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SummitTIMES

Vol 06 | Issue 31 | Gangtok | Tuesday 02 February 2021

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | ₹ 5

**COVID-19:
India
records
11,427 new
cases, 117
fatalities**

NEW DELHI, FEB 1 (PTI): With 11,427 new coronavirus cases being reported in a day, India's COVID-19 tally has increased to 1,07,57,610, while the number of people who have recuperated from the disease has surged to 1,04,34,983, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Monday.

The national recovery rate surged to 97 per cent.

The death toll increased to 1,54,392 with 118 daily new fatalities. The COVID-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.44 per cent, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The COVID-19 active cases remained below 2 lakh for the 13th consecutive day.

There are 1,68,235 active coronavirus infections in the country which comprise 1.56 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

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

According to the ICMR, 19,70,92,635 samples have been tested up to January 31 with 5,04,263 samples being tested on Sunday.

The 118 new fatalities include 40 from Maharashtra, 21 from Kerala, 9 from West Bengal, 8 from Uttar Pradesh, 6 each from Punjab and Tamil Nadu, 4 each from Delhi and Karnataka.

A total of 1,54,392 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 51,082 from Maharashtra followed by 12,356 from Tamil Nadu, 12,217 from Karnataka, 10,853 from Delhi, 10,173 from West Bengal, 8,658 from Uttar Pradesh and 7,153 from Andhra Pradesh.

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

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

2000 km march by Tibetan duo against Chinese atrocities to culminate in Gangtok today

**SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 01 FEB:**

To draw global attention to their three main issues, two Tibetan youths, Tenzin Dhondup and Tenzin Nyima travelled more than 2000Kms on foot to arrive at their final destination, Sikkim, on Monday.

The march 'Dharamshala to Sikkim' covered eight States of India.

The duo entered Sikkim from Rangpo gate on the 89th day of their march this morning. They received a warm welcome from members of Tibetan Settlement Office, Gangtok, Local Tibetan Assembly, Gangtok, six Tibetan organizations from Sikkim, Bharat Tibbat Sahyog Manch and other organisations on their arrival at Rangpo.

After a short reception, the duo accompanied by Tibetans from Gangtok, Rabongla and Kalimpong continued their march towards Gangtok. They will halt at 32nd No. today and are scheduled to reach the capital on Tuesday. They have decided to march upto Nathula border.



Initially, Tenzin Dhondup started a solo march from Dharamshala to Nathula in Sikkim on 02 November and later Tenzin Nyima joined him from Chandigarh for the rest of the march. The main objective of the march is to draw

the attention of the world to three issues- urgent attention to the deteriorating environmental situation in Tibet, the world must accept Tibet as an occupied country and China should be punished for the recent attack on the Indo-Tibet

border by boycotting products made in China.

Speaking to media persons, Tenzin Dhondup mentioned that the main objective of the march was to give a message to the people of the country and the world on

these three main issues.

"We got the opportunity to meet people and talk and share about these relevant issues throughout our march," he said.

He stated that deteriorating environmental situation

in Tibet is a great matter of concern for India too as China is building a dam on the Brahmaputra river in Tibet. This is a threat for those living downstream in India as well.

Mr Dhondup stated that boycotting Chinese goods can have an impact on the Chinese economy which can send a strong message. He urged everyone to support them in these issues.

Likewise, Tenzin Nyima said, "I decided to accompany him in the march to support these issues and also to help him through the entire march."

He stated that environment and human rights are a global responsibility so everyone should support Tibet on such crucial issues.

The reception programme at Rangpo had Chairman of Teesta Urja Limited, GT Lachungpa who congratulated the duo for taking the initiative to convey the message on important issues to the world. He added that Sikkim is a peaceful state, and it needs

turn to pg02

Rajya Sabha MP urges Centre for tourism relief package

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 01 FEB:**

MP Rajya Sabha, Hishey Lachungpa attended NDA meeting convened on virtual mode by Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Prahlad Joshi on 30 Jan, 2021, a press release informs.

The meeting was chaired by Prime Minister, Narendra Modi and attended by Union Home Minister, Amit Shah, Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh and BJP President, JP Nadda among others attended the meeting.

Mr Lachungpa said that SDF has been supporting the NDA since 2014 and will continue

to support NDA in national interest.

While applauding the Central Government for its quick and effective redressal in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, timely rolling out of the vaccination program for all Indians, the MP praised the Government of India.

Among important matters raised during the meeting, Mr Lachungpa requested the Central government to extend all possible assistance towards reviving and strengthening of Tourism in Sikkim and if possible, offering relief package to the tourism

stakeholders and transport operators.

He also reiterated the long pending demand for Limboo-Tamang seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly and inclusion of 11 Left-Out Communities of Sikkim including the Majhi Community, as recently recommended by the Government of Sikkim, in Tribal Lists. He addressed these issues directly to the Prime Minister.

Mr Lachungpa said that these pending issues were taken up by the previous SDF government. The Prime Minister Modi and Mr Nadda also addressed the gathering.

NRIs will soon be able to float one-person cos

NEW DELHI, FEB 1 (PTI):

Seeking to further improve the ease of doing business, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said NRIs will be allowed to set up one person companies, definition of small companies will be revised and various provisions of the Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) Act will be decriminalised.

The proposed relaxations to rules governing One Person Companies (OPCs) are expected to benefit start-ups and innovators.

Dedicating a separate portion of her 2021-22 Budget speech to company matters, Sitharaman said in the next fiscal year, MCA 21 portal will be driven by data analytics, artificial intelligence and machine learning features as well as have additional modules such as for e-adjudication and compliance management. MCA 21 portal is used for submitting various documents



as part of compliance requirements under the companies law.

Sitharaman, who is also in charge of the corporate affairs ministry, said the decriminalising of the procedural and technical compoundable offences under the Companies Act, 2013, is now complete, and that the next step is to take up decriminalisation of the LLP Act, 2008.

Further, she proposed revising the definition of small companies under the Companies Act, 2013 by increasing their thresholds for paid-up capital from 'not

exceeding Rs 50 lakh' to 'not exceeding Rs 2 crore' and turnover from 'not exceeding Rs 2 crore' to 'not exceeding Rs 20 crore'.

"This will benefit more than two lakh companies in easing their compliance requirements," she said.

Regarding OPCs, the minister said she is proposing to "incentivise" the incorporation of such companies. OPCs will be allowed to "grow without any restrictions on paid up capital and turnover; allowing their conversion into any other type of company at any time, reducing the residency limit for an Indian citizen

to set up an OPC from 182 days to 120 days and also allow Non Resident Indians (NRIs) to incorporate OPCs in India".

OPCs, which have lesser compliance requirements, can be set up with one member.

Further, the minister said the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) framework will be strengthened, e-courts system shall be implemented and alternate methods of debt resolution and special framework for MSMEs shall be introduced.

These are to ensure faster resolution of cases.

"During the coming fiscal 2021-22, we will be launching data analytics, artificial intelligence, machine learning driven MCA21 Version 3.0. This Version 3.0 will have additional modules for e-scrutiny, e-Adjudication, e-Consultation and Compliance Management," she said.

Infections remain low but Sikkim loses one more to Covid on Sunday

274 MORE VACCINATED ON MONDAY

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 01 FEB:**

Novel coronavirus claimed its 135th life in Sikkim on Sunday when a 65-year-old male from Pakyong-Senti in East District passed away at STNM Hospital. While most of Sikkim's Covid fatalities have been with co-morbidities, this case is being recorded as a COVID-death since the patient did not have any co-morbid conditions.

In his daily health bulletin on Monday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia, in-

formed that the patient was admitted to STNM Hospital on 30 Jan after taking ill. He tested positive for COVID-19 in Truenat screening and passed away at around 11:45 AM on Sunday due to a cardiac arrest and COVID pneumonia at STNM Hospital.

He was also the only person to test positive for Covid in the last 24 hours in Sikkim from the testing of 19 samples on Sunday.

There were no RT-PCR tests conducted on Sunday since the VRD Lab is closed on Sundays.

Sikkim's tally of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 now stands at 6,091, of which 5,779 people have made full recoveries, four patients getting discharged on Sunday. The number of active cases of novel coronavirus has further reduced to 82 and there is no one currently in ICU.

In other developments, 274 persons were vaccinated for Covid-19 on Monday - 180 receiving their Covid shots in East District, 64 in North District and 30 West Dis-

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World Cancer Day
4th February

Organized by:
Mani Trust
Under - Health and Medical Awareness Programme

In Technical Collaboration with:
Union for International Cancer Control (UICC)

In Association with:
Block Development Office, Kalimpong - II
& Pedong Multipurpose Women Primary Co-operative Society Ltd.

Media Partners:
Kalimpong Television & Summit Times

SummitTIMES

Date: 4th Feb 2021 | Venue & Time: Pedong Community Hall, Kalimpong - II at 11 am

I AM AND I WILL

Join us On 4th February

Internet Blackout Continues In 7 Haryana Districts, Restored In Others

CHANDIGARH, 01 FEB [NDTV]: Mobile internet services will remain suspended in seven of Haryana's 22 districts for another day. The order was issued by the state home department on Monday evening in view of the "critical law and order" situation amid the ongoing farmers' protest along Delhi's borders.

"The mobile internet services, bulk messaging, all dongle services, except for voice call, will remain suspended (till 5pm on February 2) in Kaithal, Panipat, Jind, Rohtak, Charkhi Dadri, Sonapat and Jhajjar districts," read the order. The statement added that there is a "clear potential of disruption of public utilities, assets and disturbance of law and order... on account of misuse of internet services... by spreading inflammatory material and false rumours" through social media websites.

Services in seven other districts -- Ambala, Kurukshetra, Karnal, Hisar, Bhiwani, Sirsa and Fatehabad - were restored Monday evening. The order comes on a day when Twitter blocked some 250 accounts tweeting, or retweeting, with the #ModiPlanning-FarmerGenocide hashtag, and making "fake, intimidatory and provocative tweets", government sources said.

There has been no internet at Delhi's protest sites of Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur after the Republic Day tractor rally turned violent after months of peaceful protests against three farm laws.

15-day Classical Dance Workshop by Culture Dept



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 01 FEB:

The Culture Department in collaboration with North Eastern Zone Cultural Centre (NEZCC) Dimapur is organizing a 15-day classical Dance

Workshop at Singtam, East Sikkim from 01 to 15 Feb, 2021, a press release informs.

Advisor Culture Department, Bhim Kumari Sharma attended the inaugural program as the

chief guest along with the Chairman Forest Department, Tshering Lepcha as the guest of honour. The program was also attended by faculty members of Natraj Kala Kendra Society Singtam, officials of

Culture Department and the participants.

Bhim Kumari Sharma, addressing the function, said that such programmes provide exposure to children and help in giving a platform to

the hidden talents in our state. It is praiseworthy that the Culture Department in collaboration with NEZCC has taken the initiative to organize such programmes.

Further, she stated that it would be more beneficial if such programmes are organized regularly focusing on remote areas of the state where children from economically backward areas can avail of such facilities. She urged the participants to take full advantage of this program.

The program ended with vote of thanks proposed by OSD, Culture Department, Bhawani Ghimirey.

Bridge, cement plant inaugurated in north Bengal

SILIGURI (WB), FEB 1 (PTI):

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday inaugurated a slew of projects in the northern districts of the state, including a 3.29 km-long bridge over river Teesta and a cement plant. Constructed at a cost of Rs 500 crore, 'Joyee' bridge over river Teesta connects Haldibari and Mekhliganj in Coochbehar district, reducing the distance between the two towns from 85 km to a mere five km, Banerjee said.

"Work to develop Infrastructure is being undertaken across the state. A number of bridges and roads are being built in various places," she said after virtually inaugurating the projects



from Uttar Banga Utsav ground here.

The chief minister, on the occasion, also inaugurated a Rs 450-crore cement plant at Mo-

hitnagar in Jalpaiguri district, a few youth hostels, and a number of electricity sub-stations in the northern districts, including one in Malda, which has been set up

at a cost of Rs 80 crore.

