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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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SKM 9TH FOUNDATION DAY

Chamling dreaming but SKM with NDA is reality: Golay

AARON RAI

ASSANGTHANG, 04 FEB:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha is a member of the NDA and Pawan Chamling can only dream of coming to power again, said SKM president, Chief Minister PS Tamang on his party's 9th Foundation Day celebration in his constituency, Poklok-Kamrang in South Sikkim today.

SKM celebrated the day across the state in separate functions but a state level celebration was decided against keeping in mind the COVID-19 pandemic. The celebration in Pok-

lok-Kamrang was held at the Assangthang Helipad where Mr Tamang was accompanied by his wife, Krishna Rai.

In his address, the Chief Minister congratulated and wished all the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha party workers.

"There can be alternatives to Golay but that alternative can never be Pawan Chamling," he stated.

The function was also addressed Poklok-Kamrang in-charge, B Rai, South District Nari Shakti Coordinator and Chairperson of the Organizing Committee, Babita Lim-

bu, amongst others.

Poklok-Kamrang in-charge, KB Rai wished all the party workers and said that SKM has been campaigning for change since 2009 in the name of 'Golay Khema'.

South District Nari Shakti Convenor and president of the Organizing Committee, Babita Limboo, shed light on the background of the foundation day of the party.

Emphasizing on the need to rise above the politics of discrimination, she said SKM believes in the politics of inclusion. She also shared her past struggles for change and

added that people of the constituency are lucky to get a Chief Minister as their representative in the State Legislative Assembly.

The program included various cultural performances while the evening's program will have performances from popular singer Astha Rawat and comedian, Mahindra Bagdas.

On the occasion, the organizers felicitated the Chief Minister and his wife. Bhagirat Rai, Babita Limboo, Laxmi Tamang and others were also felicitated on behalf of the community for their contribution to the party.



24 officers promoted to Special Secy rank

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 04 FEB:

Twenty-four officers of the 2002 batch of the State Civil Services, currently serving as Additional Secretaries, were today promoted to the rank of Special Secretary. With this promotion, they move into Super-time Grade - II in level 21 of the Pay Matrix.

The promotions cleared by the Department of Personnel are currently in officiating capacity and will be regularized on the recommendation of SPSC.

5 more Covid cases and 839 more vaccinations in Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 04 FEB:

Even as the number of daily cases of Covid-19 in Sikkim remains in single-digits, the total number of the confirmed cases crossed the 6100-mark today and now stands at 6,103 with the detection of five fresh cases of novel coronavirus in the last 24 hours.

In the meantime, Sikkim registered nine more recoveries on Wednesday to bring down the number of active cases to 82. The total number of recovered Covid patients in the State has accordingly further improved to 5,791.

In his daily health bulletin on Thursday, Health Depart-

ment State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia, informed that the five new cases were picked up in the testing of 225 samples on Wednesday. All five cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 184 samples, while 14 samples tested by TrueNat and 27 by rapid antigen testing returned negative for COVID-19.

Among the new cases are one person from Lower Tarku in South Sikkim, one from SMIT Complex, Majhitara and one from Middle Sichey.

39-year-old Binita Rai from Gangtok and 33-year-old Shiva Raj Kumar who had given his address as Club Mahindra remain untraceable over the

phone numbers provided by them during testing. Mr Bhutia informs that upon enquiring with Club Mahindra, they learned that no person by the name Shiva Raj Kumar was with them.

On the vaccination front, the process began for front-line workers on Thursday from West District with the vaccination of 60 of them. Likewise, 241 health workers in East District [Rural], 86 at STNM hospital, 49 at Urban PHC, Gangtok, 100 at Central Referral Hospital, Tadong, 152 in North District and 151 in South District were vaccinated. A total of 839 persons were vaccinated in Sikkim today.

Twitter CEO 'likes' Tweet asking for emoji for #FarmersProtest hashtag

NEW DELHI, 04 FEB

[NDTV]: Twitter chief executive Jack Dorsey has hit the 'like' button on several tweets that praised singer Rihanna for her tweet on the protest by farmers against new agriculture laws in India. Rihanna and climate activist Greta Thunberg's tweets on the farmer protests have been condemned by the government as interference in domestic matters.

Among the tweets 'liked' by Mr Dorsey was one by Washington Post journalist Karen Attiah, who tweeted, "Rihanna has raised her voice for social justice movements in Sudan, Nigeria, and now India, and Myanmar. She is a real one."

Mr Dorsey hit the 'like' button on another tweet by Ms Attiah, who said, "Now is as a good

time as ever for @Twitter and @Jack to add a Twitter emoji to the massive #FarmersProtests in India - like they did for historic international protests like #BlackLivesMatter and #EndSars"

A global battle of perception has broken out on social media after Rihanna and Ms Thunberg's tweets on the farmer protests that have been going on for months, demanding the government to withdraw three farm laws that they claim would hurt their earnings and put minimum price guarantee in danger.

The government has said it is willing to discuss the laws clause by clause and even agreed to pause the laws for one-and-a-half years, but the farmers want nothing less than com-

plete repeal of the laws.

Actors, politicians and sports stars including Sachin Tendulkar tweeted to ask people to "remain united" and not allow "external forces" to harm sovereignty, using the hashtags #IndiaTogether and #IndiaAgainstPropaganda

The Delhi Police today cited another tweet by Ms Thunberg in a case filed today that alleges an overseas "conspiracy" and an attempt to "promote enmity between groups". The teen climate campaigner, unfazed, tweeted that she "still" stood with farmers and "no amount of threats" would change that.

The farmers are dug in on a highway on the Delhi-Haryana border. The police have barricaded the areas to stop tractors and more crowds coming to the area.

Why Are We Not Talking About Kids?

JIWAN RAI

Gangtok has been eerily evolving into a kind of open air jail for kids. Other towns and villages across the state are not getting any better either. But that is not the most unfortunate reality. Our glacial insensitivity to our hapless kids whom we 'lock up' in congested settlements with no option to free themselves and yet expect them to grow normally and perform extraordinarily is the most inhuman crime we could commit. Our blindness is bizarre.

We so sanctimoniously judge our kids who display tendencies of falling victim to reckless conduct. We tell them to compare our 'innocent childhood' with their 'strange childhood'. We tell them how hard we worked - we went to bed early, woke up early, studied hard, remained focused on our goals and blah blahblah. And then we tell them off for their sleeplessness in the night, their sleeping in, their lack of focus and their addiction to electronic gadgets. We worship ourselves and write them off. We glorify ourselves and demonize them. Having snatched every inch of space from them, we tell them, "We worked our fingers to the bone for you".

Have we ever given a thought to the fact that the reason we were happier children despite less prosperity was the ample space we enjoyed and the freedom of being naturally playful. The physical and social benefits we enjoyed are mere legends for our kids

who have just rooms at home, streets and paths outside. We went outside and poured our stress and emotion into our games thus using play as a distraction. We derived our happiness from our outdoor play. We became Maradona, Pele, PT Usha, Gavaskar

VIEWPOINT



and Kapi Dev on the playground. We didn't have to pick up a gun and shoot senselessly on computers or mobile phones.

Many of us didn't have a proper playground. But there were open physical spaces where we could play freely. Research shows that playtime decreases the tendency to misbehave as energy is diverted towards positive activities that increase self-confidence, develop their personality, help them to solve problem and assist them in devel-

oping a sense of control over their emotions. Playing together helps them develop social skills, social roles and team work.

Our school system (education), has become a legendary joke. It is a system that is entrusted with the grave responsibility of developing children into capable citizens but is totally clueless about children's problems. The HRDD asks the school management to ensure full attendance. School heads ask class teachers and subject teachers to ensure full attendance. Teachers ask students to come to school regularly and ask guardians to stay alert.

Have we ever asked why students find it boring to come to school? Have we conducted serious research into finding out the underlying reasons? Way back in the 1600s (four centuries ago), the western world had figured out, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy". We call our students to schools, house them in buildings from 9am to 4pm, provide zero space and zero materials for physical play and then have the audacity to scold them for feeling bored. That is our school system in general. Of course, exceptions are always there. Breaks and games periods are meant to allow students to experience freedom from classroom boredom and have fun. It is this kind of fun that makes the learning experience beautiful. Opportunities to let loose do a world of good to kids.

COVID-19: India records 12,899 new cases, 107 fatalities

NEW DELHI, FEB 4 (PTI):

With 12,899 people testing positive for coronavirus infection in a day, India's COVID-19 tally of cases rose to 1,07,90,183, while the recoveries surged to 1,04,80,455, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Thursday.

The death toll increased to 1,54,703 with 107 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,04,80,455 pushing the national COVID-19 recovery rate of 97.13 per cent, while the COVID-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.43 per cent. The total COVID-19 active caes remained below 2 lakh.

There are 1,55,025

active coronavirus infections in the country which comprise 1.44 per cent of the total cases, the data stated.

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

According to the ICMR, 19,92,16,019 samples have been tested up to February 3 with 7,42,841 samples being tested on Wednesday.

The 107 new fatalities include 30 from Maharashtra, 20 from Kerala, 7 each from Ch-

hattisgarh and West Bengal and 6 each from Delhi and Uttar Pradesh.

A total of 1,54,703 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 51,169 from Maharashtra followed by 12,371 from Tamil Nadu, 12,225 from Karnataka, 10,864 from Delhi, 10,195 from West Bengal, 8,674 from Uttar Pradesh and 7,157 from Andhra Pradesh.

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

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

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turn to pg02

"No amount of threats...": Greta Thunberg after Delhi Police files case

NEW DELHI, 04 FEB

[NDTV]: Greta Thunberg's controversial tweet on a "toolkit" for supporting the farmer protests was cited in a case filed today by the Delhi Police that includes charges of sedition, an overseas "conspiracy" and an attempt to "promote enmity between groups". The teen climate campaigner, unfazed, tweeted that she "still" stood with farmers and "no amount of threats" would change that.

Greta Thunberg's tweets in support of the protests near Delhi against farm laws are among many posts that have drawn international attention over the past two days to the farmers' agitation that began late-November. The Cyber Cell of the Delhi Police is investigating several tweets but the subject of the FIR refers to Greta Thunberg's tweet this morning on a "toolkit" guiding people on how to support the farmers' protests.

The Delhi Police said "some elements" were trying to take advantage of the farmer protests and "one account" had posted a toolkit that was authored by a group called the "Poetic Justice Foundation" that was a "Khalistani organisation".

"Taking cognizance of the toolkit, the police has registered a case for spreading disaffection against the government of India (sedition) and disharmony between groups on religious, social and cultural grounds, and criminal conspiracy to give shape to this," said Praveer Ranjan, Special Commissioner of Police.

Mr Ranjan said the toolkit "exposes the conspiracy by an organized overseas network" to instigate the farmer protests. Soon after the FIR was filed, Greta Thunberg doubled down on her views with a new tweet: "I still #StandWithFarmers and support their peaceful protest. No amount of hate, threats or violations of human rights will ever change that. #Farmer-sProtest"

The 18-year-old's first tweet came on Tuesday night, soon after pop star Rihanna posted a one-line comment sharing a CNN story.

Social worker gets Rashtriya Prerna Doot award

BIKASH CHETTRI NAMTHANG, 04 FEB:

Krishna Bahadur Chettri of Namthang Karek, South Sikkim, has been conferred with the Rashtriya Prerna Doot award at Chhapra Bihar on 03 Feb.

The award was conferred by the 'Face of Future India' during its 5th Annual Function National Youth Exchange Programme at Galaxy Palace of Chhapra Bihar. Face of Future India is an initiative by Indira Gandhi NSS awardees.

A total of 32 youths of the nation have been conferred this award on the basis of services and contributions in the field of social work, cinema and medicine.

Krishna Bahadur Chettri is a social worker and he is the general secretary of National In-



tegrated Forum of Artists and Activists (NIFAA) Sikkim State, general secretary of Blood Army of Sikkim and he is also as-

sociated with many other social organisations.

The award ceremony was attended by secretary Ramakrishnan Mission

Ashram Chhapra Swami Atidevanand Maharaj as chief guest accompanied by District Commandant Chhapra,

Harendra Singh, Principal Narayan College Goriya-kothi Premendra Ranjana Singh, UNICEF Doctor, Ashis Kumar as guests.

SKM celebrates Foundation Day across West Sikkim



RUDRA KAUSHIK GYALSHING, 04 FEB:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha celebrated its 9th Foundation Day in all the constituencies of West Sikkim on Thursday. Area MLAs, party's portfolio holders and functionaries of the respective constituencies were present at these events.

