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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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SNOWBOUND LACHEN: The higher reaches of North Sikkim were treated to a fresh blanket of heavy snow over the week-end. Much as the snow has framed Lachen in picture-postcard prettiness, it has also snapped connectivity. Owing to the heavy snowfall, the road to Lachen was blocked beyond Bonsai Bridge, about 10KM short of the North Sikkim village, on Sunday morning. People had to commute on foot from the bridge to Lachen till the time of filing this report. [from WANGCHUK BHUTIA]

Shakshi Manawata Mission Foundation distributes blankets and stationery items

RANGPO, 05 JAN: Shakshi Manawata Mission Foundation, Sikkim, organised a "Blanket, Food and Exercise Copy, Pen Distribution Program" at Rangpo IBM today.

Ranjeeta Singh, a member of the organization, informs that 100 blankets, food packets, exercise copies and pens were distributed in the area.

She informed that it was two days back, while on an evening walk by the riverside that she noticed that many people were in need of blankets. Today, in the presence of Sikkim Bihari Jagran Manch Central Committee President Swaminath Prasad and representatives from Sai Sewa Samiti-Rangpo, Brahmakumaris, and local residents, the distribution program was organised.



Petrol, diesel prices up for 4th straight day as US strike roils oil market

NEW DELHI, JAN 5 (PTI): Petrol and diesel prices rose for the fourth straight day on Sunday as global oil prices jumped after the US killed a top Iranian general, fanning fresh fears of conflict in the crude-rich Middle East.

Retail pump price of petrol was hiked by 9 paise per litre and that of diesel by 11 paise, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

Petrol in Delhi now costs Rs 75.54 per litre -- the highest in more than a year, while a litre of diesel comes for Rs 68.51.

While global stock

markets were mixed following the US killing of Qasem Soleimani, oil prices jumped more than 3 per cent on Friday. Oil markets will reopen on Monday after the weekend break.

The killing of Soleimani represents "a significant spike in geopolitical risks and could lead to a direct confrontation between the US and Iran," Oxford Economics said in a commentary.

India is 84 per cent dependant on imports to meet its oil needs and any spike in global prices has a direct bearing on its economy. Not just im-

ports but even domestic crude oil -- which forms the raw material for making petrol, diesel and other petroleum products -- is priced according to international benchmarks.

Middle East accounts for more than two-thirds of the country's oil imports, with Iraq and Saudi Arabia being the top suppliers.

Even though the import basket has been sought to be diversified with oil being contracted from nations such as the US, pricing in all the regions is governed by international benchmarks and rates

went up everywhere following Friday's strikes.

Officials said there is no immediate threat of any supply disruption to India and the only impact would be felt in prices.

For an economy that is struggling to recover from a six-year low growth rate of 4.5 per cent, a spike in oil prices poses significant risk as it will not just stoke inflation but also lead to higher outgo on government subsidies on cooking fuel.

"Nowhere in the world has seen any supply being stopped

because of US strikes. Oil continues to flow as normal," an official said.

Sunday's price increase is the fourth straight day of retail prices going up. Since January 2, petrol price has increased by 38 paise per litre while diesel rates have gone up 55 paise.

Prices were unchanged over the new year. Rates of petrol have been on the upswing since December 26 and that of diesel since November 29, 2019. Diesel prices have increased by Rs 2.78 per litre over this period while petrol has become costlier by 91 paise.

Chief Minister's Gold Cup begins in Jorethang



NAMCHI, 05 JAN [IPR]: The 9th All India Chief Minister's Gold Cup International Football Tournament, organised by the South District Football Association [SDFA] kicked off at Jorethang Playground today with Education Minister Kunga Nima Lepcha declaring the tournament open.

The opening ceremony was also attended by Power Minister MN Sherpa, Buildings & Housing Minister Sanjit Kharel [also the patron of the tournament], Salghari Zoom MLA Sunita Gazmer [also a Patron], Political Secretary to the CM Jacob Khaling [Patron], Zilla Adhyaksha South Tshering Dem Bhutia and a host of State Government officials, members of organising

committee and local gentry.

The inaugural match was played between Sikkim Youth Club and Kalimpong VI which the former team won 5:4.

A total of 14 teams from Sikkim, Kalimpong, Darjeeling, Shillong, Kolkata, Punjab and also from Nepal and Bhutan are taking part in the tournament.

The chief guest, in his brief address, shared that the tournament was being organised after a gap of nearly five years in Jorethang and for this, the credit goes to Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang [Golay] for encouraging young footballers to participate in the tournament.

He added that the State Government has

given priority to sports and other activities as sports can aid today's youth in making them physically fit and mentally sound.

SDFA general secretary Pavitra Manav informed that the final match is scheduled for 19 January coinciding with the concluding day of Jorethang Maghey Sankranti Mela.

The tournament is being telecast live through Facebook and screens have been installed at MG Lane and the playground gallery.

The theme song of South District Football Association was also released by the chief guest today.

Nedup Lepcha, goalkeeper of Sikkim Youth Club, was adjudged as the 'Hero of the Match' and presented with a cash award of Rs 10,000.

SummitTIMES IN NEPALI

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2019 was satisfying for publishers, non-fiction titles dominate

ZAFRI MUDASSER NOFIL

NEW DELHI, JAN 5 (PTI): For publishers in India, 2019 was a satisfying year in terms of the books they brought out and the success they had in reaching out to readers and commercially as well.

The year was also gratifying for many publishing houses as it brought national and international acclaim for a number of their authors.

Summing up the year, HarperCollins India (HCI) CEO Ananth Padmanabhan says, "We continued to buck the trend and grow faster than the market. Our new books, what we call the front list, grew at a high double digit and our back list held its ground in a year when the market saw a few troughs."

HCI also had two major publishing partnerships with Juggernaut Books and Harvard University Press

to exclusive represent their sales and distribution.

"HarperCollins is also uniquely positioned in India as a publisher in the education space under the Collins Learning imprint and in 2019 our growth trajectory continued as we increased our reach into schools significantly and our textbooks are now being taught in over 5000 schools," Padmanabhan told PTI.

The year saw many authors of HCI and their books win awards across fiction, nonfiction, business and children's - JCB, Atta Galatta, TATA Lit Live, Gaja Capital, Prabha Khaitan, Sushila Devi, BICW, IBBY Honours and the Gourmand Cookbook Award. "It has also been a year of extraordinary debuts across genres - several astonishing new voices, including, amongst them, Madhuri Vijay whose 'The Far Field' was also the most celebrated fiction

of the year, going on to win the JCB prize and the Tata Lit Live prize," the HCI CEO says.

MLEE Ashwarya, Publisher (Ebury Publishing and Vintage Publishing), Penguin Random House India, says 2019 was a very eventful year in terms of politics, social issues, environment and the young India finding its voice.

"This had a direct impact on our publishing list, and we published timely, topical and new voices in fiction and non-fiction. We had the best election list, war/hero stories, lifestyle books and popular as well as literary fiction," she says.

"I would say we learnt to understand better what the readers want to read and how we can get the best books in the formats they would like to read them be it audio, ebook or physical," she adds.

Rupa Publications MD Kapish

Mehra says at Rupa Aleph, they had the opportunity to publish many successful titles in the non-fiction space in 2019.

"Ranging from 'The Hindu Way' by Shashi Tharoor (Aleph), 'Reset' by Subramanian Swamy (Rupa), 'RSS for the 21st Century' (Rupa), 'Blue Lotus' (Aleph), it was a year that was dominated by non-fiction writing which was spread across the spectrum ranging from politics to philosophy to religion to self help. It was a well-rounded publishing programme," he says.

Publisher and Editor in Chief Hachette India Poulomi Chatterjee says the house had a terrific year of wonderful books and great results across the adults' and children's lists. "In the adult non-fiction segments we've had tremendous success with the inspirational and standout autobiographies of Viswa-

nathan Anand and India's first blade-runner Major D P Singh as well as two popular books on specific areas of India's history - Archana Garodia Gupta's 'The Women Who Ruled India' and Subhadra Sengupta's 'Mahal', she says. "We've kept abreast with analysis and commentary on hot-topic debates with Gautam Das's award-winning 'Jobonomics' on India's unemployment crisis, Sanjoy Chakravorty's 'The Truth about Us: Politics and Information from Manu to Modi' and Pavan Lal's incisive study of white-collar crime in 'Flawed', on the rise and fall of India's diamond mogul Nirav Modi," she says.

Hachette's food narratives were in the spotlight again - Saeed Koranne-Khandekar's 'Pangat' on Marathi culture and food (which also won the CNT Excellence in Food Writing Award), Anoothi Vishal's 'Busi-

ness on a Platter', an incisive look at the restaurant business in India, and Sadaf Hussain's 'Daastan-e-Dastarkhan' on Muslim cuisine from across the country - received all-round praise, Chatterjee says.

"We've always been champions of debut fiction writers and this year has been no different. In our selective and small fiction list we've had the privilege to publish Dhairini Bhaskar's very accomplished 'These, Our Bodies Possessed by Light' and Varun Mathew's cutting political satire 'The Black Dwarves of the Good Little Bay'," she says.

According to Chatterjee, science fiction and fantasy is a genre Hachette has been focusing on building because there is such a massively talented pool of writers out there, and great stories for every reader to enjoy.

turn pg 2

Maha portfolios: Ajit Pawar gets Finance, Anil Deshmukh Home

MUMBAI, JAN 5 (PTI): Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and senior NCP leader Ajit Pawar has got the finance and planning department while party colleague Anil Deshmukh is the state's new Home minister, a senior official said on Sunday.

Besides, first-time Shiv Sena MLA Aaditya Thackeray, who is the son of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, has been given charge of the environment, tourism and protocol departments, he said.

Senior Congress leader Balasaheb Thorat has got the revenue ministry while his party colleague and former chief minister Ashok Chavan got the Public Works Department (PWD)- excluding public undertakings, the official added.

NCP's former leader of opposition in state Legislative Council Dhananjay Munde has got the social justice department while party leader Jitenra Awhad has been given housing.

With this allocation of portfolios, the Sharad Pawar- led NCP has got most of the 'plum' ministries.

There were speculations that either Ajit Pawar or Jayant Patil of the NCP would get the Home department, but the portfolio has been allocated to their party colleague Anil Deshmukh, the MLA from Katol in Nagpur district of Vidarbha.

The chief minister has kept the general administration department (GAD), information and technology, and law and judiciary departments with himself.

The urban development department has been allocated to Shiv Sena's Eknath Shinde, who will also hold charge of PWD (public undertakings).

Senior Shiv Sena leader Subhash Desai has got industries and mineral departments, while party leader Anil Parab got the transport and parliamentary affairs departments.

Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari on Sunday approved the list of portfolios as proposed by the chief minister, a Raj Bhavan spokesperson earlier said.

The list of portfolios to be allocated to ministers was sent to the governor on Saturday evening.

Among the NCP ministers, Chhagan Bhujbal got the food and civil supplies, and consumer protection departments, Nawab Malik- minority development, Waqf Board, skill development and entrepreneurship, Dilip Walse Patil- Excise and labour, Jayant Patil- water resources development and command area development, and Rajendra Shingane- food and drug administration (FDA).

Besides, NCP's Rajesh Tope has been allocated public health

and family welfare departments, Hasan Mushrif- rural development, and Balasaheb Patil- cooperation and marketing.

From the Shiv Sena, Dadaji Bhuse has got agriculture and ex-servicemen welfare departments, Sandipan Bhumare- EGS and horticulture, Gulabrao Patil- water supply and sanitation, Sanjay Rathod- forest, relief and rehabilitation, and disaster management, and Uday Samant- higher and technical education.

Among the Congress ministers, Yashomati Thakur has been allocated women and child development department, Varsha Gaikwad- school education department, Sunil Kedar- animal husbandry and dairy development, youth and sports welfare, Vijay Wadettiwar- OBC welfare and salt land development, Amit Deshmukh- medical education and culture, K C Padvi- tribal development, and Aslam Shaikh- textile, fisheries and port development.

