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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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**3050  
vaccinated,  
1 new case**

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 13 MAR:**

A total of 3050 persons received shots of COVID vaccine at 41 vaccination sites across the State on Saturday. On the day, 2748 persons were provided the first dose of vaccine, while 302 completed their vaccination schedule with the second dose of vaccine.

In his daily health bulletin on Saturday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia mentioned that 938 persons [763 first dose and 175 second dose] in East District, 437 [433 first dose and 04 second dose] in West District, 327 [209 first dose and 118 second dose] in North District and 1348 [1343 first dose and 05 second dose] in South District have received their COVID vaccination.

Among those vaccinated today, 410 are healthcare workers [246 first dose and 164 second dose], 355 frontline workers [217 first dose and 138 second dose], 316 persons of age group 45 to 59 years with comorbidities and 1969 persons of age group 60 years and above.

Meanwhile, Sikkim saw one new case of novel coronavirus in the last 24 hours taking the state tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported so far to 6184. On the other hand, the number of active cases of novel coronavirus has come down to 47 with eight more recoveries of COVID patients in the State. The figure of recovered cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim has further improved to 5905.

Mr Bhutia informed that a person from Melli in South District reported positive for COVID-19 in RT-PCR testing of 131 samples. He added that the only new case in the State was reported from the testing of 153 samples on Friday.

Also, test results of the 33 contacts of the Deorali Girls Sr Sec School staff who had tested positive for the virus are yet to arrive.

## More than 2000 receive degrees at SRM Univ convocation,

**SAGAR CHETTRI  
GANGTOK, 13 MAR:**

The 2nd convocation of Shri Ramasamy Memorial [SRM] University, Sikkim was held here at Manan Kendra on Saturday. The convocation was conducted for more than 2000 students who have passed out from different departments of the university from 2016 to 2020.

During the convocation, gold medals were presented to 33 students, silver medals to 35 students and bronze medals for 32 students.

The convocation had Education Minister, Kunga Nima Lepcha as the chief guest accompanied by Transport Minister, Sanjit Kharel, Additional Chief Secretary to Education Department, GP Upadhyaya, Vice-Chancellor SRM University, Sikkim Prof Satish Kumar among other dignitaries at the venue, while the convocation was also virtually joined by the Chancellor, Dr TP Ganesan and President, Dr P



Sathyanarayanan of SRM University Sikkim.

In his convocation address, the Education Minister congratulated all graduate students for passing out from the university. He said that the university has provided wings to students through degrees to achieve their desired dreams and vision.

He urged young students to take inspiration from the life of former President, Abdul Kalam who started from humble beginnings and reached the highest office of the country.

The Minister mentioned that it is the endeavor of Sikkim government to make Sikkim a hub for quality education in the country. He thanked the SRM University for their contribution in helping Sikkim in this endeavor.

In his welcome address, SRM University Sikkim president, Dr Sathyanarayanan mentioned that SRM University Sikkim has completed six years in the state.

The Sikkim government has always been leading and guiding the university, he said fur-

ther adding that SRM University would always work with the state government to take education to the next level in Sikkim. He also thanked the Education Department for supporting the growth of the university.

While presenting the annual report of the university, Vice-Chancellor Prof Kumar mentioned that SRM University was established in 2013 and has undergraduate and post-graduate programmes under Faculty of Information Technology & Management, Faculty of Social Sciences and

Faculty of Sciences and also offering PdD programme in all faculties.

He added that the strength of students has also increased from the initial 80 to 2200, which includes 1200 under graduate, 350 post graduates, 50 PhD scholars and 600 diploma students under skill development courses. He informed that 30% of students in the university are from north-eastern and other states of India and Nepal and Bhutan.

The VC mentioned about various programmes, faculties, infrastructure and laboratories and other facilities of the university. He also listed out achievements, scholarships and social responsibilities delivered by the university.

Earlier, the chief guest and other guests presented medals, ranks, degrees and diplomas to students, which was followed by a pledge to students administered by the Chancellor.

## Meeting reviews prep for Sikkim Global Film Fest



**GANGTOK, 13 MAR (IPR):** A review meeting regarding the upcoming Sikkim Global Film Festival 2021 was convened at the conference hall of Soochna Bhawan (Department of Information and Public Relations), Tadong, today.

The meeting was chaired by the Chairperson, Sikkim Film Promotion Board (SFPB), Pooja Sharma and co-chaired by Political Secretary to CM, Jacob Khaling.

The meeting also had the presence of Advisor IPR Department, Birendra Tamling, Secretary IPR, Siphora Targain, Director IPR, Benu Gurung, Joint Director IPR (Film), Bishal Khawas, and officials including the members of the SFPB organising committee.

The review meeting was conducted to assess the preparedness and take stock of the progress for the upcoming Sikkim Global Film Festival, 2021.

During the meeting, various agenda ranging from finalisation of date, venue, confirmation of celebrities, guests, conduct of press conference and various activities including fashion shows, producers meet and matters pertaining to hospitality, logistics, publicity, promotion, marketing, film entries, awards, felicitations, work distribution along with the future plan of action were discussed at length.

During the meeting, it was informed by Chairperson, SFPB, Pooja Sharma to hold a press conference on 15 March 2021 to brief on further course of action followed by the review meeting on 19 March, 2021 at Soochna Bhawan (Department of IPR).

## Yuksam-Tashiding constituents thank CM for 'historic' visit

**PRITAM LAMA**

**YUKSAM, 13 MAR:**

The residents of Yuksam-Tashiding have thanked Chief Minister PS Tamang [Golay] for his recent 3-day tour [01-03 March] of the constituency when he made the effort to reach even the more remote parts and listen to the people's aspirations and grievances.

A letter of gratitude conveying this sentiment was presented to the Chief Minister at his official residence, Mintokgang, on Friday by a delegation representing the public of Yuksam-Tashiding constituency. The delegation was led by area MLA, Sangay Lepcha who remarked, "The Chief Minister's visit has given hope to the people of Yuksam-Tashiding."

Terming the tour as historic, the letter of gratitude, signed by the area MLA and others, states that "never in the history, such an attention has been received by



the people of our constituency before".

"Ours was a constituency that was neglected by the previous regime. So much so that such visits never occurred except during elections. Since now, after seeing your diligence, generosity and fo-

cus, we are now of confirmation that fate of Sikkim and Sikkimese has landed in safe hands, and that our constituency too shall climb the ladder of development under your trusted leadership," the letter addressed to the Chief Minister reads.



**Mr SIKKIM FROM MANGSHILA:** 28-year-old Binoð Biswakarma from Mangshila, North Sikkim, flexed his way to the 20th Mr Sikkim Bodybuilding Championship title on Saturday. The event, organised by Sikkim State Body Building Association, was held at Mannan Kendra on 13 March.

## Endless wait for Korea jobs frustrates Nepal's youth as they question govt's commitment

**CHANDAN KUMAR MANDAL**

**KATHMANDU, 13 MAR [KATHMANDU-POST]:** In 2018, Ajay Sodari of Ghodaghodi Municipality, Kailali made a plan to migrate to South Korea. But he was unaware of the time and effort it would require to land a Korean job.

As a first step, Sodari started preparing on his own with whatever study materials he could get online and some Korean language books.

"I thought of going to South Korea, which is an attractive labour destination for Nepali migrants," said Sodari. "You can do a lot in a short span if you can get a Korean job."

With such aspirations, Sodari sat the Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK), a mandatory Korean language test for those wanting to work in South Korea. But he could not pass the test in 2018. Sodari moved to Kathmandu to prepare for the test in 2019.

With all the struggle that comes in moving from Kailali to Kathmandu and after nearly eight months of hard work, Sodari did crack the test in 2019, when a record number of over 92,000 applicants had appeared for the examination.

Sodari was among the 6,773 individuals who cleared both the language test and the skill test, which

is a test of candidates' basic understanding of the job sector they are planning to enter, to get a job in Korea in 2020 under the Employment Permit System (EPS).

But then the Covid-19 pandemic struck. It suspended Nepali workers' migration to the east Asian country for an indefinite period.

There are thousands like Sodari waiting for more than a year now to get to South Korea having passed both the tests.

How long the wait will be is still unclear.

Sodari was even selected by a Korean employer. He had also received his contract from the employer and the Certificate for Confirmation of

Visa Issuance, after which, during normal time, candidates must reach Korea within 90 days.

However, after a long-wait of nine months, the Korean employer cancelled the work contract with Sodari.

Labour migration to South Korea has witnessed obstructions since the first week of February last year. Later in the same month, the migration of Nepali youths to South Korea was temporarily halted as South Korea became an epicentre of Covid-19.

Since then, although labour migration to other countries has resumed, departures of Nepali candidates to South Korea remain sus-

pending.

Bhim Raj Bhatta from Melauli Municipality, Baitadi was also selected to go to Korea in 2020. Like Sodari, he also started preparing for the language test in 2018 from home and cleared the test in 2019 after moving to Kathmandu.

"I worked in Kathmandu so that I could learn the Korean language. I would work in the daytime and study at night," said Bhatta, 24. "The dream was to reach South Korea and do something for the family."

Bhatta does not know what he should be doing as he waits for his long-held dream to become reality.

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## Couldn't stay on the sidelines and watch Gangtok flounder: Kailash Pradhan on why he is in the GMC fray

AARON RAI

GANGTOK, 13 MAR:

Senior architect, 56-year-old Kailash Chandra Pradhan, one of the hitherto non-political persons who has thrown his hat in the fray for the Gangtok Municipal Corporation elections, explains that he decided to contest because he could no longer stay on the sidelines and watch his city suffer because of half-baked and half-hearted plans.

Mr Pradhan has filed his nomination papers from two wards - Upper and Lower MG Marg - and while speaking to SummitTimes today, shared his belief that Gangtok was at a crossroads at present and could either grow to its true potential as an urban space or collapse beyond repair.

He holds up his experience and credentials



as an architect who understands planning to underline that the GMC needs to be staffed by the right people who are motivated by their love for the city and the Gangtokians instead of people who, even if they mean well, don't understand the nuances of planning.

When pressed, he explained that as a professional, he could see all that was wrong and poorly thought out in the "developmental"

plans on the anvil for Gangtok and as Gangtokian he could no longer ignore the irreversible harm that disinterested planning could wreck here; hence the decision to contest.

He admits that he does not see his candidature as being specific to a particular ward but as a means to become part of the decision-making body for Gangtok, a role in which, he reiterates, he can provide an important service to the

Gangtokians.

As for his coming from a reasonably privileged background, he has invited Gangtokians to join his workshops, interact with him and then decide whether he has the empathy and keenness to work for the town and its people or not.

Addressing the question of how he expects to convince wards that have traditionally been represented by members of the business community for whom he might come across as "outsider," Mr Pradhan accepted that while this might be how many see the situation, he was hoping that constituents in his wards see him as a Sikkimese and a Gangtokian and vote as Sikkimese and invested Gangtokians themselves.

Mr Pradhan has been allotted "Pen with seven rays" as his election symbol.

## 20 lakh jobs on Friday, highest so far: Govt

NEW DELHI, MAR 13

(PTI): The Health Ministry said on Saturday that more than 20 lakh vaccine doses against the coronavirus were administered across the country the previous day, the highest single-day count so far.

As many as 16,39,663 beneficiaries -- health-care workers (HCWs) and frontline workers (FLWs) -- were vaccinated for the first dose and 4,13,874 such people received the second shot.

"India recorded a significant milestone in its countrywide COVID-19 vaccination drive which

started on January 16. More than 20 lakh (20,53,537) vaccine doses were given on Day-56 of the vaccination drive (March 12) through 30,561 sessions," the ministry said in a statement.

