in the New Year, shares in GameStop, a Texas-based chain of computer games stores, were swapping hands at US\$19 (£14) each. By the close on Tuesday January 26 they were worth US\$347 – an increase of over 1,700%.

GameStop PRICE ACTION

Driven by a David v Goliath narrative of revenge against previously untouchable Wall Street “fat cats”, the surge was coordinated by the almost 5 million members of WallStreetBets, using apps like Robinhood that allow anyone to trade financial securities and derivatives for little or zero commission fees. In the words of one of these traders:

People are risking their lives to wage war against the suits and it brings tears to my eyes to watch them do it.

BEATEN AT THEIR OWN GAME

This produced an estimated US\$6 billion in stinging losses for hedge funds and activists “short selling” GameStop shares. Short selling is a bet on stock prices going down, and is done by borrowing shares, selling them, and then buying them back later to return to the lender – hopefully at a reduced price.

Critics argue that hedge funds that engage in short selling have an incentive to push down prices in questionable ways, such as spreading negative rumours about the company’s future. The practice was blamed to some extent for major financial institutions going into freefall during the global financial crisis in 2008.

By buying GameStop to hurt those with short positions, retail investors employed a classic Wall Street tactic that hedge funds use against one another. Buying enough shares to cause the price to surge forces short-selling hedge funds to buy back the borrowed shares at a higher price to cover their positions, which in turn pushes the price higher. In Wall Street parlance, it’s the “short squeeze”.

Hedge funds like Melvin Capital had to swallow soaring losses as the share price hit certain levels and triggered “margin calls” where they had to immediately repay their lenders. Melvin only survived thanks to a cash injection of US\$2.8 billion from other hedge-fund backers.

In previous years, such an attack would have been quickly swept aside by the larger firepower of hedge funds and established Wall Street institutions. Activist

short sellers also kept the lid on things by publishing damning research on targeted firms. Our study from 2017 demonstrated that a short-seller thesis can almost instantaneously affect online message board sentiment and send investors fleeing.

The difference now is retail investors’ much better access to the financial markets, swelling their numbers and their ability to collectively move



prices. The number of users on Robinhood has increased from 500,000 in 2014 to 13 million in 2020, and trading stocks is the most common use for the US government pandemic stimulus cheques in almost every age bracket.

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

Robinhood and other trading platforms banned trading in GameStop shares around the time they peaked, sparking outrage at a perceived “rigged” game tilted towards the big players. Both Democratic and Republican senators have condemned this decision to block retail investors while hedge funds can continue to trade. The platforms claim they had to impose temporary suspensions to protect their own financial positions from the risk of targeted stocks tumbling and retail traders who have borrowed to maximise their buying power suddenly racking up losses they can’t afford to cover.

The debate over how regulators should respond to this conflict is meanwhile intensifying, raising the prospect of new rules that discriminate against retail investors. That could fatally undermine trust in the regulators, since they would effectively be saying it’s alright for Wall Street to employ short squeezes but not the little guys.

Either way, these events have brought issues to the fore that regulators would have needed to address further down the road anyway, since the trading game has clearly changed in the last couple of years. For example, one new danger is an unfriendly foreign country feeding “fake news” into social media to enrage retail investors about perceived unfairnesses, which galvanises them into attacks that prevent the markets from working efficiently.

After all, some would argue that short sellers are unfairly portrayed as villains in this David v Goliath battle. They help to keep markets liquid by making share pur-

chases easier for those who do want to buy a particular stock, and they can put a spotlight on companies that are poorly managed, dishonest, or engaged in poor corporate governance.

As a New York Times profile of notorious short-seller Andrew Left states, “In a town with a dozing sheriff, vigilantes become the agents of order.” Left’s fund, Citron Capital, made a 100% loss on its short position in GameStop.

So how should the regulators play this? They may not want to curb investor discussion in online communities, even if it were possible, or try and set parameters about constitutes “manipulation” and “honest discussion” of a particular stock. One option might be to increase their monitoring capacity, perhaps through some kind of early-warning system based on the volume of online chatter and the sentiment being expressed. They could feed this information to the trading platforms to let them take a view on temporarily limiting trading on those securities.

I WON’T DO WHAT YOU TELL ME...

Nobody knows how the present situation will end. The intense activity by retail investors could prompt a wider sell-off by forcing hedge funds with short positions to sell other shares to raise the cash to cover their losses. This could hurt companies and investors that were only spectators in this battle, with potentially far-reaching consequences.

For those worried about the potential for chaos, Rage Against the Machine might offer a crumb of comfort. Since that Christmas number one, numerous attempts to achieve a similar feat have been less successful. The collective action was diluted by the sheer number of copycat campaigns.

Similarly, we have seen campaigns by traders launched against Blackberry and AMC Entertainment, and there are rumours of a similar strategy being employed against American Airlines. Whether they reach similar levels as GameStop remains to be seen.

Either way the crowd will regroup, and regulators will need to learn valuable lessons from this episode. Having shown what a crowd of renegade investors can achieve, this could well have opened up a powerful new front in anti Wall Street activism.

[James Bowden is Lecturer in Financial Technology, University of Strathclyde; Edward Thomas Jones is Lecturer in Economics, Bangor University]



Should People Who Have Recently Had COVID Be Vaccinated?

MATT WEBSTER
theconversation.com

A recent report from Public Health England showed that 83% of people who had had COVID were protected from reinfection five months later. Given that 3.7 million people in the UK have had COVID, should those with antibodies be at the back of the vaccine queue?

With the current high death rate, rising case numbers, closed schools and a seemingly interminable lockdown, it is natural to look for ways to speed up the vaccination rollout. Surely those who have already had COVID and recovered can be deprioritised so that people shielding at home can receive the vaccine sooner?

Certainly, the government is not afraid of hacking the process to increase short-term vaccine coverage. The recent example of lengthening the wait for a second dose proves that. But how feasible and effective

would it be to not vaccinate people who have had the virus?

First, how sure are we that those people recovered remain protected five months later? While there is no doubt that the antibodies that helped you recover from COVID will last for some time after your illness, hopefully reducing the chance of reinfection, this study was on recovered healthcare professionals, looking at whether they went on to catch COVID again.

Despite the rising case number, a lot improved in those five months, particularly in the availability of protective equipment for healthcare workers and the isolation of COVID patients in hospital. This complicates checking healthcare worker’s antibody-derived protection rates and the calculation for how long you may remain protected.

ANTIBODY TESTING

But can’t we just check the antibodies at the test centres, sending those home that don’t need their

immune system trained in COVID-focused jiu-jitsu? We can definitely test for antibodies. The test has been available – with a few stop-starts – for some time, but critically it relies on a blood test.

England’s test-and-trace programme, which has struggled to process swab tests on the scale needed to match case numbers, would surely collapse at the request to process antibody tests for the entire UK population. Shipping, extraction, processing, testing ... all while poor Mrs Jones sits in a school hall with a nurse poised with a vaccine jab waiting for the green light.

How about using the test-and-trace data to sort those that need the jab from those that don’t?

While I will overlook that use of “don’t” (antibodies are not everlasting, even if you have had COVID) the real question here is how much do you trust the accuracy of test and trace, and of people’s ability to self-declare ac-

curately? At the start of the pandemic everyone I spoke with had “had that COVID” despite being untested and unable to identify any exposure other than “I went on a train”.

