



**BERNIE SANDERS' MITTENS,
MEMES HELP RAISE
\$1.8M FOR CHARITY**
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**A UNIVERSAL INFLUENZA VACCINE MAY
BE ONE STEP CLOSER**

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**CANNES FILM FESTIVAL,
CANCELED IN 2020, IS
POSTPONED TO JULY**

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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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State Open TT C'ship begins

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 JAN:**

The 23rd edition of State Open Table Tennis Championship 2021 got underway here at the indoor gymnasium hall of Paljor Stadium complex on Thursday.

A total of 77 paddlers are participating in this three-day championship being organised by the Sikkim Table Tennis Association [STTA]. The championship is playing out in cadet boys and girls, sub-junior boys and girls, junior boys and girls and open men and women categories.

An STTA press release informs that Sikkim Olympic Association president, Kuber Bhandari, who is also the STTA general secretary, declared the championship open today.

The opening ceremony was also attended by STTA executive members and coaches of the Department of Sports & Youth Affairs.

Daily cases stay low with only 5 new detections

**455 MORE
RECEIVE
COVID
VACCINE
SHOTS**

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 JAN:**

Five new cases of novel coronavirus were reported in Sikkim in the last 24 hours taking the number of confirmed cases reported so far in the State to 6,084. With this, the noticeably low number of daily cases continues, a news made even more reassuring with the confirmation that there is no one so incapacitated by Covid-19 to require admission into the ICU. There are currently no patients in the ICU facility of the Covid-dedicated STNM Hospital.

Meanwhile, 5,752 COVID patients have already been discharged from home and facility isolations with three more patients making full recoveries on Wednesday.

In his daily health bulletin on Thursday, Health

Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen, Bhutia informed that of the five new cases, four were reported from East District and one from West Sikkim.

These five cases were detected from the testing of 199 samples on Thursday - four through RT-PCR testing of 141 samples and one in rapid antigen testing of 50 samples.

While providing details about the new cases, he informed one person from Burtuk, one from number of daily cases continues, a news made even more reassuring with the confirmation that there is no one so incapacitated by Covid-19 to require admission into the ICU. There are currently no patients in the ICU facility of the Covid-dedicated STNM Hospital.

Also on Thursday, 455 more health workers were vaccinated for COVID-19 on Thursday.

While giving the break-up of the vaccination, Mr Bhutia informed that 65 persons in Rural East District, 90 at STNM hospital, 100 at Central Referral Hospital, 50 in West District, 50 in North District and 100 in South District were vaccinated today.

**SAGAR CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 28 JAN:**

All Sikkim Scheduled Caste Welfare Association [ASSCWA] took out an awareness rally on Thursday to register its protest against atrocities targeting the Scheduled Caste community.

The rally, which was primarily taken out to protest the recent incident reported from Reshi near Rhenock in East District where a person was stopped by some members of the local community from participating the last rituals of his father because he had married a Schedule Caste.

Although the ASSCWA went to great lengths to clarify, repeatedly, that the rally was not against any particular community or people or policies or government, the fact



that incident it brought to light actually transpired in the second decade of the 21st Century should scandalize and offend every Sikkimese.

It is informed that ASSCWA learned of the incident through a letter from some residents of Reshi that a person from

their area was restricted by some individuals of the same area from participating in the funeral rituals of his father. The reason was that son had married a lady from the Scheduled Caste.

Speaking to media persons, ASSCWA president Shekhar Sewa in-

formed that the incident took place on 15 January and was brought to the association's notice through a letter on 17 January.

He added that a team of the association visited the area on 18 January and enquired into it with the family members and

people of the area and found that the son had indeed been "punished" so inconsiderately for having married into the Scheduled Caste community.

He added that the association really felt "bad" that such an incident

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Super-specialists attend to patients at Namchi medical camp



**BIKASH CHETTRI
NAMCHI, 28 JAN:**

A 4-day 'Super Specialist Medical Camp,' including a "Mega Laproscopy Camp" with Dr Bikram Kharka, Dr DB Bista and Dr Varun Kumar, organized by the Health Department is underway at the District Hospital, Namchi.