Besides, Cabinet minister Shankarrao Gadakh (Independent MLA) got soil and water conservation department.

Among Ministers of State (MoS) from the NCP, Dattatray Bharne has got PWD, forest, animal husbandry and GAD, Sanjay Bansode- environment, drinking water and sanitation, Prajakt Tanpure- urban

development, power, tribal development, and Aditi Tatkare- industries, tourism, horticulture and sports.

Shiv Sena's MoS Shambhuraj Desai got Home-rural, finance and planning, and Excise, while Abdul Sattar got revenue, rural development, port and salt land development.

Among the Congress' MoS, Vishwajeet Kadam got cooperation and agriculture departments, while Satej Patil got Home-urban, transport, IT and ex-servicemen welfare.

Besides, MoS Rajendra Yadravkar (Independent MLA) has got medical education, public health and family welfare, while Bachchu Kadu (also Independent legislator) got water resources department, school education and OBC welfare.

The Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi government, comprising the Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress, had been facing criticism from the opposition BJP for delay in the allocation of portfolios despite being in power for over a month now.

Shiv Sena president Uddhav Thackeray was sworn-in as chief minister on November 28 along with six ministers, two each from his party, NCP and Congress.

The Cabinet was expanded on December 30 with the induction of 36 ministers.

Cold wave conditions to intensify in Odisha



BHUBANESWAR, JAN 5 (PTI): Cold wave conditions are likely to intensify in Odisha from Monday with dense fog set to envelop many parts of the state for the next two days, the Meteorological centre here said in a bulletin on Sunday.

There will be gradual fall of minimum temperature by 4 to 5 degrees Celsius in most parts of the state from Monday, the bulletin said.

While minimum night temperature is likely to drop, maximum day

temperature will remain below normal for the next couple of days in the state, where several areas experienced light to moderate rainfall during the last two days, it said.

People in Odisha experienced slight respite from the biting cold as minimum temperature across the state remained above 10 degrees Celsius on Sunday.

The Met centre said dense fog is likely to prevail at one or two places over the districts

of North Coastal Odisha, Angul, Sundergarh, Keonjhar, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Khurdha and Puri on Monday and Tuesday.

Similarly, light rain or thundershower is likely to occur at one or two places in the districts of Sundergarh, Keonjhar, Sambalpur, Bargarh, Jharsuguda, and Nuapada on January 8, it said, adding light to moderate rain or thunder shower may occur at one or two places in the state.

With the IMD predicting intense cold for the next few days, the Odisha government has asked the district collectors to take steps to save people from harsh weather and paddy from rains.

As paddy cultivation has been severely damaged in several coastal areas, the district collectors have been asked to make an assessment and submit reports on the crop loss due to unseasonal rains, said a senior official.

From 'free Netflix subs' to 'hot chats', how dubious accounts are enticing Twitter users into calling pro-CAA toll free number

NEW DELHI, 05 JAN: From offers of "100 percent guaranteed" jobs to promises of free Netflix subscriptions and mobile internet data to discounts on premium watches and private hot chats, several accounts on Twitter are asking users into sending missed calls to the BJP's toll-free number launched two days ago to register people's endorsement for the contentious Citizenship Amendment Act 2019.

A quick search of the toll-free number "8866288662", which was launched by the BJP on Thursday, lists out several such messages from Twitter users asking people to sending missed calls to

the number.

One Twitter user @kapilverma73, citing sources, goes on to tell people that (Prime Minister Narendra) "Modiji would deposit Rs 15 lakhs to their account if they send missed call to 8866288662. "Paisa turant aapke khathe mein (the money will come immediately to your account," the user adds.

Another Twitter user @snehal_ind who joined the social media platform in March 2019 promises free Netflix subscription for 6 months to first 100 callers to the number CAA support number 8866288662.

Netflix responded to this particular tweet:

"This is absolutely fare. If you want free Netflix please use someone else's account like the rest of us."

Some Twitters users also falsely stated that the toll-free number is a platform for people to register their support against the CAA. Some Twitters users also falsely stated that the toll-free number is a platform for people to register their support against the CAA.

Twitter user @caprashantg shared screenshots of several of these users who have misled people to giving missed call to the pro-CAA number. Some of those tweets have been deleted. As part of a programme to mobilise support for the

Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the BJP had launched the toll-free number on Thursday for people to give missed calls to register their endorsement of the law ahead of the party's 10-day mass contact drive from 5 January. BJP general secretary Anil Jain told PTI that the toll-free number will allow people to register their support for the amended citizenship law, which seeks to grant citizenship to minorities from three neighbouring countries who arrived in India by 31 December, 2014, due to religious persecution. The number is part of BJP's 10-day national campaign between 5 to 15 January to garner support for CAA.

BJP leader duped in online banking fraud

NAGPUR, DEC 5 (PTI): Unidentified fraudsters withdrew Rs 75,000 from a local BJP's leader's bank account after making him download some mobile apps and share confidential information, the police said here on Sunday.

Chandan Tulsigiri Goswami (53), media-in-charge of the

city BJP, said in his complaint that he had taken a loan of Rs 4.40 lakh from Bajaj Finance.

After paying off the loan, he asked the company to refund him Rs 10,000 deducted on account of insurance. He exchanged several emails with the company over the issue.

On September 12 last year, a man posing as an officer of Bajaj Finance called him and asked him to download 'AnyDesk' mobile app to get back his money.

Goswami installed it and also downloaded MobiKwik app and sent five rupees to the caller through the app, as per the instructions.

Within minutes, Rs 75,000 were withdrawn from his account, he found.

After scrutinising his complaint, a case of cheating under IPC section 420 and relevant sections of the Information Technology Act was registered at Lakadganj police station on Saturday, a police official said.

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2019 was satisfying for publishers...

"We started 2019 with the hugely acclaimed 'The Gollancz Book of South Asian Science Fiction' featuring known writers in the genre and new voices as well, and followed that up with a stellar collection of fantasy stories by 14 women writers in 'Magical Women' and another volume by Hugo and Nebula award-winner S B Divya titled 'Contingency Plans for the Apocalypse,'" she says.

Pan Macmillan MD Rajdeep Mukherjee says 2019 was a significant year during which it published some notable nonfiction and fiction in India and also globally. The story of Sunanda Pushkar, biography of Flipkart, Naguib Mahfouz's unpublished stories, Simon Taufel's professional guidance and "52 Red Pills" by Eika and Siddharth Banerjee were some of the highlights of Pan Macmillan

On the international front, it came out with Jeffrey Archer's "Nothing Ventured", "Moment of Lift" by Melinda Gates, "Permanent Record" by Edward Snowden and Elton John's memoir "Me" among other books.

Juggernaut publisher Chiki Sarkar says it had a "range of big hits which included Rajat Gupta, 'Early Indians', and the new book by Nobel Prize winners Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Dufflo. We are now at break even in print. On the digital side we have a subscription number of 30,000 and our beta launch of Airtel books has been a success which we are ramping up in 2020".

Bloomsbury India says it saw significant growth in 2019.

"In trade books, we have grown 35 per cent and in academic books we have grown 30 per cent from 2018. Our major trade titles were 'The Anarchy' (William Dalrymple), 'City of Girls' (Elizabeth Gilbert) and 'Amit Shah and the March of BJP' (Anirban Ganguly and Shiwanand Dwivedi)," says Yogesh Sharma, senior VP of Bloomsbury India.

"Bloomsbury India, in fact is the only publisher which has reflected CAGR OF 25 per cent year on year. Our financial year is from March to February. Academic segment showed growth of 54 per cent and digital touched 34 per cent. The best selling segment has been drama and fashion," he says.

For Speaking Tiger, 2019 was a year of prizes and shortlists.

Writer-journalist Shanta Gokhale won the TATA Lifetime Achievement Award for her memoir "One Foot on the Ground: A Life Told Through the Body", while Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's novella "My Father's Garden" was shortlisted for the JCB Prize and his children's book "Jwala Kumar and the Gift of Fire" for the Crossword Book Award shortlist, along with another Talking Cub title - Bijal Vachirajani's "A Cloud Called Bhura", which talks about climate change.

"Prizes apart, we did some significant works in non-fiction, among the most notable were Purushottam Agrawal's 'Who is Bharat Mata? On History, Culture and the Idea of India - Writings on and by Jawaharlal Nehru', and Nandita Haksar's 'Kuknalim: Naga Armed Resistance' - both works that addressed important issues facing the country today," says Speaking Tiger Publisher Ravi Singh.

"Upamanyu Chatterjee had a new offering for his dedicated band of readers - his first collection of short stories, 'The Assassination of Indira Gandhi - Collected Works' - and we also published 'The Fate of Butterflies' by Nayantara Sahgal. And our surprise debut was classical vocalist Shubha Mudgal's first collection of short stories 'Looking for Miss Sargam,'" he says.

Roli Books also said 2019 was another interesting year as it published a number of books across varied subjects from current affairs, biography, cookbooks to true crime.

"Some standout successes were 'The Mughal Feast - Recipes from the Emperor Shah Jahan', which was called 'a rare documentation' and has been a super commercial success, and 'Black Warrant: Confessions of a Tihar Jailer' by Sunil Gupta and Sunetra Choudhury," says Priya Kapoor, editorial director at Roli Books.

"We also had some real success with selling subsidiary rights, notably AV rights for our books across the front list and back list with 10 deals signed and a number others under negotiation," she says.

Palimpsest CEO Bhaskar Roy says for the publishing house, fiction occupied as much space as non-fiction.

"There were compelling novels and equally assertive works by historians as well. Palimpsest was active on both fronts and came home with laurels. Feminist writer Selina Hossain's 'Charcoal Portrait' is about a war child, adopted by a German couple at a medical camp after the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War.

"We ended the year with journalist Nirmalya Banerjee's 'The Buddha and the Borders', a well-researched account of the long lama trail in the eastern Himalayas. The author traces the footsteps of faith through places like Bhutan, Nepal, Sikkim, Kalimpong, Shillong and Tawang," he says.

2019 was full of optimism for Niyogi Books, says Trisha Niyogi.

"We brought out around 60 English and 10 Hindi books and also initiated a new project for publishing children's literature. A number of our books of perennial interest had to be reprinted. To cap it all, we sold rights of a few of our books in Japanese, Chinese and other languages," she says.

For Simon & Schuster India, 2019 was a mixed bag as non-fiction did well, as has been the case the past few years in the subcontinent, says its Senior Commissioning Editor Sayantan Ghosh. One of the top books it published was "Celestial Bodies" by Jokha Alharthi, the first Omani novel to ever win the Man Booker International Prize.

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LAND FOR SALE

A land measuring an area for 50x32 1/2 at Roadside just below housing colony is for sale. It is just a one minute walking distance from Namchi bazaar taxi stand. Interested party may contact 9593373387 and 9434406761

Search begins for ‘Prince of Football’

GANGTOK, 05 JAN [IPR]: Sports & Youth Affairs Minister, Kunga Nima Lepcha, inaugurated a winter football coaching camp here at Paljor Stadium for “Search of Prince of Football Talent Hunt.”

Bhaichung Bhutia along with Secretary, SYA, Kuber Bhandari, Director [SYA], NK Pradhan, departmental coaches and parents of children participating in the camp were also present for the inauguration.

The programme is being organized in collaboration with BhaichungBhutia.

Under the programme, under-15 and under-13 teams from the districts will be prepared and state



level teams formed. The state level teams will be taken on exposure trips to Delhi. A ‘Prince of Football’ will be chosen in each age-group and provided exposure trips to Europe by Bhaichung Bhutia. Winter coaching camps for football and other sports and games are underway at all the four districts. The Department has appealed to parents and interested youngsters to take advantage of this opportunity and join the coaching facilities.

8 states finalise action plan for agri export policy: Govt

NEW DELHI, JAN 5 (PTI): The government on Sunday said eight states, including Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Karnataka, have finalised action plan for agriculture export policy which aims to double such exports.

