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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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55 nomination papers in 8 most-contested municipal wards

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 09 MAR:**

The Unreserved [general] wards have understandably attracted the highest number of candidates filing nominations for the Municipal elections. The fact that the election is also non-partisan for the first time, in that political parties are not allowed to field candidates, or, as per the rules, play any role, direct or indirect, in the process, has clearly attracted wider interest since “independents” have to no longer go up against political parties.

What should also be of interest in the fact that general wards reserved for women have attracted high candidate interest and figure impressively among wards receiving the most number of nomination papers.

The total number of candidates could change on 11 March, the last date to withdraw nomination papers, but as things stand, there are 55 nomination papers still on the record when the numbers are added for the most-contested wards of each of Sikkim's seven municipal bodies. Mangan has two wards tied for the top spot with three candidates each.

Arithang-II ward under Gangtok Mu-

nicipal Corporation has the highest number of candidates in the fray this time. The 14 nomination papers which have cleared scrutiny in the ward are MD Shafique, Raju Tamang, Raju Tamang, Deo Kumari Pradhan, Ram Prasad Basnet, Rajeney Gurung, Damber Kumar Chettri, Navraj Tiwari, Indra Kr Gurung, Prakash Thapa, Digendra Gurung, Chiteez Thapa, Shabir Ahmad Khan and A. Gurung.

Under Rangpo Nagar Panchayat, the Unreserved ward of Rangpo Upper Bazar has the highest number of 12 candidates. In the running are Madan Kumar Karki, Badrudin Ansari, Dev Nath Sharma, MD Haiderali Ansari, Sajan Kr Agarwal, Bal Bahadur Sarki, Sanjiv Kumar Gupta, Bikash Kumar Prasad, Sudhir Kumar Chettri, Pinku Kumar Prasad, Chotey Lall Prasad and Meera Kumari.

In Singtam Nagar Panchayat, the Unreserved ward of Daragaon has the highest number of candidates for the municipal body in the fray at seven. The seven candidates are Mukesh Agarwal, Ta Tshering Lepcha, Pranay Sharma, Ram Naresh Giri, Manoj Gupta, Rupesh Kr Prasad and Ram Narayan Prasad.

In West Sikkim, the Unreserved women

ward of Central Gyalshing has the highest number of candidates for Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat at 5. In the fray are Jyoti Darjee, Khina Maya Tewari, Kunta Sangmoo Bhutia, Menuka Chhetri and Rashmi Agrawal.

In Namchi Municipal Council of South Sikkim, the Unreserved women ward of Gangyap has the highest number of 6 candidates for the South district headquarter town. The six candidates are Samika Tamang Chettri, Nima Choden Lepcha, Babita Gupta, Kushboo Kumari Burma, Radhika Agarwal and Saraswati Sharma.

Also in South, Majhigaon ward [ST] under Naya-Bazar Jorethang Nagar Panchayat has the highest number of 5 candidates. The five candidates are Asis Subba, Bandan Tamang, Samten Mokta (Tamang) and Tara Subba.

In North Sikkim, the highest number of three candidates each are contesting in Upper Mangan Bazar ward [ST] and Lower Mangan Bazar ward [UR women]. In Upper Mangan Bazar, the candidates are Zangmoo Bhutia, Ugen Palzor Kazi and Tshering Pintso Saring.

In Lower Mangan Bazar ward, the three candidates are Pratiba Lama, Tenzing Chime Kazi and Tshering Doma Bhutia.

7 of 53 wards go uncontested

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 09 MAR:**

Seven candidates across five municipal bodies of Sikkim have been won uncontested in the upcoming Municipal elections.

This is not necessarily the final score of uncontested wards since more could end up with only one candidate in the fray after 11 March, the last date for withdrawal of nomination papers.

There are eight municipal wards in Sikkim which have only two contestants in the fray at present – five out of 29 wards in East, two of the five in Mangan, and three of the 12 municipal wards in South Sikkim.

The number of uncontested wards was nine in the last municipal elections held in Sikkim in 2015 when the total number of wards was two lower at 51. This was a marked improvement of the first municipal polls held here in 2010 when 44 of the 47 municipal wards in the State had been bagged by uncontested by the party in office at the time.

This is the first time that political parties have been kept out of the municipal elections in Sikkim.

In Gangtok Municipal Corporation, Karma Tempo Rapgyal from Arithang-I, a ward reserved for ST, and Sabita Pradhan from Deorali-Upper Syari, an OBC Women reserved ward, will join the GMC uncontested.

In North Sikkim, Norkit Lepcha for Pentok [reserved for ST Women] under Mangan Nagar Panchayat is uncontested.

In West Sikkim, Rinzing Bhutia for Kyongsa ward [ST] under Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat has no opponents either, while in South district, Pabitra Kumar Sharma for Daragaon [OBC-State] under Naya-Bazaar Jorethang Panchayat is uncontested.

Also in South, Janga Bahadur Rai for Purano Namchi [OBC Central] and Mamta Kalikotey in Lower Ghurpisey [SC Women] under Namchi Municipal Council are uncontested.

East dist's 29 municipal wards attract 137 nomination papers, four fail scrutiny

GANGTOK, 09 MAR (IPR): The scrutiny of nomination papers of 137 candidates of 29 wards under the municipal bodies of East Sikkim - Gangtok Municipal Corporation, Singtam Nagar Panchayat and Rangpo Nagar Panchayat - was undertaken at the Office of the Municipal Returning Officer, East (MRO, East), Ragul K in the presence of candidates, today.

The scrutiny was overseen by the Election Observers for all wards of Gangtok Municipal Corporation, Tshewang Gyachho, Secretary Social Justice and Welfare Department and all wards for Rangpo and Singtam Nagar Panchayat, Kuber Bhandari, Secretary Excise Department.

During the scrutiny, the nom-

ination papers of ninety-one candidates of nineteen wards falling under Gangtok Municipal Corporation were done ward wise wherein eighty-nine were accepted by the Municipal Returning Officer, East.

Nominations of two candidates one each from Lower Sichey ward and Lower MG Marg-Lall Bazar ward were not accepted.

The nomination papers of all twenty-one candidates for five wards under Singtam Nagar Panchayat were accepted by the MRO, East.

In Rangpo Nagar Panchayat, twenty-five nominations were filed by the candidates for five wards, wherein two candidatures were rejected and twenty-three

were accepted.

The nominations of two candidates one each from Mandi Bazar ward and from Chanatar ward were not accepted.

In the scrutiny, the Municipal Returning Officer also explained in detail the Model Code of Conduct and clarified on some queries put forth by the candidates. He also handed over a booklet on Model Code of Conduct to the candidates and further apprised on do's and don'ts of MCC.

It may be mentioned that the last date for withdrawal of candidature (if any) is until on 11 Mar, 2021 3.00pm. After 3.00pm on the same day, symbol of all contesting candidates will be allotted by the MRO East.

06 -Upper Singhithang 2 candidates, 07- Purano Namchi 1 candidate.

Similarly, the final list of candidates under Nayabazar Jorethang Nagar Panchayat are as follows; 01- Shantinagar 2 candidates, 02- Trikaleshwar 2 candidates, 03- Daragaon 4 candidates, 04- Majigaon 4 candidates, 05- Nayabazar 3 candidates.

All 38 nomination papers pass scrutiny in South

**SUMMIT REPORT
NAMCHI, 09 MAR:**

The scrutiny of nomination papers of candidates for the Municipal Elections to Namchi Municipal Council and Naya-Bazaar Jorethang Nagar Panchayat was carried out in the office of Municipal Returning Officer (MRO, South), M. Bharani Kumar in the presence of

Election Observer, C. K Chettri, today. All nomination papers passed the scrutiny.

The final list of candidates under Namchi Municipal Council are as follows; 01- Gangyap 6 candidates, 02- Dambudara 5 candidates, 03 -Upper Ghurpisey 4 candidates, 04- Lower Ghurpisey 1 candidate, 05- Upper Boomtar 3 candidates,

3217 vaccinated of which 736 receive second dose

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 09 MAR:**

Sikkim has registered only one new case of novel coronavirus in the last 24 hours taking the state's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported so far to 6175. In the meantime, the figure of recovered cases of COVID-19 has also reached 5893 with one new recovery. With this, the number of active cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim still stands at 50.

In his daily health bulletin on Tuesday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia mentioned that one person from Arithang, Gangtok, tested positive for COVID-19 in RT-PCR testing. He mentioned that 156 samples were tested on Monday, of which 113 were tested via RT-PCR.

Mr Bhutia informed that a total of 3217 have been vaccinated for COVID-19 at 28 different vaccination sites across the State on Tuesday. Out of this, 2454 have received their first dose of vaccine and 736 received the second dose of their vaccine.



While giving break-up of vaccinations, he mentioned that 825 [105 first dose and 720 second dose] healthcare workers, 373 [330 first dose and 43 second dose] frontline workers, 224 persons of age group 45 to 59 years old with comorbidities and 1795 persons of age group 60 years and above were vaccinated today.

All 10 candidates pass scrutiny in North

MANGAN, 09 MAR (IPR):

The scrutiny of nomination papers for eleven (11) candidates who have filed for nominations for the upcoming Municipal Elections 2021 for 7 Mangan Nagar Panchayat took place in the office of the Municipal Returning Officer, Tenzing. T. Kaleon, today. Election Observer for North District, D.B Rawat was also present

along with officers of the Election Department.

The documents of all the candidates were scrutinized (ward wise) and they were briefed on the details of the process. The Municipal Returning Officer explained the criteria, eligibility and the requirements for contesting the elections and answered queries and questions placed by

the candidates. He also provided information regarding the allotment of symbols for candidates. He stated that the entire election process would be fair and transparent.

For Pentok ward, which is reserved for ST Women, only one candidate - Norkit Lepcha had filed her nomination, thereby resulting into “uncontested.” She was

presented with Form-35.

There are five wards under 7 Mangan Nagar Panchayat.

All nominations were accepted and stated valid. Form 24 (Appointment of Election Agent) was distributed to the candidates.

The date of withdrawal of nominations (if any) is 11th March 2021 from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm.

15 pass scrutiny for 5 wards in Gyalshing, one wins uncontested

GYALSHING, 09 MAR (IPR):

The scrutiny of nomination papers filed by candidates for Municipal Election 2021 of Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat was held at the office of District Collector, West today.

The scrutiny was done in the special presence of Election Observer for West District, MT Sherpa alongside Municipal Returning Officer, Karma R Bonpo, Assistant Returning Officer, Agawane Rohan Ramesh and Officials from Election Department.

A total number of fifteen candidates have filed their nomination from five wards under Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat and under FORM-20 all candidates were validly nominated.

During scrutiny, all the fifteen nominations were accepted after necessary enquiries by the Municipal Returning Officer, West. The following candidates are eligible for contesting the upcoming Municipal Election 2021 under Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat.

1. 01-Kyongsa ward: Rinzing Bhutia, the said ward is reserved for (Scheduled Tribe).



2. 02-Byadong ward: Nirmala Hingmang, Praveen Darjee and Sandu Darjee, the said ward is reserved for (Scheduled Caste).

3. 03-Nayabazaar ward: Akki Doma Bhutia, Chunkila Bhutia and Laki Doma Bhutia, the said ward is reserved for Scheduled Tribe (Women).

4. 04-Central Gyalshing ward: Jyoti Darjee, Khina Maya Tewari, Kunta Sangmoo Bhutia, Menuka Chhetri and Rashmi Agrawal, the said ward is reserved for Unreserved (Women).

5. 05-New Gyalshing ward: Devendra Prasad Sharma, Durga Singh Karki Chhetri and Indra

Bahadur Karki, the said ward is reserved for OBC (State).

The deadline for filing nomination ended yesterday. The last date for withdrawal of candidature (if any) will be on Thursday until 3:00pm i.e. on 11 March and their respective symbols will be distributed thereafter. Polling will be contested on 31 March.

Later Election Observer inspected the four different polling stations under Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat. Following are polling stations according to their respective wards.

1. SPWD, AE Office, for 2- Byadong.
2. Community Hall,

Gyalshing Room No. I for 3-Naya Bazar.

3. Community Hall, Gyalshing Room No. II for 4-Central Gyalshing.

4. Community Hall, Gyalshing Room No. III for 5-New Gyalshing and polling station pertaining to 1-Kyongsha at Government Girls Senior Secondary school stands eliminated because the candidate came out uncontested.