This is the highest single-day vaccine administration so far, it said.

A total of more than 2.82 crore (2,82,18,457) vaccine doses have been administered through 4,86,314 sessions, as per the provisional report.

"These include 72,93,575 HCWs (1st dose), 41,94,030 HCWs (2nd dose), 72,35,745

FLWs (1st dose) and 9,48,923 FLWs (2nd dose), 12,54,468 beneficiaries aged more than 45 years with specific co-morbidities (1st dose) and 72,91,716 beneficiaries aged more than 60 years," it said.

Eight states constituted 74 per cent of the 20.54 lakh doses administered in the past 24 hours, with Uttar Pradesh topping the list with more than 3.3 lakh vaccine doses.

Ten states account for 69 per cent of the second dose vaccinations in India and Uttar Pradesh alone accounts for 9.71

per cent -- 4,99,242 -- of the total second dose vaccinations in the country, the ministry said.

It added that Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh reported 87.72 per cent of the new cases in the last 24 hours, with Maharashtra accounting for 63.57 per cent of India's total active cases.

Twenty states and Union territories have less than 1,000 active cases, the ministry said and 18 of states/Union territories have not reported any COVID-19 deaths in the last 24 hours.

## WB man nabbed in Maha one year after kidnapping son

THANE, MAR 13 (PTI):

The police in Maharashtra's Thane city have arrested a man who had been on the run for a year after kidnapping his five-year-old son from West Bengal, an official said on Saturday.

The police on Friday nabbed Bilal Moham-

med Manik Mulla from Ambernath in Thane district, inspector Krishna Kokni of Crime Unit I said.

The accused had allegedly kidnapped his son from South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal in early 2020, and had been on the run ever

since, the official said.

The West Bengal police had recently received a tip-off that the accused was in Thane and accordingly, they alerted the police here, he said.

According to the police, the accused had abducted his son from

his second wife and sent him away to Bangladesh with his first wife.

Based on a complaint lodged by the child's mother at the time, a case under section 363 (kidnapping) and other provisions of the IPC was registered against the accused.

## "No CM in India as weak as Nitish Kumar": Tejashwi Yadav

PATNA, 13 MAR:

Slamming the Bihar government over the issue of liquor smuggling by a family member of a minister in the state cabinet, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav on Saturday claimed that no chief minister in the country is as "weak" as Nitish Kumar.

"The allegations of smuggling of liquor against a minister is a serious matter. The government must discuss this in the house. When there are serious allegations against his minister, Nitish Kumar has been absent. The government is

scared and nervous. They are not allowing the Opposition to speak. They fear that we will show the evidence. There is no such weak chief minister in the country as Nitish Kumar," Mr Yadav told mediapersons in Patna.

Hitting out at Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tarkishore Prasad, Mr Yadav said, "The deputy chief minister is not a constitutional post. When the speaker is allowing me to speak then why is he interrupting. Who does give him the right to dictate the speaker? This government has made those people min-

isters who do not aware of the constitution."

The RJD leader alleged that the state government has destroyed Bihar in every aspect.

"There is high inflation. Unemployment is at its peak. From farmers to students, all are unhappy. Women are not safe. The government is not allowing us to put our views in the House. It is a dictatorship. Vidhan Sabha has become the office of Janata Dal (United) and Bharatiya Janata Party," said Mr Yadav.

Earlier in the day, Tejashwi, Tej Pratap Yadav and other RJD MLAs held

a protest march towards the Raj Bhawan after walking out of the Bihar assembly. They met the Governor and raised the issue before him.

Notably, there was a ruckus in the Bihar assembly regarding the allegations of smuggling of illicit liquor against state minister Ramsurat Rai. The controversy surfaced after illicit liquor was recovered earlier this week from a school in Muzaffarpur run by Mr Rai's brother.

In 2016, Nitish Kumar banned alcohol consumption in Bihar making it a dry state.

"As per preliminary reports, the incident took place due to family feud," the official release said.

Meanwhile, BJP Assam President Ranjeet Kumar Dass condemned the incident and demanded strict action against the culprit.

The deceased was the president of the committee of the No 20 booth of Burhidihing Gaon panchayat under Margherita Assembly constituency, which is going for polls in the first phase on March 27.

## Alkem donates Rs 7.5 lac to Mayal Lyang Children's Home

BIKASH CHETTRI

NAMCHI, 13 MAR:

Alkem Laboratory Unit, a pharmaceutical company located in Samardung, South Sikkim, organized a program with Mayal Lyang Children's Home, Namchi, today at the premises of the children's home. The program was organized in memory of the founder of Alkem Laboratory Unit, Late Samprada Singh.

During the program it was informed that Rs 7.5 lakh has been donated to Mayal Lyang Children's Home by Alkem Laboratory Unit, Samardung for the financial year April 2020 to March 2021. The donation, provided under the company's CSR activities, included house rent for the Home, fooding expenses, academic expenses, smart tele-



vision for the children, and occasional gifts and health-care products for the children throughout the year.

In his short address, general manager of Alkem Laboratory Unit, Ramakant Rai, said that the unit has proposed the new budget for Mayal Lyang Children Home for April 2021 to March 2022.

Head of the Mayal Lyang Children's Home, Suk Tshering Lepcha announced that the orphanage is working in collaboration with the Alkem Laboratory Unit Samardung.

The short program had cultural performances and also saw the distribution of gifts to the children by the Alkem Laboratory Unit.

Toffees made by the children were offered to the guests during the program.

The cultural programs presented to the guests by the orphanage children were; the welcome song 'Phool Hau Hami Bagaichako', three dances and the theme song 'Blessed home Mayal Lyang is my home'.

## Chandmari candidate Doncee Lama allotted Pen symbol

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 13 MAR:

Doncee Lama is contesting the upcoming Municipal elections from Chandmari ward of the Gangtok Municipal Corporation. She has been allotted the symbol of "Pen with seven rays" for this election.

Doncee Lama is a resident of Chandmari and was the Sports wing social media in-charge & Vice Convener of Nari Shakti, Chandmari, for Sikkim Krantikari Morcha. She recently resigned from her post to contest the upcoming municipal elections.

Ms Lama informed



that she chose the symbol of "Pen with seven rays" because Chandmari has seven serious

problems which she wants to address. These are road condition, water & electricity, non-ex-

istence of cooperatives, public toilets, digital signature, education, and cleanliness.

## IIT KGP receives over Rs 2cr student grant from alumni

KOLKATA, MAR 13 (PTI):

IIT Kharagpur has instituted eight new student grants for the autumn semester scheduled to begin in August this year as a group of alumni and their families have raised a corpus of over Rs 2 crore.

The institute has received generous grants from eight alumni and their families, who have come forward to support the students in need, according to a statement issued by IIT



Kharagpur on Friday.

The aids are collectively valued at around Rs 2.25 crore which will be utilised to support undergraduate and postgraduate students of chemis-

try and various engineering departments through merit-based scholarships and awards, it said.

A memorandum of understanding was signed with the for-

mer students and their families for instituting the grants at a recently-concluded virtual event, the institute said in the statement.

A key feature of these grants is that over Rs 65 lakh has been allocated for undergraduate female students exclusively.

IIT Kharagpur Director Prof VK Tewari congratulated the former students for their contributions.

## BJP booth committee president stabbed to death in Assam

TINSUKIA, MAR 13 (PTI):

A BJP booth committee president was stabbed to death in Assam's Tinsukia district by one person, who has already been arrested, police said on Saturday.

According to a senior police officer, the incident took place on Friday night at No 1 Doomdooma Nagaon village under Bordumsa police station of the district.

After a minor altercation, one Jay Chan-



dra Gogoi several times stabbed BJP member Deba Gogoi, who died of the injury, police said.

The accused was later arrested and further investigation is on, he added. Meanwhile, the

Tinsukia Information and Public Relations Officer said in a statement that there is no political angle in the murder and appealed to the people to maintain peace.

### OBITUARY



*In everlasting memory of*  
**SH TANMAY GHOSH**  
(01.01.1960 - 01.03.2021)  
(Retd. from Rangit Power Station, NHPC Ltd.)  
*We miss you every moment of our lives, your presence continues to surround us, you still live in the hearts & mind of your loving family & friends you left behind.*  
*In reverence & remembrance*  
*All employees of Rangit Power Station, family & friends.*

### KUTSE SHEGU



The 49th days kutse Shegu of Lt. Tashi Doma Bhutia of Upper Ghorpisey, Namchi South Sikkim who left her heavenly abode on 26th January 2021 falls on 15th March 2021.  
All relatives, friends and well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence Upper Ghorpisey, Namchi.  
We also express our sincere gratitude to all those who extended their support during our time of bereavement.  
*Mr. Norden Bhutia (husband),  
Mr. I Sonam Topgay Bhutia (son)  
Ms. Tshering Denka Bhutia (daughter)  
Ms. Pema Choden Bhutia (daughter).*



# Aa Jee Lein Zara: A surreal journey of love and passion

PS SUBBA

About Mahatma Gandhi – “Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth”. This incredible story too seems to be directly from the fairytale. The only difference is that this story began just here in this beautiful mountainous state Sikkim, precisely in Sikkim Govt College, Tadong. The protagonist of this story, Pramod Rajput, born in a tiny remote village of Chapra District in Bihar and son of an Army personnel was a student at this college in 1984-86 batch in BSc Mathematics (Pass course). In a very first year of this college, he fell in love with her classmate Sujata, daughter of another Army personnel from Madhya Pradesh. Since their cast was different their parents were against their love. In a very dramatic circumstances, Pramod and Sujata married secretly in Aho Mandir in presence of 3 of their friends from the same class. They were just 19-20 years old at that time. When their parents came to know about this marriage, they tried to separate them by all means. As a result of this for the sake of their love both of them ran away one day from their houses and even left Sikkim. Once they eloped their parents somehow agreed to their marriage and brought them back. Now they started going to college as husband and wife. In spite of doing all these situations, Pramod was the topper of the Sikkim Govt College on 1986 batch. After the college, their father retired from Army and the young couple moved to their village in Bihar. They



did their Mathematics honors from Bihar University and then Master in Computer Applications from North Bengal University, Siliguri.

Taking baby steps in their career, in 2000, they moved to Europe and in 2003 in USA. Now they are a very successful computer professionals and citizen of USA living there with two daughters and 84 years old father. One of their

daughters is already married now and well settled in her life.

Pramod used to write Hindi Poetries (Ghazals and nazm) from college days. In 2017 on his 50th birthday he decided to bring his Hindi poetries out of his computer files to the world. He started a YouTube channel with the name Kuchh Meri Kalam Se and also started a website

www.pramodrajput.com. He got instant success and became a regular poet in local Mushaira and Kavi-Sammelan sharing stage with big poets from across the globe. Pramod got popularity when on 07 Feb, 2019, a sher from one of his ghazals were quoted in Indian Parliament by the leader of opposition Mallikarjun Kharge and in the reply to him two shers from the same ghazal of him was quoted by none other than the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi. Perhaps, it happened first time in history that Leader of opposition and the Prime Minister quoted from the same poem of a poet. On the same year 2019, Pramod published his first book with the name Aa Jee Lein Zara which is available all over the world on Amazon. Recently his two more books which are novels with the name Saat Rang Pyaar Ke (in Hindi) and Seven Colors Of Love (in English) got published and available on amazon.

In recent book fair of Gangtok, Pramod's book Aa Jee Lein Zara was available on Hindi Book stall. After that Pramod's close friend and batch mate of 1986, Chucksung Lepcha (Additional Director Education Department, Govt of Sikkim) decided to present this book to some dignitaries of Sikkim including the honorable Governor and Chief Minister. Mr Chucksung presented Aa Jee Lein Zara to Shri Ganga Prasad the honorable Governor of Sikkim on 05 March. Mr Chucksung also decided to tell this fascinating and motivating story of Love and passion to the people of Sikkim.