This improved with mass swab-testing, but accuracy, particularly false positives, would be an issue if used to exclude vulnerable people from the vaccine queue.

Like many things related to this pandemic, a good idea is complicated by the detail. Vaccine deployment could be targeted more precisely if we knew how long each of us retained antibodies and had an instant test capable of estimating how much and for how long we would be protected. Given that we have neither – and the NHS is under immense pressure already – the approach of vaccinating in demographic groups currently appears to be our only option.

[the writer is Principal Lecturer in Biochemistry, Anglia Ruskin University]

Jharkhand reports 45 new COVID-19 cases, 1 death

RANCHI, JAN 30 (PTI): Jharkhand's COVID-19 tally mounted to 1,18,602 as 45 more people tested positive for the infection, a health official said on Saturday.

The COVID-19 death toll rose to 1,070 as one more person succumbed to the infection in the last 24-hours, he said.

Ranchi district reported the highest number of new cases at 33, followed by two cases each in East Singhbhum, Dhanbad, Gumla and Sahibganj, the official said.

The state now has 628 active cases, while 1,16,904 people have recovered from the disease so far, he said.

Jharkhand has tested 12,022 samples for COVID-19 in the last 24 hours, the official said.

Meanwhile, 8,759 healthcare workers received jabs of COVID-19 vaccine on Friday.

Among those vaccinated on Friday, only one healthcare worker reported Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFI).

So far a total of 33,069 healthcare workers in the state have received COVID vaccines, he added.

Kolkata Police arrest 3 persons, seize arms & ammunition

KOLKATA, JAN 30 (PTI): Kolkata Police arrested three persons including one woman on Saturday and seized arms and ammunition from their possession, a senior officer said.

While one man and a woman were arrested from the city's Babughat bus stand area, the third person was picked up from Baruipur in the South 24 Parganas districts, he said.

A total of six 9 mm improvised pistols and 12 magazines were seized from the possession of the man and the woman, the officer said.

"The two were trying to deliver the arms and ammunition to the other one arrested from Baruipur. The duo was coming from Bihar's Bhagalpur ...," the IPS officer said.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the man is a resident of Basirhat while the woman is the wife of the man nabbed from Baruipur, he said.

A case was started at the Maidan Police Station and the three persons were booked under the Arms Act, he added.

"Further raids and searches are being conducted for the recovery of more arms and ammunition. We are hopeful to arrest more people linked to this group," he said.

Bhutan Cabinet approves nation's first policy on tourism

YANGCHEN C RINZIN

THIMPU, 30 JAN [KUENSEL]: The much-awaited tourism policy got Bhutan has finally been cleared by the country's Cabinet. Unlike in the past, the government will now have to take measures to promote tourism as a year-round activity.

Areas with minimum tourism activity could see tourism product and service development as the policy pushes the government to spread tourism activities in those regions through provision of differing incentives and emphasis shifts to balance tourism in all regions.

The policy, endorsed by the Cabinet on January 5, is the first tourism policy document after tourism started in 1974.

To avoid mass tourism, the government will manage and regulate by adopting appropriate pricing and other mechanisms like sustainable development fee and a minimum daily package rate, among others.

"All initiatives related to tourism by the private sector shall be routed and endorsed by the TCB," the policy states.

Without the policy, tourism has been otherwise based on the vision of high value, low volume.

Meanwhile, the TCB's



proposal to open tourism by March this year would not come through. The TCB last year had proposed opening a gateway whereby tourists can pre-book their travel to Bhutan by March and visit when the Covid-19 eases.

TCB's Director General Dorji Dhradhul said that owing to the lockdown the discussion on reopening could not take place.

"We thought we could open by March but now we may not be able to because of the pandemic," he said. "The

situation keeps changing. Otherwise, we would have finalised and announced to accept bookings for tourists."

TCB is expecting to reopen tourism earliest by this June. However, there is no government directives or indication and it would depend on how the situation unfolds.

The lockdown has also disrupted the discussion on the three components submitted to the technical advisory group in September last year to reopen tourism.

The bubble tourism was

to ease restriction on travel and revive the tourism sector. It is an exclusive travel partnership between two or more countries that have demonstrated considerable success in containing and combating the Covid-19 pandemic.

In this, the tourist would be allowed to come only from one particular country that has agreed for bubble tourism with Bhutan.

"Now we'll also have to look into bubble tourism carefully, as the situation globally is not improving,"

Dorji Dhradhul said. "We need to be confident about another country that we will have bubble tourism with."

TCB had also proposed to allow tourist to come and undergo 21-day mandatory quarantine. Under this scheme, a tourist from any country can visit Bhutan. The cost would be agreed between the tour agent and tourist.

Director general said that this proposal is still on and even if the tourist wants to visit Bhutan now they can if they agree to the 21-day quar-

antine. "But we're not sure we would even have tourist wanting to come to Bhutan and follow the compulsory quarantine." However, TCB dropped the third proposal where the tourist does not have to undergo quarantine. This would have allowed tourists to come to Bhutan and visit only specific or selected areas then return to their destination. "Maybe, we can consider such an arrangement after a year or two," the director general said.

However, he said TCB is exploring ultra-high-end tourism, meaning a tourist can visit Bhutan in a chartered flight or chopper in a small group. "While the discussion is still ongoing, we shouldn't rush to reopen since the risk is still there. We don't want to compete with other countries who have reopened tourism," Dorji Dhradhul said.

The tourism sector remains closed since March last year. Only 28,000 tourists visited Bhutan in 2020 generating revenue of USD 19 million, against 315,599 tourists in 2019. Tourism sector earned USD 225 million in 2019.

There are 50,737 individuals solely dependent on tourism for livelihood and 28,159 are kidu recipients. So far, the government has spent about Nu 289 million on hotels used for quarantine.

Centre approves additional funds for Assam, 4 other states

GUWAHATI, 30 JAN [SHIL- LONGTIMES]:

A high-level committee under the chairmanship of the Union home minister Amit Shah has approved additional central assistance of Rs 1,751.05 crore under the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) for Assam and four other states affected by floods, landslides and hailstorms, an official statement issued on Friday said.

Approving the additional central assistance, the Union home minister said the Union government has resolved to help Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh, five states that braved the natural disasters.

Funds to the tune of Rs 437.15 crore has been approved for Assam; Rs 75.86 crore for Arunachal Pradesh; Rs

320.94 crore for Odisha; Rs 245.96 crore for Telangana and Rs 386.06 crore for Uttar Pradesh against floods/ landslides during the south-west monsoon 2020.

Besides, a sum of Rs 285.08 crore has been approved for Uttar Pradesh against hailstorm during Rabi 2019-20.

The central government had deputed inter-ministerial central teams (IMCTs) to all the five states immediately after the calamities, without waiting for memorandums from the affected state governments.

In addition, during the financial year 2020-21, till date, the central government has released Rs 19,036.43 crore to 28 states from State Disaster Response Fund and Rs 4,409.71 crore to 11 States from NDRF.

No new COVID-19 case in Arunachal Pradesh

ITANAGAR, JAN 30 (PTI):

Arunachal Pradesh did not record a single fresh case of COVID-19 in the last 24 hours, a senior health department official said on Saturday.

The COVID-19 tally in the state remained at 16,827 as no new case has been reported since Friday, the official said.