While in inspection process, Election Observer suggested officials to construct ramps for disable friendly polling booths, repair the door latches, and maintain safe distance for safety and hassle-free procedure of the election.

Interschool Junior Olympics kicks off in North Sikkim



WANGCHUK BHUTIA
MANGAN, 09 MAR:

The four-day district level 1st Inter School Junior Olympic games held under the theme, "Sports for Peace & Development" for under 14 and 17

boys and girls kicked off at Mangan Senior Secondary School in North Sikkim today.

The event is being organized by the Department of Sports & Youth Affairs and competitions being held

in disciplines like athletics, archery, boxing, badminton, football, karate, Taekwondo, Table Tennis, etc.

The AD Sports, Janim Lepcha, explained the event during the inauguration

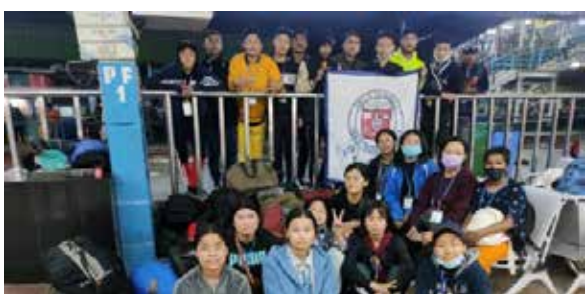
which was also attended by Dzongu MLA, Pintso Namgyal Lepcha, accompanied by ADC-North, Sonam Lepcha, DSP Karma Chedup Bhutia, zilla members and representatives of different schools.

Kewzing school students leave for NE NSS fest

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 09 MAR:

Twenty students and two escort teachers from Government Senior Secondary School, Kewzing, have left for Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, to take part in the North East NSS Festival.

A press release informs that the team is led by PGT cum NSS Programme Officer



Unit-1, Suresh Sharma and GTA, Sonam Doma Bhutia. The North East NSS Festival is going to be held at Dera Na-

tung Government College Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh from 08 to 12 Mar, 2021.

Total of 15 teams

with 300 NSS volunteers from Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Sikkim, Guwahati University, Dibrugarh University, Bodoland University, Assam Agriculture University, Assam University, Assam Donbosco University and Tezpur University are going to participate in the festival, the release adds.

Village-level Children's Parliament formed at Hee Gyathang

MANGAN, 09 MAR (IPR):

The "Village Level Children's Parliament" of Hee Gyathang GPU was formed by the District Child Protection Unit (North) as part of the Child Protection Scheme being implemented by the Social Justice and Welfare Department in coordination with the Village Level Child Protection Committee (VL-CPC) of the GPU today.

The programme was held in convergence with the "Awareness Programme on Sexual Crimes and Offences Against Children" organized by North District Police led by the SP (North), Ongmu Bhutia.

She highlighted on the growing number of POCSO cases in the district and encouraged the children to focus on their academics and ambitions.

She requested the parents and public to be community vigilantes and avert such cases in future by remaining involved and alert regarding their children's activities. She urged everyone to become proactive and



take responsibility towards the welfare of children.

The DCPO North, Wendy Lepcha highlighted on the various child related legislations and child protection mechanism functional in the State.

The SI (Mangan), Bishan Rai emphasized on the need of community alertness and cooperation in ensuring a safe environment for the children. The CWC (North) Chairperson, Mingma Doma Bhutia shared her experience in the field of domestic violence and how it correlated to children being vulnerable and prone to child abuse cases.

The newly formed Village Level Children's

Parliament were made aware of the objective behind the formation of Child Parliament, which was to provide a platform to the children to speak and to be heard; to make them active & responsible citizens with a movement of their own to fight for their rights.

The election process was conducted after the roles and responsibilities of each Minister of the Parliament were explained.

The Panchayat President-cum-Chairperson VLPCC, Sonam Kipa Bhutia administered the oath-taking ceremony. She encouraged the children to make the best use of this opportunity given to them.

SDPO (Mangan), Tseten Palzor Bhutia en-

couraged everyone to report any cases of offence against children and approach the police when required and child protection units in preventing violation of child rights.

The Panchayat President-cum-Chairperson, VLPCC, Sonam Kipa Bhutia conducted the oath taking ceremony and encouraged the children to utilize this platform to their fullest benefit.

The programme was concluded by the SDPO, Mangan, Tseten Palzor Bhutia, who encouraged everyone to report any case of offences against children and utilize the services of police and child protection units in preventing violation of child rights.

District Level Olympic Games held at Mangan



MANGAN, 09 MAR (IPR):

The 1st District Level Inter School Junior Olympic Games under Sports for Peace and Development under Khelo India, 2021 was organized by the Sports and Youth Affairs Department-North at Mangan Senior Secondary School playground today. The event was graced by the chief guest MLA Dzongu, Pintso Namgyal Lepcha and he was accompanied

by ADM(N), DSP(HQ), Zilla Panchayat, Panchayat members, Principal Mangan Senior Secondary School, Officers from various line departments and coaches.

The event began with torch relay. It was followed by march past by the athletes and band displays. Deputy Director Sports and Youth Affairs North presented a souvenir to the chief guest.

Various students

from 4 different blocks of North District, namely Chungthang block, Kabi block, Mangan block and Passindang block took part in the events.

Many sporting activities were included in the event for Under 14 and 17 categories (boys and girls, both). Under 17 Boys and Girls categories had: Athletics, Archery, Boxing, Badminton, Football, Karate, Taekwondo and Table Tennis.

Under 14 Boys and Girls had; Athletics, Badminton, Boxing, Football, Table Tennis and Taekwondo.

Under 14 boys a football semi-final game was played between Mangan Senior Secondary School and Phensong Secondary School. The former won the match and have qualified for the finals.

The winners were awarded with certificates and medals.

Training of Polling Officers begins in East

GANGTOK, 09 MAR (IPR):

A day long first session of training of Polling Officers II and III (PO 2 & PO-3) for the upcoming Municipal Election-2021 was held at the conference hall of Zilla Bhawan, East today.

Sub Divisional Magistrate HQ-II, Dr. Anand Sharma was the Resource Person of the training. He briefed the officials on the various roles and responsibilities to conduct the upcoming Municipal Election.

Additional District Magistrate and also the Assistant Municipal Returning Officer East, Tushar Nikhare presided



over the training.

During the training, the trainees were apprised about the tasks to be diligently carried out prior to the polling day, on the day of polling and after the polling day. The trainees were informed about the various do's and don'ts regarding the

polling process in line with the guidelines of the Election Commission of India (ECI). The significance of the conduct of the mock poll before commencing the actual poll was also emphasized and all the necessary procedures pertaining to the polling process were demon-

strated.

The functioning of the Electronic Voting Machine (Control and Ballot Unit) was also explained and a hands-on training session was conducted to familiarize the trainees with EVM Control and Ballot Unit.

It is to be mentioned that the role of the Polling Officer-II is to apply indelible ink, to be in-charge of the voting registers, and to generate voter slip. The role of the Polling Officer-III is to collect voters slip and to be in-charge of the control unit.

The training programme had the presence of about 130 trainees.

Brandy Norwood to play pivotal role in ABC music drama pilot 'Queens'

LOS ANGELES, MAR 9

(PTI): "Cinderella" star Brandy Norwood has been roped in to play one of the lead roles in the ABC hip hop drama pilot "Queens".

Written by Zahir McGhee, "Queens" focuses on four estranged and out-of-touch women in their 40s who reunite for a chance to recapture their fame and regain the swagger they had in the 1990s as hip hop group the Nasty Bitches.

Brandy joins previously announced cast members Eve, Naturi Naughton, and Pepi Sonuga.

All the lead actors, including Brandy, will record and perform original songs for the show as their respective characters.

McGhee will executive produce the show with Sabrina Wind.

Tim Story will direct and executive produce the pilot, while ABC Signature will produce.

KUTSE SHEGU

The 49th days kutse Shegu of Lt. Tashi Doma Bhutia of Upper Gharipsey, Namchi South Sikkim who left her heavenly abode on 26th January 2021 falls on 15th March 2021.

All relatives, friends and well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence Upper Gharipsey, Namchi.

We also express our sincere gratitude to all those who extended their support during our time of bereavement.

Mr. Norden Bhutia (husband),
Mr. I Sonam Topagay Bhutia (son)
Ms. Tshering Denka Bhutia (daughter)
Ms. Pema Choden Bhutia (daughter).



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Belgian police hit organized crime with hundreds of raids

BRUSSELS (AP): Belgian police launched an operation of unprecedented scale against organized crime on Tuesday, according to the country's federal prosecutor's office.

About 200 searches mobilizing more than 1,200 police officers were carried out simultaneously throughout the country of 11.5 million people, the office told The Associated Press.

A spokesperson at the prosecutor's office said searches started at around 5 a.m.. According to broadcaster RTBF, the searches mainly took place in the region of Antwerp, and investigators focused on drug traffickers and a



crime network with international connections.

With thousands of shipping containers reaching Antwerp every day, the Belgian port city is one of Europe's main entry ports for cocaine. Trafficking in the city has led to a surge of violence

recently, with gun battles and grenade attacks taking place.

Last year, authorities in Belgium and three other countries dismantled a criminal drug trafficking network that shipped hundreds of millions of dollars worth of cocaine

into Western Europe. The investigation, which started when a container with 2.8 tons of cocaine was found last year in Antwerp, uncovered an international network with connections in at least four European countries and South America.

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East district Interschool Junior Olympics begins in Gangtok

SAGAR CHETTRI
GANGTOK, 09 MAR:

The first district-level Interschool Junior Olympic Games, being held on the theme, 'Sports for Peace and Development,' a vertical of Khelo India for East District got underway here on Tuesday for East Sikkim.

2,354 sportspersons in U-14 and U-17 boys & girls categories from all 11 blocks of East District have registered for the Jr Olympics.

The week-long event is being organized by the Department of Sports & Youth Affairs and is sponsored by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports.

The opening ceremony at Paljor Stadium had



Sikkim Olympic Association president, Kuber Bhandari, as chief guest accompanied by Sikkim Amateur Athletic Association president, Hari Chettri, as the guest of honour.

In her welcome address, Sports & Youth Affairs Department Deputy Director [East], Lalita Chettri, informed that each block of the district is being represented by

214 students. Competitions are being held in eight disciplines in U-17 boys & girls and six disciplines in U-14 boys and girls categories at being hosted at six venues in and around Gangtok.

Athletics is being held at Khel Gaon, Reshithang, Archery at the Archery Field in Tathangchen and Boxing, Badminton, Football, Karate, Table-Tennis

and Taekwondo at different venues in the Paljor Stadium complex.

Archery and Karate have not been included in the U-14 category.

The Deputy Director informed that the short-listed teams and athletes will participate in the upcoming state-level competition.

The opening ceremony included a torch-bearing ceremony by the ath-

letes followed by march part escorted by PET Rakdong BAC, Bhanu Chapagai and oath taking ceremony for participants administered by Assistant Director Rhinock BAC, Pintso Bhutia.

Another highlight of the opening ceremony was a Taekwondo demonstration.

The opening ceremony was followed by an U-17 football match between Gangtok and Ranka BACs.

In the nail-biting faceoff, Ranka edged past Gangtok 2-1. Anish Rai and Jigdel Zangpo Bhutia scored for Ranka, while the lone goal for Gangtok was scored by Prashant.

SRM Univ celebrates Int'l Women's Day



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 09 MAR:

SRM University Sikkim observed International Women's Day with a series of events for students, faculty and the support staff on 08 Mar, 2021, a press release informs.

The School of Social Sciences organized a debate competition among students on the theme of 'Women in Leadership'. Participants spoke passionately on the theme, both for and against the

motion.

The School also presented a street play called Dekhi-Suni which highlighted the small and subtle discriminations women face. The day was rounded off with a series of programmes which included discussions on the significance of International Women's Day as well as speeches by male faculty on women who have had the most influence on their lives.

There were also friendly contests like

Pictionary and musical chairs. Speaking at the inauguration of the day's programme, Vice Chancellor Ch Satish Kumar discussed various scientific research which rebuts traditionally held notions about women.

He further added, "While this day should be observed at all levels of society, it is important that we take it out of the narrow confines of the urban middle class and into rural areas. That will be an accomplishment."