On the occasion, a large number of people from various constituencies of West Sikkim joined SKM and were welcomed with khadas.

Party functionaries recalled their struggle and sacrifices in the fight against the former SDF government.

The party functionaries also spoke about strengthening the party from the grassroot level, working together to serve the people, hearing the grievances of the people and resolving their problems through an effective approach.

The developmental promises made by the

SKM government were also reiterated by the party workers. They maintained that the SKM government is committed to fulfil the aspirations of the people relating to all-round development of Sikkim. They also spoke about future plans and policies of the SKM government.

Area MLAs in their speech also promised developmental initiatives to be taken up by SKM government in their respective constituencies.

HSP invites SKM to focus on promises while celebrating foundation day

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 04 FEB:

Hamro Sikkim Party has invited Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, as it celebrates its foundation day, to remember why the people voted it into government - "for a bright, progressive and democratic future."

In a statement issued today, HSP president, Dr Bina Basnet, contends that the SKM Government has mishandled the education system and argues that resources "misused" in the if celebrations could have been "diverted for infrastructure development for which our students are fighting."

She alleges further that the SKM Govern-

ment has "not been able to fulfil what had been promised by them in their manifesto" and goes on to accuse the SKM of developing an expertise in "victimisation, transfers and nepotism" instead.

"Nowadays in Sikkim, the resources and manpower are being directed to find few fake ID's in the virtual world, while someone beaten up in broad daylight in the real world goes untraced," she points out to underscore her contention that the SKM Govt is operating with misplaced priorities.

She concludes demanding that the State Government "take up the issues of the college students on a war footing."

HC stays arrest of Amazon Prime Video's Aparna Purohit

ALLAHABAD, FEB 4 (PTI):

The Allahabad High Court on Thursday ordered no coercive action against Amazon Prime Video's India Originals head Aparna Purohit, facing an FIR for the alleged derogatory depiction of Hindu deities in web series Tandav.

A bench of Justice Sidharth granted a temporary reprieve to Purohit against the arrest while reserving its verdict on her anticipatory bail plea.

While reserving the ruling, the bench said no coercive action should be taken against Purohit till

the pronouncement of the order. While pleading for anticipatory bail for Purohit, her counsel submitted to the court that the web series was only a work of fiction and there was no intention of the applicant to outrage the religious feeling of any community.

A criminal case has been lodged against Purohit and the makers and actors of the web series, including its director Ali Abbas, producer Himanshu Krishna Mehra and writer Gaurav Solanki in Rabupura police station of Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Budh Nagar.

Why Are We Not...

Children who have the freedom to explore their world have higher chances of becoming happier and more successful. But sadly, many of our kids have to run away from school to hone their sporting talents. They play football and cricket in the jungle. They sneak into rivers for a swim.

Since politics is the single most public institution that has a direct influence on our society and politicians are demigods whom people worship, I challenge all the political parties and politicians to prioritize child-friendly politics. We need play field, parks, gardens and plenty of spaces for kids to be themselves. When the ban on the sale of liquor along highways was implemented, there was a hue and cry everywhere. Imagine closing down adult entertainment - there would be protests, rallies and lobbyings. But when we rob kids of their amusements, we do not even realize it. Children are Sikkim. They are India. For Sikkim, they are our 371F, Old Laws and other political rights and privileges for which we cry ourselves hoarse. If we fail to see their problems and address them, our politics are fundamentally wrong. Just because they can't protest and they do not have a voting right, we cannot ignore their issues. The reason we are evolving into a grumpier and sadder society is probably because we are robbing children of their rightful playfulness and happiness.

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DOCUMENTS LOST

I, Shri Sudarshan Chhetri, son of Bidur Gautam currently residing at Kharka Bazar an student of Soreng B.Ed College have lost my following documents as follows

1. Certificate of Identification. (COI)
2. OBC Certificate.
3. Class X - 2011 (Roll No. 3142942)and Class - XII 2013 (Roll no. 3637421) Marksheets.
4. Graduation Marksheets (all 6 semester)
5. Class XII pass certificate.

The above documents has been missing in between Kharka Bazaar and Singling Area on 15 to 21 October 2020.

My GD No, if 124 st. 22.10.2020.at Soreng Police Station, West Sikkim.

If found contact: 9832725833, 9002100641, 9933890151.

Maharashtra Assembly Speaker resigns

MUMBAI, 04 FEB [PTI]: Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Speaker Nana Patole, tipped to be the next chief of the state unit of the Congress, resigned from his post on Thursday.

Legislature sources said Mr Patole handed over his resignation to

deputy speaker Narhari Zhirwal.

Mr Patole, the MLA from Sakoli in Bhandara district, is likely to replace revenue minister Balasaheb Thorat as state Congress president soon, according to party sources.

The Congress shares

power with the Shiv Sena and Nationalist Congress Party in Maharashtra.

A delegation of Congress ministers, headed by Mr Thorat, had recently met the party leadership in Delhi.

The budget session of the state legislature is to begin from March 1.

PIB webinar discusses "Textile, Apparel and Cottage Industries energizing AatmaNirbhar Bharat"

GANGTOK, 04 FEB (PIB): Textile, Apparel and Cottage Industries of North Eastern States have competitive advantage differentiated by quality and resource optimization, experts opined in a Webinar organised by Press Information Bureau, Guwahati on the topic 'Textile, Apparel and Cottage Industries energizing AatmaNirbhar Bharat growth with emphasis on Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' here today. Experts from Industry, entrepreneurial fraternity, Government sector along with academicians deliberated and discussed about the potential of North East from cultural, socio-economic growth, development and policy perspective.

Assistant Professor, Prof (Dr) Mohd Shahnawaz Abidin, Department of Management, Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi said that what exemplifies culture is the élan and vibes demonstrated by people during the festivities of North Eastern States. He said textiles and apparels add on to the feeling of joy and celebration in these festivities. He said

that Textile, Apparel and Cottage Industries have a competitive advantage with huge bio-diversity. He said that textiles are environment friendly and utilises Eri, Muga and Tussar Silk which encourages employment and Human Resources development of the North Eastern States.

Assistant Professor in Department of Distance Education, Prof (Dr) Mohd Yasir Arafat, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh said that there are huge opportunities in allied business such as Cottage, pottery, eco-tourism, chemical and Agri-business, among others. He said that the competitive advantage of North Eastern States with trade and commerce potential with other South Asian countries add to the global competitiveness. He said that in North Eastern States, these Industries with nimble and supple Supply Chain Management have enduring effect on energizing growth and development.

Talking about 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' where Assam and Rajasthan are grouped together, Ms Smita Saikia,

Media and Communication Officer, PIB Guwahati said that just as the bangles and the turbans in Rajasthan, it is the Gamosa or the Mekhla in Assam, which demonstrates the vibrance and enthusiasm of the people in festivities of Assam. She said that 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' is about looking into others culture and be aware of the vast diversity of India and how people celebrate culture with joy and élan.

Field Publicity Officer, Sucharita Sahoo, Field Outreach Bureau, Barpeta said that Cottage and Textile Industry add on to the emotional and cultural talent and value system in family and society. Talking about the huge potential of these industries in employment and business value-adds, she that Cottage industry employs the local talent and harness their potential.

Talking about Government initiatives such as Stand-Up India and Start-up India, Make in India, Professional Sarod player, Mayukh Gangopadhyay said that Cottage and Textile industries have a seasonal demand and there are supply

and demand changes affecting productivity and entrepreneurial business. He said that apparels are changing season wise such as in winter, spring, autumn. He said that early market analysis with global demand and supply is vital for marketability.

The webinar was managed and coordinated by Joint Director, Samrat Bandyopadhyay, PIB, Guwahati.

The interactive Webinar had enthusiastic participation of students, academicians and Industry fraternity of Assam and North East. Field Exhibition Officer, Hiramani Das, Regional Outreach Bureau, Guwahati welcomed the experts as the webinar delved into details on the various aspects of the topic such as Culture, Infrastructure and socio-economic development of North East, among others.

Along with students, eminent journalists and other government senior officials from Doordarshan Guwahati, Regional Outreach Bureau, Guwahati, All India Radio Guwahati were also present on the occasion.

DEBITS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL, SILIGURI
2nd Floor, PCM Tower, 2nd Mile, Sevoke Road, Siliguri-734001

Case No : TRC/22/2018 arising from DRPC NO 1538 dated 15/12/2014 (OA NO 249/2011)

IN THE MATTER OF
State Bank of India V/s - Smt. Santi Pradhan & ors.

SALE NOTICE

The under mentioned property will be sold by on line e-auction through web portal <https://dt.auctiontires.net> "AS IT IS WHERE IT IS" basis for recovery of Certificate amount in case number mentioned hereinabove. The property will be sold only to those persons who are subject of Sikkim and possess valid Certificate of Identification in this regard.

Description of the property:-
"Mortgaged property being all piece and parcel of a plot of land measuring 3.7083 hectare covering Plot Nos. 1573, 1582, 1585, 1588, 1589, 1590, 1599, 1600, 1601, 1605, 1606, 1607, 1608, 1611, 1632 & 1634 of Khatian No. 257 under
Dung Dung Block, Elaka-Sang, East Sikkim (Sikkim) presently owned by Sri Krishna Bahadur Pradhan, S/O Shri . Ganga Bahadur Pradhan"

Date and time of e-auction: 10 th day of March, 2021 at 15:00 hours (3:00 PM) up to 16:00 hours (4 P.M.) with auto time extension of 5 (five) minutes, till sale is conducted.

Reserve Price: The reserve price of the Property is fixed at Rs. 40,70,000/- (Rupees Forty Lakh Seventy Thousand) only.

Earnest Money Deposit (EMD): EMD is fixed at Rs. 4,07,000/- (Rupees four Lakh Seven Thousand only). The intending purchasers are required to pay Earnest Money Deposit in form of Demand Draft/RTGS/ NEFT/ fund transfer to credit of System Suspense Branch Parking Account, State Bank of India, Singtam Branch, No Lien Account no 4599813875155 (IFSC Code-SBIN0007515) -on or before 8th March, 2021. By 4:00 P.M.

Bid Increment: Incremental bid value is fixed at Rs.50,000/- (Rupees fifty thousand only) or in multiple thereof for both the properties.

Registration and submission of bid : The participants/intending purchasers are necessarily required to submit duly signed and filled up Annexure I & II of the sale proclamation in 2nd Mile, Sevoke Road, Siliguri-734001 on or before 8th March, 2021 before 16:30 hours (4:30 PM) along with supporting documents and proof of EMD for registration because only registered participants/intending purchaser can log in and participate in the e-auction. However, bidders are also allowed to submit duly signed and filled up bid form and declaration in PDF format along with proof of EMD to the Recovery Officer to his official e-mail ID rsid.alekh@sbil.co.in within the above mentioned date and time. No bid will be accepted after the said date and time. The user ID and pass word will be directly sent to registered participants/intending purchaser with further directions, if any, for login and participating in the auction on their e-mail ID by the e-auction service provider company.

The other details and terms and conditions of the sale are available on the proclamation of sale that has been uploaded on <https://dt.auctiontires.net> web site.

Intending purchasers may contact Mr. Anand Bansal, Contact No.: 8001196912/8001196214 and email ID: an.07515@sbil.co.in

A. K. Mondal
Recovery Officer
DRY Siliguri, Govt. of India
14/03/2021, Siliguri

UDD discusses removal of aerial supply lines with telecom Cos



GANGTOK, 03 FEB (PIB):

A meeting regarding the beautification of all the Urban and Rural Bazaars of Sikkim by removing all aerial connectivity lines was held in the chamber of Secretary, Urban Development Department, with all the Telecom Service Providers operating in the State. Present in the meeting were Secretary, UDD, GM, BSNL, Gangtok, Network Engineer Vodafone, AGM BSNL, SCO Reliance Jio, Jio Center Manager, Additional Chief Engineer Smart City Gangtok, MD SBM Chief Engineer UDD Joint Secretary, UDD.

Secretary, UDD apprised the house that since Sikkim is a Tourist Destination State, many tourist flock to the State to enjoy its scenic beau-

ty but this has over a time been marred by the overhead utility lines which can be seen all over the Bazaars of the State Now, since Smart City is to construct a 12Km duct from Vajra to Ranipool, the Secretary cum State Mission Director, Smart City, requested all these private companies to utilize this duct to the fullest which will help in removing the aerial connectivity which is currently marred the beauty of the place. She also asked the house for suggestions to be taken up by the Department to overcome the constraints towards beautification of the Bazaars areas of the State including Class - II & Class - III Bazaars.

