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SummitTIMES

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Six ministers take oath along with Kejriwal

NEW DELHI, FEB 16 (PTI): Six MLAs, including Manish Sisodia, Satyendar Jain, Kailash Gahlot and Gopal Rai, took oath as ministers in the newly sworn Delhi Cabinet on Sunday.

Others who took oath at the Ramlila Maidan were Rajendra Pal Gautam and Imran Hussain.

Rai, who was the Labour Minister in the previous government, took oath in the name of martyrs of freedom struggle. Gautam, who held the Social Welfare portfolio in his last tenure, took oath in the name of Buddha.

Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal administered the oath of office and secrecy at the ceremony.

Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) won 62 seats in the Delhi Assembly elections, while the Bharatiya Janata Party bagged eight seats.

Kejriwal took oath as the Delhi chief minister for the third successive time.

Two more Indians on board cruise ship off Japanese coast test positive for coronavirus

Tokyo, Feb 16 (PTI): Two more Indians on board a quarantined cruise ship off Japan have tested positive for the novel coronavirus even as India assured that it will provide all possible assistance to its nationals on the ship to return home after they test negative in the final coronavirus tests that would begin on Monday, the Indian Embassy said on Sunday.

A total of 138 Indians, including 132 crew and 6 passengers, were among the 3,711 people on board the ship, Diamond Princess, that arrived at the Japanese coast earlier this month.

The total number of people infected with COVID-19 on the ship rose to 355 on Sunday.

“Over the last 2 days, 137 new cases on #DiamondPrincess tested positive for #COVID19, including two Indian nationals, taken to onshore medical facilities for treatment. Three other Indian crew members, receiving treatment are responding well, with no fever or pain,” the Indian Embassy tweeted.

Earlier, three Indian crew members tested positive for the virus and are receiving treatment.

The Indian Embassy in a tweet said that the final tests for the COVID19 on the ship would begin on February **turn to pg02**

CM lobbies Union Health Minister to convert New STNM Hospital into AIIMS

Central team to visit Sikkim soon to explore proposal

NEW DELHI, 16 FEB [IPR]: Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang [Go-lay] met Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare & Science and Technology, Dr Harsh Vardhan, this morning in the national capital.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister placed various issues of Sikkim to the Union Health Minister and also apprised him about how the Government of Sikkim was willing to collaborate with the Government of India to upgrade the multi-speciality hospital at Sohyagang to the level of All India Institute of Medical Sciences [AIIMS].

The CM also requested the Union Health Minister to consider the proposal to convert the multi-speciality hospital into AIIMS with AIIMS-New Delhi being the anchor hospital.

He also informed that if this happens, it will not only benefit the people of Sikkim immensely but will also be very useful for those hailing from the



neighbouring North East Region.

After giving a patient hearing, the Union Health Minister assured full co-operation from his end and said that he will send

a team of experts to Sikkim to study the proposal.

Further, the Union Health Minister also asked the Chief Secretary of Sikkim and the Resident Commissioner

to approach the Union Health Secretary and other officials on Monday in New Delhi regarding the matter.

The Chief Minister was accompanied to the

meeting by Minister for Urban Development and Housing Department Arun Upreti, Chief Secretary SC Gupta and the Secretary to the Chief Minister SD Dhakal.

SPYF to relaunch movement for better health services if demands remain unaddressed



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 FEB:

Sikkim Progressive Youth Forum (SPYF) has demanded that all district hospitals in the State provide health services and benefits meeting the specifics detailed in the Indian Public Health Standards [IPHS]. SPYF, it may be recalled, had launched a strong movement in the final months of the last government pressing this very demand.

The organisation has further demanded that all District Hospitals, Primary Health Centres and other health centres in

the State provide medicines free of cost.

SPYF announced today that it will re-launch its movement if these demands are still not fulfilled.

Addressing a press conference here this afternoon, SPYF member Shankar Sharma informed that the organisation will meet Health Minister Dr MK Sharma soon on this issue and submit its demands in written.

He mentioned that the organisation had started its movement initially for Gyalshing District Hospital but will

now speak up for all District Hospitals and Health Centres in the State.

“After our movement, Gyalshing District Hospital received some facilities but not all our demands have been fulfilled. Now, these facilities are slacking again so we have decided to launch our movement once again,” he explained.

Mr Sharma informed that SPYF has collected signatures of more than 10,000 people during its recent tour of rural Sikkim to understand the condition of health centres in the State.

“We will submit these

signatures with our demand to the Health Minister soon,” he said.

Another SPYF member, Rupen Karki, mentioned that SPYF will primarily be pursuing two demands – provision of health services and benefits as per the Indian Public Health Standards [IPHS] and free medicines at all District Hospitals, Primary Health Centres and other health centres in the State.

“Health is a primary issue for the people so we are very hopeful that the present government will address our

demands in the coming budget session of the State in the interest of the people,” he said.

He underlined that these issues have not been raised exclusively by the SPYF but were also supported by the Sikkim Krantikari Manch when it was in the Opposition during SPYF’s movement.

Mr Karki stressed that health services in rural areas were in very pathetic condition and that the pressure on District Hospital would reduce if the condition of rural health centres were improved.

No timeline to remove I-T exemptions: Nirmala Sitharaman

HYDERABAD, FEB 16 (PTI): Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday said the idea behind introducing second alternative tax slabs sans exemptions is to take the country towards “a simplified, exemption-free and reduced rate of tax regime.”

However, there was no timeframe set by the government to remove all exemptions, she told reporters here after an interactive session with trade representatives and intellectuals on the Union

budget.

“At the moment we only started a second alternative with some exemptions removed or some exemptions included, although the original intention was to remove all exemptions and give a clear simplified reduced rate of income tax,” the finance minister said.

The budget 2020-21 has introduced more tax slabs and offers higher limits provided the taxpayer is ready to forego all the existing exemptions

and deductions including home loan interest, other tax savings investments.

“We have not made up our minds as yet (on the removal of all exemptions)... We are trying step by step, move forward and no particular timeline given,” she said when asked if there is any timeframe for removing all income tax exemptions.

Addressing a post-budget press conference on February 1, Sitharaman had said the government intended to remove all I-T exemptions

in the long run.

On Sunday, she said that based on a simulation and assumption, 69 per cent of taxpayers would have benefitted and probably 11 per cent would have been “attracted” had the new tax regime been introduced last year.

When asked about the Supreme Court order on telcos’ payment of dues and the concerns expressed by some bankers, Sitharaman said it may not be proper for her to comment on the matter

as there is a Ministry concerned looking into it.

“The concerned Ministry is looking into it. So, it may not be proper for me to comment on it” she added. To a query on allegations by the Telangana government that there was a decline in devolution of funds to states from the Centre, she said the allocation is followed as per the recommendations of the Finance commissions and it is not true that the centre is not cooperating with states.

Sikkim eves end U23 One-Day tourney on third position



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 16 FEB:

Sikkim ended its Women’s U23 One Day Trophy campaign on Saturday with a victory against Arunachal Pradesh and on third position behind Chandigarh and Nagaland on the points table.

The tournament, hosted by Sikkim Cricket Association [SiCA] at KIIT Cricket Stadium, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, saw Sikkim play nine matches in the league round, securing five victories, two losses and two draws.

Sikkim beat Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland, drew against Bihar and Jammu & Kashmir, and lost to Puducherry and Chandigarh. The tournament had 10 teams and saw matches being played in three venues in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack and a total of 45 matches in the league round.

On Saturday, Arunachal Pradesh won the toss and chose to bat first, scoring 142 runs in 50 overs losing 7 wickets. Megha Sharma top-scored for Arunachal with 72 runs. Sikkim took wickets at regular intervals with Mariam Subba taking 3 wickets, Aruna Barman 2, and Pranita Chettri and Rinki Rajak taking a wicket each.

Sikkim achieved the target in 34 overs with Nandika Kumari of Pakyong and Rinki Rajak putting up an opening partnership of 101 runs of which Nandika scored 30.

Rinki Rajak went on to score 84 and remained not-out. Sikkim earned 4 Points from the win and ended the season with a total of 24 Points and in the third position in the league table behind of Chandigarh and Nagaland.

Rinki Rajak emerged the top-scorer of the season with 568 runs collected on the backs of 10 sixes and 68 fours, including one century and 4 half-centuries.

Aruna Barman is at number 6 on the wickets table with 18 wickets.

Pranita Chettri of Gangtok and one of the youngest cricketers in the team is among the most economical bowler in the tournament, a SiCA press release informs.

SiCA adds that this was one of the finest tournaments played by the women’s team. The team is coached by Amosh Rai.

Sedition case: Three engineering students from Kashmir released



BENGALURU, FEB 16 (PTI): Three Kashmiri engineering students, arrested on sedition charges in Hubballi district were released after execution of a bond under Section 169 of the CrPc, police said on Sunday.

The three students studying in a private engineering college in Hubballi were arrested on Saturday for raising pro-Pakistan slogans and posting it on social media on the first anniversary of the ghastly terrorist attack that left scores of CRPF soldiers dead at Pulwama in Kashmir.

The students were released after they executed a bond under 169

CrPc, wherein they come back whenever they are summoned, Hubballi-Dharwad police commissioner R Dilip told PTI.

Section 169 of the CrPc is involved when the investigating officer is of the view that there was no sufficient evidence to produce an accused before a court for remand.

On the media reports about bail given to the Kashmiri boys, the police commissioner said they got confused.

He said the police were handling the matter sensitively because the case itself was sensitive with national ramifications, which may lead to trial by media.

5th phase of NISHTHA training in North Sikkim



SUMMIT REPORT

MANGAN, 14 FEB:

The fifth phase of National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement [NISHTHA] training concluded on Friday at Mangan Senior Secondary School in North Sikkim.

A total of 151 teachers and principals of

primary and elementary government schools took the training which covered innovative teaching methods, the use of art and technology in the classroom and basic counselling techniques.

The training had five key resource persons and one resource person from the State.

The State resource person was Tseten Lhamu Lepcha [HM/ Gor SS] and the key resource persons were Manorath Dahal [HOD Social Science, SCERT], Dhiraj Rai [GTM, Phodong SSS], Sangay Doma Bhutia [PGT/ Chemistry, Mangan SSS], Diki Dolkar [PGT/ English, Mangan SSS]

and Chakochen VA [PGT/History].

On 10 Feb, a central team from NCERT had also visited the Mangan centre and interacted with the school heads.

Earlier, the 4th phase training was held from 04 to 08 February at Mangan Senior Secondary School (North) for 133 teachers.

PM rules out rethink on decisions on Art 370, CAA 'despite pressure'



VARANASI (UP), FEB 16

(PTI): Ruling out any rethink on decisions on CAA and Article 370, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday asserted that his government remains and will remain firm on the steps despite pressure from all sides.

"Be it the scrapping of Article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir or the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the country waited for decisions on these for years," he told a public meeting here during a day-long visit to his Lok Sabha constituency.

"These decisions were necessary in the interest of the nation. Dunya bhar ke saarey dabao ke bajwood, inn faislon par hum qayam hain aur qayam rahengey (Despite pressure from all sides, we remain firm on these decisions and will continue to remain firm)," Modi said.

Provisions of Article 370 of the Constitution, which accorded special powers to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, were abrogated by the government in August last year.