Int'l Women's Day celebrated at Amba Mamring

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 08 MAR:

International Women's Day was celebrated at Amba Mamring VAC (Village Administration Centre) in the presence of Additional District Collector (Development), Pakyong, Block Development Officer, Pakyong, Citizens Foundation staff, SRLM staff, teachers of Amba and Mamring Se-

nior Secondary Schools, Self-help groups from different villages of Pakyong and more than 60 schoolgirls from Amba and Mamring Senior Secondary Schools. This event was organized jointly by Citizens Foundation, Gram Panchayat Unit, Amba, SRLM Sikkim and Mamring Senior Secondary School.



RJD joins Congress-led Grand Alliance in Assam

GUWAHATI, MAR 9 (PTI):

The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) on Tuesday said that it has joined the opposition Congress-led 'Grand Alliance' in Assam and will contest one seat during the first phase of the assembly election.

With this, the number of constituents in the Grand

Alliance has gone up to eight. RJD Assam president Shonarul Shah Mustafa told PTI that the party has formally joined the opposition grouping and it will contest the Tinsukia constituency which will go to polls during the first phase on March 27.


"Now talks are on between central leaders of

the RJD and the Congress to finalise the seat-sharing agreement for the second and third phase of polling," he said. Mustafa said that the party has fielded Hira Devi Choudhury for Tinsukia, which has a large number of Hindi-speaking people.

State Congress spokesperson Bobbeeta Sharma confirmed that the RJD has

joined the Grand Alliance.

Earlier, the Grand Alliance consisted of the Congress, AIUDF, Bodoland People's Front (BPF), CPI, CPI(M), CPI(ML) and the Anchalik Gana Morcha (AGM). It was formed to fight the upcoming election for the 126-member assembly against the BJP-led NDA.



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT COLLECTOR
GYALSHING, WEST SIKKIM

Memo No. 420/DCW/

Dated: 08/03/2021

PUBLIC NOTICE

Under Section 3G of National Highway Act, 1956

Whereas the Central Government, in the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, declared its intention to acquire the land specified in the Schedule annexed to the notification bearing No. 4445(E) dated 08.12.2020 published in the Gazette of India, Extraordinary, Part II, Section 3, issued under sub-section (1) of Section 3A of the National Highways Act, 1956 (48 of 1956) (hereinafter referred to as the said Act) for building (Widening/ Four laning etc.) maintenance management and operation of NH No. 510. On the stretch of land from Km 58+840 to Km 75+000 (Legship to Gyalshing) in the district of West in the state of Sikkim.

And whereas, the substance of the said notification was published in Hamro Varta and Sikkim Express dated 12.12.2020 under sub-section (3) of section 3A of the said Act.

And whereas the Competent Authority has received objections filed under Section 3-C considered and disallowed the same appropriately.

And whereas, in pursuance of sub-section (1) of section 3D of the said Act, the Competent Authority has submitted its report to the central Government.

And whereas, upon receipt of the said report of the competent authority and in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (1) of section 3D of the said Act, the Central Government has declared that the land specified in the said Schedule should be acquired for the aforesaid purpose.

And whereas, the said declaration has been published in the Gazette of India, Extraordinary, Part II, bearing No. 855(E), dated 22.02.2021 as required under Section 3D of the said Act.

And further, in pursuance to sub-section (2) of section 3D of the said Act, the Central Government hereby declares that on publication of this notification in the Officials Gazette, the land specified in the said Schedule shall vest absolutely in the Central Government, free from all encumbrances.

Now, therefore, in compliance of sub-section (3) of Section #G, the Competent Authority hereby invites all the landowners or persons interested in the land being acquired under these proceedings to submit their claims in respect of the land mentioned in the Schedule given here-in-below within a period of 15 days from the date of publication of this Public Notice in the office of the Competent Authority i.e. Office of District Collector, Gyalshing, West Sikkim, by 23.03.2021.

All the persons interested
(owner of the lands and other interested person(s)) in the lands specified in the Schedule given below are hereby called upon to submit their claims in the said land (their share, area of land, any assets attached there to e.g. structure/tress etc. and state the nature of the respective interest in such lands along with relevant records. The said landowners or persons interested therein shall also furnish the particulars of their Bank Accounts to which they would like their compensation amount to be credited. The claims may be submitted in the following indicative format:

Name of village/ Town	Name of the Landowner/ interested person	Field Survey No.	Area of Land in his share	Any structure/ trees/tube well attached to the land	Na me of the Bank & Branch in which he/ she hold the Account	Particulars of the Bank Account No. IFSC Code of the Bank Branch.
1						
2						
3						
4						

SCHEDULE
Schedule is attached herewith to this notice

Sd/-
District Collector
Gyalshing, West District
Sikkim.

The date and time of tender and submission of completed bid document are as under.

- Uploading of bidding documents in e-procurement portal by the Department: 12/03/2021.
- Last date for submission of bids online by the Bidders: 15/04/2021, 1600 hours.
- Last Date of submission of hard copy of bid security: 16/04/2021.
- Date of opening of bids: After the lifting of Code of Conduct for Municipal Election.

2. Eligible Contractors having experience in the construction of building works may download the details and bidding documents from the e-procurement portal i.e. www.sikkimtender.gov.in w.e.f 12.03.2021.

3. The completed tender documents must be uploaded in the e-procurement portal on or before 15/04/2021, 1600 hours. All the relevant papers as per the bidding documents along with the cost of tender document and Earnest Money Deposit (EMC) in the form of challan / demand draft and TDR respectively drawn in favour Additional Director (Accounts), Rural Development Department, Government of Sikkim, should be upload in the portal.

4. The department reserves the right to accept or reject and bid without assigning any reason thereof.

IMPORTANT EVENTS

NAME OF WORK	1	Construction of Rurban Rurban Community Complex and Training Centre cum Cafeteria at Pegha Goan at Soreng in West Sikkim Under Shyam Parsad Mukharji Rurban Mission.
DATE OF UPLOADING OF BIDDING DOCUMENTS AND OTHER IMPORTANT EVENTS IN E-PROCUREMENT PORTAL		12/03/2021
LAST DATE AND TIME FOR UPLOADING OF BIDS IN E-PROCUREMENT PORTAL		15/04/2021, 1600 hours
DATE AND TIME OF OPENING OF BIDS		After the lifting of Code of Conduct for Mincipal Election.
PLACE OF OPENING OF BIDS		Office of the Assistant Engineer (P), Rural Development Department, Government of Sikkim, Gangtok.
APPROVAL OF BID		After the lifting of Code of Conduct for Mincipal Election
COMMUNICATION OF APPROVAL		After the lifting of Code of Conduct for Mincipal Election

Sd/-
Additioanl Chief Engineer (P)
RDD

RO. No. 262/IPR/Pub/Classi./20-21
Dated: 08.03.2021

The Uprising Sustains

In spite of everything

The Dalai Lama, in a short teaching on the Jataka Tales, underlined destructive emotions such as fear, anger and suspicion, and delved on how these emotions can be tackled through love and compassion.

As much as he was drawing out the morals from Jataka Tales, he was also speaking from experience, having witnessed how “fear, anger and suspicion” have affected his land and his people and how they continue to be hounded because the insecurities of others and also the suspicions projected on them. His teachings have to be received in light of the present that the Tibetans find themselves in and the anniversary of the Tibetan Uprising Day on 10 March when emotions are bound to be running high in the community. 62 years have passed since the Tibetans rose up against China, and a sizeable number of them have remained refugees ever since then. The Dalai Lama clearly sensed the doubts that must be creeping into many minds and also made a clear call for unity among the Tibetan people. He even admitted that in the past, even monasteries in Tibet fought each other because of sectarian divisions. “However, now we are in the 21st century. Such sectarian violence and attitude is outdated and backward,” the Dalai Lama has often said.

His call for unity, his flagging of aggressive emotions as a worry and his effort to continue speaking to his people are not new; in fact, these have been a consistent part of his world view and belief structure ever since he became a public figure. But as mentioned earlier, his people find themselves at another anniversary, Wednesday marking the 62nd Uprising Day, and could use some comfort from the icon who has held them together in exile for more than six decades now.

The Tibetan rose up against Chinese occupation on 10 March, 1959. That was a long time ago... even the generation that was born immediately after the first group of Tibetans followed the Dalai Lama into exile are now past their youth and have become senior citizens watching the Tibetan issue get sidelined, compromised and subverted - never by the Tibetans, but often even by their friends and hosts. Through the years, the Berlin Wall has fallen, USSR has disintegrated and even Communist China has embraced capitalism and globalisation, but things have not improved for Tibetans inside Tibet under Chinese occupation. If anything, the situation has consistently turned worse.

As for Tibetan tenacity itself, six decades of Chinese attempts at placating and subjugating, shutting out and opening, swamping and cajoling, have failed to quell the proud nationalism of Tibet. Communist China has managed to change the demography of Tibet and engineered infrastructure which remains impossible to consider anywhere else in the world, but it has still remained unsuccessful in erasing Tibetan identity. Even though the Tibetans receive what can only be called token support from governments around the world, its people persevere and their cause sustains. Meanwhile, the world has so much at stake in China that it is unlikely that international pressure on it to resolve the Tibet issue will be meaningfully exerted in the near future. In that sense, the Tibetans have not only suffered in the hands of China, but have also suffered deception by friends.

Six decades of such denial would have broken the back of any movement, but Tibetans keep optimism alive by still reiterating belief in the middle-path approach laid out by the Dalai Lama, and by doing so they remind the world that nothing sustains like hope. Through the haze of defeatism and negativity that pervades our times, a silver lining streaks with the Dalai Lama’s commitment to Tibet and Tibetans and the now proven resilience of the Tibetans themselves to nurture and cultivate their faith, culture and traditions in exile even as it gets diluted and erased at home. He continues to remain optimistic about the chances of returning with self-respect and also knows that age is catching up with him. He is also obviously aware that China is only playing the waiting game hoping that the Tibetan unity that he has crafted with so much hard work will disintegrate after he is no longer around to hold the strands. To defend against this, he has introduced democracy to his people and nurtured a second line of leaders.

What he is nurturing are a People who will stand strong in the future as well as they have thus far under his guidance. The Dalai Lama is a man of faith and that perhaps explains his tremendous reserves of patience and ability to let go and trust people. And when he leads by example, he radiates hope and the Tibetans in exile, and even those at home, continue to draw inspiration from him. The community has reciprocated well because even though they remain refugees, the Tibetans can congratulate themselves for having achieved much more than many democracies and independent nations around them. It is this sentiment and confidence that they should celebrate when they mark their Uprising Day, not the delays and the changing faces of people and organizations they saw as friends.

Google’s scrapping third-party cookies – but invasive targeted advertising will live on

EERKE BOITEN

THECONVERSATION.COM

Google has announced plans to stop using tracking cookies on its Chrome browser by 2022, replacing them with a group profiling system in a move the company says will plot “a course towards a more privacy-friendly web”.

The change is significant. Chrome commands some two-thirds of the web browser market. Third-party tracking cookies, meanwhile, underpin much of the targeted advertising industry. And, while Mozilla’s Firefox and Apple’s Safari have already stopped supporting third-party cookies, Google is the first firm to produce replacement advertising support.

Rather than tracking and targeting you on an individual basis, Google’s alternative groups you instead into a crowd of people with similar generalised interests. Google argues this grants users more privacy. This sits oddly with the reassurance to advertisers that the new technique is at least 95% as effective as individual targeting.

But beneath the gloss of Google’s press releases, the shift from tracking to profiling raises a number of new privacy and discrimination concerns. Ostensibly a move to boost individual privacy, Chrome’s new system ultimately looks set to benefit Google, handing the company yet another advantage over its beleaguered AdTech competitors.

COOKIES TO COHORTS

The traditional web tracking and targeting method uses so-called cookies: small files stored by web browsers such as Chrome. Their original purpose was to retain information – such as the items you’ve added to online shopping carts, for example – between browsing sessions. This was seen as useful for consumers.

Nowadays, cookies mostly serve



advertising interests. On Chrome, third parties use cookies to track you across the web, amassing enough data on your browsing habits to target you with highly specific adverts.

In recognition of how invasive this tracking has become, the EU’s data protection laws class cookies as “online identifiers”, subject to regulations that require websites to gain your consent before issuing cookies to your browser.

Google’s new system for Chrome will abandon that. The browser will instead use your recent browsing history to generate your “cohort identity”. That’s currently achieved by using a “simhash”, which in simple terms generates “magic numbers” to represent your interests before grouping you with those in possession of similar numbers.