Two more persons recuperated from the disease on Friday, taking the total number of recoveries in the state to 16,758, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Dr Lobsang Jampa said. The recovery rate in the state has touched 99.58 per cent, while the positivity stands at 0.07 per cent and the fatality rate at 0.33 per cent, he said.

Arunachal Pradesh currently has 13 active COVID-19 cases, while 56 people have succumbed to the infection so far.

The Capital Complex Region -- comprising Itanagar, Naharlagun, Nirjuli and Banderdewa areas -- and West Kameng have the maximum number of active cases at four each, the SSO said.

A total of 3,91,822 samples have been tested for COVID-19 so far, including 547 on Friday, he added.

State Immunization Officer (SIO) Dr Dimong Padung said that a total of 16,350 health workers have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine so far including 609 on Friday.

The health department has been carrying out the inoculation drive four days a week -- Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, he said.

Seven persons reportedly developed after effects following immunization, the SIO added.

Bhutan's never-ending chilli issue

TASHI DEMA

THIMPU, 30 JAN [KUENSEL]: The recent chilli problem exposed all shortcomings and now as price skyrockets, some charging as high as Nu 800 a kilogramme, the demand is for consumer protection.

People took to social media to raise their concern when chilli price skyrocketed to Nu 800 a kilogramme amidst the shortage. Many people said they would not mind paying the price if farmers are benefitting from the increase in price but alleged it was vendors, who were taking advantage of the situation.

Some people raised questions on the role of the government, agriculture ministry and Office of Consumer Protection (OCP) to protect consumers. Many accused OCP of failing to protect consumers although the Consumer Protection Act 2012 and Consumer Protection Rules and Regulations 2015 mandate them.

The views are varied if not the chillies.

A Thimphu resident, Karma, said the government should intervene and allow import of chilli until the local production hits the market. "Tobacco products are imported without restrictions and alcohol is produced with-in and distributed freely."

Another resident, Kuenga, said consumers have no right to blame farmers even if they charge Nu 500 or even 1,000, as farmers put in lots of effort to produce the product. He explained farmers are forced to sell chilli at Nu 30 or 40 a kg during production season. "When we are not concerned for farmers that time and if there is no minimum price support from the government, it is not fair."

He said all these problems call for a systematic approach towards vegetable production and marketing. "It is time we

have to use cold storage system." But as much as the chilli price impacted consumers, suppliers and farmers are equally worried.

A chilli supplier from Dagana is worried the exorbitant price would force the government to lift the ban on chilli. "If that happens, many farmers would suffer."

He pays Nu 250 for a kg of chilli to farmers in Lhamoizingkha and sells it for Nu 300 a kg to vendors at the Centenary Farmers' Market.

"Since I am not allowed to come out of my vehicle because of the pandemic, I don't know how much the vendors are selling it for," he said. "They are making 100 percent profit even if they sell it for Nu 600 a kg."

A farmer from Umling said they sold at Nu 400 a kg but could not believe it fetched Nu 800 at Gelephu market. "But how long will people buy at that price?" she said. "It will only force the government to allow import or fix a price, which will only affect farmers, as vendors have a way to sell it at a high price."

An agriculture extension officer in Gelephu said farmers in his gewog sell chillies for Nu 400 a kg. "I think it is the vendors who charged Nu 800 to consumers. A farmer in Shompangkha said he was surprised when his chillies fetched him Nu 500 a kg recently in Sarpang. He said he never expected his chillies would fetch so much money but with prices of all commodities increasing in the market, he thought it was a good opportunity to sell his chillies for the price.

He, however, said he knows the high price will not last long. "Consumers will make noise, as vendors are selling it for Nu 800."

But it is not just local chillies that are costing consumers huge money.

ITBP gets new commander in Ladakh



NEW DELHI, JAN 30 (PTI):

The Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), which guards the Line of Actual Control with China, has posted a new officer to head its frontier in Ladakh, official sources said on Saturday.

Lhari Dorjee Lhatoo, a 1999-batch officer of the Manipur cadre, will be replacing ITBP Inspector General (IG) Deepam Seth, who was commanding the force troops deployed along the LAC with China in Ladakh.

Seth, a 1995-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer of the Uttarakhand cadre, has been transferred to the ITBP Headquarters in Delhi, as per an order issued by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police Headquarters here.

Lhatoo had recently joined the border guarding force. He has earlier

served in the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and the Special Protection Group (SPG).

"The transfer has been done on administrative and strategic grounds. IG Seth has been posted in the same capacity and will handle the personnel and vigilance charge at the ITBP Headquarters in Delhi," a senior officer told PTI.

The new IG is expected to take charge in Ladakh in the next few days, he said.

Leh is the base for the ITBP north-west frontier and an IG-rank officer, equivalent to a Maj General rank in the Army, commands the formation that is responsible for the deployment of the troops in this part of the 3,488-km long Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China that runs from the Kara-

koram Pass in the Himalayas to Jachep La in Arunachal Pradesh.

Seth has been a part of various military talks, as a representative of the Union Home Ministry, being held with the Chinese to move forward on the long-negotiated disengagement process in eastern Ladakh as thousands of troops from both the sides remain deployed at friction points under freezing conditions since May last year.

He also oversaw induction of additional ITBP troops in Ladakh that was undertaken in the wake of the standoff.

The officer was posted to head the newly-created formation in mid-2019 and was decorated with the president's police medal for distinguished service this Republic Day.

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VIDEO NEWS SECTION

Paul Pogba shows less can be more after tyranny of expectations

JONATHAN LIEW
LONDON, 30 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: When Paul Pogba was about nine or 10, a man called Sambou Tati – his youth coach at US Roissy – decided to convert him from a striker into a midfielder. At the time, Pogba was a brilliant footballer with one glaring weakness: he loved the ball so much he would simply dribble and dribble with it for as long as he could. By moving further back, Tati reasoned, Pogba might have less time on the ball, but would offer greater influence on the team as a whole.

Although he probably didn't know it, in so doing Tati had established an entirely new field of footballing study, one that continues to absorb and confound the game's greatest minds to this day: How To Get The Best Out Of Paul Pogba.

Yes, it seems we're still playing this game in 2021. The clenched fists. The bulging veins. The impassioned rants. The battery of television pundits warning that unless he bucks his ideas up, this 27-year-old World Cup winner and four-times Serie A champion may never fulfil his potential. And yet for all this, over recent weeks there have been moments when it feels like we might just be getting somewhere.

Since re-establishing himself in Manchester United's starting XI last month, Pogba has been quietly exemplary. His three goals – stunning efforts from long range – have directly contributed to wins at West Ham, Burnley and Fulham. His defensive contributions are up. His positional discipline has been good. Even in defeat by Sheffield United on Wednesday, he was probably United's best player. All of



which has naturally generated a fair amount of excitement and a fair few questions. Is this a blip or a breakthrough? Is Pogba good again? Was he always good? Will he stay good?

In a way, the very framing of the issue is the problem here. So much of the debate around Pogba since he rejoined United seems to have taken place in a weird vacuum, divorced from symbiosis and context, as if the performance of a single player could be isolated from that of the team around him. As it turns out – and really, this should surprise nobody – if you surround a good player with other good players in a successful team, they may just begin to look better themselves.