The prime minister's tough talk assumed significance in view of protests against the CAA in various parts of the country.

Citing certain key decisions of his government, Modi referred to the trust set up for the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya and asserted that it would work "rapidly".

"A trust has been formed for the construction of a grand Ram temple in Ayodhya. This trust will work rapidly," he said.

He said that after setting up of the trust, the work on the construction of 'Ram dham' will start with fast speed and added that his government

has also decided to transfer 67 acres of land to the trust.

The government had recently set up the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra on the Supreme Court's directive to the Union government to form a trust that can look into the construction and management of the temple.

The prime minister earlier launched or laid foundation of 50 projects worth Rs 1,254 crore in his Lok Sabha constituency.

He also flagged off IRCTC's 'Maha Kaal Express' through video link during his day-long visit to the city.

It will be the first overnight privately-run train in the country to connect three Jyotirling pilgrimage centres of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, and Ujjain and Omkareshwar in Madhya Pradesh.

The prime minister dedicated to the nation the Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya Memorial Centre and unveiled a 63-foot statue of the RSS ideologue -- the tallest statue of the leader in the country.

"The soul of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya give us encouragement. We are working for uplift of Dalits, deprived and others sections. And this is what Upadhyaya's 'Antyodaya' says - to give all facilities to last beneficiary in the queue," Modi said.

He also inaugurated a 430-bed super-speciality government hospital here.

He said that in past few years, Rs 25,000 crore worth developmental projects have either completed or were going on in fast speed in Varanasi.

Roadway, highway, waterway and railway

have been given top priority by the government and the Purvanchal Expressway work was going on at fast speed in Uttar Pradesh.

The prime minister also laid emphasis on better connectivity of heritage and religious sites, saying that tourism will be the main source of making the country 5 trillion dollar economy.

He said, "Our behaviour as a citizen will decide direction of the country in future. Country is not made by governments only, but values of people residing here."

Soon after his arrival here, Modi participated in the closing ceremony of the centenary celebrations of the Shri Jagadguru Vishwaradhy Gurukul and released the translated version of the Shri Siddhant Shikhamani Granth in 19 languages and its mobile application.

Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa were present on the occasion.

Launching the 'Shri Siddhant Shikhamani Granth' Mobile App, the prime minister said it is a coincidence that the centenary celebrations are taking place at the beginning of a new decade and that this decade will once again establish India's role in 21st century in the world.

He said the digitisation of Shri Siddhant Shikhamani Granth via Mobile App will further strengthen the engagement with the younger generation and will also inspire their lives.

Modi suggested conducting an annual quiz competition on topics related to Granth, via this Mobile app.

Awareness prog on NARI and DAMU at KVK-East

GANGTOK, 16 FEB [PIB]: ICAR- Krishi Vigyan Kendra, East Sikkim, organized an awareness programme on Nutri-Sensitive Agricultural Resource Innovations [NARI] and District Agro-Met Unit [DAMU], GKMS at its campus on 12 Feb.

A total of 54 farmers from six blocks - Nandok, Rhenock, Khamdong, Rakdong-Tintek, Martam and Duga - had attended the awareness programme.



TRAU hold Chennai City to goalless draw in I-League

IMPHAL, FEB 16 (PTI): A resolute Tiddim Road Athletic Union (TRAU) FC held defending champions Chennai City FC to a goalless draw in a Hero I-League match at the Khuman Lumpak Stadium here on Sunday.

TRAU goalkeeper Shayan Roy was magnificent under the bar to deny the visitors all three points.

The first half was entertaining as both sides created goal-scoring opportunities but failed to convert them.

Chennai adopted a cautious approach in the first half, which prompted the hosts to press hard.

TRAU earned a penalty in the 13th minute when Ajith Kumar was adjudged to have handled the ball inside the 18-yard box. Skipper Princewill Emeka stepped in but his effort rattled the woodwork, thus squandering a glorious opportunity.

In the 33rd minute, Netrajit Singh's volley went inches wide of the post.

Chennai coach Akbar Nawas made two early substitutions in the first-half, bringing on Pravitto Raju and Jishnu Balakrishnan in place of Jackson Dhas and Varun Mathur but still failed to find the net.

The second half belonged to TRAU goalkeeper Shayan, whose heroics saved the day for the hosts.

The hosts survived a scare in the 50th minute when Vijay's low-driven cross was almost deflected into

the back of his own net by Deepak Devrani but to his relief, the ball rolled inches wide off the woodwork.

In the 58th minute, Chennai had a free-kick on the edge of the box. Katsumi Yusa curled one towards the top-left corner but was denied by a fine save from Shayan.

Chennai retained possession and kept the attack alive.

Ajith Kumar's cross found Roberto Eslava, who headed towards goal from point-blank range but Shayan came up with another brilliant save to deny Chennai.

Shayan was at it again, saving Fito's left-footed drive in the 65th minute. He couldn't have done anything about the Spaniard's free-kick a minute later but the crossbar came to his rescue.

Three minutes later, Shayan threw himself at yet another Eslava header from close range, leaving the Chennai skipper wondering what else he needs to do to break the custodian's resilience.

TRAU could have wrapped up the three points but substitute Krishnananda Singh missed a sitter in the 89th minute, failing to convert a delightful Premjit Singh delivery, barely a couple of yards away from goal.

In the final minute of stoppage time, Katsumi's cross found Fito on his favoured left foot only to be denied by Shayan again.

With this result, TRAU rose to the fourth position with 16 points, while Chennai City slipped to seventh place with 15 points.

Portuguese president visits churches in Old Goa

PANAJI, FEB 16 (PTI): Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa on Sunday visited churches in Old Goa, including the Basilica of Bom Jesus where relics of St Francis Xavier are preserved.

He also paid a visit to the Institute Mater Dei Santa Monica, a church in the Old Goa heritage complex, and the Christian Art Museum located in the premises.

All these structures at Old Goa, located about nine km from Panaji, are part of the complex certified as world heritage monuments by UNESCO.

Basilica of Bom Jesus rector Fr Patricio Fernandes told reporters that he showed de Sousa the cascade containing relics of St Francis Xavier.

"The Portuguese president prayed to the relics of St Francis Xavier and went around to see the building, which was constructed in 1605," he said.

The president was "impressed" with the structure and the spiritual vibes at the Basilica, he added.

The relics of Spanish saint are revered across the world by faithfuls.

The Portuguese president arrived on a two-day visit to Goa on Saturday after which he chaired a function where several MoUs were signed between Goa and Portugal in sectors like education, ship-building, water and sewage management.

He also addressed a seminar on 'Urban Designs' in Panaji on Saturday before attending a dinner hosted by Goa Governor Satya Pal Malik.

The Portuguese president on Saturday said he was feeling at home in India, especially in Goa because of the coastal state's "human micro-climate".

He said there are no first class or second class cultures. "All cultures are first class cultures and civilisation," he added.

Two more Indians on board cruise....

17 and continue over multiple days.

"Hoping our Indian nationals - braving the situation, to test negative, allowing them to travel back HOME. @IndianEmbTokyo stands ready for all possible assistance," the mission said.

On Saturday, it said that the condition of the three Indians infected with the virus was improving.

The embassy said it was making efforts for early de-boarding of all the Indians from the ship after the end of the quarantine period and was in discussions with the Japanese government and the ship management company for the disembarkation modalities and welfare of Indians.

The ship was quarantined after a passenger who de-boarded last month in Hong Kong was found to be the carrier of the COVID-19 on the ship.

The embassy has also sent an email to all the Indian nationals on board the ship, assuring them of all help and assistance.

They are also requested to follow the Japanese government's health and quarantine protocols, the embassy said on its Facebook page.

The Japanese government on Thursday announced that passengers aged 80 or older will be given the option to disembark the ship if they test negative for COVID-19. Those who meet the age requirement and have pre-existing conditions or are staying in rooms without balcony will be prioritised for disembarkation.

No Indian national falls under this category, eligible for early disembarkation, the statement said on Friday.

The death toll from China's coronavirus epidemic climbed to 1,665 after 142 more people died, mostly in the worst-hit Hubei Province, and the confirmed cases jumped to 68,500, officials said on Sunday.

The coronavirus outbreak originated in central China's Hubei province in December last year and has spread to several countries, including India.

Many countries have banned arrivals from China while major airlines have suspended flights to the country.

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Donation drive underway for monastery project at Dokey



YOGEN THATAL SINGTAM, 16 FEB:

A donation drive is currently underway here for a monastery being constructed at Dokey, Upper Chisopani, near the Devithan, under Khamdong-Singtam constituency.

Raju Gurung, volunteering in the donation drive, shares that the project is for the peace and prosperity of all

people and to receive blessings from them.

The attempt is to revive the project since the project has been stalled for a while due to lack of funds, it is informed.

Those interested in donating towards the project can contact Mr Raju Gurung at 8167311136 or Harka Bdr Gurung at 8918262470.

Surreal, proud moment for 'Delhi ke nirmata' who shared stage with Kejriwal

New Delhi, Feb 16 (PTI): 'Surreal', 'dream come true', 'proud moment' -- these were the sentiments of people, called Delhi ke Nirmata by AAP for their contribution to the city's development, after they shared the stage with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal during his swearing-in ceremony on Sunday.

Around 50 people from different walks of life were special guests at the event held at the Ramlila Maidan here.

Shabina Naaz, who has been working with night shelters around Chandni Chowk and Kashmiri Gate for the past five years, said she

can't believe it really happened.

"When the first time I got a call I could not believe that it is really happening. I can tell you that only the AAP government can invite a person as unimportant as me," Naaz said.

Lazwanti, who has been working as a sanitation worker for the last nine years in Delhi, said recognising people like her shows the "affectionate nature" and the ground connect of the AAP government.

"No one recognises our contribution but this government is different. It not only recognised our contribution but also

honoured us," and an emotional Lazwanti said.

Arun Kumar, a bus marshall who saved a six-year-old from being kidnapped, said the experience has changed his life.

"It is an honour for me to represent bus marshals. We work hard every day to provide security to women. The AAP government is very serious about women safety and we are making the dream of Arvind Kejriwal true," said Kumar.

Kejriwal, in his address after taking oath as chief minister, also lauded the contribution of the 'Delhi ke nirmata', saying "it is

not me, or AAP but all people like these who are responsible for developing the national capital".

Geeta Devi, a bus marshall, said she always wanted to be a police officer but could not become one.

When she got to know about the work of bus marshal, she applied for it and since then she says she never looked back.

"I think that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is working very hard for d as a bus conductor for the last 20 years, believes that every work is important in society.

"I am very happy for

the invitation and I have come with my family for the ceremony. They all are so proud of me today," a teary-eyed Singh said.

Construction worker Vijay Kumar Sagar Sagar is presently working on a project on Sultanpuri Road in Delhi.

"I have lived through some really tough times for a consistent profession that could support me and my family," he said.

"I am honoured by the tag of Delhi ke nirmata. I hope that he continues being the Chief Minister of Delhi for the next 15-20 years and works to develop Delhi," he said.

Second coronavirus patient discharged in Kerala

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB 11 (PTI): In further relief to Kerala, a student treated for the novel coronavirus in the state was discharged on Sunday after two consecutive test results returned negative, becoming India's second patient to recover from the infection, health authorities said.