Hidden within a cohort of a few thousand individuals, you’ll then have adverts targeted at your cohort, rather than you as an individual. This is presented as a boost for privacy, as it moves away from the individualised tracking and targeting that made third-party cookies particularly invasive.

TOWARDS FACEBOOK’S MODEL

Conceptually, Google’s proposed system isn’t new – it is a form of profiling, which enables an advertising model that Facebook has been using for some time. Targeting someone’s

cohort identity is just like creating a “Lookalike Audience” based on one individual, which is a service Facebook currently offers advertisers.

We should expect profiling to also create a number of different named cohorts, from which advertisers can create Custom Audiences with mixed interests – something that Facebook also offers.

This is where profiling becomes problematic. In 2016, it was revealed that Facebook allowed housing advertisers to exclude users based on race. Even after Facebook made changes to its audience groupings, it was still possible for advertisers to discriminate based on sensitive interests held predominantly by minorities.

Profiling involves machine-learning algorithms and AI technologies which have repeatedly been shown to reinforce real-world bias. As such, Google’s decision to sack key members of its AI ethics team just as Chrome is adopting a profiling advertising model appears particularly alarming.

Aside from the known harms and risks of profiling, it’s unclear how Google’s new model enhances individual privacy. For the system to work, Chrome must freely volunteer your cohort identity to any website you visit, whereas a third-party cookie doesn’t reveal that volume of

data to all websites.

The smaller cohorts get, meanwhile, the easier you’ll be to spot within them. And you’d expect Google to favour smaller cohorts, seeing as larger cohorts naturally reduce the accuracy of targeted advertising. Overall, the change will introduce a number of new risks for privacy and discrimination. So why else might Google have chosen to scrap third-party cookies on Chrome?

GOOGLE’S MIXED MOTIVATIONS

One reason is regulation. The EU’s new ePrivacy directive may well move to abolish the traditional use of tracking cookies within the EU anyway, with far-reaching consequences for other jurisdictions. So Google may simply be jumping before being pushed.

By restricting how third-party advertising services can use Chrome, Google may be set to benefit by stifling competition, too. An interest group for online advertisers has already asked the UK’s competition watchdog to account for the Chrome change as part of its existing probe into Google’s advertising practices. Google itself will retain ample tracking possibilities after the change, particularly when Chrome users are logged in to their Google accounts.

Google is the biggest beneficiary of Chrome’s move from cookies to cohorts. Framed as a privacy boon, Google’s new system only mildly restricts its traditional targeted advertising reach, while adding Facebook’s profiling-based mode of advertising to its repertoire.

End users like you and I, meanwhile, are unlikely to notice any difference whatsoever. We’ll still be watched and targeted based on our online activity – only now as part of a group, rather than an individual.

[the writer is Professor of Cybersecurity, School of Computer Science and Informatics, De Montfort University]

City of Lost Mosques: How Suzhou Tells the Story of China’s Islamic Past

ALESSANDRA CAPPELLETTI

THECONVERSATION.COM

The labyrinth of alleys and lanes in the old city of Suzhou hides a secret: historical fragments of the long history of Islam in China. Regular stories in the international press highlighting the treatment of Muslims in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region tend to obscure the fact that Islam was once highly regarded by Chinese emperors.

From written records and imperial edicts engraved on steles (standing stone slabs monuments) it is clear that these Islamic communities enjoyed the favour of the emperors – especially during the Tang (618-907 AD), Yuan (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties. Islam was looked on favourably by the imperial court because of its ethics, which – as far as the emperors were concerned – promoted harmonious and peaceful relations between the diverse peoples in the imperial territories.

Before the Panthay and Tungan rebellions in the second half of the 19th century in western China, when millions of Muslims were killed or relocated, Islam was considered by Christian missionaries in the country – and particularly by Russian scholars – as a growing threat. Islam was considered by many in the west to have the potential to become the national religion in China – which would have made China the biggest Islamic country in the world.

ISLAM AND CHINA: A SPECIAL CONNECTION

Today, Suzhou is a vibrant, wealthy city of 12 mil-

lion people only 20 minutes by high speed train from Shanghai. What remains of “Islamic Suzhou” lies just outside the city wall to the north-west. There is only one active mosque: Taipingfang, in the northern commercial and entertainment district of Shilu.

Taipingfang was restored in 2018 and is where local and visiting Muslims go to pray. It’s in a busy part of the neighbourhood, squeezed in a tiny alley, surrounded by small restaurants and hotels, canteens, food stalls and butchers catering to Uighur and Hui Muslims. The butchers of Taipingfang – like those in Beijing’s Niujie area where the majority of the city’s Muslim minority lives – are popularly thought to sell the best meat.

Before 1949, Suzhou had at least ten mosques of various sizes and social importance. Many of them were vast buildings with precious furniture and sophisticated decorations, while others were smaller intimate prayer rooms. One of them was a women’s mosque presided over by a female imam.

The women’s mosque, Baolinqian, was one of a cluster of four mosques was built during the Qing Dynasty, all connected to the wealthy Yang family inside the city walls in the north-western part of the city. Built in 1923, it was established by initiative of three married women from the Yang family who donated the building and raised funding from other Muslim families to turn it into a women’s mosque. During the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976), the mosque’s library, containing holy scriptures, was damaged and the build-

ing was turned into private houses. Nothing remains today to show it was a mosque.

Another Yang family mosque, Tiejunong, was built over three years during the reign of the Qing emperor Guagxu, from 1879 to 1881. It was the biggest in Suzhou with an area of more than 3,000 square metres, featuring seven courtyards. The main hall for Friday prayers had ten rooms and could hold more than 300 people. The courtyard included a minaret and a pavilion in which was housed an imperial stele.

Now a middle school, Tiejunong is recognisable from the external architecture and an ancient wooden engraved side door. Beyond a monumental entrance, there is still the idea of the main courtyard surrounded by trees. Now there is a huge football field, and the trees on the sides of the walkway are still visible from their chopped trunks. The ablution area covered by blue tiles clearly shows the past presence of a mosque.

Tiankuqian Mosque was built in 1906 and is now inhabited by poor city residents – most likely as a result of the practice during the Cultural Revolution of reallocating large, aristocratic or religious buildings as living accommodation for indigent families. The mosque used to cover an area of almost 2,000 square metres, with a main hall, a guest hall and ablution room.

The structure of the main hall was like a large lecture place, containing – as the local historical records report – a ginkgo wood horizontal plaque written in calligraphy

by master Yu Yue. Because many Muslim jade workers had businesses in the same district, donations made the mosque the most prosperous in the whole of China. And, in the 1920s, a school teaching Islamic and Confucian texts was opened there.

Many of the mosques had affiliated schools teaching the Arabic language and Islamic writings to the children of the Muslim communities. Suzhou is one of the first cultural centres where Islamic scriptures were published in the Chinese language. Translations from Persian into Chinese were made by the 16th-century Suzhou scholars, Zhang Zhong and Zhou Shiqi, making the city an early hub of Islamic intellectual culture.

But it was an Islamic hub hybridised in its Chinese context, a process described in Jonathan Lipman’s book, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China*. Islamic texts were taught alongside Confucian ones, giving birth to an eclectic corpus of Islamic writings.

The oldest Suzhou mosque, Xiguan, takes its name from the adjacent Xiguan bridge in the centre of the old city. It was built in the 13th century during the Yuan dynasty, probably financed by the prominent Muslim Sayyid family, and its influential Yunnan’s provincial governor, Sayyid Ajall Shams al-Din Omar al-Bukhari (1211–1279).

The mosque was later incorporated into a government building during the Ming dynasty, so only written accounts remain of its existence in local Chinese records. This suggests – and it is already a well-known

historical assessment – that the Yuan dynasty favoured Muslims from Central Asia in its administration and government service. This significant population group was much later, in the 1950s, classified within China as the Hui minority and constitute about half of China’s Muslims today.

TRACES OF THE PAST

The Cultural Revolution effectively banned Islam in China, as religions of any kind were considered tools to oppress and silence the peoples’ needs.

As a result, little remains of these religious buildings today. But the traces that do still exist – a door, a stone, the structure of the façade, or simply a known address, written in an archive – are symbolic representations of a past life. These are clues to the diverse social context and spiritual geography that these places inspired and were part of.

As the American sinologist, Frederick Mote – a professor of history at Princeton University – argued, Suzhou’s past is embodied in words, not stones, and the fragments of Suzhou Islamic communities can be pieced together with the help of historical written records. These records of a diverse past are equally important to the future in a country where religious diversity is under attack. The more recent reports of China’s oppression of its Muslim minorities, tragically, makes that all the more clear.

[the writer is Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, Xi’an Jiaotong Liverpool University]

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Mamata rejects "outsider" tag in Nandigram

NANDIGRAM, MAR 9 (PTI): Coming down hard on those calling her an outsider in Nandigram, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Tuesday for them people "coming from Gujarat" are insiders.

Addressing booth-level TMC workers a day ahead of filing her nomination for the seat, Banerjee said people who had "sold their souls to outsiders from Gujarat" are insulting the Nandigram movement by playing the communal card.

Banerjee is pitted against her former confidante Suwendu Adhikari, who joined the BJP some time ago, in the high-profile seat.

Without naming Adhikari even once, Ba-



nerjee said she had made up her mind to contest either from the Singur or Nandigram--the two cradles of anti-land acquisition movement-- that catapulted her to power in 2011.

She said she decided to contest from Nandi-

gram because of overwhelming response of the people.

"I have heard some people are calling me an outsider in Nandigram. I am amazed. I was born and brought up in the neighbouring Birbhum district, and the person

who is calling me an outsider was also not born here. Today I have become an outsider, and those coming from Gujarat have become insiders in Bengal," she said.

Adhikari has often called himself "bhoom-putra" (son of the soil)

while seeking to get back at the TMC supremo who has been targeting the BJP with the "party of outsiders" barb.

Accusing Adhikari of trying to incite communal passions, Banerjee said, "Those who have sold their souls to the outsiders are insulting the Nandigram land acquisition movement by playing the communal card."

"Some people are talking about 70:30 ratio (of Hindu- Muslim population). Those doing that are insulting the sacred Nandigram movement which people of both communities fought together. People of Nandigram will make BJP 'April fool' on April 1 when polling is held," she asserted.

20 militants of different outfits surrender in Manipur

IMPHAL, MAR 9 (PTI): Twenty militants belonging to different banned outfits laid down their weapons before Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Tuesday.

Sixteen of the surrendered militants belong to the Thadou People's Liberation Army (TPLA), while the remaining are of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the

PREPAK (PRO).

The surrender programme took place at the banquet hall of the 1st Manipur Rifles.

"In another major achievement of our BJP-led government, altogether 20 militants from different proscribed outfits have surrendered with arms and ammunition to the government," the chief minister tweeted.

The surrendered militants will be given one-time assistance of Rs 4 lakh each and a monthly stipend of Rs 6,000 each during their stay at rehabilitation camps for three years, he said in a Facebook post.

Singh said that the surrendered militants will also receive job-oriented skill development training.

Bengali biopic of legendary filmmaker Hiralal Sen made

KOLKATA, MAR 9 (PTI): A Bengali biopic of legendary advertisement film and documentary maker Hiralal Sen, known to be one of the torchbearers of Indian cinema, has been made.

Actor Kinjal Nanda has essayed the role of Sen, while Saswata Chatterjee has portrayed the role of another key character Jamshedji Madan and Tannishtha Biswas has brought to life the character of Kusum Kumari Devi in periodic movie 'Hiralal' that was released in theatres on March 5.

"Hiralal Sen was one

of those forgotten figures in the Indian film industry who had sought to make it an important medium of entertainment and information at the same time. The movie will help people know more about Sen," Nanda told PTI on Tuesday.

Sen, in whose name an award was constituted in the competition section of Indian films in the Kolkata International Film Festival, was born into a rich family in Barisal in present-day Bangladesh in 1866 and he got addicted to talkies after watching one at Star Theatre in Kolkata

in 1898.

He started the Royal Bioscope Company with his brother Matilal Sen and gave a new dimension to movies with advertisement films and documentaries.

The company had to be shut in 1913 due to Sen's lack of business acumen and he died of cancer in 1917, days after a devastating fire broke out at a warehouse storing all his works.

"The film is a tribute to one of the torchbearers of Indian cinema. It is an attempt to reconstruct his life and works," director Arun Roy said.