*Pramod Rajput can be reached at Pramod.rajput@gmail.com*

## National Youth Parliament awardee meets CM



GANGTOK, 13 MAR (IPR):

An awardee of the National Youth Parliament Festival, 2021 organised under the aegis of Ministry of Youth Affairs Government of India and NSS, Avinam Manger called on the

Chief Minister of Sikkim, Prem Singh Tamang at Mintokgang, today.

Enquiring about his wellbeing, Chief Minister congratulated him and assured every possible support towards his career. He is a resident of Dikchu, East Sikkim and

is the son of DN Manger and Jashodha Gurung.

Presently, he is pursuing English Literature from NB Bhandari Degree College, Tadong. It is also mentioned that his oratory skills were highly appreciated by the Prime Minister through a tweet.

## Stitching, Crochet and Product-Making training at Yuksam

SUMMIT REPORT  
YUKSAM, 13 MAR:

A 3-day workshop on Stitching, Crochet and Product making concluded on Saturday at Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee training hall in Yuksam.

The workshop was co-financed by Secure Himalaya, UNDP and Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee and had Mon Bahadur Thatal and Tshering Uden Bhutia as master trainers.



By the end of the three days, the more than 30 trainees had acquired the skills to craft face masks, shopping bags/

jholas, wallets, phone pouches, crochet teddy bears, crochet strawberry key-chains, tote bags, caps etc.

## Endless wait for Korea jobs.....

“I am confused about what I should be doing. What if I give up and start doing something else and then migration to South Korea resumes?” said Bhatta. “If I start my own business, then I would again need to take loans as I come from a middle-class family. The government should at least clearly tell us whether we are going or not.”

According to Nepal government statistics, more than 65,000 Nepali workers have gone to South Korea since 2008 under the EPS. The East Asian country remains the preferred labour destination country for aspiring Nepali migrants for its better pay, safety and other facilities compared to destination countries in the Persian Gulf.

Starting from January 2021, the minimum wage in South Korea has been hiked by 1.5 percent from South Korean won 8,590 per hour to 8,720 (approximately Rs892) per hour.

If a labourer works 209 hours every month, the labourer can now earn 1,822,480 won (or around Rs 186,398). The minimum new wage in the country is applied to all industries.

Meanwhile, people like Sodari and Bhatta have been thronging the government agencies like the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, Department of Foreign Employment and Employment Permit System (EPS) Korea Section to inquire about their prospects of reaching South Korea.

They have even formed ‘EPS Victims Family’, a loose group of over 100 candidates, under Sodari's leadership to put pressure on these agencies so that they can get to South Korea at the earliest. In July last year, frustrated with the delay, they even protested at Maitighar Mandala.

There are nearly 8,000 Nepali workers, including first-timers and returnees, who have contracts for the second stints in Korea, waiting, according to government data. Prakash Shrestha from Ramechhap had returned home in December 2019 during a job break. He had the option of rejoining the same job after his leave.

“I had signed the contract that I would return in three months. I wanted to return as it is a well-paying job. I could again work for four years and ten months,” said Shrestha, who has been living in Kathmandu doing nothing for nearly a year now. “While I have been spending my hard-earned money in Nepal, the government should clearly say whether we would ever reach Korea or not.”

However, so far, Sodari, Bhatta, Shrestha and thousands of others do not see any light at the end of the tunnel.

All they hear from the authorities is the message of ‘wait and see’. According to Kumar Prasad Dahal, director general at the Department of Foreign Employment, although Nepal's migration to South Korea has been halted for a long time, there has been no change in policy, meaning they can still go.

“The Covid-19 pandemic affected the migration to South Korea,” said Dahal. “But as there are no policy barriers, we hope that some candidates will be sent this month or the next.”

South Korea has started taking workers from Vietnam and Cambodia through sampling, according to Dahal.

“But Nepal is still placed among high-risk countries, and therefore, Nepali workers’ departures have not resumed yet,” he added.

Government authorities have been saying that it's the South Korean side that has not allowed Nepali workers to enter the country.

“Despite having a government-to-government agreement deal with the Korean government, demand for workers has to come from the private sector. If they do not demand our workers, then the government cannot do anything,” said Dahal. “Once the demand pours

in, they have to take our workers.”

But if Shrestha's case is anything to go by there is still demand for Nepali workers.

“The company has been sending me texts repeatedly asking when I would join,” he told the Post.

Like thousands of other workers, Shrestha is also worried that prolonged uncertainty might cost him his job in South Korea.

“Contracts of around 40 percent of workers who wanted to return to my company have been cancelled as they could not report on time. The employer cannot wait for months,” said Shrestha. “I fear the same for myself.”

When the Post reached out to the South Korean Embassy in Kathmandu to inquire over the ongoing delay in sending workers, they refused to talk and instead suggested consulting with the EPS Centre, the Nepal chapter of the Human Resources Development Service, South Korea.

The EPS Centre, in return, did not comment and asked the Post to talk to the Employment Permit System (EPS) Korea Section under the Department of Foreign Employment.

But labour migration experts and aspiring migrants say that while the host government could be on ‘wait and see’ mode before allowing Nepali workers in, the Nepal government could have taken the required initiative all these months.

“First of all, we have to see whether our government is even interested in sending these workers,” said Swarna Kumar Jha, a migration expert who is also a coordinator of the National Network for Safe Migration. “If it is, then there could be a diplomatic intervention.”

Candidates too blame it on the government's failure to negotiate diplomatically with the Korean government.

“All they give is a readymade answer that it will resume soon and they are waiting for a response from Korean authorities,” said Sodari. “The bureaucrats alone cannot do much unless the labour minister or the foreign minister or even the prime minister steps in to resolve our issues.”

Dahal agrees that a diplomatic resolution could speed up the issue. “A high-level diplomatic discussion could possibly lead to removing Nepal from high-risk countries and resumption of Nepali workers’ departure,” said Dahal.

But experts say the ongoing political instability means that the government has not been able to focus.

“Recent political upheavals, change of leadership in the Labour Ministry with the new minister and secretary and relations between the political leadership and bureaucrats must have affected the whole scenario,” said Jha. “A G2G deal in supplying Nepali workers makes it even easier to discuss the matter at a high level, if not physically then virtually. The Nepali mission in South Korea must be taking its initiatives, but at times such a decision should also come from the Nepal government or a high level, which does not seem to have happened.”

Meanwhile, workers like Sodari have no option but to wait. The wait so far has already been long enough.

“I had to take loans to fund my Korean language preparation and stay in Kathmandu. I invested tens of thousands of rupees and worked hard for eight months,” said Sodari. “Starting from 2018, I have already spent three years for the Korean job. I never knew it would take so long. My family members and I are frustrated over the future of my job.”

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## Odisha cop suspended after skeleton found in seized car

**BHUBANESWAR, MAR 13 (PTI):** An assistant sub-inspector, who is also in-charge of a police outpost here, was suspended recently after a skeleton was recovered from a car parked on its premises, a senior officer said on Saturday.

Bhubaneswar Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Umashankar Dash told reporters that the remains of a middle-aged woman were found in a car that was seized two years ago in connection with a ganja smuggling case and had since been parked outside Janla outpost here.

The Behrampur Police, which had seized the car here, had sought to seek its release from Janla outpost in February, when the skeleton was found in the vehicle. A post-mortem at AIIMS-Bhubaneswar revealed that the deceased was a 45-year-old woman, who suffered from tuberculosis, the DCP said.

According to police sources, the skeleton had surfaced last month, but the matter was taken up by the authorities only recently after the media got a whiff about the incident and enquired about it.

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**PAEDIATRIC CLINIC & O P D**

8.00 am And 6.00 pm

**VACCINATION CLINIC**



## Expenditure Rush

### More evidence of March Madness in accounts sections of govt depts

In these times of climate change and global warming, readers are often informed about weather-related trends like the hottest year, coldest or wettest day of the year etc. Now, Sikkim can add the richest Month of the year to this list of extremes. And that honour will go to the month of March, the last month of a financial year when Sikkim's babus, the hands that form the executive branch of governance, suddenly wake up to their task of utilizing funds earmarked for various planned projects and undertakings. And even then they appear to wait right until the last day to spend (hopefully on development) crores which they should have staggered through the year to ensure that projects were not stalled or delayed.

A segment politely titled, "Rush of Expenditure", the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on State Finances for the year ended March 2018 informs that despite standing rules – as enumerated in the Sikkim Financial Rules (yes, ironically, there are such rules in place) - recommending that rush of expenditure be avoided in the closing month of the financial year, the accounts sections of various government departments continue to go on a spending overdrive because, clearly, for the rest of the eleven months they keep busy with something else. As per Note 3 of Rule 84 of Sikkim Financial Rules, 1979 rush of expenditure, particularly in the closing month of the financial year, is to be regarded as a breach of financial regularity and should be avoided.

This Report details that contrary to provisions of the Sikkim Finance Rules, the State Government incurred an expenditure under 42 Major Heads (22 grants/ appropriations) incurred during the month of March 2018 was Rs 413.50 crore, which ranged between 52 and 100 per cent of the total expenditure under those "Major Heads." Before that, Rs 1,062.25 crore, 22.26% of the total expenditure for the year 2016-17, was blown up in the month of March 2017 alone! Lessons continue not to be learned and recommendations of the CAG Report continue to be ignored with alacrity. For the eternal optimist, things are on the mend, but not really so, since Sikkim's accountants have actually been "improving" on their last-month spending spree. In the financial year 2015-16, they signed away "only" 18.29% of the state exchequer's total expenditure for the fiscal in March. This had worked out to Rs 823.44 crore for March 2016.

The extravagance of perhaps needs more clarity. The Sikkim Government has still not brought out a Budget Manual detailing the procedures for preparation of budget estimates, realisation of revenue, control over expenditure etc. As a result, against the total provision of Rs 7,463.79 crore during 2017-18, only an expenditure of Rs 6,019.07 crore was incurred. And people still talk of funds crunch. Perhaps, if they planned their spending better, it would have been logistically possible to spend everything. In 2017-18, as a result, Rs 1,444.82 crore (19.36 per cent) was left unspent despite being provided for.

On 31 March 2017, the last day of the financial year, the accounts sections burned the midnight oil to clear Rs 352.16 crore on one day alone – 7.38% of the total expenditure for the year. If it is any consolation, and it should not be, this was lower than what they had spent on 31 March 2016 - Rs 530.87 crore, 11.79 per cent of its total expenditure for the financial year 2015-16!

To get some context, an evenly distributed, properly planned and executed expenditure schedule for the year would have seen an average of 8.33% of the total expenditure spent every month. But the accounts divisions of government departments are clearly not bothered by such rules and regulations, and in fact appear resolutely intent on thumbing their noses at such directives. In 14 cases, 100 per cent expenditure for the year 2017-18 was incurred in March, which, in case anyone has doubts, was contrary to the extant rules. Rush of expenditure towards the end of the year is obviously indicative of weak budgetary and monetary control. This revelation begs the question: What did the departments do with these 14 projects through the previous 11 months? Most probably received complaints and dodged accountability.

Now, some readers might expect a comment to follow from the details shared above. But really, is a comment even required after a piece littered with so many exclamation marks and presentation of evidence of such mind-boggling ineptitude?

# Meghan Markle, the UK Press and the Problem of Diversity

NINA ROBINSON  
THECONVERSATION.COM

The resignation of the executive director of the Society of Editors, Ian Murray, represents a welcome step in the long battle to tackle structural racism in the UK media. Murray stepped down after his assertion that the "UK media is not bigoted" caused an outcry in the industry.