"This cement plant will generate employment for 7,000 people," Banerjee said.

She also threw open to public 'Devi Kamteswari' bridge over river Mansai, built at a cost of Rs 150 crore. The bridge connects Dinhata and Sitai towns in Coochbehar district.

These apart, an overbridge at Phulbari in Jalpaiguri, set up at an expenditure of Rs 45 crore, was also unveiled by the TMC supremo.

Banerjee said that education hubs would soon be coming up at Dow Hill and Mongpu, and a hill campus of the Presidency University was being set up at Kurseong in Darjeeling district.

Sikkim education reform commission and the need to have the state's education board

PRAMIT CHETTRI

The liberal and reformative gateway for India's education system was opened with the announcement of the New Education Policy by the Union Government in July 2020, the last time we saw the changes in the education system was in the year 1986 when the National policy of education was launched then. The 21st-century reformation to overhaul the education system in our country and to make the school and college level education more holistic, flexible, inclusive, and multidisciplinary was the need of the hour. On the other hand, so far the diversity of the country is concerned it is also more pertinent to bring reforms as per the need of one's states and region.

As far as Sikkim is concerned there haven't been any sweeping changes in educational policy. It also cannot be ruled out that so far the state of Sikkim is concerned our policy framers needs to envision more particularly Sikkim centric education system. The present government of the state has moved towards the right direction in setting up the state's own Education Reform Commission to revamp the existing education system of the state and to bring the sweeping changes as per the needs and circumstances of our state.

Therefore the Sikkim Education Reform Commission which is proposed to be set up in lines with the new education policy of the country should closely look into the aspect of making Sikkim the knowledge superpower and focus on the promotion of socio-economic and cultural values and overall the preservation of the distinct identity of Sikkim and in the other hand just as the new education policy among other things aims in developing a sense of respect towards the country constitutional values and promotion of regional languages, the Education Reform Commission should also devise a mechanism and recommend in setting up of a formal learning centre for different major languages of Sikkim and its promotional aspect and orchestrate for making e-contents of various literary figures and works of literature of our state.

SIKKIM'S DISTINCT IDENTITY.

Being a Sikkimese we must not lose sight of the fact that the State's merger

with the Indian union is a conditional one wherein it has been categorically stated that all the proclamation of the chogyal, the old laws, and the distinct identity of the state would be specifically protected and thereafter conferring this condition a special provision in the Constitution of India was inserted. So here the question comes that how do we let the common citizens and the students know about the socio-economic and the cultural facets of Sikkim if the same is not taught in our school syllabus, how can the newly established Sikkim Education Reform Commission fill this lacuna to address this issue and further how has the National Education Policy launched by the union government allowed the states to frame the education policy by respecting the spirit of the diversity and federalism.

RESPECT FOR THE DIVERSITY AND THE LOCAL CONTEXT.

Since education falls under the state list the respective states have the liberty to make laws on the subject of education and also the new education policy was framed in a liberal context wherein it has distinctively given leverage to the states to make its laws as per the local context. Under the spirit and concept of federalism if the states are given enough leverage i.e like the one given by the new education policy through the medium of education then we all can be sure that the chances of thriving the diversity of the country in one hand and the growth of cooperative federalism, on the other hand, will be at pace.

We as Sikkimese always contemplate that why we are not taught about Sikkim in our school days, why is it that the state's socio-economic, history art, and culture are being buried and why students are left with no option to read and research on Sikkim and its people. Making our students and citizen know and read about Sikkim will not let them forget other subjects but will further help them shape about one's role and responsibility towards the state of Sikkim.

So the lacunae can be filled not just only with the incorporation of syllabuses and the curriculum of Sikkim but through a systematic and statutory overhaul which can be made by the

Sikkim Education Reform Commission. For this, it is also imperative for us to see whether any legislative precedent exists or not and to see the intention of the legislature of the state.

SIKKIM BOARD OF SCHOOL EDUCATION ACT, 1978

It always becomes important for us to see the intention of the legislature of the state and on what circumstance any statutory act has been passed. In the year 1978, the 1st cabinet headed by the then Chief Minister Lt. Kazi Lendup Dorjee had passed important educational legislation that certainly

VIEWPOINT

can bear the torch for the reformation in the education sector of the state in contemporary times. Though the veracity of this act is not known on whether this act is still in the statute book or whether it has been repealed but still, the text of the act is so significant and its relevance in today's circumstances is so important that the act in entirety cannot be avoided. The framers of this legislation have completely respected the supreme identity of Sikkim and have further given the upper hand to the state in the policy decision of the educational subject.

Therefore as per this Act, it stipulates for the establishment of the Board of School Education (Sikkim State Board) to prescribe curricula textbook and other instructional materials for schools and to conduct the examination at the school level in the state of Sikkim.

FORMATION OF STATE BOARD

However, it has become very important for us to constitute state government administered autonomous state board in lines with the 1978 Act passed by the Sikkim Legislative Assembly which could play a vital role in regulating the education sector till the secondary level education and further consider incorporating local level syllabus and curriculum that could envision Sikkim centric education system and make Sikkim the knowledge superpower and further focus on the promotion of Sikkim's socio-economic and cultural values and overall for the preservation of the distinct identity of Sikkim.

THE CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION (CBSE) AND THE STATE BOARD.

Several states like Kerala, Uttar Pradesh has their board wherein the curriculum is framed and examination of Secondary and High Secondary are conducted by the state Board itself. To preserve the distinct identity of Sikkim the education Reform Commission should formulate a mechanism by giving authority to the State Board wherein exclusively Sikkim-related syllabuses are taught in the secondary level education as per the existing policy framework of the union government.

On the other hand, even if we see the 1978 Board of School education the act has given the state board the upper hand in the decision taken by the Central Board of Secondary Education. The act therein has distinctively given the power to the state board that if the state board deems fit and necessary to replace the decision taken by the Central Board of Secondary education then the state board shall be well within their rights to replace the decision taken by the CBSE.

THE STATE BOARD AND THE NEW EDUCATION POLICY.

With the pedagogical structure in the new education policy being 5+3+3+4 consisting of Foundational years for the age group of 3-8 years then preparatory stage for the age group of 8-11 years after that the middle stages for the age group of 11-14 years and then the secondary stage for 4 years which will cover school education from classes 9-12 years. Hence it will be very necessary for the state education reform commission to look into the aspect of incorporating the local level syllabus into the secondary stage which consists of education from class 9 till 12. On the other hand, why is it necessary for the Reform commission recommended state Board to do so is because the New Education Policy itself is in the favour of having a multidisciplinary study wherein it has given the secondary level students to pick and choose any set of subjects from the education curriculum to import the flexibility and critical thinking.

[The author is the Supreme Court Advocate and hails from Malbassey, Budang Village in West Sikkim.]

NYK Namchi launches water conservation program



BIKASH CHETTRI NAMCHI, 01 FEB:

Nehru Yuva Sangathan Namchi under the sponsorship of National Water Mission (Jal Shakti Mantralaya) Government of India launched a programme on water conservation 'Catch the rain where it falls, when it falls' in Namchi today.

The launch, held in the conference hall of District Administrative Centre, Namchi, was organised by Nehru Yuva Sangathan Namchi under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India.

Sub Divisional Magistrate South District, Rohan Agawane was the chief guest along with invited guests, participating youth clubs, youth volunteers, teachers, students, invited representatives from various departments and members of Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan Namchi.

In his inaugural address, District Youth Coordinator of NYKS Namchi, Muskan Rai mentioned that this initiative falls under Jal Shakti Abhiyan, a scheme of the central government and the tagline is 'catch the rain where it falls when it falls'.

He also presented a brief introduction of the scheme and informed about the steps initiated

by Nehru Yuva Sangathan all over the country.

Meanwhile, a member of NYKS Namchi gave a powerpoint presentation on the scheme wherein she highlighted steps that would be followed from its initial stage of implementation.

Fifty villages from ten blocks have been selected in South District for the programme launched today which are among the 31,150 villages from all over the country where successful implementation and outcome is expected, according to the presentation.

The 'water pledge' - pledge for the conservation and protection was taken by everyone present during the program.

The introductory video prepared by National Water Mission for the campaign was also screened during the launch today.

The chief guest in his address expressed his enthusiasm to work on the project after seeing good number of youth clubs participating. While highlighting the concept of the programme launched today, he focused on the role of each and every individual in making this initiative a successful one and informed about the roles and responsibilities each individual can play.

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NRIs will soon be..

peaceful neighbours so the state would also support such initiatives for the peace.

Member of Parliament, Tibetan Parliament in Exile, Youdon Aukatsang appreciated the initiatives of the two youths for creating awareness on important issues by covering a distance of more than 2000Kms since over two months.

She alleged that China not only bullies Tibet but other countries as well and Tibet has witnessed many incidents of self-immolation due to the brutality by Chinese authorities. On the same, she asserted that India and other countries should not tolerate any suppression and the people should put pressure on the government to have a clear stand on Tibet.

The MP urged people to stop buying Chinese items and to promote Make in India campaign of the Indian Prime Minister. She further urged all to stop using Chinese apps and to protest against Chinese institutes in India.

Earlier, Bharat Tibbat Sahyog Manch [BTSM], Sikkim president, Rudra Poudyal stated that India and Tibet have had cordial relations for a long time. He mentioned that the world community should stand with Tibet and protest the inhuman behaviour of China. He congratulated the duo for their efforts to create mass awareness on these issues.

The programme was also addressed by BTSM coordinator, Daya Ram Bhattarai and RSS Sikkim unit Pracharak, Nandan Kumar Rajak.

Farmers' protest: A fortress in making in Ghazipur

NEW DELHI, FEB 1 (PTI): With parked DTC buses sealing main entry points, multi-layered security arrangements and check points -- both by police and farmers' union volunteers -- Ghazipur, the new focal point of the ongoing farmers' agitation, witnessed heightened restrictions on Monday.

The Delhi-UP border site, which is galvanising farmers from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand days after BKU leader Rakesh Tikait's emotional appeal, is a fortress in the making with security arrangements being implemented with every passing day.

Concertina wires -- a new addition in at least three points -- boulders in between the barriers. No major road is open for movement of vehicles and people which is proving to be a growing problem for many passing the stretch.

Rakesh Tikait, the star farmer leader, while addressing a packed crowd from the main stage also mentioned the newly put barbed wires in his speech.

"They (the administration) have put these barbed wires, not us. They are not allowing people to come to Delhi. We are not the one blocking the roads. If we block roads, they ask us to vacate, but no action is taken when the same is done by these security forces," he said to a cheering crowd.

On Wednesday night, the atmosphere was tense at Ghazipur. The Ghaziabad administration had issued an "ultimatum" to the protesters to vacate a stretch of the Delhi-Meerut expressway they were occupying as the January 26 clashes painted a not-so-peaceful picture of the peasant community.

As security presence at the site escalated, fears grew that the protesters would be forcibly evicted, but the emotional outburst of Rakesh Tikait saved the day -- and possibly the whole movement -- and people in tens of thousands started converging at the protest site in support of the agitation.

Many commuters complained that the heightened security measures and new restrictions on routes day after day are affecting their daily commute.

"Since December we were facing problems with this stretch, but the security and restrictions has been grown by leaps and bounds. The interior routes which they have not barricaded -- as of yet -- are not only congested but are in a pathetic condition, making them too dangerous to travel on," said Navdeep Kumar, a regular commuter of the National Highway-24.

To keep at bay an unruly crowd and any possible plot to disturb the peaceful movement, the volunteers have taken the matter into their own hands. They are maintaining high vigil in the area by setting up multiple-check points.



Will provide indoor facility in Sikkim: BCCI

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 01 FEB:

Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has announced that an indoor facility will be built in Sikkim with a gymnasium and a swimming pool.

A press release from Sikkim Cricket Association (SICA) informs that in his recent visit to

Sikkim, BCCI Secretary, Jay Shah had expressed the urgent need of developing indoor facilities as the state has a long monsoon and the players are unable to practice properly which sets them back when the season starts in September.