“The Agri Export Policy was announced last year with an objective of doubling the export and ensuring doubling of farmers’ income...Many states have nominated nodal agency and nodal officer. Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Nagaland, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Punjab and Karnataka have finalised the State Action Plan

and other states are at different stages of finalization of the action plan,” the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said in a statement.

The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) has been adopting a focused approach for ensuring greater involvement of the state governments for effective implementation of Agri Export Policy (AEP).

Throughout the year APEDA held a series of meetings with state government officials and other stakeholders for preparation of state action

plan which included all essential components like production clusters, capacity building, infrastructure and logistics and research and development and budget requirements for the implementation of AEP, it said.

Several rounds of discussions were held with the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare, Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying, Ministry of Food Processing Industries and other agencies for seeking inputs for formulating a strategy to increase exports and address the existing bottlenecks in the trade.

State level monitoring committees have been formed in many of the states. Cluster visits have been made by APEDA nodal officers to the product clusters, it added.

The roadmap for cluster development in the clusters notified under AEP was prepared to address the identified interventions during the cluster visits.

“As a result of cluster visits by APEDA, the cluster level committee has been constituted in the states viz. potato in Punjab, isabgol in Rajasthan, pomegranate, orange and grapes in Maharashtra

and banana in Tamil Nadu,” the statement said.

APEDA organised a number of seminars and meetings for the implementation of AEP throughout the year.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the National Cooperative Development Corporation to include co-operatives for active role in AEP.

A Farmer Connect Portal has also been set up by APEDA on its website for providing a platform for Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and Farmer Producer Companies to interact with exporters, it said.

Women chauffeurs drive change, one ride at a time

TRISHA MUKHERJEE
NEW DELHI, JAN 5 (PTI): Determined to be the drivers of their lives, a growing number of women are traversing a tough road to empowerment by becoming professional chauffeurs -- of cars, two-wheelers and even buses.

Driven by financial need and sometimes to just look for fresh career opportunities, the women are cutting through gender barriers to ensure they steer the course of their lives, and also stay the course.

And sometimes they script stories of remarkable resilience and liberation.

professional driver told PTI with pride.

She has been working with Uber for four years and drives on multiple routes between Gurgaon and Noida, managing to make nearly Rs 2,000 everyday.

“I am happy the difficult days are behind me. But, more importantly, I am extremely proud of having overcome my own fears,” the 43-year-old said.

Stories like Gulesh’s are, however, just the beginning, the first steps towards changing the scenario -- one statistic at a time.

city phenomenon. Women in smaller towns are also beginning to ‘drive’ the path towards change.

In West Bengal’s Durgapur town, Sushmita Dutta is defying convention by driving people on a Honda Activa two-wheeler.

The 42-year-old has been a partner driver with Indian transportation network company Ola for the last three months.

A company spokesperson said they had witnessed a significant increase in the number of women fleet operators over the last few years across four, three and two-wheelers.

There are no precise numbers for exactly how many professional women drivers there are with both Ola and Uber declining to give details.

Contributing to the cause of making the country safer for women, while providing livelihoods for resource-poor women in the country is Delhi-based NGO Azad foundation.

Under its ‘Women on Wheels’ programme, the foundation aims to empower women with minimal economic and social capital to become professional drivers.

and currently drives bus number 392 that plies between Dhaura Kuan and Noida Sector 62.

Saritha, who was earlier a luxury car chauffeur with Azad Foundation, said four years of driving a heavy vehicle has started taking a toll on her health. And with her income depending on the number of kilometres she drives daily, she barely manages to make enough to support herself and her ageing parents back home.

But she doesn’t want to quit yet.

“The work with the foundation was more comfortable, and perhaps I will eventually go back to work there. But, it isn’t time yet. I feel if I quit, people will say I couldn’t handle the pressure because I am a woman.

According to the Road Transport Yearbook for 2015-16 (the latest such report brought out by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways), women counted for only 1.5 crore of the over 16 crore valid drivers’ licences issued across the country as on March 31, 2016.

Of these 1.5 crore women, only 17.73 per cent drive professionally.

No wonder Waled Aadnan was “pleasantly surprised” when he found a woman driving him on one of his Uber rides.

“I was pleasantly surprised to begin with. That only gave way to an appreciation of how truly path-breaking her role in society is, she is changing perceptions of gender roles with every ride, meeting myriad people and challenging deep-seated beliefs,” the 28-year-old risk analyst said.

This is not just a big

Like Gulesh Chauhan, a driver with ride-hailing company Uber, who found herself at the crossroads after her husband passed away in 2007.

The woman, who had never stepped out in public without a veil, did not just have to cope with her loss but also the pressure of supporting herself and her then nine-year old son.

She said she struggled to make ends meet for five years with menial jobs at neighbourhood departmental stores. And then in 2012, her mother and son advised her to drive a car and turned her life around.

“I cannot express in words how it feels. For the longest time I had never even sat beside a man except my husband, and now I drive young men and women around dropping them to their destinations,” the now

Susmitha Alva from the foundation said it has trained at least 2,000 women to become professional drivers since its inception in 2008. It has employed 1,000 of them at their sister for-profit organisation Sakha Consulting Wings Private Limited that provides “safe transport solutions for women by women”.

“More than 400 women trained by Azad Foundation that we know of are currently practising as professional drivers in the cities where we work (Delhi NCR, Jaipur and Kolkata),” she said.

V Saritha from a remote village in Telangana is one of them.

Having trained and worked at Azad Foundation for nearly five years, she is the first and the only woman bus driver with Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC).

The 36-year-old has been with the bus service provider since 2015,

“Also four years back when I joined DTC, I opened a door for women to be part of this world. I don’t want to close that door. I will leave when more women join here,” Saritha said.

Safety is an issue.

While many women customers feel safe when they see a woman chauffeur them around, women drivers also need to be made secure.

“Besides imparting the training to drive a car, the foundation also trains the women to address technical glitches with the vehicle on the road. To ensure their safety, we have collaborated with the Delhi Police to train them in self-defence,” Susmitha from the Foundation said.

Painting workshop begins at Manan Bhavan



GANGTOK, 05 JAN [IPR]: A 4-day painting workshop organised by the North East Zonal Cultural Centre in collaboration with Culture Department commenced today.

Art enthusiasts from all over state gathered at Manan Bhavan braving the cold weather to participate in the workshop

which will continue till 08 January.

Renowned artist, and president of Oviya Art Circle, Deepa Rai, speaking at the inaugural function, thanked the Culture Department, GoS, and NEZCC for facilitating such a platform for art enthusiasts to assemble and work together.

“Such initiatives facilitate the artists to showcase their creativity, interact and encourage budding artists to open their talents for economic ventures,” she commented.

The workshop was inaugurated by Deputy Director, Culture Department.

Bihar will carry out NPR updation from May 15-28: Sushil Modi

PATNA, JAN 5 (PTI): Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Sushil Kumar Modi has said the updation process of the National Population Register (NPR) will be carried out in the state from May 15 to May 28 this year, notwithstanding the West Bengal and Kerala governments’ decision to put the exercise on hold in their respective states.

The senior Bihar BJP leader also said administrative and punitive action would be taken against officials if they refuse to carry out the constitution mandated NPR.

“The NPR process in 2020 will be carried out between April 1 to September 30 in the country. In Bihar it will be done between May 15 and May 28, 2020,” Sushil Modi told reporters on Saturday.

The statement assumes significance as Kerala Chief Minister P Vijayan has written to 11 non-BJP chief ministers, including his Bihar counterpart Nitish Kumar, citing a resolution passed by the state demanding scrapping of the amend-

ed Citizenship Act and asking them to take similar steps against the contentious legislation.

Nitish Kumar is running a coalition government in the state with the BJP.

“Kerala has decided to address the apprehensions about NRC that preparations of NPR (National Population Register) will lead to NRC by staying all activities relating to NPR in the

state,” Vijayan, the lone Left Chief Minister in the country, said in the letter.

The Bihar cm, who has already said no to National Register of Citizens (NRC) in the state, has not spoken anything on the NPR so far. Addressing the press conference on Saturday, Sushil Modi said the process of preparing NPR began in 2010 during the UPA regime which was completed between April 1 to September 30 that year.



VILLAGE ADMINISTRATIVE CENTRE
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Ref. No. 366/ E/VA/1A

Date: 26/12/19

NOTICE

This is to inform all that the nine days theater workshop cum acting course is going to be held at Gram Prashasan Kendra for age between 08-18 years old under CHILD FRIENDLY GPU from 4th to 12th January 2020.

Interested participants may apply for registration.



DATE: 03-01-2020
FIRST ROUND OF THE TOURNAMENT (SOUTH- WEST)
VENUES: NAMCHI SINGITHANG PLAYGROUND AND DENTAM PUBLIC PLAYGROUND

FIXTURE- II
Venue: Namchi Singithang Playground (South District Constituencies)

Tumin Lingee

6/1/2020; 1:30 PM

Melli

8/1/2020; 11:30 AM

Namchi Singithang

7/1/2020; 11:30 AM

Rangang Yangang

Burfung

6/1/2020; 11:30 AM

Temi Namping

8/1/2020; 1:30 PM

Namthang Rateypani

7/1/2020; 1:30 PM

Poklok Kamrang

E

F

Venue: Dentam Public Playground (West District Constituencies)

Rinchenpong

6/1/2020; 11:30 AM

Salghari Zoom

8/1/2020; 1:30 PM

Yoksam Tashiding

7/1/2020; 1:30 PM

Yangthang

Gyalshing Bernyak

6/1/2020; 1:30 PM

Daramdin

8/1/2020 11:30 AM

Maneybong Dentam

7/1/2020; 11:30 AM

Soreng Chakung

G

H

Note:

- The first round matches will be played at Namchi Singithang and Dentam Public ground for South & West constituencies respectively.
- The duration of the matches will be 35-10-35 minutes
- Matches will be played as per FIFA Rules
- Organizing committee reserve the right to reschedule the fixture (if required)
- Every player should show their Voter ID Card at the time of Technical check up (if player is under 18 years than Aadhar Card)
- Each Team should submit one constituency flag (6x4 feet) during registration.

Pending Issues

Difficult Delhi or poor follow-up?

Any time the Chief Minister or other leaders, whether from the government or outside of it, visit Delhi and call on Ministers and leaders there, they submit memorandums which reiterate a substantial list of “pending issues” with the Centre.

The list of demands has remained unchanged for a while, and this not because Sikkim is unimaginative, but because the demands have remained pending and hence continue to be petitioned for. Delhi has acquiesced to Sikkim’s demands/ requests in too piecemeal a fashion – IT exemption for the Sikkimese and ST status for Limboos and Tamangs – are the only major demands that have been granted in a long while now, and these too after too many years of dithering and delaying. The list of demands and its follow-up has been so static that one does not even need to await an official communiqué any more before putting out a report on what Delhi was reminded about and received a patient hearing. That is how routine the pending nature of Sikkim’s demands has become!

One understands that the wheels turn slow in Delhi, and now that the current dispensation in office there is trying to reinvent the wheel itself, Sikkim will need to learn afresh how to get things moving in the Capital. But even as Sikkim and its representatives try and find their way around the new Delhi, a question that still needs to be asked is why Sikkim needs to keep returning to Delhi with “pending issues”. At one level, the reason is simple - because Delhi needs to constantly be reminded about them since concerns of a State that sends only one MP each to the two Houses of Parliament are rarely a priority. There is nothing that Sikkim can do about that “tyranny” of slim representation. But there must be more reasons behind Delhi’s easy amnesia on Sikkim’s pending issues, for one the possible fact that Sikkim still does not have officers diligent enough to follow up on proposals which have even the PMO’s backing. Once the politicians raise a demand with Central leaders and the same gets forwarded to the respective ministries, the bureaucracy comes into play and the files start moving. Files don’t however move if there is no one pursuing them, and experience bears out that Sikkim officials rarely do so. What is worse, sometimes, they don’t even respond to queries from the Centre. There have been enough instances even in the recent past when recalcitrance has underlined follow-up from Sikkim’s departments.