His comment came in response to Oprah Winfrey's interview with the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, where they spoke of being subjected to racist treatment by the tabloids. During the interview, headlines were shown highlighting the different way Meghan Markle had been treated by the UK press compared with her sister-in-law, Kate Middleton, the Duchess of Cambridge. Buzzfeed pulled together 20 headlines to compare the way they are treated.

Journalists across the industry came together in a show of allyship to counter Murray's assertion. ITV News anchor Charlene White pulled out of the Society's National Press Awards, due to be held on March 31. White, the first Black woman to present ITV News at Ten, wrote: "Perhaps it's best for you to look elsewhere for a host for your awards this year. Perhaps someone whose views align with yours."

Among many senior journalists to comment on the issue of race and diversity in the media, Katherine Viner, the editor-in-chief of The Guardian said: "Every institution in the United Kingdom is currently examining its own position on vital issues of race and the treatment of people of colour ... the media must do the same. It must be much more representative and more self-aware."

Murray's insistence that, "The UK media has a proud record of calling out racism ... If sometimes the questions asked are awkward and embarrassing, then so be it, but the press is most certainly not racist," bears no relation to my experience as a woman of colour and experienced journalist. But there is a growing body of research to demonstrate how the media fails to represent the voices people from diverse ethnic backgrounds people and women.

In 18 years as a journalist I have seen more and more "dog whistling" on race, ethnicity and immigration issues by the UK press, something that became hugely pronounced during the Brexit campaign. Coverage of Eastern European migration using language emphasising "floods" and "hordes" of migrants to a country under "siege" was followed by an increase in hate crime. Home Office



data showed a 41% increase in race and religious hate crimes in 2016 after the Brexit vote. Language has consequences.

#### DIVERSITY PROBLEM

According to a Reuters Institute report (2015) UK journalism has a "significant" diversity problem with Black Britons underrepresented by a "factor of more than ten". A 2017 report from the National Council for the Training of Journalists found that 94% of journalists in the UK are white. When you consider that most news organisations are based in London, where 2011 census data shows the population is 60% white, that suggests a considerable shortfall in people from diverse ethnic backgrounds in those newsrooms.

A Women in Journalism snapshot analysis in September 2020 analysing a week of news coverage on TV, radio and newspaper front pages found that, of 111 voices quoted, just one belonged to a Black person.

More important than the race for numbers is the lack of inclusion. Inclusion means you are included in the workplace team and not made to feel like an "outsider" for being "different". Being on the outside, with a constant feeling of being undermined and misunderstood, has a cumulative and damaging effect.

My colleague Marverine Duffy, head of undergraduate journalism at Birmingham City University (BCU), has called out what she sees as a "culture of fear and cliqueness" in some newsrooms. This sense of

non-inclusion often leads to people of colour prematurely leaving the profession. So an overemphasis on entry-level diversity schemes in media organisations is the wrong approach.

#### WHO ARE THE GATEKEEPERS?

My research project for the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity is looking at the "gatekeepers" of radio news, collating data on the ethnic background of senior managers in the sector to look at how power is distributed in the industry.

It's the senior managers who determine hiring and firing, support and sponsorship. They decide which stories to cover and how. A story I worked on with a Black colleague about immigration to the UK was supposed to look positively at the improvement of Eastern European children's language skills as they settled into Britain. One of the senior editors stepped in and changed the focus of the piece to emphasise a "flood" of families overwhelming schools. We were powerless to do anything about it.

The BBC's Annual Report for 2019-20 admitted it was "a long way from our leadership target for BAME representation", adding that "there is still a lot more ... to do to increase the percentages of women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds at the highest levels of the BBC".

#### MEDIA MATTERS

An Ofcom report from 2019 found there serious diversity issues in the UK's radio broadcasting in-

dustry, with only 7% of employees from BAME backgrounds compared to 12% in the wider population. This matters because the media amplifies and projects a narrative to the whole of the UK. It is a reflection of the nation and if we are putting out a one-sided picture where people of colour are portrayed with (often negative) stereotypes, it breeds division and hostility in the wider community.

In their 2021 book Access All Areas, Marcus Ryder, a visiting professor at BCU's Centre for Media Diversity, and Sir Lenny Henry argue that representation of "minorities" in the media industry is the wrong way to view the data. They make the point that the group that holds the most power in the UK media still tends to be white, able-bodied, heterosexual men from London and the south-east – who actually only make up 3% of the UK's population.

Women – who are also woefully under-represented in the top echelons of the media – people of colour, the LGBTQ+ community, people who are disabled or live outside London and the south-east make up the vast majority of the UK population.

Their voices must be heard and represented fully in the media for any well-functioning democracy. Anyone who doesn't recognise this – or worse still, denies there's even a problem – should not be speaking on our behalf.

*[the writer is Lecturer, Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity, School of Journalism, Birmingham City University]*

## COVID Vaccines: Is It Wrong to Jump the Queue?

DOMINIC WILKINSON & JONATHAN PUGH  
THECONVERSATION.COM

In the UK, an Oxford city councillor has been suspended after mentioning on social media that she had received a COVID vaccination from a private doctor. Meanwhile, media reports suggest that two Spanish princesses, who did not yet qualify for vaccination in Spain were vaccinated while visiting their father in the United Arab Emirates. They are among a number of ultra-wealthy people getting vaccinated in that country.

There have also been reports of people accessing vaccines early in the UK, despite not being in any of the groups prioritised for vaccination at the time.

So how concerned should we be about these cases?

One issue relates to the lawfulness of providing a vaccine outside the national allocation scheme. In the UK, COVID vaccines are not authorised outside of the NHS. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency is carrying out an investigation into the Oxford case.

Strict controls over the distribution of a vaccine are justified to ensure the safety and efficacy of vaccines. Regulations are partly to protect patients, but also to protect the public at large. If someone receives an ineffective vaccine, they may be falsely reassured and go on to un-

wittingly spread the virus. Someone who receives an unsafe vaccine may experience side-effects that not only harm her but also undermine confidence in vaccines in the wider community.

But an even more important reason for ensuring that access to the vaccine occurs in an orderly way is based on considerations of justice. Approved vaccines are still a scarce resource. Not everyone who wants to access a vaccine has yet been able to. So there needs to be an ethical decision about who should receive the vaccine first. That is why there is a queue.

#### TWO WAYS TO JUMP THE QUEUE

It is important to separate two cases. In some cases, queue jumping is wrong because it involves displacement – taking someone else's place.

To use a trivial example, if there are 100 seats in a cinema and you jump a queue of 100, someone who has waited will not get a seat. This sort of displacement can be wrong because it disrupts a fair process for allocation. Someone misses out.

But with vaccines, there is a more important reason. Vaccine allocation schemes prioritise those at greatest risk of severe COVID. If someone jumps the queue, another person who is at higher risk will have their vaccine delayed and may become se-

riously ill in the meantime.

But other cases do not involve displacement. In the case of the Oxford councillor or the Spanish princesses, they did not take the place of someone in the UK or Spanish allocation schemes. Their vaccines were from a separate pool. No one had their vaccine delayed. That is like someone avoiding the queue for the cinema by paying for a private screening.

Queue jumping is not necessarily wrong if no one is displaced. Actually, in some cases, queue jumping is morally the right thing to do.

Some people have been vaccinated early using doses that would otherwise not be used. It would be morally wrong to waste COVID vaccines given the global scarcity. So if you are offered a vaccine through the national scheme, it is best to take it, regardless of whether you are in a current priority group.

#### QUEUE JUMPING AND INEQUALITY

Some people object to queue jumping, even if it does not clearly involve displacement. One thought is that it might be unfair for someone to get the vaccine earlier than they are supposed to, even if it doesn't affect anyone else's access. For instance, allowing people to pay for vaccination outside of the public system would introduce new forms of inequality.

Yet the claim that all unequal-

ity must be avoided is controversial. Our society is unequal in many ways – the very existence of private healthcare is one example. We could make everyone equal by taking away any option for private healthcare, but that would make some people worse off and no one would be better off. Philosophers call this "levelling down" inequality.

Another reason for concern about public figures jumping the queue is because of the message it sends. It might undermine confidence in the national allocation of vaccines if politicians or public figures are seen to bypass the scheme.

Social solidarity is a key component of a successful response to the pandemic and may be threatened if public figures are seen to circumvent the rules everyone else is abiding by. That may be less of a concern for private citizens.

Right now, it is vital that vaccines are distributed in an orderly and ethically informed way. The English famously love to queue – and to complain about those who are pushing in. But all queue jumping is not equal, and not all queue jumping for vaccines is wrong.

*[Dominic Wilkinson is Consultant Neonatologist and Professor of Ethics, University of Oxford; Jonathan Pugh is Research Fel-*

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## Parody tracks add heft to poll battle cry in Bengal



**KOLKATA, MAR 13 (PTI):** With election campaigning in West Bengal having reached fever pitch, parties are looking for ways to spice up the battle cry, with some of them launching snappy poll slogans and parodies of popular songs to take a jibe at rival camps.

After the raging success of TMC's 'khela hobe' number, the Left has come up with its own version of Shah Rukh Khan's 'lungi dance' hit song from 'Chennai Express', as it sought to mellifluously criticise the policies of the BJP-led Centre as well as the Mamata Banerjee government in the state.

Sharpening its attack on the TMC, the parody touches various issues such as coal pilferage from abandoned mines, Sarada scam, 'cut-money'

allegations.

It does not spare the saffron camp either, calling out the party over escalating fuel prices, privatization of profit making PSUs among other issues.

The 3.14-minute song -- Hal pherao lal pherao -- asks people to vote for the Left Front to restore West Bengal's glory.

Senior party leader and its candidate from Jadavpur, Sujan Chakraborty, said the parody, which has gone viral on social media, aims to reach out to a wider audience.

Shubhajit Sarkar, the state committee member of SFI -- the CPI(M) students wing said, "We hope to drive home our inherent messages through music."

"After the over-

whelming success of 'Tumpa Sona' parody, which egged on people to attend the February 28 Brigade Rally (by the Left, Congress and the ISF), we are sure this one, too, will hit the right notes," he added.

Earlier, the BJP had released its campaign song 'Pishi Jao', recreating the famous 'Bella Ciao' song of Italy.

In the video, the saffron party talks about the problems faced by the people of West Bengal under Mamata Banerjee's rule and asks "Pishi" (as Banerjee is sarcastically referred to by the opposition camp for allegedly favouring his nephew and TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee) to leave the seat of power in the state.

## Kenyan runner convicted of doping offense in criminal court

**NAIROBI, MAR 13 (AP):** A female runner became the first athlete in Kenya to be convicted of a doping offense in a criminal court.

Distance runner Florence Jepkosgei Chepsoi, who finished second at the 2019 Jakarta Marathon, was sentenced to one year of community service after she was found guilty of presenting false documents and lying to the Kenyan anti-doping agency at a hearing.

She changed her plea to guilty having initially pleaded not guilty when she was first charged in court last year.

Kenya criminalized doping offenses in 2016 in the midst of a stream of drug scandals among its world-renowned distance runners. The East African nation updated its anti-doping laws late last year.

Chepsoi was initially charged with doping by

the Anti-Doping Agency of Kenya in 2017 after testing positive for the banned steroid prednisolone at a race in China.

When she appeared before a tribunal, she presented documents she claimed were from a hospital as part of her defense. ADAK found the documents were forgeries and Chepsoi had never been treated at the hospital, leading the anti-doping body to push for her to be prosecuted in a criminal court.

It's rare for an athlete to face criminal charges for doping offenses, although Chepsoi is not the first worldwide.