No fresh COVID-19 case reported in Arunachal for 3 days

ITANAGAR, MAR 9 (PTI): Arunachal Pradesh did not report any new COVID-19 case in the last three days, a senior health official said on Tuesday.

The northeastern state's coronavirus tally stands at 16,839, of which three are active cases, while

16,780 people have recovered from the disease and 56 patients have succumbed to the infection so far, State Surveillance Officer Dr Lobsang Jampa said.

The recovery rate among the coronavirus patients in the state stands at 99.64 per cent,

he said.

The state has so far tested over 4.08 lakh samples for COVID-19, including 281 on Monday, Jampa said.

A total of 48,752 people have been vaccinated in the state thus far, State Immunisation Officer Dimong Padung said.

ED summons East Bengal Club official in Saradha case

KOLKATA, MAR 9 (PTI): The Enforcement Directorate (ED) issued summons to East Bengal Club official Debabrata Sarkar in connection with the multi-crore Saradha chit fund scam, sources said on Tuesday.

Sarkar had been asked to appear for questioning on Wednesday at the CGO Complex office of the ED, they said.

Sarkar is alleged to have helped the owner of Saradha Group, Sudipta Sen, in the case initiated by SEBI and also secured sponsorship for the club to the tune of Rs 4 crore, they added.

Arindam Das, an associate of Sen and an



agent of Saradha Group, has also been summoned in connection with the matter on Thursday, sources said.

Thousands of common investors have been duped by the Saradha Group by means of the

fraudulent schemes floated by it.

The ED is probing the money laundering aspect of the scam.

Earlier, Sarkar was in CBI custody for allegedly receiving payments from the Saradha Group.

Three arrested for conspiracy to kill Himanta: Police

GUWAHATI, MAR 9 (PTI): Three persons, including the vice president of ULFA pro-talk faction, were arrested on Tuesday for allegedly hatching a conspiracy to kill Assam minister and North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) convenor Himanta Biswa Sarma, a senior police officer said.

Munna Prasad Gupta, the police commissioner of Guwahati, told PTI that the force had "received an input about the conspiracy" and immediately initiated an investigation into the matter.

"We picked up the trio last night (Monday night).

Following their interrogation, we arrested all three and produced them before a court. They have

been remanded in police custody for three days," he said.

The trio have been slapped with a raft of charges under various sections of the IPC, including 120B (criminal conspiracy), 121 (attempt to wage war against the state) and section 18 (conspiracy of a terror act) of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

One of the three accused has been identified as ULFA's pro-talk faction vice president Pradip Gogoi, Gupta said.

"We are yet to find out more details about the other two, but we believe they must have some connection with the ULFA. Everything will be clear after a thorough investigation," the police commissioner added.

Assam CM Sonowal files nomination for assembly polls

GUWAHATI, MAR 9 (PTI): Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Tuesday filed his nomination from Majuli as the BJP candidate for the second consecutive term for the assembly polls.

The chief minister filed his papers on the last day of submitting nominations before Majuli Deputy Commissioner Bikram Kairi.

Before filing his nomination papers, he addressed a huge rally where NEDA convenor Himanta Biswa Sarma, AGP president Atul Bora, BJP's state unit president Ranjeet Dass and state party in-charge Baijyanta Panda were present.

He sought the blessings of the people to return him and the party to power so that they continue to "serve the state and ensure further development initiated under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi".

Sonowal said that during the last five years, the state has witnessed unprecedented development.

"In the last assembly elections we came to you promising 'poriborton' (change) and to protect 'Jati-Mati- Bheti' (identity, land and the base),

which we have fulfilled with dedication and we appeal for your continued love and trust in us so that we can continue with this journey," he said.

The chief minister visited temples and various religious places before joining a procession to the public meeting, which was marked by the cultural traditions of Majuli, the world's largest river island.

Sonowal was clad in a dhoti, pat-silk kurta with a jacket representing the sizeable Mising tribe of the constituency along with 'gamosas' of the different communities living on the island, and was also seen sporting a Nepali cap for a while during the procession.

His main contender in the seat will be former Congress minister Rajib Lochan Pegu, who represented Majuli for three consecutive terms since 2001 but lost to Sonowal in 2016 by 18,923 votes.

Majuli goes to the polls in the first phase on March 27.

Elections to the 126-member assembly are being held in three phases with the second and third phases on April 1 and April 6, respectively.



KOLKATA, MAR 9 (PTI): A day after a devastating blaze claimed nine lives at the New Koil-ghat building of Eastern Railway here, a political storm has broken out ahead of West Bengal assembly polls, with the BJP blaming the TMC government for poor disaster management and the ruling dispensation rubbishing the allegation.

BJP West Bengal co-incharge Amit Malviya in a tweet said, the state should equip local bodies with fire fighting equipment and put in place appropriate protocols.

Quipping "Pishi has failed Bengal," Malviya tweeted, "WB needs a proactive disaster management policy, equip local bodies with fire fighting equipment and put in appropriate protocols.

"It also needs a transparent and efficient fire

fighting policy, with mechanism to certify buildings for fire preparedness."

"Pishi" is the Bengali word used for paternal aunt and the BJP refers to Mamata Banerjee as "Pishi" as she is the aunt of TMC MP and party heavyweight Abhishek Banerjee.

Countering the allegation, state Fire and Emergency Services Minister Sujit Bose said, "From installing hydraulic ladder to largely containing the blaze, our men did everything possible. It is the Railways which could not provide us with a map of the interiors of the 12th floor."

Bose regretted that the saffron party is politicising the tragedy for "cheap electoral gains".

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had visited the site on Monday night and alleged that senior

railway officials were not present.

"The building belongs to the Railways. But I have come to know that no one from the Railways reached the spot till now. Our fire department asked for the building map from them in order to enter the premises but there was no cooperation from them," she had said.

The chief minister, however, said that she did not want to indulge in politics with a mishap. Nine persons, including four firefighters, three railway personnel and an assistant sub-inspector of Kolkata Police, died in the blaze, police said.

Railway Minister Piyush Goyal has set up a high-level committee to ascertain the cause of the fire at the sprawling building situated on Strand Road in the central business district of the city.



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US lets Venezuelans stay temporarily, will review sanctions

WASHINGTON (AP): The Biden administration said Monday it is offering temporary legal residency to several hundred thousand Venezuelans who fled their country's economic collapse and will review U.S. sanctions intended to isolate the South American nation.

Both measures mark a shift from U.S. policy toward Venezuela under President Donald Trump.

President Joe Biden's administration announced it would grant temporary protected status to Venezuelans already in the United States, allowing an estimated 320,000 people to apply to legally live and work in the country for 18 months.

Trump resisted repeated calls from Republican and Democratic lawmakers, primarily from South Florida, to grant temporary protected status to Venezuelans though he issued an order deferring deportation for a smaller number on his final day in office.

The Trump administration also significantly tightened U.S. economic sanctions on Venezuela, most notably on its crucial oil sector, to try and force President Nicolas Maduro to give up power after an election in 2018 that the United States and more than 50 other countries consider fraudulent.

A senior Biden administration official portrayed that as a failed strategy.

"The United States is in no rush to lift sanctions," the official said, speaking to reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss the policy. "But we need to recognize here that unilateral sanctions over the last four years have not succeeded in achieving an electoral outcome in the country."

U.S. sanctions, which began under President Barack Obama, have increased economic pressure on the once prosperous country. Its economy was already suffering from mismanagement and the deterioration of its all-important oil industry.

In the last few years, the Venezuelan economy has been in free fall, with widespread shortages of food and medicine and frequent power outages. An estimated 5 million people have fled, mostly to neighboring countries such as Colombia, but many have settled in South Florida. The Biden official said the Maduro government has "adapted" to the most punishing of the sanctions, against transactions with Venezuela's state-owned oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela SA, and the U.S. needs to work with its allies on new strategies.

"Oil markets long ago have adapted to oil sanctions and that they are able to sustain themselves through illicit flows," the official said. "So, really we could keep on with unilateral sanctions and stay in this situation for who knows how long or we actually could start sitting down with the international community to see how we can actually exert coordinated pressure and set clear expectations for the way forward."

Chelsea retains 4th in EPL with home win over Everton

LONDON, MAR 9 (AP): Kai Havertz is finally making an impact at Chelsea and helping the pursuit of Champions League qualification. The Germany playmaker Havertz has struggled to convince since joining from Bayer Leverkusen in the offseason for up to 70 million pounds (then USD 92 million).

Havertz struggled under previous Chelsea manager Frank Lampard, suffering lasting effects from a coronavirus infection and battling for regular first-team action.

But Havertz helped Chelsea to beat Everton 2-0 at Stamford Bridge on Monday and was unlucky not to have a goal to his name after starring in the false nine position.

Havertz was unlucky not to be credited with Chelsea's first goal, with Ben Godfrey's deflection eventually confirmed as an own goal. The lively forward later saw a neat finish ruled out for



handball before winning a penalty that Jorginho converted.

"I'm very happy with his performance, no doubt about his quality his talent and also not about his character," Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel said.

"He needs to adapt to the Premier League, he needs to be at a club where you play to win every game, where the

highest standards are normal. That's a normal process also for him to adapt to this mentality."

Chelsea's mean-spirited defense under Tuchel continues to set new standards in west London. The German has now become the first manager to secure five clean sheets in his first five home league games.

Chelsea boasts nine clean sheets in Tuchel's

11 matches in charge, and only Maurizio Sarri with 12 games has enjoyed a longer unbeaten start to life at the club.

It leaves Chelsea two points ahead of fifth-placed West Ham, which beat Leeds 2-0 in the other game on Monday.

A year ago, West Ham was out of the relegation zone only on goal difference. Now the east London club is chasing Euro-

pean qualification.

West Ham took the lead in the 21st minute with virtually its first attack.

Jesse Lingard played a neat one-two with Said Benrahma and skipped into the area, where Luke Ayling clumsily brought him down. The Manchester United loanee's penalty was saved by Leeds goalkeeper Ilan Meslier but he netted from the rebound.

"Once that first goal came, we settled down and now we're starting to learn to win ugly," West Ham captain Declan Rice said.

West Ham extended its lead when Craig Dawson arrived at the far post to head in Aaron Cresswell's corner in the 28th.

"We didn't play the best, but we're grinding out those results, we've got a real solidity about us and long may that continue," Rice said.

It's very disappointing, really slack: Langer on slow over-rate in Melbourne Test

MELBOURNE, MAR 9 (PTI): Head coach Justin Langer on Tuesday said Australia were "really slack" in not maintaining their over-rate in the Melbourne Test against India which eventually cost them a place in the World Test Championships final.

Australia were fined four WTC points for being two overs behind in the second Test of the four-match series.

India recently beat England 3-1 in a home Test series to set up a WTC final clash with New Zealand in June and Australia could have qualified in place of the Kiwis if not for that slow



over-rate penalty.

"This might be the silliest thing I've ever said, but our manager Gavin Dovey ... he'd been away, he'd gone home for Christmas to be with his family," Langer told SEN.

"It wasn't until after the game that we realised our over rate was down. Now, that's really

slack on our behalf."

In the WTC standing, New Zealand finished 0.3 per cent ahead of Australia, who had decided not to travel to South Africa for a Test series due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I remember we were in the team room afterwards and I spoke to Paine (skipper Tim

Paine) and Dene Hills, our analyst, about it. I was a bit grumpy about it and I thought 'imagine if this cost us the World Test Championship'," Langer said.

"And I mentioned it to the players afterwards that two overs down could cost us the World Test Championship. And so, we have to get better at that and make sure it doesn't happen in Sydney and Brisbane.

"It's very disappointing, but the lesson is the things that we can control, we have to control. And we can't relax for a second in Test cricket."

With India hosting the T20 World Cup later

this year, Langer said IPL-bound Australian players' performances in the T20 league will be taken into consideration when they sit to select the team for the ICC event.

"There's no better showcase for some of our players. They're playing in the same conditions (as the World Cup). We'll watch that really closely and see who performs well," Langer said.

"It's a great opportunity for a lot of players. They get to play a lot of cricket under pressure, that can only benefit them individually and us collectively."

The IPL will run from April 9 to May 30 across six venues in India.

kriniar helps Inter beat Atalanta 1-0 to go 6 points clear

MILAN, MAR 9 (AP): Inter Milan moved six points clear at the top of Serie A after a 1-0 win at home against high-scoring Atalanta. Defender Milan Kriniar scored early in the second half on Monday and boosted Inter's chances of winning its first Italian league title in more than a decade.