Partly, you sense, this is a tyranny of expectations: a function of the way Pogba arrived, the world-record fee he arrived for, the state United were in when they signed him

and the sort of player he was assumed to be. "For £89 million, Pogba will be expected to win big games, grab games by the scruff of the neck," Gary Neville said when he signed in 2016. Jamie Carragher said on Sky a couple of months ago: "I thought he might have an impact like [Frank] Lampard at Chelsea, [Steven] Gerrard at Liverpool, Yaya Touré at Man City, players who drove their teams to titles, European Cups."

But Pogba has never been this sort of player: the one-man hurricane who drags a struggling team to glory. And nor, in many respects, were the others. Lampard had Michael Essien and Claude Makélélé alongside him; Gerrard had Xabi Alonso and Javier Mascherano; Touré had Fernandinho and David Silva. Even in their most inspired moments, they were uplifted by strong teammates, not the other way around. Pogba was 23 when he returned

to Old Trafford, and in a way had spent his whole career learning: from Paul Scholes in his first United stint, from Arturo Vidal and Andrea Pirlo at Juventus. Now, the learning would stop. His job would be to turn around a dysfunctional superclub at the age of 23. And not with goals or saves, but from central midfield, with the likes of Ander Herrera, Marouane Fellaini, Scott McTominay and Jesse Lingard for company. And when it didn't work, we shouted at him to try harder, as if he were a racehorse or a recalcitrant piece of computer hardware, rather than a human playing a team sport.

Perhaps this is why Pogba has so often been the focal point of United fans' criticism, a media obsession, a surrogate for the decrepitude of the wider organisation. And perhaps it is only now, with United second in the league, that we see just how reliant Pogba's

game is on a functioning collective around him. The 25-yard screamers are really just the ornamentation: at heart Pogba is a combination player, all neat touches and dainty triangles, and sweeping diagonal passes for quick, ruthless forwards to finish.

Numbers tell only part of this story. Pogba's raw creative stats are down in almost all areas: fewer passes, fewer touches, fewer dribbles, fewer shots. But he is winning the ball more, competing more in the air, doing more with less. As Tati realised all those years ago, sometimes Pogba is at his most effective when he isn't always on the ball. "Because I like to get a lot of touches, teams press you more," Pogba said this week. "Now I try and play quicker, play more as a team than an individual."

The lingering question, of course, is how sustainable this all is. It was only last month, after all, that Pogba's agent Mino Raiola declared that Pogba's time at Old Trafford was "over" and claimed it was best that he was sold. There are 18 months left on his contract. With no new deal in the offing and United unwilling to let him go for free, all the signs still point to a parting of the ways in the summer.

Shortly after the last World Cup, Pogba's former manager José Mourinho speculated that he is at his best in "closed habitats" – short, confined periods where he can focus his energies on a distinct goal. It's possible that something similar is happening now. That with the end in sight, Pogba can simply focus on the next few months, on winning the league title and leaving in a blaze of glory. If so, then against all the odds, Pogba's return to United may yet have a happy ending all round.

'It needs to change': Chelsea 'disgusted' with racist abuse of Reece James

LONDON, 30 JAN [PA MEDIA]: Chelsea have thrown their weight behind calls for social media companies to do more to stamp out racism on their platforms after the defender Reece James became the latest player to be subjected to vile abuse.

The England full-back revealed he had been targeted on Friday evening, posting the message "No room for RACISM!!" in response. His club was quick to condemn the attack, which followed similar abuse directed at West Brom's Romaine Sawyers and the Manchester United duo Axel Tuanzebe and Anthony Martial this week.

A statement issued via Chelsea's Twitter account said: "Everyone at Chelsea FC is disgusted with the racist abuse Reece James received on social media on Friday evening. This club finds racism and all forms of discriminatory behaviour completely unacceptable. We totally condemn it.

"In sport, as in wider society, we must create a social media environment where hateful and discriminatory actions are as unacceptable online as they would be on the street. We add our voice to those urging social media platforms and regulatory authorities to take stronger, more effective and more urgent action against this despicable behaviour. Something needs to change and it needs to change now."

Speaking about the earlier incidents on Friday, the Premier League chief executive, Richard Masters, called for action to stamp out online hate. He said: "I am appalled to see the racial abuse received by players this week. Racist behaviour of any form is unacceptable and nobody should have to deal with it. Tackling online hate is a priority for football, and I believe social media companies need to do more."

Nepal to allow unrestricted entry to vaccinated tourists

SANGAM PRASAIN KATHMANDU, 30 JAN [KATHMANDUPOST]: Nepal is considering allowing unrestricted entry to vaccinated tourists in a bid to boost the morale of the moribund tourism industry ahead of the upcoming spring peak season, Tourism Minister Bhanu Bhakta Dhakal said on Friday.

There will be no quarantine and coronavirus insurance requirements, and all visitors will need to produce is proof of having had the shot. Many countries have started issuing a vaccine certificate or vaccine passport to international travellers.

"In order to ease restrictions on travel, we are allowing tourists to travel freely if they produce a certificate that proves they have been vaccinated," Dhakal told a media briefing here on Friday. He said the ministry had also recommended resuming issuing on-arrival visas to all tourists at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport. The Seychelles became the first country in the world to welcome vaccinated tourists without quarantine requirements.

Dhakal said the government was also preparing to extend the 72-hour validity of negative Covid-19 test reports for those who have not been vaccinated. Currently, all visitors to Nepal above age five must have a negative PCR test obtained not more than 72 hours before departure, according to the Department of Immigration.

A mandatory seven-day hotel quarantine, with a second negative PCR test on the fifth day after arrival, is required. Trekkers and mountaineers must also have insurance coverage worth \$5,000.

The government still has not resumed granting on-arrival visas at Kathmandu airport, except to officials of diplomatic missions and non-resident Nepalis.

"We are taking a few proposals which we

Dina Asher-Smith returns in style with 60m World Indoor Tour victory

KARLSRUHE, 30 JAN [PA MEDIA]: Dina Asher-Smith made an impressive return to competition as she equalled her personal best in winning the women's 60m at the World Indoor Tour in Karlsruhe. It was the 25-year-old's first taste of international competition since she won the world 200m title in Doha in October 2019.

Asher-Smith crossed the line in a time of 7.08sec ahead of Orlann Ombissa-Dzangue of France, while her teammate and current British

record holder Asha Philip finished fifth.

Earlier, Asher-Smith had cruised through her semi-final heat in 7.11sec in her first indoor race for three years. After taking last year off from competition, she is now set to step up her preparations for the delayed Tokyo Olympics.

Asher-Smith is scheduled to move on to race in Düsseldorf on Sunday, and also compete in France with a view to potentially racing in the European Indoors in Poland in March.

Brazil's Hulk signs 2-year deal with Atletico Mineiro



SÃO PAULO, JAN 30 (AP): Brazilian club Atletico Mineiro signed on a free transfer former Brazil striker Hulk.

Hulk left China's Shanghai SIPG and is expected to play for Atletico Mineiro after the Brazilian championship ends in February. He has a two-year contract.

Atletico Mineiro is coached by Jorge Sampaoli, a fan of the 34-year-old Hulk.

After only two professional matches for

Brazil's Vitória in 2005, Hulk moved to Japan, where he played for three clubs. His best form came in 2008-12 at Porto, where he won the national league four times and lifted the Europa League trophy in 2011.

