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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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CM condoles demise of former Cabinet colleague

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 DEC:**

Chief Minister PS Tamang has condoled the passing away of his former Cabinet colleague, Aita Singh Baraily, who passed away late Saturday night in Siliguri.

In a message posted on his official Facebook page, the CM writes: "I am extremely sad to learn about the untimely demise of

former Minister and Member of Sikkim Legislative Assembly (from Ratepani - West Pandam constituency) Shri Aita Singh Baraily.

Shri Baraily was an energetic leader and a humble human being.

I extend my deepest condolences to the bereaved family members in the hour of grief and pray for the departed soul to find eternal peace. Om Shanti."

Chamling mourns passing away of Aita Singh Baraily

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 DEC:**

Sikkim Democratic Front president, former Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, has expressed deep condolence on the untimely demise of former Minister Aita Singh Baraily.

Mr Baraily, the State's first Minister from the Scheduled Caste community, passed away late on Saturday night in a Siliguri hospital.

And SDF press release informs that in his condolence message, Mr Chamling remembered the late Mr Baraily as one of the founding leaders of the SDF who was part of the initial struggle and had consistently stood strong as a committed party member serving on various posts.

The SDF press release adds that the late Mr Baraily served as Transport Minister in the first SDF government from 1994 to 1999 and

as MLA in 1994-1999 and 2004-2009 terms.

Mr Chamling has remembered Mr Baraily as a "quiet and introverted gentleman of a few words who always quietly worked away for the benefit of the party and the State including during the preparations and campaign for the 2019 elections and worked hard for the SC community as SDF party In-charge of the SC front."

"His passing away has made Sikkim poorer. I on behalf of the SDF family would like to pay rich tribute and gratefulness to him for his dedication and hard work in his service to the state. He has contributed to the progress that we have been able to achieve in our 25 years tenure and will be forever remembered through his work in Sikkim and the SDF party. He will be greatly missed," Mr Chamling has conveyed.

Summit Times in Nepali

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575 Run Against Covid in Gangtok

**SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 13 DEC:**

Run Against Covid, the event organized by the sports of wing of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, attracted the participation of 575 runners and was flagged off by Chief Minister PS Tamang from Titanic Park here on Sunday morning.

Runners in six categories covered the 15Km route from Titanic Park to Hospital Dara, Zero Point, Varja-Swastik to Bojoghari and back to Zero Point via Secretariat Road, Dukit Pan Dokan, Sikkim Legislative Assembly, New Market, Tibet Road and back at the starting point.

In Men's 18 to 30 years category, Rohit Harijan [49 minutes and 23 seconds] finished on first place followed by Riwarz Chettri [49 minutes and 42 seconds] and Bikash Bhujel [50 minutes and 20 seconds]. Sahinur Mulla [50 minutes and 31 seconds] and Surat Raj Subba [51 minutes]



stood on the fourth and fifth positions respectively in this category.

In Women's 18 to 25 years category, Anjali Subba [58 min and 12 seconds] came first, followed by Chandra Kala Sharma [1 hour, 01 minute

and 26 seconds] and Ranjana Tamang [1 hour, 04 minutes and 37 sec] on second and third positions respectively.

Similarly, Sabina Rai [1 hour, 10 minutes and 19 seconds] and Sushila Rai [1 hour, 12 minutes and 49 seconds] came

fourth and fifth respectively.

Ashish Subba [55 minutes and 11 seconds] finished in the first position in Men's 31 to 45 years category, while Sher Bahadur Chettri [57 minutes and 49 seconds] stood on second position and

Dr Sudarshan Tamang [59 minutes and 14 seconds] on third position. In this category, Mahesh Tamang [one hour] and Gyan Bahadur Pradhan [1 hour and 01 minute] came in fourth and fifth respectively.

In Women's 26 to 36 years category, Bharati Gurung [1 hour, 16 minutes and 59 seconds] top the top spot followed by Samjana Rai [1 hour, 23 minutes and 18 seconds] on second position and Angela Rai [1 hour, 25 minutes and 40 seconds] on third position. Likewise, Hishey Bhutia [1 hour and 27 minutes] and Ankita [1 hour, 29 minutes and 27 seconds] stood on the fourth and fifth positions respectively.

In Men's veterans, Subarna Subba [56 minutes and 11 seconds] emerged the champion, while Amar Subba [1 hour, 02 minutes and 16 seconds] and Kushal Dewan [1 hour and 03 minutes] finished on the second and

turn to pg03

COVID-19 caseload in India rises to 98.57 lakh with 30,254 new cases

NEW DELHI, DEC 13 (PTI): India's COVID-19 caseload rose to 98.57 lakh, while the number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 93.57 lakh pushing the national recovery rate to 94.93 per cent, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Sunday.

The total coronavirus cases mounted to 98,57,029 with 30,254 infections being reported in a day. The death toll rose to 1,43,019 with 391 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 93,57,464 pushing the national recovery rate to 94.93 per cent, while the COVID-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent.

The COVID-19 active caseload remained below 4 lakh for the seventh consecutive day. There are 3,56,546 active coronavirus infections in the country which comprises 3.62 per cent



of the total caseload, the data stated.

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

According to the ICMR, 15,37,11,833 samples have been tested up to December 12 with 10,14,434 samples being tested on Saturday. The 391 new fatalities include 80 from Maharashtra, 47 from Delhi, 44 from West Bengal, 32 from Kerala, 31 from Uttar Pradesh and 21 from Punjab.

A total of 1,43,019

deaths have been reported so far in the country including 48,139 from Maharashtra followed by 11,939 from Karnataka, 11,883 from Tamil Nadu, 9,981 from Delhi, 9,010 from West Bengal, 8,056 from Uttar Pradesh, 7,052 from Andhra Pradesh and 5,057 from Punjab.

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

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

Spice Board hosts online Buyer-Seller Meet spices of Sikkim and North Bengal

HORTICULTURE SECRETARY FLAGS PRESENCE OF MIDDLEMEN AS FACTOR RESULTING IN LOW PRICE REALIZATION FOR FARMERS



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 DEC:**

Spices Board organized a virtual Buyer-Seller Meet covering Sikkim and North Bengal 11 December, recognizing how the region grows abundant produce of large cardamom, ginger, turmeric, cherry pepper, bay leaf, pepper, etc. More than 180 farmers, farmers groups, FPOs registered as sellers and about 60 buyers, processors and exporters from various States registered as buyers for the BSM.

A PIB press release informs that "considering the need to fully tap the potential of intrinsically rich spices grown in Sikkim & North Bengal for value addition and exports," and given the current pandemic situation, Spices Board organized the virtual Buyer-Seller Meet in association with Horticulture and Cash Crops Development Department and Confederation of Indian Industry. The idea was to provide a platform to

farmers, farmers groups, FPOs etc (sellers) to interact directly with exporters, processors & institutional buyers to establish market linkages and improve the value chain, the release adds.

D Sathiyam, Chairperson and Secretary, Spices Board, delivered the keynote address highlighting the schemes implemented by Spices Board for large cardamom growers and also export-promotion activities in the region.

turn to pg03

Mountain Legislators confer at Sustainable Mountain Development Summit

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 DEC:**

Members of Parliament and MLAs representing the nine Himalayan states, two Union Territories and hill districts conferred during the second session of the Sustainable Mountain Development Summit, an annual event of the Integrated Mountain Initiative, held online and hosted by the Sustainable Development Forum of Uttarakhand (SDFU).

The session brought together 40 MPs and MLAs from the Himalayas and featured deliberations on key policy issues and was moderated by the IMI president, former Sikkim MP, PD Rai, and was chaired by Lok Sabha MP from Shillong, Vincent Pala.

Keeping COVID-19 as a focus topic, the speakers discussed health and vaccination issues along with employment and green recovery, an

IMI press release informs.

Funding, arrangements for testing for COVID-19 in the country, the mindset of tourists who visit the Himalayan region and logistics to transport vaccines over rough terrain and whether the Centre would keep this in mind while rolling out the vaccine, featured prominently during the discussion.

Legislators tabled questions on the role of organic diet in treating COVID-19 and exploring medicinal plants from the Himalayas to battle the pandemic.

The release adds that the opportunity that working from home gives white-collar workers can push tourism in the Himalayas allowing highly-educated intellectuals from the cities to travel to rural areas for a quieter, more holistic lives.

The MLAs and MPs reiterated that



keeping sustainable development with inclusive growth should be the new mantra.

Some of the MPs who joined the panel were Dr LS Pfoze, Agatha Sangma, and Lalrosanga.

Four MLAs from Sikkim, DR Thapa, Sonam Venchungpa, Farwanti Tamang and Raj Kumari Thapa, represented

the State in the panel.

This was the day-3 of the ninth edition of the Sustainable Mountain Development Summit and the first session was themed, "Co-creating Resilient Mountain Solutions through partnerships: Accelerating collaborative efforts."

This session focused on combining

the outcome of the previous sessions, discussing policies that would take the ideas forward.

Key themes of this session explored the financial pool states could source to fund forest conservation and carbon footprint reduction, expand possibilities to boost ecosystem services, create an organic green future with examples from the earlier sessions and creating state-sponsored digital jobs.

Chairperson of the Summit, Dr Rajendra Dhole, has invited all interested to join the valedictory programme scheduled for Monday by registering at <https://e3170.hubilo.com/community/#/home>

SMDS is an annual event of the Integrated Mountain Initiative (IMI) which brings together legislators, bureaucrats, academicians, NGOs and members of the civil society.

Nawin Kiran announces dharna against irregular appointments

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 13 DEC:

Sikkim Subject Committee vice-convenor, Nawin Kiran Pradhan, announced plans to sit on a peaceful demonstration on 20 December in front of the East District Collectorate here at Sichey to protest what he sees as “illegal” appointment of around 1,600 people on government jobs by the state government in the past year and a half.

He explained that the 100-day ultimatum he had given the State Government to address his demands has already expired and hence SSC has decided to take its protest to the next level starting with a dharna on 20 December.

He added that should even the dharna go unheeded, he will



petition the High Court against the appointment of around 1600 employees in different departments and PSUs by the State government between May 2019 and June 2020.

Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, Mr Pradhan pointed out that SSC had demanded the cancellation of these appointments and employment notices to

be issued for these posts, regularization of those appointed under the One Family-One Job scheme as also the services of adhoc, MR and other temporary employees, implementation of Trade Union Act 1926, allow CBI into Sikkim and initiate steps to fulfill the demand for tribal status for the twelve leftout communities and reserving Limboo-Tamang seats in the State

Assembly.

On the State Bank of Sikkim loan defaulters' issue, Mr Pradhan detailed that there were 2,342 such defaulters who owe the bank around Rs 623 crores. He added some of the defaulters have already begun processing their repayment and hence he was giving them some more time to settle their accounts.

Mr Pradhan had

earlier announced that he would release the names on Saturday, 12 December.

“Since it will take some more days to compile the list of the bank defaulters who have come forward to repay their loans and give undertakings, we have decided to wait till Wednesday and will now make the list public on social media platforms on Thursday after removing names of those defaulters who have given an undertaking to the bank,” he said.

Likewise, SSC member, Bina Rai, stressed that the 20 December dharna will be peaceful and held from 9 AM to 4 PM on 20 December, a Sunday, and invited individuals and members of social and political organizations to join the dharna.

Bimal and Binoy hold parallel public meetings at Birpara and Sukhna



SMRITA KHAWAS

DARJEELING, 13 DEC:

Before politics heats up in earnest in the Darjeeling Hills, it appears to be playing out in the plains. Within days of Gorkha Janmukti Morcha chief [Bimal faction], Bimal Gurung, organizing a public meeting in Siliguri, public meetings were held by GJM [Bimal faction] at Doars Birpara and the Binoy faction at Sukhna in Siliguri.

Addressing the public meet at Birpara, Bimal Gurung reiterated that his and his party's alliance with BJP was over and that he was now Mamata Banerjee's TMC government.