The release mentions that the Board has asked the State Asso-

ciations to identify a location for the facilities and send details to BCCI at the earliest.

SICA President, Lobzang G Tenzing has thanked the Secretary of BCCI for his proactive initiatives as well as the Chief Minister of Sikkim for his continuous support and guidance.

Can't give extra chance to Civil Services aspirants who appeared in 2020: Centre to top court



NEW DELHI, 01 FEB [PTI]:

The centre told the Supreme Court on Monday that it cannot grant an extra chance to the civil services aspirants who could not appear or prepare well for their last attempt in the UPSC exam in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, reiterating it would amount to extending "differential treatment" to similarly placed candidates.

The top court, however, adjourned the hearing in the matter till Friday after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta sought time to discuss the issue once again.

At the outset, a bench of Justices AM Khanwilkar and Dinesh Maheswari was told by Additional Solicitor General SV Raju that the Centre was not agreeable to giving a one-time concession to the candidates who were not able to appear in their last attempt due to the pandemic.

Mr Raju also furnished a chart to the court giving details of relaxation given by Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) in civil services exams since its inception and said that in 1979, 1992 and 2015 relaxations were given to the candidates due to change in patterns of examination.

The bench said then it is not the first time that the exemption would be granted.

Mr Raju said that in 1979 and 1992 there was no preliminary examination and something new was introduced and subsequently rules were tweaked.

The bench said that the one-time relaxation will benefit over 3,300 students without even increasing the age-limit.

It told Mr Raju that if the centre is not acceding to the suggestion then it would like to hear the petitioners. Senior advo-

cate Shyam Divan, assisted by advocate Anushree Prashit Kapadia, sought the chart submitted by Raju to the court.

Mehta told the bench, which resumed the hearing in the post lunch session, that the centre would like to discuss the matter once more and sought adjournment of the hearing till Wednesday or Thursday.

The bench said it is not recording anything but asked the Centre not to notify the rules for 2021 civil service exams till then and posted the matter for further hearing on Friday.

In its affidavit, the Centre said the contention by the petitioners that their preparation was hampered due to the stress caused by the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic does not hold weight as the UPSC had already given extra time to the candidates by postponing the civil service (preliminary) examination from May 31, 2020 to October 4, 2020.

"It is further submitted that giving an additional attempt or relaxation in age for some candidates would amount to extending differential treatment for similarly placed candidates at the examination," it said, and added that providing an extra attempt could further have "cascading effect" by creating a ground for challenge by candidates, who have already appeared for the October, 2020 exam.

It said that non-final attempt candidates, who took the examinations without any murmur or discontent, would disadvantageously be placed in future examination, if the relief is granted to the petitioners as it would enable a vast number of experienced candidates, to participate in the examination again.

The centre said it was

decided by the minister for state (personnel, public grievance and pension), who the competent authority for approving matters related to IAS/IPS/IFS on January 20, not to provide relaxation in age and number of attempts.

On January 29, the top court had asked the centre as to why one-time relaxation cannot be given to civil services aspirants who could not appear or prepare well for their last attempt in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It had asked centre to apprise it by February 1 on how many candidate would appear if one-time relaxation is given and how many times it has been done since the UPSC was established.

On January 25, the centre had told the top court that allowing extra attempt in UPSC civil services exam to those who could not appear in their last chance in 2020 due to COVID-19 would create a "cascading effect", detrimental to the overall functioning and level playing field necessary for a public examination system.

It had said 4,86,952 candidates appeared in the October 4, last year examination and the UPSC had "left no stone unturned in their pursuit to accommodate for the means and interests of the candidates".

The top court on September 30 last year had refused to postpone the UPSC civil services preliminary exam because of the COVID-19 pandemic and floods in several parts of the country.

However, it had directed the central government and the UPSC to consider granting an extra chance to candidates who have their last attempt in 2020, with corresponding extension of the upper age-limit.

Lalitpur Metropolitan City launches app for people to register complaints

KATHMANDU, 01 FEB [KATHMANDUPOST]: Lalitpur Metropolitan City has released an app with which its citizens can now directly lodge their complaints to the city officials staying at home.

City's mayor Chiri Babu Maharjan on Monday inaugurated the app named 'LMC City Police,' amid a function.

"This is the best way to lodge complaints or any wrongdoing that has been taking place within the city and the city police is standby to take action and shoot down the problem," said Maharjan.

With this new app, Lalitpur Metropolitan City has asked its citizens to post problems with pictures like that of leaking drainage, of electric poles that need to be relocated, and problems of stray animals.

"This is a step ahead to materialise our smart city drive," said Maharjan. "We encourage people to download this app and lodge their problem directly to the city police. Complainants' names will be kept secret."

With the app people who stay within the metropolitan city can get information of ongoing construction or any development work according to Raju Man Maharjan, spokesperson at the city.

"Now people need not come to the city to complain, they can directly post their problems or any mismanagement within the city," said the spokesman.

After logging into the app, anyone can get contact details of city officials. Sitaram Hachhetchu, chief of the implementation division at the city said with this new technology, the city police can solve the problem very fast.

After Hachhetchu was appointed as the new chief of the city police, footpath encroachment, the problem of street vendors and other public awareness programmes have been getting priority.

Webinar by NIELIT on e-waste dismantling and segregation training

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 01 FEB:

National Institute of Electronics and IT (NIELIT) Gangtok under the aegis of Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY), Government of India conducted a webinar today to discuss the MeitY sponsored project 'Capacity building through skill and entrepreneurship development on e-Waste Management for the North Eastern states by NIELIT, Gangtok.

A press release informs that the webinar was attended by the project stakeholders especially the eight State Pollution Control Boards of the respective NE states which were represented by the Nodal Officers nominated for the project by the Pollution Control Boards. Skill Development Missions of the 3 states namely Assam, Sikkim and Meghalaya too were present during the meeting.

The main agenda for the meeting was to discuss the envisaged roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders for carrying out 2 courses in

e-waste dismantling and segregation namely the Master Trainer Training and the Entrepreneurship Development Training Programs for the youth of the 8 North Eastern States of India.

The project has been conceived with a two-fold objective of opening up of livelihood options for the educated unemployed youths in the NE states through participation in the e-waste recycling business and also to address the issues of e-waste being faced especially by the North Eastern states such as the ever-increasing volumes of e-waste which needs to be transported to other states having recycling facilities and hence often not economically viable.

The 2 courses under the project are sponsored courses and participants would be undergoing a 5 days residential training program at NIELIT Gangtok post online sessions during which the participants would be exposed to state of art infrastructure being built for e-waste dismantling

and segregation at NIELIT Gangtok. Trainings are scheduled to start from March 2021.

The participants were addressed by CEO, NK Mohapatra, Electronics Sector Skills Council of India, Director/Scientist-F, Dr Sandip Chatterjee, MeitY, Govt of India, Additional Director, CPCB, Anand Kumar, New Delhi who were welcomed by Scientist-C, Khagendra Sharma, NIELIT Gangtok & the Project Chief Investigator during the inaugural session.

The speakers encouraged the representatives from the Pollution Control Boards and the Skill Development Missions to provide full support and nominate suitable candidates for the training programs for the benefit of the States to which the stakeholders agreed full support.

The webinar concluded with submissions and feedback of each of the nodal officers from the 8 Pollution Control Boards of NE states and the representatives of the Skill Development Missions.

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Battling the Big-C

Build better defenses. Generate wider awareness

Thursday, 04 February, is World Cancer Day, and this is one that should receive even wider attention. As the world over, Cancer is palpably on the rise in Sikkim as well and even as better health-care facilities are extended to patients and their families, it is important that wider awareness is generated on this health issue so that infection rates are brought down and detections made earlier. The pandemic has not been kind towards this pursuit with the virus having scared people away from seeking diagnosis in time either out of fear or initially out of logistics making even hospital visits difficult in the initial days. The health infrastructure was also under stress managing nCoV and diverted from their primary task of attending to patients and risk and those requiring treatment. This setback is also unfortunate because it puts the partial gains of the CATCH programme at risk of being squandered. CATCH was a welcome step towards institutionalizing annual health check-ups because it is primarily such habits which will ensure timely detection. CATCH, which was unfortunately not seen through to its potential, could have popularized preventive healthcare against the practice of going to hospitals and seeking doctors only after one has taken ill. In cases like Cancer, too often, this stage is too late.

And make no mistake, Cancer is a major concern which is only going to loom larger in the years to come. Look around, just about everyone has some experience on the matter, either through a relative who has been diagnosed with “C.A.” or a friend who has someone in the family with Cancer. If it is any consolation, Sikkim is not alone in the nightmare and the increase in Cancer cases here reflects a global trend.

A recent report of the UN shows that cancer is now the world’s biggest killer – with the number of cases set to explode in coming years. A new global cancer report compiled by UN Agency, The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) shows that as a single entity, cancer is the biggest cause of mortality worldwide with an estimated 9.6 million dying of it every year. What is worrying is that Cancer cases worldwide are forecast to rise by 75% and reach close to 25 million over the next two decades. It is projected that by 2030, there will be 12 million cancer deaths per year! The pandemic might deliver a spike in the coming year when it comes to cancer because of delayed prognosis and disrupted care!

The exclamation point reinforcing the worry, it is clearly time then that Sikkim also begins addressing this health issue on more levels than just referring Cancer patients to treatment outside the State. When one talks of a War on Cancer at the global level, one refers to the effort to find a cure for cancer by increased research and the development of more effective cancer treatments. These obviously do not apply to Sikkim and the State should consider itself lucky that it got itself an Oncology centre ahead of the pandemic. So, while the world works on R&D, Sikkim should focus its energies on prevention, earlier detection/diagnosis and screening. Sikkim also needs wider awareness about Cancer, not just as a preventive measure, but also as a support system for families combating cancer in the family. The latter is a growing pool, hence it is unfortunate that Sikkim has not worked out a support system for patients and their families. Awareness is also important because as per WHO, more than 30% of cancer deaths can be prevented by modifying or avoiding key risk factors.

The focus for the World Cancer Day this year is – I am and I will. This theme highlights the value of every individual to fight against cancer. It is envisaged as an empowering call-to-action asking people to take action to save the future. The theme also acknowledges that all of us can fight against cancer.

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Internet Shutdown at Farmers' Protest Sites Highlights Modi's Record of Stifling Digital Dissent

SUBIR SINHA
theconversation.com

The storming of the Red Fort in Delhi on January 26 marked an escalation of tensions between the Indian government – led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi – and farmers who have been protesting against agricultural reforms since August 2020.

With footage of the farmers clashing with police going viral, the Red Fort incident also marked a spike in interest in the farmers’ movement around the world, much to Modi’s embarrassment.

The authorities’ response to events at the Red Fort – a historic building symbolic of Indian independence, and located in the very heart of Old Delhi – was swift. Delhi Police shut down the city’s internet, affecting more than 52 million mobile phone subscribers. The shutdown was ostensibly in the interest of public safety, but it’s also the latest episode in India’s long-running story of heavy-handed internet crackdowns – a strategy used time and again to quell swelling protest movements.

India’s control over the internet is comparable to some of the world’s most authoritarian countries. While India ranks second in the world in terms of mobile internet subscribers, the country also leads in shutdowns. They’re used with alarming regularity to disrupt protest movements and – in the case of Kashmir, currently under the world’s longest internet shutdown – to control entire populations.

During the Citizen Act protests last year, shutdowns were used in Aligarh – home to the Aligarh Muslim University – one of the hubs of the protests, where severe police brutality is alleged to have taken place. The Indian government implemented more than 106 internet shutdowns in 2019 alone – the vast majority in response to protests.

This control is largely achieved via the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, passed into law in 2017, which expanded the government’s powers

for surveillance and connectivity suspension, empowering it to control dissent and opposition.