The patient from Kasaragod, one of the three positive cases of coronavirus detected in the country on their return from China, would, however, remain under home quarantine for ten

days, the state health department said.

"Two consecutive results of the patient came negative and was then discharged today morning. The patient will have to remain under home quarantine for ten more days," a senior health official told PTI.

More than 2,000 people are still under observation for the novel coronavirus in the state, which had accounted for all three positive cases in the country.

Earlier on Thursday, a student from Alappu-

zha was discharged after his two consecutive samples sent for testing at the National Institute of Virology (NIV) in Pune turned out to be negative.

India's first coronavirus case, a woman medico from Thrissur, is awaiting test results from Pune NIV after samples screened at the Alappuzha centre of the institute had returned negative last week.

"Now, we are waiting for the test result of the student admitted to Thrissur Medical College Hospital. Once the

negative result is received, we can proceed to discharge," the official said. Both the discharged students, studying in a university in Wuhan, the epicentre of the deadly virus that has claimed over 1,600 lives in China, had earlier tested positive for the infection and were treated in isolation wards set up in medical college hospitals in Alappuzha and Kasaragod.

Of the 2,210 people under surveillance in various districts, as many as 16 were in isolation wards in hospitals and the remaining 2,194 are

in home quarantine, Kerala Health Minister K K Shailaja said in a release on Sunday.

Of the 415 samples sent for testing at the NIV in Pune, a total of 396 turned out to be negative and the results of the remaining were awaited, the release, quoting the Minister, said.

Earlier, after the three students tested positive, the government had declared the coronavirus as a state calamity, but withdrew it after effective quarantine and no fresh cases were reported.

Israeli army: Hamas hackers tried to 'seduce' soldiers

JERUSALEM, FEB 16 (AP): The Israeli military on Sunday said it has thwarted an attempt by the Hamas militant group to hack soldiers' phones by posing as young, attractive women on social media, striking up friendships and persuading them into downloading malware.

Lt Col. Jonathan Conricus told reporters that the phones of dozens of soldiers had been infected in recent months, although he said the army detected the scam early on and prevented any major secrets from reaching the Islamic militant group.

We do not assess there is any significant breach of information, the military spokesman said.

Conricus said this was the third attempt by Hamas to target male sol-

diers through fake social media accounts, most recently in July 2018.

But he said this latest attempt was by far the most sophisticated.

He said Hamas used a number of social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Telegram, to make contact with unsuspecting soldiers.

Posing as young women on social media, the group struck up friendships with the soldiers, sending photos, texts and voice messages to them.

The women claimed to be new immigrants to explain their poor Hebrew, and even claimed to be deaf or hard of hearing as an excuse for texting, instead of speaking directly on the phone, Conricus said.

The profiles appeared on multiple platforms, and he said the photos were disguised to make it difficult to reverse track them, giving the accounts additional authenticity.

We see that the level of social engineering is much higher and much more advanced and sophisticated when compared to previous attempts done by Hamas, he said.

We see that they're of course learning and updating their game.

Eventually, they sent the soldiers links to seduce them into downloading what they said was a Snapchat-like app to exchange photos that could quickly disappear, Conricus said.

In reality, the links were to three malware programs Catch&See, ZatuApp and GrixyApp

that allowed Hamas to gain access to the soldiers' phones.

He said it was very clear that Hamas was behind the effort.

He said the malware linked to known Hamas servers and at least one of the profiles had been used in a previous Hamas scam.

There was no immediate comment from Hamas Conricus declined to say how many soldiers had been targeted.

But he said that dozens had downloaded the malware.

He said soldiers had reported the suspicious activity relatively early on, allowing the army and the Shin Bet internal security service to monitor their phones.

It is now in the process of removing the malware, he said.

best to get the result we want."

East Bengal have had a plethora of problems to deal with this season but can take a few positives from their last outing against Punjab FC. They struck early in that game, courtesy an Ansumana Kromah stunner but conceded an equaliser, eventually drawing 1-1.

Zero Waste Management training at Kaluk



GYALSHING, 16 FEB [IPR]: Kaluk BAC conducted a two-day training on recycling & reuse of plastic waste and Zero Waste Management on 13 and 14 February as part of Swaccha Bharat Mission (Grameen).

The participants were mainly representatives from Self Help Groups and unemployed youth.

They were given training on recycling and reuse of plastic waste into income-generating saleable items and goods.

Awareness on zero waste management was also given to the SHGs.

The main aim of the training was also to reduce the volume of waste from reaching landfills.

SKM's Rinchenpong area In-charge, Phurba Tshering Bhutia, and Panchayat members were present for the valedictory function. Mr Phurba Tshering and BDO Kaluk assured to support promising SHGs with complete marketing assistance and further advanced training on plastic waste management.

Pvt school in Karnataka in dock over dictat to students against Kannada

BENGALURU, FEB 16 (PTI): A private school in the city has landed in trouble after it allegedly issued a dictat to its students asking them not to converse in Kannada on the campus, prompting the Karnataka government to order a probe.

The international school at Channasandra here allegedly issued a recent communiqué to the students and parents not to use Kannada on its premises.

It warned that students found talking in Kannada would be slapped with a fine of Rs 50 initially and if repeated, the penalty would be doubled.

The matter was

brought to the attention of Karnataka primary and secondary education minister S Suresh Kumar by some parents, who submitted copies of the purported letter and apprised him of the school management's alleged

disregard for the language of the state.

The minister has written to the Principal Secretary of his department to investigate the matter and submit an action taken report, official sources said.

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV

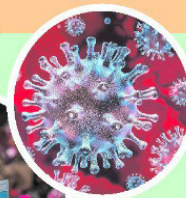
- Fever
- Difficulty in breathing
- Dry Cough
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome
- Pneumonia - like symptoms

Treatment

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

Precautions to Prevent nCoV

- Wash your hands often with soap.
- Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer
- Observe good personal hygiene.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms.
- Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats.
- Avoid travel to nCoV affected places.
- Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome, and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.



If you seek help, you may call :
-Toll free no. 104
District surveillance Officer
EAST : 7029372100
WEST : 9593297809
NORTH : 9641957468
SOUTH : 7407691463
New STNM
AMS : 9434711402

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

Either Instill Mediocrity or Prepare Achievers

Not quotas, expand access to quality education instead

Little over a decade back, it took the Supreme Court to hold the Centre's hand from forcing a 27 per cent blanket reservation for Other Backward Classes in elite educational institutions without a clearly reasoned out plan. That argument has however now fallen off track in light of new reservations introduced, but that discussion we leave for another time. For now, let's return to the SC order on the OBC reservation proposal. That reservation was eventually extended, but only after it was made more effective and more reasoned, and this was done by excluding the "creamy layer" from partaking in the quota envisioned for backward classes. In its original form, the reservation was clearly inspired by vote-bank politics, an impertinence which compromises futures, sidesteps merit and, more dangerously, undermines genuine issues. To stay with the topic, back in 2006 during the initial hearings on the case, the Supreme Court did not stay the proposed reservation because OBC's did not deserve it or because the general category students would have suffered; its hand was forced when it became clear that the well-being of OBC's was not the real reason why the quota was being proposed. Had it been so, the Central Educational Institutions Act [which allows for the reservation] would have been a more intelligent piece of legislation, not one that justified the reservations on the basis of census data collected in 1931! Had those who drafted and pushed the quota plan been even remotely motivated to improve the lot of the OBC's, they would have first informed themselves better with at least up-to-date data on how many there were still OBC and a clear idea of who the 'socially and economically backward' people of the country were. Neither of this was apparently done.

This is not a rant against reservations/ quotas, because these are clearly required in a country where discrimination continues to dominate decisions and in such an environment, a dictated-by-law quota is the closest that sections of the society which have traditionally been denied and left-out can receive a stab at access, and through such access, equality.

Returning to what this piece began with, why was the original proposal so superficial? The simple answer is - when vote-banks can be captured with rhetoric and sops, there is no pressure for genuine affirmative action. But the initial SC observations brought people out on the streets protesting or celebrating the Supreme Court ruling, depending on which side of the divide they found themselves - with emotional responses. That is where things go wrong, in India and even in Sikkim. Emotions are necessary to motivate interest; reactions and stands, on the other hand, should flow from intelligent debate, sound reasoning and long-term perspective. It is here that those who have enjoyed quotas and reservations need to step back and take stock. Has reservation delivered? Obviously not, because while those already within the quotas are seeking more exclusive niches, those on the outside are shoring up arguments to justify inclusion in the reserved categories.

Quotas, protectionism and reservations kill competence in the long run... they snigger at ambition. What these vote-banks should demand is a stronger foundation. The demand should be for the setting up of quality schools equipped with the best infrastructure and staffed with the best educators available, teaching from syllabus and courses that are contemporary and forward looking. These should be institutions of such excellence that everyone will want to study in them and arrangements should be made for a quota for general students instead so that the interaction makes everyone richer in experience. If this is done, the marginalized and the socially and economically backward will turn the tide in one generation. Where 72 years [for India] and 43 years [for Sikkim] of protection and reservation have met with only limited success, this one instance of delivery on a genuine need will succeed within less than a decade. The nation will probably never come around to undertaking something like this, but Sikkim could, and it probably should. In fact the country has tried, but those initiatives were compromised by red-tape and half-baked initiatives. Sikkim could learn from those shortfalls and deliver a model which grooms proud achievers and does not churn out insecure ambitions. For instance, there is talk of setting up hostel facilities for students from the Primitive Tribe Group of Sikkim. While this will be handy for now, for the long run, PTG representatives should demand a top-up on whatever crores are being provided for these hostels to set up an "international level" school in, say, Dzongu. The best school possible for Lepchas in Dzongu with a quota for general category students filled through competition. Don't allow short-cuts, ensure quality facilities and quality education and reap the benefits.

How Media Coverage of Epidemics Often Stokes Fear and Panic

KARIN WAHL-JORGENSEN
theconversation.com

New contagious diseases are scary. They frighten us because they are unknown and unpredictable. The ongoing outbreak of the novel coronavirus has received extensive media attention, coverage that can tell us a lot about how uncertainty in the face of such an epidemic can all too easily breed fear.

For about a decade, I have been studying the role of emotions in journalism, including in the coverage of disasters and crises. Media coverage is vital to our shared conversations and plays a key role in regulating our emotions, including fear.

While fear is an emotion that we frequently experience as individuals, it can also be a shared and social emotion, one which circulates through groups and communities and shapes our reactions to ongoing events. Like other emotions, fear is contagious and can spread swiftly.

Media coverage sets the agenda for public debate. While the news doesn't necessarily tell us what to think, it tells us what to think about. In doing so, the news signals what issues merit our attention. Research has consistently shown that when issues receive extensive media coverage and are prominent in the news agenda, they also come to be seen as more important by members of the public.

The current outbreak has been much more prominent in media coverage than recent epidemics, including Ebola. For example, a Time Magazine study shows that there were 23 times more articles in English-language print news covering the coronavirus outbreak in its first month compared to the same time period for the Ebola epidemic in 2018.