Sikkim should have figured out by now that Delhi lacks the capacity and the time to figure out Sikkim’s “issues”. Most of the pending issues, however, need to be resolved by Delhi which lobs the ball back to Sikkim’s court and expects a neatly packed and formatted solution to be recommended by Sikkim for enforcement by Delhi. In complicated matters, the State also needs to provide the supporting arguments and watertight justifications and a ready-reckoner on Sikkim’s special status and the leeway it allows. For more routine issues, sometimes it is as simple as placing the right proposal on the right table. Since this is clearly not happening as fluidly and as professionally as is required for new demands to be framed (since the old have been granted), what else can the elected representatives do but keep trooping down to Delhi to raise issues that are still pending even after everyone has cleared them in principle?

Sikkim needs a bureaucratic machinery at home to troop through the doors that its leaders open in Delhi. Till that happens, an annual Delhi pilgrimage with a dusted list of pending demands will remain and constant feature.

WRITE US:

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

Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

With the US and Iran on the brink of war, the dangers of Trump’s policy of going it alone become clear

KLAUS W. LARRES

THECONVERSATION.COM

President Donald Trump’s policy toward Iran is in deep crisis. The president’s approach has the support neither of America’s allies nor of its strategic rivals, China and Russia. And his policy – made even more confrontational by the shooting of a high-ranking Iranian official – has boxed him into a situation where, short of dramatic reversal, Washington and Tehran are edging close to war.

By failing to forge policies in cooperation with allies, the U.S. was robbed of advice and expertise in how to tackle the problems posed by Iran. Above all, it led to the dangerous deterioration of relations between the U.S. and Iran after the U.S. became the sole country to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal. That deal was painstakingly negotiated by the Obama administration in cooperation with five other world powers.

Instead of Trump’s harsh policy imposing maximum pressure on Iran, Iran has turned the tables and has put pressure on a freshly impeached U.S. president whose reelection is by no means assured and whose international diplomatic isolation and weakness is no secret in the region.

And once again, Trump took unilateral action early on Friday morning. The killings of Iran’s revered and powerful military commander, General Qassem Soleimani, and Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in a U.S. drone strike on Baghdad airport has further escalated tension in the region.

The killings immediately caused huge anti-American protests in Iran and led to the rise of global oil prices

and the fall of stock markets around the world.

Iran has vowed “harsh revenge” for the assassination of Soleimani, the strategic mastermind behind Tehran’s entire ambitious Middle East policy. He also coordinated Iran’s widespread covert operations program and provided much of the strategic expertise for President Bashar Assad’s war in Syria.

WISHFUL THINKING?

Since coming to office in January 2017, President Trump’s approach to resolve America’s longstanding quarrel with Iran has consisted of two stages.

The politics of maximum pressure – imposing stiff economic sanctions – combined with harsh rhetoric toward Tehran’s leaders was to be followed by a second stage of intense personal diplomacy that would culminate in the signing of a great new deal of cooperation with longtime enemy Iran.

It would turn Trump into one of America’s greatest foreign policy presidents and might even, or so he hoped, earn him a Nobel Peace Prize.

As an international relations scholar and former diplomatic and foreign policy adviser at the German embassy in Beijing, I believe this approach consisted of a lot of wishful thinking.

Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei simply refused to engage with Washington on the conditions laid down by Trump. Those conditions included Iran halting all uranium enrichment and ceasing support for the region’s militant groups.

TABLES TURNED

Trump’s unorthodox idea – conducting the nation’s diplomacy sin-

glehandedly and without asking for much advice from experts in the State Department or from his allies – has been revealed as untenable.

Trump’s withdrawal from the 2015 multi-party nuclear deal with Iran was caused by his unhappiness that the deal was not meant to restrain Iran’s aggressive politics in the region. Trump also believed it would not effectively prevent Tehran’s ability to manufacture nuclear weapons in the long run.

But his policy toward Iran appears not to have contained and intimidated the country’s leaders. It has instead emboldened the country to aggressively challenge U.S. policies in the Middle East.

U.S. withdrawal from the deal was deeply resented by both Iran and the international community. And it started the rapid deterioration of relations with Tehran.

The recent siege of the U.S. embassy in Baghdad by violent protesters who were clearly directed by the Tehran regime recalled the Iranian hostage crisis 40 years ago that decisively contributed to President Jimmy Carter’s electoral defeat.

The shooting down of an expensive American drone by Iran in June as well as Tehran’s open support of the Assad regime in Syria and the Hezbollah terrorist organization in Lebanon were further indications of Iran’s challenge to the U.S.

It appears that Trump’s airstrike on the Baghdad airport was an attempt to demonstrate America’s power and to break out of a largely self-inflicted foreign policy failure.

NEW TACK

I believe that President

Trump’s diplomacy toward Iran requires urgent course corrections.

The only option left – and one not yet seriously considered by the Trump administration – is to fall back on cooperation with other great powers, not least with Washington’s many allies, such as the U.K., France and Germany, who are still anxious for American global leadership. The Trump administration has little option but to return to the Obama-era nuclear deal with Iran, though perhaps it could be somewhat modified to enable Trump to save face.

The administration could then embark on a unified Western policy to restrain both Iranian leadership ambitions in the Middle East and Tehran’s nuclear ambitions.

The killing of Soleimani and the angry reaction to his death, however, has made this almost impossible in the short run. But tempers may cool.

Despite recent joint Russian-Chinese-Iranian naval maneuvers, Moscow and Beijing are also still interested in containing Iranian ambitions. Iranian dominance in the Middle East and the resulting further tension and escalating rivalry with Saudi Arabia for regional control would hardly benefit the great powers and the stability of the region.

Whether or not the Trump administration is capable of and willing to embark on such a major change of course is unclear. But I believe it is the only way out of a crisis largely caused by Trump’s unilateral policies.

[the writer is Richard M. Krasno Distinguished Professor; Adjunct Professor of the Curriculum in Peace, War and Defense, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill]

Why more couples are choosing to live apart



SIMON DUNCAN

THECONVERSATION.COM

For many couples, moving in together signifies a big step in the relationship. Traditionally, this meant marriage, although nowadays most cohabit before getting married, or splitting up. But there is a third choice: living apart together.

Not only is it surprisingly common, but living apart together is increasingly seen as a new and better way for modern couples to live. Surveys have previously suggested that around 10% of adults in Western Europe, the US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia live apart together, while up to a quarter of people in Britain statistically defined as “single” actually have an intimate partner – they just live somewhere else.

Living apart together supposedly gives people all the advantages of autonomy – doing what you want in your own space, maintaining preexisting local arrangements and friendships – as well as the pleasures of intimacy with a partner. Some even see it as “subverting gendered norms” – or at least that women can escape traditional divisions of labour.

But our research shows a darker motivation – people can end up living apart because they feel anxious, vulnerable, even fearful about living with a partner. And, despite living apart together, women still often continue to perform traditional roles.

STAYING SEPARATE

While some who live apart have long distance relationships, most live near one another, even in the same street, and are together much of the time. Nearly all are in constant contact through text, Facebook, Facetime and other messaging platforms. And virtually all expect monogamous fidelity.

Surveys show three different types of couples who live apart together. First are those who feel it is “too early”, or who are “not ready” to live together yet -- mostly young people who see cohabitation as the next stage in their lives. Then there are the

couples who do actually want to live together but are prevented from doing so. They can’t afford a joint house, or a partner has a job somewhere else, or can’t get a visa, or is in prison or a care home. Sometimes family opposition, for example to a partner of a different religion, is just too intense.

Third is a “preference” group who choose to live apart together over the long term. These are mostly older people who have been married or cohabited before. It is this group that are supposed to use living apart to create new and better way of living.

FEARS AND THREATS

Our research, however, based on a nationwide survey supplemented by 50 in-depth interviews, points to a different story for many “preference” couples. Rather than seeking a new and better form of relationship through living apart together, the ideal remained a “proper” family -- cohabitation, marriage and a family home. But respondents often feared this ideal in practice, and so “chose” to live apart as the best way to deal with these fears while still keeping a relationship. Often they had been deeply hurt in previous cohabiting relationships, financially as well as emotionally. Some women experienced abuse. As Michelle* explained: “I don’t want to lose everything in my house, I don’t want to be possessed, I don’t, and I don’t want to be beaten up, by someone who’s meant to love me.”

Not surprisingly, Michelle had “built a very solid brick wall” with her current partner. It was living apart that maintained this wall. Another respondent, Graham, had experienced an “incredibly stressful time” after separation from his wife, with “nowhere to live and no real resources or anything”. So living apart was a “sort of self-preservation”.

Current partners could also be a problem. Wendy had lived with her partner, but found that “when he drinks he’s not a nice person ... He was abusive both to me and my

son”.

Living apart together was the solution. Maggie was repelled by her partner’s “hardcore” green lifestyle: his lack of washing, sporadic toilet flushing, and no central heating (which she needed for medical reasons). She also felt her partner looked down on her as intellectually inferior. So living apart together was “the next best thing” to her ideal of conjugal marriage.

Some men found the very idea of living with women threatening. For Ben, “not a big commitment merchant”, living apart together was at least “safe”. And several men in the study hoped to find more “compliant” partners abroad. Daniel, whose current, much younger, partner lived in Romania, explained how his “whole universe was blown apart” by divorce. And how he felt that “females in England ... seem to want everything straight off in my opinion – I just didn’t want to communicate with English women at all.”

Given these fears, worries and aversions, why do these people stay with their partners at all? The answer is a desire for love and intimacy. As Wendy said:

“I do love him...[and] I would love to be with him, if he was the person that he is when he’s not drinking.”

Maggie told us how she “really loved” her partner and how they had “set up an agreement” whereby “if I do your cooking and your washing and ironing can you take me out once a month and pay for me”. Even Gemma, who thought living apart together gave her power in the relationship, found herself in “wife mode” and did “all his washing and cooking”.

For some people, then, choosing to live apart is not about finding a new or better form of intimacy. Rather living apart is a reaction to vulnerability, anxiety, even fear – it offers protection.

*names have been changed.

[the writer is Emeritus Professor in Social Policy, University of Bradford]

India condemns ‘targeted killing’ of Sikh community member in Pakistan’s Peshawar

NEW DELHI, JAN 5 (PTI): India on Sunday strongly condemned the “targeted killing” of a minority Sikh community member in Pakistan’s Peshawar. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said Pakistan should stop “prevaricating” and take immediate action to apprehend and give exemplary punishment to the perpetrators of the crime.

“India strongly condemns the targeted killing of minority Sikh community member in Peshawar that follows the recent despicable vandalism and desecration of the holy Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan at Nanka-



na Sahib and the unresolved case of abduction, forced conversion and marriage of a Sikh girl Jagjit Kaur,” the MEA said.

It said the government of Pakistan should act in defence of their

own minorities instead of “preaching sermons” about it to other countries.

India had on Friday strongly condemned vandalism at the revered Gurdwara Nankana Sahib in Pakistan and called

upon the neighbouring country to take immediate steps to ensure the safety and security of the Sikh community there.

The External Affairs Ministry said members of the minority Sikh community in Pakistan have

been subjected to acts of violence at the holy city of Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak Dev.

The MEA said these reprehensible actions followed the forcible abduction and conversion of a Sikh girl who was kidnapped from her home in the city of Nankana Sahib in August last year.

According to media reports, a mob attack took place at the shrine where the Sikhism founder Guru Nanak Dev was born.

Reports suggested that hundreds of angry residents at Nankana Sahib pelted the Sikh pilgrims with stones on Friday.

Bardhaman station building collapse: One injured dies



KOLKATA, JAN 5 (PTI): One of the two persons injured when a portion of the Bardhaman Railway Station building in West Bengal collapsed, died on Sunday, an official said.

A portion of the two-storeyed station building of Bardhaman collapsed on Saturday evening.