Jio, D Chakraborty, Center Manager said that

the Company would be glad to lay down the underground cables provided permission is granted for the same. The constraints faced were also discussed at length. One of the main bottlenecks proved to be the numerous utility lines running underground which makes it almost impossible to dig the duct for laying the underground fibers. Also, the backbone for laying the fiber optics is already there along the National Highway but there is no road crossing which is required to connect the households in the interiors. In order to cross the cables in the interiors permission is to be sort from the National Highway and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHID-

CL). Also, because of the constraint of funds many of these old & ugly cables have not been replaced over a period.

The Chief Engineer, UDD, apprised the house that BSNL has defunct poles at Soreng Bazaar which is hampering the beauty of the place so if permitted this could be removed to which the GM, BSNL consented.

The Representatives from Jio also requested to enable them to give in their inputs/submission so that all aspects could be investigated.

The Secretary suggested that a Joint Inspection will be undertaken together with the Telecom Service Providers and the Smart City Engineers so that the exact areas for laying of the

cables / crossings can be identified and all modalities can be adhere to.

Also, it was remarked by all those present that the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) has kept no provision for crossing the Highway by ducts which has to be addressed for which it is pertinent to have the members of NHIDCL to attend the next meeting.

The Telecom Service Providers have also asked that the process for obtaining permission to get tower erected may be looked into as it involves a very long process so that it would be easier to maintain connectivity in the State. The Secretary also asked the house for any suggestion or any corrective measures to be undertaken by the Department to facilitate the removal of aerial connectivity which are at present running all over the State.

All the Representatives agreed to the suggestions and expressed their gratitude for providing this much needed co-ordination meeting with the Department and also for providing the duct which would make it convenient in removing these overhead utility lines to a great extent.

CRH observes World Cancer Day



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 04 FEB:

Central Referral Hospital (CRH) observed World Cancer Day today with an online talk on "Tobacco Health Hazard Awareness" by noted speaker and Mumbai based senior ENT Surgeon, Dr Neeta Prassanna Ghate, a press release informs.

The talk was organized by Department of ENT Head and Neck Surgery, Sikkim Manipal Institute of Medical Sciences (SMIMS) under Sikkim Manipal University (SMU).

Dr Neeta Prassanna Ghate is a retired academician and an active medical literature activist and has been actively involved in creating awareness against Tobacco for the last many years. She also shared her experience as a member of Prevent Addiction through Children's Education (PACE) Group. The talk was moderated by Associate Professor and ENT Surgeon, SMIMS, Dr

Mohonish N Chettri.

Spearheaded by the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), the day aims to save millions of preventable deaths each year by raising awareness and improving education about the disease alongside calling on governments and individuals across the world to take action.

This year is the ultimate year for the 3-year campaign theme 'I am and I will' and focuses on 'Together, all our actions matter'. It emphasises on how our actions have an impact on everyone around us, within our neighbourhoods, communities and cities.

Many advanced research regarding cancers in Sikkim and the North East India are being conducted at SMIMS. The departments of Biochemistry, Pathology, Microbiology, Obstetrics & Gynaecology and Dermatology, etc are involved in multiple ongoing cancer research projects in the

Institute. Local research and data are important and pivotal for evidence based treatment of diseases.

Associate professor, Dr Pesona Lucksom, OBG & Tata Fellowship in Gynaecological Onco Surgery, CRH says, "This World Cancer Day, we want people to know that many cancers can be managed and even cured, especially if they're detected and treated as early as possible. Cancer cases in the North East states including Sikkim have a significant contribution to the increasing number cases in India. Cases of Lung, Oral, Breast and Cervical cancer being the most common. At a personal level, women particularly can learn about self-breast examination from genuine online sources and conduct it on themselves once a month. Many common hereditary cases can be treated if detected early to prevent millions of avoidable deaths."

ICAR-NRCO organizes training on basics of Orchid Cultivation



GANGTOK, 04 FEB (PIB):

A 3-day training on "Basics of Orchid Cultivation" organized for SHG members of Jagirithi, Smrithi, Lotus and Koko Mendo of Pakyong Sub-Division began at ICAR-NRCO, Pa-

kyong, on 04 Feb.

The programme was inaugurated by Director Dr Rampal.

21 trainees from Chalamthang, Lossing and North Karthok are attending the training.

"He was 25, my son 20": Priyanka Gandhi meets family of farmer who died

LUCKNOW, 04 FEB [NDTV]: Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday met family members of Navreet Singh, a farmer who lost his life during the protest in New Delhi on Republic Day, and also attended a prayer ceremony for him in Uttar Pradesh's Rampur. "Navreet was 25, my son is 20. I want to tell this family you are not alone. The country and all of us are all standing with you," she said.

Accompanied by senior Congress leaders including the party's Uttar Pradesh unit chief Ajay Kumar Lallu, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra arrived at Rampur's Dibdiba village. She attended the 'antim ardas' ceremony and sat with family members with her head covered.

A Samajwadi Party delegation and Rashtriya Lok Dal leader Jayant Chaudhary also visited the village at the same time as the Congress leaders.

Navreet had died after his tractor overturned on January 26, the Delhi police had said, when sections of a massive tractor parade during protests against the centre's new agricultural laws strayed off agreed routes, clashing with cops. The family, however, has claimed he had been shot first. The Uttar Pradesh government has denied this, saying his post-mortem report says the death was from injuries from the tractor accident and no bullet was found.

"Forensic doctors from England have said he was shot twice. The tractor overturned after he was shot. Priyanka ji said she will take our complaint ahead," Navreet's grandfather Hardeep Singh told NDTV in an interview. Uttar Pradesh minister Mohsin Raza called the visit a "drama". "The drama Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Rahul Gandhi are doing, nothing is going to come out of it. You are offering fake sympathy at a time Modi's ji policies are helping farmers," he said.

Earlier on her way to Rampur, three to four vehicles in Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's convoy ran into each other on a highway in western Uttar Pradesh's Hapur district. No one was hurt in the incident but some vehicles were damaged.

Mizoram students' body stages sit-in against coup in neighbouring Myanmar

AIZAWL, 04 FEB [PTI]: Mizoram's top students' body staged a sit-in on Wednesday, protesting the recent military coup in Myanmar and the human rights violation in the neighbouring country.

The students showed solidarity with the people of Myanmar, a country with which Mizoram shares a 404 km free movement regime (FMR) border. They also expressed solidarity with Myanmar's Mizo communities, which too have faced the brunt of the coup.

Myanmar shares a 1,468 km border with India. The border touches the north-eastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram. According to a demographic study

of Myanmar's bordering areas, there is a significant Naga, Mizo and some Assamese population living there.

Early Monday morning, Myanmar's military staged a lightning coup, detaining Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, leaders of her ruling party and Myanmar president Win Myint. The army chief General Min Aung Hlaing was granted "legislative, judicial and executive powers".

The swift power seizure effectively returns a nation at the edge of democracy to direct military rule. On Wednesday, hundreds of students and leaders of NGOs participated in the demonstration held in front of

Vanapa Hall in Mizoram capital Aizawl. Peter Chhangte, vice president of student body Mizo Zirlai Pawl, said the purpose of the demonstration was to reach out to the Mizo communities living in Myanmar.

"We share the sufferings and joy of our Mizo brothers and sisters in Myanmar. We will always stand for them," he said.

He urged the Mizoram government to take measure to ensure that the Mizo communities in Myanmar do not face problems in the current political situation there. He said several Mizos were among leaders of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), who have been detained.

Workshop on counselling skills for reps from childcare institutes of West Sikkim



SUMMIT REPORT

GYALSHING, 04 FEB:

A workshop on "basis counselling skills and training on individual care plan" for functionaries of CCI's (Child Care Institutes) of West Sikkim was organized by the District Child Protection Unit, West Sikkim, at West District Zilla Panchayat Conference Hall today.

DCPO-West Bhawana Subba, in her welcome address, highlighted the idea behind the workshop and pointed out that everyone across the

globe has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as were children residing at different CCI's.

The workshop, she said, will build capacity of functionaries at children's homes to handle problems they come across and also help identify the root causes of different behavioural issues and focus on healing.

"And if we are talking about mental health, we will have to work with those children whose life has been very difficult. They need proper intervention

through counselling to be able to identify, accept and understand the present prevailing issues and become resilient," she stressed.

Resource person, Clinical Psychologist Neelima Subba, in her session, underlined the need for basic counselling skills and also demonstrated art-based therapy.

Further she explained childcare plans forms as per the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 and Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Rules, 2017.

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Bring Home the Hivre Bazaar Experience

Invest social capital and the results will be good

A remote village in Maharastra easily outshines the more celebrated civil societies of the country's metros. And they do so not because of the brilliance of one man alone, although that helped, but because the residents were willing to push their realities towards a brighter tomorrow. The village experienced mass exodus during the severe drought in 1972. Even as the village folk abandoned agriculture and moved out, those who could not move, stayed back and fell into dependency and alcohol. And that is how things remained there for slightly over a decade and a half until, in 1989, Popatrao Baguji Pawar, the only postgraduate in the village contested for the post of gram panchayat sarpanch and won. He started by getting the around 22 illicit liquor shops in the village closed. That is a lot of liquor shops for a village with a population of less than 1,000 people! But it was clearly about more than shutting down these outlets, because he had to also reform the alcoholics, realizing early that for any plan to resuscitate the village, the people will have to participate. Alcohol, as Sikkim will know well, does not lend itself very well to collaborations, well, at least collaborations that help build something. This task achieved, Popatrao managed to secure bank loans for farmers and started rainwater harvesting, water conservation and management programs, which involved building 52 earthen bunds, percolation tanks, 32 stone bunds and nine check dams. This was a huge undertaking and partly inspired by what Anna Hazare had pulled off at Ralegan Siddhi, barely 35 km away from Hivre Bazaar. Before his first term as Sarpanch was over, reverse migration started as families started returning home. Today, the village, with its 235 families and an overall population of 1,250, has a monthly per capita income of Rs 30,000, up from Rs. 830 in 1995, plus it has 60 families with an annual income of over 10 Lakh rupees.

What Popatrao did right was that he learned from other examples, was willing to invest in the people, trust them and work with them. What the villagers of Hivre Bazaar provided was a willingness to contribute, persevere and share.

They traded well in social capital.

Social Capital is counted in one's relationship with others in a community in which citizens have a tendency to engage in civic affairs, band together in voluntary groups, come together for collective action. Social Capital buys better futures because it engages the present in collaborative undertakings for a shared aspiration for a better future, encourages sharing of ideas, fosters debate and resolution. When people collaborate, they do not just clean jhoras and undertake plantation drives, they talk, they discuss, they disagree and while they respect discordant ideologies, believe in the community. In the present times of multiple sources of information, it becomes difficult to sift the rumour from the news and judge inspired intent from ulterior motives. A society that can keep up lucid lines of communication becomes the best informed because it keeps the doors open to all points of views and un-layers developments and issues more intelligently. In doing so, the society discovers common intent, and intent modulated in unanimity can only be good. This Social Capital, once it has matured into an instinctive assembly of concerned citizens, becomes what we know as a Civil Society. Social Capital charts the course for collective development and a Civil Society keeps the journey on the right path.

The Hivre Bazaar experience needs to be attempted more widely; it might be in Maharastra, but the model can be replicated anywhere in the world, and surely in Sikkim as well.

WRITE US:

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

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GameStop: I'm One of the WallStreetBets 'Degenerates' – Here's Why Retail Trading Craze is Just Getting Started

MOHAMMAD RAJJAQUE
theconversation.com

I joined the WallStreetBets forum on Reddit almost two years ago. But I was far from the image of the typical "bored, young Reddit trader" that has been portrayed in the media lately. I had worked in banking, and been a retail investor for more than 15 years – in addition to teaching financial management at a Russell Group university for more than eight years.

The average profile of members was similar to mine in terms of knowledge and experience – only much younger and with much deeper pockets than me, I think. The forum had just above a million members and it was a good source of learning and information.

The users referred to themselves as "degenerates" or "retards" (an anagram for "traders") and, when they posted their analysis of possible trading opportunities, it was known as "DD" or due diligence. These DDs would be very detailed, just like the kind of analysis that the now famous Keith Gill – aka DeepFuckingValue – would later post on computer games retailer GameStop, which led to the 100-fold price surge that has recently taken the world by storm.

KEITH GILL'S JULY 2020 ANALYSIS OF GameStop

These DDs were scrutinised and discussed by members and any discrepancies in arguments or data were usually identified quickly. Existing members continually reminded newcomers about the risks involved with suggested trades and cautioned that anyone putting more than 2% of their total capital into a risky trade was making a mistake.

The most important feature of the forum was transparency. Members regularly shared the status of their trade – both losses and profits. Traders like Gill even regularly posted the status of their portfolio, including losses.