Hulk moved to Zenit St. Petersburg, where he won three titles and played for Brazil in the 2014 World Cup. He left in 2016 for China and won another two trophies with Shanghai.

Australian Open gets green light for 30,000 a day as WA loosens border restrictions

MICHAEL MCGOWAN SYDNEY, 30 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Crowds at this year's Australian Open will be capped at half the pre-Covid average, after Victoria's top health official signed off on allowing up to 30,000 spectators to attend the start of the tournament next month.

On Saturday, Victoria's sports minister, Martin Pakula, confirmed the government had agreed to a plan that would allow daily crowd capacity of 30,000 for the first eight days of the tournament, reducing to 25,000 per day from the start of the tournament quarter-finals.

Pakula said a total of 390,000 people were expected to attend Melbourne Park to watch the tournament during the fortnight, about half the average attendance in recent years.

He said it would be "the most significant event with crowds the world has seen for many, many months".

"That means on Rod Laver Arena, as we get to the end of the tournament, we'll have an incredible atmosphere, not that different to the atmosphere we've seen in all the Opens in years past," Pakula said.

On Saturday the Tennis Australia chief executive, Craig Tiley, revealed that 22 players remained in hotel quarantine, including Japan's Kei Nishikori and the French world No 28, Benoit Paire. The last players were to be released at midnight on Saturday.

The hotel quarantine program has come in for criticism from some Open participants, but Tiley insisted to reporters that "99.9%" had been satisfied.

Tiley said players who had been through a hard lockdown – meaning they were unable to access training facilities during



the quarantine due to positive Covid-19 cases on flights to Australia – had been given "priority" with their schedules and access to training facilities.

Also on Saturday, the Western Australian premier, Mark McGowan, announced travellers from Queensland and Victoria would no longer have to self-isolate upon arrival in the state from next week. Victorians will not have to self-isolate on arriving in WA from next Friday, with the state designated "very low risk" from that time. From 12.01am on Monday, Queensland arrivals will also be downgraded to a "very low risk" category.

But travellers entering WA must be prepared to take a Covid test and undergo health screening, as well as complete a declaration about where they have come from.

New South Wales will be rated a low risk, with arrivals still required to self-quarantine for two weeks and undergo a Covid test. Australia again recorded no new

cases of community transmission on Saturday. Victoria has now gone 24 days with no new cases of the virus outside of hotel quarantine.

WA recorded no community cases of the virus in the past 24 hours, marking nearly 10 months without a virus case in the WA community. But three cases have been detected in hotel quarantine in the past 24 hours. Two of those cases are of the new variant strains of the virus, making a total of seven variant strain cases in the quarantine system.

Victorian health authorities announced virus fragments had been found in wastewater at three more Victorian towns, including the popular holiday destinations of Cowes and Castlemaine. The fragments were found at Castlemaine, Cowes and Pakenham on 27 January.

The health department urged residents and anyone who had visited these areas from 25 January to 27 January to get tested if they had symptoms of the virus.

Canada to quarantine travelers, suspend flights south

TORONTO (AP): Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Friday announced stricter restrictions on travelers in response to new, likely more contagious variants of the novel coronavirus — including making it mandatory for travelers to quarantine in a hotel at their own expense when they arrive in Canada and suspending airline service to Mexico and all Caribbean destinations until April 30.

Trudeau said in addition to the pre-boarding test Canada already requires, the government will be introducing mandatory PCR testing at the airport for people returning to Canada.

“Travelers will then have to wait for up to three days at an approved hotel for their test results, at their own expense, which is expected to be more than \$2,000,” Trudeau said.

“Those with negative test results will then be able to quarantine at home under significantly increased surveillance and enforcement.”

He said the measure will be take effect “in the coming weeks.”

The steep cost for the hotel stay includes the cost for a private PCR test, security, food and the cost of measures the designated hotels will have to take to keep their workers safe.

“The cost is a ball-parking. This isn’t like any other facility. This is one where there has to be infection prevention



control measures, security and other costs as well. It’s not just a regular stay at a hotel,” said Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada’s chief public health officer.

Tam also said a test will be required on the 10th day after people return. The prime minister said those with positive tests will be immediately required to quarantine in designated government facilities to make sure they’re not carrying variants of particular concern.

Trudeau also said the government and Canada’s main airlines have agreed to suspend service to sun destinations right away. He said Air Canada, Westjet, Sunwing, and Air Transat are cancelling air service to all Caribbean destinations and Mexico starting Sunday until April 30.

“They will be making arrangements with their customers who are currently on a trip in these regions to organize their

return flights,” Trudeau said. Mexico’s Foreign Relations Department said in a statement that “the government of Mexico expresses its hope that the measure recently announced by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau can be withdrawn as soon as possible, in order to avoid a deep economic crisis in the North American Region.”

Trudeau said starting next week, all international passenger flights to Canada must land at four airports: Vancouver, Toronto, Calgary and Montreal.

“We will also, in the coming weeks, be requiring nonessential travelers to show a negative test before entry at the land border with the US, and we are working to stand up additional testing requirements for land travel,” Trudeau said.

Canada already requires those entering the country to self-isolate for 14 days and to pres-

ent a negative COVID-19 test taken within three days before arrival. Tam, Canada’s top health official, said that security contractors will be going door-to-door to check on returnees who are isolating at home. The move to require a hotel stay upon return would discourage vacations as people would not want to have to quarantine at a hotel at their own expense upon return.

“It’s excellent. It’s a shame it’s this late. This is something they could have done ages ago,” said Dr. Andrew Morris, a professor of infectious diseases at the University of Toronto and the medical director of the Antimicrobial Stewardship Program at Sinai-University Health Network.

“This is definitely a step in the right direction.”

More and more governments are thinking about ways to be more aggressive because of the

new variants, delays in vaccines, the challenges with getting the population vaccinated and the strains on health care systems. Public Safety Minister Bill Blair said officials have been urging Canadians to cancel all nonessential travel and are trying to eliminate it.

“Unfortunately, some are making the choice to engage in nonessential travel. If they are going to make that choice, they should bear the full cost,” Blair said. Ontario Premier Doug Ford said his province will begin testing at Toronto’s Pearson International Airport on Monday as a stop gap until federal measures are in place.

Trudeau also announced there will be a delay in part of the next shipment of the Moderna vaccine, which arrives next week. He said Canada will receive 78% of the expected amount, translating to 180,000 doses.

Vaccine rollout faces challenges in France’s poorest region

SAINT-DENIS, FRANCE (AP): Samia Dridi, who was born, raised and works as a nurse in Saint-Denis, fears for her impoverished town, recalling how the coronavirus cut an especially deadly path through the diverse area north of Paris, a burial place for French kings entombed in a majestic basilica.

Dridi and her sister accompanied their frail 92-year-old Algerian-born mother to a vaccination center for the first of two shots to protect against COVID-19 days after it opened last week for people over the age of 75.

While red tape, consent requirements and supply issues have slowed France’s vaccination rollout nationwide, the Seine-Saint-Denis region faces special challenges in warding off the virus, and getting people vaccinated when their turn comes.

It is the poorest region in mainland France and had the highest rise in mortality in the country last spring, largely due to COVID-19. Up to 75 percent of the population are immigrants or have immigrant roots, and its residents speak some 130 different languages. Health care is below par, with two to three times fewer hospital beds than other regions and a higher rate of chronic illnesses. Many are essential workers in supermarkets, public sanitation and health care.