The camp, organized on the directions of the Chief Minister, got underway on Wednesday, and with this launch came the announcement that

such camps will be held every month.

CMO, Namchi District Hospital, Dr DC Sharma, informed that specialists from several disciplines will be attending to patients here. At the camp, there is Dr Sangay Lamtha for gastroenterology, a cardio clinic by Dr DP Rai, neuro surgery consultations by Dr Roshan Tamang, and fistula surgery by Dr Choden Norbu and Dr. Neeraj Bhattarai.

The camp also

marked the introduction of laproscopy machines at the hospital, a function for which South Zilla Adhakshya, Tshering Dem Bhutia, was the chief guest.

The CMO informs that the newly installed laproscopy machine and the facility readied for it will attend to 12 patients at the medical camp. Future camps, he adds, will bring specialists based on the requirements of patients at the hospital.

CMMSS recipient continues to shine: Chujachen's Albert Gurung selected for California Youth Leadership Summit

**AARON RAI
GANGTOK, 28 JAN:**

Albert Gurung, a Sikkim lad currently pursuing his graduation from Rajdhani College, Delhi University, has been selected to participate in the California Sister Cities Youth Leadership Summit scheduled to be held online on 06 Feb, 2021.

The California Youth Leadership Summit is being hosted by the Sister Cities International Southern California Chapter and is organized by the Sister Cities International Southern and Northern California Chapters along with KIF USA.

Albert, who hails from Posakey Basti, Chujachen, East Sikkim, completed his school education from Pinegrove School, Himachal Pradesh, as a Chief Minister's Meritorious



Scholarship recipient and this is not his first selection for an international event. While still in school, he had been selected for the Round Square International Conference 2018 in Canada where he represented his school and the country.

Albert was also awarded the King Constantine Medal for Social Service, 2019, by Round Square International, United Kingdom.

He is also a member of the popular Sikkim

turn to pg02

Why is the life of educated Indians far removed from the education they worship?

JIWAN RAI

Some of the most profound statements on education have been made by Indian statesmen. Come Teachers Day, India will be abuzz with high sounding speechifying, waxing eloquent on what education means and how the best education is possible. Imitating their seniors, hapless students make speeches decorating them with great quotes on education.

There is no doubt that we take education extremely seriously. As a matter of fact, I have heard that many parents in north America feel apprehensive about sending their children to schools where the predominant population is Asian (Indian and Chinese). That is simply because of the intensity of competitiveness that Asian students bring into the schools. India is a country where education is literally worshipped. Children have been

taught to bow their heads before their books.

But it would be worthwhile to ask how much education has benefitted Indians. This may be way too complicated and vast a matter. But here is my knee jerk reaction to the question.

I want to look at the application of education at three levels - day to day life, professions and the highest level of studies.

VIEWPOINT

EDUCATION AND DAY TO DAY LIFE: Somehow our education has failed to train us to adopt conscious reasoning against intuitive feelings. Our major decisions on day to day life issues are made instinctively, uninformed by education. Our decisions are predetermined culturally and we do not make an effort to let education intervene and make us rethink them. That an excessive consumption of salt causes an increase in blood pressure is

a textbook lesson everyone has been taught. But what percentage of Indian households have actually taken the time to measure the amount of salt they consume? Even worse, in the hills, particularly among Nepalis, we habitually serve extra salt on a plate with raw chillies. Have you ever wondered why there are blood pressure problems with the majority of over 40 people in the state? Excessive oil and carbohydrate intake has made this education-obsessed India the diabetes capital of the world. Some common textbook lessons we so conveniently ignore - turning off the lights and fans when not in use, keeping toilets clean, not spitting, urinating and defecating in open, not littering the surroundings and so on. We know the textbook answers and write these answers perfectly on our answer sheets in school exams- but rarely apply these lessons in day-to-day life.

EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONS: That our

graduates are not job-ready is a given. Forget about the ones from regular colleges and universities - even the ones with professional degrees like doctors and engineers, for the most part are not job ready. Teachers, for the most part are neither trained nor have an aptitude for the profession. The majority of them take teaching as a stop gap arrangement and take the first flight to leave when they get an opportunity by way of the famous "deputation". Some pass competitive exams to find other jobs. These are examples of how inadequate our education is to prepare us for our professions. What words can one borrow to describe contemporary Indian journalism! Is it any wonder that countries that were poorer than us 40/50 years ago have overtaken us? We keep blaming the Nehrus and Netas - but a huge share of the blame must be shared by our professionals.

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**CONTACT
SUMMIT TIMES
REPORTERS
SINGTAM
8170070813
MANGAN/
DIKCHU
9832612485/
9434011213
GANGTOK
9800571148
8116388176
9832424750
8016270440**

Rally reminds Sikkim...

happened in a place “near the capital in this modern age.”

The rally was participated in by ASSCWA members carrying banners and placards and was also joined by representatives of other organizations. The rally started from the East District Administrative Centre and ended at Barpibal in Sichey.

Speaking about the rally, Mr Sewa stated that the rally was neither against any community, religion or section nor against any individual or political party but action has been taken in the interest of members of the SC community.

“We are not blaming the entire society but some individuals have still not changed their mindset about how they see our community even in this age. So, the main objective of the rally is to create awareness among the people to change their perception,” Mr Sewa said.

He reiterated that the rally was not to blame or hurt anyone but a move to ensure that such incidents did not repeat in the future because people were still suffering if they opt for inter-caste marriage.

“Our intension is not to put anyone in the jail for atrocity. We just want to bring the awareness among the people to change their perception of the SC community,” he said.

He added that this initiative was also to empower members of the SC community through such awareness rallies to make them empowered to raise their voice against any injustice and fight for their rights.

Mr Sewa thanked the individuals of Reshi who brought the matter to the association.

He informed that the association has already taken the matter to the DC, SP and to other concerned authorities. He clarified that the association was not against the government or any political party as they have been working in the interest and welfare of the SC community.

He added that the association will take bigger and more aggressive steps in case of such incidents continue in the future.

“However, we felt that it was very important for us to create awareness among the people to ensure equal status for us in the society as members of SC community have been shouldering important responsibilities and making substantial contributions to the society,” he said.

CONTACT

SUMMIT TIMES REPORTERS

SINGTAM

8170070813

MANGAN/ DIKCHU

9832612485/

9434011213

GANGTOK

8116388176

9832424750

8016270440

Unsatisfied B.Ed. applicants call off protest pending departmental meeting on demands

SHRAVAN CHHETRI
GANGTOK, 28 JAN:

A section of the applicants seeking admission in Govt B.Ed. College, Soreong, not satisfied with the selection process, have called off their fortnight long protest pending a meeting of the Education Department scheduled for 29 Jan when the Additional Chief Secretary is expected to confer in detail with officials about the issues raised by the unsatisfied applicants.

This group, it may be recalled, has complained of lack of transparency in the merit list released for admission to the college, arguing that only application numbers are mentioned as against the established practise of mentioning the percentage [qualifying marks] of the selected students. This had led a section of the students who did not make it to the merit list to



doubt the selection process.

For some background, the students had approached officials at the Education Department, and on 20 January, were told that a decision will be communicated to them in four days.

When the students approached the Depart-

ment on 25 Jan to follow-up, they learned that because of an unscheduled official tour of the ACS, Education Department, a meeting to discuss their demands could not be held.

The applicants were not satisfied with the explanation at the time and decided to begin a pro-

test at the Department itself until the issue was resolved. However, shortly after, upon receiving word that the ACS will be convening a meeting on 29 Jan to discuss the matter, they decided to call off their protest and await a decision.

According to sources, around 150 could

not make it to the merit list even though many of them are convinced that they have secured higher percentages in their graduation compared to some of the selected candidates.

Meanwhile, a new batch began at B.Ed. College, Soreong, on Monday.