THE GAMES BEGIN

The forum started discussing GameStop around a year ago. But at that time it was just a trading opportunity. There wasn't any talk of taking down hedge funds or a war with Wall Street until two months ago. In January 2021, based on the discussion in the forum, I bought 11 shares in GameStop, in gradual steps ranging in price from US\$80 to US\$350 (averaging US\$200) as a calculated trade based on the available information at the time.

By late January, it had become a frenzy as forum members piled into GameStop and other stocks, including BlackBerry and cinema group AMC Entertainment, using low-fee trading platforms such as Robinhood. This was based on the knowledge that many hedge funds had bet heavily on these share prices to go down (known as "short positions"), and that driving them up would cost big investors a fortune. In the event, the damage has run to billions of dollars and some players, including Melvin Capital, Maplelane and Citron, got burned.

The WallStreetBets forum has grown exponentially. The number of members now stands at 8.4 million and still rising, and it is almost impossible to follow the discussion or extract information from the barrage of posts. Even the founders of the forum have complained that it is a victim of its own success.

The response from the trading

apps has been questionable in my opinion. They either stopped or severely restricted buying by individual traders while allowing everyone to sell, thus suppressing demand and price. And these restrictions were only for retail traders - not hedge funds.

Outraged retail investors are bringing more than 30 class-action lawsuits against Robinhood, and a house committee hearing by US lawmakers is expected later in February. The New York attorney general, Letitia James, is reviewing Robinhood's reaction, while prominent figures like CNN host Chris Cuomo, Tesla's Elon Musk and tech investor Chamath Paliapitiya have openly questioned whether Robinhood imposed the restrictions to favour hedge funds with short positions. Notably, one of the main customers for the user data that Robinhood sells is Citadel Securities, which is one of Melvin Capital's backers.

Robinhood responded that it imposed the restrictions temporarily while it raised additional funding to cover a huge hike in the amounts the clearing houses were demanding to cover the period until each trade settled. It has since raised over US\$3 billion from backers and has partially lifted the restrictions.

THE NEW ROCK'N'ROLL

Beyond this individual Reddit forum, a wider change seems to be taking place. For the past few weeks, most of the fastest-growing communities on Reddit are related to investment and trading discussions. And this trend is spreading across the world. Similar forums have emerged in the UK, Europe and Malaysia.

There is also the realisation

among institutional investors that social media users working collectively are capable of exposing carefully hidden information and spreading it like wildfire. It may mean that more people may choose to manage their own investments in future rather than paying generous fees to hedge funds and other financial institutions to do it for them.

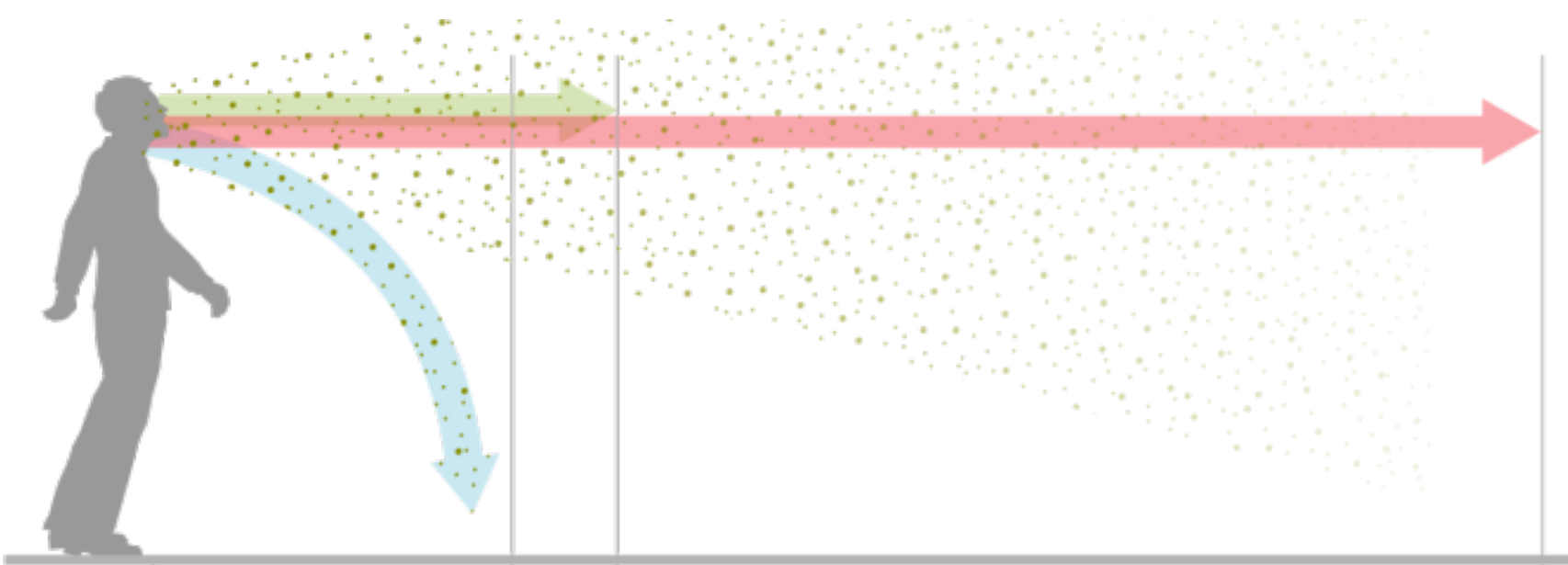
It may also lead to significant changes in risk management and disclosure practices. For example, Citron, which specialises in taking short positions, says it will no longer put its research into the public domain.

On a more social level, this phenomenon appears to have made young people much more interested in how the financial markets work. Social media forums and commission-free trading appears to be creating a new generation of investors.

This democratisation of capital markets may be a solution to the indifference that has long existed among the ordinary population towards saving and investing - reversing a trend that has existed for more than three decades.

As for me and my 11 shares in GameStop – currently worth US\$990, or about half of what I paid for them – I plan to hold them for two reasons. The company now has the support of 8.4 million WallStreetBets members as potential customers, many of whom are also the primary customers for its gaming products. GameStop is now also a well recognised brand among young social media users across the world. Wish me luck.

[the writer is Program Director, Accounting and Financial Management Division, University of Sheffield]



If Control Measures are Stopping Flu in its Tracks, Why Aren't They Stopping Coronavirus?

STEPHEN KISSLER
theconversation.com

As the COVID-19 pandemic rages, other respiratory illnesses have been unusually quiet this year. Fears of a dangerous influenza and COVID-19 "syndemic" have come to pass as influenza cases reached some of the lowest rates ever observed.

The near absence of the flu might reflect increased rates of vaccination as seen in the US, but distancing, hand washing and masking have probably played an even bigger role. If these measures are so effective against the flu, though, why is SARS-CoV-2 still spreading?

REPRODUCTION NUMBERS

Reproduction or "R" numbers measure how well a disease spreads and, therefore, how difficult it is to control. The number tells us how many people a single infected person will probably infect. The reproduction number for seasonal influenza usually hovers between 1.2 to 1.5, whereas early estimates for SARS-CoV-2 ranged from 2 to 4. This means that under "normal" circumstances – in the absence of masking, distancing, frequent hand-washing – SARS-CoV-2 is about twice as infectious as the flu.

To stop an epidemic from spreading, we need to reduce R below 1. That's a lot easier for seasonal influenza than for SARS-CoV-2. If distancing and masking halved the reproduction number for both illnesses, SARS-CoV-2 would continue to spread while influenza would stop dead in its tracks.

But this isn't really satisfying. We've basically just said that SARS-CoV-2 spreads better because it infects more people. Just what makes SARS-CoV-2 harder to control?

AEROSOLS vs DROPLETS

SARS-CoV-2 and influenza spread in similar ways: both can spread via contaminated surfaces, large respiratory droplets and smaller respiratory aerosols. However, the relative importance of each pathway differs between the two viruses.

For influenza, contaminated surfaces and droplets are the main concern. Hand washing, masking and distancing all do a good job preventing this sort of spread.

SARS-CoV-2, on the other hand, features explosive "super-spreading events", pointing toward the importance of aerosol-based spread. A recent study (not peer-reviewed) supports the idea that increased aerosol-based spread helps explain the different spread patterns of SARS-CoV-2 and influenza.

Masking, distancing and hand washing still help, but aerosol-based spread allows SARS-CoV-2 to evade these measures more easily.

IMMUNITY

SARS-CoV-2 is a new virus to humans. Besides small levels of cross-immunity that previous infections with other coronaviruses might have given us (and this is far from certain), our bodies generally can't detect and fend off an infection from SARS-CoV-2.

Influenza is different: since influenza circulates every year, we've all had multiple influenza infections, each of which has boosted our immunity to the flu. This immunity helps keep the reproduction number for influenza low since it reduces the probability of spreading infection. Without this immunity, the reproduction number for influenza would probably be closer to that of SARS-CoV-2, as it was in the 1918 influenza pandemic.

HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

Websites that track the reproduction number of SARS-CoV-2 show something remarkable: aside from small peaks and dips, the reproduction number has hovered in many locations right around 1.

This probably reflects something about human behaviour: as people watch SARS-CoV-2 cases in their communities, they adjust their behaviour accordingly. Are cases high? Maybe we should stay in tonight rather than going to a restaurant. Are they low? Maybe we can risk a play date for our kids.

Similar decisions are being made at the community level, with stay-at-home orders, business closures, and mask mandates alternately applied and lifted depending on the severity of the outbreak. This ultimately keeps SARS-CoV-2 right on the edge of its ability to spread.

This means that anything that spreads less well than SARS-CoV-2 is likely to be pushed below the key reproduction number threshold of 1. If this is true, then we should see resurgences of other respiratory infections when SARS-CoV-2 is gone and behavioural restrictions are lifted. This is just what happens: in Australia cases of the childhood respiratory virus RSV spiked after the country lifted lockdowns in October, well outside of the normal time when that virus spreads.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

It is good news that influenza rates are currently down, but we must remain vigilant. Since influenza hasn't swept through the population this year and boosted our immunity, we could see spread in the summer months. Next winter's influenza season might also be unusually severe due to the lack of immunity from this year. Vaccination will be all the more important.

Low levels of influenza circulation could also affect the way the virus evolves. Scientists will need to monitor this closely since anticipating the virus' evolution is key to formulating next season's vaccine.

Meanwhile, we can take heart that the measures we've adopted to reduce SARS-CoV-2 are working, as proven by the reduction in other respiratory illnesses. If it weren't for these measures, COVID-19 would be an even bigger problem than it is now. As we face both new and familiar infectious disease threats in the future, we can now be confident that we have a set of powerful tools available to help keep ourselves healthy.

[the writer is Postdoctoral Researcher, Immunology and Infectious Diseases, University of Cambridge]

Australian Open draw delayed but TA 'absolutely confident' grand slam will go ahead

MIKE HYTNER

MELBOURNE, 04 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: The Australian Open will go ahead as scheduled, starting on Monday at Melbourne Park, despite the detection of a Covid-19 case in a hotel quarantine worker at a facility linked to the tennis.

"We're absolutely confident the Australian Open will go ahead," Tennis Australia's chief executive, Craig Tiley, said on Thursday afternoon. "We will be starting on Monday and we have no intention of changing times."

But players eager to know which side of the draw they are on and the identity of their opening opponents will be kept waiting, with the draw for the year's first grand slam put back from Thursday to Friday.

Some 500 players and support staff were forced into isolation after the infected person – a 26-year-old man working at one of the hotels containing some of the sizeable tennis cohort visiting Melbourne – returned a positive test result on Wednesday.

Testing began in earnest on Thursday morning and those affected will remain in isolation until they return a negative test. As a result, Thursday's play in the six warm-up tournaments being contested at Melbourne Park was postponed.

Depending on test results, those events should resume on Friday, with a busy day of tennis expected as organisers



play catch-up.

"We know that we have a period now where we have to work with those 507 players and their staff," Tiley said. "The probability is very low that there'll be an issue though."

"We expect them all to test negative. The plan is to continue to play [in the lead-up events] tomorrow as planned. If we have to go through this again, we'll go through this again. We have three and a half weeks of tennis to play and we'll go on as scheduled."

How Tennis Australia plans to squeeze all remaining matches in before Sunday would be announced later on Thursday, Tiley said, but asking some players to play two matches in one day is a likely scenario.

With inclement weather forecast to hit Melbourne on Friday, Tiley said matches would be played on courts under roofs.