In Kashmir, where there are tight restrictions on the rights to free expression, speech and assembly, internet shutdowns function as an “invisibility cloak” to crack down on dissent and isolate Kashmiris from the rest of the world. Because India’s supreme court has ruled that “indefinite internet shutdowns” are illegal, India’s government instead downgrades or “throttles” Kashmir’s mobile connectivity from 4G to 2G, seriously limiting what can be loaded on phones.

TRACTORS AND TEAR GAS

The recent events at the Red Fort also presented an example of India’s disinformation ecosystem. At a pivotal moment, some protesters raised a flag sacred to Sikhs next to the Indian flag, even as movement leaders pleaded with them to climb down. Hundreds of cameras caught the moment the flags were raised, uploading photos to social media.

These images were immediately seized upon by social media influencers loyal to Modi, who began a disinformation campaign which spread across the country, claiming the flag to be that of Khalistani separatists. In Modi’s India, separatists are often depicted as enemies of the state.

Disinformation spreads particularly quickly in India, where mobile internet packages make it cheaper to access social media than to run a Google search. This lack of “net neutrality” – favouring traffic to certain websites over others – discourages users from fact-checking what they see on social media.

In response to the fast-spreading flag disinformation, social media activists sympathetic to the farmers were quick to point out that the flag was the Sikh “Nishan Sahib”. They showed how the same flag is flown at all Sikh gurdwaras, used by regiments of the Indian army, and had even been sported by Modi while he campaigned in Punjab. It’s unclear how successful these efforts to neutralise “fake news” have been in a country with powerful state-backed media companies.

ANGRY ANCHORS

Television anchors on state-backed news channels regularly tarnish protesting farmers as Khalistani separatists, Pakistani spies, members of the opposition Congress party, or communists. Using abusive words such as “behuda” (impudent), “badtameez” (ill-mannered), and “gunda” (goons), these anchors are aware that their language will inflame passions when cut into shorter clips for social media. These images achieve virality on WhatsApp and Facebook via common channels of circulation, drumming up support for the state’s crackdowns on dissent.

As with the flag dispute, India’s activists also know how to use the digital space to achieve their objectives. They post videos, release their own memes and hashtags, and are particularly strong at satire, humour, music and art.

By positioning cameras at key protest sites, clashes are recorded and live-streamed on social media, capturing alleged police brutality and heightening the pitch of public debate. Unfortunately, such tactics are often nullified by the state’s common default to full internet shutdowns.

And in a further move to shut down dissent, the government recently reportedly sent a legal notice to Twitter that led to the blocking of several accounts linked to the farmers’ protest – revealing the Modi administration’s ability to censor groups and individuals on specific platforms, too.

Beyond signalling the authoritarian drift of the “world’s largest democracy”, India’s internet shutdowns are also expensive affairs. Even as Modi promises to build a “digital India” to boost the country’s economy, his internet shutdowns are costing India US\$2.8 billion (£2 billion) a year – which equates to 70% of the global cost of shutting off the internet in 2020. That he is willing to foot this bill is indicative of how much is at stake for Modi. It is time for the world to take notice.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer in Institutions and Development, SOAS, University of London]



Myanmar's military reverts to its old strong-arm behaviour — and the country takes a major step backwards

ADAM SIMPSON &
NICHOLAS FARRELLY
theconversation.com

Just before the newly elected members of Myanmar’s parliament were due to be sworn in today, the military detained the country’s de facto leader, Aung San Suu Kyi; the president, Win Myint; and other key figures from the elected ruling party, the National League for Democracy.

The military later announced it had taken control of the country for 12 months and declared a state of emergency. This is a coup d’etat, whether the military calls it that or not.

A DISPUTED ELECTION AND CLAIMS OF FRAUD

In November, the NLD and Suu Kyi won a landslide victory in national elections, with the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) faring poorly in its key strongholds.

Humiliated by the result, the USDP alleged the election was subject to widespread fraud. However, international observers, including the Carter Center, the Asian Network for Free Elections and the European Union’s Election Observation Mission, all declared the elections a success. The EU’s preliminary statement noted that 95% of observers had rated the process “good” or “very good”.

Reputable local organisations, such as the People’s Alliance for Credible Elections (PACE), agreed. These groups issued a joint statement on January 21 saying “the results of the elections were credible and reflected the will of the majority voters.”

Yet, taking a page out of former US President Donald Trump’s book, the USDP pressed its claims of fraud

despite the absence of any substantial evidence — a move designed to undermine the legitimacy of the elections.

The military did not initially back the USDP’s claims, but it has gradually begun to provide the party with more support, with the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, General Min Aung Hlaing, refusing to rule out a coup last week.

The following day, the country’s election authorities broke weeks of silence and firmly rejected the USDP’s claims of widespread fraud — setting the stage for what Myanmar historian Thant Myint-U called “[Myanmar’s] most acute constitutional crisis since the abolition of the old junta in 2010.”

THE CIVILIAN-MILITARY POWER-SHARING ARRANGEMENT

It is difficult to see how the military will benefit from today’s actions, since the power-sharing arrangement it had struck with the NLD under the 2008 constitution had already allowed it to expand its influence and economic interests in the country.

The military had previously ruled Myanmar for half a century after General Ne Win launched a coup in 1962. A so-called internal “self-coup” in 1988 brought a new batch of military generals to power. That junta, led by Senior General Than Shwe, allowed elections in 1990 that were won in a landslide by Suu Kyi’s party. The military leaders, however, refused to acknowledge the results.

In 2008, a new constitution was drawn up by the junta which reserved 25% of the national parliament seats for the military and allowed it to appoint the ministers of defence, border affairs and home affairs, as well as a vice president. Elections in 2010

were boycotted by the NLD, but the party won a resounding victory in the next elections in 2015.

Since early 2016, Suu Kyi has been de facto leader of Myanmar, even though there is still no civilian oversight of the military. Until this past week, the relationship between civilian and military authorities was tense at times, but overall largely cordial. It was based on a mutual recognition of overlapping interests in key areas of national policy.

Indeed, this power-sharing arrangement has been extremely comfortable for the military, as it has had full autonomy over security matters and maintained lucrative economic interests.

The partnership allowed the military’s “clearance operations” in Rakhine State in 2017 that resulted in the exodus of 740,000 mostly Muslim Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh.

In the wake of that pogrom, Suu Kyi vigorously defended both the country and its military at the International Court of Justice. Myanmar’s global reputation — and Suu Kyi’s once-esteemed personal standing — suffered deeply and never recovered.

Nonetheless, there was one key point of contention between the NLD and military: the constitutional prohibitions that made it impossible for Suu Kyi to officially take the presidency. Some NLD figures have also voiced deep concerns about the permanent role claimed by the armed forces as an arbiter of all legal and constitutional matters in the country.

A BACKWARDS STEP FOR MYANMAR

Regardless of how events unfold this week and beyond, Myanmar’s fragile democracy has been severely

undermined by the military’s actions.

The NLD government has certainly had its shortcomings, but a military coup is a significant backwards step for Myanmar — and is bad news for democracy in the region.

It’s difficult to see this action as anything other than a way for General Min Aung Hlaing to retain his prominent position in national politics, given he is mandated to retire this year when he turns 65. With the poor electoral performance of the USDP, there are no other conceivable political routes to power, such as through the presidency.

A coup will be counterproductive for the military in many ways. Governments around the world will likely now apply or extend sanctions on members of the military. Indeed, the US has released a statement saying it would “take action” against those responsible. Foreign investment in the country — except perhaps from China — is also likely to plummet.

As Myanmar’s people have already enjoyed a decade of increased political freedoms, they are also likely to be uncooperative subjects as military rule is re-imposed.

The 2020 general election demonstrated, once again, the distaste in Myanmar for the political role of the armed forces and the enduring popularity of Suu Kyi. Her detention undermines the fragile coalition that was steering Myanmar through a perilous period, and could prove a messy end to the profitable détente between civilian and military forces.

[Adam Simpson is Senior Lecturer, University of South Australia; Nicholas Farrelly is Professor and Head of Social Sciences, University of Tasmania]

Mamata dubs union budget "anti-people";attacks BJP

SILIGURI (WB), FEB 1 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Monday slammed the union budget as "anti- people" aimed at deceiving the masses and said the BJP talks about nationalism, but in practice, they are the ones who are selling resources of the nation to the private players.

Reiterating the demand for withdrawal of new agri laws, Banerjee wondered why the Centre is hesitant to write off farm loans if it can waive NPAs running into crores of rupees.

"They (BJP) lecture others on nationalism, but in practice, they are the ones who sell the nation. They are selling everything from PSUs, Insurance, Railways to Ports.

"This is a budget to deceive the masses. It's anti-farmer, anti-people and anti-country budget," Banerjee said while addressing the inaugural ceremony of Uttar Banga Utsav here.

Speaking about agri infrastructure cess, Banerjee said, "They are now implementing a new cess. Revenues earned through cess are taken by the centre and not shared with the states".

She said that regular increase in petrol and diesel prices and imposition of cess on these products have severely affected the poor people owing to the related price hike of essential commodities.

Taking a dig at the saffron party for sending a chartered plane to fly TMC leaders to Delhi for in-



duction into the saffron camp, Banerjee mockingly said they do not have money to pay for the travel of migrant workers but have money to fly corrupt leaders in chartered aircraft.

"During COVID period we paid for transportation of migrant workers. But, they (BJP) have money for using chartered planes to fly corrupt leaders to New Delhi. This only shows their true colour," she said, taking a swipe at the saffron party.

Maintaining that a Rs 3,200 crore project for north-south road connectivity between Siliguri and Kolkata in the state is already in

progress, Banerjee said that when her government is already implementing it, what more is there for the central government to do.

The Union Finance minister announced Rs 25,000 crore for road construction in West Bengal in the budget, including upgradation of the existing Kolkata-Siliguri highway.

Banerjee asserted that the funds allocated for road development in poll-bound West Bengal should instead be given to the farmers.

"There is no need, I will do it on our own in the state.

Don't do such politics during

elections," she said. Banerjee said that work on another road link is also on via Bardhaman and Rampurhat to connect north Bengal with the southern districts of the state.

She accused the centre of depriving West Bengal, saying that while Assam has been given opportunity for regional air connectivity, it has denied the same for existing airports in Coochbehar, Malda and Balurghat in the state.

"If you (central government) don't start air services to these airports, I will do it," she said.

The chief minister said that the budget proposal for disinvestment in the insurance sector will

leave the general people uncertain about their future.

"They had promised Rs 15 lakh in your account, but in reality they will take away Rs 15 lakh from you and sell off the PSU insurance companies," she said refering to Modi's promise on bringing back black money swindled abroad.

She said that privatisation of central PSUs will lead to loss of job security of employees, while asserting that in her government, every job is safe.

Banerjee said that her Finance minister Amit Mitra has told her that the union budget is "disguised, camouflaged to deceive the people". She claimed only a chosen few close to BJP are being given control of all the businesses while others are suffering.

Banerjee claimed that the BJP leadership has reneged on its pre-Lok Sabha election promise of re-opening seven tea gardens in north Bengal, while the centre has again announced a Rs 1,000 crore package for tea gardens in the budget.

Maintaining that the TMC government's "Swasthya Sathi" health insurance programme is a success, she said, it is providing healthcare worth Rs 5 lakh to each family annually for 10 crore people of the state.

Exuding confidence of winning the assembly elections for a consecutive third term, Banerjee told the gathering, "don't worry, Didi will stay and you will get every-

thing".

She claimed that Bengal has become the guiding star of India and the whole world is saying it is the future of the country.

"This is why I have demanded Kolkata to be made the capital of the country apart from three more in the country",she said.

"We have done all development work... a lot of industries are coming to north Bengal," she said, adding that to help students and youth of the state secure their future is her goal for the next five years.

"I am not ashamed to say that I have lost hands down in the Lok Sabha elections in north Bengal. I urge you to come back this time and bless us," she told the audience at the inauguration of the festival.

The BJP won seven out of eight seats in north Bengal in 2019 Lok Sabha elections, while one went to the Congress.