This turnaround, he said, came after three years of examining the Bengal Chief Minister's work, he realized that “she fulfills what she promises.”

“BJP used me for many years and did not give us even 1 kg of rice when we were underground. BJP never did anything for our Gorkha community till now and I want to ask why,” he said.

Stressing that the BJP has betrayed the Gorkhas, he appealed that the saffron party not be given even one vote from the Doars.

On the other hand, Binoy Tamang, at his public meeting at Sukhna,

said, “Constitutional rights should be given to the people of the hills as soon as possible by the Central Government and until that happens, we will remain second class citizens. I am addressing my public here after 1047 days. 47 is a good number for India. Now the Gorkha community will also get freedom.”

The Indo-Nepal 1950 treaty and the Indo-Bhutan Treaty of 1949 are two obstacles affecting the identity of Gorkhas as Indians, he said, while adding that until these treaties are repealed, the problem of Gorkha identity will not be solved.

254 teachers trained as Health & Wellness Ambassadors

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 13 DEC:

A 4-day online training for school teachers from 127 State Government Schools of East Sikkim was jointly organized by Population Education Cell of the SCERT, Education Department and Rashtriya Kishore Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) unit of Health Department from 08 to 11 December, a press release from Education Department informs.

Under the program, two teachers from every government school in the selected districts, are being trained as “Health and Wellness Ambassadors.” The program was jointly launched by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in February under the Ayushman Bharat Program.



The idea, officials inform, is to provide “comprehensive knowledge, psychological support and services” to school-going children related to health and wellbeing to enhance their “growth, development and educational achievements.”

These Health and Wellness Ambassadors are

expected to create a support group of students in their respective schools who will go on to serve as “Health and Wellness Messengers.”

For Sikkim, a 16-member State Resource Group comprising of faculty members from SCERT and DIET, School Heads and officials from Education and Health Department

have been trained by the National Resource Group.

The training module covers eleven themes - Emotional and Mental Wellbeing, Gender Equality, Interpersonal Relationships, Nutrition, Prevention and Management of Substance Misuse, Health and Sanitation, Reproductive Health and HIV Prevention, Promotion of Safe Use

of the Internet, Media and Social Media and Security against Violence and Injuries.

The training program here was jointly inaugurated by Dr Rabin Chhetri, Director SCERT, and Dr Phumzey Denzongpa, Director RCH, Health Department.

The 254 teachers were divided into three groups and training sessions conducted online.

Binod Yonzon is new STBA president

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 13 DEC:

Binod Yonzon was elected president of Sikkim Tamang Buddhist Association following elections held on Saturday. The results were declared late Saturday night at Tamang Bhawan, Syari.

A press release from the association informs that Mr Yonzon won by a huge margin.

The other representatives elected to the STBA executive body are- Vice President: Surendra Moktan; Vice President (II): Passang Tamang;

General Secretary: Adeep Tamang; Joint Secretary (I): Man Singh Tamang; Joint Secretary (II): Deepa Tamang; Treasurer: Kalpana Lama Tamang; Assistant Treasurer (I) : Sarda Tamang; and Assistant Treasurer (II): Manoj Tamang.

Governor mourns Aita Singh Baraily's demise

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 13 DEC:

Governor Ganga Prasad has mourned the demise of former Minister of Sikkim, late Aita Singh Baraily.

A press communiqué received from the Raj Bhawan informs that the Governor expressed his

condolences to the family in this hour of grief.

In his condolence message, the Governor said, “Shri Aita Singh Baraily has made unprecedented contribution in his political life, working for the progress of the State and the benefit

of every section of the society. He has served the State in different capacities in its nascent stage.”

The Governor has prayed for strength and solace to withstand the loss and for the departed soul to rest in peace, the release adds.

With 22 new cases, Sikkim's Covid count rises to 5,338

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 13 DEC:

Sikkim registered 22 fresh cases of novel coronavirus in the 24 hours ending 8 AM Sunday, taking the state's tally of confirmed COVID-19 cases to 5,338.

In the meantime, the number of discharged Covid patients in Sikkim has further improved to 4,770.

There are now 356 active cases in the State, of whom three are currently in ICU facility of the COVID-dedicated STNM Hospital here.

In the daily health bulletin on Sunday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia, informed that of the 22 new cases, 20 were reported from East District and two from South Sikkim.

The new cases were picked up from the testing of 183 samples on Saturday - 18 testing positive from RT-PCR testing of 122 samples, two in TrueNat testing of 15 samples and another two in rapid antigen testing of 46 samples.

Of the 22 new cases, four were admitted to STNM

Hospital and one to the Ayush Hospital at Gyalshing in West Sikkim and 17 sent to home isolation in East Sikkim.

While providing details of the new cases reported from in and around the capital, Mr Bhutia mentioned that three persons from Development Area, four from Upper Shyari, three from Sichey, one from near the Forest check-post in Chandmari and one from Lal Bazaar have tested positive for COVID-19.

There are four new cases reported from Tadong, of whom one person is from Metro Point, one from the Housing Colony at 5th Mile, one from Baha'i School Road and one from near Tadong government college.

Further, one person from Duga and one from Sakyong-Sang in East District and two from Namchi and one from near Mamring JHS in South District have also tested positive for COVID-19.

Mr Bhutia adds that one person from Siliguri has also tested positive and the concerned authority in Siliguri been informed about the test result.

"No Farmers, No Food": 9-year-old Climate Activist joins farmer protest

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC:

Licypriya Kangujam, the nine-year-old climate activist, has come out in support of the farmers protesting centre's new agricultural laws for the last 18 days.

Licypriya Kangujam told the farmers that climate activists across the world are with them. Ms Kangujam has been posting videos and pictures of her with farmers at the Singhu border. “Hope my voice will reach all over the world. No farmers, No food. No justice, No rest,” the activist wrote on Twitter along with a video in solidarity with farmers.

“Met with children who are spending last 14 days in this cold freezing temperature with their parents and grandparents at farmers' protest site in the middle of the highway at Sanghu Border,” the activist wrote on the microblogging site.

She also urged the farmers to stop stubble burning as it increases air pollution. “Our farmers are the biggest victims of climate change. Frequent floods, droughts and

other extreme weather events like cyclones, typhoons, locusts, etc are destroying their crops..,” Licypriya Kangujam said.

“Thousands of farmers are dying every year. Our leaders must listen to the voice of the farmers. We want climate justice for our farmers and also should take out a permanent solution to solve the ongoing farmers' crisis at the earliest,” she added.

On the 5th Anniversary of Paris Agreement on Saturday, Ms Kangujam protested with the farmers as a part of global climate strike against the inaction by the world leaders following the signing 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, which legally binds international treaty on climate change.

“Stubble burning is being practised for the last many years and hundreds of thousands of years ago. There was no air pollution before. It came only in the last 5-6 years. So, our leaders have to find out how to solve the air pollution crisis permanently. We can't blame only farmers,” she told news agency ANI.

'Those who give dough can also have pizza'

GAURAV SAINI

NEW DELHI, DEC 13

(PTI): A group of five

friends set out from Amritsar on a cold Saturday morning. They didn't have much time to organise a regular langar, so they collected 'regular-sized' pizzas from a Haryana mall and set up a stall at the Singhu border.

Around 400 pizzas were distributed within minutes as a huge crowd, including the protesting peasants and residents from nearby areas,

queued up.

The 'pizza langar' has since hogged headlines and garnered compliments from different quarters, and also brickbats from a certain section.

“The farmers who gave the dough for pizzas can also afford to have one themselves,” says Shanbir Singh Sandhu, who organised the 'pizza langar' with his four friends for the peasants protesting at the Delhi-Haryana border against the contentious agri-

marketing laws.

“We didn't have much time to organise a regular lentils-chapatti langar... So we came up with this idea,” says Sandhu, who is himself a farmer and an economics student at Guru Nanak Dev University in Amritsar.

The farmers have been protesting at several border points into Delhi for over two weeks over their demands to repeal the new legislations, which they claim would benefit the corporates, and end the traditional

wholesale markets and the minimum support price regime.

Sandhu's friend, Shahnaz Gill, underscored that people get bored eating the same thing everyday. “We thought we should bring them (farmers) something else to keep their spirits up,” he said.

The 21-year-old student of agriculture says this is first time they have organised a 'pizza langar', expressing happiness that people have appreciated their efforts.

~ SummitTIMES ~ CLASSIFIEDS

LAND FOR SALE

Two plots available – 30X40 sq ft and 50X30 sq ft
Junkeri Dara, Samlik Marchak

Price negotiable
Contact : 6296366498,
9641878315, 9593262407

LAND FOR SALE

A land measuring an area for 50x32 1/2 at Road-side just below housing colony is for sale. It is just a one minute walking distance from Namchi bazaar taxi stand. Interested party may contact 9593373387 and 9434406761

LAND FOR SALE

An area measuring 1 acre at Sadam South Sikkim near Loretto Convent School at Gupti road. Price negotiable any one interested can contact: 78640-04501, 62970-03235, 98320-48410

FOR RENT

Two and half storeyed (1st to 3rd floor) complex is available for rent in the heart of Ranipool Baazar (Opposite UCO Bank). The building area is 35'x60' appx. in each floor and is fit for offices, shopping complexes, guest houses, banks etc. Contact: 8509755220, 8348007688.

GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

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

BUILDING FOR SALE

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

ATMA puts together Farmer-Scientist interaction at Sawa

SUBASH RAI
GANGTOK, 13 DEC:

Agriculture Technology Management Agency, East, organized a Farmer-Scientist Interaction and Kissan Ghosti at Sawa, Lower Dalapchand, on 12 December.

The program was chaired by East Zilla Adakshya, SS Bokhim, accompanied by ward Panchayat, Mohan Chettri, along with Additional Director, Agriculture Department East, Bina Rai, who is also the project Director ATMA, Joint Director Rachna Gurung, ADO-Rongli, Phurba Lepcha, Als, Horticulture, VIW, IFCO-Tokyo, Crop Insurance Incharge, Bikash Sharma, Rhenock Block BTM, MAs and FAs and attended by more than 60 farmers and SHG

members who also put up stalls on the day.

The programme was coordinated by the BTM, Dhanraj Chettri.

In her address, the Joint Director appraised the gathering on the motive of FSI and Kissan Ghosti and highlighted the FOA of ATMA, major schemes like PM-Kissan Pension, PMKSY and PMFBY.

During the interaction session queries related to farming, especially crop damage by wild animals, seed village, crop insurance, farm machineries and vermi-compost were raised.

Some demands were raised by women SHG members and farmers for machinery, training on bee-keeping, wine-making and mushroom cultivation, opening of Farm Schools on various



enterprises especially on Mushroom Cultivation and Rajmash.

The Additional Director, in her address, assured that all the demands placed by the farmers would be addressed and also informed the meeting about efforts being made and suggested that they gear up for major

activities in a bigger way and reaping the benefits of the upcoming schemes.

She urged the Women Catering Group leader, Homika Gurung, a women's group in the area comprising of more than 10 members and carrying out various activities like dairy, mushroom cultivation,

catering services, pickle making, snacks and their journey was recently highlighted in media channels in the State.

The crop insurance consultant urged the gathering to ensure Rabi crops immediately to get the benefit of insurance cover.

Later, the chief guest, along with the officials,

visited the stalls installed by the SHGs and handed over cash incentives to all six groups.

The chief guest, in his address, appreciated the programme organised by ATMA and recognized that it was much needed in the area to motivate farmers and to hear their grievances. He also appreciated the stall display by SHG groups and urged them take up bigger roles by increasing production.

He announced a grant for a stocking-selling store at Upper Dalapchand which is under construction and assured aiding intensive bee-keeping training through the Zilla Panchayat fund.

The program concluded with the vote of thanks by AI, Passang Lepcha.

State-level Tamu Lochar celebrations to be held in Rangpo



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 DEC:

Rangpo is gearing up to host a grand Tamu Lochar [the Gurung New Year] celebration and Gurungs from across the state are expected to gather there for the celebration which plans to underscore the history and significance of Tamu Lochar for the community.