Criminal prosecutors normally target people such as doctors and other support staff who facilitate doping in what they refer to as doping conspiracies rather than the athletes themselves. The World Anti-Doping Agency rec-

ommends athletes do not face criminal prosecution for doping.

The United States passed a law in December that criminalized doping conspiracies and allows U.S. prosecutors to go after doping schemes at international events in which Americans are involved as athletes, sponsors or broadcasters.

The Rodchenkov Anti-Doping Act was named after Grigory Rodchenkov, the former Moscow lab director who helped uncover state-sponsored doping by Russian athletes.

However, the Rodchenko Act makes clear that individual athletes are not subject to prosecution.

ADAK said more athletes would "face the law" for doping in the coming days. Four other Kenyan athletes are facing criminal charges for doping offenses.

## Assam reports 21 new COVID-19 cases

**GUWAHATI, MAR 12 (PTI):** Assam reported 21 new COVID-19 positive cases on Friday taking the total case load to 2,17,776, according to a bulletin issued by the National Health Mission, Assam.

Meanwhile, 19,219 beneficiaries were administered the COVID-19 jabs during the day taking the total to 5,24,629 so far, the bulletin said.

A total 934 people with comorbidities, 5923 senior citizens and 8,058 health care workers and front-line workers received the first dose of the vaccine on Friday.

Around 4,304 health care and front line workers had received the second dose of vaccine on

Wednesday.

The cumulative total number of beneficiaries and health care workers who received the first dose of the vaccine so far in the state is 4,47,724, while 76,905 received the second dose.

There was no case of adverse event Following immunization reported during the day.

Among the 21 new positive cases detected during the day, six were from Sonitpur, five from Kamrup Metropolitan, and three each from Dibrugarh and Nagaon.

The state reported no fresh deaths during the day due to the contagio. As a result the total number of deaths due to the disease remained at 1097 and the current death rate

is 0.50 per cent, the bulletin said.

Altogether 1347 COVID positive patients have died due to other reasons, it said.

The number of active cases in the state is 281 currently.

The new cases were detected out of 12,475 tests with a positivity rate 0.17 per cent, the bulletin said.

The total tests conducted so far have reached 70,04,429 including both RT-PCR and Rapid Antigen Test. The number of recovered patients discharged during the day was 18 while the recovery rate in the state is currently 98.75 per cent, the bulletin said.

The total number of recovered patients so far is 2,15,041, it added.

## Former Union minister Yashwant Sinha joins TMC

**KOLKATA, MAR 13 (PTI):** Former Union minister Yashwant Sinha, a bitter critic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi regime, on Saturday joined Trinamool Congress days ahead of the high-octane West Bengal assembly polls.

Sinha, who served in the cabinet of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, had quit the saffron party in 2018 after having serious differences with the party leadership.

His son Jayant Sinha is the BJP MP from Hazaribagh in Jharkhand.

"The country is passing through a strange situation. Our values and principles are in danger.

"The strength of



democracy lies in the robustness of its institutions, and all the institutions have been weakened systematically," Sinha said.

The octogenarian leader pledged support to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in her fight against the BJP:

"We welcome Yashwant Sinha to our party. His participation

would strengthen our fight against the BJP in the elections," TMC Lok Sabha party leader Sudip Bandopadhyay said.

Sinha had served as Union Finance minister twice- once in the Chandrasekhar cabinet in 1990 and then again in the Vajpayee ministry.

He also held portfolio of External Affairs ministry in the Vajpayee cabinet.

## Nepal's rebuttal to international rights concerns draws flak

**BINOD GHIMIRE**

**KATHMANDU, 13 MAR [THEGUARDIAN]:**

On March 7 the National Human Rights Commission issued a statement in response to a statement by three international human rights organisations saying that they were interfering in the internal matter of a sovereign nation.

On March 1, the New York-based Human Rights Watch, the Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists, and London-based Amnesty International had urged the government to immediately withdraw the appointments to the National Human Rights Commission that undermines the independence of constitutional human rights bodies as they were made without consultation or parliamentary approval.

The appointments in question were among the 38 recommendations made by the Constitutional Council on December 15 in 11 different constitutional bodies after the amendment to the Constitutional Council (Functions, Duties, and Procedures) Act, through an ordinance, allowing the council to recommend names in the presence of three of the six members.

On February 3, President Bidya Devi Bhattarai administered the oath to 32 of them while the writ against the ordinance was sub-judice in the Supreme Court.

"The illegitimate appointments process is not simply an abstract irregularity but will lead to ineffective and weak implementation of critical mandates to protect human rights and other rule of law objectives," read the March 1 statement.

In its rebuttal, the National Human Rights Commission said, "It is unfortunate that the statement questions sanctity and the credibility of the human rights institutions of Nepal which is a party to most of the fundamental human rights treaties."

"It is very surprising to know that the international human rights organisations tacitly urge the international community in an indirect way not to cooperate with the commission which has been working hard to serve the people of Nepal in the field of human rights," it added.

But former office-bearers in the commission and the human rights lawyers say the rebuttal was unprincipled and unwarranted and it looked like the constitutional human rights watchdog was defending the government.

"The statement from the commission surprised me. Human rights is not an internal matter. It very much has an international jurisdiction," Mohna Ansari, a former member at the commission, told the Post. "By defending the move to issue the ordinance, the commission spoke on behalf of the government."

Nepal is a party to the various international human rights conventions and instruments and its laws and mechanisms must therefore adhere to basic international principles. The constitutional human rights watchdog in Nepal has the responsibility to monitor if the conventions are followed and the people have gotten their rights enshrined in the statute.

Further, since it is a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council Nepal has an added obligation to present an example as a member of the council, it has the job to assess the human rights situation across the globe.

Ansari's sentiment, therefore, is widely shared among human rights advocates.

They say it is the job of the constitutional commissions to monitor the government's activities and hold it accountable but the constitutional watchdog's move shows it could derail from its constitutional duties.

Govinda Sharma Paudyal, another former

member of the commission, said the statement from the commission added to the suspicion that the commission might compromise in its role to keep the authorities in check in the human rights issues.

"The commission was expected to pressurise the government in expediting the endorsement of amendment of the National Human Rights Commission Act-2012 after a necessary revision," he told the Post. "However, it has sided with the government by defending the ordinance."

Though the Constitution of Nepal mandates to amend the 2012's Act of the commission to make it compatible with the changed context, it hasn't been done yet.

Not only is the government not keen to strengthen the National Human Rights Commission's mandate but wants to weaken the existing one.

In April 2019 it registered an amendment bill to the Act with a provision to undermine its authority. The bill, which proposes the constitutional commission to recommend the cases it has investigated to the attorney general, is pending in the federal parliament.

The government did not push for the endorsement following criticism from different quarters. However, it has refused to revise provisions that curtail the authority of the constitutional bodies.

"The government always tries to control the constitutional bodies," said Ansari. "It is the

## Nepal's Covid-19 toll reaches 3,014 with two more death

**KATHMANDU, 13 MAR [KATHMANDUPOST]:** Nepal on Saturday reported two more Covid-19 related fatalities, pushing the death toll to 3,014. The country also recorded 60 new cases.

The overall infection tally has reached 275,178 with 915 active cases.

According to the Ministry of Health and Population, 271,249 infected people have recovered from the disease so far, 72 of them in the past 24 hours.

Kathmandu Valley recorded 44 new infections in the past 24 hours. Of them, 30 cases were confirmed in Kathmandu and 14 in

Lalitpur.

In the past 24 hours, 48 new infections were recorded in Bagmati Province, three in Gandaki, five in Lumbini, one each in Province 2 and Karnali and two in Sudurpaschim.

As of Saturday, 2,212,796 PCR tests have been carried out across the country.

A total of 2,362 PCR tests were performed in the past 24 hours, according to the data released by the ministry.

Nepal had reported 48 new infections on Friday. Similarly, 97 infections were recorded in the country on Thursday and 104 on Wednesday.

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# Liverpool's slump: a story of burnt-out brilliance and the need to go again

BARNEY RONAY

**LONDON, 13 MAR [THEGUARDIAN]:** The story of Liverpool FC's wild, thrillingly committed Premier League collapse has been told mainly in numbers so far. And to good effect. Deprived of crowds, staging or a wider emotional palette, that basic outline – 38 points down on last year; 68 home games unbeaten versus six defeats in six – has captured the starkness of a complete sporting immolation. This is a train that has simply stopped.

Better to burn out than fade away, and it has to be said no one has ever won and then lost the Premier League title quite like this. It is easy to forget that 14 games and nine wins into the current season Liverpool were five points clear at the top of the table.

After which, the meltdown. The next 14 have brought three wins and eight losses. Thirty-six goals in the first 14 games has shrunk to just 11 in the second. Jordan Henderson hadn't lost in the league at Anfield since January 2017. In February he played in three defeats in three weeks. What kind of team does this? And more to the point, why?

Over time the wider details of exactly what happened here will emerge. Our 12-volume Warren report awaits. What we have so far are ground-zero stills, our own live rolling Zapruder footage.

One thing does stand out. A brilliant team built out of Jürgen Klopp's own restless energy have come to resemble a band of hollow men limping from stage to stage, but the manager has been more or less silent on the causes. Instead he has looked uneasy, an ancient mariner stalking the

fringes – a little haunted and hollow-eyed, but passing for now on the discharge of blame. This is significant in its own right. Klopp analyses, and overanalyses. He will have his own very clear version of events. But right now he just isn't telling.

With good reason, too. Not just because Klopp is a fundamentally decent man, not naturally inclined to burn it all down in the hope of preserving his own reputation. But this is also a story that points into some difficult areas. It has been tempting to look for intangible causes, some kind of dark magic at play. In dank corners of the internet it has been suggested that ending that 30-year wait for a title has brought its own ill wind, strange humours, some kind of avenging emotional payoff.

In reality this has been a matter of structure and planning, of cause and effect. This was always a project built on the finest margins, a pared-back punkish setup, a team built to play in a way that would eventually stretch them to the edge of their own capacities. Not to mention a team built to feed on the synergy with their home crowd, and to chase the grail of another league title. What happens when both those things are wiped away at a stroke?

This is why Klopp gets a pass here. What this season's collapse tells us is that this model has built-in limits and brutally fine margins for error. In many ways it casts an even more favourable light on Klopp's achievement in building that team in the first place.

To get the clearest view it is worth going back to where this began. Klopp's team found



their definitive shape in the spring of 2018, not long after the departure of Philippe Coutinho and the arrival of Virgil van Dijk. That February Liverpool went to Porto and won 5-0, a giddy, gleeful kind of game where suddenly the front three, the full-backs, the midfield axis were all in place and it all looked thrillingly slick, a team fizzing with possibilities. A month later Mohamed Salah scored four in the 5-0 defeat of Watford. A month after that Liverpool went 3-0 up in half an hour against Manchester City, the acme of that attacking blitz style.

From there a 97-point league season in 2018-19, with the Champions League won, bled straight into the title-winning year. A peak arrived with the World Club Cup victory and the breathless return, crown slung over one shoulder, to thrash Leicester City 4-0 on Boxing Day 2019. This was a team playing with a kind of light around them.

The real stutters and stumbles arrived just after Christmas this season. Injuries were the catalyst. The real issue is the lack of cover, those fine margins again. Liverpool began the season with three battle-hardened centre-backs, two of them prone to injury.

Most teams at their level have four, or in Manches-

ter City's case six. Even Arsenal have five. What happens when your own three are suddenly unavailable?

This is where Klopp blinked, where he will draw criticism for dismantling his champion midfield to fix his defence. What could he have done differently? Klopp saw the future in the draws against West Brom and Newcastle, in the FA Cup defeat by Manchester United when Rhys Williams, a non-league footballer the year before, was traumatised by Marcus Rashford. He was right to be spooked.