“One of the two injured persons who were taken to the Bardhaman Medical College and Hospital, succumbed to his injuries,” state minister Swapan Debnath said.

“The person who was critically injured died at the hospital at around 2.35 am,” Bardhaman Medical College and Hos-

pital deputy super Dr Amitava Saha told PTI.

The identity of the deceased person has not been ascertained, Saha said.

According to officials, construction and repair work was underway at the century-old station building, nearly 100 km from Kolkata.

Bhitarkanika reopens for tourists after ten-day break

Kendrapara (Odisha), Jan 5 (PTI): BHITARKANIKA NATIONAL PARK IN ODISHA’S KENDRAPARA DISTRICT REOPENED FOR TOURISTS ON SUNDAY AFTER REMAINING closed for ten days for the annual census of the estuarine crocodiles, a senior forest official said.

The national park receives around one lakh tourists every year, the official said.

“The restriction on the visitors was imposed to prevent noise pollution during the headcount exercise of the reptiles in Bhitarkanika,” divisional forest officer of Rajnagar Mangrove (Wildlife), Bikash Ranjan Das said.

The national park was closed for the annual census of the estuarine crocodiles from December 26, 2019 to January 4, 2020.

“We are ready to host



domestic and international tourists after a ten-day break,” he said.

At least 1,757 salt-water crocodiles including albino species were counted this year along the water-bodies of Mahanadi deltaic region while the census figure, recorded last year, stood at 1,742, Das said.

Bhitarkanika National Park has reestablished

itself as country’s lone habitation corridor for albino estuarine crocodiles, according to the latest findings.

“There are large habitats for saltwater crocodiles in Sundarbans in West Bengal and large mangrove wetlands in the Andaman Islands, but those cannot match density and population of crocodile available in

Bhitarkanika,” crocodile researcher Dr. Sudhakar Kar said.

The crocodile conservation programme was launched way back in 1975 and then, two white crocodiles had been counted in the Bhitarkanika water bodies, he said.

“Albino species were also earlier sighted in the past years. However we

are apprehensive of their mortality rate. As they have been re-sighted, the brackish water bodies of the national park have emerged as favourable habitation for white crocodiles,” he said.

Das said visitors are required to submit identity-proof for entering the national park.

Boat journey along the mangrove-covered water bodies is a major attraction for tourists. On any given day, 350-400 tourists make voyage on water bodies by boats and there would be no compromise on the safety aspect, forest officials said.

The private boats which are devoid of life jackets and other safety gadgets for tourists are barred from operating, they said.

The boats and vessels owned by the department are all armed with safety equipment, they added.

Odisha, Chennaiyin look to close gap with top-four

BHUBANESWAR, JAN 5 (PTI): Odisha FC are all set to take on Chennaiyin FC in what is a crucial Hero Indian Super League (ISL) encounter for both sides at the Kalinga Stadium here on Monday.

A win against Chennaiyin FC can take Odisha to within a point of fourth-placed Mumbai City FC. And with the league entering a decisive phase, Josep Gombau’s side cannot afford a slip-up.

Chennaiyin FC are also at a stage where anything other than three points could render the gap between them and the top four clubs too much to cut down. They are currently eighth on the table with nine points but a win will see them draw level with Odisha who are sixth.

For all the emphasis on the possession-based philosophy that Gombau advocates, results have been a mixed bag for his team. However, they are coming off a 2-1 win over Jamshedpur and will look to continue their form.

But Gombau must

fix his side’s vulnerability on set-pieces. Odisha have scored the joint lowest amount of goals from set-pieces this season so far (2).

A more troublesome stat for the coach is on the defensive. Out of the 15 goals they have conceded, 7 of them have come from set-pieces (most by any team). The likes of Carlos Delgado have to marshall the backline better.

Odisha have also had trouble closing out games. They generally tend to perform better in the first half before running out of steam in the second.

Of the 13 goals they have scored, only five have come in the second half of games and 10 out of the 15 goals they have shipped have been in the second half. The Odisha think-tank must figure out the reason behind this trend and find a remedy soon enough.

“We have created a lot of chances, creating crosses. Of course, we have to score more goals. Going forward we have to be confident. Defensively



we have to improve.

“It is not that we are conceding many goals. Under coach Josep Gombau we are trying to improve on our loopholes. Next match we will go for a win,” said Jacobo Varela, Odisha FC’s assistant coach.

The big worry for Chennaiyin FC will be the inability to string a couple of wins together. They have just two wins in nine games and are yet to win consecutive ISL games since the start of last season.

The visitors are yet to keep a clean sheet under Owen Coyle, who has been

in charge for three games. The inconsistent displays from the likes of Lucian Goian have not helped. Thankfully, Eli Sabia returns after suspension for Coyle.

“Whether we are playing at home or away, we treat matches in the same manner. If we don’t do that it takes away from our strengths. We have great respect for Odisha but if we change our philosophy it will be detrimental. We have some great goal scorers.

“We were the lowest-scoring team initially but when I came in suddenly we scored seven goals in three matches. We have to be positive

against Odisha,” said Coyle.

Chennaiyin’s attack will most definitely revolve around Rafael Crivellaro. The Brazilian playmaker has been exceptional in the last three games under Coyle.

He was involved in four goals in these three games and has created 21 chances in the season so far, second only to FC Goa’s Brandon Fernandes.

Chennaiyin are yet to win away from home this season and Monday will be the perfect time to get one. For Odisha, the sights will be set on a second consecutive win at the Kalinga Stadium.

FIR against SP in Assam for sexually harassing police officer’s daughter

GUWAHATI, JAN 5 (PTI): An FIR has been registered against the Superintendent of Police of a hill district in Assam under the POCSO Act on the charge of sexually harassing a minor daughter of another senior police officer during a new year party. The SP threw the

party on December 31 in which a senior lady police official went with her teenage daughter, sources said on Sunday.

The IPS officer allegedly sexually harassed the teenager in an inebriated condition inside a room of his official bungalow at the district

headquarter town.

The girl’s mother, who is a senior Assam Police Services officer, lodged a complaint along with her daughter at the All Women Police Station and “a case was registered on January 3 under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenc-

es (POCSO) Act,” a police source said.

The girl’s statement has already been recorded but whether the SP has been questioned is not yet clear.

At the Crime & Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) website, the status of the FIR

has been blocked with a message, “Case considered to be sensitive, cannot be displayed.”

CCTNS is a project of the central government for creating a comprehensive and integrated system for effective policing through e-governance.

Stalin greets Mamata Banerjee on her birthday

CHENNAI, JAN 5 (PTI): DMK President M K Stalin on Sunday greeted West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on her 65th birthday.

The Leader of Opposition in Tamil Nadu Assembly took to twitter to greet the Trinamool Con-

gress top leader.

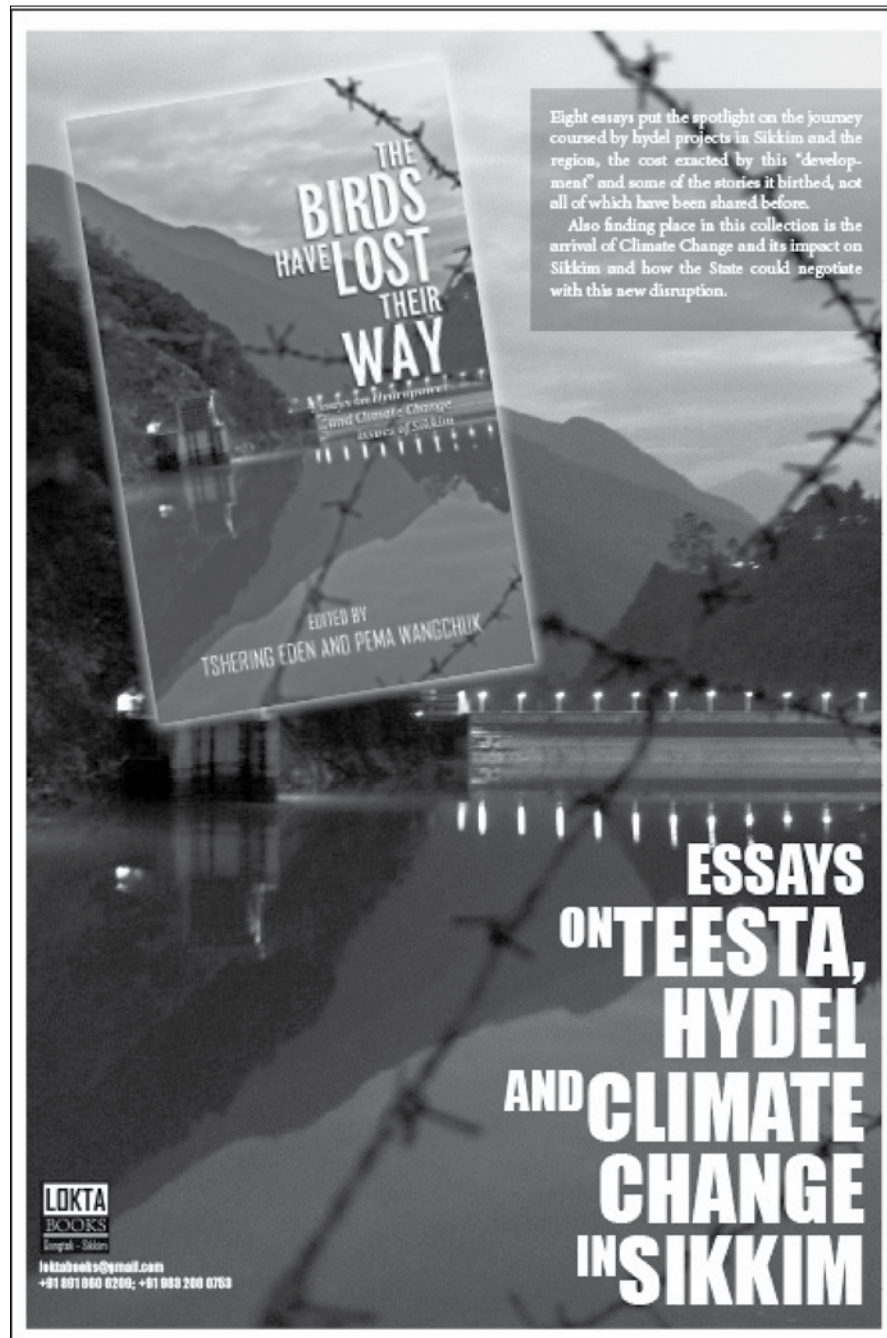
He said, “Many happy returns of the day to Hon’ble Chief Minister of West Bengal “Didi” @MamataOfficial.

On behalf of the DMK, I wish you many more years of service to the people of West Bengal

and India.”

Stalin shares a good rapport with Banerjee and he has attended Trinamool Congress-led Opposition rally in West Bengal last year.

Also, Banerjee had attended a DMK event here in August, 2019.



Wolves stalemate shows Manchester United lack their old fear factor

JONATHAN WILSON
THEGUARDIAN

"You're not famous any more," sang the home fans in the Jack Hayward Stand, but that isn't really true. Manchester United are still famous, it's just not for the same thing any more. Once, as Steve Bull observed at half-time, Wolves would have feared United, but no longer. There was at least a semblance of pattern here, at least until they got into the final third, but unless they get an early goal and can counter, United rarely look like blowing opponents away.

Once United wore red shirts that for more than 100 years had symbolised passion and attacking flair, a club that believed in doing things the right way. Here they wore black with orange detail, because they are a brand, far more adept at selling merchandise and growing their social media following than any of that dull 20th-century stuff like putting together a football team.

Once they were renowned for their astuteness in signing and promoting youth, a facet always near the surface when they meet Wolves, given how they enticed Duncan Edwards from the Midlands. Perhaps it's because they've promoted youth so successfully that the youths are now the players they rest for Cup games, but here it was Wolves' youngsters, Pedro Neto in particular, who looked the more promising. Not that there was a huge amount of promise on either side. This was not a good game, one of those disjointed occasions that so often characterise the early rounds of the Cup when both teams field half-and-half sides.