A press communiqué from Rangpo-based Sanjay Agarwal informs that a Gurung Losar Celebration Committee

headed by Sikkim Poultry Board chairperson, Krishna Gurung, has been instituted to host the state-level celebration on 30 December.

The celebration will be organized abiding by the COVID-19 guidelines and youth have played a vital role in making this happen, the celebration committee's president informs.

The committee has KB Gurung as vice president, Kiran Gurung as general secretary and Kailash Gurung and Sarita Gurung as treasurers.

Bishnu Sharma Adhikari named for Badri Narayan Pradhan Smriti Puraskar

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 DEC:

Senior litterateur from the Dooars, Bishnu Sharma Adhikari, will be conferred with the Badri Narayan Pradhan Smriti Puraskar 2020.

The Badri Narayan Pradhan Smriti Prathistan, Bagrakote, has been presenting this prestigious award to eminent personalities of Nepali literature since 2012.

A meeting of the prathistan chaired by its convener, Dr Mohan P Dahal, on Saturday



chose Bishnu Sharma Adhikari for the 10th Badri Narayan Pradhan Smriti Puraskar, informs general secretary of the organisation, Rupesh Sharma.

The awardee is being recognized for his contributions to Nepali literature for the last five decades.

The award will be presented during a function scheduled to be held on 17 January 2021 at Bagrakote and includes a cash prize, shawl and a letter of appreciation.

Mahila Kavya Manch begins work in Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 DEC:

Mahila Kavya Manch [MKM], Sikkim, organised a 'Kavi Gosthi' here at Development Area on Saturday chaired by MKM-Sikkim president, Bhakti Sharma and conducted by poet Deepa Rai.

An MKM press release informs that during the programme, poet Rupa Tamang was elected vice-president and Deepa Rai secretary of MKM-Sikkim.

The organization also elected district presidents in Manika Sharma for East District, Apsara Dahal for



West District, Dr Chuki Lepcha for North District and Louise Bista for South District.

The release adds that Sikkim had connected with Mahila Kavya Manch in July earlier this

year but activities could not be held smoothly due to the COVID pandemic and that Saturday's programme was to launch the platform for women poets.

Mahila Kavya Manch

was launched on 01 February, 2017, by Naresh Naj in Patiala, Punjab.

The poets meet ended with vote of thanks proposed by poet Manika Sharma.

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Dance workshop gets underway at New Heavens Dance Institute

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 13 DEC:

A 10-day dance workshop organised by New Heavens Dance Institute at Rangpo Majhigaon Hall got underway on Sunday. Inaugurated by Milan Silwal, a senior SNT officer, the opening ceremony was also attended by Mr Ultimate 2016, Sanjay Chettri, as special guest, a press release informs. Participants from across the state have enrolled



for the workshop which will include sessions with respected

performing artists like Mingma D Lepcha, Bhim Bahadur Chettri, Gagan

Diyali, Vikky Tamang and Hema Dewan. The students began their

training with Mingma D Lepcha of Dance-Plus Season-02 fame.

575 Run Against Covid...

third positions while Subash Rauth [1 hour, 04 minutes and 47 seconds] and Karma Tshering Bhutia [1 hour and 05 minutes] ran in fourth and fifth respectively.

In Women's veterans, Saraswati Rai [1 hour, 05 minutes and 07 seconds] finished first followed by Tshering Lhamu [1 hour, 14 minutes and 02 seconds] and Passang Doma [1 hour, 19 minutes and 03 seconds] on second and third positions respectively. Likewise, Sandhya Gurung [1 hour, 24 minutes and 33 seconds] and Tashi Lhamu [1 hour, 24 minutes and 54 seconds] came on fourth and fifth positions respectively.

The winners in different categories received cash prizes, the kitty increased by the Chief Minister who provided additional cash prizes of Rs 50,000 for the first positions, Rs 30,000 to second, Rs 10,000 to third, Rs 5,000 to fourth and Rs 3,000 to fifth position in all categories carrying a cash prize component.

The prize money thus increased to Rs 75,000 for the first position holders, second prize to Rs 45,000, third prize to Rs 20,000, fourth prize to Rs 10,000 and fifth prize to Rs 6,000.

Likewise, the CM also presented cash prizes of Rs 30,000 to first, Rs 20,000 to second, Rs 15,000 to third, Rs 10,000 to fourth and Rs 5,000 to fifth position in men's and women's of veterans' category which originally did not carry a cash prize component.

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SummitTIMES

Spice Board hosts online...

He stressed the need for aggregation, post-harvest improvement and direct market linkages to promote export of spices from the region, particularly the Organic spices which are in considerable demand in the export market.

PIB adds that Secretary, Commerce & Industry Department, HD Sharma, highlighted that three spices have been covered under the One District, One Product programme of the Govt of India and that the Industries Dept will work closely with the Horticulture Dept, Spices Board, NABARD, MSME, FPOs etc to promoting establishment of spices-based processing industries in the state.

Similarly, Dr S Anbalagan, CEO, Sikkim Organic Farming Development Agency, detailed the potential and availability of certified organic spices in the state and invited buyers to source organic spices from the state.

MT Sherpa, Secretary, Horticulture, mentioned the presence of middlemen in the current supply chain of spices in the state leading to low price realization for the farmers and the need for market linkage programmes like BSM which will help shorten the supply chain, connect growers directly to the buyers etc thereby resulting in better price realization.

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV

- Fever
- Difficulty in breathing
- Dry Cough
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome
- Pneumonia - like symptoms

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 syndrome. and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.

Treatment

- Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition.
- No vaccinations available as of now.
- Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected.

If you seek help, you may call :

-Toll free no. 104
District surveillance Officer
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WEST : 9593297809
NORTH : 9641957468
SOUTH : 7407691463
New STNM
AMS : 9434711402

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM**

Empowerment for Equality is a No Brainer

So why should only women fight for women's issues?

Despite a Supreme Court verdict, most of the women are still denied entry to Sabarimala temple. When the judgment arrived, it was welcomed by “women activists”. Every woman of menstruating age who has made failed attempts to offer prayers at Sabarimala and verify whether the State and the society will allow a Court verdict to be obeyed is introduced as an “activist.” The many voices getting heard on the issue are again of “women activists” and “well-meaning” men-folk. And therein lies one of the root causes of a variety of problems plaguing the country – this acceptance that women’s empowerment is the look-out of only these two segments.

It is unfortunate that gender equality battles are led almost exclusively by women, leading to this weird situation where even when women speak of equality, we, by and large, see them as being feminist. Even those who don’t see feminism as the handiwork of over-ambitious women, and may even support it, slot efforts towards equality as “feminist” moves. To see how embarrassingly offensive such responses, even if subconscious, are, compare it against the male equivalent for feminism – chauvinism. The dictionary definition of a Male Chauvinist reads: “A man whose behavior and attitude toward women indicate a belief that they are innately inferior to men”. By contrast, women, even when pursuing the basic right of equality (and not superiority), are seen as feminist. We have even co-opted grammar to perpetuate male superiority. The problem lies in this whole mentality in which even the language has been hamstrung in chauvinistic lexicon where the only female equivalent for a male “stud” is a “slut”. It is this subliminal conditioning of our minds that has injured us to the many depressing realities of our country. It is in this zombie-like acceptance that things have always been like this that the many woes of our society, and not only the ones regarding women, are born. It all starts at home with how we grow up getting used to the almost continuous reinforcement of gender biases. Before we know it, we have been brainwashed. So, when guests arrive, the son will tell the jokes and the daughter will serve water.

Any practice which discriminates people on the basis of gender, caste, community, color or faith should immediately repulse people. Revulsion can be the only response to news that women are being refused access because of their gender. But such news does not revile us anymore. Even when most of us do not agree with such practices, we do not feel offended enough because we have been conditioned at home, in school and in the work places to see women as somehow not equal. Worryingly, very few people are embarrassed for holding on to such attitudes. Of course, one could argue that most women are comfortable with such hierarchies, but those comfort levels are akin to the Stockholm Syndrome where a kidnapped person starts being grateful towards the kidnapper. What choice do they have? Give women economic and decision-making powers and see if they slip back to being submissive, all-suffering daughters, wives and daughter-in-laws. We need to change our vocabulary. Equality issues cannot be painted as empowerment because that is an already existing right that is being reinforced. Empowerment needs to be about much, much more. Attitudinally, we need to at least reach a level where we do not fight for just a quota in jobs or elected posts for women, but reach a place where we see ambition in women as normal. And the process, because the brainwashing started at home, needs to begin at home. Parents need to consciously repair the damage. Then we will have to move to schools, because it is there that the stereotypes, instead of getting demolished, are reinforced. We do this much, and we will not have to worry about the workplaces because “empowerment” would have happened by then. We could then reach a situation where, when a journalist needs to get feedback on the HC verdict on Haji Ali, does not call up only women groups, and can just step out an ask random people, all of whom will welcome it with headline-making phrases. We could reach a situation where, even when regressive mindsets try to deny women, they are forced to capitulate because the men, instead of waiting for women groups to file a case, instinctively boycott such places themselves. With patronage, by way of donations and presence, taken away, the offensive mindsets which look down on women will quickly become genuine liberals. And all of this is not about “empowering” women, it is about making the society more compassionate and responsive, because that is what we will achieve with such a turnaround in attitudes.

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Which Age Group Should Get the COVID-19 Vaccine First May Depend On Timing

CHRIS BAUCH, MADHUR ANAND & PETER C. JENTSCH
THECONVERSATION.COM

COVID-19 vaccines are on the horizon. Lately, it seems like each week brings news of another clinical trial demonstrating vaccine efficacy. But if supplies are initially limited, decision-makers will need to make hard choices about who should get them first.

One approach is to prioritize groups who are most vulnerable to serious outcomes like hospitalization and death, such as the elderly. Another approach is to prioritize groups who are most responsible for spreading the infection. The question is which approach will work best in a given population.

Our team decided to study this question using our combined 30 years of experience in population modelling, including the 2003-04 SARS outbreaks and the 2009 H1N1 pandemic. We developed a mathematical model of COVID-19 transmission and vaccination in Ontario, published as a preprint (a manuscript yet to be checked for errors). The types of models we employ are not mere mathematical abstractions or theories, but rather have been validated for many similar respiratory infections over the past three decades.

We found that if vaccination starts sufficiently early in 2021, a strategy of vaccinating individuals 60 years of age and older will prevent the most deaths. But more surprisingly, we found that if the vaccine is not available until later in 2021, we might be able to prevent more deaths by first vaccinating younger age groups — working-age adults and children — who have more contacts with others.

VACCINES CAN PROTECT THE UNVACCINATED

To understand this result, we must first explain that vaccines work in two ways. First, they provide direct protection: the vaccinated person doesn’t get infected. Second, they also provide indirect protection: the vaccinated person does not pass infection on to others. We do not yet know if the COVID-19 vaccines will prevent the passing of infection to others, but such transmission-blocking effects



are a common feature of most licensed vaccines.

If enough people are vaccinated, the level of indirect protection in a population can be high. And indirect protection can be very powerful. Had it not been for indirect protection, smallpox would never have been globally eradicated in 1977. Once a sufficient number of individuals are vaccinated, herd immunity is achieved. But it is achieved through a kinder, gentler means than letting everyone become infected, and the virus is thereby eliminated from the population. Hence, indirect protection can have very strong effects in real populations.

This is not just the prediction of a mathematical model. This effect has been observed in empirical data on influenza vaccination from Japan, where vaccination of schoolchildren was found to reduce deaths in the elderly. Similarly, some jurisdictions practice cocooning, where if a vaccine does not work in a vulnerable person due to their advanced age or an immature immune system, we vaccinate the people around them instead. This approach is also recommended for the COVID-19 vaccines.