The draw for the Open was scheduled to be made behind closed doors on Thursday evening but will now take place on Friday afternoon.

The delay should allow for all test results to be returned and, assuming there are no positives, a full draw will be able to be made, with the tournament referee Wayne McEwen in attendance.

"It will be a smaller version to what we've done before because the focus is to get the draw done and get it out there so everyone can start planning what they are doing Monday and who they are watching," Tiley said.

"We will make the decisions on which halves play where by Saturday as we've got to get through quite a few matches on Friday."

Tiley said most of the players were taking the latest setback to their

preparations for the Open in their stride.

"The players have been remarkable," Tiley said. "They've been 14 days in quarantine, some of them longer, and it took them a while to get used to that as we all know with their comments."

"But the majority have been fantastic ... when we made the calls last night and this morning they completely accepted it and have all gone and got tested."

"They've been very appreciative of the opportunity to play and I had a number of calls late last night and also this morning from them confirming that we want this to happen and we will do whatever."

Earlier on Thursday, Victoria's deputy chief health officer, Prof Allen Cheng, said the risk to players and their support staff who had been quarantining at the Grand Hyatt hotel of contracting

the virus was low.

"I think it's unlikely [they would test positive] but we have asked for testing of all of the players and other people who have been in that hotel," Cheng said. "We think the risk to other guests at the hotel, so tennis players and their accompanying staff, is relatively low because they were in the rooms at the time as opposed to staff who were outside the rooms."

"That said, the last case to leave the hotel for the health hotel left on the 22nd so we're now getting on to close to 14 days since that time. So we think that risk is relatively low so we're testing them to be sure, and it's precautionary."

Victoria's premier, Dan Andrews, struck a more cautious tone and said there were no guarantees. "The tournament proper should not be affected by this, [but] these things can change," he said.

AJP ties up with Rajior Dal for Assam assembly polls

GUWAHATI, FEB 4 (PTI): Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) chief Lurinjyoti Gogoi on Thursday said his outfit has forged an alliance with the Rajior Dal, led by jailed anti-CAA activist Akhil Gogoi, for the upcoming state elections.

After a two-and-a-half-hour-long meeting with Akhil Gogoi at Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) here, where the activist is undergoing treatment for various ailments, the former student leader said that the two new regional parties have

stitched an alliance, and a formal announcement in the matter would be made soon.

Last month, the Rajior Dal had written to Lurinjyoti, seeking an electoral understanding between the two parties.

"We had been talking about putting up a united fight against the ruling BJP. Today, both the parties sealed an alliance. A formal announcement will be made in a few days in the presence of leaders from both the parties," Lurinjyoti told PTI outside GMCH.

He also said that the

AJP is currently holding talks with the Bodoland People's Front (BPF), which is at present a part of the BJP-led state government, and discussions are "moving in the positive direction".

"We have already tied up with the Autonomous State Demand Committee from Karbi Anglong. We are also looking to ally with Ganashakti and Rabha Hasong, both of which are part of the NDA. We want to create an alliance of ethnic parties that will engage in inclusive politics," Lurinjyoti said.

7,139 Indian prisoners lodged in foreign jails: MEA



NEW DELHI, FEB 4 (PTI): A total of 7,139 Indian prisoners, including undertrials, are lodged in various jails around the world, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday.

Saudi Arabia has the highest number of 1,599 Indian prisoners, followed by the United Arab Emirates with 898 and Nepal having 886 inmates, according to information provided by Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan in Rajya Sabha.

"As per the information available with the

ministry, the number of Indian prisoners in foreign jails as on December 31, 2020, is 7,139, which also includes undertrials," he said responding to a question.

He said due to strong privacy laws prevailing in many countries, the local authorities do not share information on prisoners unless the person concerned consents to the disclosure of such details.

"Even countries which share information do not generally provide detailed information about the foreign nation-

als imprisoned," he said.

Muraleedharan said Indian missions and posts abroad remain vigilant and closely monitor incidents of Indian nationals being put in jail for alleged violation of local laws.

"Missions and posts also maintain a local panel of lawyers where Indian community is in sizable numbers," he added.

According to the details provided by the minister, 548 Indians are languishing in jails in Malaysia and 536 are lodged in Kuwaiti prisons.

No fresh COVID-19 case in Arunachal, tally at 16,829

ITANAGAR, FEB 4 (PTI): Arunachal Pradesh did not report any fresh COVID-19 case in the past 24 hours, a health department official said on Thursday.

The total caseload in the northeastern state stood at 16,829, he said.

Two more persons were cured of the disease on Wednesday, taking the total number of recoveries to 16,764, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) Lobsang Jampa said.

The recovery rate among coronavirus patients in the state stood at 99.61 per cent.

State Immunisation Officer Dimong Padung said 16,876 health workers have received vaccine shots thus far, and seven cases of adverse event

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

The state has received 32,000 doses of Covishield vaccine from the Centre so far. Arunachal Pradesh currently has nine active cases and 56 people have succumbed to the infection.

The Capital Complex Region, comprising Itanagar, Naharlagun, Nirjuli and Banderdewa areas, has the highest number of active cases at three.

Altogether 3,93,880 samples have been tested for COVID-19, including 566 on Wednesday, and the positivity ratio is at 0.05 per cent, the SSO added.

RS bypolls in Gujarat, Assam on March 1: EC

NEW DELHI, FEB 4 (PTI): Rajya Sabha bypolls to three seats in Gujarat and Assam, including the one which fell vacant due to the death of senior Congress leader Ahmed Patel, will be held on March 1, the Election Commission said on Thursday.

Two Rajya Sabha seats in Gujarat fell vacant late last year, following the deaths of Ahmed Patel and Abhay Bhardwaj (BJP). While Patel died on November 25 last year, Bhardwaj passed away on December 1 last year.

The Rajya Sabha terms of Patel and Bhard-

waj were to end in August 2023 and June 2026, respectively.

One Rajya Sabha seat in Assam fell vacant after lone Bodo People's Front MP Biswajit Daimary resigned from the upper house in November last year. His term was to end in April, 2026.

The notification for the bypolls will be issued on February 11 and the election would be held on March 1.

The counting of votes will take place on March 1 evening. As per procedure, counting for Rajya Sabha elections is held on the day polls take place.

Odisha reports 87 new COVID-19 cases, one fresh fatality



3,35,369 on Thursday as 87 more people tested positive for the infection, while one fresh fatality pushed the death toll to 1,907, a health department official said.

Of the fresh cases, 51 were reported from quarantine centres and 36 detected during contact tracing.

Sundargarh district recorded the highest number of new cases at 26, followed by Mayurbhanj at nine and Khurda at seven, the official said.

"Regret to inform the

was also suffering from hypertension," the health department said on Twitter. The state had reported the last coronavirus fatality on January 25.

Of the 1,907 COVID-19 deaths, Khurda district accounted for 335, followed by Ganjam (248), Sundargarh (173), Cuttack (141) and Puri (117).

Fifty-three other coronavirus patients have died due to comorbidities, the official said.

Odisha now has 910 active cases, and

conducted over 77.96 lakh sample tests, including 21,742 on Wednesday, and the positivity rate now stands at 4.3 per cent.

According to the official, the state has vaccinated 2,13,346 health workers till February 3.

The health department said that 1,92,437 frontline workers have been registered for receiving COVID vaccines in the second phase of the inoculation drive scheduled to begin on February 6.

8 girls among 10 Brus rescued in Tripura

AGARTALA, FEB 4 (PTI): Eight girls and two women from the Bru community were rescued here after they fled a rehabilitation camp in North Tripura district in search of jobs, police said on Thursday.

Acting on a tip-off, police raided Chandrapur bus terminus in Agartala on Wednesday and rescued the girls and the women who escaped the rehabilitation camp in Kanchanpur with the

help of a middleman, officer-in-charge of East Agartala police station, Mumtaz Begum, said.

They were handed over to ChildLine for accommodation in a shelter home, she said.

"If their guardians are identified, the rescued persons will be handed over to them," Begum said.

It is yet to be ascertained whether it is a case of human trafficking or not, a ChildLine offi-

cial said.

Mizoram Bru Displaced People's Forum secretary Bruno Msha said, "It is unfortunate that they fled the camps."

Generally, anyone going out has to make an entry in a register. We are also trying to find out the truth."

There are eight camps in Tripura for Brus who fled neighbouring Mizoram in waves following ethnic clashes.

Jhumpa Lahiri's new book to release in April

New Delhi, Feb 4 (PTI): Pulitzer prize-winning Jhumpa Lahiri will be coming out with a new novel in April, Penguin India announced on Thursday.

The new book, titled "Whereabouts", follows Lahiri's 2013 novel "The Lowland" and 2006's "The Namesake".

Written in Italian and translated into English by Lahiri, "Whereabouts" is the story of a woman protagonist and her jour-

ney through life.

"This is a story of a woman protagonist who longs to belong but dares not conform, who is moving through her life in a city that almost becomes her companion."

"From the sidewalks, parks, and bridges to the pool and the train station that leads her to her grieving mother after her father's untimely death, she moves through the city, one season after another. Until one day, her

perspective changes and the life, as she knows it, is transformed," the publisher said in a statement.

Lahiri expressed her gratitude to Penguin for publishing her book.

"I am so grateful to Meru Gokhale and to all at Penguin Random House India for following me on my creative journey and publishing this new novel, born from my love of a new language," the author of "Interpreter of Maladies" said.

VIDEO NEWS SECTION

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Ian Wright
'disappointed'
after racial
abuser escapes
criminal
conviction

LONDON, 04 FEB [PA MEDIA]: Ian Wright has expressed disappointment after an Irish teenager who admitted racially abusing him escaped a criminal conviction.

Patrick O'Brien, of Tralee, County Kerry, abused the former Arsenal and England striker in private messages on Instagram last May after he lost a Fifa game on PlayStation.

The 18-year-old pleaded guilty to harassing Wright on 11 May, contrary to the Non-Fatal Offences Against The Person Act 1997, and sending a message by phone that was grossly offensive, obscene and menacing.

At a sentencing hearing at Tralee District Court on Wednesday, Judge David Waters said he "didn't see anything to be gained" by imposing a criminal conviction, and handed O'Brien probation.

He noted O'Brien had shown genuine remorse for his actions, and had donated €500 (£440) to the Irish Network Against Racism out of his own volition.

The judge said the language used by O'Brien was reprehensible, but was the unthinking behaviour of a "a naive young man". He added that O'Brien had written an apology to Wright, which was accepted by the football pundit, who forgave his abuser.

Wright wrote on Twitter: "I've seen today's judgement and I'm disappointed. This case was never about revenge, it was always about consequences for acts of racism. My forgiveness of this young man was for my own deeply personal need and desire to move forward without further anguish. I'm a 57 year old man that has experienced racism throughout my life. I wasn't expecting my forgiveness to be an invitation to lighten a sentence. "Seeing this judgment I can only wonder what deterrent there is for anyone else who spouts this kind of vile racist abuse.

"An individual wished death upon me because of my skin colour. No judge's claims of 'naivety' or 'immaturity' will ever be acceptable to us. The supposed immaturity and naivety of our attackers is never any comfort. "So yeah I am disappointed. I'm tired. We are all tired."

Judge Waters had earlier said he had received a "very positive" probation report on O'Brien, which said he had co-operated in full, made full and frank admissions of his guilt, and had been in non-stop contact with his probation officer and was very co-operative.

His family are law-abiding, decent people, his solicitor Patrick Mann told the court. Mann said O'Brien was a "very, very good boy" who was getting "great results" at school, adding that he was "still a young lad", and asked that he be allowed to go forward "without any stain" on his record.

Help parents find a way to let their children exercise, ministers urged

PAUL MACINNES

LONDON, 04 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: The government needs to give parents a helping hand in providing children the exercise they need during the lockdown half-term, the UK's leisure industry body has said, after guidance on reintroducing sports clubs failed to materialise.

With most schools across England set to break up in 10 days' time, a period without traditional learning for many children will be followed by one without recourse to sports clubs or activities, as research continues to show a decline in physical activity amongst the young.

Ukactive, which represents the British leisure sector, has been calling for government to provide a "recovery plan" for ensuring physical activity can be safely reintroduced into schools both during term time and holidays. This follows Boris Johnson claiming he was "hopeful" schools could reopen in England from 8 March.

But with guidance yet to be published, it is now thought too late to safely op-



erate clubs this February half-term. Now Ukactive is calling for guidance for parents on how best to make use of open spaces like parks and gardens.

"Physical activity is vital for children's physical, social and emotional wellbeing, particularly at this time, so we must ensure they are

encouraged to keep playing and moving", said Jack Shakespeare, Ukactive's Director of Children, Young People, Families and Research.