Meanwhile, speaking to SummitTIMES, Dean, Govt B.Ed. College, KL Singh, stated that the college will abide by whatever decision the Department takes on the matter and that he was confident that the matter will be resolved soon.

“We don't want to point fingers at people or the department, but if something inexact has happened it has to be corrected and that's when justice will have been delivered,” one of the students unsatisfied with the selection process as it stands said.

PIB webinar discusses on Vaccine FAQs to tackle Vaccine Hesitancy

GANGTOK, 28 JAN (PIB): An Efficacious Covid-19 Vaccination involves effective communication with timely information dissemination on Vaccine to tackle any hesitancy, experts opined in a Webinar organised by Press Information Bureau, Guwahati on the topic 'FAQs for information dissemination and awareness to tackle Vaccine Hesitancy' here today. Experts from Medical along with academicians deliberated and discussed about Covid-19 Vaccination process and its awareness from medical, psychological, academic, societal and policy perspective.

Padma Shri Naresh Chander Lal, Ambassador of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan, Andaman and Nicobar Islands said with optimism that this is an achievement of scientific fraternity that a vaccine for Covid-19 is a solution to tackle the virus. He said that many are affected by economic, social, emotional, psychological effects because of the Covid scenario. He said that with optimism, people and particularly, the youth has to lead others in this vaccination endeavour and its awareness. Shri Lal said that public and societal awareness is vital to communicate the efficacy and safety of the vaccine. He said, whether it is businesses, social and cultural sectors, education, institutions, trade and commerce, markets or industries have been affected by this Covid scenario, so it is the responsibility of all citizens to led in this scenario to a normalcy which would encourage growth, development and prosperity of the country. He said in this endeavour, vaccine is an achievement of humanity. Lauding PIB for this initiative and discussion on this vital issue, he said the tackling all the frequently asked Questions on Covid vaccine hesitancy are always welcome.

Talking about awareness initiatives and latest activities on Covid-19 vaccine by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Dr Manzoor Ahmad, MS(Surgery), ZVM Unani Medical College and Hospital, Pune said that correct and timely information awareness is vital. He said that Covid-19 Vaccination is the Largest Vaccination Drive and India has the experience of tackling the vital capacity building and infrastructure for this vaccination. Dr Ahmad said that minor side effects

should not deter individuals for vaccination. He said that people after vaccination could join their normal errands and work immediately. Dr Ahmad said that vaccine not just to protect an individual but also the family and relatives. He said that thereby, this is to protect the society and strength the health system of citizenry to tackle viruses.

Senior Assistant Professor, Prof (Dr) Mohd Arif Khan, Department of Social Work, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh said that youth and women in families are the ambassadors of this growth journey for public and societal awareness. He said that Covid vaccination awareness has to be disseminated with proper strategy and information has to be communicated to all the decision makers and opinion leaders with complete data. He said that proper data analysis with strategic communication is vital for the effective results of the awareness endeavour.

Advocate Delhi High Court, Abdur Rahman Mallick said that not only technology but also other value-added processes have been worked at, whether it is logistics, information communication strategy, training of vaccinators, inventory management of vaccine, management of health care professionals, among others. Talking about Indian Constitution, he said that health of an individual and a healthy society is vital for the well-being of nation and prosperity of citizenry.

The informative and knowledge webinar was planned and coordinated by Joint Director (M&C), Samrat Bandyopadhyay, PIB, Guwahati.

Senior officers of PIB were present in webinar. Field Exhibition Officer, Hiramani Das, Regional Outreach Bureau, Guwahati welcomed the experts as the webinar delved into details on the various aspects of the topic such as Covid information management including in the arena of health, efficacy of communication, among others.

The interactive Webinar has enthusiastic participation of students, academicians and medical fraternity as they said that this information cum knowledge Webinar would help them in informed decision making and to be aware about the Covid precaution and about Vaccination process.

ADVISORY

We would like to draw your kind attention to the number of cases related to girls/ women befriending strangers on Facebook/social media and leaving their homes and going to far-off places like Delhi, Karnataka and Punjab, etc. to meet their so-called friends.