The coronavirus was initially widely seen as the great equalizer, infecting rich and poor. But studies have since shown that some people are more vulnerable than others, notably the

elderly, those with other long-term illnesses and the poor, often living on the edges of mainstream society, like immigrants who don’t speak French.

Dridi, 56, a nurse for more than three decades, feels relieved there is currently “no significant evolution” of the virus in her town. But she doesn’t forget what happened when the pandemic first hit. “We had entire families with COVID,” she said. Many have multiple generations living together in small apartments, something experts say is an aggravating factor common in the region.

Despite those grim memories, local officials grapple with special challenges getting out word about vaccines to a population where many don’t speak French, lack access to regular medical care and, like in much of France, distrust the vaccine’s safety.

Next month, a bus will travel through the region, notably visiting street markets, to provide vaccination information. In addition, about 40 “vaccination ambassadors” who speak several languages are to be trained to reach out, starting in March, about vaccinations as well as “fake news” surrounding them. A case in point is Youssef Zaoui, 32, an Algerian living in Saint-Denis.

“I heard the vaccination is very dangerous, more than the virus,” said Zaoui, sitting in the shadow of the basilica. His proof that he need not worry about the virus: the butcher down the road and the man selling cigarettes nearby. They were there at the beginning of March “and they’re still here. ... Me, I’m still here,” he said. Is there a chance the vac-

cine could turn the tide on the inequality reflected in death statistics for the region?

“Before the vaccine becomes a great equalizer, everyone must be vaccinated,” said Patrick Simon, who co-authored a study last June on the vulnerability of minorities in Seine-Saint-Denis to COVID-19. But he said the challenges for marginalized communities to access health care continues, “so these inequalities will also be reproduced for the vaccine.”

While the French health care system is meant to provide accessible medical treatment for all, the bureaucratic demands and co-payments often scare away new immigrants or the very poor. Government health guidance doesn’t always reach those outside the system. As a nurse at a municipal health center, Dridi sees up front the poverty that translates into vulnerability to the coronavirus.

“I’m giving an injection, a shot, putting on a bandage ... and some say, ‘I live in a car, I’m in the street,’” she said.

That misery was not apparent at the vaccination center where Dridi’s mother got her shot — among 17 opened across the region last week and where Saint-Denis’ more fortunate, who live in private homes, were seen on a recent visit. Some made their way into the center on canes or held by an arm. One couple showed up on a scooter. All were eager to be vaccinated. They were among the lucky ones. Appointments were cut back after allotments of doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine were diminished, like elsewhere in France and Europe.

WHO team visits 2nd Wuhan hospital in virus investigation

WUHAN, JAN 30 (AP): Members of a World Health Organization team investigating the origins of the coronavirus pandemic visited another Wuhan hospital that had treated early COVID-19 patients on their second full day of work on Saturday. Jinyantan Hospital was one of the city’s first to deal with patients in early 2020 suffering from a then-unknown virus and is a key part of the epidemiological history of the disease.

The team’s first face-to-face meetings with Chinese scientists took place on Friday, before the experts who specialize in animal health, virology, food safety and epidemiology visited another early site of the outbreak, the Hubei Integrated Chinese and Western Medicine Hospital.

The Geneva-based WHO said late Thursday on Twitter that its team plans to visit hospitals, markets like the Huanan Seafood Market that was linked to many of the first cases, the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and laboratories at facilities including the Wuhan Center for Disease Control. All hypotheses are on the table as the team follows the science in their work to understand the origins of the COVID19 virus, WHO tweeted. It said the team had already requested detailed underlying data and planned to speak with early responders and some of the first patients.

No income, 2,000 mouths to feed: Lockdown squeezes Greek zoo

ATHENS, GREECE (AP): It’s feeding time at Greece’s only zoo, and a capuchin monkey grabs as many mandarins as it can — even tucking one into his long, supple tail. It might be wise to stock up.

After being closed for almost three months due to COVID-19, the zoo on the fringes of Athens could be on the road to extinction: With no paying visitors or — unlike other European zoos — enough government aid to cover its very particular needs, the Attica Zoological Park faces huge bills to keep 2,000 animals well-fed and healthy. “As things are ... we still can go on for at least one month,” zoo founder and CEO Jean Jacques Lesueur said. “After that, we don’t know.”

Unlike some businesses forced to temporarily close due to virus-control restrictions, the zoo continues to have sizeable operating expenses. Between food, salaries, utilities, medical care and other expenses, the cost of caring for the animals currently exceeds 200,000 euros (\$243,000) per month.

“That’s the difference between us and other companies: When they close they close. We close, but we don’t close,” Lesueur told The Associated Press.

Founded in 2000 and located in the town of Spata, the zoo occupies



20 hectares (50 acres) and is home to 290 species, from elephants to prairie dogs. It’s involved in education, conservation and breeding, and belongs to the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria, which has about 400 members.

Having to close again on Nov. 7 after Greece’s two-month spring lockdown came at a bad time for Attica Zoological Park. The zoo normally operates year-round but does a lot of its business during cooler weather “because in Greece people go to the beaches, to the islands, they don’t visit zoos” in the summer, the French-born Lesueur said.

Visitors account for more than 99% of its revenue, from tickets, food and beverages and gift shop sales. So every month’s revenue counts, and the loss of December, usually busy due to the Christmas holidays, was

particularly heavy. So far, suppliers have shown understanding and are accepting credit. Two-thirds of the zoo’s staff is on state-supported furlough, and an expected installment of state aid will take care of this month’s pay for the rest, the CEO said.

The zoo also has sold 5,000 advance tickets at reduced prices for when the lockdown ends, and Lesueur says that helped pay December’s salaries.

Lockdown also affects the zoo’s residents, accustomed as they are to crowds of humans. For nearly three months, they’ve only been seeing their keepers. So the tables were turned when an AP journalist visited last week: Several curious animals and birds came close for a good look.

“Animals miss visitors, because it’s part of their life,” Lesueur said. “All the animals you see

(here) are born in other zoos. So they are used to people.” Greece has registered about 150,000 confirmed COVID-19 infections so far and some 5,800 deaths in the pandemic. After peaking above 3,300 in November, the number of new daily cases is holding in the triple digits.

Nevertheless, the greater Athens region remains the country’s worst-hit area and authorities said Friday they will reimpose tougher lockdown restrictions there after a January decline in infection rates was reversed this week. Overall, Lesueur says he’s optimistic that the zoo will get clearance to reopen in coming weeks.

“Except if the COVID (situation) gets worse. That’s another story,” he said. “Now if we are closed for another two months or three months, I really don’t know what is going to happen.”

China’s first Hualong One nuclear reactor begins operations

BEIJING (AP): China National Nuclear Corp. said its first nuclear power unit that uses Hualong One, a third-generation nuclear reactor, started commercial operations on Saturday.