Although there were seven changes from the United team that lost so dismally at Arsenal on Wednesday, the sense was of a team selected with the aim of protecting Marcus Rashford and Aaron Wan-Bissaka, both of whom began on the bench. In the end, Rashford had to be called upon with 21 minutes remaining. He hit the bar immediately but that was a rare opportunity in another drab display.

It says much for the abject way in which United's squad has been put together that the decision to rest Fred, coupled with the injuries to Paul Pogba and Scott McTominay, left them fielding both Nemanja Matic and Juan Mata in midfield. That might have been a reasonable prospect at Chelsea at the beginning of the last decade – although Mata's time at the club came between Matic's two spells there – but here it felt a little like using a Nokia 3310 in an era of smartphones. Sure, it can make a call, or ghost a free-kick just wide, but the result, hardly surprisingly, was that whenever a Wolves player got a run at them – and with Adama Traoré, Neto and the 21-year-old Benny Ashley-Seal, Wolves had plenty of runners – there was danger.

Who will be the Premier League's winners and losers this season?

BARRY GLENDENNING
THEGUARDIAN

CAN ANYONE STOP LIVERPOOL?

In a word: no. Jürgen Klopp's side have succeeded in making a total mockery of any notion that their apparently relentless march to a first league title in 30 years might be derailed by fixture congestion either side of Christmas.

Much was made of the fact that they were scheduled to play a grueling 13 games in 40 days across four competitions between 23 November and 5 January but, with just one – Sunday's FA Cup tie against Everton – left to go, they have taken maximum points from the nine Premier League games they contested during that period.

Liverpool lead their nearest rivals, Leicester, whom they demolished on Boxing Day, by 13 points with a game in hand. They have proved similarly impervious to injuries to key personnel such as Fabinho, Joël Matip and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain and, even if their current form turns out to be unsustainable, it seems utterly inconceivable that they



might suffer the kind of collapse that would allow a rival in full flight to remain anything other than a speck in their rearview mirror.

WHO WILL FINISH IN THE TOP FOUR?

In the absence of anything resembling a close title race, the battle for the three remaining Champions League spots should provide some excitement and drama near the Premier League summit.

Leicester and Manchester City have put enough daylight between themselves and the chasing posse to suggest they will occupy two of the berths available, but the chase for fourth spot

looks to be between Chelsea, Manchester United, Tottenham and Wolves.

It is Chelsea's to lose as they are in the box seat but, like their nearest rivals, they are dogged by inconsistency. Although Frank Lampard's side have not strung back-to-back league wins together since the first week of November, their grip on fourth has barely been loosened but a winning streak from any of the teams behind them would prompt some serious jitters.

Still fewer than 10 points off the pace for fourth with a little under half the season to go, a reinvigorated Arsenal under the new manage-

ment of Mikel Arteta might still fancy their chances of swooping with a sustained challenge while a place in the Europa League would have been beyond the wildest dreams of fans of Crystal Palace and Sheffield United before the season commenced.

IS ANY MID-TABLE SIDE SAFE FROM THE DROP?

Seventh on Christmas Day in 1995, Norwich ended up being relegated and that should prove a cautionary tale for any team outside the current top six suffering delusions of adequacy.

This time last season Brighton were 10 points clear of the relegation

zone but still needed to rely on the charity and shortcomings of others to finish just above the thick black line. Of the current top 10 Crystal Palace look most vulnerable to an admittedly unlikely collapse.

Beyond that nobody is safe but fans of Everton, Southampton, Brighton and West Ham have various reasons to be confident of survival.

Newcastle, in 13th, have just lost three matches in a row and, with their treatment room stuffed to the gun-wales, find themselves on a slide that shows no sign of being arrested any time soon.

Mike Ashley, their

famously parsimonious owner, may have to dig deep this month if he is to keep them in the top flight for yet another season fraught with the now traditional peril, disillusionment and rancour. Considering the return he has got from his summer outlay, even a January splurge might not be enough to save his team.

WHO WILL GET RELEGATED?

Only three teams in the Premier League's 27 full seasons – West Brom, Sunderland and Leicester – have been bottom of the table on Christmas Day and avoided relegation but after steering the Foxes to unlikely survival in 2015 Nigel Pearson looks set fair to repeat the feat with Watford.

Installed as the club's third manager of the season in early December, he masterminded three wins out of four over the festive period, lifting the club off the foot of the table on Boxing Day and providing genuine hope to the denizens of Vicarage Road.

Norwich, the new bottom side, urgently need to start converting home leads into wins if they are to have any chance of extending their

stay in the top flight.

Dogged by injuries, a porous defence and out-of-form strikers, Bournemouth have taken only four points from the past 30 available and look destined for the drop after five years punching above their weight.

WHO WILL WIN THE GOLDEN BOOT?

Last season's competition ended in a three-way tie between Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, Sadio Mané and Mohamed Salah on 22 each, a tally that looks likely to be beaten by the most prolific striker this time.

A rank outsider before the season started, Jamie Vardy has 17 goals to his name already and is four clear of Danny Ings, who has been banging them in for a Southampton side that had until recently been struggling.

After an astonishing streak of 11 goals in eight games, Vardy has endured a comparative drought, scoring just one in four before missing Leicester's past two matches. Level with Ings, Aubameyang seems likely to make even more hay while the sun is shining over the Emirates following the arrival of Arteta.

Takumi Minamino set to show Jürgen Klopp he is more than a handyman

NICK AMES
THEGUARDIAN

It was no ordinary afternoon's browsing for anybody passing through Osaka's Komagawa shopping street on 13 January 2014. The main thoroughfare had come to a standstill and on one side a long stretch of punters stood with arms reaching out in preparation to meet a special guest. Soon enough Takumi Minamino, wearing his full Cerezo Osaka get-up and pursued at close quarters by an anxious-looking man wielding a clipboard, advanced past each one, slapping their hands in the process. He stopped just short of the end as a loud buzzer went off and eventually his feat was confirmed: Minamino had broken the Guinness world record for high-fives given in one minute, his total of 187 beating the previous tally by 16. The framed certificate he received shortly afterwards was, at that point, one of the more notable garlands afforded to a footballer who had not yet played 50 first-team games.

If nothing else the achievement showcased Minamino's fast reactions and, on Sunday afternoon, Anfield should have a chance to appreciate them in the world champions' colours for the first time. The former Red Bull Salzburg forward is likely to make his debut against Everton and events have certainly moved quickly since, three months ago, he moved Jürgen Klopp into what might have been a knowing grimace when executing a superb volley at his future home. Liverpool had been on Minamino's case since well before then but it does him no harm that, in both Champions League group stage fixtures, a persuasive argument could be made that he was the best player on the pitch.

One reason for the buzz of anticipation about his arrival is that his talents – best seen in slick turns, magnetic ball control, cute through-passes and laser-like finishing with

both feet – lend themselves well to YouTube compilations. But another is that those eye-catching showings in front of his new public went a step further. They showed he can make an immediate impact and operate with the intoxicating blend of creativity and relentless physicality that sets this Liverpool side apart: a consequence of the Red Bull finishing school's industry-leading commitment to intense counter pressing. The question, now, is exactly what part he will play in Klopp's short- and longer-term thinking.

"I have a little time to think about where he will fit in," Klopp said after his signing was confirmed last month, referencing the fact Minamino was not eligible to play until New Year's Day. During his four years in Salzburg he occupied virtually every conceivable attacking position, with a bias towards a variant of the No 10 role. Liverpool are relatively light in that particular area but for the next few months Klopp may decide to use him as relief for any of Mohamed Salah, Roberto Firmino and Sadio Mané, particularly for league games once the title has become a formality and regaining the Champions League becomes their focus in the spring.

But the likelihood is that Minamino, who turns 25 a week on Thursday, will prove too good – or too ambitious – for permanent utility-man status. When Japanese media tracked down Levir Culpi, who gave the then 17-year-old his debut for Cerezo in November 2012, the Brazilian coach stressed the need for Minamino to become "an absolute regular, not a handyman" at Liverpool and suggested he should aim to succeed Firmino in the centre-forward position. Minamino can be "a more determined player" than Firmino, Culpi said, and there is certainly logic in the idea that his legs should still be fresh in 18 months' time, when Firmino will be pushing 30.

In biting cold, Mohun Bagan beat Real Kashmir 2-0

SRINAGAR, JAN 5 (PTI) There was bone-chilling cold. Then there was a Real Kashmir outfit used to such extreme conditions but Mohun Bagan still, making light of both, won their I-League match 2-0 here on Sunday.

After a barren first half, Joseba Beitia (71st minute) and Nongdamba Naorem (73rd) scored for the Kolkata giants in a span of two minutes, shattering the hopes of home fans.

It was a chilly morning, with the temperature dipping to 1 degree, but 11,500 Kashmiri spectators still enthusiastically watched the game against one of India's biggest and oldest clubs.

For tickets, they queued up since 9 o'clock in the morning, but quite a few of them still could not make it to the ground. Such was the craze.

The game started at 11.30 am at the TRC ground because of biting cold, but the harsh weather conditions failed to stop the visitors from showing their skills.

The green and maroons had the lion's share of possession and more shots on target but the home side had more attempts and five more corners in a game which could have gone either way.

Mohun Bagan coach Kibu Vicuna started with newly-signed Senegalese striker Baba Diawara and brought in Dhanachandra Singh in the backline.

Scotsman David Robertson, the RKFC coach, however, preferred the same starting XI that won against reigning champions Chennai City



in the previous game.

The visitors were strong from the starting whistle and notched up as many as three corners in the space of first six minutes.

Talented winger Nongdamba Naorem had his first chance of the game, in the 22nd minute, but his left-footer from inside the Kashmir box failed to cause any problem for goalkeeper Phurba Lachempa.

Both sides got golden chances to score but the first half remained goal-less.

In the second half, while Bagan continued to dominate possession, the home side had better scoring chances in the opening 20 minutes.

Bazie had a shot on the turn from deep inside the Bagan box in the 49th minute but the effort sailed over the crossbar.

Then, Sankar Roy made the save of the game in the 65th minute to deny Mason Robert-

son, who attempted an header from close off a Higginbottom set piece.

By now, Kashmir had thrown in Ivorian striker Gnohere Krizo in the mix and had stepped up their attacks. However, it was the visitors from Kolkata who turned the match on its head within a space of two minutes.

First, off a long Dhanachandra Singh throw from the right-flank, Daniel Cyrus somehow managed to deflect the ball in the path of an onrushing Beitia.

Beitia positioned his body perfectly to meet the loose ball with a right-footed jab, which powered its way through to the Kashmir net. The ball went in off the keeper and Bagan were 1-0 ahead.

A couple of minutes later, another young Bagan talent S K Sahil showed outstanding vision and

found substitute P M Britto down that same flank with a wonderful through ball.

Britto rushed in to clear and floated the ball back in. Naorem, who had an outstanding game, was at the end of this one and blasted a perfectly-connected volley into the back of the net to hand Bagan a 2-0 lead.

Kashmir did make valiant attempts to come back and Love-day Okechukwu missed their best chance with less than five minutes to go. Krizo, too, had an attempt from close, but to no avail. RKFC co-founder Sandeep Chattoo said, "Definitely Mohan Bagan played a good game but I am quite confident that RKFC won hearts of its fans in Kashmir. Every match is lesson for us to improve further and I am sure we have learnt our lessons."

Robertson also ex-

pressed his thoughts and opined, "We played a good game. We lost our focus for five minutes against a team like Mohun Bagan and they capitalised on it. It's just these fine margins of football. I am just disappointed."

Mohun Bagan have 10 points from five games, while Kashmir dropped to eighth spot with five points from four games.

Mohun Bagan coach Vicuna expressed his joy and said, "We won against a tough opponent, but it was not our best match. Real Kashmir were going with their set piece, but we played better football against Churchill brothers."

"Today we played good football, and coped with the difficulties of conditions."