It is often seen that people with fake credentials prowl social media platforms solely with the intention of luring innocent womenfolk with false promises of a lucrative employment or marriage.

In light of the above cases, the State Women's Commission requests all to crosscheck the credentials of strangers befriended on social media platforms before trusting them blindly and leaving your homes to meet them. Your safety is our main priority and you are advised to contact the following numbers for any kind of help or in case of distress.

181 women's helpline

9883833188

8900576356

9547999722

9775484447

Chairperson

Sikkim State Commission for Women

GNLF thumbs down “extravagant” GTA endorsement of Rs 16 Cr for 2 footpaths



SMRITA KHAWAS
DARJEELING, 28 JAN:

Gorkha National Liberation Front today condemned the tender floated by the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration for the construction of two footpaths on a lavish budget of two footpaths.

While one footpath is from Sirikhola Trekkers Hut to Molay Fatak at Rimbik within Darjeeling Pulbazar Block for ₹ 10.55 crore, the other is a footpath onwards from Molay Fatak to Sabargram in Rimbik for ₹ 4.99 crore.

Addressing a press conference today at Darjeeling Press Guild, GNLF general secretary Sandip Limbu claimed that such “development programs” benefited only a few and were antithetical to GTA-2's promise of “Naya Soch-Naya Bichar.”

These funds, he ar-

gued, could be used to construct five roads instead – from Sirikhola Trekker Hut to Upper Sirikhola, Beachgaon, Forest Village, Gorkhe-Samanden and Musepakha-Dandagaun – which will serve the people better.

The area, he added, already has a natural trekking route under Singalila National Park and what would work better for the people would be a motorable road.

Why is it necessary to build an RCC footpath over a natural trekking path? he questioned, aluding that such extravagant projects opening the risk of corruption.

“We will be meeting the GTA Chief Secretary and appeal to them to look into this matter so that the public can get an equal share of development from GTA,” he added.

Training on Organic on-farm inputs for Lower Fambong farmers



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 JAN:

The Sikkim Organic Farming Development Agency coordinated a daylong training by the Lower Fambong GPU Pan-chayat on 27 Jan, 2021 in collaboration with Meve-

dir for farmers there.

This training covered organic manure preparation and production of on-farm inputs through Amrit Jal for the wards of Lower Fambong GPU.

More than 50 farmers attended the training.

SHGs receive donation of sewing machines from NHPC

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 JAN:

NHPC, Teesta-V Power Station, distributed 11 sewing machines to Self Help Groups of Singbel, Dochum and Linkutar wards on Thursday.

The machines were handed over at NHPC's

admin office at Balutar, East Sikkim, as part of the Corporate Social Responsibility & Sustainable Development commitments in the presence of senior officers and members of the Ladies Welfare Association of the Power Station.

Why is the life of...

Do we use our education (not the education degree) in our professions to make the lives of those whom we serve better? Let my fellow Indians who warm government chairs and enjoy government perks answer this question.

What can we say about lessons against practicing dowry the caste system and sex discrimination? To answer this question, we need to ask another question: How many education ministers, secretaries, top education officials, academicians and scholars practice all of these evils?

EDUCATION AND THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF ACADEMIA: Apart from the past glory of being Vishwa Guru, India has just been a spectator and reluctant follower of western scholars. The emergence of ground breaking ideas in every field of education have been born in the west. The west has become the centre of our learnings. They give us the textbook lessons. They write the laws. They discover. They invent. They sit us down to teach. From Charles Darwin to Karl Marx, from Julius Welhausen to John Dewey, from Sigmund Freud to Maynard Keynes and Soren Kierkegaard are all from the west and the world has been following their ideas.

Have you ever wondered why abstract science never developed in India? Our scientists are doing well in terms of making careers but Indian scientists are hardly regarded as those who come up with earth-shattering scientific discoveries. We are at best just the followers and learners of western science. We have not been able to produce scientists that match Blaise Pascal, Newton, Planck, Einstein and their like. As an aside, it is terribly disturbing to note the broad acceptance that Indian's vaccine received despite never going through third phase trials. Where were the voices of academia that should have objected to this unscientific move? Apart from a few random voices, very few spoke up. The vaccine may be fine but it is scientifically wrong to use publically without the data from third phase trials.