"Children have as much right to exercise outside each day as adults, but they exercise in very different ways to adults. The government must

ensure all children have access to safe public spaces for play, such as parks and gardens, and that parents and carers feel confident they can do this safely.

"It is particularly important that vulnerable children and young people, and those from disadvantaged back-

grounds, are supported to be physically active so that our health inequalities do not deepen further." A call for greater clarity was echoed by the charity the Youth Sports Trust, whose Chief Executive, Ali Oliver, said guidance must be forthcoming soon.

"It is vital that clear guid-

ance is provided around the safe provision of daily physical activity, physical education and after-school sport over the next few weeks so school leaders and teachers know this is an important priority, and can feel confident in their delivery on reopening", she said.

"Sadly, we know that some schools felt they had no choice but to reduce provision of PE and after school sport when they returned in September due to a lack of clarity around what they could and couldn't do. This cannot happen again."

A recent study by Sport England into the effect of the pandemic on activity amongst young people saw a fall in the number of children completing a recommended 60 minutes of physical activity each day in 2020 from 53.4% to 51.1%. But while children were able to walk and cycle more during lockdown, participation in team sports, swimming and running all saw substantial falls. The impact on the ability to exercise was also experienced most strongly by black and minority ethnic children.

Are we in a golden age of Premier League left-backs?



SACHIN NAKRANI

LONDON, 04 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: Jerry Seinfeld tells a joke – indeed it's the first joke he ever told – about the plight of left-handed people. "So, I am left-handed," it goes, "and left-handed people do not like that the word 'left' is associated with negative things. Left feet. Left-handed compliment. 'What are we having for dinner? Leftovers.' You go to a party, there is nobody there. 'Where did everybody go?' 'They left!'"

As they say, it's funny because it's true. But turn your gaze from the comedy stage and towards that of top-flight English football and something rather different comes into view. Because, right now, being left is not a negative, specifically in regards to left-backs. Every team has always had at least one but rarely has it been the case that so many have been so good at the same time, from an attacking point of view especially.

Andrew Robertson, Aaron Cresswell, Lucas Digne, Luke Shaw, Kieran Tierney and Sergio Reguilón to name six, and that's before you get on to Oleksandr Zinchenko, James Justin, Matt Targett, Ryan Bertrand, Ezgjan Alioski and Ben Chilwell. It is quite the roll call and leads to an obvious question: is this most unsettling of times a golden age of Premier League left-backs? And if so, has it come about via fluke or design?

Graeme Le Saux is is well placed to comment given he was one of the finest left-backs of his generation, winning 36 England caps as well as being part of the Blackburn team that won the title in 1995, and regularly watches the current crop as a television pundit, most notably for the US broadcaster NBC. Le Saux is in little doubt that what we are seeing in the Premier League – and fur-

ther afield – is no accident. Rather it is a trend that has come about through targeted factors which have led to a once-novelty player becoming the norm.

"I don't see myself as being different to any of the current left-backs," says Le Saux, who also works as a director at Real Mallorca. "At Blackburn especially I was encouraged to get forward and be creative and I'd set myself targets in regards to how many crosses I wanted to get into the box every game for the likes of Alan Shearer, Mike Newell and Chris Sutton. I wasn't happy unless I delivered at least three in each half that led to chances for those strikers.

"You then had the likes of Bixente Lizarazu and, of course, Roberto Carlos, and a little bit later Ashley Cole and Leighton Baines. All really good, attacking left-backs. But there were very few. Now we see an entire generation of left-backs who stand out as much as anyone on the pitch, and that is down to coaching – young full-backs in general are being taught and encouraged to be outlets; to get ahead of the ball as opposed to staying behind it and holding their position in a back four."

The significant role full-backs, and left-backs especially, play from an attacking point of view is backed up by statistics. After January's final round of Premier League games, three of the top eight assist providers in the division were left-backs: Robertson, Cresswell and Digne, all of whom had provided five assists, more than, among others, Roberto Firmino and Raheem Sterling. Robertson, meanwhile, was sixth for chances created (38) and led the way for crosses from open play (103) and passes (1,575), and this during a season when the 26-year-old's form for Liverpool has been mixed to say the least.

Premier League left-backs rule, and there is no doubt that full-backs broadly now tend to be as good offensively as they are defensively – if not better. Going back to Le Saux's point that this has come about through coaching, another question arises: have full-backs become adept at getting forward because that's what the modern game has increasingly required of them, or has the modern game become a prominent environment for full-backs who are adept at getting forward because so many have come through? Is it chicken or egg?

"From a tactical point of view, the game has been narrowing for some time – there are fewer wingers so it's been more and more up to full-backs to provide the width going forward," Le Saux says. "I don't have the science to back it up but I have a strong feeling that for many years now kids who have played full-back in 11-a-side football, at whatever level, have been told to get forward and leave it to the holding midfielder to provide security to the two centre-backs, and that will have been in reaction to the way the game has been going.

"All full-backs now need to be comfortable on the ball and tactically astute so they know when to go and when to stay. Physically they also need to be at a high level given the distances they need to cover. That is what makes Robertson so impressive – it doesn't matter how hard he works in a game he always looks like he's got something left. He's a fantastic athlete."

The Scotland captain has been this country's best left-back for a couple of years at least but undeniably faces competition in that regard from the current crop, and from no one more so than Shaw, who after years of struggle has been outstanding for Manchester United

this season. The 25-year-old has been strong defensively – seen most vividly in his handling of Mohamed Salah during last month's goalless draw at Anfield – and offensively has significantly improved compared with the previous campaign. There have been more crosses, more touches in the opposition area and more chances created, all of which has led to his assists contribution shooting up from zero to three, his two most recent coming in Tuesday's 9-0 thrashing of Southampton, when, attacking-wise, Shaw arguably had his best game for Ole Gunnar Solskjær's side.

"He's now playing at his level and key to that is him trusting himself physically," says Le Saux. "There were always periods in a game when he was on his haunches and blowing, thinking he couldn't keep going. He's got through that with the run of games he's had and he now has confidence in his ability to keep getting up and down the pitch. As a full-back there is no better feeling in the world."

As good as Shaw has been he is not as important to his team as Tierney has become for his, with the 23-year-old now firmly one of Arsenal's best players, from an attacking point of view especially. Across north London, Reguilón has been a revelation for Tottenham since arriving from Real Madrid last September. "He has a phenomenal engine and can whip a ball in from anywhere," says the football writer, and Spurs supporter, Harry Sherlock. "He's become a key member of José Mourinho's best XI and the fans are already wondering if Real will come knocking for him in the summer; they have a buy-back clause, after all."

"For sure there's a really good crop of left-backs in the Premier League, and as a former left-back myself I'm delighted they're finally getting the credit they deserve!" Le Saux says. "In all seriousness, I reckon if you covered their faces, put them in a lineup and just looked at their bodies, you wouldn't be able to tell the difference. They're all stocky but not too broad, not too tall and have near identical power-to-agility ratios. There are exceptions like Dan Burn at Brighton, who does a good job in that position despite being way over 6ft, but, by and large, that's the standard blueprint for all modern full-backs. There is a definite type now."

Clinical Real Kashmir FC hit Indian Arrows for a six



KALYANI (WB), FEB 4 (PTI): Real Kashmir FC got back to winning ways in grand fashion, inflicting a 6-0 drubbing on Indian Arrows in an utterly lopsided I-League match here on Thursday, the result propelling the Snow Leopards into second place in the standings.

RKFC scored through Dipanda Dicka (42nd, 74th), Lukman Adememi (51st), Haroon Amiri (61st), Chesterpoul Lyngdoh (80th) and Danish Farooq (86th).

Coming into the match on the back of two successive draws, Real Kashmir FC showed their swiftness in the field of play before trouncing their opponents by an embarrassing margin.

Giving their fans something to cheer about, RKFC's Haroon Amiri, Lukam Adefemi and Dipanda Dicka dominated the match with their skills.

After a surge of attacks from Real Kashmir, the Arrows slowly got into the game, and put up a fight. They finally broke out and threatened the Real Kashmir goal in the 18th minute through Fela, but his weak shot was easily saved by Mithun Samantha.

Most of Real Kashmir's chances kept coming in from long balls and corners. Minutes after the water break, Mason Robertson wasted another opportunity to break the deadlock. The RKFC skipper broke past three defenders, before releasing a low strike, only to be denied by the Arrows keeper.

The Snow Leopards finally broke the deadlock in the 42nd minute, through Dicka, as the two teams went into half-

time with the score reading 1-0 at the Kalyani Municipal Stadium.

Pratesh Shirodkar stole the ball off Brijesh Giri. Farhan Ganai then launched a long ball forward and Sajad failed to clear his line. Dicka pounced on the bouncing ball and headed it before the oncoming Bukhari to open the scoring.

Just after the first half, Lukam Adefemi's bullet header in the 51st minute left the opposition goalkeeper bewildered as the Snow Leopards doubled their lead.

Sena Ralte delivered an astonishing cross from a free-kick, which was headed home by defender Haroon Amiri to hand Real Kashmir a three-goal advantage in the 61st minute.

In the 74th minute, forward Dicka made no mistake and tapped home from a close range to score his second, and Real Kashmir's fourth goal of the match.

In the final moments of the match, Chesterpoul Lyngdoh and Danish Farooq scored one each in the 80th and 86th minute respectively to crush Indian Arrows.

It was a clinical performance by Real Kashmir in the second half as the David Robertson-coached side scored five goals in that period.

Real Kashmir made just one change from their goalless draw against Gokulam Kerala FC, as head coach Robertson brought in Farhan Ganai for Farooq.

Indian Arrows, who lost narrowly to Chennai City FC, made two changes as coach Venkatesh Shanmugam started with Sajad Hussain Parray and Abdul Hannan.

Crime, conflict, chaos crushing Afghan hopes for tomorrow

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN (AP): Every morning when Khan Wali Kamran left for work, he was afraid his children might be killed in Kabul's streets before he got home in the evening. Finally, he couldn't take it anymore, and a month ago he sent his four children to live with his parents in his home village.

He's not the only one afraid. Afghanistan is supposed to be moving toward peace after decades of war, but to the people of the capital Kabul, turmoil only seems to be getting worse.

Frequent bombings have everyone on edge. It's not just dramatic attacks like one that killed dozens at a university last year. There's also been a string of targeted killings, like the bomb planted on the car of a prominent cleric that detonated Tuesday in the middle of busy morning traffic, killing him and his driver — one of four such bombings that day.

The tensions are increased because it's not clear who is behind the attacks. Some are claimed by the Islamic State group, who took responsibility for the cleric's killing and the killing of a judge Wednesday in eastern Nangarhar province. But many go unclaimed, blamed by the government on the

Taliban who have denied responsibility for most attacks, raising suspicions that militias run by prominent warlords both allied with and opposed to the government are creating chaos.

Then there's the surge in crime. Armed robbers brazenly rob shops or even mug people in broad daylight in public parks crowded with people, stripping them of money and phones at gunpoint. Cars stuck in traffic can be ransacked by thieves.

In one case, organized thieves robbed three branches of the same supermarket in different parts of the capital at almost the same time on the same day. Kidnappers are known to snatch children and adult men from the streets, demanding ransoms from their families, anywhere from \$50 to \$5,000. Residents of Kabul have stopped going out after dark.

"We are afraid when we get in our car, go to the office, when we are near our home, in the mosque," Kamran said. "Life has become hell."

Fear so dominates Kamran's world that he asked that The Associated Press not identify the village where he sent his four children, including his youngest, a 2-year-old

son. Others who spoke to AP asked to be identified only by one name, afraid of drawing the attention of criminals or armed factions.

Last year, hope was high that a peace deal reached by the Taliban and U.S. government would lead to an end to more than four decades of relentless war and finally bring peace to Afghanistan. But subsequent talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government have been excruciatingly slow.

Many Afghans fear that the deteriorating security is a sign that, rather than peace, what is coming is yet another phase in the war, reminiscent of the chaos of the 1990s when warlords' armed factions battled for power. That fighting came after the Soviets withdrew and before the Taliban took power. Now the Americans, who helped oust the Taliban nearly 20 years ago, are pulling out, their numbers down to 2,500 troops after former President Donald Trump accelerated the withdrawal.

Analysts say there are participants on both sides of the conflict who have more to gain from war than peace.

"The war is about power, not even about religion," said Torek Farhadi, a former Afghan govern-

ment adviser. "Some of the killings are by the Taliban, some by circles in Kabul who stand to lose wealth, power and status should peace come to Afghanistan."