The truth was out. Liverpool's replacements are a very obvious step down. These are not players ready to chase the best in Europe. No planning, no succession had been laid down. Eight out of 10 starting outfield players in the 2018 Champions League final are still in Liverpool's best team now. With Henderson and Fabinho jiggled into the centre-back roles, with Diogo Jota injured – a rare high-grade reinforcement – there was nowhere to go, no room to wriggle.

The bizarre world arrived at the start of February with the current run of six defeats in seven league games. Klopp may be keeping his counsel, bruised by

events beyond football, a little sad and tender on his touchline, with the sense that someone has shaved Aslan's mane. But the peaks of the last two years are not diminished by this.

The opposite, in fact. An unspoken truth about Klopp's title-winning Liverpool is that they don't contain many obviously great individuals. Only three players in the squad – Van Dijk, Salah and Alisson – possess the kind of galáctico chops that might make them standalone stars at one of Europe's mega-clubs. This is instead a feat of high-end coaching, shared commitment and a system perfectly geared to these parts. Very good footballers have been encouraged to reach out into the far limits of their talent. But the system also requires rest and reinforcement to sustain its levels. Neither of these came.

Last season Van Dijk, Roberto Firmino and Trent Alexander-Arnold played in every league game. Georginio Wijnaldum played 37, Andrew Robertson 36, Sadio Mané 35, Salah 34. The entire first XI played at least 10 midweek games. The same happened the year before – and this in a team where the tempo is always superheated. Opponents found being on a pitch with those red

shirts a horribly draining experience. Liverpool had to be Liverpool every week.

Signings have been made in moments of need. But the fact remains Liverpool have spent £12m net in the past two seasons. Net spend on transfer fees – not wages and bonuses – in the last four years is £60m. This is excellent business. But it isn't a recipe for resilience. In the long term you need more space to fail.

And so we have this, a fine-margins project that reached a rare pitch because of the brilliance of the system, the first XI, the shared energy from the stands. But which has, in the past 14 league games, found its own edges. This can hardly come as shock to Liverpool's owners, or indeed to Klopp. The refusal to gorge in the good times, to splurge on Timo Werner, is not neglect or poor husbandry. This is hard-nosed financial management. Assets will be sweated. Past performance is not a guarantee of future results.

There will be no waste, no sop to chasing glory. If the team burn themselves out while creating one glorious, low-cost brand-burnishing mini-era, well, so be it.

Plus, of course, that first XI is still on site. There was a glimpse of that power with Fabinho returned to midfield against RB Leipzig in midweek. The pieces could quite easily fall into their slots once again, the tempo resurrect itself, the habit of winning replace the habit of losing. But there can be no illusions now over what Klopp achieved with that high-functioning, high-wire group of fellow travellers; or what will be required to build it again.

*Lyon draws at Reims 1-1 and misses chance to pressure rivals*



**REIMS, MAR 13 (AP):** Lyon missed a chance to pressure its French title rivals and needed an injury-time equalizer from substitute Tino Kadewere to match Reims 1-1.

Midfielder Mathieu Cafaro put mid-table Reims ahead in the 32nd minute when he neatly volleyed in a cross from the right.

Kadewere earned his battling side a point when he rose superbly to nod in Memphis Depay's pinpoint cross from the left.

Third-placed Lyon is level on points with second-placed Paris Saint-Germain but behind on goal difference, and two behind leader Lille.

Reims goalkeeper Predrag Rajkovic saved well from Lyon midfielder Lucas Paqueta early in the second half, and Paqueta had a strong penalty claim dismissed

after appearing to be tripped.

As Lyon pushed forward, Depay had a low shot saved with 20 minutes left and Rajkovic reacted well to keep out a low effort from substitute Maxwell Cornet in the 82nd.

After Depay's brilliant curling effort shaved the post in the 88th, he found his range for Kadewere's head.

**WEEKEND MATCHES** Argentine coach Jorge Sampaoli takes charge of his second game for Marseille when his side faces Brest at home on Saturday.

Sunday's big game sees Lille visiting fourth-placed Monaco, which will move into title contention with a win.

Also, defending champion PSG hosts Nantes days after knocking out Barcelona to reach the Champions League quarterfinals.

## New batting philosophy won't change but need to execute plans better: Iyer

**AHMEDABAD, MAR 13 (PTI):** India's "play freely" batting philosophy that skipper Virat Kohli has advocated won't change despite the opening T20 debacle against England, the rapidly-rising Shreyas Iyer said but acknowledged that it needs better execution in the coming games.

India posted just 124 against England in the first match here on Friday, unable to cope with a very disciplined pace bowling show by the visitors, spearheaded by Jofra Archer and Mark Wood. England took just a little more than 15 overs to overhaul the target.

Asked if India will need to step away from the new batting philosophy of gong for the shots no matter what the situation, Iyer said, "...it won't change because if you see the batting line up we have and the power-hitters down the line, we don't have to change anything to be honest."

"We have come with a plan and we have to execute as much as possible because going into the world Cup we need to see to it that we tick all the boxes. This is a five-match series, so it is a perfect time to try different stuff and see what suits us," he explained.

The second T20 is scheduled to held here on Sunday.

The selectors picked IPL performers like Suryakumar Yadav, Ishan Kishan and Rahul Tewatia for the series while the in-form Rishabh Pant also made a return on the back of his strong international performances in the past couple of months.

Asked if he is under any pressure to perform, Iyer said: "I am in no sort of pressure to perform, I am playing freely, happily and enjoying my innings."

Iyer came out to bat at number five after Pant

was promoted in the batting order. He said, batting position is not his concern.

"Coming into Indian team, you have to be flexible with which batting position you will be batting. I haven't made any changes, it is just the mindset, what the team requires and (I) batted according to the situation," he said.

"It was a challenging situation, we had to keep playing the natural game and keep the scoreboard ticking irrespective of losing early wickets."

Iyer, who captains Delhi Capitals in the IPL, said his experience of playing in the league helped.

"I have been in this situation before, been there in IPL, it is not the first time. I knew I will get odd boundaries, and momentum changes if a partnership (gets going). So from that point of view, their bowlers bowled well. It was their day and kudos to them."

Asked the reason behind playing three spinners, he said: "We practised on this surface before the match and when spinners were bowling, it was stopping and turning, very similar to the two-paced wicket which we played on. The plan was to play three spinners, as that's our strength."

Talking about his thought process when he came out to bat with the team struggling at 20-3, Iyer said: "I knew Rishabh was hitting well, my thought was to just take singles. He was the dominator at the time and I decided I will play ball to ball before the spinners come on."

"It worked pretty well for me. They bowled three overs of Adil (Rasheed) and I was waiting for that one over. It was difficult to take on the bowlers in the initial phase...we kept losing wickets so obviously it didn't work out for us."

## Better with age? Westwood takes lead at Players Championship

**PONTE VEDRA BEACH, FLA. (AP):** Lee Westwood isn't interested in comparing himself with the player who rose to No. 1 in the world a decade ago. All he knows is he's playing some of his best golf, and he gets another chance to see if it can hold up against the best field.

Westwood had all the shots Friday in a bogey-free round at The Players Championship, with two birdies at the start and a nifty pitch to a troublesome pin on the par-5 ninth to close with a another birdie and a 6-under 66.

That gave him a one-shot lead over Matt Fitzpatrick (68) going into the weekend on the Stadium Course at the TPC Sawgrass, with U.S. Open champion Bryson DeChambeau not too far behind.

Westwood, who turns 48 next month, played well enough to win the Arnold Palmer Invitational last week at Bay Hill except that DeChambeau was one shot better in a fascinating duel of generations on a course that favors power.

Sawgrass favors no

particular style, and it produced an eclectic mix of contenders at the halfway point.

"I think to compete in any of these tournaments against the best players in the world, you can't have any weaknesses in your game," Westwood said. "I wouldn't be able to say I'm doing this better or that better. There's not a shot out there I'm afraid of. There's not a shot out there I'll walk up to and think, 'I haven't got this one.'

"I'm comfortable out there with everything."

He was at 9-under 135 and will be part of the All-England final pairing Saturday.

Sergio Garcia was another shot back after a 72 that looked like it was a lot worse with so many putts the Spaniard missed, including a 23-inch par putt on the 15th hole that followed a 5-foot par putt he missed on the 14th.

Still, the 2008 champion showed plenty of game — and enough par putts that went in — to stay in the hunt. He drilled his approach to inches away on the par-5 11th for his third



eagle of the week, which already ties the tournament record.

And he finished in style with an approach that danced around the flag and settled 5 feet away for birdie on the 18th.

"It was a beautiful roller coaster," Garcia said. "There were a lot of good things. Unfortunately, a lot of bad things. But more than anything there was a lot of fighting, and that's one of the things that I'm most proud of because when things are not really happening and you miss a couple putts here and there, it's easy to kind of let

the round get away from you."

When the second round was suspended by darkness, 16 players were within five shots of the lead.

DeChambeau was in the group three shots behind after a 69 that began with a double bogey from the trees and a muffed chip out of the rough from behind the green. He was bogey-free the rest of the way on a course that doesn't let him swing for the fences because of water and cross bunkers and other brands of trouble.

"I'm happy with the fact that I've still been

able to keep myself in it and score well," DeChambeau said. "I've been pretty lucky, for the most part. I don't think that'll happen this weekend. I've got to make sure that my game is good off the tee, so I don't have those issues occurring and I don't have to rely on luck for the most part. I have to get it in the fairway."

Kirk holed out from the first fairway for eagle and closed with back-to-back birdies for a 65. Starting with a chip-in for birdie on the 15th, he played six straight holes in 6 under.

Sungjae Im tied the tournament record with



# Afghan bomb kills at least 8; UN slams high civilian deaths

**KABUL, AFGHANISTAN (AP):** A powerful car bomb killed at least eight people and wounded 47 in Afghanistan's western Herat province, officials said Saturday. Hours later, the U.N. condemned an "alarming" increase in attacks in the country targeting civilians. The death toll in the explosion late Friday that also destroyed 14 houses is expected to rise because several of the injured were critical, said Rafiq Sherzai, a spokesman for the provincial hospital.

One among the dead and 11 of the injured were Afghan Security Forces personnel while the remainder were civilians, including women and children, said Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Ari-an.

No one immediately claimed responsibility. Within hours of the attack, the U.N. Secu-



rity Council at a press briefing in New York condemned an "alarming" increase in attacks in Afghanistan targeting civilians even as the Taliban and the Afghan government hold on-again-off-again talks in Qatar.

"These heinous attacks have targeted civil servants, the judiciary, the media, health care and humanitarian workers, including women in prominent positions, those who protect and

promote human rights, and ethnic and religious minorities," the council said.

The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for many of the targeted killings while the Taliban and the government have blamed each other for trying to sabotage efforts to reach a peace agreement.

The slow pace of talks and the increasing violence has prompt-

ed the United States to cobble together a peace proposal, which was delivered last weekend. Both sides are expected to review and revise the eight-page plan ahead of a far-reaching meeting the U.S. has proposed to be held in Turkey within weeks, when Washington hopes to see an agreement.

The U.S. meanwhile is reviewing a peace deal the Trump administration signed with the

Taliban, which calls for the final withdrawal of the remaining 2,500 U.S. troops from Afghanistan by May 1.

The growing consensus is for a delay but in a sternly worded letter to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani last weekend pressing for progress on making peace with the Taliban, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said all options, including the withdrawal, are still on the table.

The proposed peace deal offered by the U.S. calls for an interim "peace government" to shepherd a post-war Afghanistan to elections and constitutional reforms. It also calls for the protection of equal rights for women and minorities.

The U.N. Security Council also called for "full, equal and meaningful participation of women," and a quick move toward a reduction in violence.