We have some questions to face head on. Why have we been dwarfed by western thought? Is it accidental that the intellectual giants, for the most part, are only born in the west? Why do we use education only as a tool to manage our emergency crises (namely finding a job) and utterly fail to use these lessons to make our jobs effective in a real sense? Why is the life of educated Indians far removed from the education they worship so devoutly and go to any extent to gain?

CMMSS recipient continues...

youth empowering platform, the Wandering Souls of Sikkim, and Sikkim Students' Parliament.

He is also actively involved in various social service activities.

California Sister Cities Youth Leadership Summit, a nonprofit online event, will be run by young professionals and college students for high school and college students throughout California, as well as college students from California's sister cities around the world.

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KOLKATA OFFICE:

Irshad Ali/ Imteeyaz. Synapse, 6, Madan Street, Mezine – 2, 2nd floor. Kolkata – 700072. Ph. 033-22124348/ fax 033-22124337/ mob. 9830547774/ 983108397.

E-mail: contact.synapse@gmail.com/ irshad_ali123@rediffmail.com

BEFORE THE OATH COMMISSIONER OF SIKKIM AT GANGTOK

AFFIDAVIT

I, **Duk Bahadur Chettri**, aged about 27 years, son of **Bhakta Chettri**, Hindu by faith and a permanent resident of Chuza Martam, East Sikkim P.O. Sangkhola and P.S. Singtam in East District of Sikkim, Do hereby solemnly affirm and declare on oath as follows:

- That I am the natural and legal son of **Bhakta Chettri**.
- That my father actual and correct name is **Bhakta Chettri** which has been recorded in his certificate of Identification bearing Sl. No. 295, Vol. No. XVII issued by office of the District Collector East District, Gangtok and same name has been recorded in his other relevant documents.
- That inadvertently in my Birth Certificate bearing registration No. 634/1995 dated 27.06.1995 issued by Birth and death Cell Government of Sikkim and Electoral identity Card bearing No. YWZ0035857 issued by Election Commission of India my father name has been recorded is “**Bhakta Bahadur Chettri**” instead of “**Bhakta Chettri**”.
- That hence this affidavit is made bonafide and to declare that the person, by the name, caste and title “Bhakta Chettri” and “Bhakta Bahadur Chettri” denotes and refer to one and the same person. i.e. my father.

Deponent

VERIFICATION

I, **Duk Bahadur Chettri**, the deponent before –named, do hereby verify and state that the contents of the foregoing affidavit in paragraphs 1 to 4 are true to the best of my knowledge and belief. Nothing in materials has been concealed or suppressed therefrom.

Verified and sworn to this affidavit at Gangtok, East Sikkim on this the 28th of January, 2021.

Deponent

CM felicitates Ayush for hi Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Baal Purashkar



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 28 JAN:

Ayush Ranjan, a student of Rangpo Senior Secondary School, was felicitated today by Chief Minister PS Tamang on receiving the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Baal Purashkar 2021 for his innovation in App

development.

Ayush has also received INSPIRE Award, Kalam Dristi, Technophile Awards among many others, a press communiqué from the Chief Minister's Office informs.

His Apps include a Digi Smart Bin, Automat-

ed LPG Ordering System, Mushroom Arc etc.

The felicitation was hosted at the CM's residence, Mintokgang.

During the programme, the CM enquired after his well-being and encouraged Ayush to keep up his innovative activities and

held him up as an asset for Sikkim and assured to extend every possible support to ensure him a bright career.

The CM instructed that new laboratories be developed across the state besides infrastructural development of Rangpo Sr. Sec. School,

the release informs.

Education Minister Kunga Nima Lepcha, ACS Education GP Upadhyaya, Secretary Education Anil Raj Rai and Coordinators School Education, Shushma Trikhatri and Mamta Gurung, also attended the felicitation programme.