The reactor, located in the city of Fuqing city in China’s southeastern Fujian province, was designed to have a 60-year lifespan, with its core equipment domestically

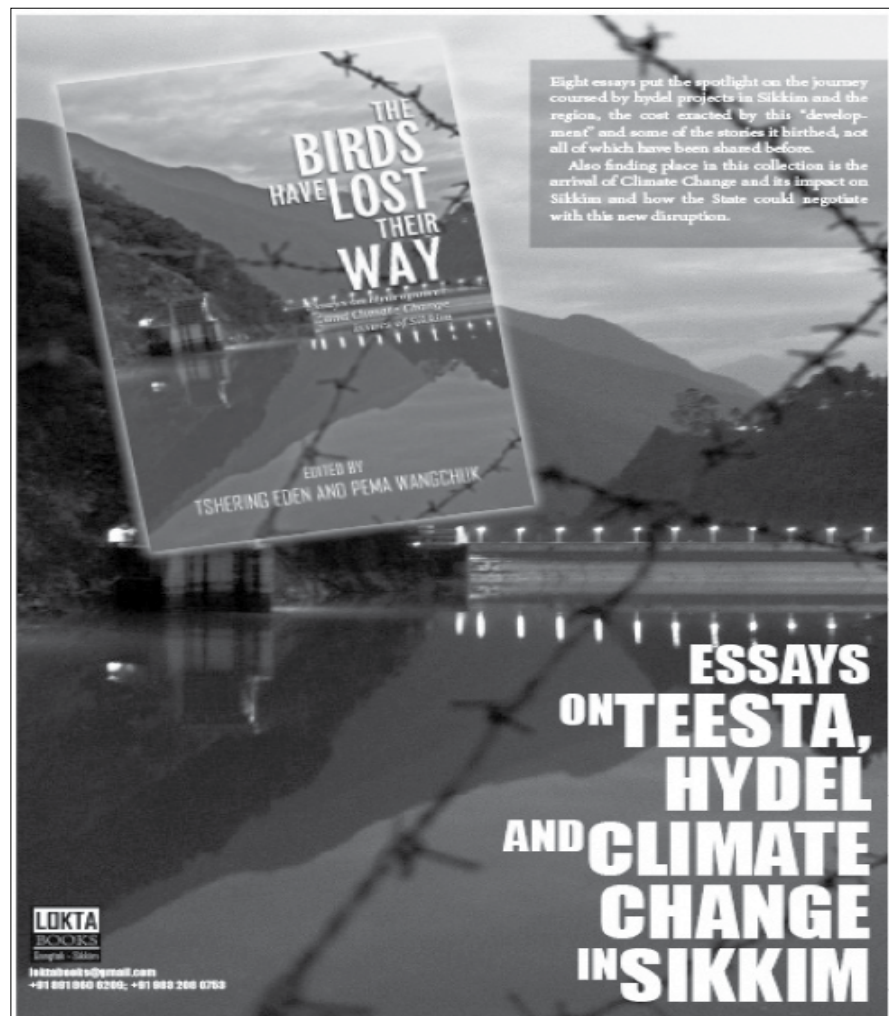
produced. Each unit of the Hualong No. 1 has a capacity of 1.161 million kilowatts and can meet the annual domestic electricity demand of 1 million people in moderately developed countries, according to China National Nuclear Corp, or CNNC.

“With Hualong One online, China is now at the forefront of third-generation nuclear

technology in the world, alongside countries like the United States, France and Russia,” said CNNC President Yu Jianfeng.

Yu said the commercial use of Hualong One will also reduce carbon emissions and help achieve China’s low-carbon goals such as carbon neutrality before 2060.

A second Hualong One unit is due to be completed later this year.





BIRTHDAY GIRL! The Modern Family actress, Ariel Winter visits a hair salon before celebrating her 23rd birthday at home in Los Angeles.

Megan Fox Puts Those Machine Gun Kelly Engagement Rumors to Rest With Two Words

After Megan Fox was spotted wearing a massive ring on that finger, the star shared a closer look at the accessory on Instagram. Spoiler alert: It's by no means a diamond. Megan Fox's message is coming in loud and clear.

The Transformers star is not engaged to Machine Gun Kelly, at least not yet anyway. Long story short, paparazzi recently spotted Megan rocking a massive ring on that finger, sparking a frenzy of speculation that MGK had proposed. In light of the rumors, Megan took to her Instagram Story on Friday, Jan. 29 to set the record straight. She shared a close-up photo of the accessory, which, much to fans' disappointment, is by no means a diamond engagement bauble.

The chunky silver ring has "F--K YOU" plated across it, and for added measure, Megan included an irritated emoji face.

But just because wedding bells aren't in the couple's immediate future, there's no denying Megan and her rocker beau are the real deal. In fact, it was love at first sight for Me-

gan and MGK after first meeting on set of Midnight in the Switchgrass nearly one year ago.

"I looked into his eyes [and] I felt the most pristine, most gentle, most pure spirit," the actress recalled to Nylon in September. "My heart shattered immediately and I just knew that I was f--ked."

Megan, who is currently in the midst of divorcing Beverly Hills, 90210 actor Brian Aus-



tin Green, will be on hand to support Machine Gun Kelly (née Colson Baker) as he makes his Saturday Night Live performance debut tomorrow night.

The artist is teaming up with host John Krasinski for the first SNL of the new year. Check out a teaser here.

Cicely Tyson, her memoir just out, was active to the end

NEW YORK (AP): Cicely Tyson was active to the end, in the middle of promoting her memoir "Just As I Am" when she died at age 96.

Published earlier this week, "Just As I Am" was No. 1 on Amazon.com within hours of the groundbreaking actor's death Thursday, displacing a bound edition of Amanda Gorman's inauguration poem "The Hill We Climb." One of Tyson's final tweets was a tribute to the 22-year-old poet.

"Your words remind us that we will rise, rebuild, reconcile and recover. Thank you for your words and light," Tyson tweeted Wednesday.

Many media outlets this week had been celebrating Tyson and her memoir. "CBS This Morning" put online its week-old interview with Tyson, in which she was asked what she wanted the world to remember about her. "I've done my best. That's all," she told Gayle King.

King was emotional Friday talking about Tyson. "I just can't express my feelings today," King said. Of the interview, she added: "It takes on a totally different meaning. I'm now just analyzing everything she said."

In what producers said was her last TV interview, Tyson spoke to "Live With Kelly and Ryan" about her shy childhood and landing her Oscar-nominated role in "Sounders." "I never really worked

for money," she explained. "I've worked because there were certain issues that I wish were addressed about myself and my race as a Black woman."

Tyson's book — broken into three sections, Planted, Rooted and Bountiful — became a parting gift to fans and

to late jazz great Miles Davis. She told Sellers that she wrote the book because everyone knew the glittery and successful version of herself but "no one knows Cicely Tyson, the person down here."

In a People magazine story running this week, she said, "It's very exciting



chronicles a woman who went from selling shopping bags on the streets of Harlem to being cheered by presidents, winning Emmy and Tony awards and receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom..

In the days before her death, Tyson was also a guest on The Bakari Sellers Podcast, where she talked about her acting choices, injustices and her marriage

to know that you are, hopefully, making a roadway for someone else to follow." In an NPR interview, Tyson said she came to acting so that she "could speak through other people," after being naturally drawn to observing other people as a shy child. Her advice? "Just stick with it. There's always a reason why you keep going in the direction you chose to go in."

Rod Stewart reaches plea deal for Florida altercation



WEST PALM BEACH, FLA. (AP): Rock icon Rod Stewart and his son have reached a plea deal to settle misdemeanor battery charges stemming from an altercation with a security guard at a posh Florida hotel.