'KILLER VIRUS'

My own research suggests that fear has played a particularly vital role in coverage of the coronavirus outbreak. Since reports first started circulating about the new mystery illness on January 12, and up until February 13 2020, I have tracked

reporting in major English-language

where several cases have been re-

er disease outbreaks show a similar



newspapers around the world, using the LexisNexis UK database. This includes almost 100 high-circulation newspapers from around the world, which have collectively published 9,387 stories about the outbreak. Of these, 1,066 articles mention "fear" or related words, including "afraid".

Such stories often used other frightening language – for example, 50 articles used the phrase "killer virus". One article in The Telegraph newspaper was typical of this fear-inducing language, in describing scenes on the ground in Wuhan shared on social media:

"Mask-wearing patients fainting in the street. Hundreds of fearful citizens lining cheek by jowl, at risk of infecting each other, in narrow hospital corridors as they wait to be treated by doctors in forbidding white hazmat suits. A fraught medic screaming in anguish."

Tabloid newspapers such as The Sun and The Daily Mail, were more likely to use fear-inducing language. For example, The Sun's coronavirus liveblog routinely refers to the virus as a "deadly disease".

Many stories offered local angles by reporting on fears in local areas affected by the outbreak. In the UK, this led to a particular focus on Brighton,

ported. For example, a story in The Times suggested:

"Conversations about miniature bottles of antibacterial hand sanitiser are normally far from a mainstay of lunchtime pub chitchat. However, such is the anxiety over the coronavirus that locals in The Grenadier in Hove yesterday readily admitted to changing their hand-washing routines."

Other reports localised the story by discussing the impact on Chinese-owned businesses. The Manchester Evening News, for instance, reported that: "The fear of coronavirus is hitting businesses hard, with some reporting a 50 per cent drop in custom since the outbreak. And Chinese Mancunians report suffering more racial abuse."

A number of stories, by contrast, sought to temper fears and provide reassurance. For example, Singaporean prime minister Hsein Loong was widely quoted in cautioning against panic:

"Fear can make us panic, or do things which make matters worse, like circulating rumours online, hoarding face masks or food, or blaming particular groups for the outbreak"

FEAR CAN BE CATCHING

Research on coverage of earli-

spective, it is instructive to look to a comparison to coverage of seasonal influenza, which is estimated by the World Health Organization to kill 290,000 to 650,000 people around the world every year. Since January 12 2020, world newspapers have published just 488 articles on the seasonal influenza without mention of the coronavirus.

In sharp contrast to coverage of this novel coronavirus, fewer than one in ten stories about flu (37 of 488) mentioned fear or similar phrases.

The prominence of fear as a theme in reports of the coronavirus suggests that much of the coverage of the outbreak is more a reflection of public fear than informative of what is actually happening in terms of the spread of the virus.

Former US president Franklin D Roosevelt probably overstated the case when he famously said that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself". Yet at a time rife with misinformation, fake news and conspiracy theories, it is worthwhile remaining alert to the dangers of this contagious emotion in the face of uncertainty.

[the writer is Professor and Director of Research Development and Environment, School of Journalism, Cardiff University]

The origin and evolution of love

NICK LONGRICH
THECONVERSATION.COM

Why do we love? At best, it's a mixed blessing, at worst, a curse. Love makes otherwise intelligent people act like fools; it causes heartache and grief. Lovers break our hearts, family sometimes drive us mad, friends can let us down.

But we're hard-wired to bond with each other. That suggests the capacity for love evolved, that natural selection favoured caring for one another. Fossils tell us that love evolved hundreds of millions of years ago, helping our mammalian ancestors survive in the time of the dinosaurs.

Humans have peculiarly complex emotional lives. Romantic love, the long-term bonding between males and females, is unusual among mammals. We're also unusual in forming long-term relationships with unrelated individuals (friendships).

But humans and all other mammals share one kind of love, the bond between a mother and her offspring. The universality of this attachment suggests that it's the original, ancestral form of bonding – the first kind of love, from which all others evolved.

Evidence of parent-offspring bonding appears around 200 million years ago, in the latest Triassic and earliest Jurassic periods. Fossils of Kayentatherium, a Jurassic proto-mammal from Arizona, preserve a mother who died protecting her 38 tiny babies. For this behaviour to exist, the instincts of both mother and offspring first had to evolve.

In primitive animals, such as lizards, parents aren't exactly parental. A mother Komodo dragon abandons her eggs, leaving hatchlings to fend for themselves. If she ever meets her young, she is likely to try to eat them: komodo dragons are cannibals. The young will instinctively run for their lives upon meeting her – and should.

Guarding hatchlings requires that the mother evolve instincts to see her small, helpless offspring as things to protect, not easy prey. Meanwhile, the offspring must evolve to see mum as a source of security and warmth, not fear.

Kayentatherium's fossilised mother-child association implies that this instinctive evolution had already happened. But Kayentatherium probably wasn't a doting mother. With 38 kids, she probably couldn't feed them, or spend much time on them.

In Welsh rocks laid down in the Late Triassic, we find evidence of more advanced parental care. Here, the proto-mammal Morganucodon shows mammal-style tooth replacement. Instead of endlessly replacing teeth from birth to death – as in lizards and sharks – Morganucodon was toothless as a baby, developed baby teeth, then shed those for adult teeth.

This replacement pattern is associated with lactation. Babies that suckle milk don't need teeth. So Morganucodon mothers made milk. Providing more care to her young, Morganucodon probably invested heavily in a few offspring, like modern mammals, and would have evolved a correspondingly stronger bond with them. The young, completely dependent on the mother for food, would have developed a stronger emotional attachment as well.

It's at this point in mammal history that our mammal ancestors stopped seeing each other as lizards did, exclusively in terms of danger, food and sex, feeling only the primitive emotions of fear, hunger and lust. Instead, they started to care for one another. Over millions of years, they increasingly began to bond, to protect and seek protection, exchange bodily warmth, groom one another, to play with, teach and learn from each other.

Mammals evolved the ability to form relationships. Once they did, this adaptation could be used in other contexts. Mammals could form relationships as family and friends in sophisticated social groups: elephant herds, monkey troops, killer whale pods, dog packs, human tribes. And in some species, males and females formed pair bonds.

Romantic love between men and women is a recent evolutionary development, associated with males helping females care for children. In most mammals, males are absentee fathers, contributing genes and nothing else to their offspring. In our closest relatives, chimpanzees, paternal care is minimal.

In a few species, including beavers, wolves, some bats, some voles and Homo sapiens, pairs form long-term bonds to cooperatively raise children. Pair bonding evolved sometime after our ancestors split from chimps, 6 million to 7 million years ago – probably before the split

between humans and Neanderthals.

LOVE IN OUR DNA

We can guess that Neanderthals formed long-term relationships, because their DNA is in us. That implies that Neanderthals and humans didn't simply mate. We had children, who themselves became parents, and grandparents, and so on. For the results of those unions to not just survive, but thrive and integrate into their tribe, mixed children were likely to have been born to parents who cared for them – and each other.

Not all encounters between our species were peaceful or pretty, but neither were they entirely violent. Neanderthals were different from Homo sapiens, but enough like us that we could love them, and they, us – even coming from different tribes. A love story worthy of Jane Austen, literally written into our species' DNA.

There's an adaptive benefit to love. Today, the ecosystem is dominated by animals with parental care. Mammals and birds, and social insects including ants, wasps, bees and termites, all of which care for their young, dominate terrestrial ecosystems. Humans are the dominant terrestrial animal on Earth.

Parental care is adaptive by itself, but by teaching animals to form relationships, it also paved the way for the evolution of sociality and cooperation on a larger scale. Parental care in wood roaches, for example, led one lineage, termites, to evolve vast family groups (colonies) that literally reshape the landscape.

Ants, forming up to 25% of the biomass of some habitats, likely evolved coloniality in the same way. Evolution can be violently competitive, but the ability to care and form relationships allowed for cooperative groups, which became effective competitors against other groups and species.

Caring helps us cooperate and cooperation helps us compete. Humans can be selfish and destructive. But we've dominated the planet only because an unparalleled ability to care for one another – for partners, children, families, friends, fellow humans – allowed cooperation on a scale never before seen in the history of life.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer in Evolutionary Biology and Paleontology, University of Bath]

How Nepal's migration ban traps female 'modern day slaves' in the Gulf

KATIE MCQUE

KUWAIT, 16 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: Amita* knew she had to escape. After five months of being assaulted, starved and being forced to work for 20 hours a day as a domestic maid in a suburban house in Kuwait, the 45-year old from Nepal seized her chance. While the household slept, she climbed out of a downstairs bathroom window and fled.

Amita managed to find the Nepali embassy, hoping that staff there would assure her safety and help send her home to Kathmandu.

They refused. "They said there were many ladies like me who had left their employer's house and they are reluctant to pay [for a plane ticket]," she says. "Instead, they told me to go to jail."

Staff advised Amita that her only option was to surrender to the police for absconding from her employment contract. After serving an 11-day prison term, she finally got her flight: the authorities deported her at the Kuwaiti government's expense.

All Gulf countries employ migrant domestic workers under the "Kafala" system, where their mobility is controlled by their employer,

who hold their passport and legal control over their ability to change employment or leave the country.

But while this system is problematic, a policy introduced by the Nepali government in 2017 has compounded issues faced by Nepali migrant women.

Protection or discrimination?

Under pressure to take action to protect workers travelling abroad for employment, the Nepali government issued an order banning Nepali citizens from travelling to the Gulf for jobs as domestic workers.

"[The 2017] ban on Nepalese citizens to work as domestic workers in the Gulf, particularly the females, is solely to protect [them from] illegal trafficking and violence," a spokesperson from the Nepalese labour department told the Guardian. "Regarding the assistance of those citizens ... [the] government is very concerned regarding their safety and [to] surely help them return back. However, at times there may be some delay to manage the legal procedures."

But activists refute this. They say that far from protecting Nepali domestic workers from exploitation and abuse, the embargo dis-



criminate against women – and indeed actively endangers them – as the main group seeking domestic work.

A third of Nepalis are estimated to live on incomes of \$3 a day (£2.30) or less, making Nepal one of the world's poorest countries. For Nepali women desperate to earn, the Gulf remains a favourite destination for jobs, where salaries for domestic workers can be around \$400 per month.

The ban has not stopped women from seeking work in the Gulf, but means travelling there directly from Nepal is no longer an option. Women resort to travelling through neighbouring countries such as India before making their onward journey.

This means that even be-

fore they reach their destination, Nepali migrant women are a target for trafficking and exploitation from groups posing as recruitment agencies, who may sell them to another party, or lie to them about the type of work will be undertaking.

"Most Nepali women are not documented [by the Nepali government] when they migrate and they become very vulnerable," says Manju Gurung, director of Pourakhi, a migrant rights NGO and shelter in Kathmandu. "Due to this, women are paid less, or not paid. Their passports are often confiscated by their employer. They also face lots of physical abuse, sexual exploitation. They are modern day slaves."

By contrast, the majority of male Nepalis who migrate to the Gulf work as labourers. As such, they are entitled to greater consular protection, including repatriation and subsidies if they become ill.

Without such protections, female domestic workers often have to rely on funding from non-government organisations if they are abused by their employer or face other hardships.

Vulnerable and exploited

Female migrant workers' precarious immigration status also leaves them susceptible to further exploitation.