## Kuwait's #MeToo moment: Women denounce harassment, violence

**DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (AP):** Abrar Zenkawi was cruising toward the beach in Kuwait City when she saw a man waving and smiling in her rearview mirror.

Elsewhere, this may have been a benign highway flirtation. But in Kuwait, it's a haunting routine that often turns dangerous. The man pulled up beside her, inched closer and finally drove into her. Zenkawi's car, carrying her toddler nieces, sister and friend, flipped six times.

"It's considered normal here. Men always drive way too close to scare girls, chase them to their homes, follow them to work, just for fun," said Zenkawi, 34, who spent months in the hospital with a shattered spine. "They don't think about the consequences."

But that may be changing as women are increasingly challenging Kuwait's deeply patriarchal society. In recent weeks, a growing number of women have broken taboos to speak out about the scourge of harassment and violence that plagues the Gulf nation's streets, highways and malls, in an echo of the global #MeToo movement.

An Instagram page has led to an outpouring of testimony from women fed up with being intimidated or attacked in a country where the criminal code doesn't define sexual harassment and lays out few repercussions for men who kill female relatives for actions they consider immoral. A wide variety of news and talk shows have taken up the subject of harassment for the first time. And one journalist used a hidden camera to document how women are treated in the streets.

The spark may have come from fashion blogger Ascia al-Faraj, who vented in January on Snapchat to her millions of followers after being hounded by a man in a speeding car. In such episodes, men often try to "bump" a woman's car, but many serious accidents result, as in Zenkawi's case.

"It's terrifying, all the

time you're feeling so unsafe in your own skin," al-Faraj told The Associated Press. "The responsibility is always on us. ... We must have had our music too loud or our windows down."

Shayma Shamo, a 27-year-old doctor, sought to seize the momentum of al-Faraj's viral video, creating an Instagram page called "Lan Asket," Arabic for "I will not be silent."

Shamo's rage had been building for weeks. In December, a female employee of Kuwait's Parliament was stabbed to death by her 17-year-old brother, reportedly because he didn't want her working as a security guard. It was the third such case — described as "honor killings" — to make headlines in as many months. The National Assembly, all-male despite a record number of female candidates in the recent election, offered none of the customary condolences.

"The silence was deafening," Shamo said. "I thought, OK, that could happen to me, and anyone could get away with it."

Kuwait, unlike other oil-rich Persian Gulf sheikhdoms, has a legislature with genuine power and some tolerance for political dissent. But restrictions to slow the spread of the coronavirus prevented Shamo from staging a protest and forced her to take her grievances online, as women in the region's more repressive countries have done recently.

The Lan Asket account thrust sexual harassment, long shrouded in shame, into the limelight.

From there, the conversation moved to traditional media. A well-known female journalist at state-linked al-Qabas newspaper went out at night with a hidden camera and captured motorbike riders recklessly trying to catch her attention, men yelling sexual slurs on the street and strangers pulling the hair of female passersby — offering proof to millions in Kuwait of the harassment women were describing.

"It seems rudimentary, but we've never had these discussions before," said Najeeba Hayat, who helped organize the Lan Asket campaign, which is also training bus drivers to report harassment, organizing an ad campaign to raise awareness and creating an app that allows women to anonymously report abuse to police. "Every single girl has kept this in her chest for so long."

As the movement gained steam, lawmakers scrambled to respond. Seven politicians, from conservative Islamists to stalwart liberals, submitted amendments to the penal code last month that would define and punish sexual harassment, including one that called for a \$10,000 fine and one-year prison sentence.

"The Kuwaiti penal code doesn't cover harassment, there are just some laws that cover immorality that are so vague that women can't go and report to the local police," said Abdulaziz al-Saqabi, a conservative who was among those who drafted amendments.

But women's rights activists, whose input the lawmakers did not solicit, are skeptical that the proposals will result in significant change, especially with the nation in the midst of a financial crisis and with Parliament now suspended because of a political standoff.

The frustration is familiar for activist Nour al-Mukhled. For years, she and other women have struggled to abolish a law that classifies the killing of adulterous women by their fathers, brothers or husbands as a misdemeanor and sets the maximum penalty at three years in prison. Such leniency remains common across the Gulf, although the United Arab Emirates criminalized "honor killings" last fall.

Kuwait also has statues that let kidnappers evade punishment by marrying their victims and empower men to "discipline" their female relatives with assault.

## 4 killed as Myanmar forces continue crackdown on protesters

**MANDALAY, MYANMAR (AP):** Security forces in Myanmar on Saturday again met protests against last month's military takeover with lethal force, killing at least four people by shooting live ammunition at demonstrators.

Three deaths were reported in Mandalay, the country's second-biggest city, and one in Pyay, a town in south-central Myanmar. There were multiple reports on social media of the deaths, along with photos of dead and wounded people in both locations.

The independent U.N. human rights expert for Myanmar, Tom Andrews, said Thursday that "credible reports" indicated security forces in the Southeast Asian nation had so far killed at least 70 people, and cited growing evidence of crimes against humanity since the military ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Reports on social media also said three people were shot dead Friday night in Yangon, Myanmar's largest city, where residents for the past week have been defying an 8 p.m. curfew to come out on the streets.

Two deaths by gunfire were reported in Yangon's Thaketa township, where a protest be-



ing held outside a police station was dispersed. A crowd had gathered there to demand the release of three young men who were seized from their home earlier Friday night. Photos said to be of the bodies of two dead protesters were posted online. The other reported fatality Friday night was of a 19-year-old man shot in Hlaing township.

The nighttime protests may reflect a more aggressive approach to self-defense that has been advocated by some protesters. Police had been aggressively patrolling residential neighborhoods at night, firing into the air and setting off stun grenades in an effort at intimidation. They have also been carrying out targeted raids, taking people from their homes with minimal resistance. In at least two

known cases, the detainees died in custody within hours of being taken away.

Another possible indication of heightened resistance emerged Saturday with photos posted online of a railway bridge said to have been damaged by an explosive charge.

The bridge was described in multiple accounts as being on the rail line from Mandalay to Myitkyina, the capital of the northern state of Kachin. The photos show damage to part of a concrete support.

No one took responsibility for the action, but it could serve a two-fold purpose.

It could be seen as support for the nationwide strike of state railway workers, who are part of the civil disobedience movement against

the coup.

At the same time, it could be aimed as disrupting the ability of the junta to reinforce its troops in Kachin, a state whose residents have long been at odds with the central government. The Kachin ethnic minority fields its own well-trained and equipped guerrilla force, and there has been outrage in Myitkyina at security forces' killing of anti-coup protesters there.

The prospect of sabotage has been openly discussed by some protesters, who warn that they could blow up a pipeline supplying natural gas to China. They see China as being the junta's main supporter, even though Beijing has been mildly critical of the coup in its public comments.

In Washington on Friday, the Biden admin-

istration announced it is offering temporary legal residency to people from Myanmar, citing the military's takeover and ongoing deadly force against civilians.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said the designation of temporary protected status for people from Myanmar would last for 18 months. The offer of temporary legal residency applies to people already in the United States. Mayorkas said in a statement that worsening conditions in Myanmar would make it difficult for those people to safely return home.

The Feb. 1 coup reversed years of slow progress toward democracy in Myanmar, which for five decades had languished under strict military rule that led to international isolation and sanctions.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party led a return to civilian rule with a landslide election victory in 2015, and an even greater margin of votes last year. It would have been installed for a second five-year term last month, but instead Suu Kyi and President Win Myint and other members of the government were placed in military detention.

## Police detain participants in Russian opposition forum

**MOSCOW (AP):** Russian police on Saturday detained about 150 participants of a forum of independent members of municipal councils, an action that comes amid the authorities' multi-pronged crackdown on dissent.

Police showed up at the gathering in Moscow shortly after it opened, saying that all those present will be detained for taking part in an event organized by an "undesirable" organization. A police officer leading the raid said the detainees will be taken down to police precincts and charged with administrative violations.

OVD-Info, an indepen-

dent group monitoring arrests and political repression, said that more than 150 participants in the forum were detained. Among them were Ilya Yashin, an opposition politician who leads one of Moscow's municipal districts; former mayor of Yekaterinburg Yevgeny Roizman; and Moscow's municipal council member Yulia Galyamina.

"Their goal was to scare people away from engaging in politics," Andrei Pivovarov, a politician who helped organize the forum, said in a video from a police van.

Pivovarov has played a leading role in Open Russia, a group funded by

self-exiled Russian tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Khodorkovsky moved to London after spending 10 years in prison in Russia on charges widely seen as political revenge for challenging President Vladimir Putin's rule.

A 2015 law introduced criminal punishment for membership in "undesirable" organizations. The government has used the law to ban about 30 groups, including Open Russia.

An earlier law obliged non-governmental organizations that receive foreign funding and engage in activities loosely described as political to register as "foreign agents."

The laws have been widely criticized as part of the Kremlin's efforts to stifle dissent, but the Russian authorities have described them as a fit response to alleged Western efforts to undermine the country.

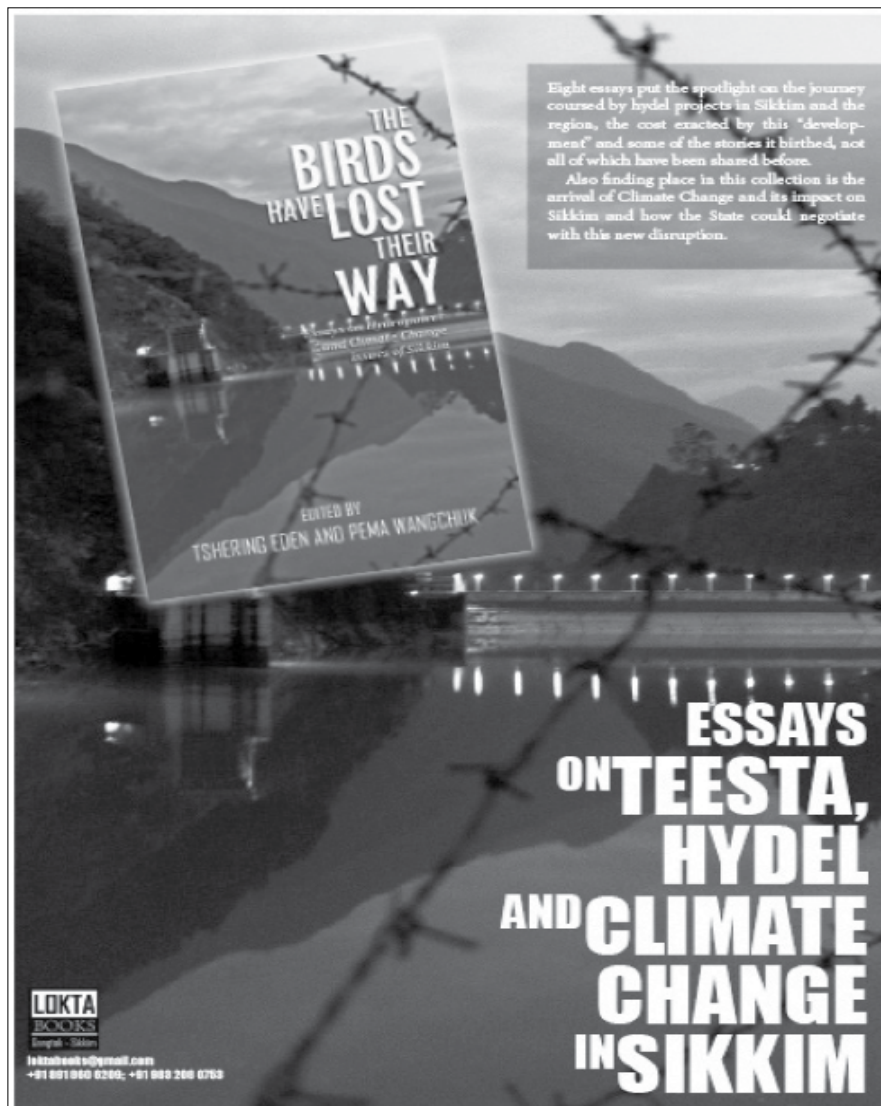
The police crackdown on Saturday's forum follows the arrest and imprisonment of Russian opposition leader, Alexei Navalny.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's most determined political foe was arrested on Jan. 17 upon returning from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from a nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. Russian author-

ities have rejected the accusation.