"I am astonished as to how such a vindictive government, which wants to sell off the country can talk of patriotism.

They are selling off the country and are talking of one nation, one leader," she said.

She said that the centre has called for 'one nation, one ration card', but the West Bengal government could not fully implement it owing to COVID pandemic.

"We have done around 40 per cent of the work, but there has been some delay owing to COVID," she said.

No fresh COVID-19 case in Arunachal, tally at 16,828

ITANAGAR, FEB 1 (PTI): Arunachal Pradesh did not report any fresh COVID-19 case in the past 24 hours, a senior health department official said on Monday.

The total caseload in the northeastern state stood at 16,828, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Lobsang Jampa said.

A total number of 16,758 people have recovered from the disease so far, he said, adding, there are 13 active cases.

Fifty-six patients have succumbed to the virus in the state so far.

Altogether, 3,92,211 samples have been tested for COVID-19, including 68 on Sunday, the official said.

State Immunisation Officer (SIO) Dimong Padung said 16,736 health workers have received vaccine shots thus far.

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

Hemant Soren flays union budget

DUMKA, FEB 1 (PTI): Criticising the union budget presented in Parliament Monday, Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren said the NDA government was out to sell every assets of the country. He further said that the budget was a big disappointment for the middle class as there was no concession in the income tax.

"Atmanirbharbharat (self-reliant India) slogan seems to have got converted into 'atmabecho bharat' (sell India)," Soren wryly said while reacting on the budget 2021-22.

He said there has been no change in the MGNREGA which is meant for the welfare of the poor.

SC accepts resignation of Nagaland Lokayukta

NEW DELHI, FEB 1 (PTI): The Supreme Court Monday accepted the resignation of Nagaland Lokayukta Justice (retd) Uma Nath Singh, days after he said he was willing to step down as suggested by the apex court provided the state government or others are restrained from initiating any kind of action or defaming him in media based on the pending plea.

The top court, while accepting the resignation of the state ombudsman, also acceded to some of the pre-conditions and directed that Justice (retd) Singh be given adequate security whenever he goes to Nagaland to collect his personal belongings.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde, however, expressed its inability to accept the submission of senior advocate Vikas Singh that nobody should be allowed to tarnish the image of Justice Singh and only factual reporting, confined to the content of the apex court's order be permitted.

How can we can pass an order that there should not be any misreporting, said the bench, also comprising Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian.

The court also ordered expunction of adverse remarks made by the state ombudsman against the Nagaland's advocate general K N Balagopal and a lawyer who filed the plea against Justice Singh.

The top court also did not ac-

cede to the submission of Vikas Singh that the petition of Nagaland government be dismissed instead of being disposed of.

We have not heard the matter on merits., the bench said while disposing of the plea of the state government. The plea of the Nagaland government had raised questions over the functioning of Lokayukta in the state.

The state government, in its plea, has urged the apex court to pass appropriate direction in exercise of its power under Article 142 of the Constitution to ensure that the institutional integrity of the post of Nagaland Lokayukta and the spirit of the Nagaland Lokayukta Act, 2017 are preserved .

Justice (retd) Singh, the former Chief Justice of Meghalaya High Court, had said in his note that he submits his resignation due to unpleasant circumstances and a very hostile environment and he was unable to continue as the Chairperson Lokayukta, Nagaland, forthwith.

This court may treat this as his resignation and may pass orders accordingly, it had said.

The note of submission said that Nagaland or any other authority or person shall not use or refer to any material or averment placed on record in the present petition or connected with the state government for initiating any kind of action, complain or proceedings or defaming him in media or any oth-

er manner to his privileges, status (professional, official or otherwise) . It had also urged the top court that nobody should be allowed to tarnish the image of Justice (retd) Singh and only factual reporting, confined to the content of the apex court's order be permitted.

The Registrar General of the Gauhati High Court and the Chief Secretary of Nagaland and Commissioner/ Secretary to the Governor be directed to ensure taking custody of articles supposed to be handed over by Lokayukta to his office, it had said, adding that this would be needed for his safe and graceful exit after the resignation.

The ombudsman had said he has no objection if a compromise is arrived at in a criminal case involving his one of the earlier personal security officers by a trial court at Kohima. Earlier, the top court had wondered as to how the Lokayukta of Nagaland would discharge his duties in the north-eastern state while sitting in national capital. In August last year, the apex court had agreed to hear the plea filed by the state government which has arrayed Chairperson, Lokayukta as one of the respondents.

Article 142 of the Constitution deals with enforcement of decrees and orders of the Supreme Court and says that in exercise of its jurisdiction, it may pass order for doing complete justice in any matter pending before it.

BJP a gas balloon alive only in the media: Mamata

KOLKATA, FEB 1 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday hit out at the BJP calling it "a gas balloon alive only in the media" and a "washing machine" for those with ill-gotten money.

She said those who have quit TMC and joined BJP have done so to secure the money they have accumulated.

Banerjee said she had already decided not to give them tickets in the coming assembly elections had they stayed on in TMC.

"There is nothing to worry about. The government of 'Ma-Mati-Manush' (TMC slogan) will retain power in the state ... BJP is a gas bal-

loon, alive only in the media. They have money and are using agencies to put up (party) flags on the streets.

"Let them do so and stay alive in the media... TMC will stay alive in your hearts. You assure me this and I will ensure you a (good) future," she said while speaking at the 'State level meet of All India Fair Price Shop Dealers Federation' held at the Netaji Indoor Stadium.

"... Dacoits have suddenly accumulated so much money.

Now they are approaching the 'BJP washing machine' where they are entering black and coming out white. They are going there for mon-

ey and nothing else," she said. "I would not have given them the ticket to fight the elections. Why should I give tickets to those who have done bad work! People will be happy if I give tickets to new people instead of to these people," Banerjee, who is also the TMC supremo, said.

Hitting out at the NDA government at the Centre, she accused it of not purchasing adequate quantity of paddy from West Bengal.

"I have a complaint. The central government talks big.

But the rice provided to the people by the FCI is rotten. The central government purchases several lakh tonnes of rice

from Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh whereas it buys only 69,000 tonnes of rice from West Bengal. "The state government purchases 45 to 50 lakh metric tonnes of paddy from the farmers, spends Rs 31 per kg to prepare it (convert it into rice) and sends it to be distributed free of cost by PDS. This is not there in any of the other states," she said.

Banerjee announced extension of the ration dealers' licence from the regular period of one year to three years.

She said that the government will provide Rs two lakh as compensation to the family of a ration dealer in the event of the person's death.

No new COVID-19 case in Andamans for six days



PORT BLAIR, FEB 1 (PTI): Despite a steady inflow of tourists into Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the Union Territory has not recorded a single fresh COVID-19 case for six straight days, a health department official said on Monday.

The caseload in the archipelago remained at 4,994, he said.

The death toll was at 62 as no new fatality due to the infection was reported in the last 24 hours, the official said.

The Union Territory now has four active cases, and 4,928 people have recovered from the disease so far.

The COVID-19 inoculation drive was not carried out on January 31 as the National Immunisa-

tion (NID) round of Pulse Polio 2020-21 started on the day, he said.

Altogether, 2,844 health workers have so far received the shots of COVID-19 vaccine in the Union Territory.

The overall coronavirus situation is under control in the archipelago as the local administration has been strict to ensure that health safety protocols are followed to contain the spread of the disease, he said.

The Andaman and Nicobar administration has conducted 2,23,137 sample tests for COVID-19 so far, and the positivity rate stands at 2.24 per cent, he said.

The islands remained coronavirus-free till the first week of June last

year. The first case in the Union Territory was detected on June 10, 2020.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands reported its first COVID- 19 death on July 27 last year.

Official sources said anybody arriving here by flights or reaching by ships from Kolkata or Chennai is mandatorily required to show a negative coronavirus report before the authorities allow them to enter the islands.

The tourism industry, which was severely hit due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has started witnessing a steady inflow of travellers into the archipelago as all the major tourist destinations in the islands have been opened.

VIDEO NEWS SECTION

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Barcelona, Real Madrid women seek better COVID-19 protocols

MADRID, FEB 1 (AP): Players for Barcelona and Real Madrid's women's teams staged a protest before the cl sico between the sides in the Spanish league to demand better COVID-19 protocols.

They stood motionless for a few seconds after the initial whistle to send a message to the Spanish soccer federation.

Several women's games have been postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic in Spain, including five for league leader Barcelona. The players have been calling for more efficient measures to protect the athletes and the competition.

Barcelona won 4-1. The Catalan club has a two-point lead over second-place Levante. Real Madrid, in its first season with a women's team, sits third. Barcelona has three games in hand compared to Levante and Real Madrid.

Spain has been one of the countries hit the hardest by the pandemic in Europe.

Fake job racket busted; Nigerian among 8 held

MUMBAI, FEB 1 (PTI): Mumbai Police have busted an inter-state gang which prima facie duped several people to the tune of lakhs under the pretext of helping them get jobs and arrested eight persons, including a Nigerian, an official said on Monday.

Police stumbled upon the activities of the gang after two persons started running after seeing a constable in suburban Goregaon, he said.

The duo was taken into custody and their interrogation revealed the racket, the official said.

He said the cash collected from the victims was deposited in the bank account of the Nigerian, identified as Repuli Chiku Ochebu Jude (47), who has been staying in Mumbai.

Three of the eight accused are residents of Uttar Pradesh, he added.

A court remanded the eight accused in police custody till February 4, the official said, adding that further investigation is underway.

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Messi shows his worth, leads Barcelona to win over Athletic

MADRID: Lionel Messi showed his worth yet again, scoring on a beautiful free kick to lead Barcelona to a 2-1 win over Athletic Bilbao in the Spanish league on Sunday.

The 650th goal in his Barcelona career came amid the noise prompted by Spanish newspaper El Mundo's report that his contract is worth 555 million euros (\$673 million) over four seasons. The Catalan club, mired in debt and political turmoil, had to quickly deny its involvement in the leak.

Antoine Griezmann also scored for Barcelona, which won its fifth in a row in the league and moved into second place for the first time this season. It has the same 40 points as Real Madrid but is ahead on goal difference. Atlético earlier opened a 10-point lead after winning 4-2 at Cádiz with a pair of goals by Luis Suárez.

Messi, who had his request to leave Barcelona denied by the club last season, seemed unaffected by the leak Sunday of his contract details. He played well from the start and was decisive again at the Camp Nou Stadium. The Argentine great opened the scoring in the 20th minute with a free kick shot that curled over the wall and found the top corner for his



12th league goal.

"Messi has done a lot for this club and today he scored a great free kick goal," Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman said. "We have to respect him. It seems there is bad intention and a desire to hurt him. Without Messi you can't aspire too much."

Athletic equalized with an own-goal by Jordi Alba as the defender tried to clear a cross by Raúl García in the 49th, and Griezmann put Barcelona ahead again, completing a cross by Óscar Mingueza in the 75th.

It was the third meeting

between Barcelona and Athletic this month, with the Catalan club winning a postponed league game and losing the Spanish Super Cup final.

Athletic was trying to win its sixth consecutive match in all competitions. The loss was only its second since coach Marcelino García Toral was signed in the beginning of the year — the first also was against Barcelona. It was Barcelona's first home match in 2021. It had played eight consecutive games away from the Camp Nou, including in the Copa del Rey and the Spanish Super Cup.

RED-HOT SUÁREZ

Suárez continued his stellar form with Atlético, scoring twice in the win over Cádiz to help Diego Simeone's team open a huge lead at the top.

Suárez scored a goal in each half to reach 14 league goals this season, marking his best-ever league start in Spain and becoming the league's leading scorer. The Uruguay striker, who was let go by Barcelona at the end of last season, has scored nine goals in his last eight matches with Atlético.

"When a striker is on a roll, you have to take advan-

tage of it," Suárez said. "You have to enjoy it because it's hard to stay at this level the whole year."

It was the eighth league win in a row for Atlético, which reaches the halfway mark of the season with the 10-point gap to Barcelona and Real Madrid despite having a game in hand.