Sushanti*, 33, left Nepal for Dubai three years ago

to work as a cleaner. Last year, she became pregnant, and when the father found out he abandoned her. In the United Arab Emirates sex outside of marriage is illegal and punishable by up to a year in jail. She concealed her pregnancy for six months and kept working until she could no longer hide it.

Sushanti knew she couldn't ask the Nepalese authorities for help, and got a loan to pay for her flight to Kathmandu.

But Sushanti's problems did not end with her return to Nepal. Too frightened to return to her family unmarried and pregnant, she now lives in a shelter with her newborn daughter and is faced with a new set of

challenges.

Nepal's citizenship laws state that children with foreign fathers cannot have their births registered in the country. This means the children of migrant workers are often stateless, leaving them stigmatised, and unable to access education beyond primary school level. As adults, these stateless children are not legally able to work or apply for passports. Because of this, some women feel they have to give their children to an orphanage in the hope they will be adopted, becoming documented citizens in the process.

"It is challenging for the women to go back to their communities with these babies. Sometimes women give their children to the orphanage and they re-migrate because they cannot go back to their community, as the family members won't accept them," says Gurung. "And the migration cycle begins again." Sushanti is preparing to leave her daughter in Nepal and travel once more for work. "My family in Nepal is very strict, I cannot tell them this situation. I have a little girl but now I am going back to Dubai," she says. "I have to earn a salary. Who will give me money if I don't go back?"

*Names have been changed to protect identities

Joint India-Bangladesh military exercise concludes

UMROI (MEGHALAYA), FEB 16 (PTI): A joint military exercise between the armies of India and Bangladesh concluded in Meghalaya's Umroi on Sunday, defence officials said.

A total of 150 personnel each from the two armies had taken part in the ninth edition of the two-week-long 'SAMPRITI' military exercise conducted at the Joint Training Node here, Defence spokesperson Ratnakar Singh said.

"The exercise allowed the two armies to understand each other's tactical drills and operating techniques. It provided a platform for them to share their experiences on counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations and providing aid to civil authorities in disaster management," he said.

Singh said that besides promoting un-



derstanding and interoperability between the two armies, the exercise helped strengthen the ties between In-

dia and Bangladesh. Personnel of the two contingents also participated in friendly volleyball and basketball matches, he said.

Earlier, similar exercises were conducted with the armies of Malaysia and China at the Joint Training Node,

which was inaugurated by the Union Minister for Defence, Nirmala Sitharaman. The exercise was the first of its kind between the two armies.

Restraint over language must be maintained in Bihar polls: Paswan

ASIM KAMAL, NEW DELHI, FEB 16 (PTI): The Bihar Assembly polls later this year should be fought on local development issues and restraint over language must be maintained, Union minister and LJP leader Ram Vilas Paswan has said.

The remarks by the BJP ally assume significance as they come after a vitriolic Delhi Assembly polls campaign in which some BJP leaders were rapped by the Election Commission for making inflammatory speeches.

In an interview to PTL, Paswan said the NDA alliance in Bihar was intact and expressed confidence that it would form the government with a two-thirds majority as the Opposition was a "sunken ship".

"LJP (Lok Janshakti Party) has strongly been with the NDA. I have always said only that animal dies on the road who cannot decide whether to go left or right. As far as Nitish (Kumar) ji is concerned, I don't think he will go anywhere," he said when asked about the state of the NDA alliance in Bihar.

In the Delhi polls, winning and losing aside, Kumar's JD(U) and the LJP fought as part of the NDA, he pointed out, asserting that nobody would leave for the opposition alliance in Bihar.

"What is there in the Opposition. Lalu Yadav is in jail, he is unwell, rest of the parties are singing different tunes. So who will go over to the Opposition. It is not even a sinking ship, it is one that has already sunk. They are fighting among themselves, NDA is intact," the Union minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution said.

There is no challenge in Bihar and the NDA will form the government after getting two-thirds majority in the assembly polls, Paswan said.

On BJP leader and Union Home Minister Amit Shah's assertion that Kumar would lead the NDA alliance in Bihar, he said the LJP has no objection to it.

Asked about the vitriolic Delhi polls campaign and provocative statements by some BJP

leaders in the run-up to the elections, he said LJP chief Chirag Paswan had made the party's stand clear on this and Shah also admitted that it might have been counterproductive.

"No one has ever gone to the Election Commission against us. Chirag has said that the issue of election is one of development," he said.

Article 370 has been abrogated along with Article 35A, triple talaq banned and the Ram Janambhoomi issue is also resolved, so now the state elections should be on local issues, he said.

"In national polls, there is no match for Narendra Modi. In state polls which happened recently, it has been proven that focus should be on local issues of development and restraint over language be maintained," he said.

"Restraint over language should be a must and I would like to appeal to the people of Bihar to vote on the basis of performance, keeping in mind the work done by the central and state governments," he said.

The BJP had mounted

one of its most aggressive campaigns in the Delhi Assembly polls, with Home Minister Shah leading the saffron charge fuelled by its planks of Hindutva and nationalism, and its strident opposition to anti-CAA protest in Shaheen Bagh.

In their bid to rally their supporters, several BJP leaders made controversial and even incendiary remarks against their rivals, prompting the Election Commission to take serious actions like barring Union minister Anurag Thakur and MP Parvesh Verma from campaigning.

The Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi party won a thumping mandate in Delhi, winning 62 seats out of the 70.

Asked if seat sharing for the Bihar polls could be a stumbling block for the NDA, Paswan said everything would work out smoothly.

He said his party could not come to an agreement with the BJP in Jharkhand but if they would have, results would have been better.

"Our party never wants any undue fa-

vour. In 2014, we fought on seven seats. Before 2019, newspapers started saying that we will get 2 seats-3 seats, so Chirag made it clear that we fought 7 seats and we will fight the same. So there were talks with Amit Shah and Arun Jaitley, we fought seven seats and won all of them," Paswan said.

On whether issues such as the amended citizenship act or the National Population Register (NPR) will be important in the Bihar polls, Paswan said, "I don't think so."

He said all doubts had been cleared regarding the issues related to the CAA, NPR and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

Many state governments, including Bihar, said they would not implement the NRC and Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself made it clear that there was no discussion on NRC and it was not an issue.

With curtains falling on the Delhi Assembly polls, all eyes are now on Bihar elections, slated for October and November this year.

CISF saves man who collapsed at Kolkata airport



KOLKATA, FEB 16 (PTI): CISF officials saved the life of a 53-year-old passenger who collapsed at the Kolkata airport by administering him an emergency medical procedure, a senior official said on Sunday.

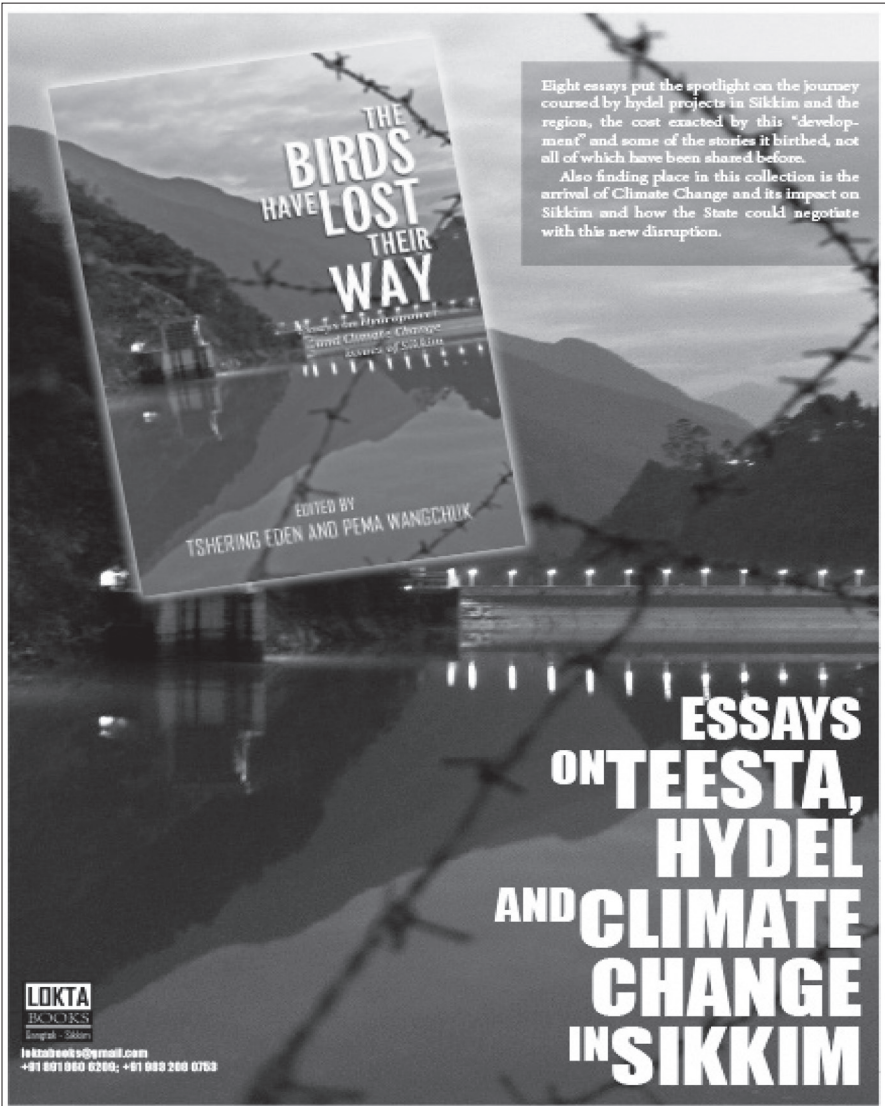
J Roychowdhury suddenly fainted and fell in the terminal area of the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport Saturday noon when he was in the security-hold area, he said.

On-duty CISF Sub Inspector Partha Bose saw the man collapsing and he immediately rushed to the man's side, he said.

"The passenger was unconscious but was breathing. SI Kumar with assistance from Inspector Shampa Karmakar immediately administered cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) medical procedure to the passenger. The passenger soon regained his senses," the official said.

The medical team that attended to the Bagdogra-bound passenger later reported him to be stable, he said.

The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) is designated as the federal civil aviation security force guarding 61 airports in the country. It has trained a number of its personnel in conducting CPR and similar medical procedures for helping travellers in emergency medical conditions.



India to play day-night Test in Australia



BHARAT SHARMA

NEW DELHI, FEB 16 (PTI): India will play a day-night Test during their much-anticipated tour of Australia later this year, BCCI president Sourav Ganguly said on Sunday.

This comes a month after captain Virat Kohli asserted that his team was ready to play a day-night Test anywhere in Australia.

“Yes, India will play a Day/Night Test in Australia. A formal announcement will be made soon,” BCCI president Sourav Ganguly told PTI.

Ganguly, a former captain, also said that the second Test of the next home series against England will be a day-night affair. He added that the Board will try to have at least one day-night Test in each series moving forward.

India played their maiden day-night Test against Bangladesh last November at the Eden Gardens, winning the match quite comfortably with plenty of time to spare.