Ayush was accompanied by his Principal, Dr Hannah Yonzan, PGT Physics, Shyam Kumar Pradhan and his parents Sanju and Hare Ram Sharma, the release adds.

Ayush was mentored by the PGT Physics, who is also the in-charge of the Atal Tinkering Laboratory at the school which one of the few established here by NITI Aayog.

"This has been possible due to the support of Principal, and entire staff of the school," Ayush is quoted in the release as saying.

Italian Cup: Juventus thrash SPAL 4-0, Atalanta beat Lazio in 3-2 thriller

ROME, 28 JAN [AFP]: Aleksey Miranchuk scored the winner as 10-man Atalanta beat Lazio 3-2 in a thrilling Italian Cup quarter-final on Wednesday, while a much-changed Juventus eased past second-tier SPAL to also reach the last four. A dramatic match in Bergamo saw five different goalscorers, a red card and a missed penalty as Atalanta came out on top in a rematch of the 2019 final, won 2-0 by Lazio.

"It was fun, wasn't it? A fascinating game, at times spectacular," Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini told RAI Sport. Atalanta, bidding to win only the second major trophy in their history and first since the 1963 Italian Cup, are now unbeaten in 14 matches in all competitions and will face either Napoli or Spezia, who play on Thursday, in the last four.

"Reaching the semi-final is a great achievement," added Gasperini. "This is a competition we want to approach in the best possible way and to go as far as possible."

On Tuesday, Inter Milan won a bad-tempered derby against AC Milan and will face Juventus, who saw off second-tier SPAL 4-0, in the two-legged semi-finals, which will be played on February 2-3 and 9-10.

At the Gewiss Stadium, Albanian defender Berat Djimsiti gave Atalanta a seventh-minute lead after a goalmouth scramble which saw Lazio goalkeeper Pepe Reina save from Jose Luis Palomino. The former Liverpool and Napoli stopper had to be alert to prevent Luis Muriel from doubling the advantage just a few minutes later.

But the visitors levelled in the 17th minute, as Kosovo Vedat Muriqi, making his 16th appearance for Lazio since joining from Fenerbahce, headed home Francesco Acerbi's cross to score his first goal for the capital club.

Centre-back Acerbi produced a magical moment to put Lazio ahead 11 minutes before the break, weaving past three defenders before

prodding the ball into the net. A breathless first half was capped in style as Ruslan Malinovsky drilled in an equaliser for Atalanta after good work from Muriel.

Atalanta's hopes of reaching the final suffered a blow just eight minutes into the second period, as Palomino was shown a straight red card for pushing Manuel Lazari when the Lazio substitute was deemed to have a clear goalscoring opportunity.

But Gasperini's men made light of their man disadvantage, moving back in front in the 57th minute as Cristian Romero set Miranchuk free to score his second Cup goal of the season. Gasperini signalled he wanted his side to keep attacking, though, sending on striker Duvan Zapata shortly after the goal.

The Colombian wasted little time in making an impact, winning a penalty for a foul by Wesley Hoedt, only to see his spot-kick held by Reina.

Lazio boss Simone Inzaghi responded to his team's reprieve by introducing top-scorer Ciro Immobile, but it was Acerbi who came closest to forcing extra time when his 89th-minute header was brilliantly saved by home 'keeper Pierluigi Gollini.

Juve cruise through - Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo made nine changes to the side which beat Bologna in Serie A on Sunday, with Cristiano Ronaldo rested from the matchday squad and goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon starting the day before his 43rd birthday.

But the record 13-time winners still made short work of SPAL, the only lower-league team to make the quarter-finals this season. Juve -- who lost to Napoli on penalties in the final last term -- took a controversial 16th-minute lead when Alvaro Morata scored a spot-kick which was awarded by VAR for a foul on Adrien Rabiot, despite little contact and the Frenchman being originally booked for diving.

Renault Kiger arrives in India



NEW DELHI, 28 JAN: Renault premiered Kiger in India today.