CONDITIONS WILL CHANGE LATER IN THE PANDEMIC

We think the switch in strategy between early and late 2021 predicted by our model occurs because indirect protection from vaccines will become stronger, later on in the pandemic.

In the early stages of a

pandemic, most people are still susceptible. Therefore, if a few individuals are immune because of the vaccine, they don’t protect their contacts since there are too many other ways their contacts could get infected, as illustrated on the left side of the diagram.

However, as time goes on, more individuals will become infected and gain immunity. Under these conditions, adding more immune individuals to the population by vaccination can work more effectively to protect their contacts, as seen on the right side of the diagram. In other words, chains of transmission are replaced by chains of protection. At some point, more deaths can be prevented through indirect protection instead of direct protection.

HOW TO APPLY THIS APPROACH

Our model was designed to provide insight into how vaccines work, and not to comment on specific policy recommendations. There are also important caveats to our study. For instance, we did not study a strategy of prioritizing residents of long-term care facilities, most of whom are older than 60 years of age. We also assumed that COVID-19 immunity is long-lasting, although evidence on this is still accumulating. However, the effect we identify relies upon well-validated principles of infectious disease epidemiology, and we found the effect persisted under the various scenarios explored

by our modelling.

To apply these ideas in practice, public health authorities would first need to assess population immunity through a survey that tests population blood samples for COVID-19 antibodies a few months before vaccination starts. They could then plug these numbers into a mathematical model to determine whether they should prioritize the elderly, or instead prioritize groups that spread the infection the most.

We think this approach could be feasible. Standard mathematical modelling frameworks could be used, and their predictions are more reliable when predicting months ahead instead of an entire year. Also, antibody surveys are a more accurate way to determine a population’s infection history than case notifications, which would make the model predictions less subject to uncertainties.

ETHICAL DIMENSIONS, AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Some might argue that the clear ethical choice is to give the vaccine first to those who are most vulnerable to fatality from the disease. We argue that decisions should be based on best available evidence and consider both direct and indirect effects. If the evidence suggests we can prevent more deaths in the elderly by vaccinating other age groups first, then that is the ethical decision. In other words, the right thing to do requires careful and sometimes nuanced thinking, but always evidence.

Indirect protection may seem like an abstract concept in the grip of a fast-moving pandemic. However, looking ahead, and with hope, we think it will be practically impossible to globally eradicate COVID-19 without it, just as in the case of smallpox. Vaccination policies will have to take advantage of indirect protection sooner or later, in one context or another.

[Chris Bauch is Professor of Applied Mathematics, University of Waterloo; Madhur Anand is Professor & Director, Global Ecological Change & Sustainability Laboratory, University of Guelph; Peter C. Jentsch is PhD Candidate, Applied Mathematics, University of Waterloo]

The truth about much ‘casual’ work: it’s really about permanent insecurity

DAVID PEETZ
THECONVERSATION.COM

The federal government’s industrial relations “reform” bill offers a new definition of “casual” employment that creates more problems than it solves.

It effectively defines a casual job as anything described that way by the employer at the time a job commences, so long as the employer initially makes “no firm advance commitment to continuing and indefinite work”.

Anyone defined as such loses any entitlement to leave they might otherwise have got through two recent Federal Court decisions.

Fair enough, you might think. Casual jobs are meant to be flexible. There can’t be an ongoing commitment.

But that’s not what the data on “casual employment” tell us.

I’ve drilled into previously unpublished data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics to get a better sense of what “casual employment” means for those employed as such.

Overall, what I’ve found suggests the “casual” employment relationship is not about doing work for which employers need flexibility. It’s not about workers doing things that need doing at varying times for short periods.

The flexibility is really in employers’ ability to hire and fire, thereby increasing their power. For many casual employees there’s no real flexibility, only permanent insecurity.

The federal government’s new bill will not solve this. It will reinforce it.

CASUAL DEFINITIONS

Technically the ABS does not routinely estimate the numbers of casual employees. For a few years (to 2013) it published data on workers who received a casual loading, and it occasionally asks people to self-identify whether they are casuals. But mostly its data on “workers without leave entitlements” (collected quarterly) is used as a proxy measure of casual employment.

About 24% of Australian employees were in

this boat in 2019 – a high proportion compared with most other industrialised countries.

THEORY VERSUS REALITY

The ABS data I’ve analysed includes statistics collected before 2012. But since the proportion of employees without leave entitlements has been relatively stable since the mid-1990s, the results remain relevant. They show:

- about 33% of “casuals” worked full-time hours
- about 53% had the same working hours from week to week, and were not on standby
- about 56% could not choose the days on which they worked
- almost 60% had been with their employer for more than a year
- about 80% expected to be with the same employer in a year’s time.

Very few (6% of “casuals”) work varying hours or are on standby, have been with their employer for a short time, and expect to be there for a short time.

There are many reasons to question whether an employee without leave entitlements could really be defined as a genuinely flexible casual worker. It’s better to just call them “leave-deprived” employees.

A COMMON FEATURE: POWERLESSNESS

The common features of all leave-deprived employees are permanent insecurity and low power.

Leave-deprived employees are about twice as likely as “permanent” workers (with leave entitlements) to have variable hours. But almost all “permanent” workers with variable hours have a guaranteed number of minimum hours. Yet less than a third of leave-deprived employees have that guarantee.

Overall, 27% of leave-deprived employees have variable hours and no minimum guarantee of hours. That is the case for only 2% of “permanent” workers.

We can think of variable hours as reflecting employers’ flexibility needs, and a guarantee of

minimum hours as reflecting employees’ power. The big difference between leave-deprived employees and “permanents” is in the power employees have.

Sometimes you hear the term “permanent casuals”. They should more accurately be called “permanently insecure”.

CASUAL LOADING

Another sign of low power is how few leave-deprived workers receive the casual loading – the 25% extra pay meant to compensate them for their lack of leave entitlements.

When the ABS used to ask about casual loading, less than half of leave-deprived workers said they got it. That’s hardly surprising, given how often breaches of awards have been uncovered.

A study published in 2019 found low-paid leave-deprived workers in Australia, on average, were paid less than equivalent “permanent” employees.

Low power is what should be expected when an employment contract only lasts as long as the current shift. A worker might not even get formally terminated, just not be given any more hours.

WHY HAVE CASUAL EMPLOYMENT?

There may be good reasons to have casual employment when work is genuinely intermittent and uncertain.

But that’s not the case for most leave-deprived jobs. They are, instead, long-term and stable – yet still insecure for the employee. The only flexibility in them lies with the employer’s power to withhold work.

Allowing employers to overrule previous court decisions and define who is and is not a casual, as proposed in the current bill, will not overcome any of these problems.

Instead, it will just entrench the practice of employers using “casual employment” to increase their power.

[the writer is Professor of Employment Relations, Centre for Work, Organisation and Wellbeing, Griffith University]

Valiant Togan remembered on 148th death anniv



TURA, DEC 12 [SHILLONGTIMES]: Tributes were paid to Pa Togan Nengminja Sangma, an A.chik warrior, on his 148th death anniversary at Chisobibra, South Garo Hills, on Saturday.

Togan was remembered as the man who led Garo warriors to fight the Britishers at a time when India was afflicted with colonialism.

The observance on Saturday at Togan

Memorial Park was attended by Williamnagar MLA, Marcuse N Marak, as well as East Garo Hills Deputy Commissioner, Swapnil Tembe, among others.

Speaking on the occasion as the chief guest, Marcuse said it was Togan who led the A.chik warriors to fight the British Army in Garo Hills.

Referring to the contemporary scenario,

Marcuse highlighted the need to fight for development, eradication of poverty and social evil.

The legislator also informed that the government will allocate a special budget in the next financial year for the death anniversary of the warrior.

Marcuse further beseeched the people to work in tandem with the district

administration in order to bring development to the region.

Meanwhile, the DC spoke at length about the eminence of Togan and informed that the district administration is collaborating with the Tourism department to revamp the Togan Memorial Park at Chisobibra.

He also exhorted the locals to comply with the COVID-19 protocols during Christmas.

Shillong hoteliers gloom-ridden about tourist flow to state after new entry rules

SHILLONG, DEC 12 [SHILLONGTIMES]: Meghalaya is set to reopen for tourists from December 21, after a nine-month pandemic-triggered hiatus, but hoteliers and other stakeholders of the tourism sector are far from being enthused.

Federation of Shillong Hotels president, PS Sehdeva, felt that the tourist flow to the state would not be like before, when tourism was booming.

"The new registration process for tourists will affect the flow for some time till they get used to it," Sehdeva predicted.

He, however, hoped that good days for hoteliers in the city would arrive and they would be able to welcome their guests soon.

It is learnt that several hotels in the city have been asked to use the Meghalaya Tourism app, where the details of the

tourists, including their check-in and check-out time, will be registered.

Another hotelier, Arnold Lanong, maintained that things would not be like before until and unless a cure for COVID-19 was available.

Lanong anticipated that people from far-off places would not like to travel to the state during the pandemic. "So I am expecting some tourists from Assam only to come here on weekends. Probably, they may come and even return the same day itself," the hotelier said, while informing that the majority of the hotels in the city have opened since last month for people to serve their quarantine periods there.

Urging more clarity on the new rules, he said there was still a lot of confusion about the registration of tourists since the entry and exit points would

become functional from December 16.

Another hotelier in the city, who did not wish to be named, recalled that all hotel rooms in the city were booked during Christmas last year.

"But things are not going to be the same this time around in view of the COVID-19 situation. So I am just expecting some tourists to come to the city from Assam," the hotelier said.

It may be mentioned that visiting Meghalaya will not be a cakewalk anymore as tourists would have to follow several contactless protocols.

First of all, a tourist would have to download the Meghalaya Tourism App and register for receiving an e-invite or contact a registered tour operator who can register on behalf of the tourist.

After registering, the tourist will have to

upload his/her photo identity on the app besides providing the complete tour itinerary with confirmed booking details (be it rooms in a hotel/ guest house/ homestay) for at least the first two nights.

If the tourist is staying as a guest of any family or friend in the state, then the individual will declare the full address and contact details of the family or friend and complete itinerary for the e-invite to be generated.

Once the process is complete, the tourist will receive an e-invite that would have to be presented at the entry checkpoints along with a COVID-negative certificate.

The government has also started a helpline, 8132011037, where tourists can send WhatsApp messages for queries between 10 am and 8 pm on all working days.

CAA implementation in Bengal soon: Vijayvargiya

KOLKATA, DEC 12 (PTI): The Citizenship Amendment Act will be implemented in West Bengal soon, BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya Saturday said.

Vijayvargiya, the BJP Bengal minder who was talking to reporters at Thakurnagar in North 24 Parganas district which is largely inhabited by backward Matua community, did not say anything on the contentious National Register of Citizens.

"Even if the West Bengal government opposes the implementation of CAA we (Centre) will go ahead in implementing it. If the state supports the implementation it will be fine," he said.

BJP national president, J P Nadda during his recent visit to



the state had said that rules for implementation of the Act are being framed. CAA will be implemented in letter and spirit after it.

To a categorical question about implementation of NRC, Vijayvargiya replied curtly "We are talking about implementation of CAA here."

BJP MP from Bongaon Shantanu Thakur, a

member of the Matua community later told reporters "We will be looking forward to Union Home Minister Amit Shah making the announcement on implementation of CAA during his visit to Thakurnagar.

Matuas, who have a sizeable population in the state, are lower caste Hindu refugees who migrated to West Bengal from neighbouring

Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) during Partition and in the subsequent decades. Permanent citizenship has remained a longstanding demand within the Matua community.

Party sources said Vijayvargiya and Thakur held discussions about Shah's proposed visit to Thakurnagar, the community headquarters, soon.

JFA bats for support to newspapers provided they pay and retain employees

GUWAHATI, DEC 12 [HILLTIMES]: Journalists' Forum Assam (JFA) advocates for due support to the Indian newspaper industry, which is facing an exceptional crisis because of the Covid-19 pandemic affecting both of its circulation and advertise revenues since March 2020, but with the condition that every media group would pay their employees according to the concerned wage board guidelines endorsed by the Supreme Court of India.