"Every match is an important step toward reaching our goal," Simeone said. "To continue like this we have to keep focused on match after match." Simeone's team has 50 points from 19 matches, remaining on pace for a

100-point season for the first time. "These are important numbers that put us at the top," Suárez said. "We have to stay on this path."

Suárez opened the scoring with a well-placed curling free kick in the 28th and added his second from the penalty spot in the 50th.

Saúl Ñíguez netted before halftime and Koke Resurrección got on the board near the end of the match to complete the scoring for Atlético, which is seeking its first league title since 2014.

Cádiz, winless in its last three league matches and sitting 13th in the standings, got goals from Álvaro Negredo in the 35th and 71st minutes.

OTHER RESULTS

Celta Vigo and Granada failed to move closer to the top of the standings after a scoreless draw in Granada. Celta, winless in its past six games in all competitions, stayed in 10th place. Granada was seventh.

Celta was held despite the return of striker Iago Aspas, who had been sidelined for nearly a month because of a muscle injury.

Earlier on Sunday, 12th-place Getafe was held to a 0-0 draw against Alavés, which had lost four in a row in all competitions and is just inside in the relegation zone.

Inspirational and always shouting: Henderson embodies Liverpool spirit



Jonathan Wilson London, 01 Feb [theGuardian]: Nine minutes: Mohamed Salah gave the ball away. West Ham advanced down the left. Salah charged back, which is usually a sign he has done something for which he feels he needs to make amends. But he couldn't recover in time.

Michail Antonio was already moving at pace when Trent Alexander-Arnold got to him, and was able to sling a dangerous cross into the box. Tomas Soucek, the Czech Fellaini, rumbled into the penalty area. He didn't have to check his stride. Neck muscles flexed, he readied himself for a fourth headed goal of the season. And suddenly there was Jordan Henderson, nipping in front of him to head the ball to safety.

Sixty-eight minutes: Liverpool cleared a corner and Alexander-Arnold slung the ball out to the left. Xherdan Shaqiri swept it instantly to the top of the box.

Salah's first touch was sublime, his second beautifully deft and Liverpool suddenly had a 2-0 lead. About 10 yards behind him was Henderson, having sprinted 70 yards. He was the first to congratulate Salah and, in the unlikely event the Egyptian's first touch had been less than sensational, he would have been on hand to collect the loose ball.

Salah was the obvious reason Liverpool beat West Ham. His two goals were both brilliant. But equally necessary was Henderson. He has become for Liverpool something more than a player.

He is a captain of the most inspirational kind, not just relentlessly energetic, but a constant cajoler and organiser – as these games behind closed doors have proved. The soundtrack to modern Liverpool is a constant Wearside bark, as though a collie at sheepdog trials had decided to commentate on itself. But Henderson

embodies something more: he has become the spirit of all that is best about the club, somebody endlessly and selflessly willing to do what the team need rather than what necessarily comes most easily to him.

Talk to any of Henderson's former coaches and they will tell you his greatest asset is his willingness to learn. It is that which has underlain his apparently endless capacity for reinvention.

When he first emerged at Sunderland, Henderson played on the right side of midfield. It was Steve Bruce who moved him into the centre, but very much as a box-to-box player.

At Liverpool, asked to play as a holder under Brendan Rodgers and then Jürgen Klopp, he initially struggled. His great breakthrough came after being shifted to the right of the midfield three. But when in autumn 2019 he had to revert to that deepest-lying midfield role, he excelled. And now, he looks a perfectly serviceable central defender.

The absence of Virgil van Dijk, Joe Gomez, Joël Matip and Fabinho prompted Liverpool to turn to their 12th starting central defensive pairing of the league season, Nat Phillips partnering Henderson, as he had after half-time in the win against Tottenham last Thursday.

But this looked a test far more likely to expose a player unfamiliar in the position. In the Premier League this season, nobody has scored more often from set-pieces, more from crosses or with more headers than West Ham.

That's why that first header against Soucek was so vital, to show Liverpool were not to be cowed. In the end, West Ham did score, with their sixth corner of the game, but by then Liverpool already led 3-0 and there were only three minutes remaining.

Any assessment of Liverpool at the moment has to take into ac-

count their injuries. Liverpool are such an interconnected unit that changes in one area can have a major impact elsewhere.

This has been a season of fire-fighting all over the pitch and the changes of shape and personnel mean it's unwise to draw firm conclusions but the first half seemed to demonstrate the danger that Thiago Alcântara, for all his excellence on the ball, could slow Liverpool down.

In part, of course, that's the point. His role is to protect possession, to bring a sense of calm and to give Liverpool the option of playing in a more reserved style. But circumstances – the raft of injuries, including to Thiago, and the lack of time on the training pitch with the compressed calendar – have made a gradual integration impossible.

The result was that, before the break, Divock Origi and, particularly, Salah made a number of runs that went unseen, or at least that resulted in no attempt to feed them in, while the flow forward from full-back, which at its best can seem irresistible, was often interrupted, Alexander-Arnold and Andy Robertson left waiting for the pass rather than running naturally on to balls played in front of them.

But in the second half, Liverpool were more direct and more purposeful – and never more so than in that stunning second, that went from box-to-box in two passes – more like the Liverpool of last season.

Underpinning it all was Henderson. He blocked crosses. He tracked runs. At one point he challenged Soucek when he must have known doing so would mean a kick in the head. He took the ball from Alisson to orchestrate play. And always, always, he shouted.

In the end, Salah's artistry won the game – but it was Henderson's spirit that made it possible.

Indian women's hockey team holds world No.2 Argentina to 1-1 draw

BUENOS AIRES, FEB 1 (PTI): The Indian women's hockey team put up a spirited performance to hold world No.2 Argentina to a 1-1 draw and end its tour of the country on a high.

Skipper Rani struck for India in the 35th minute while Emilia Forcherio scored for the home team through a penalty stroke on Sunday. This was India's fourth scheduled match against the side after the third match to be played on Saturday was abandoned due to incessant rains.

Earlier in the tour, India had drawn 2-2, 1-1 against the Argentina junior team and lost 1-2, 2-3 to Argentina 'B' team.

Against the Argentina senior side, India lost 2-3 and 0-2 in the first and second matches respectively.

The Indians played with an intent to secure the elusive win against Argentina in their last match of the tour.

But the experienced home team continued to showcase a dominant performance, getting off the blocks in the first quarter with a

well-structured attack.

The early pressure on India's defence line worked for Argentina as they earned two penalty corners within three minutes of the first quarter.

But India goalkeeper Savita was upto the mark and made brilliant saves to deny the hosts.

India found a good opportunity to score in the 11th minute when they were awarded a penalty corner, but couldn't execute it.

Three minutes into the second quarter, Rani found yet another opportunity to score when experienced forward Vandana Katariya assisted her but a valiant Argentine defence held strong, covering every inch in the striking circle.

In the following minutes, Argentina won two penalty corners in the 23rd and 24th minutes but Savita stood like a rock in front of the goal.

Skipper Rani finally found the right opportunity to score when India made an aggressive start to the third quarter.

It was Vandana again who found Rani poised

in front of the goal and fed her the ball from the right flank.

Rani made no mistake in receiving the pass and swiftly struck the ball past the Argentine goalkeeper to earn India a 1-0 lead in the 35th minute.

India had two good opportunities to extend the lead in the 39th and 50th minutes of the game, but wasted both the opportunities.

Argentina, on the other hand, pushed for goals and a body foul while defending penalty corner in the 55th minute, saw India concede a penalty stroke.

From the resultant set piece, Forcherio was on target to draw level.

Under pressure, India conceded two more penalty corners in the 56th and 59th minutes but Argentina could not utilise the opportunities.

"After the 1-0 lead, we had to stay calm and continue to pursue our attack. We had to play more smartly but that's something we can work on," said India's chief coach Sjoerd Marijne after the match.

Tottenham struggles without Kane in 1-0 loss to Brighton

BRIGHTON, FEB 1 (AP): Tottenham struggled without the creativity and cutting edge of injured striker Harry Kane in a 1-0 loss at Brighton, leaving Jose Mourinho's team six points off the Premier League's top four.

Leandro Trossard scored the winner for fourth-from-last Brighton in the 17th minute, side-footing home a finish from inside the area after a cut-back from the right by Pascal Gross.

Kane was missing after injuring both ankles

in the 3-1 loss to Liverpool on Thursday and his absence for a few weeks, according to Mourinho could be crucial in Tottenham's bid to keep in touch with its rivals for Champions League qualification. Gareth Bale replaced Kane in the Spurs attack for his first start in 12 weeks, but the on-loan Real Madrid forward squandered possession regularly and looked off the pace before being substituted in the 61st minute.

Brighton was the likelier scorer of a second

goal at Amex Stadium, with Tottenham defender Toby Alderweireld needing to produce a sliding block near his goal line to clear a goal-bound shot from substitute Aaron Connolly in the final minutes.

Argentine midfielder Alexis Mac Allister also hit the post in the first half for Brighton, which moved seven points clear of the relegation zone.

Tottenham stayed sixth, ahead of Chelsea and Everton on goal difference.

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Jane Fonda receives COVID-19 vaccine

LOS ANGELES, FEB 1 (PTI): Hollywood veteran and activist Jane Fonda said she has received the first dose of the coronavirus vaccine.

The 83-year-old two-time Oscar winner took to Instagram on Sunday to share a photo of herself receiving the vaccine.

"Got vaccinated today! Yay! It doesn't hurt. #vaccine," Fonda captioned her picture.

The actor joins the growing list of famous names like Harrison Ford, Samuel L Jackson, Steve Martin, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sean Penn, Tyler Perry in the US and Ian McKellen, Joan Collins, Judi Dench, David Attenborough, Tom Jones, Hugh Bonneville in the UK to receive the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Fonda's post comes a week after it was announced that she would be receiving the Cecil B DeMille Award at the 2021 Golden Globes ceremony on February 28.

Europe's jobless rate steady, but doesn't tell whole story

FRANKFURT, GERMANY (AP): The unemployment rate was steady at 8.3% in December in the 19 countries that use the euro, as government support programs aimed at getting the economy through the pandemic continue to hold down layoffs — for now.

The jobless figure published Monday by the EU's statistics agency is up from 7.4% December 2019, before the pandemic caused governments to impose restrictions on businesses to fight the spread of the coronavirus.

While the fact that the unemployment rate rose only modestly during the pandemic is good news, economists say government support won't last forever and that the unemployment rate will rise somewhat when such programs are withdrawn.

Meanwhile, Eurostat, the EU's statistics agency, again noted that the official rate does not count workers who stopped looking for a job during the unusual circumstances of the pandemic - for instance, to take care of children whose schools have been closed.

Governments are deploying programs that pay most of workers' salaries if they are put on short hours or no hours instead of being laid off. The idea is to get the economy through the pandemic without letting mass layoffs make the recession worse, or letting it slow the recovery through delays in finding and training new workers. The support also helps keep the pandemic from sapping consumer spending in shops, keeping them and the larger economy afloat as well.

The unchanged figure highlights once again "the extent to which government policies have protected jobs during the pandemic," said Jessica Hinds, Europe economist at Capital Economics.

Military takes control of Myanmar; Suu Kyi reported detained

NAYPYITAW, MYANMAR (AP): Myanmar military television said Monday that the military was taking control of the country for one year, while reports said many of the country's senior politicians including Aung San Suu Kyi had been detained.

An announcement read on military-owned Myawaddy TV cited a section of the military-drafted constitution that allows the military to take control in times of national emergency. It said the reason for takeover was in part due to the government's failure to act on the military's claims of voter fraud in last November's election and its failure to postpone the election because of the coronavirus crisis.

The announcement and the declaration of a state of emergency follows days of concern about the threat of a military coup — and military denials that it would stage one — and came on the morning the country's new Parliament session was to begin.