Inter's seventh successive win saw it restore its healthy advantage over second-placed AC Milan. It is also 10 points clear of third-placed Juventus, which has played a match less.

"Our rivals had won and closed the gap so it was inevitable that we felt a certain pressure, which will keep on increasing," Inter coach



Antonio Conte said.

"Moreover, we were facing an Atalanta side which takes points off all the big teams. We've taken home a really important win against a team which could have disrupted our title bid but which is now 13 points

behind us."

It was the first time Atalanta failed to score away from home in Serie A since 2019, and Gian Piero Gasperini's side remained fifth, a point behind Roma.

"We had a good match, we're satisfied

but angry because of the result," Gasperini said.

"For the game that we had we feel we deserved more than a defeat.

"But we were playing against Inter, which is first in the standings and on course for the title: it's their year. We'll come out

of this match stronger, with more belief."

Atalanta scored 11 goals in its past three matches and came closest to taking the lead at the end of a tense first half as first Inter goalkeeper Samir Handanovic pulled off a fantastic save to deny Duvn Zappata then Marcelo Brozovic had to clear from practically on the line from the ensuing corner.

Inter broke the deadlock nine minutes after the break when Atalanta failed to properly clear a corner and Kriniar fired the loose ball into the bottom left corner.

Inter held on for its seventh clean sheet in its past nine league matches. It has conceded only two goals in that run.

Löw to quit as Germany coach after European Championship

BERLIN (AP): Germany coach Joachim Löw will step down after this year's European Championship, bringing forward his previous plan to quit after the next World Cup.

The German soccer federation said Tuesday that Löw asked to terminate his contract, which was to run through the 2022 World Cup, after this

year's European tournament. Löw took over as coach after the 2006 World Cup and had been assistant coach to Jürgen Klinsmann for two years before that.

"I'm taking this step very consciously, full of pride and with gratitude, but still with the same motivation for the upcoming European Championship," Löw said. "Pride, because it

is something very special for me and an honor to be engaged for my country. And because I have been able to work with the best players in the country for almost 17 years."

Löw led Germany to the 2014 World Cup title, its fourth overall, but he has been under pressure since a first-round exit at the last World Cup and subse-

quent lackluster performances. Germany's last game was a 6-0 loss to Spain in the Nations League in November.

"The federation knows what it has in Jogi. He is one of the biggest coaches in world soccer," federation president Fritz Keller said. "Jogi Löw has shaped German soccer like no other

for years and helped it to the highest levels internationally."

Löw said he would do all he can at the European Championship, which was postponed last year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"I'll give my best," Löw said, "to make our fans happy and to be successful at this tournament."

Another defendant in sports gambling case pleads guilty



CHICAGO (AP): A guilty plea was entered Monday by another defendant in the sports gambling case that involved a northern Illinois mayor who was pardoned by former President Donald Trump.

Matthew Knight, 47, pleaded guilty to conspiracy charges for allegedly collecting gambling losses or paid off winnings for the multimillion-dollar sports gambling ring.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Terry Kinney told U.S. District Judge Virginia Kendall that evidence in the case is made up of several secret recordings, as well as "surveillance evidence" of Knight meeting with gamblers, either to pay them or accept money from them.

Vincent Del Giudice of Orland Park, the al-

leged leader of the ring, pleaded guilty last month to gambling conspiracy and money laundering charges. Prosecutors alleged Del Giudice, 55, paid a Costa Rica-based sportsbook a service fee of \$10,000 a week to use its online platform and recruited gamblers to place wagers on his website.

Two others, Todd Blanken and Eugene Del Giudice, also pleaded guilty to charges relating to the case.

Donald Trump decided in the final hours of his presidency in January to pardon Mettawa Mayor Casey Urlacher, brother of Chicago Bears great Brian Urlacher. Casey Urlacher, who was accused of working as an agent for the ring, is now running for re-election.

Kane Williamson to miss NZ-Bangladesh ODI series



WELLINGTON, MAR 9 (AP): Captain Kane Williamson will miss New Zealand's three one-day internationals against Bangladesh later this month with an elbow injury.

In a statement New Zealand Cricket medical manager Dayle Shackel said Williamson has a small tear in his left elbow tendon that requires immediate treatment.

"Kane's been managing the elbow injury to varying degrees this summer and unfortunately it hasn't improved," Shackel said.

"He obviously has a high volume of training and playing across the three formats which has inhibited his ability to recover.

"We believe he now needs a period of rest and rehabilitation to get the injury right."

Williamson is now unlikely to play for New Zealand at home again during the southern hemisphere summer.

The one-day internationals will be played on March 20, 23 and 26. Williamson will also likely miss three Twenty20 internationals against Bangladesh on March 28 and 30 and April 1 while traveling to the Indian Premier League.

He will rejoin New Zealand for its two-test series against England in May before the World Test Championship final against India at Southampton from June 18 to 22.

Indian women win toss, opt to field against South Africa in 2nd ODI

LUCKNOW, MAR 9 (PTI): Indian women won the toss and elected to field against South Africa in the second ODI of the five-match series here on Tuesday.

India made one change with Mansi Joshi replacing Monica Patel, while South Africa fielded an unchanged playing XI.

India lost the first ODI by eight wickets.

Teams:

India Women: Jemimah Rodrigues, Smri-

ti Mandhana, Punam Raut, Mithali Raj (c), Harmanpreet Kaur, Deepti Sharma, Sushma Verma (w), Poonam Yadav, Jhulan Goswami, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Mansi Joshi.

South Africa Women: Lizelle Lee, Laura Wolvaardt, Sune Luus(c), Lara Goodall, Mignon du Preez, Marizanne Kapp, Nadine de Klerk, Trisha Chetty (w), Ayabonga Khaka, Shabnim Ismail, Nonkululeko Mlaba.

Brazil justice annuls Lula’s sentences, enabling 2022 run

SAO PAULO (AP): A Supreme Court justice on Monday annulled all convictions against former Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a ruling that potentially would allow him to run again for the presidency next year.

The decision also laid bare the country’s political divisions, with leftists celebrating their 75-year-old leader’s return to the political arena as conservatives said the rulings were tantamount to impunity.

Others saw the ruling, based on procedural grounds, as an attempt to preserve a vast but embattled corruption investigation that has led to numerous convictions of powerful businessmen and politicians but that has been accused of impropriety.

The decision by Justice Luiz Edson Fachin drew no conclusions about the mammoth “Car Wash” investigation centered on state-run giant Petrobras, from which the da Silva probes emerged. It said, instead, that the federal court in the Southern city of Curitiba, which convicted da Silva twice of corruption and money laundering, didn’t have jurisdiction to put the leftist leader on trial.

Fachin said the cases will be sent to the federal court of Brazil’s Federal District, where they can begin anew.



But Deltan Dallagnol, who prosecuted da Silva as head of the the Car Wash task force, said on Twitter that the ruling may end the case against the former president altogether because the statute of limitations may have run out. Da Silva still faces other prosecutions in Brasilia, but those are far from any final decision.

Da Silva’s lawyers issued a statement welcoming the decision, saying it “is aligned with everything we have said for more than five years in these suits.”

But Brazilian media reported that the country’s prosecutor-general Augusto Aras, an ally of conservative President Jair Bolsonaro, is preparing to appeal the decision.

Da Silva has been a dominant figure in Brazilian politics for decades, first as firebrand metalworkers’ union organizer who launched failed bids for the presidency, then as the charismatic everyman whose popularity grew on the

job as president from 2003 to 2010 thanks to hefty government hand-outs to the poor and infrastructure investments during the country’s commodities boom.

He left office with an approval rating in the mid-80s, and former U.S. President Barack Obama referred to him as the most popular politician on earth. But his star fell in recent years as Brazil’s economy slumped and corruption scandals involving the former leader and those around him gained traction.

He was boxed out of the 2018 election by the first of his two criminal convictions, which came in July 2017.

Maurício Santoro, professor of political science at the University of the State of Rio de Janeiro, said by phone the move will boost da Silva and the Workers’ Party, which has been dented by corruption investigations. However, he questioned whether Lula would gain enough impetus to actually make another run for president,

given there are still many who reject him and his party.

“We have seen in recent months Lula’s popularity rising again. That has to do with the pandemic and the humanitarian disaster we’re living through now. When you put all that together, we have a political mood in Brazil right now that is a little more sympathetic than three years ago,” Santoro said by phone. “But I think there is a limit to how far that movement can go.”

People in some cities went to their windows and chanted, “Lula livre!” — “Lula free!” — or blasted jingles from his presidential campaigns. There were also cries of “Bolsonaro Out!” that have appeared at times since the COVID-19 pandemic hit Brazil one year ago.

Da Silva has been sentenced to 12 years and seven months for allegedly receiving an apartment worth about \$1 million as a bribe from construction company OAS. Da Silva has always denied ownership of the apartment.

Another conviction involved his alleged ownership of a ranch in Atibaia, outside Sao Paulo.

He was imprisoned in April 2018 while leading polls for the presidential election then just months off.

With da Silva out, conservative lawmaker

Bolsonaro won the election handily. Da Silva was released from prison in November 2019 due to a decision of the country’s top court that a person can be imprisoned only after all appeals have been exhausted.

The decision also affects the reputation of former federal Judge Sergio Moro, who sentenced da Silva in the first case, was involved in the second and left his post to become justice minister in Bolsonaro’s administration. He resigned in April last year after falling out with the president.

Da Silva’s legal team had wanted the top court to deem Moro biased after a series of messaging app leaks published by The Intercept Brasil showed apparent coordination between the then-judge and Car Wash prosecutors to land the leftist leader behind bars.

By sidestepping those motions, Fachin’s decision effectively preserves other Car Wash prosecutions, according to Paulo Calmon, a political science professor at the University of Brasilia.

Had the Supreme Court determined Moro was biased, top executives and others he sentenced to prison as part of the investigation could have moved to have their own cases annulled.

“What happened here was a transfer of jurisdiction,” Calmon said.

Myanmar protesters defy curfew; media outlets ordered shut

YANGON, MYANMAR (AP): Demonstrators in Myanmar’s biggest city came out Monday night for their first mass protests in defiance of an 8 p.m. curfew, seeking to show support for an estimated 200 students trapped by security forces in a small area of one neighborhood.

The students and other civilians earlier took part in one of the many daily protests across the country against the military’s seizure of power last month that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

The military government also placed a major curb on media coverage of the crisis. It announced that the licenses of five local media outlets — Mizzima, DVB, Khit Thit Media, Myanmar Now and 7Day News — have been canceled.

“These media companies are no longer allowed to broadcast or write or give information by using any kind of media platform or using any media technology,” it said on state broadcaster MRTV.

All five had been offering extensive coverage of the protests, often with livestreaming video online. The offices of Myanmar Now were raided by the authorities Monday before the measure was announced.

DVB said it was not surprised by the cancellation and would continue broadcasting on satellite TV and online.

“We worry for the safety of our reporters and our staff, but in the current uprising, the whole country has become the citizens’ journalists and there is no way for military authorities to shut the information flow,” Executive Director Aye Chan Naing told The Associated Press.

The government has detained dozens of journalists since the coup, including a Myanmar Now reporter and Thein Zaw of AP, both of whom have been charged under a public order law that carried a penalty of up to three years in prison.

The night’s street protests began after police cordoned off part of Yangon’s Sanchaung neighborhood and were

believed to be conducting door-to-door searches for those who fled attacks by security forces to seek shelter in the homes of sympathetic strangers.

News of their plight spread quickly on social media, and people poured into the streets in neighborhoods all over the city to show solidarity and in hopes of drawing some of the pressure off the hunted protesters. On some streets, they constructed makeshift barricades with whatever was at hand.

In the Insein district, they spread across road junctions, singing songs, chanting pro-democracy slogans and banging objects together.

The diplomatic missions of the United States, Britain, Canada and the European Union all issued statements urging the security forces to allow the trapped people to return safely to their homes. Although all have been sharply critical of the Feb. 1 coup and police violence, it is unusual for such diplomatic statements to be issued in connection with a specific, ongoing incident.

“There is heightened tension caused by security forces surrounding Kyun Taw Road in Sanchaung Township, Yangon. We call on those security forces to withdraw and allow people to go home safely,” said the U.S. Embassy’s statement.