It may be mentioned that the Indian Newspaper Society (INS) has urged the Union government to announce a stimulus package for the newspaper industry as it faces a loss of around Rs 12,500 crore in the last eight months. As a result many of the

publications have either shut down or suspended some of their editions indefinitely and 'if this situation prevails, many more will be compelled to close their operations in the near future', asserted the owners' association.

"One can well imagine, the downfall of the fourth pillar of the world's largest democracy will have severe socio-political repercussions, as well as affect its 30 lakh workers and staff, who are directly and indirectly involved in the newspaper industry as journalists, printers, delivery vendors and many others," said INS chief L Adimoolam adding that the newspaper industry was putting in 'its best efforts to bounce back and now looking forward to the government to provide the much needed

stimulus package'.

Arguing that the newspapers continue to play a vital role in the dissemination of verified & factual news in these challenging times, the INS also urged the government to remove residual 5% customs duty on newsprint, provide two years tax holiday, 50% increase in the government advertisement rates, 200% increase in the government spend on print media and immediate settlement of outstanding bills of advertisements released through various government agencies.

"We too urge the government to seriously look into the crisis faced by the newspaper industry, but like to remind the INS that most of the large print media houses in the country still disobey those SC approved guidelines

relating to the salaries and other benefits of their employees," said JFA president Rupam Barua and secretary Nava Thakuria adding that the Centre, which accepted the Majithia Wage Board recommendations in 2011 itself, should take the note.

The forum also appealed to the government to enact specific laws relating to the salary and other legal benefits for media employees engaged with the satellite news channels and prescribed digital media outlets across the country. Otherwise, the coverage of Majithia Wage Board (now confined to journalists and other employees belong to newspapers and news agencies) can be expanded to other electronic media outlets as well.

Odisha committed to create investment-friendly environment: Patnaik

BHUBANESWAR, DEC 12 (PTI): Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Saturday said his government is committed to create a conducive environment for the promotion of industries in the state and focusing on the implementation of new projects.

The state has developed an online system for over 30 government-to-business (G2B) services to reduce the regulatory burden on industries, he said.

"Odisha is concentrating on technological reforms to

reduce physical interface in extending government services.

The state has been creating a conducive business environment by inculcating professionalism and behavioural change in the agencies," he said.

The state is fast emerging as the manufacturing hub of eastern India and was able to attract new investments of over Rs 1 lakh crore in various sectors during the COVID-19 crisis, Patnaik said, while addressing the FICCI's 93rd Annual General Meeting.

He said the state has also developed a land bank with over one lakh acre available on a GIS-based platform to facilitate industries to select sites for their projects.

Odisha was at the top among states for attracting investments during the April-September period of 2019, and is poised to continue this leadership position, he said.

"Apart from new investments, Odisha is also focusing on the grounding of the projects. In the recent past, new industrial projects were

launched in diverse sectors ranging from healthcare, renewable energy, downstream to steel and aluminium, IT and food processing," he added. The chief minister said the government is targeting specific sectors including the ancillary and downstream businesses in the metal industry.

"We are working towards further development in major industrial regions such as Angul and Jharsuguda for aluminium and Kalinganagar for steel downstream projects," he added.

11 new COVID-19 cases push Mizoram's tally to 4,035



AIZAWL, DEC 13 (PTI): Eleven more people, including four security personnel, have tested positive for COVID-19 in Mizoram, pushing the tally to 4,035, an official said on Sunday.

Of the 11 fresh cases, five were reported from Aizawl district, three from Serchhip, two from Lawngtlai and one case from Lunglei district, he said.

Two army personnel, who have returned to Mizoram on vacation and two Border Security Force (BSF) jawans were among the newly infected people, he said.

Only one patient has developed symptoms of COVID-19, while the rest 10 patients were asymptomatic, he said.

The state now has 192 active cases, while 3,836 people have

recovered from the virus. The COVID-19 recovery rate in Mizoram is 95 per cent and the infection rate is 2.46 per cent.

Mizoram has reported seven COVID-19 deaths so far and all the victims were from Aizawl district.

The state has tested 1,64,236 samples for COVID-19 till date, including 1,034 on Saturday.

28 people among Meghalaya CM's high-risk contacts: DHS

SHILLONG, DEC 12 [SHILLONGTIMES]: A day after Chief Minister Conrad Sangma announced testing positive for COVID-19, DHS (MI) Dr Aman War on Saturday said that 28 people have been identified as the high-risk contacts of the chief minister.

War also informed that many politicians, bureaucrats, office staff, people from various NGOs and Dorbar Shnong

had met Conrad before he tested positive.

With regard to vaccination campaign, he said the frontline workers have been insured to the tune of Rs 50 lakh.

He, however, asserted that people would still have to continue to comply with COVID-19 norms despite the availability of vaccine. War said unless majority of people are vaccinated, the adherence to COVID norms is imperative.

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Jharkhand reports 189 new COVID-19 cases; tally rises to 1,11,366

RANCHI, DEC 13 (PTI): Jharkhand's COVID-19 tally mounted to 1,11,366 as 189 more people tested positive for the infection, a health department official said on Sunday.

The COVID-19 death toll remained at 995 as

no fresh fatality has been reported in the last 24 hours, he said.

Ranchi district registered the maximum number of fresh cases at 78, followed by Palamu (15), Bokaro (12) and East Singhbhum (12).

Jharkhand now has 1,610 active coronavirus cases, while 1,08,761 people have been cured of the disease so far, the official said.

The state has tested 19,757 samples for COVID-19 in the last 24 hours, he added.

Assam reports no COVID-19 deaths, 152 fresh cases

GUWAHATI, DEC 12 (PTI): Assam registered no COVID-19 deaths on Saturday, while 152 new cases pushed the tally to 2,14,584, Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. Altogether 118 people were cured of the disease during the day, taking the total number

of recoveries in the state to 2,10,054.

The recovery rate among coronavirus patients in the state currently stands at 97.89 per cent. The death toll remained at 1,000 as no new fatality due to the infection was reported after eleven days, he said.

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Real Madrid ease to derby win over Atlético after Casemiro opener

SID LOWE
MADRID, 13 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: Real Madrid's grand week came to a perfect end on Saturday. If these three games in seven days are to define their season as the narrative had declared, far from coming to a premature end it looks set to turn out nice again. Zinedine Zidane was on edge and on an ultimatum, his team threatened with elimination from the Champions League group stage for the first time ever and with being left so far adrift domestically as to be virtually done. But they did what they always seem to do in situations like these and rose again, beating Sevilla, beating Borussia Mönchengladbach and doing what no one had done since February by beating Atlético Madrid too.

On Friday afternoon Zidane had declared Atlético favourites to win the league; on Saturday night his team defeated their city rivals 2-0 with a first-half goal from Casemiro and then an own goal by Jan Oblak. Diego Simeone's team had not lost for 26 matches – going back to the last time they faced Real Madrid – and although they remain top, the title race was opened up at Valdebebas. It is one that includes Real now, too. Not just because of the score, but also because of the script this game followed. As for Zidane, here was more evidence that the only reason to doubt him is that it is precisely that doubt, that danger, which brings the best from his players.

On Saturday, they did it again; Atlético had swept almost everyone else aside, winning eight of their 10 games, but against Real they managed only a single shot on target. And if Real's opening goal was an act of simplicity, Casemiro leaping alone to head in Toni Kroos's corner, there was a logic to their lead and to the victory that it set up. The derby was only 14 minutes in, but a pattern had emerged already and Real had taken a control they never really looked like relinquishing.

Oblak had already dived to deny Karim Benzema, pushing his shot against the near post, and Atlético were struggling to get possession. In previous seasons that might not have mattered; this year, when the ball is a more integral part of their identity, it did. Now they had a new scenario to confront: struggling to escape their own half, denied the breathing room to pick out a pass. After 914 minutes, Simeone's side trailed for the first time this season. Worse, they were almost two down soon after, when Lucas Vázquez's speared delivery evaded Benzema at the far post.

Tyson Fury all bluster and brickbat but Anthony Joshua refuses to bite

KEVIN MITCHELL
LONDON, 13 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: It was a nice try. "Boxing's about less talk, more action," an uncharacteristically wired-up Anthony Joshua barked in the immediate afterglow of his finest performance since the night three years ago when he ended Wladimir Klitschko's career. Unfortunately, it's not, AJ. Without the talk, nobody walks. Fighters fight, but only when the deal is done.

Yet, even as Kubrat Pulev's shredded remains wriggled in front of him on the canvas after Saturday night's doomed but energetic challenge at Wembley Arena, the old Bulgarian's conqueror was not in the mood for clichés or platitudes.

There was a perfunctory tap of gloves, brief acknowledgment of their excellent, tense and entertaining struggle, but little more. No smiles or hugs. Nor did the winner give his paymasters the quotes they wanted. Sky Sports was fishing for soundbites about the fight that mattered way more than this one: against Tyson Fury, next door in front of a full house at Wembley Stadium in high summer, with Covid-19 a fading memory – and maybe a second one in Cardiff. This had been an hors d'oeuvre; what everyone wants is la grande bouffe.

The champion was not in the mood. After nearly half an hour of throwing and dodging health-threatening leather, putting his opponent down in



the third, jabbing and uppercutting him to shreds then levelling him for a full count in the ninth, Joshua hurled the easy questions back. "I don't really want to do an interview," he said.

The most cooperative celebrity in the business, a smiling, friendly guy who asks as many questions of journalists as they ask of him, who opens supermarkets in his sleep, was not going to perform. Not tonight. "I just want the fans to appreciate the hard work," he said. "Everyone go home and have a lovely Christmas, and we'll reunite in 2021."

It was left to Eddie Hearn to fill in the gaps. The Matchroom supremo said of the talk that will make this fight walk: "We're going to be friendly, we're going to be nice, but we know what we have to do. Starting from tomorrow, we make the Tyson Fury fight straight away. It's the only fight in boxing, it's the biggest fight in boxing, it's the biggest fight in British boxing history. I know

he wants it. He is the best heavyweight in the world. I promise you, he'll break him down, he'll knock him out. We will get it done."

You could almost hear Joshua saying to himself, "You better, pal." Within an hour, Fury was on social media to tell the world he would knock Joshua out in three rounds. "Anthony Joshua just shit himself live on television," Fury said in a video uploaded to Instagram. "He got asked did he want the the fight and he went around the bushes." At least one of the principals was playing his part in this pantomime.

Whatever Joshua did or did not mean in that emotional moment standing in front of a ringside microphone, he is as desperate to put his IBF, WBA, WBO and IBO belts on the line as Fury is to pony up his WBC title. And that might be the source of Joshua's post-fight irritability.

Hearn has said Joshua is happy to split the proceeds 50-50, which is a serious carrot to seal a

deal. Maybe Joshua is not so keen on that division of a pot that is likely to soar past £200million on the way to creating boxing history – with a bit of help from Sky, Fury and the media.

Perhaps he reckons this hugely impressive win – his 24th, his 22th by stoppage, his 10th as champion, and a statement victory after the doubts that infected his brand when Andy Ruiz had the impertinence to temporarily stop his run in 2019 – entitles him to something like 60-40. "Less talk, more action," he repeated. Was that a nod towards the negotiating table?

Matchroom do not own Joshua, although Hearn's involvement has been mutually beneficial beyond anyone's imaginings since the raw Watford heavyweight turned pro with a gold medal from the London Olympics as his bargaining chip. The fighter will say he has delivered; now it is Eddie's turn – and he hasn't let him down yet.

As for the fight, it deserved a stadium audience of 90,000, instead of the thousand allowed in with a nod to briefly loosened restrictions as the virus keeps the country in its grip. It was like everyone had been allowed out for the weekend and were going to make the most of it.