Ferdaws Faramarz, Kabul police spokesman, accused the Taliban of carrying out attacks in order to "create a gap between the people and government."

Afghans say the deep corruption that permeates the government and security agencies has crippled their capacity and made them incapable of keeping Afghans safe. Despite the billions of dollars spent in Afghanistan since the 2001 ouster of the Taliban, more than 72% of the country's 32 million people live below the poverty level, which is a daily wage of less than \$1.90.

Lawlessness has accelerated in the past few years as gangs and militias grow bolder and poverty worsens. Local TV reported recently that in the past 100 days, more than 177 people in Kabul were killed and 360 wounded in suicide attacks, bomb blasts and crimes, a figure police officials confirmed to the AP was accurate.

Malik, 22, runs a small barber-shop in Kabul's posh Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood, where dip-

lomats and powerful government officials live. He used to stay open until 10 p.m., but now he shuts down by 7 most nights, ever since he was robbed last year.

The thieves were heavily armed and showed no fear. While two waited outside, two others entered his shop, demanded the cash and walked out with 30,000 Afghanis, the equivalent of \$380, as well as two mobile phones.

"We were in shock," Malik said, asking to be identified by just one name. He waited for months for police to do something, but no one was arrested and the stolen goods never recovered.

"They just told us we should be careful," Malik said.

Amir, another Kabul resident, said that when he goes to the mosque for prayers, he leaves his money and phone at home. "I know there are robbers everywhere when I step outside my door."

But Amir, a Shiite, is particularly afraid of the Islamic State group, which has targeted the minority community in brutal bombings. Some attacks have been particularly horrific, including one on educational center that killed at least 25, many of them students waiting to take university entrance

exams, and another at a maternity hospital last May that killed 24. IS claimed it carried out 82 attacks in Afghanistan in 2020, killing or wounding 821 people, including 21 assassinations. Most of the victims in its attacks were either security personnel or Shiite Muslims.

But the perpetrators of many of the targeted killings are unknown. Often carried out by sticky bombs planted on the victim's car, assassinations have struck young intellectuals and professionals, including journalists, activists, lawyers, judges.

The violence is taking its toll on Afghans' mental health, said psychologist Sharafuddin Azimi, who estimated tens of thousands of Afghans suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

His practice has increased each year, and he said many of his clients are in deep depression, without hope for tomorrow and fearful of death at any time.

"Many of our loved ones, the youth, women, men and children are terrified," he said.

"All the time they expect there can be an explosion ... or they feel somebody is following them and they might get stabbed or shot by a thief and get killed."

Head of Tokyo Games won't resign after statement about women

TOKYO (AP): Yoshiro Mori, the president of the Tokyo Olympic organizing committee, said on Thursday he would not resign despite pressure on him to do so after making derogatory comments earlier in the week about women.

The controversy over the gaff-prone former Japanese prime minister is one more problem the postponed Tokyo Olympics really didn't need as organizers and the International Olympic Committee try to pull off the postponed games in the midst of a pandemic. They are scheduled to open on July 23.

"I am not thinking to resign," Mori said. "I have been working hard and helped devotedly for seven years. I will not be stepping down."

In an on-line meeting of the Japanese Olympic Committee board of directors earlier in the week, Mori was reported by the daily newspaper Asahi Shimbun saying women talk too much in meetings. His comments have created a storm in Japan where women are grossly under-represented in politics and in board rooms. "The statement made at the Japan Olympic Committee was an inappropriate expression, contrary to the spirit of the Olympics and Paralympics," Mori said. "I am deeply remorseful. I would like to withdraw the statement. I would like to apologize for any unpleasant feelings."

In an on-line meeting, Asahi reported him saying: "Women are very competitive. When one of them raises her hand, they probably think they have to say something, too. And then everyone says something." His comment came when he was asked about the presence of few women on the board of the Japanese Olympic Committee. "If we are going to have more women directors, someone has remarked, then meetings go on for a long time unless we restrict the comments. I'm not saying who that is."

'Eye of the storm': Diverse east London grapples with virus



LONDON (AP): Taxi-cab driver Gary Nerden knows colleagues who got seriously ill from COVID-19. He knows the area of east London where he lives and works has among the highest infection rates in the whole of England. But since he can't afford not to work, he drives around picking up strangers for up to 12 hours a day, relying on a flimsy plastic screen to keep him safe.

"I've got people telling me they won't wear a mask, saying they're exempt," said Nerden, 57. "I've got diabetes, I have to look after myself. I wipe the handles, the seat belt, after every customer, but that's all I can do, really."

Nerden and his wife, a hospital administrative worker, live in the outer London borough of Redbridge, which in mid-January had the country's second-highest rate of residents testing positive for the coronavirus: 1,571 cases per 100,000 people. Official figures estimated that at one point, 1 in 15 people there had COVID-19 — even after the government imposed a third national lockdown to control a fast-spreading, more contagious variant of the virus.

Redbridge and its surrounding areas, which lie on a commuter belt between the capital's northeast and coastal Essex, have been dubbed the "COVID triangle" because they all topped England's worst infection rates in recent weeks. While case rates

have come down significantly, local leaders said the situation remained critical and the borough was still "in the eye of the storm."

They say the area's large number of essential workers in public-facing jobs, combined with dense housing and high levels of poverty, contribute to why the virus has hit it much harder than most places in the U.K. Those factors also make fighting the pandemic there particularly challenging. "We have some of the most front-line workers here in the community: the taxi drivers, the NHS (National Health Service) workers, the train drivers going into central London, the commuter workers, the cleaners," Redbridge Council leader Jas Athwal said.

"People are taking their chances — is it about feeding my children, or risking myself with COVID? And of course, they need to feed their children," Athwal added. "All that accounts for the excess number of virus infections, the deaths, because people are having to go out to do their job."

Many of those lower-income workers with high exposure to the virus are from ethnic minority backgrounds, who are among the most at-risk — as well as the hardest to persuade to get vaccinated. Redbridge's population is among the most diverse in the country, with large Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities and fewer than 40%

of residents identifying as white British.

Numerous studies have shown that the pandemic is causing disproportionate serious illness and deaths among ethnic minorities and those from poorer households. In the U.K., Public Health England found that after accounting for factors like age and sex, people of Bangladeshi heritage were dying from COVID-19 at twice the rate of white Britons. Black people and other Asian groups also had a 10% to 50% higher risk of death. Experts say that is due to a combination of factors. People from minority groups are more likely to live in crowded housing and to take poorly ventilated public transport to go to work. They are also more likely to have long-term conditions like heart disease and diabetes that increase their risk of becoming seriously ill if they catch the virus.

Khayer Chowdhury, a Redbridge councillor of Bangladeshi descent, said many Asian households in the borough are multigenerational families living together under one roof, giving the virus greater opportunity to spread.

"Our diversity makes us unique, but it also makes us vulnerable," he said.

Britain has lost more than 100,000 lives to the coronavirus, the worst death toll in Europe.

"Here in the community, everybody knows somebody who's passed away," Athwal said. "The

fear is finally starting to hit home."

Officials say a small but increasing number of people are breaking restrictions, partly because of fatigue with lockdown rules. Enforcement officers have broken up gatherings and "car meets," shutting down and fining clubs and restaurants for hosting parties. On a recent weekday, a large team of police officers patrolled the main shopping street, which bustled with a steady stream of people despite the government's "stay at home" message.

But the bigger challenge is on the vaccination front. Several U.K.-based studies have suggested that vaccine take-up rates for both the coronavirus and other jabs among Black people and minorities are significantly lower than that in the general population. Some researchers say that's caused by longstanding distrust of authorities and disengagement from public health messages, and exacerbated by anti-vaccine posts on social media.

Local resident Salman Khan and his wife said they were not sure they would have the job if offered, because the pandemic has made them question "whether the government and the news is telling the truth."

Dr. Anil Mehta, a local doctor, said health officials are making every effort to reach the poorest and hardest to reach communities. This week he is offering vaccine shots out at homeless shelters, hoping to inoculate the area's many refugees and those sleeping rough. He said he's also taken up the role of "myth-buster," trying to dispel misinformation and conspiracy theories.

"People believe in all sorts of things — this is affecting fertility, or against Black Lives Matter," Mehta said. "There is a lot of hesitancy, whether they want it, whether they trust us. That's our battle at the moment."

German government prepares more economic help in pandemic



BERLIN (AP): Germany's governing parties have agreed on more help for families with children and people on benefits, as well as tax help for companies, as they try to keep Europe's biggest economy on course to grow out of the pandemic.

Leaders of Chancellor Angela Merkel's governing coalition agreed late Wednesday to give a one-time 150-euro (\$180) bonus to families that receive child benefit, following a 300-euro bonus last year, news agency dpa reported. There also will be a 150-euro payment for people on welfare benefits.

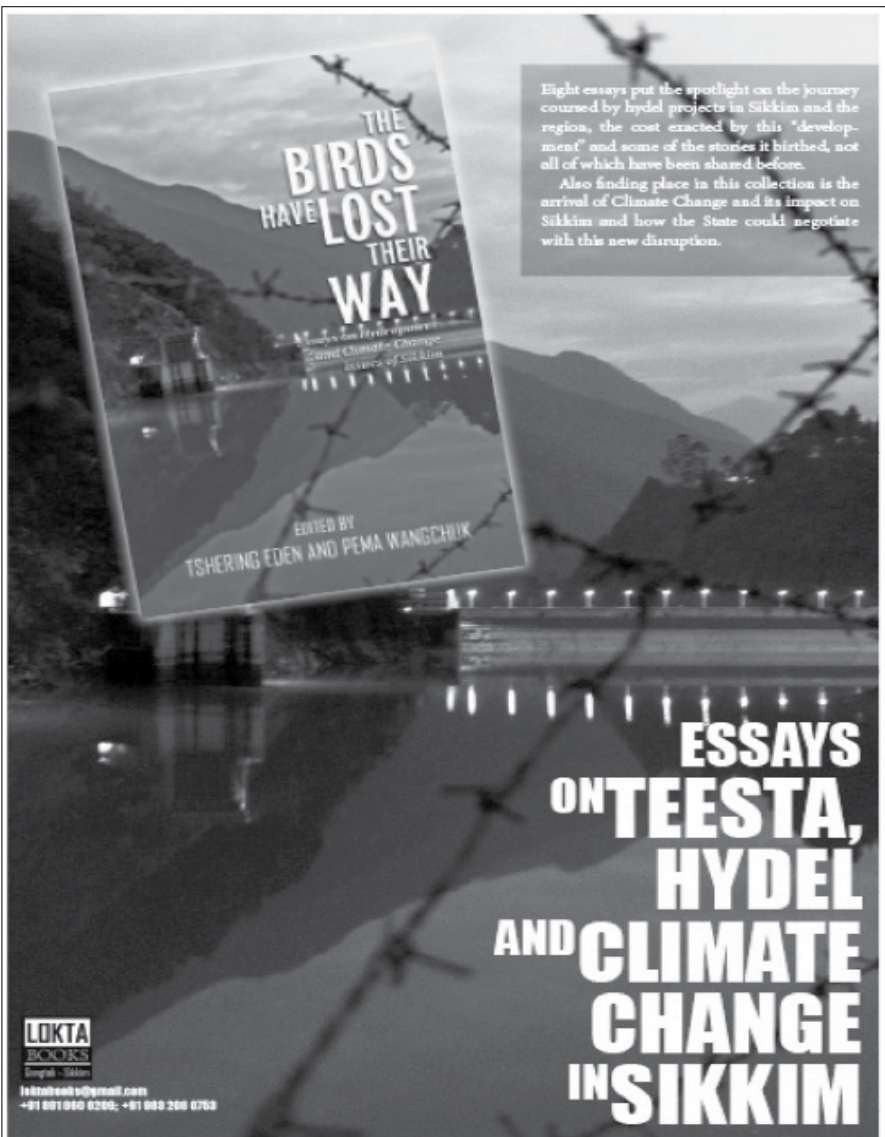
Companies that have suffered losses because of the pandemic will be given greater scope to offset those losses against profits from previous years in their tax returns. And a cut in sales tax on food in restaurants and cafes, from 19% to the reduced rate of 7%, will be extended from the end of June to the end of next year. A program to help cultural facilities will be extended.

Restaurants, cafes and bars have been closed, except for take-outs and deliveries, since early November as part of a lockdown that was expanded in mid-December and is still in force.

Its current expiry date is Feb. 14.

Merkel and state governors will confer next week to decide what, if any, restrictions can be loosened. New infections have decreased considerably in recent weeks, but they're still above the government's target.