Reports on social media citing witnesses said as many as 50 people were arrested overnight in Sanchaung and other parts of the city, but many of those who had been hiding were able to leave safely at dawn Tuesday, a few hours after police abandoned their search.

On Monday night, security forces chased crowds, harassed residents watching from windows, and fired stun grenades. They also were some reports of injuries from rubber bullets.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was following developments in the Sanchaung district where “many of those trapped are women, who were peacefully marching in commemoration of International Women’s Day,” U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

“He calls for maximum restraint and urges for the safe release of all without violence or arrests,” Dujarric said, and for respect of the rights to freedom of assembly and expression for peaceful demonstrators voicing “their hopes and desires for the future of their country.”

Guterres also called the occupation of a number of public hospitals in Myanmar by security forces “completely unacceptable,” the U.N. spokesman said.

The nighttime hours have become increasingly dangerous in Myanmar. Police and army units routinely range through neighborhoods, shooting randomly to intimidate residents and disrupt their sleep, and making targeted arrests.

Security forces shot and killed two people in northern Myanmar during the day, local media reported.

The Irrawaddy online newspaper said the victims were shot in the head during anti-coup protests in Myitkyina in Kachin State. Graphic video on social media showed protesters backing away from tear gas, responding with rocks and then fleeing after a fusillade of what seemed to be automatic gunfire.

Demonstrators hurriedly carried away the injured, including one apparent fatality, a person with a severe head wound. A second body was seen later on a stretcher, his head covered with a cloth.

Another shooting death took place in Pyapon, a city about 120 kilometers (75 miles) south of Yangon.

To date, the government’s violent crackdown has left more than 50 protesters dead. At least 18 people were fatally shot Feb. 28 and 38 on Wednesday, according to the U.N. Human Rights Office.

Security forces also clamped down on anti-coup protesters elsewhere Monday, firing tear gas to break up a crowd of about 1,000 people demonstrating in Pyinmana, a satellite town of the capital, Naypyitaw. The protesters deployed fire extinguishers to create a smokescreen as they fled from authorities.

Gibraltar, a vaccine champion, launches ‘Operation Freedom’

GIBRALTAR (AP): Maskless parents pick up smiling Cinderellas, Harry Potters and hedgehogs from schools that reopened after a two-month hiatus just in time for World Book Day’s costume display. Following weeks under lockdown, a soccer team resumes training at the stadium. Coffee shops and pubs have finally raised their blinds, eager to welcome locals and eyeing the return of tourists.

There’s an end-of-hibernation feeling in Gibraltar. The narrow British overseas territory stretching between Spain and the mouth of the Mediterranean Sea is emerging from a devastating virus surge. COVID-19 has killed 93 people, nearly all of them in January and February this year, and infected over 4,000 of its 33,000 residents.

But the compact, high-density geography that is blamed — together with new virus variants — for the surge of infections has also been key to Gibraltar’s successful vaccination campaign, with word-of-mouth facilitating the rollout.

The recent easing of restrictions — what Gibraltar authorities have dubbed “Operation Freedom” — also owes much to the steady delivery of jabs from the U.K.

By the end of March, Gibraltar is on track to have completely vaccinated all residents over 16 and its vast imported workforce, Health Minister Samantha Sac-

ramento told The Associated Press. That’s over 40,000 people. Only 3.5% have so far rejected the vaccine.

But Gibraltar’s struggle to regain normality is only just starting. It still faces the many challenges of reopening in a globalized world with unequal access to vaccines and new virus variants emerging. Sacramento has been working on contingency plans, including topping up vaccinations with a booster.

“Being vaccinated is absolutely no carte blanche to then behave without any restrictions. But then, we also have to go back to being a little bit more human, being able to breathe fresh air,” the minister said in an office atop the local hospital.

“It’s ‘Operation Freedom,’ but with caution,” she added.

Finding that balance can be tricky for a territory linked to both Spain and the U.K. As a British territory, Gibraltar has received five vaccine consignments from London, mostly the Pfizer-BioNTech jab. A handful of AstraZeneca shots have also been reserved for those possibly vulnerable to severe allergic reactions.

Expanding Gibraltar’s limited flights with the U.K., which is also rolling out vaccinations at high speed, could in theory be done by mandating tests and quarantines upon entry. But the contagious virus vari-

ant first found in Britain has been a source of concern.

In Spain, restrictions have tamed an end-of-the-year coronavirus surge that strained public hospitals. But, like much of the European Union, Spain is struggling with a slow vaccine rollout that hopes to immunizing 33 million residents, or 70% of its population.

Most Gibraltarians are eager to travel. With an area of only 6.7 square kilometers — a territory only a little bigger than The Vatican and Monaco, most of it dominated by the imposing presence of its famous Rock — Gibraltar can sometimes feel claustrophobic.

“I’ve been on the Rock now for a couple of months, without having stepped foot on Spain. That’s a big part of our lives, going across the border, visiting new cities each weekend. That’s what I’m looking forward to most,” said Christian Segovia, a 24-year-old engineer who works at a shipping company.

With over 15,000 people fully vaccinated and an additional 11,000 awaiting their second dose, people in their 20s are now being called in for their first shots. Non-Gibraltarians who come in to work in health care or other frontline jobs are already vaccinated, and authorities are now trying to inoculate all the remaining trans-border workers.

Vanessa Olivero commutes every day,

crossing on foot the airport landing strip that separates Gibraltar from Spain’s La Línea de la Concepción. Some 15,000 workers were making the same trip before the pandemic, but the numbers are lower now because tourism remains closed.

The 40-year-old, who sells tobacco and spirits in one of Gibraltar’s many duty-free shops, says she can’t wait to get her shots because facing customers puts her at risk. She suffers from asthma, has two daughters and older relatives to take care of.

“Just tell me where and when and I’ll present both of my arms,” joked Olivero. “I want all this to be over, to return to normality, to be able to give a hug, to give a kiss, to go for some drinks with friends.”

Gibraltar has issued vaccination cards to people who get their second shot. It’s also developing an app storing vaccine data and test results that authorities want to link with other platforms elsewhere to revive international travel. Critics, though, say such passports discriminate against those unable to access vaccines, especially in poorer countries.

Gino Jiménez, president of Gibraltar’s Catering Association, harbors some doubts but welcomes the app if that helps bring back foreign tourists. His restaurant, a popular local hangout for breakfast and lunch, is following health guide-

lines to draw back those who “are still testing the waters to see if it’s safe to go out.”

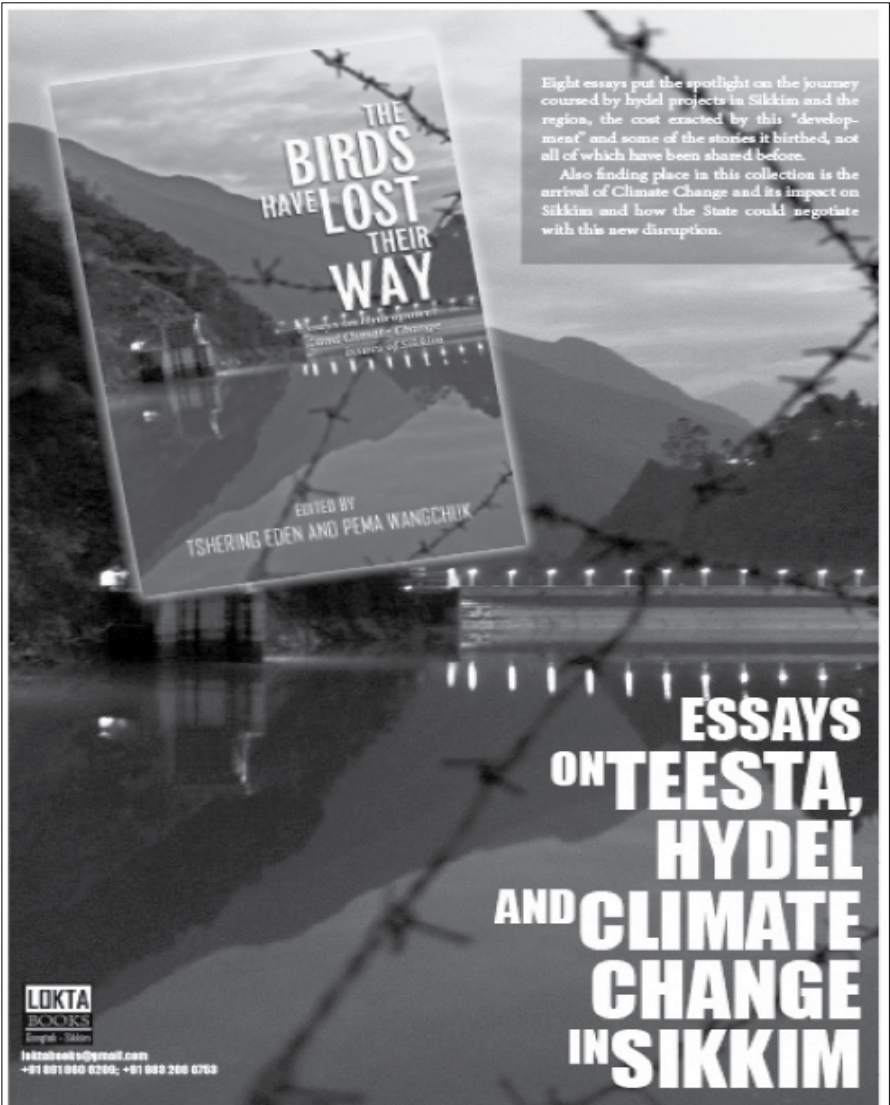
“We are a very close, very sociable community. And there’s nothing like sitting around the table having a cup of coffee and talking,” said Jiménez, who is lobbying the government to quickly vaccinate the nearly 2,000 employees of restaurants and pubs, most of them Spaniards.

Waiters wear two masks, tables are reserved for a maximum of six and there are no afternoon alcohol sales.

After re-opening schools, pushing back the night-time curfew from 10 p.m. to midnight and lifting mandatory mask-wearing in low-density, non-commercial areas, the next big thing The Rock is looking forward to is Gibraltar’s soccer match against the Netherlands on March 30. The World Cup qualifier will be a test for the resumption of mass events, allowing 50% stadium capacity and requiring fans to prove immunity.

While they wait, Gibraltarians are enjoying their new normality. At the Chatham Counter-guard, an 18th-century defensive bastion now turned into a strip of pubs and restaurants, a dozen teammates of the Collegians Gibraltar Hockey Team celebrate over pints their first training session since November.

“This is what normality is ... to be able to get a beer with your own people,” said Adrian Hernandez, 51. “God, did I miss this!”



BTS on 1st Grammy nod: 'It's hard to express in words'

NEW YORK (AP): Stuck at home during the pandemic, BTS created "Dynamite" and released the song to their isolated fans as a gift. Now, the gift has returned to them — in the form of their first Grammy nomination.

"A lot of people were sad and down and out because of the COVID situation and it was sort of our suggestion to pick (everyone) up," Jin said in an interview this week with The Associated Press.

"We were supposed to do the whole stadium tour all over the world. There was no plan to release a single like 'Dynamite,'" RM explained. "'Dynamite' gave us huge success in Korea, of course, a Grammy nomination, a performance, so you know, life is really interesting."

"Dynamite" became BTS' first No. 1 hit on the Billboard Hot 100 chart when it was released last year. After years of logging Top 40 hits and selling out arenas and stadiums, the seven-member collective is competing for best pop duo/group performance and will also perform at Sunday's show.

BTS is the first K-pop act to compete at the Grammys.

"It's really hard to express in words," Jimin said of the nomination.

"Even now we can't still believe that we were nominated, and we'll be able to perform at the Grammys. So, we're thankful. We're honored."

BTS' explosive hit will battle another No. 1 smash — Lady Gaga and Ariana Grande's "Rain on Me" — as well as Top 10 successes like Taylor Swift and Bon Iver's "Exile" and Justin Bieber and Quavo's "Intentions." J Balvin, Bad Bunny and Dua Lipa's "Un Dia (One Day)," which topped the Billboard Hot Latin songs chart, rounds out the five nominees.

"I always listen to 'Rain on Me.' It's so great to listen to that song on the treadmill. It was a hit. It was fire last year," RM said. "And, of course, 'Intentions,' 'Exile' was crazy. And J Balvin and Dua Lipa."