The takeover is a sharp reversal of the partial yet significant progress toward democracy Myanmar made in recent years following five decades of military rule and international isolation that began in 1962. It would also be shocking fall from power for Suu Kyi, who led the democracy struggle despite years under

house arrest and won a Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy released a statement on one of its Facebook pages saying the military's actions were unjustified and went against the constitution and the will of voters. The statement urged people to oppose Monday's "coup" and any return to "military dictatorship."

It was not possible to confirm who posted the message as NLD members were not answering phone calls.

The military's actions were already receiving international condemnation.

U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken issued a statement expressing "grave concern and alarm" over the reported detentions.

"We call on Burmese military leaders to release all government officials and civil society leaders and respect the will of the people of Burma as expressed in democratic elections," he wrote, using Myanmar's former name.

The office of the U.N. secretary-general was also among those to issue a statement condemning the developments as a "serious blow to democratic reforms."

The detention of the politicians and cuts in television signals and communication

services on Monday were the first signs that plans to seize power were in motion. Phone and internet access to Naypyitaw was lost and Suu Kyi's party could not be reached. Phone service in other parts of the country was also reported down, though people were still able to use the internet in many areas.

The Irrawaddy, an established online news service, reported that Suu Kyi, who as state counsellor is the nation's top leader, and the country's president, Win Myint, were both detained in the pre-dawn hours. It cited Myo Nyunt, a spokesman for the NLD.

The report said that the party's Central Executive Committee members, lawmakers and regional Cabinet members had also been taken into custody.

A list of other people believed to have been detained, compiled by political activists, included filmmaker Min Htin Ko Ko Gyi, writer Maung Thar Cho, and prominent veterans of the country's 1988 student protest movement, such as Ko Ko Gyi and Min Ko Naing. Their detention could not immediately be confirmed.

The military TV report said Commander-in-Chief Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing would be in charge of the country, while Vice President

Myint Swe would be elevated to acting president. Myint Swe is a former general best known for leading a brutal crackdown on Buddhist monks in 2007. He is a close ally of former junta leader Than Shwe.

In a later announcement, the military said an election would be held in a year and the military would hand power over to the winner.

As word of the military's actions spread in Yangon, the country's biggest city, there was a growing sense of unease among residents who earlier in the day had still been packed into cafes for breakfast and had been doing their morning shopping.

People were removing the bright red flags of Suu Kyi's party that once adorned their homes and businesses. Lines formed at ATMs as people waited to take out cash, efforts that were being complicated by internet disruptions. Workers at some businesses decided to go home.

The military maintains its actions are legally justified, though Suu Kyi's party spokesman as well as many international observers have said it is in effect a coup.

The 2008 constitution, implemented during military rule, has a clause that says in cases of national emergency, the president in coordination

with the military-dominated National Defense and Security Council can issue an emergency decree to hand over the government's executive, legislative and judicial powers to the military commander-in-chief.

The clause had been described by New York-based Human Rights Watch as a "coup mechanism in waiting."

It is just one of many parts of the charter that ensured the military could maintain ultimate control over the country at the expense of elected politicians. The military also was guaranteed 25% of seats in Parliament and control of several key ministries, especially those involved in security and defense.

The 75-year-old Suu Kyi is by far the country's most popular politician, and became the country's de facto leader after her party won 2015 elections, though the constitution barred her from being president. She had been a fierce antagonist of the army during her time under house arrest.

Nevertheless, once in power Suu Kyi had to balance her relationship with the country's generals and even went on the international stage to defend their crackdown on Rohingya Muslims in the country's west, a campaign the U.S. and others have

labeled genocide. That has left her reputation internationally in tatters.

She remains wildly popular at home, where most supported the campaign against the Rohingya. Suu Kyi's party captured 396 out of 476 seats in the combined lower and upper houses of Parliament in November's polls.

The military has charged that there was massive voting fraud in the election, though it has failed to provide proof. The state Union Election Commission last week rejected its allegations.

Amid the bickering over the allegations, the military last Tuesday ramped up political tension when a spokesman at its weekly news conference, responding to a reporter's question, declined to rule out the possibility of a coup.

Then Wednesday, the military chief told senior officers in a speech that the constitution could be revoked if the laws were not being properly enforced. Adding to the concern was the unusual deployment of armored vehicles in the streets of several large cities.

On Saturday and Sunday, however, the military denied it had threatened a coup, accusing unnamed organizations and media of misrepresenting its position.

EU: AstraZeneca to supply 9 million more vaccine doses

BERLIN, FEB 1 (AP): Pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca has agreed to supply 9 million additional doses of its coronavirus vaccine to the European Union during the first quarter, the bloc's executive arm said Sunday.

The new target of 40 million doses by the end of March is still only half what the British-Swedish company had originally aimed for, triggering a spat between AstraZeneca and the EU last week.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said after a call with seven vaccine makers Sunday that AstraZeneca will also begin deliveries one week sooner than scheduled and expand its manufacturing capacity in Europe. Step forward on vaccines, tweeted Von der Leyen, who has come under intense pressure over the European Commission's handling of the vaccine orders in recent days.

The EU is far behind Britain and the United States in getting its population of 450 million vac-

inated against the virus. The slow rollout has been blamed on a range of national problems as well as delayed authorization of the vaccines compared to elsewhere and an initial shortage of supply.

The announcement last week that AstraZeneca would initially only supply 31 million doses to the EU's 27 member states due to production problems triggered a fierce dispute between the two sides, with officials in Brussels saying they feared the company was treating the bloc unfairly compared to other customers, such as the United Kingdom.

On Friday, hours after regulators authorized the vaccine for use across the EU, the commission announced that it was tightening rules on exports of COVID-19 vaccines, sparking an angry response from Britain. The commission has since made clear the new measure will not trigger controls on vaccines shipments produced in the 27-nation bloc to the small territory that is part of the United King-

dom bordering EU member Ireland. Under the post-Brexit deal, EU products should still be able to travel unhindered from the bloc to Northern Ireland.

EU member states praised the bloc's executive branch last year for signing numerous deals with vaccine makers, saying the joint purchase using combined market weight of the entire bloc had ensured a fair distribution for all 27 countries at good prices.

In a statement, the European Commission said it plans to set up an specialized body to improve the bloc's response to health emergency and deliver a more structured approach to pandemic preparedness. As part of the effort, together with industry, the EU said it will fund design and development of vaccines and scale up manufacturing in the short and medium term, and also to target the variants of COVID-19.

The pandemic highlighted that manufacturing capacities are a limiting factor, it said. It is essential to address these challenges.

Major storm heads to Northeast after blanketing Midwest



WASHINGTON, FEB 1 (AP): After days of frigid temperatures, the Northeast braced for a whopper of a storm that could dump well over a foot of snow in many areas, create blizzard-like conditions and cause travel problems for the next few days.

The storm system blanketed parts of the Midwest in the most snow some places had seen in several years. Chicago got almost 7 inches of snow by Sunday morning, leading to the cancellation of a

couple hundred flights at the city's two airports. In Wisconsin, snow depths in some counties near Lake Michigan had reached more than 15 inches, and the snow was still falling.

That's more snow than we've seen in a decade, Chris Stumpf, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Sullivan, Wisconsin, told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

Three to 5 inches of snow arrived in central Ohio by early Sunday, making for some slip-

pery roads. Washington, D.C., and parts of Virginia had also received some snow, with up to 3 inches in some areas. By the afternoon, the snow was expected to reach Pennsylvania.

Heavy snow falling at an inch to 3 inches an hour was forecast for Monday in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, the National Weather Service said. Much of the region could see blizzard-like conditions, with a foot to 18 inches of snow.

Temperatures were

expected to be in the upper 20s to lower 30s for the New York City metro area.

The snow was expected to start falling in Massachusetts on Monday morning, bringing up to a foot of snow to impact the evening commute. The storm will reach northern New England later that night, meteorologists said.

Winds strong enough to bring down tree branches with gusts ranging from 35 to 50 mph were forecast for the storm.

Somali forces end jihadist siege of Mogadishu hotel, 5 dead



MOGADISHU, SOMALIA (AP): At least five people have died in the attack on a Mogadishu hotel by Somalia's al-Shabab rebels that was ended early Monday by security forces, according to the Somali police force.

The siege of the Afrik hotel ended after a gun battle that lasted for more than eight hours, and all four rebel attackers were killed, Somali police spokesman Sadiq Adan Ali said.

The rebels exploded hand grenades and rocket-propelled grenades in their attempt to repulse

the police forces who were closing in on them, he said.

In addition to those killed, 15 people were injured and have been hospitalized, health authorities said.

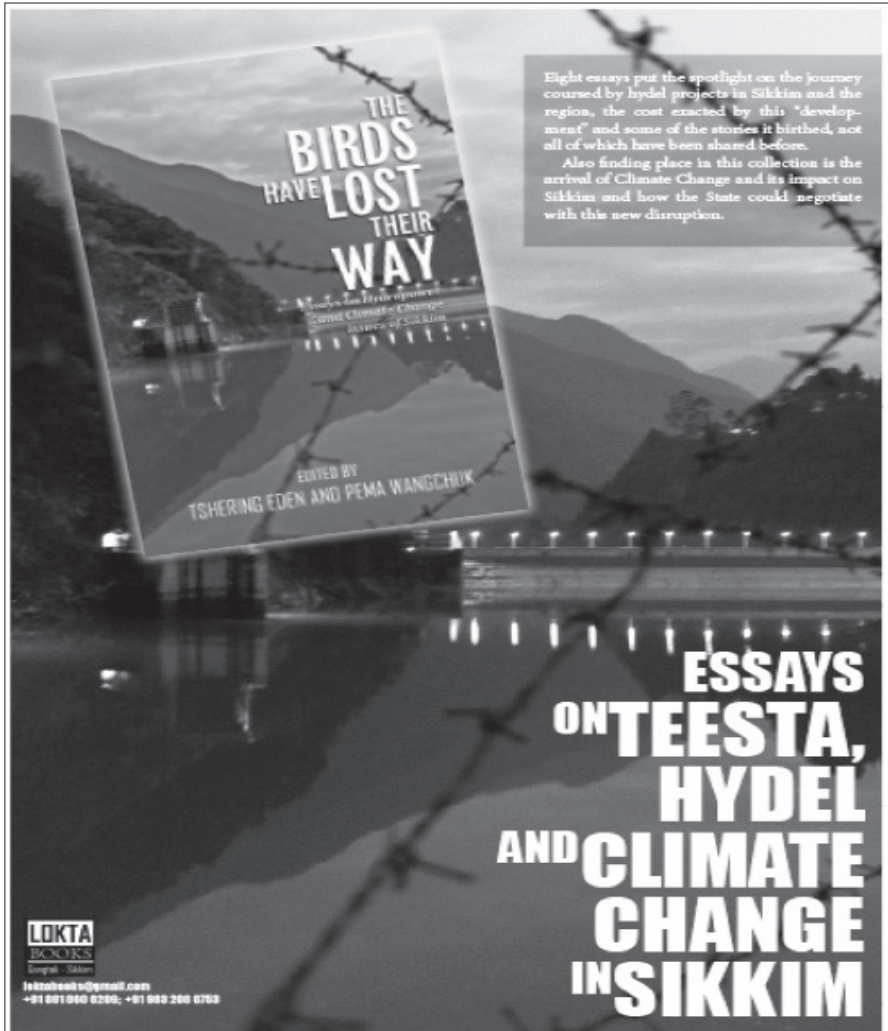
Al-Shabab claimed responsibility for the attack through their Andalus radio and Somalimo website.

Among the dead are Gen. Mohamed Nur Galal, a well-known retired army veteran who lived in the hotel. Another general and more than 100 civilians were rescued from the hotel, which is

near the strategic K-4 junction on the road to the capital city's international airport, said Ali.

The road leading to the airport has been reopened Monday morning and forces are cleaning of the destruction caused by the explosion of a vehicle at the entrance to the hotel which started the attack Sunday.

Somalia's President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed and the country's prime minister condemned the attack and sent their condolences to the families of the deceased.