Joshua was thrillingly alive from the first bell; so was Pulev, despite his years. They were scheduled to fight in October, 2017, but went in different directions – like most of Pulev's early punches on Saturday night. Joshua quickly established dominance. Nobody, surely, throws more uppercuts, and plenty landed on Pulev, who keeled over in the third, yet kept going.

He had his moments. His pedigree was solid, if a little worn. And he grew older and slower by the round. Joshua, eight years younger at 31, tamed his own impetuosity, alive to the perils of his assignment, then constructed his hurricane. As Pulev's legs weakened and his overhand right swung with diminishing threat, Joshua thrashed his chin repeatedly from under his guard.

Pulev, a keen student of architecture, knows how buildings without solid foundations collapse under the trauma of instant pressure. As Joshua's long, classical right cross crashed into his defenceless jaw for the last time, Pulev was that building.



Bayern's Lewandowski salvages 1-1 draw at Union Berlin

BERLIN, 13 DEC (REUTERS): Champions Bayern Munich again had Robert Lewandowski to thank as they came from a goal behind for the fifth straight Bundesliga game to rescue a 1-1 draw at Union Berlin on Saturday as they held on to top spot ahead of RB Leipzig on goal difference.

Union stunned the visitors in the sixth minute with Grischka Proemel's glancing header from a corner.

It was a familiar scenario for the Bavarians, whose 17 goals conceded equals their record after the 11th matchday from the

2008/9 season under Juergen Klinsmann.

However, Bundesliga top scorer Lewandowski rescued a point in the 67th, tapping in a Kingsley Coman assist for his 13th goal of the campaign on his 200th appearance for the club.

Bayern, who have won only one of their last four league games, are now level on 24 points with Leipzig, who beat visitors Werder Bremen 2-0. Bayer Leverkusen, who have 22, can go top with a home victory over Hoffenheim on Sunday. "We can definitely play better than that,"

said Bayern coach Hansi Flick, who led them to five titles in 2020.

"We knew in advance it would be a very difficult season. Now we have to see what positives we can draw for this situation and improve on the things that have not

worked well."

The hosts were far the better side and twice came close with Taiwo Awoniyi, who forced a superb save from Manuel Neuer in the opening minute and in the 22nd beat the keeper but fired wide.

The Bavarians, who face unbeaten VfL Wolfsburg and Bayer Leverkusen next week, struggled to find their rhythm in the first half while leaving big gaps in defence.

However, after the break, as Union fans outside the stadium chanted and lit fireworks, the visitors connected a bit better and their Poland striker Lewandowski struck the equaliser.

Home keeper Andreas Luthe then made the save of the day in stoppage time, palming away a point-blank Leroy Sane header.

Chelsea lose at Everton as Manchester derby ends in stalemate

SIMON EVANS
MANCHESTER, 13 DEC (REUTERS): Chelsea's 17-match unbeaten run came to an end with a 1-0 defeat at Everton, while the Manchester derby between United and City ended goalless in the Premier League on Saturday.

The results leave Tottenham Hotspur top of the table on 24 points level with Liverpool. Jose Mourinho's Spurs visit Crystal Palace while Juergen Klopp's champions are at Fulham on Sunday.

Chelsea hoped to grab first place, for 24 hours at least, but a first-half penalty by Iceland's Gylfi Sigurdsson gave Everton victory on the return of 2,000 fans at Goodison Park.

The home side went

ahead in the 22nd minute when Dominic Calvert-Lewin was brought down in the box by Chelsea goalkeeper Edouard Mendy and Sigurdsson stroked home the spot kick.

Chelsea's Reece James hit a post with a low first-half drive while a Mason Mount free kick also hit the woodwork with 10 minutes left in the second half as the visitors' normally potent attack misfired on Merseyside.

Everton moved up to seventh in the standings on 20 points while Chelsea remain third on 22 after 12 games.

The Manchester derby at an empty Old Trafford lacked its usual excitement with both sides cautious and few chances.

The only major incident saw United awarded a penalty in the 48th minute when Kyle Walker kicked Marcus Rashford's foot in the box but the decision was overruled after VAR found the England striker had been in an offside position.

The nearest an unusually flat City came to scoring was a first half effort from Riyadh Mahrez that was well saved by David De Gea, with Kevin De Bruyne unable to make the most of the loose ball.

After their Champions League exit at the hands of RB Leipzig on Tuesday, United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer needed to avoid the kind of result that might have raised serious questions about his role and was pleased

with his team's display.

"The glass is always half-full with me. That's just the way you have to look at it. In my time against Man City, that's the best performance we've had. Not the best result but it's the best performance. I think so," said the Norwegian.

VILLA PENALTY
A stoppage-time penalty by Anwar El-Ghazi gave Aston Villa victory at Wolverhampton Wanderers in a Midlands derby which saw both teams finish with 10 men.

Villa had Douglas Luiz sent off in the 85th minute and Wolves midfielder Joao Moutinho was dismissed shortly after the visitors scored against the run of play to register their

fourth away win of the season. Nelson Semedo hauled down John McGinn in the penalty area and El-Ghazi made no mistake with the spot-kick as he blasted the ball past keeper Rui Patricio. Newcastle United shook off the effects of a COVID-19 outbreak at the club when Miguel Almiron netted the fastest Premier League goal this season and Dwight Gayle scored a late winner in a 2-1 home victory over West Bromwich Albion.

Almiron fired Newcastle ahead after 20 seconds when a mistake by defender Brislav Ivanovic allowed the hosts to counter-attack and Joelinton found the Paraguayan midfielder unmarked in the box as West Brom scrambled to recover.

F1 star Hamilton vows to fight to improve human rights

SAKHIR, DEC 13 (AP) World champion Lewis Hamilton vowed not to ignore pleas to improve human rights in Bahrain and other countries where Formula One hosts races, after reading letters from alleged torture survivors and being sent a drawing from the young son of a Bahraini man on death row.

Hamilton received personally addressed letters from three alleged torture victims in Bahrain ahead of a race there two weeks ago, and has since read them.

"I think there's definitely work to be done in the background and I definitely won't let it go unnoticed," the seven-time F1 champion said on Saturday.

Included with the letters to Hamilton was a photo of 11-year-old Ahmed, who is proudly holding up his drawing of Hamilton's Mercedes F1 car.

The drawing, which was sent by email to The Associated Press, came with the boy's personal written plea: Lewis, Please save my father.

"When I was drawing the car I thought that it could save my father," the boy said. "We struggle every day without him, I really hope he comes back to us."

He is the son of Mohammed Ramadhan, who in his letter to Hamilton said he was arrested after supporting Bahrain's pro-democracy uprising and then allegedly framed in a murder case and beaten with iron bars in order to extract his confession. He is facing execution.

"I think the saddest thing for me was that there's a young man on death row and it's not clear ... and when his son writes me a letter it really hits home. All lives matter," Hamilton said from the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

"When I get some time now, I will definitely try and speak to (people) and see how I can positively impact that (F1) weekend as a sport moving forwards.

Hamilton said he wanted to address the human rights issue with Bahrain's Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa last week in Bahrain the second of two races to be held there but had to sit out that race after contracting the coronavirus.

"I'd hoped after the first race to have had time to sit and address it with the Crown Prince, but I was bed-ridden for most of the week and I wasn't able to see anybody," Hamilton said.

"Now, look, ultimately it isn't necessarily my responsibility to speak up on the places that I don't know everything about. But I think that, we together, always have to work to push for change, for improvements."

M o h a m m e d Ramadhan's wife and mother-of-three Zainab Ebrahim said she has been deeply traumatized.

"This year has been the most heart-wrenching with the realization that Mohammed's death sentence would not be overturned. Living with that reality every day

and having to tell my children that their father was never coming home has broken me," Ebrahim said.

"My husband is an innocent man, He has done nothing wrong. It is time for this nightmare to end and he is set free to return to those who love him."

Ebrahim and her son's comments were sent to the AP by Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, the Director of the London-based Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy.

"When world champions like Lewis Hamilton speak out, lives can change forever," Alwadaei told The AP.

"F1 has a responsibility to support Lewis in speaking out. When Hamilton initially received the letters, he was also copied in on an NGO letter sent to F1 chairman Chase Carey listing alleged abuses in the Persian Gulf island since 2011.

"The human rights issue in so many of the places we go to is a massive problem," Hamilton said in response at the time, pledging to read the letters he'd been given.

"I do think as a sport we need to do more ... not just saying that we're going to do something. More than a dozen rights groups co-signed a letter endorsed by Amnesty International to Carey, urging F1 to leverage compensation for victims and ensure people can protest without reprisals.

Bahrain is accused of exploiting F1 to gloss over, or Sportswash its human rights record, by using a high-profile sporting event to project a favorable image of their country. Another letter sent to Carey, co-signed by 30 British cross-party parliamentarians, asked F1 to implement its human rights policy at the Bahrain GP amid concerns about rights violations linked to the race.

"I don't think we have a massive problem," Carey said in an interview with CNN earlier this month.

"I think the world could use a few more places where you try and create good through encouragement and positive reinforcement, as opposed to boycotting or protesting."

Carey's comments were strongly disputed by mother-of-four Najah Yusuf, one of three who wrote to Hamilton along with Ali AlHajee, a man who is in Jau Prison after organizing pro-democracy protests.

The three survivors' letters, initially reported by The Guardian newspaper and obtained by The AP, contain harrowing descriptions of extreme beatings, torture and sexual abuse. The AP has asked Bahrain's National Communication Centre and the Bahrain Embassy in Britain to comment on the accusations.

"The government of Bahrain takes the protection of its citizens' human rights and freedom of expression extremely seriously, and this is explicitly protected by Bahrain's constitution," the centre said in a statement on Nov. 27.

After fires, Australia gets ready for floods

SYDNEY, 13 DEC (REUTERS): Just days after bushfires threatened an Australian World Heritage site, thousands were bracing for floods on the subtropical east coast on Sunday, with beaches closed and the authorities urging people to sandbag their homes.

With as much as 475 millimetres (18.7 inches) of rain in the previous 24 hours, the Bureau of Meteorology issued a "severe weather warning" for the border area between New South Wales and Queensland states, a heavily populated area that includes the Queensland state capital Brisbane.

A week earlier, nearby Fraser Island was evacuated due to bushfires, dashing hopes that wetter weather would make seasonal fires less catastrophic

than last year. Scientists attribute the erratic weather in the early Australian summer to a La Nina pattern - which typically features strong rain - combined with climate change.

Fraser Island, the world's largest sand island, is now under the flood warning, which includes urging drivers to avoid roads where waters were already rising.

"These are dynamic weather systems and you should always expect the unexpected," bureau senior flood hydrologist Justin Robinson told a news conference.

The warning comes soon after Queensland

opened its border to the neighbouring state after months of closure due to COVID-19. The authorities urged people travelling for

end-of-year holidays to exercise caution since they may not be familiar with flood-prone areas.

"It isn't a time to take a chance and drive through those floodwaters," said New South Wales emergency services commissioner Carlene York. "Be aware of your surroundings and where you might be parking your caravan or you may be driving."

Emergency services had rescued four people, including some from cars trapped on flooded roads, and received about 700 calls for help, she said.

At the heavily populated Gold Coast, south of Brisbane, the authorities closed beaches due to dangerous surf, while the emergency services set up several locations where people could stock up on sandbags.

ZECHARIAS ZELELEM

DJIBOUTI, 13 DEC

[ALJAZEERA]: With

communications gradually being restored to parts of Ethiopia's war-hit Tigray region, survivors and residents in the town of Mai Kadra have been able to share harrowing accounts of the slaughter of civilians more than a month ago, the worst confirmed atrocity in a weeks-long conflict between government forces and the now-fugitive regional government.

On November 12, nearly two weeks after the start of the fighting in the northern region, an Amnesty International investigation cited witnesses as saying that forces linked to the embattled Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) had gone on a rampage in the small town three days earlier.

Armed with weapons including machetes and knives, the attackers hacked and stabbed residents to death, the witnesses told Amnesty, which said it could confirm "the massacre of a very large number of civilians" after examining and verifying gruesome photographs and videos from the scene.