While the venue has not been finalised yet, the pink ball game is likely to be held in either Adelaide or Perth. Hosting the game in one of these venues makes sense given the better time slot for Indian broadcast au-

dience.

On the eve of India’s three-match ODI series opener at home against Australia last month, Kohli had said, “We’re ready and up for the challenge - whether it’s Gabba, Perth... it doesn’t matter to us. It’s become a very exciting feature of any Test series and we’re open to playing day-night Tests.”

After India’s mauling of Bangladesh in their maiden day-night Test outing in Kolkata, Ganguly had said that they “will deal as per the request” of the host Board when on tour.

India declined Australia’s offer to play a day-night Test in Adelaide in 2018-19, citing lack of experience.

However, with day-night match seen as a possible answer to Test cricket’s dwindling attendances, Australia had been hoping that India will agree to play one game at the Gabba this year.

A Cricket Australia (CA) delegation met top BCCI officials on the sidelines of a limited-overs series in January with the day-night Test figuring on the agenda.

Meanwhile, it is also learnt that India is set to play three ODIs and three T20 Internationals in Sri Lanka after the IPL.

Zimbabwe looking forward to Bangladesh challenge: Taylor



DHAKA, FEB 16 (AFP): Zimbabwe batsman Brendan Taylor has said his side’s performance in the recent series against Sri Lanka would motivate them to do well against Bangladesh in the one-off Test later this month.

Zimbabwe, playing their first Test series in more than a year, pushed Sri Lanka hard in two home matches in January before narrowly going down 0-1.

They lost the first Test, and then an unbeaten second-innings century from Kusal Mendis denied them a series levelling-win in the second Test.

“We have had two good Test matches that went five days against Sri Lanka. We took a lot of positives from that. Hopefully, we can carry that on to the first Test (against Bangladesh),” Taylor told reporters at Dhaka airport on Saturday.

Zimbabwe will play their Test against Bangladesh at Dhaka’s Sher-e-Bangla National

Stadium from February 22.

“Bangladesh have always been very difficult to... (beat) here. We know what we are up against... But we look forward to it,” said the 34-year-old Taylor.

Bangladesh are currently in a bad run of form in Tests, losing their last six matches -- three of them by an innings margin -- but Taylor warned that would not give his side any leverage.

“I think they always play well at home. That’s their comfort zone, where they thrive... and always have a good record,” he said.

Batsman Craig Ervine will lead Zimbabwe in the Bangladesh Test, with regular skipper Sean Williams missing the game to be with his family for the birth of his child.

Zimbabwe will also play three one-day internationals and two Twenty20s during the Bangladesh tour in March.

Antoine Griezmann takes Barcelona joint top of La Liga after Getafe struggle



SID LOWE

BARCELONA, 16 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: “Sometimes it is good for you to suffer,” Antoine Griezmann said when this game came to an end, supporters at the Camp Nou departing relieved. Barcelona had suffered, that’s for sure; whether that is good for them is another matter.

Quique Setién’s side had beaten Getafe, opening a 10-point lead on the team just below them and for the moment going joint top with Real Madrid, but the look on Lionel Messi’s face did not speak of total satisfaction. This had been hard, a game that had seemed set to escape Barcelona early on and might have done at the end.

Ultimately, though, Barcelona held on. Goals from Griezmann and Sergi Roberto were enough, despite a brilliant strike from a man who may soon join them, Angel Rodríguez pulling one back to set up a tense final 30 minutes.

It is not by chance that Getafe are third, the season’s great revelation. Or that, from the Barcelona bench, the final instruction in the last minute was to hit the ball long to Arturo Vidal, seeking safety, getting them over the line.

Getafe may have got more here, their man-

ager heading down the tunnel disappointed and defeated just before that one last play. José Bordalás may also have wondered about a possible second-half penalty and a first-half goal that was ruled out.

Pressing Barcelona into their own area, denying them an easy way out, Getafe had begun with the intent that has characterised them. Jorge Molina was not the first to escape into space when he drew the corner from which Getafe thought they had the opener. Molina got to the delivery first, connecting with a header that Marc-André ter Stegen saved and there, running in to finish, was Allan Nyom. Behind him, though, Samuel Umti-

ti was lying on the turf, dazed. When the referee went to the screen, he saw why: Nyom had turned his shoulder into Umtiti’s face, knocking him down; the goal was ruled out.

A goal, though, could not be ruled out. It almost came when Jaime Mata evaded Ter Stegen inside the area and Marc Cucurella struck fractionally wide. Soon afterwards, Gerard Piqué only just hooked away from Molina, worried whistles following from the stands. The ball had been Barcelona’s, perhaps, but the game was not. And then, suddenly, it was.

A wonderful, deft touch from Messi unlocked the area for Griezmann to cleverly steer past Soria after

33 minutes. It was the sixth successive Barcelona goal assisted by Messi but there would not be a seventh. Junior delivered for Sergi Roberto to score the second, the disbelieving look on Bordalás’s face telling a story.

Not that he gave up. Getafe sent on Kenedy and Ángel – the striker Barcelona may yet sign as an emergency replacement for Ousmane Dembélé – and if they were still doubting his value, he offered them a superb side-footed volley. It was his 10th goal of the season, nine off the bench, and one he did not really celebrate. A calling card, perhaps; a call to action, certainly.

Revived, Getafe came at Barcelona again. There

was belief now – and then disbelief when Ter Stegen somehow slapped the ball away from Mata on the line. Nerves returned, a few more whistles too. Griezmann could have eased them when he blasted wildly over first and well wide next.

Between those two chances Piqué pulled on Ángel’s shirt as the striker pressed, stole possession and headed into the area alone. There was a game on here, that was for sure. There just was not much time to play it.

With a minute left Messi bent a shot wide. It was his 33rd in a row without a goal and no one else would get one either. Surveying the scene, aware of how they had suffered, Barcelona settled for that.

Conflict complaint against Kapil Dev rendered infructuous

NEW DELHI, FEB 16 (PTI): BCCI ethics officer D K Jain on Sunday confirmed that he has rendered the conflict of interest complaint against Kapil Dev as “infructuous” after the former India captain stepped down from his multiple cricketing roles.

Jain, who is into his last month of his one-year contract with the BCCI, had earlier rendered infructuous the complaint against Shantha Rangaswamy and Anshuman Gaekwad in December af-

ter they also stepped down from their multiple posts.

“The complaint against Kapil has been rendered infructuous,” Jain told PTI.

All three of them were part of the Cricket Advisory Committee but resigned in September after MPCAL life member Sanjeev Gupta had levelled conflict of interest allegations against them. BCCI has now formed a new CAC.

Jain had called Rangaswamy, Gaekwad and Kapil for a personal hear-



ing on December 27 and 28 in Mumbai but the World Cup-winning cap-

tain did not appear due to personal reasons.

As per the BCCI con-

stitution, no person can occupy more than one post at the same time.

Hope my biopic inspires young girls to take up cricket: Mithali Raj

SHUBHA DUBEY

MUMBAI, FEB 16 (PTI): Mithali Raj, captain of the Indian women’s national cricket team in Tests and ODIs, hopes her biopic “Shabaash Mithu” inspires young girls to join the sport.

The biographical drama will be directed by Rahul Dholakia, best known for making movies such as “Raees”, “Lamhaa” and “Parzanian”.

“I’m happy that there is a biopic on my story because a lot will be shown about the struggles of a woman cricketer. When we started way back in the ‘90s, the journey of a woman cricketer in our country was difficult,” Mithali told PTI on the sidelines of the Lakme Fashion Week Summer/Resort 2020.

The sportstar said there are a lot of girls who wish to play cricket but feel there is no scope for them to grow and the Taapsee Pannu-fronted film will bust that myth.

“It will also inspire a lot of young girls who

dream about becoming a cricketer. Many young girls have the urge to play the sport but never get to see it on television so they feel there is no scope. This will open a lot of opportunities for them to dream,” she added.

The film, produced by Viacom18 Studios, stars Taapsee in the lead, and the cricketer said she is looking forward to see the actor slip into her shoes.

“I feel quite nice about having Taapsee on board to tell my story. I have seen a sports drama where she played a hockey player. She kind of has this way of playing a sportsperson. And I think what little I’ve seen of her, she will be able to even ape my skill at some level,” Mithali, 37, said.

The first look of the film was unveiled last month and has been well-received by the audience. “Shabaash Mithu” will hit the theatres on February 5 next year.

At the LFW Summer/Resort 2020, Mithali walked for designer Pay-



al Singhal on Saturday. For the show, the designer collaborated with Corcal Bone & Beauty.

The cricketer, who made her debut at the fashion gala, said as an athlete she hardly gets an opportunity to dress up and walking the ramp was a fun experience.

“I was excited. I have done a couple of shows for charity and had a little bit of experience of walking the ramp. I had fun,” she added.

The collection titled ‘Parvaneh’ (Persian for ‘Butterfly’), celebrated the free-spirited

wanderer. Inspired by ‘Chrysalis’, the transitional state of a caterpillar blossoming into a butterfly, the collection brought out modernism through the language of traditional Indian art.

“I did this collection in six weeks. I work better under pressure. I like to work with garments while they are being made. I like them to evolve during the process,” Payal said.

With a grand finale by Delhi-based designer Amit Aggarwal, the fashion gala concludes on Sunday.

Mumbai Indians to face CSK in IPL opener on March 29



NEW DELHI, FEB 16 (PTI): In a repeat of last edition’s final, defending champions Mumbai Indians and runners-up Chennai Super Kings will open the 13th IPL at the Wankhede Stadium on March 29.

The franchise-based event will start 11 days after India’s home ODI series against South Africa ends on March 18 in Kolkata.

The Indian Premier League will release the schedule for the knockouts later, but the final is scheduled for May 24.

Sadio Mané ensures Liverpool go 25 points clear at top with win at Norwich

PAUL MacINNES

Norwich, 16 Feb [theGuardian]: The numbers keep on racking up for Liverpool. Twenty-five points clear at the top of the table, 76 points from a possible 78 this season and an unbeaten streak that runs for 43 matches, back to January 2019. Here, a 17th straight league victory was decided by Sadio Mané’s 100th goal in English football. That 19th league title just keeps getting closer.

While the big picture can sometimes seem bogging, the smaller details remain more readily comprehensible. This was another match in which the champions-elect had to graft, bide their time and enjoy some luck before earning a deserved victory.

Norwich played their football, as they always do, and had chances which they squandered, as they often do too. They were also disciplined and resolute in their defending and, as the contest reached the final stages, a draw looked a realistic possibility. But then Liverpool found a way.

It came from a long ball, sent forward by Jordan Henderson in the 78th minute. Mané was standing between two Norwich players on the edge of their box and one of them, Christoph Zimmermann, got up early to meet the ball. The German missed it, however, perhaps aided in part by a push from the Liverpool forward. But before anyone had a chance to even cry foul play Mané had taken the ball under control, spun and shot low, left-footed inside Tim Krul’s right-hand post. “I have many compliments for my lads for this performance,” said the Norwich manager, Daniel Farke. “For the performance, the workload and the tactical discipline. But then because of this one moment of magic from Mané I have to accept this loss. I don’t complain [about the push] because I have learned from this season that VAR never works in our favour. There is a push and if the referee had given a free-kick it would not have been overturned. But he allowed the goal and it’s not a clear and obvious mistake.