The cost of the new aid measures is estimated at some 7.5 billion euros. Germany last year put together huge aid and stimulus programs — including an across-the-board cut in sales tax in the second half of 2020, which expired as planned on Dec. 31 and whose effectiveness has been questioned.





TINY TWO-PIECE! The model, Alessandra Ambrosio looks adorable while posing for a photo shoot in Florianopolis, Brazil.

1 tweet from Rihanna on farmer protests gets India incensed

NEW DELHI (AP): It took just one tweet from Rihanna to anger the Indian government and supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party. The pop star linked a news article in a tweet drawing attention to the massive farmer protests that have gripped India for more than two months.

Now, senior government ministers, Indian celebrities and even the foreign ministry are urging people to come together and denounce outsiders who try to break the country.

"It is unfortunate to see vested interest groups trying to enforce their agenda on these protests, and derail them," India's foreign ministry said in a rare statement Wednesday, without naming Rihanna and others who followed her suit.

Tens of thousands of farmers have been hunkering down at the Indian capital's fringes to protest new agricultural laws they say will leave them poorer and at the mercy of corporations. The protests are posing a major challenge to Modi who has billed the laws as necessary to modernize Indian farming.

Their largely peaceful protests turned violent on Jan. 26, India's Republic Day, when a section of the tens of thousands of farmers riding tractors veered from the protest route earlier decided with police and stormed the 17th century Red Fort in a dramatic escalation. Hundreds of police officers were injured and a protester died. Scores of farmers were also injured but officials have not given their numbers.

Farmer leaders condemned the violence but said they would not call off the protest.

Since then, authorities have heavily increased security at protest sites outside New Delhi's border, adding iron spikes and steel barricades to stop demonstrating farmers from entering the capital. The government had also

restricted access to mobile internet at protest sites up until Tuesday evening.

The latest controversy started Tuesday when Rihanna tweeted to her more than 101 million Twitter followers: "Why aren't we talking about this?!" She linked to a CNN news report about

the agriculture laws and asked people outside India not to meddle with their country's affairs. Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut, a supporter of Modi's party, posted a message quoting Rihanna's tweet. "No one is talking about it because they are not farmers, they are



India blocking internet services at the protest sites, a favored tactic of the Modi government to thwart protests. Soon, international condemnation from human rights groups and outrage from Indian supporters of Modi's party followed.

Then India's foreign ministry accused "foreign individuals" and celebrities of "sensationalism." The ministry's statement did not, however, name Rihanna. Teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg and the niece of U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris, Meena Harris, were among others who then tweeted their support, and a social media storm soon followed.

Bollywood entertainers and sports stars, many of whom have long been silent on the farmer protests and are known to toe the government's line, tweeted in one voice.

They used hashtags #IndiaAgainstPropaganda and #IndiaTogether, echoing the government's stand on

terrorists who are trying to divide India," she wrote.

Rihanna's and Thunberg's tweets also prompted responses from almost every senior leader of Modi's party, including Foreign Minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar and Home Minister Amit Shah, who said that "no propaganda can deter India's unity."

India's opposition leaders rallied against the government's move.

The main opposition Congress party leader Shashi Tharoor said the damage done to India's global image by the government's "undemocratic behaviour" could not be restored by making celebrities tweet.

Tharoor in a tweet said Indian government getting "Indian celebrities to react to Western ones is embarrassing."

Former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram took a swipe at India's foreign ministry and called its statement "puerile reaction."

'The Nevers' to premiere on HBO in April

LOS ANGELES, FEB 3 (PTI): "The Nevers", a sci-fi period drama created by Joss Whedon, will air on HBO in April, the premium cable network has announced.

HBO released a teaser trailer of the show on Tuesday night that gave a glimpse into "The Nevers", which revolves around a gang of Victorian women who find themselves with unusual abilities, relentless enemies, and a mission that might change the world.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, Whedon exited the show in late November citing "the physical challenges of making such a huge show during a global pandemic".

Screenwriter Philippa Goslett, known for her work in films like "Mary Magdalene" and "How to Talk to Girls at Parties", took over showrunner duties from Whedon last week.

Led by Laura Donnelly, Ann Skelley, Olivia Williams and Nick Frost, the cast of the show also includes Kiran Sonia Sawar, Elizabeth Berrington, Ella Smith, Viola Prettejohn, Anna Devlin and Martyn Ford.

The six episodes HBO will debut in the spring were filmed before Whedon's departure.

The remainder of the first season, under Goslett, will follow at a later time.

Whedon and producers Geoff Johns and Jon Berg were under investigation by WarnerMedia, HBO's parent company, over allegations of misconduct on the set of "Justice

League" made by star Ray Fisher, who starred as Victor Stone alias Cyborg in the DC comic-book film adaptations.

Late December last year, WarnerMedia said the company had concluded the investigation and "remedial action" had been taken, without elaborating what it entailed.

Whedon stepped in for Zach Snyder on the 2017 superhero project after the latter exited the film in the wake of a family tragedy.

When the completion of the probe was announced by WarnerMedia, Fisher said he will not be part of any project associated with DC Films President Walter Hamada, whom the actor earlier called "most dangerous kind of enabler".

In January, Fisher confirmed he had received official confirmation that studio Warner Bros has decided to "remove" him from the cast of their upcoming superhero movie "The Flash".

In his previous posts, the actor has accused Hamada of protecting Johns and Whedon by hampering the studio's investigation into his allegations.

Hamada became president of DC Films in 2018, after "Justice League" opened in theatres to poor reviews and box office records.

However, Fisher maintains Hamada has failed to take his claims seriously about the Whedon-led reshoots of "Justice League".

Weinstein accuser demands deposition as settlement looms

NEW YORK, FEB 3 (AP): A producer who says disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein repeatedly sexually assaulted and raped her over seven years says she wants him deposed for a lawsuit even though she might accept a settlement.

Alexandra Canosa, a producer on Netflix's Marco Polo, maintained late Monday in court papers that depositions will help her decide whether to accept a settlement approved last week by a Delaware bankruptcy court judge.

Of the USD 35 million set aside for creditors, the settlement calls for roughly half to go to Weinstein's accusers.

Attorney Thomas Giuffra said in the Manhattan federal court filing that Canosa will decide whether to settle after seeing depositions and learning the size of a payout. Ms. Canosa will have a monumental settlement decision to make," he wrote. The lawyer said Canosa was deposed last week and Harvey Weinstein and his brother Bob should face questions too.

It is not fair or equitable that Ms. Canosa as a victim of horrendous abuse should be subjected to a lengthy and intrusive deposition so that Defendants could evaluate her claims while being deprived of the same opportunity by deposing her abuser and his principal enabler, Giuffra wrote.

Late Tuesday, Manhattan Judge Paul A. Engelmayer reiterated that the Weinstein brothers must be deposed by February 12. He said he could drop the deadline if Giuffra doesn't adequately explain why Canosa doesn't yet know how much she'd collect from the settlement or if Harvey Weinstein's lawyers convince him the imprisoned Weinstein is too ill to be deposed. In her lawsuit, Canosa alleged she was raped, sexually abused, intimidated and

harassed from 2010 until September 2017, during what Harvey Weinstein maintained were business meetings. The attacks, she said, occurred in New York, Los Angeles, Malaysia and Budapest, Hungary. Canosa claims Weinstein threatened that she would lose her job at his company and he would blackmail her if she denied his advances. Weinstein attorney Imran H. Ansari said Tuesday in an email that Canosa, who is suing for 30 million, could face an uncertain financial recovery with The Weinstein Company bankruptcy, and Mr. Weinstein, who denies the claims against him and stands by evidence in this case that establishes an amicable and consensual relationship, in a financial state that is far from healthy." Those Plaintiffs who have availed themselves of the settlement likely recognise that it is the only route to a realistic recovery, he added.

Court records show at least 55 claims have been filed in the bankruptcy case, with over 39 accusers having supported the payout plan and eight voting against it. The plan calls for awards to be calculated with a formula that distinguishes between physical sexual or nonphysical sexual claims as well as claims for emotional distress and economic harm. Lawyers for Bob Weinstein, who is also named in Canosa's lawsuit, did not immediately return a request for comment. Last year, Harvey Weinstein began serving a 23-year prison sentence after a New York jury convicted him for the rape and sexual assault of two women.

He also faces rape, forcible oral copulation and other charges in California after five women said they were attacked during events in Los Angeles and Beverly Hills from 2004 to 2013.



Aries: You've got work and career on your mind today, Aries. Gone are the days when you worked for love and love alone. The new you knows what he/she is worth and won't shy away from putting a price on their work. Entrepreneurs will find that this is an exceedingly good time with profits increasing at a steady pace. Word for the wise: focus on putting your coins in the bank. Tip: It's all about work and career in the Aries HQ.

Taurus: Like the rams, you're prioritising work and career too, and you've got that big goals energy about you! Focus on hiring and training the right crew, who can help you take your vision forward. If you're single and in the mood to mingle, fate could unexpectedly align you with a power player, somebody who's adept at saying all the right things at the right time. They may or not not be your usual type. But, hey, there's no harm in getting to know them, right? Tip: You've got that big goals energy about you.

Gemini: What do you do when your best-laid plan falls apart? Do you moan and groan or accept this as an opportunity to be inventive and grow? Something tells us the ability to improvise is going to come in handy today. Remember,

things are happening for you, and not to you. Choosing to focus on the silver linings will help you get through it all. Tip: Spontaneity is a skill that will come in handy.

Cancer: Sometimes, it's best to choose the path of silence and solitude in order to look at a given situation from a brand new perspective. Retreat into your sacred space even when the responsibilities are playing tug-of-war with you. You'll be so, so glad you did! For some of you, mental health could be a cause of concern at this point. What are you giving your attention to? Could you be magnifying your troubles by repeating a certain story in your head? It's a good idea to work with a healer or therapist. Tip: Get some distance.

Leo: It's easy to get caught up in a space of emotions when you're "this" close to a certain situation. Challenge yourself to get some distance, anyway. This will not only give you perspective, but also help you put an end to the negative patterns that you have been repeating on loop. Boundary issues may be a prominent theme for some of you as well. There are things you're okay with, and then

there are things you're not. Leo, let go of the need to apologise for the things that make you uncomfortable. Tip: Boundary issues may be a theme for you right now.

Virgo: Uh-oh! Mercury is in the mood to make mischief once again. Some of your best-laid plans could fall apart. Alternatively, you could face unexpected roadblocks. It will be easy for you to see yourself as the victim under these circumstances. Challenge yourself to rise above this complex anyway. Learning to pause and breathe will provide you with much-needed perspective. Tip: Pause and breathe.

Libra: Libra, at any point you have two options: to choose to focus on the dark clouds that surround you, or shift your gaze towards the silver linings. The choice is and has always been yours. Something tells us you're in the mood to get your optimism on and call in a miracle or two. What the cards want you to know at this moment: you are surrounded by big manifestation energy, which is helping you take your career and creative projects to the next level. Tip: You are surrounded by big manifestation energy.

Scorpio: What if we're all a part of the divine consciousness? A manifestation of Source energy in human form? Look beyond the illusion of separation and recognise the love and light in each individual. This will help you rise above the judgements created by the monkey mind. As such, the path of meditation and contemplation will help you rise above the negative thought patterns that are weighing you down. Tip: We're all a part of the same divine consciousness.

Sagittarius: There will always be more things to do and tens and thousands of deadlines to meet. You have to make the choice between allowing your worldly responsibilities to get the better of you, or balancing them alongside your spirituality. Find a way to bridge the gap between the two, Sagittarius. Start by setting aside more time for you to be by yourself today. Tip: Find a way to balance the material with the spiritual.

Capricorn: You've fought long and hard for this, Capricorn. You've fought long and hard for this. Don't give up now. The cards are reminding

you that you're *this* close to the victory run and that the help and resources you need will be made available to you if you simply allow yourself to receive what has always been yours. Tip: Don't give up now!

Aquarius: Spirituality is a big theme for you right now, Aquarius. You're tired of the trials and tribulations of the mundane world and wish to seek solace in something higher. It's a good idea to chant, meditate, practice yoga or reconnect with a practice that helps you stay grounded. Some of you may feel inspired to visit a place that facilitates the inward journey. Others may sign for a workshop or retreat. Tip: It's time to traverse within.

Pisces: Uh-oh! Mercury is in retrograde again, making it hard for you to trust your own intuition. Go with your first instinct, which is usually right. Alternatively, you could make a list of pros and cons in order to assess your options carefully before you proceed. Some of you may have trouble expressing your truth once you have come to a conclusion. As always, keep in mind that those who love you unconditionally will never expect you to be anybody but yourself. Tip: Speak your truth unapologetically.