Days later, a preliminary investigation by a government-appointed rights watchdog stated that there may be as many as 600 victims, saying the killings were committed by a local youth group with the support of other Tigrayan civilians, police and militia.

Home to up to 45,000 people of Tigrayan, Amhara and other ethnic origins, Mai Kadra had been under the control of the TPLF until its forces retreated from the town a day after the massacre as Ethiopian government troops made advances in western Tigray.

Despite the Ethiopian government's capture of the Tigrayan capital of Mekelle on November 28, fighting between the TPLF and Ethiopian army units is believed to be continuing in parts of rural Tigray. Swaths of the region remain inaccessible to journalists and aid workers, making it hard to verify claims from all sides and leaving observers fearing that additional war crimes may yet be uncovered.

The federal government imposed a communications blackout when it began its military operation on November 4, but Mai Kadra has had its phone services restored for a little more than a week now. Al Jazeera has been able to communicate with a total of six survivors, witnesses and relatives of victims who were in Mai Kadra on November 9 and said

newspaper reported.

Switzerland has been hard hit by the epidemic, with around 5,000 new COVID-19 cases every day recently. Roughly 1.3% of the population has been infected in the last 28 days. The directors said they feared a third wave of COVID-19 infections early next year could trigger a collapse in the

health system. A spokesman for the Swiss Department of Public Health declined to comment on the letter on Sunday.

Gregor Zuend from Zurich University Hospital described how one young cancer patient had to be sent home without having his tumor removed because there was no free spaces.

Survivors recount horrific details of Mai Kadra massacre



the bloodletting went on unabated for nearly 24 hours.

'I THOUGHT IT WAS THE END'

Solomon Chaklu said he had come to Mai Kadra from the town of Dansha to inspect a vehicle he had intended to buy.

"Police and TPLF youth militias went all over town searching for non-Tigrayans to kill," Solomon told Al Jazeera on the phone. "At around 3pm, police and the youths with machetes came to the home we were hiding in," he said.

"They dragged me outside, where I saw maybe 20 or 30 bodies of people who lay dying or were dead. I thought it was the end for me."

The Ethiopian government maintains that a TPLF-backed Tigrayan youth militia dubbed the "Samri" singled out men like Solomon and Ferede, who are of ethnic Amhara descent. There have been long-standing tensions between Tigrayans and Amhara and militia members from the Amhara region neighbouring Tigray have taken part in fighting against the TPLF's forces alongside the Ethiopian army.

Solomon said he, his friend Ferede Leu and a third man were asked to produce ID cards that would identify their ethnic group. The third man was left alone after he pleaded for his life in Tigrinya, the language of the assailants, according to Solomon.

"They tried to kill me," he said. "I was surrounded by four men and one of them struck me in the head and back with his machete. I remember the others laughing as they watched him."

When he regained consciousness, Solomon was informed that his friend, Ferede, had been hacked to death. He himself was bleeding profusely and the next day was taken to hospital in the city of Gonder some 260km (162 miles) away. Discharged after two weeks, he is currently recovering from multiple machete blows and a broken leg in his home in Dansha.

"Men turned into

bloodthirsty beasts that day," he said.

'WE CAN STILL HEAR THE HORRIFIC SOUNDS'

Ethiopian state media reported that the massacre was the result of surviving TPLF units taking out their frustration on the town's residents after having been routed in battles with the Ethiopian army.

Hadas Mezgebu, whose husband of 17 years was murdered in front of the family's home in Mai Kadra, said she believed the attackers "had planned this for days".

"They had asked to see people's identity cards. When the killings started, they knew which homes to go to. They knew my husband was Amhara."

On the day of the killings, Tilahun Getnet says he hid in the home of his half-brother, Tebekaw Zewdu, who had lived in Mai Kadra for nearly 30 years.

"We heard the Samri gang wasn't targeting women and children, so we lay hidden just above the ceiling of my brother's home for hours," Tilahun said on the phone. "Twice they searched the home and left after only finding my brother's wife and children."

But the machete-wielding killers came back for a third search of the home and grew frustrated when they could not locate Tebekaw, 37. They began threatening his wife and

son.

"When she refused to reveal where her husband was hidden, they seized their 11-year-old son and threatened to slaughter him if she didn't reveal his husband's whereabouts. That's when my brother came out from hiding. They hacked him to death there, in front of his wife and son who screamed for mercy."

Tilahun said his half-brother's family has since moved out of Mai Kadra. "We can still hear the horrific sounds of that day when we dream at night."

REPORTS OF TIGRAYANS TARGETED

Thousands of people are thought to have been killed since fighting began in Tigray on November 4, with the United Nations saying that an estimated one million people have been displaced across the region, in addition to the nearly 50,000 who have fled to neighbouring Sudan.

In the Sudanese refugee camps, a number of Tigrayan refugees have told journalists they escaped after Tigrayan civilians in Mai Kadra had been killed by Ethiopian federal forces and members of an Amhara militia. Some said they had seen hundreds of bodies and described scenes of ethnically motivated attacks, including killings with knives and beatings.

Amid the divergent accounts, TPLF

leader Debretsion Gebremichael has dismissed accusations of his forces' involvement in any mass killings as "baseless", while Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has said the federal forces have not killed a single civilian during their operation against the TPLF.

When probed by Al Jazeera, TPLF official Fesseha Tessema said the group is aware of killings involving Tigrayan victims. "The heinous crime committed against Tigrayans in Mai Kadra is just one among similar crimes that should be investigated by an international body," he said.

Earlier this week, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said there is "an urgent need" for independent monitoring of the developments in Tigray, warning that the "exceedingly worrying and volatile" situation "is spiralling out of control, with appalling impact on civilians".

Amnesty, meanwhile, concurs there may be victims of additional atrocities among people of both ethnicities during the fighting, but its lead Ethiopia researcher said the organisation has no doubt as to who was behind the killings of November 9.

"We have had follow-up interviews with victims, who say the killers were provided support by armed local [TPLF] militia," Fisseha Tekle, Amnesty's lead Ethiopia researcher, told Al Jazeera. "Youth groups were armed with axes, machetes and knives and told to go home to home in search of Amhara men."

While Ethiopian officials say the conflict is dwindling down and reject what they describe as outside "interference", the United Nations continues to press the government to grant it access to people in war-torn areas to provide much-needed humanitarian aid.

Chinese capsule with 2kg of moon rocks begins journey to Earth

BEIJING, 13 DEC

[ALJAZEERA]: A Chinese space capsule is bringing back the first moon rocks in more than 40 years after orbiting the moon for about a week.

The Chang'e 5 lunar probe started its three-day return to Earth by firing up four engines for about 22 minutes to move out of the moon's orbit, the China National Space Administration said in a social media post on Sunday.

The craft's lander touched down on the moon earlier this month close to a formation called the Mons Rumker, an area believed to have been the site of ancient volcanic activity. It collected about 2 kilogrammes (4.4 pounds) of samples.

The return capsule is expected to land in northern China after separating from the rest of the spacecraft and floating down on parachutes. The material would be the first brought back since the Soviet Union's Luna 24 probe in 1976.

The rocks and other debris were obtained both by drilling into the moon's crust and scooping directly off the surface.

They may be billions of years younger than those brought back by earlier US and Soviet missions, possibly offering insights into the moon's history and that of other bodies in the solar system.

China has set up labs to analyse the samples for age and composition

and is also expected to share some of them with other countries, as was done with the hundreds of kilogrammes brought back by the US and the former Soviet Union.

China's space programme has a series of ambitious missions under way, including a probe en route to Mars.

The Chang'e lunar programme, named after the ancient Chinese moon goddess, has been operating the Chang'e 4 probe on the moon's less-explored far side for the past two years.

Future plans call for returning a human to the moon and perhaps a permanent moon base. China is also building a space station to begin operating as early as 2022.

Israelis maintain anti-Netanyahu protests in wintry weather



JERUSALEM, DEC 13

(AP): A few thousand Israelis protested against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, demanding that he resign in the face of corruption charges and the pandemic.

Some 2,000 people demonstrated outside Netanyahu's official residence in Jerusalem. The size of the crowds has shrunk in recent weeks with the arrival of wintry weather.

Protesters held signs reading Go and Everyone is equal under the law.

They also carried an inflatable submarine, alluding to a USD 2 billion purchase of German submarines that critics allege Netanyahu

was implicated in.

The protesters say Netanyahu must resign because of the corruption charges against him, saying he has lost the public's trust and can't properly manage the country under charges of fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes.

Netanyahu denies wrongdoing on all charges, which revolve around a series of scandals involving media moguls and billionaire associates. His trial is set to begin evidentiary hearings early next year.

The protests have been a nuisance for Netanyahu, who has seen his popularity plummet during the coronavirus

outbreak, with Israel on the verge of what may be a third national lockdown with cases again trending upward.

With Israel appearing to be headed toward its fourth national election in two years, the long-serving Netanyahu may be banking on recently arrived vaccines to give him a boost in the polls.

Opinion polls show that if the election were held today his Likud Party would emerge as the largest in parliament. But it would be weaker than today and challenged by a new party set to enter the fray that is led by a former Likud lawmaker calling for Netanyahu's rule to end.

Swiss hospitals implore health minister to tighten coronavirus restrictions

ZURICH, 13 DEC (REUTERS):

The directors of five of Switzerland's largest hospitals have written to the health minister asking for urgent measures to reduce coronavirus infections, the SonntagsZeitung newspaper reported on Sunday.

In their letter to Health Minister Alain Berset, the directors of the

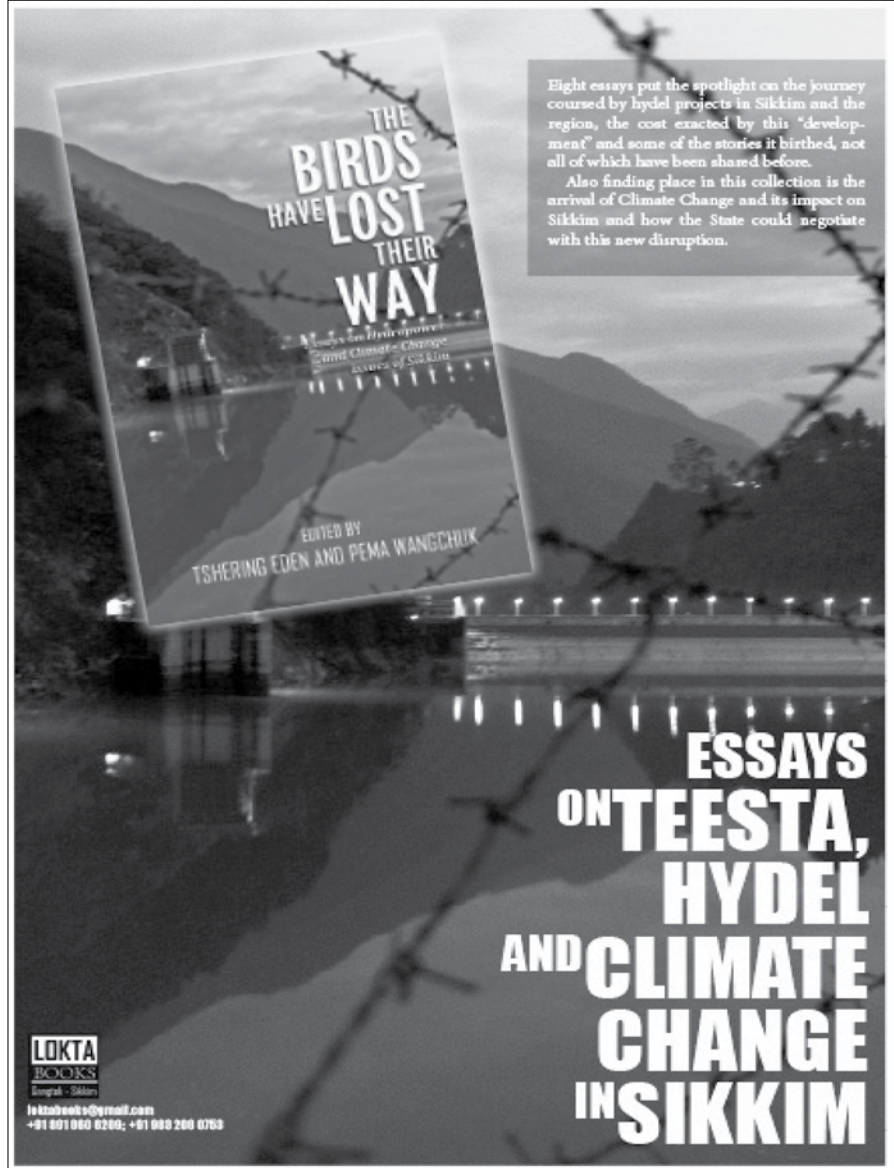
university hospitals of Zurich, Bern, Basel, Lausanne and Geneva said the pandemic was forcing them to postpone operations for patients with other life-threatening conditions while intensive care beds were becoming scarce.