Sri Lanka govt, opposition slam US’ travel ban on Army chief

COLOMBO, FEB 16 (PTI): Sri Lanka’s ruling and opposition parties have strongly opposed the US move to impose a travel ban on the country’s Army chief Lt Gen Shavendra Silva, saying America’s decision was based on independently unver-ified information.

The US last week imposed travel restrictions on Lt Gen Silva and his immediate family mem-bers over alleged gross violations of human rights during the final phase of the island nation’s Civil War in 2009.

“Silva was only conducting a war against a designated terrorist group which was the LTTE. The US themselves named many organiza-tions terrorist after 9/11 attacks,” Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena told reporters.

“The Foreign Minis-try has issued a state-ment saying that we do not respect the move. As the government, we are taking steps to convey our stance and act in line with the contents of our statement,” he added.

Gunawardena said US Ambassador to Lanka Alaina Teplitz has been summoned to the foreign ministry to discuss Co-ombo’s response.

Sajith Premadasa, the main opposition leader, echoed a similar view.

“Imposition of a trav-el ban on army com-mander Shavendra Silva and his immediate family

is regrettable and unfor-tunate. He is one of the heroic field commanders who spearheaded the na-tional effort to eradicate terrorism,” Premadasa tweeted.

“All of us stand by him and his family at this hour of need. As a coun-try we shall always stand with the war heroes that brought about an end to 30 years of terrorism,” he said.

Other opposition fig-ures also said that Silva was doing his job as a battle commander and should therefore not be punished for fighting the LTTE.

Lt Gen Silva, 55, was appointed as the Sri Lankan Army Command-er last year and previ-ously headed the Army’s 58th Division in the final battle against the Lib-eration Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels of the civil war in 2009.

His brigade was ac-cused of attacking civi-lians, hospitals and stop-ping humanitarian sup-plies to trapped Tamil civilians.

The Sri Lanka Army has denied the alleged rights abuses.

After the brutal civil war ended, Silva served in New York as Sri Lan-ka’s Deputy Permanent Representative at the UN Mission.

According to a Unit-ed Nations report, some 45,000 Tamil civilians were killed in the last months of the war alone.

Wave of violence leaves journalists in Somalia ‘under siege’, says Amnesty

KAAMIL AHMED MOGADISHU, 16 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: The increasingly hostile en-vironment in Somalia has left journalists living in fear of both the gov-ernment and militant groups, according to Am-nesty International.

At least eight journal-ists have been killed since President Mohamed Ab-dullahi Mohamed came to power in 2017, while others have survived assassination attempts or been targeted for ar-rests and censorship, the rights group has said.

“Somali journalists are under siege. From barely surviving explo-sive-wired cars to being shot, beaten up and ar-bitrarily arrested, jour-nalists are working in horrifying conditions,” Deprose Muchena, Am-nesty’s director for east Africa, said in an state-ment.

The group claimed a “surge” in violence and intimidation under the current president, known as Farmajo.

Amnesty accused the government of not investi-gating attacks on journal-ists and censoring critical reports. Five journalists had been killed in attacks by the militant group al-Shabaab, while two others died at the hands of un-identified assailants, said Amnesty. Bashiir Max-mud, a Mogadishu-based journalist, said he had re-ceived personal threats by telephone demanding he did not air sensitive sto-ries or write about them on Twitter.

“I dared to ignore them and endanger myself to let my people have news from a reliable source,” he said.

Maxmud described the conditions as like working next to a “ticking time-

Xi’s early involvement in virus outbreak raises questions

BEIJING, FEB 16 (AP): A recent speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping that has been published by state media indicates for the first time that he was leading the response to a new virus outbreak from early on in the crisis.

The publication of the Feb 3 speech was an apparent attempt to demonstrate that the Communist Party lead-ership acted decisively from the beginning, but also opens Xi up to criti-cism over why the public was not alerted sooner.

In the speech, Xi said he gave instructions on fighting the virus on Jan 7 and ordered the shut-down that began on Jan 23 of cities at the epicen-ter of the outbreak. His remarks were published by state media late Sat-urday.

On Jan. 22, in light of the epidemic’s rap-id spread and the chal-lenges of prevention and control, I made a clear request that Hubei prov-ince implement compre-hensive and stringent controls over the out-flow of people,” he told a meeting of the party’s standing committee, its top body.

China’s National Health Commission on Sunday reported a drop in new virus cases for the third straight day. There were 2,009 new cases in mainland China, bringing the total to 68,500.

The mortality rate remained stable with

142 new deaths, the commission said, rais-ing the death toll from COVID-19, a disease caused by a new coro-navirus, to 1,665. An-other 9,419 people have recovered and been dis-charged from hospitals.

Four people have died outside of mainland China, with the most re-cent fatalities in France and Japan last week.

About 400 Americans on a quarantined cruise ship in Japan were await-ing charter flights home, as Japan announced an-other 70 infections had been confirmed on the vessel. Canada and Hong Kong said they were planning similar flights.

Xi’s role was muted in the early days of the ep-idemic, which has grown into one of the biggest political challenges of his seven-year tenure.

The disclosure of his speech indicates top leaders knew about the outbreak’s potential severity weeks before such dangers were made known to the public. It was not until late January that officials said the vi-rus can spread between humans and public alarm began to rise.

Trust in the gov-ernment’s approach to outbreaks remains frac-tured after the SARS ep-idemic of 2002 and 2003, which was covered up for months.

The outbreak began in December in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei,



which has the bulk of in-fections and deaths.

On Jan 23, Wuhan be-came the first city to im-pose an unprecedented halt on outbound trans-portation, since expand-ed to other cities with a combined population of more than 60 million.

Authorities in Hubei and Wuhan faced pub-lic fury over their initial handling of the epidem-ic. The anger reached a peak earlier this month following the death of Li Wenliang, a young doctor who was reprimanded by local police for trying to spread a warning about the virus. He ended up dying of the disease him-self.

In apparent response, the Communist Party’s

top officials in Hubei and Wuhan were dismissed and replaced last week.

Even as authorities have pledged transpar-ency through the current outbreak, citizen journal-ists who challenged the official narrative with video reports from Wu-han have disappeared and are believed to be detained.

The fall in new cases follows a spike of more than 15,000 on Thurs-day, when Hubei began to include cases that had been diagnosed by a doc-tor but not yet confirmed by laboratory tests.

Overwhelmed by the number of suspected cases, the province has not been able to test every person exhibiting

symptoms. The clinical diagnosis is based on doctors’ analyses and lung imaging and is in-tended to allow proba-ble cases to be treated as confirmed ones without the need to wait for a lab result.

The virus has spread to more than two dozen countries and prompted many to place entry re-strictions on people from China and recent visitors to the country.

About 400 Americans aboard the cruise ship docked at Yokohama, near Tokyo, were told to decide whether to stay or take chartered air-craft arranged by the US government to fly them home, where they would face another 14-day

quarantine.

Those going were to begin leaving the ship Sunday night. People with symptoms were to be banned from the flights.

About 255 Canadians and 330 Hong Kong res-idents are on board the ship or undergoing treat-ment in Japanese hospi-tals. They too would face a second quarantine. The 70 new cases on the Di-amond Princess raised the number of infected to 355.

American passenger Matthew Smith told The Associated Press that he and his wife were not taking the flights, be-cause the 14-day quaran-tine for the ship is set to end on Wednesday.

Families trapped by Assad’s assault on Idlib fight to survive in the snow

Simon Tisdall and Emma Graham-Harrison

DAMASCUS, 16 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: Hun-dreds of thousands of civilians, many of them women and children, are stranded with lit-tle food or shelter in sub-zero temperatures in north-western Syria, forced from their homes by a Russian-backed mil-itary offensive that has often targeted hospitals and other civilian infra-structure.

The assault on Idlib, the last stronghold of the Syrian opposition, has created one of the great-est humanitarian crises of a long and brutal war. It has displaced more than 800,000 people since December, the Unit-ed Nations said, 143,000 of them in the last three days alone.

“It’s like we are liv-ing in a graveyard,” said

Manar al-Deiry, a teach-er sheltering with her children, aged seven and nine, in a tent on a snowy hillside near the border.

She has a makeshift stove but is frightened to use it to heat the tent be-cause the smoke is giving her children breathing problems and some fam-ilies have suffocated in their sleep.

“The cold is in our bones, we can’t get warm any more,” she said. “But I still see our situation is much better than people who are just living un-der trees with nothing to protect them from freez-ing.”

Families have fled towards the border with Turkey, but it is closed. The country already hosts 3.5 million Syrian refugees and will not al-low more across.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan spoke by phone with his US coun-terpart Donald Trump on Saturday. . The two men called for an imme-diate halt to the fighting in Idlib and condemned Syrian government forc-es’ attacks there, the

Turkish leader’s office said.

Like many in Idlib, Deiry had already fled numerous times before reaching her hillside tent, first from her home in Hama and then from two other cities in Idlib. The shrinking rebel-held area is now home to more than three million people, many, like Deiry, refugees several times over. More displaced people were arriving each day, but there was no safe place for them to go, said Mousa al-Zidane of the White Helmets vol-unteer group. “The situa-tion for people in camps is catastrophic,” Zidane said. “It was heartbreak-ing yesterday when three people died when trying to light a fire inside their tent to keep their chil-dren warm.”

Camps in northern Idlib were already five times over capacity, with shortages of food and water, and could not cope with newcomers. “We see at least four fam-ilies living in single-fam-ily tents,” said Munzer Khalil, an Idlib doctor.

“Unclean water is caus-ing an unprecedented high rate of transmitted diseases, hitting the most vulnerable, women and children the hardest.”

Although Turkey is not opening the bor-der, its forces are on the ground in Idlib and are clashing frequently with the Syrian army, moving the two countries closer to an all-out conflict than at any point in the nine-year-old civil war. Erdoğan has threatened a full-scale military intervention if the Syrian offensive does not stop by the end of this month; so far talks with Russian diplomats in An-kara appear to have been inconclusive.

Turkey is seeking to enforce a de-escalation deal for Idlib brokered in 2018 by Moscow, which backs Assad, and Anka-

ra, which supports some rebel groups in the area. The ceasefire has been routinely broken by both sides, but a campaign of attrition by Assad has escalated since Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), formerly al-Qaida’s Syr-ian affiliate, seized con-trol of most of the area last year.

Idlib, which has be-come a refuge of last re-sort for Turkish-backed rebel forces and jihad-ists, is the only main Syrian province yet to be recaptured by the regime in Damascus since fight-ing began in 2011.

The Syrian govern-ment’s military cam-paign over recent weeks has included bombing of heavily populated areas, and civilian infrastruc-ture including hospitals and markets.

In January alone, 53 health facilities have sus-pended work in Idlib due to bombardment or evac-uation and many towns have no healthcare ser-vices at all, Khalil said.

Rescue efforts are also complicated by the cold. “It’s becoming very challenging for us to evacuate civilians or go on search and rescue missions in the snow and freezing temperatures but we are doing what we can.”

David Miliband, pres-ident of the International Rescue Committee, said global values as well as global security were at stake. “The catastro-phe in Idlib is a symp-tom of the utter failure of diplomacy and aban-donment by the inter-national community of Syrian civilians.”