Prosecutors and defense attorneys announced Friday that Stewart and his son, Sean Stewart, would not be going to trial for the altercation at The Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach on New Year's Day 2020, the South Florida SunSentinel reported. Terms were not released.

Stewart, 76 and a member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, is best known for such hits as "Maggie May" and "Tonight's the Night." The London-born singer was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 2016.

Security guard Jessie Dixon told police then that the now 76-year-old Stewart and his family were at the check-in table for a private party that they weren't authorized to attend.

Dixon said the group became loud and began causing a scene. Dixon told in-

vestigators he put his hand on the younger Stewart's chest and told him to back up and make space, the report said.

That's when Sean Stewart, the rock star's 40-year-old son, got "nose to nose" with Dixon.

Sean Stewart then shoved Dixon backwards. Rod Stewart punched Dixon in his "left rib cage area" with a closed fist, a police report said.

The police report said Sean Stewart told investigators he became agitated when they were not able to attend the event "due to Dixon's interaction with him and his family."

Palm Beach officer Stephen Mancino said he viewed security footage at the hotel and determined that the Stewarts were the "primary aggressors."

Two Breakers employees who were working the private event told police they saw Sean Stewart push Dixon and Rod Stewart punch the guard.

Dixon signed an affidavit saying that he wanted to press charges against the Stewarts.

Darshan Kumaar joins T-Series' R Madhavan-led suspense thriller

Mumbai, Jan 29 (PTI): Actor Darshan Kumaar has been roped in to star alongside R Madhavan in a suspense thriller film, to be produced by Bhushan Kumar's T-Series.

The yet-to-be-titled film, directed by Kookie Gulati, also features actor Aparshakti Khurana.

Kumaar, known for his performance in movies like "Mary Kom", "NH10" and "Sarbjit", said 2021 has begun on a high note for him.

"I'm super excited to be part of the film. It is always great when you get to work on a good script. But what makes the experience even more enriching is when you have great co-stars, too.

"Madhavan is one of the best actors in our industry, who always delivers out-of-the-box performances. I'm also looking forward to working with Aparshakti Khurana, who is a wonderful actor, the actor said in a statement. The 34-year-old actor started shooting for the film recently.

The movie also marks singer Khushali Kumar's acting debut.

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Aries:

It's true that there are certain things in our lives that are predetermined—a part of the soul contract we signed prior to boarding the spaceship which brought us to the earthly realm. However, to think that we have zero power to change things around here would be an act of ignorance. Today, you are being asked to remember that you are a part of the Supreme Conscious. An extension of Source energy. So, tap into the power of free will and reinvent yourself in the way you feel inspired to. Remember, nothing can remain static in the outside world when our inner reality undergoes a transformation.

Tip: It's time to remember the Hermetic principle, 'As above, so below.

Taurus:

How do "you" feel about money, Taurus? Do you feel that you are being rewarded fairly for your efforts? Are you convinced there's a growing imbalance between what you are giving and what you are receiving from the given organisation? Here's the thing, honey: nobody is going to make that change for you unless you do it for yourself. So, show up for what you believe in and show up for it now. Ask for the raise. Demand for your paycheck. Command the respect you truly deserve. Remember, the power to change the script around has always been yours.

Tip: It's time to change your relationship with money.

Gemini:

After a period of lull, things are beginning to pick up pace around here. It's an action-packed weekend in the Gemini HQ, and you're actively pursuing the projects you have put on hold. Remember, everything starts with you. When you hit the accelerator button, the Universe will too. Some of you are being reminded that the behind-the-scenes games will only take you so far. So network like a pro and learn to (tastefully) toot your own horn. Learning to be your own PR rep will change the game for you permanently.

Tip: Things are beginning to pick up pace.

Cancer:

Food for thought, Cancer: Is love enough or do we need truth, honesty and integrity in order to sustain a relationship? You already know the answer to this one. So stop beating around the bush when you need to be direct. Stop walking on eggshells when you can tell it like it is. When you bring your most authentic self to the table, the dynamics you share will evolve with you.

Tip: It's time to bring truth, honesty and integrity to the table.

Leo:

Here's the thing, Leo: you already know. You already know what's good for you and what's not. So, why are you walking on eggshells when you can simply tell it like it is? The cards want you to remember that nothing will free you like the truth. Self-care,

the Aphrodite way, is also going to be a big theme for you this weekend. PS: Nothing reads zen-tastic quite like a bubble bath, a glass of vino (or kombucha, if you prefer!) and your favourite self-help bible. Tip: Honey, it's time to tell it like it is!

Virgo:

Here's the thing, Virgo: the Universe is not obliged to work in accordance with your timeline. In fact, nobody is. Don't take this as a bad omen or some sort of punishment, though. The Universe is flawless in every way and has a master plan in place for you. So, follow the path of least resistance as you allow life to take you where you need to go. In due course of time, you will realise that the worst thing that happened to you is the best thing that could happen for you.

Tip: You are where you need to be. Stop pushing against the flow.

Libra:

Spending time with the little ones in your tribe is going to be a big theme around here. It's amazing all the things you can learn from them without even trying! Things to do today: make art. Make macramé. Make a mess, and laugh to your heart's content. The process of letting go of your inhibitions will prove to be therapeutic on so many levels. PS: If you're having a hard time getting through to one of your children, consider adding an element of 'play' to your equation.

Tip: Make a mess.

Scorpio:

Everything's coming up roses for you, Scorpio, especially on the home and family front. Domestic bliss is indicated for coupled Plutonians. Trust that this cosmic collaboration is helping you deepen your bond. Remembering that you both want the same things from a relationship will help you tide over the so-called troubles. Those who are involved in the family business will also find that this is an opportune time. Sow the seeds you're being called to, and know that you will enjoy a magnificent harvest a few years down the line.

Tip: Everything's coming up roses, Scorpio.

Sagittarius:

Shortcuts will only take you so far—a Universal truth you're well aware of. This year, you want to dedicate yourself to the hustle, work harder than you ever have, and go after the big dreams you've put on hold for some time now. You've got that big goals energy about you, which is making you simply irresistible! Remember, this journey you've undertaken is yours and yours alone. So let go of the need to discuss with others or compare it with the trajectory of those around.

Tip: You've got that big goals energy about you.

Capricorn:

We couldn't do everything on our own even if we wanted to. The good thing is, we don't have to. Capricorn, you are blessed with at least a handful of

people who love you, care for you, and want to support you in the best way they can. So, allow yourself to reach for help and know they've got your back. As you do, keep in mind that nobody is perfect. Letting go of your unrealistic expectations will help you work with the team, rather than against it.

Tip: Allow yourself to receive the help and support you need at this moment.

Aquarius:

If the cosmic cues are anything to go by, you may find yourself in a Vicky Cristina Barcelona situation. However, you may not always be a fan of the free-love game, especially when there are feelings involved. Word for the wise: Stop playing it cool and tell the other person exactly how you feel about the given connection. PS: There's nothing wrong with monogamy or the desire to play by the rules.

Tip: You need to be honest about what you desire from this connectio

Pisces:

You can't keep showing up as the background dancer when all you ever wanted was to channel your inner Lady Gaga. Playing it small has never been your style. Neither has settling for anything less than what you deserve. So, relinquish the cloak of invisibility you have been hiding under and go after your dreams with single-minded focus. Unless you put yourself out there, nobody can help you, Pisces.

Tip: Pursue your dreams with single-minded focus.