More than 4,000 operations have been postponed at the five hospitals since October, the

newspaper reported. Switzerland has been hard hit by the epidemic, with around 5,000 new COVID-19 cases every day recently. Roughly 1.3% of the population has been infected in the last 28 days. The directors said they feared a third wave of COVID-19 infections early next year could trigger a collapse in the

health system. A spokesman for the Swiss Department of Public Health declined to comment on the letter on Sunday.

Gregor Zuend from Zurich University Hospital described how one young cancer patient had to be sent home without having his tumor removed because there was no free spaces.



Banksy mural of sneezing woman appears on England's steepest street



A mural of a sneezing woman by Banksy has appeared on a house at the end of what is said to be England's steepest street in the city of Bristol, the birthplace of the elusive street artist.

Banksy, whose true identity is a closely guarded secret, posted pictures of the work on his official Instagram account, along with the comment "Aachoo!!"

The mural, which shows the woman's false teeth propelled through the air and her handbag and walking stick sent flying by the violent sneeze, is on the side of a house at the junction of Vale Street and Park Street in the Tottenham area of the city in western England.

Vale Street has a gradient of 22 degrees and residents stage an egg rolling competition down the slope at Easter.



BACK TO REALITY! The Bachelorette couple Clare Crawley & Dale Moss spotted wearing matching black outfits while running errands in New York.

Exhausting to be constantly funny, takes toll on mental health: Mallika Dua

Actor-comedian Mallika Dua says comics often feel the pressure to constantly perform and pretend to be happy, which is why it is important to draw a line and look after one's mental health.

Dua shot to fame with her comedy sketches, often tackling Delhi stereotypes, four years ago and has since been a social media sensation.

The 31-year-old comedian said she started her comedy career purely out of fun, but soon realised that it can become an unhealthy loop of numbers and greed, one which has to be navigated with caution.

"I feel a lot of pressure, everyday. It takes a massive toll on your mental health. I didn't start to appease anyone, it was purely out of my own happiness. It started as, 'you are good at it, you should do more' then it became 'if you don't do it, you won't make money.'"

"Then it transformed into 'you must do it because others are doing it and you must be better than them.' So there's no end to it. I don't post obsessively anymore. I don't want to get caught up in the rat race of numbers," Dua told PTI.

The actor said it is no secret in comedy business that many comics across the world go through depression.

"There's something, this pressure to be constantly performing and pretending to be happy. We have to draw the line. It's exhausting to be constantly funny," she added.

Dua, who has previously featured in movies such as "Hindi Medium",



"Namaste England" and "Zero", currently stars in "Indoo Ki Jawani", which released countrywide on Friday.

Described as a coming-of-age comedy, "Indoo Ki Jawani" features Kiara Advani as a feisty girl from Ghaziabad whose left and right swipes on a dating app results in a hilarious chaos when she meets a Pakistani man, played by Aditya Seal.

Dua said she was instantly drawn to the Abir Sengupta-directed film because of its funny script and that the makers weren't offering her the part of a "token best friend", a character which she believes is mostly "underwritten" in Hindi cinema.

"It's not that all protagonists' friends are underwritten, it's typically the women that are underwritten. If you look at 'Stree' or 'Fukrey', they have well

written parts.

"That's a problem for me, which is why I don't say yes to a lot of the film's that are offered, because it doesn't really do anything for my career. It's just time pass," she added.

Dua said one of the reasons why there aren't enough women in comedy is because it was never made aspirational for a woman to be funny.

The actor said every time a woman has showcased her sense of humour, she has been made to look like "an idiot", which isn't the case with men.

"For them, being funny is taken as a romantic attribute. But it's changing now, thanks to pop culture. The next step would be if agents back their women artistes as hard as they back the male artistes," she added.

Sonu Sood launches initiative to gift e-rickshaws to underprivileged

Actor Sonu Sood on Sunday announced a new initiative under which he would be providing e-rickshaws to the underprivileged who lost their source of livelihood during the coronavirus pandemic.

Sood, known for films like "Dabangg", "Jodhaa Akbar", and "Simmba", catapulted to the national spotlight for his work in helping migrants reach their homes during the coronavirus-triggered lockdown earlier this year.

The 47-year-old actor said his initiative, titled 'khud kamaao ghar chalaao', is aimed at generating employment

opportunities to make people "self-reliant".

"I believe providing job opportunities is more important than distributing supplies. I'm sure that this initiative will help them stand on their feet yet again by making them self-reliant and self-sufficient," Sood said in a statement.

The actor had earlier also launched the 'Pravasi Rojgar' app, which aims to connect those who lost their jobs in the pandemic to companies and offers specific programmes to help improve their skills.

FKA twigs sues Shia LaBeouf over alleged abusive relationship

British singer FKA twigs has filed a lawsuit against Hollywood actor Shia LaBeouf, claiming that he was physically and emotionally abusive when she dated him from 2018 to 2019.

As per the documents, filed in Los Angeles Superior Court on Friday, the 32-year-old British singer, whose real name is Tahliah Debrett Barnett, alleged that LaBeouf, 34, left her in a constant state of fear and humiliation and knowingly gave her a sexually transmitted disease.

FKA twigs further alleged that LaBeouf physically assaulted her numerous times and once threatened to crash a car with her in it unless she told him she loved him, reported Entertainment Weekly.

She revealed that she started LaBeouf after she was cast in a supporting part in his 2019 movie "Honey Boy", which was based on the actor's childhood and his relationship with his abusive father.

LaBeouf persuaded her to move in with him, FKA twigs claimed, but soon isolated her from family and friends.

She alleged that she was subjected to constant verbal abuse from LaBeouf, who was also jealous of everyone she met, including actor Robert Pattinson, whom she dated from 2014 to 2017.

Describing one key incident in the lawsuit, FKA twigs said just after Valentines Day in 2019, LaBeouf was driving recklessly on their return to Los Angeles and threatened to crash the car unless she professed her love for him.

After he pulled into a petrol station, she claimed that the actor assaulted her as she tried to get away and forced her back into the car.

FKA twigs said she made several attempts to leave him that he resisted, but he later ended the relationship himself.



The singer said that she wants to raise awareness of "the tactics that abusers use to control you", and will donate a significant amount of any financial damages she receives to domestic abuse charities.

In an email to the New York Times, LaBeouf said that "many of these allegations are not true," but acknowledged that he owed his accusers "the opportunity to air their statements publicly and accept accountability for those things I have done".

"I have no excuses for my alcoholism or aggression, only rationalisations. I have been abusive to myself and everyone around me for years. I have a history of hurting the people closest to me. I'm ashamed of that history and am sorry to those I hurt," the actor said.

He revealed that he is in recovery and therapy over alcoholism and PTSD and added that he "will forever be sorry to the people that I may have harmed along the way.

ARIES: Family and community take centre stage, Aries. Spend time with your forever cheerleaders, the ones who have supported you and held space for you to become who you are today. Let them know how grateful you are for their presence, how much you have learnt and continue to learn from them. Commit to the practice of love. Let your compassionate side shine through. Know that everything you put into the Universe will eventually come back to you.

Tip: Family and community will take centre-stage.

TAURUS: Like you Carrie Bradshaw, you're in the mood to put your money where you can see it—hanging in your closet. This is the time to reinvent your sartorial game. But don't go overboard, which you have the tendency to. Set a budget aside from the beginning. Invest timeless pieces that can be styled differently.

Tip: Up the style game.

GEMINI: Misery loves company, doesn't it, Gemini? What the Spirit wants you to do: snap out of it already! This is not a healthy

space for you to be in. Your vibration is not supporting your soul growth nor is it helping you attract healthy relationships. Small, simple steps in the right direction will make a big difference. Start by making a gratitude list.

Tip: Raise your vibrations by giving thanks for what you have and what is yet to come.

CANCER: Sometimes you need to let your practical side take the wheel. At other times, you need to weave a little bit of magic. But this week, you're being asked to marry the yin and yang aspects of you. Use the law of attraction to draw in what you desire as you prepare to take concrete steps towards the achievement of your goals. Looks like you're getting closer and closer to the destination. On the downside, you may have to deal with somebody who has a chip on their shoulder.

Tip: You came here to conquer.

LEO: Michael Curtiz once said, "The only things you regret are the ones you don't do." Your thoughts exactly, Leo. You may have a bad rep for being spontaneous (read: impulsive), but you learned early on that nothing worth remembering is ever created within

the confines of your comfort zone. So throw the shoulds and musts out of the window.

Tip: Throw the rulebook out of the window.

VIRGO: Virgo, you're a sorceress. Stop trying to live a mundane existence. Pay attention to what the Universe is revealing to you via signs, symbols, visions, and dreams. Your clairvoyant, clairaudient and clairsentient abilities are especially heightened at this moment. Remember, your inner skeptic will make you doubt the voice of wisdom.

Tip: Listen to the voice of wisdom.

LIBRA: Isn't the boss babe act getting a little tiring? Stay committed to your goals, Libra. Remember what you came here for. But resist the urge to make your work the focal point of your existence. The cards are urging you to break out of that power suit and get in touch with the wild child within. What are the things that make you feel nurtured?

Tip: Find a balance between work and play.

SCORPIO: If you have a friend who is going through the things that you are facing right now, what would you tell them? Time to apply the sage advice to your own life,

Scorpio. Clichéd as it is, the answers you seek are already within you. Have you been letting the drama outside interfere with your sacred purpose?

Tip: Trust the guidance that's coming through from within.

SAGITTARIUS: In the wise words of Roman philosopher Seneca, "Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity." You've already done the dirty work thereby laying a solid foundation. So prepare for the grand opening, Sagittarius. What you need to keep in mind when the right opportunities come knocking at your door: the importance of striking when the iron is hot.

Tip: You are on your way to realising the grand vision.

CAPRICORN: To quote Oscar Wilde: "Be yourself. Everybody is already taken." Your relationship with yourself is undergoing a major upgrade. Keep showering yourself with love. Know that accepting yourself, flaws and all, is the key to empowerment and bringing about a change in the way you interact with the world.

Tip: You are becoming more you than you ever have.

AQUARIUS: Nearing yet another breaking point, Aquarius? When you set unrealistic expectations for yourself, you are bound to fail. See how and where you are being hard on yourself. 'I am enough' is an affirmation that will help you find wisdom and courage. Some of you may be experiencing guilt around self-care. There's only so much you can serve from an empty cup. Allow yourself to get the time out you have been yearning for.

Tip: It's time to prioritise self-care.

PISCES: So this is not the life you envisioned for yourself! Are you really lost though or simply taking a detour? Trust that you are exactly where you need to be, Pisces. Everything that is unfolding right now is a part of the divine plan that is written for you in the constellations. Remember, bringing in the energy of worry and anxiety will salt your game.

Tip: Release the need to control this situation and the path will reveal itself.