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ARRIVED IN STYLE! Nicki Minaj & Kenneth Petty make a public appearance at the Marc Jacobs show during New York Fashion Week.

I have done monologues in only two movies, says Kartik Aaryan

NEW DELHI, FEB 16 (PTI): It's been almost 10 years but Kartik Aaryan's monologues from the "Pyaar Ka Punchnama" series continue to be so popular with his fans that the actor says every time he delivers barely three lines people subconsciously think he is going for it again.

Kartik's one-man acts, where he ranted about his love life, played a significant role in the success of Luv Ranjan's "Pyaar Ka Punchnama" (2011) and "Pyaar Ka Punchnama 2" (2015).

But the 29-year-old actor asserted he has never delivered monologues beyond these two films.

"Monologues were there in just two films. Whenever I say a three-line dialogue, people think that I'm delivering a monologue. The dialogues in 'Pyaar Ka Punchnama' films were actually monologues. They were both six-page long scenes and 12 minutes in length.

"But it is just these two films out of my whole filmography -- 'Akash Vaani', 'Luka Chuppi', 'Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety', 'Pati Patni Aur Woh' and now 'Love Aaj Kal'. I have never done monologues. So it is wrong to compare," Kartik told PTI in an interview.

The actor said today people have a preconceived notion that he is doling out a

monologue as a rant or in a confrontational scene in his films.

"Both the monologues went viral, they were a hit on social media. People have really loved them. Now, it comes subconsciously to people that I'm delivering a lot of monologues.

"In 'Luka Chuppi', I barely had any dialogues because it was a situational comedy. But whenever there is a confrontational scene or a scene where I'm ranting about something, you get a sense that a monologue has started or is about to come," Kartik said.

But the actor said he is not averse to delivering monologues, which he considers his USP, if it is an important part of the script.

"If it is an integral part of a film, only then it makes sense and everybody understands that as we are all professionals. It's no harm to work on someone's USP, to encash on it. So I wouldn't hide the fact that people want me to deliver monologues in films.

"But the kind of films I have chosen recently, they didn't have situations where you can fit in a monologue," Kartik added.

The actor's latest release was Imtiaz Ali's "Love Aaj Kal". Also featuring Sara Ali Khan, the film hit the screens last Friday.

Lady Gaga "PROPOSES" to Herself in a Powerful Valentine's Day Message

Lady Gaga is putting a ring on her own finger.



This Valentine's Day, the superstar singer has decided to send a message to the world, giving herself a ring in order to show that we are all free to propose to anyone at any time. Gaga selected the "Knight Finger" ring for the special occasion, which was created by her longtime pal and fashion activist B. Åkerlund for shopping service Klarna as part of their Get What You Love campaign. The empowering campaign encourages everyone to propose how and when they want to, essentially "giving the finger" to outdated traditions.

"For my entire career, I've taken pride in using my voice to stand up for what I believe is right," Gaga says in an exclusive comment for Klarna. "So I am excited to work with my friend B. and Klarna to celebrate how far we've come as a culture, and call out the work we need to continue to do."

This year, 2020, is a leap year, and as tradition says, it is acceptable for women to propose to their partner on Feb. 29. However, Klarna and Gaga believe that everyone should have the freedom to move forward with that major life choice whenever they want to.

"The idea that a woman can only propose to a man one day every four years is so completely ridiculous!" Gaga shares. "Anyone who knows me knows that I believe any person of any gender identity should be able to express any act of love to anyone else on ANY day of ANY year."

The "Million Reasons" singer continues, "So in an act of defiance of this outdated tradition, I decided to say yes to MYSELF! And wear this ring today with pride to remind myself and everyone that the only permission you need to love comes from within you."

Of the partnership with Gaga, Klarna CMO, David Sandström, says, "Just like Lady Gaga, we at Klarna believe that if traditions go unchallenged, the status quo prevails."

"Why should we settle and conform to societal and industry expectations just because?" Sandström asks. "The Knight's Finger ring was created as a symbol to enable everyone to express love on their terms to whom they wish, just like our millions of shoppers can get what they love every day with Klarna."

The Knight Finger was designed to inspire us all to "fearlessly love on our own terms" and "cast aside traditions of the past to define our own futures," according to activist Åkerlund.

"Lady Gaga is a knight in shining armor, defeating all that stands in her way," the designer adds. "She is TRULY an inspiration in creating her own rules to express her true self. It's an honor that she chose to put my ring on her finger."

All proceeds from the sale of the rings will go to Dress for Success, an international not-for-profit organization that empowers women to achieve economic independence.

Caped crusader: who is the real target of Natalie Portman's reply to Rose McGowan?



Under fire for 'tassel campaigning' at the Oscars, Portman showed restraint and defiance in her riposte – plus mindful respect for women colleagues

It's hard to predict what the big stories from Oscar night will turn out to be. Parasite's victory was a slight surprise – but not an earth-shaker. Mystic Meg wasn't required in order to guess that Elton John might give us a tune or Joaquin Phoenix could bring out the vegan big guns.

The joy of the night is the curveball: Scorsese goggling at Eminem; Janelle Monáe popping her shirt button while struggling with a Mr Rogers cardie. Diane Keaton.

And it is one out-of-the-blue story concerning this year's Academy Awards that's proven the runaway hit in terms of Guardian audience engagement this year: Rose McGowan criticising Natalie Portman's decision to wear a cape discreetly embroidered with the names of snubbed female directors.

Exactly why this couture-handbags-at-dawn spat has so captured the imagination is still something of a mystery – and a potentially unifying one. Might it be that people like the sight of two hot warring film-star feminists? Or is there something irresistible about the calling out of apparent A-list hypocrisy?

Certainly the tide of opinion, both on Twitter and in this newspaper, has so far been staunchly pro-Rose. That little bit of stitching on Portman's jacket was just a performative, first-world attempt to jump on a bandwagon the actor herself has failed to hail. Right?

Of course. Not even Portman denies that it's tassel campaigning. What's been overlooked is that her cool, measured response – which contained nothing approaching an apology to McGowan – was a reciprocal callout.

Portman wrote: "I agree with Ms McGowan that it is inaccurate to call me 'brave' for wearing a garment with women's names on it. Brave is a term I more strongly associate with actions like those of the women who have been testifying against Harvey Weinstein the last few weeks, under incredible pressure."

This isn't just empty self-deprecation nor topical lip-service to the last two weeks. It's an allusion to the fact that McGowan took the cash rather than the stand. Her \$100,000 settlement with Weinstein in relation to an alleged sexual harassment in 1997 means she cannot testify against him in court; she has, of course, been vocal elsewhere.

Portman could have gone further. Her own track record working with female directors was questioned and found lacking. She might well have levelled the same accusation at McGowan, who has worked with a female director four times out of 27 on full-length features. That's 15%: more than most – but far from anything approaching parity.

Portman could have mentioned other issues: that McGowan's most recent theatrically released film was directed by a convicted paedophile and child pornographer, about whom McGowan said: "I still don't really understand the whole story or history there, and I'd rather not, because it's not really my business. But he's an incredibly sweet and gentle man."

That one of the female directors she worked with, Kari Skogland, had to issue a public apology after McGowan said she would "100% have been in the IRA" if she'd grown up in Belfast. "My heart just broke for the cause."

Portman did not. She mentioned projects that hadn't got off the ground, saying: "I have tried, and I will keep trying. While I have not yet been successful, I am hopeful that we are stepping into a new day." It was a mature response from someone who has been in the business since she was a child; a child whose own negotiations with professional consent (rewatch Léon and Beautiful Girls) may themselves be muddled.

To acknowledge your own failings, while not explicitly pointing out those of the person who has abruptly branded you a "fraud" and your jacket "deeply offensive", is quite something.

ARIES: Some people marry their childhood sweethearts and live happily ever after. Others serendipitously meet their soulmates in the evening of their lives after two failed marriages and several heartbreaks. Then there are those who have the privilege of meeting the one, but they take years and years to find their way into each other's arms.

Tip: Trust what's happening behind the scenes for you.

TAURUS: Wise words by Rupi Kaur to give your perspective on what you are experiencing right now: "It was when I stopped searching for home within others and lifted the foundations of home within myself, that I found there were no roots more intimate than those between mind and body that have decided to be whole." Your thoughts exactly.

Tip: You are finding a sense of home within yourself.

GEMINI: How we perceive ourselves de-

fines our relationships with not just the self, but also the world. Where are you vibrating at, Gemini? Do you believe you are being of light who is worthy of being loved? Give yourself the love and care you deserve, wild one. Address the old wounds that are keeping you from making space for the one.

Tip: Claim your independence.

CANCER: There is more than enough to go around, Cancer. So where does the feeling of lack arise from? Could our own limited beliefs be creating a sense of mistrust? Awareness is the first step to breaking old patterns and making space for the good stuff to enter. Continue to address the limiting beliefs.

Tip: You are connected to the cosmic flow of Abundance.

LEO: Those who resort to aggression in order to make a point are usually the weakest. Understand the difference between assertiveness and aggression.

Course correct if you have chosen the latter. What Spirit wants you to know: there is a way to stand up for your beliefs without going to war.

Tip: Choose assertiveness over aggression.

VIRGO: Two's a party, three's a crowd. Now that we have this out of the way, let's talk about you, Virgo. What are you going to do with this precious life of yours? Why do you keep selling yourself short or settling for less-than-perfect love? You've been seeing the signs for a while now.

Tip: It's better to fly solo than to hold onto a relationship causing you harm.

LIBRA: Libra, you're a beautiful amalgam of the mother and the crone, offering a warm cup of cocoa and sage advice to your soul circle. While giving unconditionally is truly a gift, today, you're being asked to turn your energy inwards. While, you're at it, refresh your bucket list and do at least one thing that brings you

joy and awakens that spirit of playfulness.

Tip: Live a little.

SCORPIO: The trouble is, we save our kindness and compassion for the world, while being unkind to ourselves in private. Pay attention to that inner dialogue, Scorpio. The words you are choosing in order to communicate with yourself. Replace judgements with openness.

Tip: Let your self-talk be a source of empowerment.

SAGITTARIUS: Today, you're in the mood to up your style game as you find a sustainable answer to the eternal dilemma of 'I have nothing to wear'. First things first, Marie Kondo your wardrobe. Donate the things that no longer fit right or spark joy. You always have the option to lend it to a friend who resonates with that particular style.

Tip: Reinvent your style.

CAPRICORN: Your heart isn't breaking, Capricorn. It's simply coming together.

Allow the old wounds to resurface. Consciously work through emotional entanglements in order to find your freedom. You will find that your relationships will evolve in the process.

Tip: Embrace the in-between.

AQUARIUS: What if your experiences have the power to add value to the life of another? Don't shy away from holding space for a circle or sharing your narrative with those who matter. There's a reason storytelling was considered as a form of medicine in ancient cultures.

Tip: Storytelling is a form of medicine, Aquarius.

PISCES: Cosmic truth: everybody experiences emotional pain at some point. Should that keep you from radiating like the sun, or believing that you deserve to be loved in the right way? Anything but. You're at a point in your journey where you are integrating the past lessons and seeing your experiences through the eyes of wisdom.

Tip: A period of deep healing is on the cards.