The Mariners will next host Indian Arrows on January 9 while the Snow Leopards will host Punjab FC one day later.

his third code of conduct breach in the past 18 months.

"The behaviour in this matter falls short of the standards we expect and we have acted accordingly," Sean Carroll, Cricket Australia's head of integrity and security said of the Stoinis fine.

Stoinis fined for homophobic slur during Big Bash League

MELBOURNE, JAN 5 (AFP): Australian all-rounder Marcus Stoinis was Sunday slapped with a hefty fine after directing a homophobic slur at Kane Richardson during a domestic Twenty20 Big Bash League game.

The Melbourne Stars player apologised af-

ter being found guilty of breaching Cricket Australia's code of conduct and penalised AUD 7,500 (USD 5,200). "I got caught in the moment and took it too far," Stoinis said of the incident during the clash with cross-town rivals Melbourne Renegades on Saturday. "I realised

immediately I was in the wrong and I apologise to Kane and to the umpires.

"I did the wrong thing and accept responsibility for my actions. The standards are there for a reason and I accept the penalty." The incident comes six weeks after fast bowler James Pattinson, current-

ly playing for Australia in the third Test against New Zealand in Sydney, was banned for player abuse, also reportedly a homophobic slur.

His penalty -- a one-match suspension which ruled him out of the first Test against Pakistan -- was harsher as it was

‘Many lives have been lost’: five-month internet blackout plunges Kashmir into crisis

HANNAH ELLIS-PETERSEN
THE GUARDIAN

For many in Kashmir, it has been more than 150 days of agony. The internet blackout which was imposed on the disputed Himalayan region by the Indian government in August is now the longest on record, and has left people's lives, jobs and the economy in tattered ruins. It has also, according to doctors, cost lives; how many, they say they will never know.

For Imran Hafeez, a 43-year-old doctor with nearly two decades' experience as an intervention cardiologist, it has meant watching the devastating demise of his revolutionary and lifesaving initiative, Save Heart Kashmir.

In Kashmir, where mountainous terrain and archaic road networks mean travel can often take days, patients suffering from cardiac emergencies often don't have access to specialist doctors or major hospitals in time. But through a volunteer network, 1,200 doctors across the region were connected to each other through four groups on WhatsApp, the instant internet messaging app, where they shared reports of cardiac emergencies and sought instant diagnosis.

"It was the best virtual hospital and doctors were united by WhatsApp. It was a wonderful initiative," said Hafeez, proudly recounting one of their cases, where a young man in a remote mountainous region was

displaying sinking blood pressure and severe chest pain and quickly slipping towards an imminent death. The medic attending to the man posted a message on the group and, several hundreds of miles away, Hafeez instantly recognised that the man was having a heart attack.

"Hit him quickly," Hafeez wrote to Sheen, the medic who had sent the patient's ECG from remote Ladakh. "Get two IV access. Start Thrombolysis. And another (IV) give 20ml Bolus NS. Don't waste time." Ninety minutes later, the young man was stable and conscious.

Over the 500 days it was running, the group operated round the clock and analysed 38,700 ECGs, handled 19,395 cases and administered thrombolysis 778 times to clear blocked veins. That was until 5 August, when an indefinite internet suspension was imposed upon the region and, five months on, shows no sign of being lifted.

"All is gone ... this is so depressing," said Hafeez. "We definitely saved lives and it was going very well until everything broke down. I don't know how many patients we have lost, but patient care has definitely suffered."

The decision by the Indian government, led by prime minister Narendra Modi, to revoke Jammu and Kashmir's constitutional autonomy and split it into two territories under the control of



the federal government – bringing an end to seven decades of semi-autonomous rule – was followed by a series of militaristic measures.

Tens of thousands of troops moved in, former chief ministers, legislators and separatist leaders were detained, curfews and travel restriction were imposed and all communication methods, including phone access to the internet, was cut off. While the crackdown has eased, many restrictions remain and seven million people in Kashmir are without the internet.

The administration, which has suspended internet services by invoking sections of the British colonial era Indian Telegraph Act of 1885, defended the blackout by arguing that "provocative and instigating material was posted from the internet connections and Twitter handles and other social media sites".

It is now the longest internet shutdown ever

imposed in a democracy. It is also becoming what civil society groups and freedom of expression activists have called a "worrying trend" by the BJP government, where, at the first sign of unrest, they block the internet almost instantly, as has been seen recently when a wave of protests swept across India opposing a new citizenship bill seen as discriminatory to Muslims. In the past month, shutdowns were imposed in areas of Assam, across the whole of India's most populous state Uttar Pradesh, and, for the first time, in the capital, Delhi.

Indeed, India now holds the inglorious title of being the internet shutdown capital of the world, and last year it shut off the internet a record 106 times. It is not only damaging to freedom of expression but an economically costly tool of repression: Indian mobile operators lose about 24.5 million rupees (£270,000) in reve-

nue every hour they are forced to suspend internet services.

"According to law, an internet shutdown can only be imposed if there's a public safety precaution or a public emergency, but unfortunately these two words are not defined in any legislation of India," said Radhika Jhalani, a fellow at SFLC.in, an advocacy group that has tracked internet shutdowns in India since 2012.

"Every time the government feels there will be civil unrest, rather than dealing with it through democratic means or addressing the root causes, they shut down the internet because it's the easiest thing to do. It's been three days into 2020 and we already have two internet shutdowns."

Jhalani also pointed out that several recent studies found that it is a myth that internet shutdowns curb unrest; instead they often contribute to a rise in turmoil.

The impact of the shutdown in Kashmir has proved calamitous to the economy, crushing innovation in the region and leading to a mass exodus of young people in search of new jobs. Each morning, hundreds squeeze on to the train that travels out of Kashmir's capital, Srinagar, locally dubbed the "internet express", desperately getting out of the region to carry out basic admin, register for law and medical entrance exams, contact family and find new employment miles away from home.

Shayan Nabi was once the proud owner of a small start-up company, Harmukh Technologies. The company, which ran online advertisement campaigns for domestic and foreign clients was among the many casualties of the blockade as business was impossible without internet access.

"It is depressing to be jobless. I want to go home, but then what will I tell my family?" Nabi,

30, asked as he searched for future options in New Delhi, 500 miles away, joining a wave of disenfranchised Kashmiri youths forced to leave their homes over the past five months.

"I left a bank job for this, I dropped out of MBA for this, because I wanted to do something of my own," said Nabi. "But more than being angry I feel helplessness: what can I be angry about and against whom?"

The toll has not only been economic. A software programmer working in a Srinagar-based tech company, which had relocated for several months to the southern Indian city of Bangalore after its internet lifeline was snapped, described the experience as an "emotional hell". "We had no contact with our families and even our families had no information if we are alive or not," he said.

It is unclear when the Indian government intends to allow full in-

ternet access in the region. Some IT companies have been given access but under stringent restrictions, including complete government monitoring of their activity and a ban on social media sites. This week, SMS services were restored, and 80 government hospitals were given access, although there are more than 1,000 private hospitals and medical facilities still unable to connect to the internet, which doctors say has severely affected treatment and access to medicines for patients.

Sheikh Ashiq, president of the eight-decade-old Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said the losses incurred by the region due to the internet shutdown are estimated to be well over £1bn. "Let me explain this: tourism is entirely dependent on internet and who will come to a place without internet for leisure tourism?" said Ashiq, who said thousands of artisans and weavers had been left without work as connections with their foreign clients had been severed and they could no longer sell their products online.

Ashiq described the current situation as "agony". "It's affected us badly," he added. "We live in a world with an internet-based economy and we live in a place where there's no internet. While people all over world over wished each other happy new year, we couldn't even send a simple text to anyone."

Australian Open delay valid if smoke haze worsens: Djokovic

BRISBANE, JAN 5 (AFP): Novak Djokovic said Australian Open organisers should consider delaying the first Grand Slam of the year if haze from bushfires raging around the country threatens players' health.

The opening major of 2020 is due to start at Melbourne Park on January 20 and the city was blanketed by smoke from blazes burning to the east on Saturday, compromising air quality.

Djokovic, president of the ATP players council, said in the early hours of Sunday that any delay would be a last resort, but it needed to be discussed.

"I mean, it's fair from you to say that (ask the question)," he said when pressed on the matter in Brisbane, where he is

playing for Serbia in the inaugural ATP Cup team event.

"Obviously, you have to always... because of some extreme weather and conditions, you just have to consider it.

"But I think that's probably the very, very last option for anything. I think they're going to try to do anything to not delay in terms of days and when it starts.

"I mean, and I understand why, but if it comes down to those conditions affecting the health of players, I think we should definitely consider it."

Catastrophic bushfires have been raging in Australia for weeks, leaving 24 dead and hundreds of properties destroyed.

Tennis officials last

week took the unprecedented decision to relocate the Canberra International -- an ATP Challenger 125 event and on the women's ITF World Tennis Tour, which serves as a stepping stone to the full tour.

They said play would not have been possible in the Australian capital which has been choked by smoke, with the tournament now due to start Monday at Bendigo in Victoria state.

Djokovic said he had experienced air quality issues at tournaments in China, but the bushfires had created an unprecedented situation.

The Serbian superstar said he not spoken to Tennis Australia chief Craig Tiley "but people from my team

have".

"They're obviously tracking the situation every single day as it's evolving and hopefully calming down with the smoke and fires," he said.

"I think they will, if it continues the same way and if the quality of air is affected... I think Tennis Australia probably will be forced to, I think, create some rules about it.

"I mean, it's tough for them because scheduling has to be respected in terms of play and the Australian Open starts at a certain time, so there's a lot of different things involved.

"But health is a concern for me and for anybody"

He said the ATP players' council was due to meet before the Australian Open and the issue would be on the agenda.

Imran Khan condemns Nankana Sahib incident, says it goes against his 'vision'

SAJJAD HUSSAIN

ISLAMABAD, JAN 5 (PTI): Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Sunday condemned the recent incident of vandalism at the Nankana Sahib, saying it goes against his "vision" and the government will show "zero tolerance" against those involved in it.

Gurdwara Nankana Sahib, also known as Gurdwara Janam Asthan, is a site near Lahore where the first Guru of Sikhs, Guru Nanak, was born.

According to media reports, a violent mob had attacked the Gurdwara and pelted it with stones on Friday. A team of police had to intervene briskly to control the situation.

Breaking his silence on the incident, Khan said that there is a "major difference between the condemnable Nankana incident and the ongoing attacks across India on Muslims and other minorities".

"The former is against my vision & will find zero tolerance & protection from the govt incl police & judiciary (sic)," he tweeted, referring to the Nankana Sahib incident.

Khan claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "vision supports minorities oppression and the targeted attacks against Muslims."

He also alleged that the Indian police, supported by the government, are leading attacks against Muslims.

India has strongly condemned vandalism at the revered Gurdwara and called upon the Pakistan government to take immediate steps to ensure the safety and security of the Sikh community there.

On Saturday, Indian leaders cutting across party lines and various outfits condemned the mob attack on the historic Gurdwara, terming it as "cowardly" and "shameful".

Hundreds of protesters thronged the streets near the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi demanding that Islamabad provide adequate security to Sikh shrines and community members there.

Shiromani Gurdwara

Parbhandhak Committee (SGPC), the apex body which manages Sikh shrines in India, said it will send a four-member delegation to Pakistan to take stock of the situation and urged the Pakistan government to take stringent action against the culprits who attacked the gurdwara - one of the holiest sites in Sikhism.

Pakistan's Foreign Office on Friday rejected the media reports that the Gurdwara Nanakana Sahib was desecrated in a mob attack, saying the birthplace of founder of Sikhism remains "untouched and undamaged" and the "claims of destruction" of one of the holiest Sikh shrines are "false".

EU chair Croatia votes in tight presidential runoff

ZAGREB, JAN 5 (AP): Voters in Croatia on Sunday cast ballots to choose a new president in a fiercely contested runoff race, with a liberal opposition candidate challenging the conservative incumbent while the country presides over the European Union during a crucial period.