"We're nervous and actually, frankly, we're not expecting (to win) so much because we don't want to get disappointed because Lady Gaga, Taylor, Bieber, all the big names (are nominated). So, we're kind of confused. It's like rollercoaster — back and forth, back and forth, up and down."

Their Grammy performance will mark their second on the major awards show — they assisted Lil Nas X when he sang "Old Town Road" last



year. Sunday's performance follows the recent airing of "MTV Unplugged Presents: BTS," which featured BTS covering Coldplay's popular rock ballad, "Fix You."

In a tweet — in Korean — Coldplay called BTS' rendition "beautiful."

"Coldplay came to Korea about three years ago for a big concert and me and J-Hope went to their concert and we watched 'Fix You' at that time' and it meant so much," RM recalled. "Hopefully we can work with them, or maybe have a meeting and sip some tea or coffee or anything. We love

Coldplay."

The IFPI, the organization that represents the global recording industry, said last week that BTS was the best-selling act of 2020.

The band is currently working on new music — as a group and soloists. They said the Grammy nomination does create some pressure for the next batch of songs they produce, but they're not letting the success get to their heads.

"We try to stay down to earth and put our feet to the ground and do what we do," RM said.

Emma Corrin to star in romantic drama 'Lady Chatterley's Lover'



LOS ANGELES, MAR 9 (PTI): A week after landing the Golden Globe and Critics Choice Award for her portrayal of Princess Diana in Netflix's "The Crown", actor Emma Corrin has been tapped to star in romance drama "Lady Chatterley's Lover".

Based on English author DH Lawrence's novel of the same name, the story centres on the wealthy and privileged Lady Chatterley, who finds herself married to a man she doesn't love and engages in a torrid affair with a gamekeeper on their English estate.

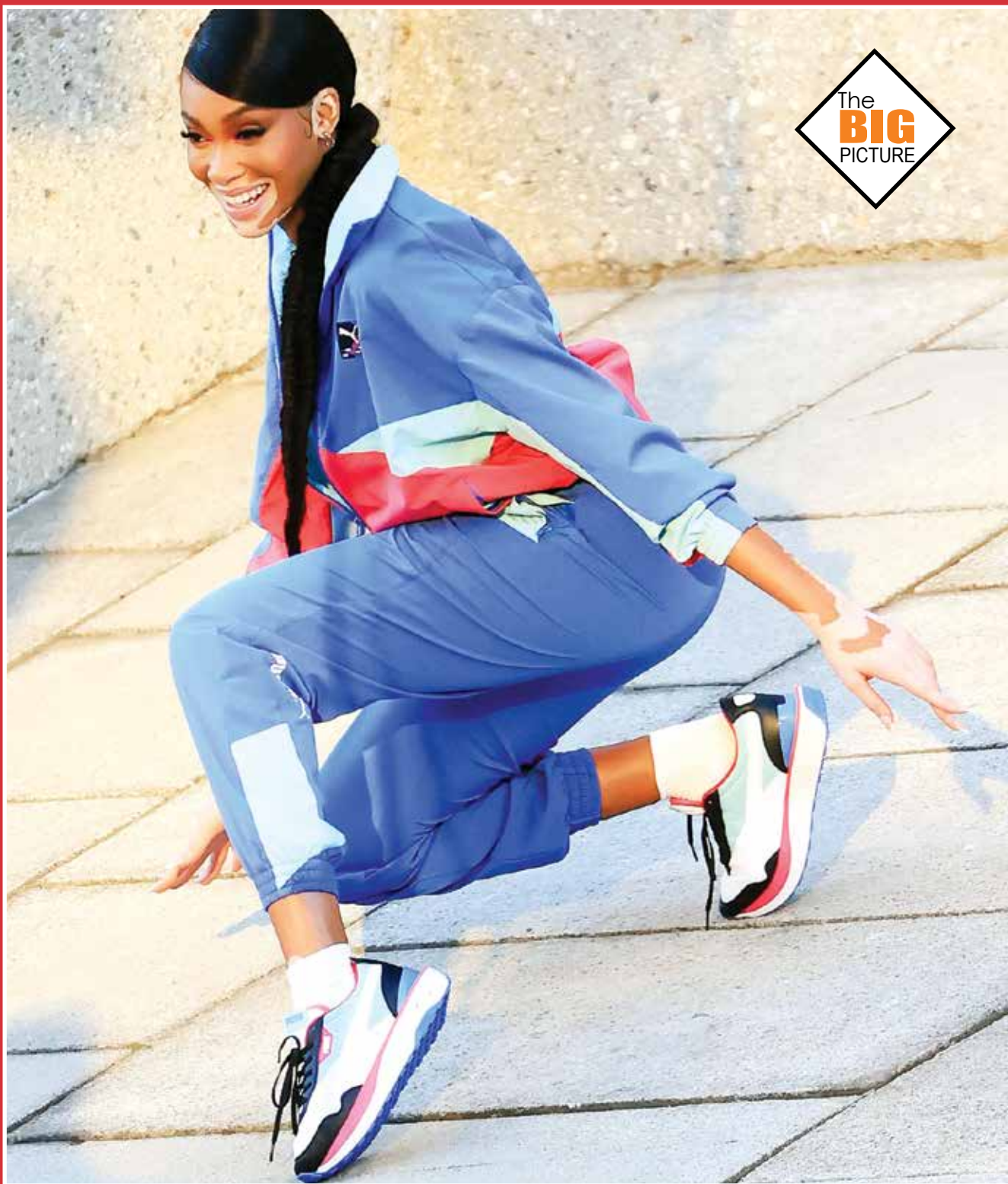
The book was originally published in Italy and France in the 1920s, but made it to the US in 1959.

According to Deadline, "Life of Pi" screenwriter David Magee is set to pen the script with "The Act" helmer Laure de Clermont-Tonnerre attached to direct.

3000 Pictures, the production company founded by Elizabeth Gabler, is backing the project.

Laurence Mark, Pete Czernin and Graham Broadbent of Blueprint Pictures are producing.

Marisa Paiva and Nikki Cooper are overseeing the project for 3000 Pictures.



PERFECTLY POSED! Winnie Harlow stunned during a Puma campaign photoshoot in Los Angeles.

'The Queen's Gambit' to be adapted as stage musical



LOS ANGELES, MAR 9 (PTI): Following the huge success of Netflix mini-series "The Queen's Gambit", Walter Tevis' novel of the same name will be getting a stage musical adaptation.

According to Variety, Level Forward has acquired the theatrical stage rights to the 1983 novel which also served as the basis for the Anya Taylor-Joy-led series.

"It is a privilege for Level Forward to lead the charge of bringing 'The Queen's Gambit' to the stage through the beloved and enduring craft of musical theatre."

"The story is a siren call amidst our contemporary struggles for gender and racial

equity, and we're looking forward to moving the project forward," said Level Forward CEO Adrienne Becker and producer Julia Dunetz.

The story centres on Beth Harmon, a brilliant chess player who struggles to overcome a broken past and the demons of addiction while battling her way to the top of the male-centered world of competitive chess in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Netflix mini-series recently earned Golden Globes for best television limited series, anthology series, or motion picture made for television. Taylor-Joy also won the award for best actress in a mini-series or television film.

YouTuber Grace Victory awakens from coma after nearly 3 months

British YouTuber Grace Victory announced on March 8 that she has emerged from the medically induced coma she was placed in shortly after welcoming a baby boy on Christmas Eve.

YouTube personality Grace Victory is celebrating after emerging from a coma.

The 30-year-old British vlogger updated her fans about her health via social media on Monday, March 8. Amid her battle with the coronavirus late last year, she had been placed in a medically induced coma shortly after welcoming her baby boy on Christmas Eve.

"I'm awake," Grace tweeted, adding a gray heart emoji. She followed that with, "Baby boy is thriving at home x."

On Dec. 28, Grace's family posted a mes-

sage on the star's Instagram explaining that she had tested positive for COVID-19 earlier in the month while in the third trimester of her pregnancy. Her condition led doctors to induce labor on Dec. 24, even though she wasn't due to give birth until February 2021.

"Grace was admitted into intensive care on Christmas Day due to issues with her breathing & therefore they had to make the decision of placing her into an Induced Coma, to give her body the rest it needs, in order to recover," the post continued.

In the message, her family expressed their love for Grace and shared their confidence "that she'll come out of this stronger than ever. She has dedicated her whole career to healing people, we now ask that you pray, to heal her."

ARIES:

It hasn't been easy, but you've found a way to work in harmony with your co-workers. Being on the same page about the future of the given venture will prove to be the secret to your success, duh! If you're a freelancer, you will soon find the opportunity to sync your forces with fellow warriors. Play your cards right, honey! You don't want to miss out on this one.

TAURUS:

This isn't about you, Taurus. It's about truth and justice. Instead of looking at the situation through the lens of your own experiences, think objectively. Finding a balance between your head and your heart will help you make the right decision. When it comes to career-related choices, think big. Expansion is a major theme for you right now.

GEMINI:

If you're looking for somebody to brainstorm with, get your sibling(s) on the phone, Gemini. Even better, set up a coffee date with them and bring your best ideas to the table. Trust that this creative collaboration will help you take your business to the next level. As such, meditation

and mindfulness are also on your agenda today.

If you have been irregular with therapy, set up an appointment with your healer/therapist. Alternatively, you could curl up with your favourite self-help bible, practice a guided meditation, or go for a long walk in the park sans your gadgets.

CANCER:

Weekly reminder, Cancer: Work on that CV (job/college application) ASAP. It's a good idea to tailor it according to the role you have in mind and be specific about your skill set. Humility is overrated! The cards are also reminding you that you don't have to do it all by yourself. There's a close friend or family member who could provide you with useful tips on how to up your game and reach out to the right organisations or companies.

LEO:

Like the Twins, you're being encouraged to brainstorm about your business with a sibling or a close friend. The ideas you are likely to channel in the process will prove to be the secret to your professional success. So what are you waiting for, Leo? Set up a Zoom call or a coffee date (unless you live with them, in which case

it's a good idea to frantically knock at their door right away).

VIRGO:

The rules have been laid down for a reason, Virgo. It's time to honour them and encourage those around you to do the same, especially on the professional front. No, this isn't going to make you the most popular person on the block. But people-pleasing hasn't been your game of choice anyway. On the personal front, you could be dealing with anger and resentment at the moment.

LIBRA:

It's a big day for you on the professional front. A day of serendipity and synchronistic encounters. You want to be fully present, Libra, lest you miss out on that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Remember, you are more intuitive than you give yourself credit for. So listen to what that inner voice is telling you at every point. On the personal front, however, you are being asked to stop obsessing over people who are unworthy of you. It's time to cut out that toxic ex or the friend who seems to be doing more harm than good. We all have to do what's healthy for us and there

is no shame in that.

SCORPIO:

Joy and celebration promise to be a constant in the Scorpio HQ. Something tells us you are about to hit a big milestone soon. So bring out the bubbly and include your co-workers in the revelry. Getting to know them on an informal level is sure to have a positive impact on how you relate with each other professionally.

SAGITTARIUS:

Nothing, and we mean, nothing, is likely to go according to plan, Sagittarius. What do you do in moments of crisis? Do you lose your sense of control or find a way to glide over the chaos? Tapping into your inner Zen master is going to be hard. But it's what you've got to do in order to stay sane. On the professional front, the cards are pointing towards a toxic person or situation—one that's taking a toll on your mental health. It's a good idea to nip the situation in the bud. Remembering the long-term impact of this interaction will give you the strength you need to make the right decision.

CAPRICORN:

Pause and take a deep breath. You are where you

need to be, Capricorn. Now is not the time to push against the flow or obsess over the destination. The path will clear itself in due course of time. On the personal front, you may find yourself playing mediator.

AQUARIUS:

It's never about fame, money or power, is it? It's about honouring your truth and creating from a space of love. The intention you are sending out in the cosmos is bringing all the right opportunities to your yard, Aquarius. Remember to remove the 'I' from this equation as you embark upon this brand new adventure. You are but a channel..

PISCES:

Things on the personal front are looking not-so-good, Pisces. You may find yourself in a deadlock situation, unable to move forward. Tread cautiously. Anything you say or do at this point could be held against you. Today, you may also find yourself addressing your limited beliefs—the lies you've grown up with that are preventing you from tapping into your true potential. Remember, we are approaching the new moon in your sign. There has never been a better time to free yourself from the old story.