Last month, Navalny was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison for violating the terms of his probation while convalescing in Germany — charges he dismissed as a Kremlin vendetta. His arrest and imprisonment triggered a wave of protests across Russia, to which the authorities responded with a massive crackdown.

The government has intensified its crackdown on the opposition ahead of parliamentary elections set for September as the popularity of the main Kremlin-backed party, United Russia, has dwindled.





# Netflix bags rights for Dev Patel's directorial debut 'Monkey Man'

**LOS ANGELES, MAR 13 (PTI):** Streamer Netflix has bought the worldwide rights for actor Dev Patel's directorial debut movie "Monkey Man".

Patel, known for movies such as "Slumdog Millionaire", "Lion" and "The Personal History of David Copperfield", also stars in the movie, which recently completed filming and will be released by the streamer in 2022, reported Variety.

The agreement, which is reported to be worth around USD 30 million, excludes territories like Spain, Latin America, Iceland, Former Yugoslavia, Poland, Russia and Baltic States, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Pan-Asian PTV and China, where there are pre-existing deals.

The India-set revenge drama will also feature "Made in Heaven" actor Sobhita Dhulipala and Patel's "Chappie" co-star Sharlto Copley.

Patel, 30, plays an unlikely hero who emerges from prison to take on a world enmeshed in corporate greed and eroding spiritual values, seeking revenge from those who took everything from him many years ago.



The actor has also penned the film's script in collaboration with Paul Angunawela and John Collee.

"I'm so thrilled to be partnering with Netflix on this adventure. I hope this will be a fresh addition to the genre at a time in this industry where my story can become our story," Patel said.

"Shooting a film during a pandemic has been quite challenging to say the least, but the opportunity to reimagine

stories from my childhood and infuse them with my love of action cinema has been an absolute joy," he added.

"Monkey Man" is co-production between BRON Studios and Thunder Road Pictures, in association with Creative Wealth Media.

Patel serves as the producer alongside Basil Iwanyk, Erica Lee, Jomon Thomas, Samarth Sahni, Christine Haebler and Anjay Nagpal.

## Ashish Vidyarthi tests positive for COVID-19

**NEW DELHI, MAR 13 (PTI):** Actor Ashish Vidyarthi has tested positive for the novel coronavirus and is currently admitted at a hospital here.

The 58-year-old actor, best known for films Drohkaal, 1942:A Love Story and Is Raat Ki Subah Nahin, took to Instagram on Friday to share his diagnosis.

Yesterday I felt a little feverish, so I took the COVID test which has turned out positive. I am now moving to a hospital here in Delhi. All well. I am good, he said in a short video posted on Instagram.

Vidyarthi said he is asymptomatic but urged all those who came in contact with him to get themselves tested for COVID-19.

Welcome to real life. Take care, thank you, he concluded.

Delhi on Friday recorded 431 new COVID-19 cases, the highest single-day rise in over two months, while the death toll reached 10,936 with two more fatalities.



**LETTING LOOSE! Actress Bella Thorne enjoyed some snacks and drinks while hosting a Listening Party and DJ set at the Sugar Factory in Miami.**

# Lili Reinhart to lead Netflix movie 'Plus/Minus'

**LOS ANGELES, MAR 13 (PTI):** Actor Lili Reinhart will top line Netflix's upcoming feature film "Plus/Minus".

The movie will be directed by Wanuri Kahiu, who was behind the popular Kenyan romance "Rafiki", Netflix said in a press release.

April Prosser has penned the film's screenplay.

Reinhart, 24, will star as Natalie, whose life, on the eve of her college graduation, diverges into two parallel realities: one in which she becomes pregnant and must navigate motherhood as a young adult in her Texas hometown, the other in which she moves to L.A. to pursue her career.

In both journeys throughout her 20s, Natalie experiences life-changing love, devastating heartbreak, and rediscovers herself.

"Plus/Minus" will be produced by Screen Arcade's Bryan Unkeless and Eric Newman alongside Jessica Malanaphy of CatchLight Studios. Alyssa Rodrigues will serve as the executive producer.



Reinhart, who broke out with popular CW series "Riverdale", most recently featured in movies such as "Hustlers" and "Chemical Hearts".

## Marc Webb to helm first two episodes of 'Just Beyond' series

**LOS ANGELES, MAR 13 (PTI):**

Filmmaker Marc Webb, known for movies such as "500 Days of Summer" and "Amazing Spider-Man", will direct the first two episodes of "Just Beyond" series.

Set up at Disney Plus, the horror comedy show is an adaptation of the RL Stine graphic novel series from

Boom! Studios.

It is being written by Seth Grahame-Smith, who is also serving as the showrunner on the project, according to The Hollywood Reporter.

Like Stine's classic "Goosebumps" book series, "Beyond" is also an anthology of spooky and chilling

stories made for the mid-grade set.

The eight-episode series started production on its first instalment in Atlanta, Georgia recently.

Grahame-Smith and David Katzenberg are executive producing through their KatzSmith Productions, alongside Aaron Schmidt.

## Actor Will Forte sets 'Expiration Date' series at Peacock

**LOS ANGELES, MAR 13 (PTI):** Actor Will Forte will play the lead role in a drama series for NBCUniversal's streaming service Peacock.

The show, titled "Expiration Date", will be written and executive produced by Harry and Jack Williams, reported Variety.

Forte, known for starring in films such as "Nebraska", "Booksmart" and "Rock of Ages", will play Robin, a man, who consumed by grief, finds a life insurance policy that covers suicide, provided that the individual doesn't carry out the deed within one year.

"Content that his family will be provided for, Robin sets his expiration date and contemplates how he will spend his final year. It's going to be a long twelve months," the official plotline read.

Universal Television will produce the show with Forte and Sarah Hammond also serving as executive producers.

Besides "Expiration Date", Forte has another series lined up at Peacock. He will star in and write "MacGruber", which is based on the "SNL" character that he created during his time on the show.

## Adarsh Gourav gets an Utterly, Butterly shout out from Amul

As congratulatory greetings for BAFTA nominee Adarsh Gourav keep pouring in, Amul stole our hearts again with a super cute post for the The White Tiger star, who has landed the leading actor BAFTA nomination for his performance in the Netflix film.

They posted an adorable cartoon that features a picture of his character Balram Halwai in the film. We also spotted a white tiger and a BAFTA trophy in the backdrop. The text on Amul's topical read: "Gourav for Adarsh?" The subtext read, "White Tiger, yellow try kar." Sharing the post on its official Instagram handle, the dairy brand wrote: "Indian actor one of five nominees for prestigious BAFTA awards."



**ARIES:**

You are their North Star, Aries. Their reason to wake up every morning and brave the day. Their love for you is as pure and unconditional as can be. However, they may not always be able to express how they feel because of how drastically different they are from you. So instead of seeking words of affirmation, notice the effort they're putting into this relationship. Observe the ways in which they are constantly showing up for you. PS: this could be for the long haul.

**TAURUS:**

Taurus, you may find yourself falling for somebody who possesses the gift of the gab. A certain somebody who doesn't shy away from telling you exactly how they feel when they're around you. This connection is all kinds of inspiring and is helping you tap into your inner storyteller. As such, this is a time of acknowledging the depth of your connection and diving deeper into the oceans of love. Yes, there is always a risk of having your heart broken here. Should that stop you from following the stirrings of your heart?

**GEMINI:**

There are certain rules that apply to all those of us who are experiencing life in the earthly realm, and the law of karma is one of them. Today, you're being guided to keep the principle of cause and effect in mind and take each step consciously. Remembering that every action you take has a reaction will help you make the right decision. Finding a balance between the head and the heart is going to be just as important, Gemini.

Yes, that means rising above the fluctuations in the emotion landscape.

**CANCER:**

The trouble is, you often allow other people to influence your decisions instead of listening to the voice of wisdom within. As a result, you end up betraying yourself. But this decision is yours and yours alone. So journal about what's weighing you down, or make time for a guided meditation. Clearing out the mental clutter is the first step to arriving at the right conclusion.

**LEO:**

Virgos, you're an alchemist. A master manifestor in your own right. Today, the cards are urging you to reflect upon what it is that you really want from your life as you: 1. Tell the Universe exactly what you want; 2. Be specific about the details; 3. Trust in your power; 4. Take the inspired action and; 5. Express gratitude for what you have and what is yet to come. Something tells us there is a major, major shift coming your way. Trust in the magic.

**VIRGO:**

Virgos who've been living the single life could meet somebody with major potential. A certain somebody who's not afraid to stand by them and commit for the long haul. Those who have been seeing each other for a while may feel inspired to do the 'practical' thing and become permanent roommates. Happily-ever-afters are a bit overrated. So this is a good start. As such, the world of art, beauty, and aesthetics has your attention. Why not bring a little more of that goddess essence

into your world and into the lives of those around you?

**LIBRA:**

How would you define 'abundance'? Is money the only marker of a good life, or does the love and support you receive from above and below contribute to the quality of your existence? It's a 'count your blessings' kind of day in the Libra HQ. You're being called to give thanks for all that you have, and all that is yet to come. At the same time, you're being encouraged to share the bounty with those around you and trust that the seeds of goodness you plant now will bear magnificent fruits in the years to come.

**SCORPIO:**

There's no such thing as coincidences, Scorpio. You have attracted these circumstances into your life for a very specific reason. They're meant to awaken you to your truth and help you move beyond the illusion. So challenge yourself to look at things from a higher perspective despite the pain associated with this experience. In doing so, you will soon understand that you are not being abandoned or rejected. You're simply being shown a deep, deep wound inside of yourself, which needs your attention.

**SAGITTARIUS:**

We've all had our share of turmoil—heartbreaks and shattered dreams too. Should that keep us from believing in the power of love? Anything but, Sagittarius. Thursday finds you looking into the rearview mirror with newfound wisdom and the realisation that everything transpired in your best inter-

est. Now that life is offering you the opportunity to open your heart again, say yes to the unknown despite the risks it entails. PS: You won't regret a thing—we promise!

**CAPRICORN:**

If there's anything your life has taught you, it's that every day is a gift from the Universe, which is precisely what you are celebrating today—with your soul crew in tow. Speaking of celebration, a surprise proposal may be on the cards for some, the kind that involves going down on one knee. Alternatively, somebody close to you could be getting hitched soon. PS: You're going to love playing bridesmaid/groomsman at this party!

**AQUARIUS:**

"In all chaos there is a cosmos, in all disorder a secret order" Let Carl Jung's words inspire you to look beyond the illusion of mayhem. Yes, there is a higher reason behind why things are unfolding in a certain manner. Trust that and keep moving. As you deepen your faith, you will realise it's much easier to call in the help and support you need at every stage.

**PISCES:**

This is a time of great movement, Pisces. A time of moving away from all that is familiar and comfortable. The old you may have resisted change. The new you thrives on making love to the unknown. Speaking of the unknown, travel may be on the agenda too—especially the romantic kind. If you're flying solo, look out for the beautiful stranger who's making eyes with you from across the room.