Croatia took over the EU's rotating presidency on Jan. 1. for the first time since joining the bloc in 2013. This means that the EU's newest member state will be tasked with overseeing Britain's divorce from the union on Jan. 31 and the start of post-Brexit talks.

Sunday's runoff presidential vote is expected to be a very tight and unpredictable race.

It's being held because

none of the candidates won more than half of the votes in the first round on Dec. 22. Current President Kolinda Grabar Kitarovic is running for a second term, challenged by leftist former Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic.

Milanovic won slightly more votes than Grabar Kitarovic in the first round but analysts have warned there is no clear favorite in the runoff and that each vote counts.

There are 3.8 million voters in Croatia, a country of 4.2 million that is also a member of NATO.

The two candidates represent the two main political options in Croatia: Grabar Kitarovic is backed by the governing, conservative Croatian Democratic Union, a domi-

nating political force since the country split from the former Yugoslavia in 1991, while Milanovic enjoys support from the leftist Social Democrats and their liberal allies.

Even though the presidency is largely ceremonial in Croatia, Sunday's election is important as a test ahead of parliamentary elections expected later this year. Milanovic's victory over Grabar Kitarovic would rattle the conservative government during the crucial EU presidency and weaken its grip on power in an election year.

While starting out stronger, support for Grabar Kitarovic had been slashed following a series of gaffes in the election campaign.

The 51-year-old had a career in diplomacy and in NATO before becoming Croatia's first female president in 2015. Going into the runoff vote, Grabar Kitarovic evoked the Croatian unity during the 1991-95 war in a bid to attract far-right votes to her side.

The 53-year-old Milanovic is leading the struggling liberals' bid to regain clout in the predominantly right-leaning nation.

Prone to populist outbursts while prime minister, Milanovic lost popularity after the ouster of his government in 2016. He now says he has learned from the experience and matured. Milanovic has urged the voters to give him a chance to surprise them.

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Bigg Boss 13: Twitterati Support Asim Riaz After Salman Khan Calls Him ‘Disgusting’



MUMBAI, 05 JAN: Unhappy with Salman Khan lashing out at Bigg Boss 13 contestant Asim Riaz, twitterati came out in his support once again and trended the hashtag #ViewersChoiceAsim.

In yesterday's episode, host Salman Khan had bashed Asim Riaz, Rashami Desai and Sidharth Shukla for their misconduct inside the house. Asim was scolded for reacting to Sidharth's cry-baby comment by saying 'Tera Baap Hoga Cry Baby.'

Salman had then reprimanded Asim by asking whether or not he knows that Sidharth's dad is no more and his comment was disrespectful. He also called him 'aboslutely disgusting' and 'looking like a nag'.

This did not go down well with Asim's fan who called out the channel and Salman for being biased towards Sidharth as

he has abused Asim's father time and again in the show but never received any such backlash.

Taking it to Twitter, fans trended the hashtag #ViewersChoiceAsim to show their solidarity towards him.

Rashami Desai too was scolded for her remarks on camera men being biased and Sidhin a fit of rage Salman even asked her to leave the Bigg Boss house if she things she is being portrayed negatively on purpose. Sidharth Shukla too received an earful as Salman said that he crosses all limits when he is angry and becomes the true person that he is.

The episode also saw Ajay Devgn and Kajol coming on the set as part of promoting their upcoming movie Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior.

4.5-km long cake to be baked in Kerala on Jan 15

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JAN 5 (PTI): With an eye on entering the records books, chefs and bakers from across Kerala will come together at Thrissur on January 15 to bake a 4.5-km long cake.

At least 700 bakers and chefs drawn from 10,000 micro and small bakery units in the state will be participating in the endeavour in an attempt to beat the Guinness record held by China, P M Sankaran, President of the National Forum of Bakers, told PTI.

The cake, which will have a height and width of four inches, will be spread along the road side on tables and desks, and will have a common base and vanilla cream topping.

About 4,000 desks will be required for the purpose, he added.

China presently has the record of baking the longest cake -- 3.2 km in length which was prepared inside a hall, Sankaran said adding this was perhaps the first time the exercise, on such a massive scale, was being attempted in the open with thousands of people watching.

The cake making event, is being organised at the famous Thrissur ground and adjoining roads by the Bakers Association Kerala (BAKE), to coincide with the conclusion of the on-going day and night shopping festival there.

The attempt will also be to showcase their culinary skills in the open. It will be prepared within an hour from the launch of the programme in the afternoon in front of the general public, he said.

The bakers will ensure quality and hygiene in accordance with the organisation's motto "suchiyilode ruchi" (taste through hygiene).



The event is being coordinated by Kiran S Palakkal, Secretary, BAKE.

The cake will display God's Own Country's natural beauty through consumable photographs spread on it. No plastic or thermocol will be utilised in the cake making programme in consonance with Kerala government's policy of keeping plastic at bay to protect the environment.

According to local historians, the first cake in the country was baked by an Indian in the historic town of Thalassery in Kannur in north Kerala in 1883.

Taking cue from European settlers in the Malabar region of Kerala, Mampally Bappu, a local entrepreneur, is said to have baked the first cake using local ingredients in the coastal town. The first bakery also came up in Thalassery.

"Kerala may be the only place in the world which has around 20,000 bakery units", Sankaran said.

Mampally Bappu, who lived in Thalassery, was a visionary who introduced the exclusive taste of cakes to Indian foodies, he said.

Eva Mendes Gives the Classiest Response After Someone Calls Her Fashion ‘Ugly’

Keeping it classy!

Eva Mendes is known for her bold and bright fashion designs that she creates for her New York and Company line, so it's not unusual to see her showing off her latest and greatest on the 'Gram.

The 45-year-old star did exactly that on Saturday after sharing a fun and flirty purple patterned dress that she called her "favorite."

"I think I resemble a horse at times. It's not a bad thing. It just is. If I was an animal I'd clearly be a horse. Or a Shetland pony," she captioned her quick video on social media, which

also showed her smiling from ear-to-ear in the frilly piece.

Adding, "Anyway here I am horsing around in my new favorite dress. The Natalya dress. I LOVE THIS DRESS!!! Thank you @alejandroblando for creating this with me! Love love love this!"

However, not everyone was a fan of the design. "Dont like these designs you need a better Designer you to pretty for these ugly patterns," one person wrote underneath the actress' post.

However, it was Mendes' response that got even more people talking in the comment section.

Hailey Bieber Gets Brutally Honest About Social Media: ‘It Hurts to Be Torn Apart’

Hailey Bieber is baring her soul when it comes to how emotionally and mentally taxing social media can be.

On Friday, Jan. 3, the 23-year-old model took to Instagram to share a powerful message about the importance of "human connection" and the ways in which social media has hurt her in the past.

The model, and wife to Justin Bieber, started off by writing, "I would say my most favorite part of existing is human connection. I absolutely love connecting with other people, I love finding common interests between me and others, hearing people's story, I love laughing with others, and I love crying with others. I feel so very very deeply."

Consequently, "My heart explodes with happiness when my friends and family are happy and my heart feels crushed when they are hurting and sad. The reason I say all of this is: because I love to connect, I do my best to expose my heart which means I love freely and I empathize deeply, and because of that I also hurt very easily when I feel like people don't see my heart and see me for who I am."

Hailey then went on to write that the reason she was sharing this was because social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter



can be a "breeding ground for cruelty towards each other."

She went on to explain that when this type of behavior is going on, she doesn't feel that people are taking the "time to connect with each other on an honest level before they resort to hatred" and "it starts to damage what could be really beautiful human interaction and connection."

"It could sit here all day and say the hate doesn't bug me," she continued. "But NEWS FLASH: it hurts to be torn apart on the internet!!!"

ARIES: There's no such thing as TMI for you today, Aries. With the moon in your sign, you're in your live-out-loud element. Don't feel bad about being so...overt. Your bold authenticity will actually create a safe space in which others can open up. Own your past, Ram! Those "embarrassing" mishaps birthed golden lessons that you can pass on to others who are struggling with the same issues.

TAURUS: You're in an emo groove today, Taurus, so just go with it. This is one of those days when you'd benefit from setting aside that intense work ethic so you can bond with the people in your environment. Power down your laptop and go have lunch with a colleague. You could even have a chance to pass along some of your sage wisdom to someone who is struggling with an issue you've overcome. Reach up to mentors too, especially a powerful woman who's been in your corner in the past.

GEMINI: Lighten up about love today, Gemini. With the moon in your "the more the merrier" eleventh house, you could turn

that table for two into a table for six or eight. If your entourage has yet to meet your amour du jour, this would be the perfect day for a getting-to-know-you gathering. Single? Sparks could fly with a friend of a friend.

CANCER: Be more "purpose-driven" in your personal life today. People adore you, and there are plenty of friendships you COULD cultivate. But since each one requires an investment of time, you want to reserve your energy for folks who fill your cup—not a bunch of small-talking randos. Have you been loading up your calendar with "meh" events out of fear of being lonely?

LEO: Bigger, stronger, faster: Well, why not, Leo? Today's moon in your expansive ninth house could bring rapid expansion to one of your goals. Take your foot off the brake, but keep your hands on the wheel. You of all people know that progress CAN happen at supersonic speed. People from other parts of the globe could be involved, so get ready to fire up Skype or Zoom and brainstorm away! To accelerate the process, you might have to take a risk. Make sure it's a

calculated leap instead of an impulsive gamble.

VIRGO: Got secrets? One of those skeletons is rattling the closet door, begging to be freed. Time for a confessional conversation, Virgo—the truth will liberate your soul. Connect with a trusted confidante tonight, over the phone or huddled in a private corner. If you just want them to listen without offering advice, make that clear up-front.

LIBRA: Forget all those parental advisories about the dangers of talking to strangers. Today, your usual people-watching could erupt into a fascinating dialogue when you see someone at a coffee shop who's reading a book that changed your life or who's wearing an indie-label designer that only a few insiders know about.

SCORPIO: You're back! On March 5, expressive Mercury turned retrograde in your passionate fifth house. You may have felt like you were missing the love boat. Or perhaps you couldn't get a clear read on a romantic interest. Get ready to shake off the confusion and insecurity today, as the communication planet powers forward and calls forth your most radiant self!

SAGITTARIUS: Put a little luxe in your life. Today's decadent fifth-house moon gives you a hall pass to be a little hedonistic. This doesn't have to be harmful to your health or the Earth. Skip the avocado toast and sip a smoothie made with young coconut milk, which requires less water to produce. Looking for a signature accessory for spring? Find a sustainable jeweler who repurposes gold and gems from antique pieces. This romantic lunation can turn up the heat with a love interest. Slip off for a lunch date, and don't be surprised if it turns into a spicy nooner. Though it's a weeknight, do what you can to lure friends out for some cultural activities—or at least happy hour!!

CAPRICORN: Bless this mess? Not today! With the Aries moon percolating in your domestic fourth house, tidying up your spaces could lead to sharper thinking. As within, so without, right? Now, here's the rub: The piles in your space might be a metaphor for situations you've been avoiding. As you're folding laundry and deleting junk mail, you may become acutely aware of emotions that you

swept under the rug.

AQUARIUS: The Aquarius social butterfly is bursting out of the cocoon thanks to today's lunar lift in your communication corner. Since you won't have much patience for desk work, rejig your schedule so you can handle the people-oriented tasks on your to-do list. A spontaneous lunch date with a coworker could turn into an amazing brainstorming session that leaves you buzzing with inspiration. With the moon in active Aries, slip out for fresh-air breaks. Who says you can't listen in on a conference call while walking the trail of an urban park?

PISCES: Would you care to upgrade, Pisces? With the moon beaming into your sensual (but sensible) second house, you're willing to splurge on quality. Review your financials: Is there room to indulge? As long as it's practical and functional, you can consider it an investment. Funds too tight for that go-with-everything Celine bag or the cold-pressed juicer? Create a special savings account and make your first deposit today. This will motivate you to keep on hustling, even if your gratification is delayed.