ANIMAL ATTRACTION! Actress Kate Upton wore animal-print Old Navy workout wear as she walked her dog in Palm Beach, Florida.

Carl Hiaasen retiring from Miami Herald after 35 years



MIAMI (AP): Writer Carl Hiaasen is retiring from the Miami Herald after composing newspaper columns for the past 35 years, the newspaper says.

The Herald published a story this week saying that Hiaasen would be done after his last column on March 14. The 67-year-old Hiaasen said he no longer wants the pressure of a weekly deadline.

"I've been thinking about easing off as the years went by," Hiaasen told the Herald. "I was 23 when I started working there. I feel like I almost grew up in the newsroom. I also feel at this stage it's a good time to step away."

That's not to say that Hiaasen will stop writing. He said he plans to continue his book projects, which have ranged from comic novels such as "Tourist Season" and "Double Whammy" to children's titles such as "Hoot."

His latest book is "Squeeze Me," about the era of former President Donald Trump.

Hiaasen's friend and also longtime Herald columnist, Dave Barry, said it might not be easy for him to adjust.

"The hardest thing for Carl is going to be when the people of Florida, especially the elected officials, continue to do idiotic things and he can't talk about it. He'll have to deal with that," Barry said. "And it's going to be hard on his fans, who love him to death despite the fact that no one has ever been able to learn to spell his name correctly."

Hiaasen has seen his share of tragedy. His brother, Rob Hiaasen, was among the five people killed in the 2018 mass shooting at the Capital Gazette newspaper in Annapolis, Maryland. Rob Hiaasen was an editor at the paper.

Aries: "Every thought, every emotion, is only a tourist and I'm not a hotel. Let them come and let them go." A little something you're being asked to remember, especially when you find yourself caught in the ebb and flow. Self-mastery is an important theme for you, and learning to rise above the mind is the first step on this journey. A teacher or mentor could step in and give you just the guidance you need to keep going.
Tip: Ride above the mind.
Cancer: Some of you may be feeling like your business has stagnated over the past few months and that it's now time to get back on track. Yes, it's a good idea to turn to digital marketing. The goal is to reach out to a wider audience who may or may not be aware of your product/service at this point of time. Don't worry too much about the do's and the don'ts. Do what comes naturally to you as you remember authenticity speaks louder than words.
Tip: It's time to up the digital marketing game.
Leo: What's your favourite ten-letter word in the English dictionary? We have a feeling it begins with a 'W' and ends with a 'T'. Yes,

Swedish nurse wins a week of isolation, films amid pandemic

GOTEBORG, SWEDEN (AP): Cinema in lockdown: Scandinavia's largest film festival is exploring the social isolation resulting from COVID-19 by setting up a temporary cinema-for-one on a desolated island in the North Sea with the only companionship the events' entire movie selection and enough food to last the week.

Lisa Enroth was selected among 12,000 volunteers to spend a week on the island of Hamneskar at Pater Noster, a former lighthouse turned boutique hotel. An emergency ward nurse from Sweden with a passion for film, Lisa said the isolation would give her "time to reflect and be alone" after a busy year amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

This year's Goteborg Film Festival, which runs from Jan. 29-Feb. 8, is certainly unique. "The Isolated Cinema" is only accessible by small boat and is located at the very edge of an archipelago in one of western Sweden's most barren and wind-swept locations.

Enroth, who left for the island on Saturday, watches the films online either in her room or a living room, or she can watch them from the top of the lighthouse itself where organizers have set up a small screen surrounded by an amazing view. The artistic director of the 44th Goteborg Film Festival, Jonas Holmberg, hopes this extreme viewing experience can help reflect on what the pandemic has done to our relationship with cinema.

"During this pandemic, so many people have turned to cinema when in iso-

lation," he said. "But the pandemic has also changed how we experience films."

Like most events, the film festival has moved online as COVID-19 restrictions banned public gatherings, but organizers have set-up a real-time streaming

platform accessible to people living in Sweden in a bid to replicate, albeit virtually, the collective cinema viewing experience. At the Draken cinema, the traditional home of the film festival, only one ticket is available for each screening, but filmmakers, actors or producers may also appear to speak about their work.

The opening gala saw the Swedish premiere of Tove, the 2020 biographical film of the Finnish author and illustrator Tove Jansson, creator of the Moonins series. Walking down an empty red carpet, platform accessible to people living in Sweden in a bid to replicate, albeit virtually, the collective cinema viewing experience. At the Draken cinema, the traditional home of the film festival, only one ticket is available for each screening, but filmmakers, actors or producers may also appear to speak about their work.

the premiere and drinking champagne. "We want to encourage that and make it as much as a social experience as is possible," Holmberg said. For the real world movie experience, a lottery determines who gets a ticket and on Saturday it was Sandra Fogel's turn to sit alone.

Of the 700-seats to choose from, she sat off-center a few rows from the side. "It's a little bit sad," she said, "because you do not know what will happen when the pandemic is over. What will happen with the cinemas?"



Anushka Sharma, Virat Kohli reveal daughter's name

MUMBAI, FEB 1 (PTI): Actor-producer Anushka Sharma and her cricketer-husband Virat Kohli on Monday announced that they have named their first child, daughter Vamika.

The couple, who announced their pregnancy last August, welcomed the baby on January 11.

In a heartwarming note on Instagram, Sharma said that the arrival of Vamika has been a blessing for them.

"We have lived together with love, presence and gratitude as a way of life but this little one, Vamika, has taken it to a whole new level!"

"Tears, laughter, worry, bliss - emotions that have been experienced in a

span of minutes sometimes," she wrote alongside a picture in which she can be seen holding the baby, with Kohli standing next to her.

"Sleep is elusive but our hearts are so full. Thanking you all for your wishes, prayers and good energy," the actor added. Soon after announcing the arrival of their first child on Twitter, the couple requested paparazzi to respect their privacy to not click photos of their newborn.

Sharma and Kohli, both 32, first met on the sets of a commercial and dated for four years before getting married in a private ceremony in Italy on December 11, 2017.

German beer sales suffer as virus restrictions bite

BERLIN (AP): Beer sales in Germany were down 5.5% last year, dragged lower by lengthy closures of bars and restaurants in the coronavirus pandemic, official data showed Monday.

German-based breweries and distributors sold 8.7 billion liters (2.3 billion gallons) of beer last year, the Federal Statistical Office said. That figure doesn't include alcohol-free beer or beer imported from outside the European Union.

German beer sales have been declining for years as a result of health concerns and other factors. They have now fallen 22.3% since 1993.

But last year's drop was unusually sharp, and a month-by-month breakdown pointed to the impact of coronavi-

rus restrictions. Sales were down 17.3% in April compared with a year earlier, and 14.1% in November.

Bars and restaurants in Germany were closed from March until May, and have been closed again since the beginning of November as part of the country's current second lockdown. Major events and festivals that would usually consume large amounts of beer also have been canceled.

Sales inside Germany — which made up nearly 83% of the total — were down 5.5% last year. Exports to other countries in the EU dropped 13.1% to 778.2 million liters (206 million gallons) while those to nations elsewhere were up 3.7% to 725.3 million liters (192 million gallons).

Jennifer Coolidge Pretended to Be Her Own Twin in Order to Date Two Guys at Once

If Jennifer Coolidge weren't already your hero, she really should be, especially after she explained how she tricked a pair of male best friends into dating her at the same time. It turns out that Jennifer Coolidge may actually be an even more brilliant actress than we all knew.

The Promising Young Woman star appeared on The Kelly Clarkson Show on Thursday, Jan. 28, where she told host Kelly Clarkson that she once pretended to be her own twin sister in order to date two different men during a years-ago visit to Hawaii. Yes, this story proves that she is an actual queen, and we all need to bow down to her.

The anecdote came up after the 59-year-old Legally Blonde actress told Kelly that she has previously had "all sorts of crazy experiences" during her trips to the Hawaiian islands.

When Kelly asked for more details, Jennifer replied, "Quite a few years back, I did come to Hawaii, and when you come and you're on vacation alone, you can kind of create anything you want," she shared. "I ended up meeting these two guys that were best friends, and I liked them both, and so I told them that I had an identical twin. And I dated both guys for two weeks."

Kelly was stunned and expressed concern that it would be "exhausting" to maintain the ruse, but Jennifer didn't appear to have any regrets. "I don't know if I would have the guts to do that now, but at the time, it really was sort of a great decision," the American Pie performer said.

Aries: Are you the master of your mind or merely the slave? You've got a 'taming of the shrew' situation at hand, Aries, a situation that requires you to rise above the judgements and the self-sabotaging patterns. This is going to be no mean feat, mind you. It's a good idea to cultivate a sustained meditation practice that renders you with the strength you need in order to confront your inner demons.
Tip: Rise above the judgements and the self-sabotage.
Taurus: Taurus, you've been around this block several times before, and you've been disappointed each of those times. If they wanted to be with you, they would be. If they wanted to make things work, they would have done that a long time ago. Stop waiting to be disappointed yet again. In the realm of work, however, things are looking up for you. Networking with the right people, getting the word across, and tastefully tooting your own horn are some ways in which you can expand your outreach.
Tip: You've been around this block several times before.
Gemini: UK-based spiritual teacher Mooji famously

we're talking about wanderlust, baby! The good news is, you have an action-packed week ahead. Some of you may be planning a spontaneous vacation, possibly with your amour in tow. Single and ready to mingle? We wouldn't put a holiday romance past you. Tip: A spontaneous vacation could be on the cards.
Virgo: The warrior never gives up. Read that again, Virgo. Today, you're being asked to pick up your arms and trudge along, despite the bruises and the scars. As you do, fix your gaze on the desired destination, and know that your invincibility will help you get through it all. It's true that you have faltered many times before and that you could falter a few times tomorrow too. But you will ultimately learn to hold your head high and emerge as the winner in any given situation. PS: Spirit has your back.
Tip: Get up. Show up.
Libra: The brand new version of you has no problem setting boundaries or calling a spade a spade. Yet, you shy away from being the most honest version of yourself with certain people for the fear that you may end up hurting them. Observe your fear, Libra. Where do you think it's

coming from? Chances are, you are behaving in a certain manner in order to seek love, approval, and validation from others. Remember, those who truly respect your presence will never expect you to be anybody but yourself.
Tip: It's time to call a spade a spade.
Scorpio: It's one of those days, Scorpio. You feel like everything and everybody is working against you and the traffic isn't helping one bit. Word for the wise: take it slow. Focus on doing one thing at a time as you approach each task in a meditative manner. Remember to include your team members too and appreciate their efforts. Know that your gratitude will bring more love and harmony into the organisation.
Tip: Focus on doing one task at a time.
Sagittarius: The cards are talking about a new work opportunity or business venture. Here's the catch, though: if there are other people involved, you may have to make a compromise of some sort. Remember, striking a deal with Lucifer doesn't have to be such a bad thing as long as you're doing it on your own terms.
Tip: Do things on your own terms.
Capricorn: There's no way out of this, Capricorn. Sometimes you just have to feel your emotions in

their entirety in order to rise above them. It will be easy for you to go into a dark space, given the intensity of your experience. Tell yourself to reach out for help anyway, knowing that your closest friends will hold your hand through this PS: If you've been considering therapy, now is the time!
Tip: Reach out for help.
Aquarius: Like the Geminis, you're being warned against the ebb and flow. It's but natural to feel pain and sorrow. It's but natural to feel the weight of the collective. What are you doing about these feelings though? Just for today, consider yourself a student of alchemy and ponder upon how you can transmute and transform your baser emotions into gold.
Tip: Consider yourself a student of alchemy.
Pisces: That 2020 was a bumpy ride for all of us is not news to you, Pisces. But don't let what transpired over the past year dampen your spirit. An opportunity you let go of (for various reasons) is finding its way back to you in a brand new form. Stay open and receptive to what the Universe is trying to show you. PS: Relocation may be on the cards for some of you.
Tip: An opportunity you let go of could find its way back to you.