This compact SUV, which the Renault claims has been specially designed and developed for India, saw its India unveil ahead of the international debut.

Renault KIGER has been designed with a host of sporty and muscular elements and stands out as a true SUV.

On the inside, Renault KIGER's smart cabin combines technology, functionality and roominess.

The compact SUV is powered by a new turbo-charged 1.0L petrol engine and is being pegged as a high performance, modern and efficient engine to ensure a sporty drive with "multi sense drive modes."

"After Duster, Kwid and Triber, we are now

preparing for the launch of Renault KIGER, a modern SUV that is a perfect fit for the Indian market. KIGER combines the best Renault has to offer: our expertise in innovative cars with the creativity and in-depth knowledge of customer needs. A strong proof that Renault really is a game-changer," shared Fabrice Cambo-live, SVP, Renault Brand, Sales & Operations.

Learning aids distributed to differently-abled students

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 28 JAN:

National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities [formerly National Institute for the Mentally Handicapped], in collaboration with the state government, organized its first teaching-learning material distribution to differently-abled students registered at special schools.

The distribution ceremony had Health Minister, Dr MK Sharma, as chief guest accompanied by NIEPID officials from Delhi and Secunderabad.

Smartphones, calculators and publications were handed over to the differently-abled students.

The Health Minister



thanked NIEPID and the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment on behalf of all the students, parents and the state government for the distributed items which, he said, will increase their confidence and make them technologically-able.

He went on to comment that given the current pandemic, it was im-

portant for the society to switch from conventional modes of learning to the digital mode, specially for differently-abled students.

It is possible that these children can be brought into mainstream society on the terms of capacity and potential rather than sympathy by actually allowing them to grow and learn at the same time, he said.

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Budget session set to be stormy



NEW DELHI, JAN 28 (PTI):

The Budget session of Parliament beginning Friday is poised to be stormy with the Opposition set to attack the government over the three new farm legislations, amid an ongoing agitation by farmers.

The session will begin with the address of the President to the joint sitting of the two Houses on Friday morning followed by the presentation of the Union Budget on February 1.

A total of 16 Opposition parties have announced a boycott of the President's address in solidarity with the farmers protesting the new farm laws, senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad said on Thursday.

The 16 Opposition parties have also demanded a probe into the violence on Republic Day in Delhi.

Opposition parties include the Congress, the NCP, Shiv Sena, DMK, Trinamool Congress, CPI, CPI-M and RJD.

With a view to have a paperless Budget, all

the documents and the Economic Survey would be made available online soon after the authenticated copies are laid on the Table of the House, the Lok Sabha Secretariat has said.

Like the last time, in this session too COVID-19 protocols will be in place and Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha will meet in shifts of five hours each -- with the upper house meeting in the morning and the lower house in the evening.

Due to the pandemic, the Winter session was not held.

The Question Hour also makes a comeback in this session.

Due to paucity of time, there was no Question Hour in the previous session. The Monsoon session also saw the two Houses working on Saturdays and Sundays. But this time, Parliament will not sit on weekends.

Private Members' business which usually takes place on Friday afternoons has also made a comeback in the Budget session, according to Lok Sabha secretariat. In the

previous session, the Private Members' business was not taken up.

Members introduce their own bills and resolutions during this period which are debated by the House.

During the session the government will also push to convert ordinances issued recently into laws. An ordinance has to be converted into a law within 42 days of the beginning of the session, else it lapses.

The ordinances issued recently include The Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Ordinance 2020, The Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 and The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2021.

The session would conclude on April 8. In order to enable the standing committees to consider the Demands for Grants of ministries and prepare their reports, the Houses will adjourn on February 15 and meet again on March 8.

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What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV

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

Treatment

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

Precautions to Prevent nCoV

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

If you seek help, you may call :

- Toll free no. 104
- District surveillance Officer
- EAST : 7029372100
- WEST : 9593297809
- NORTH : 9641957468
- SOUTH : 7407691463
- New STNM
- AMS : 9434711402

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

Pollution Needs to Be Controlled

...but the Board tasked for it \is not equipped well enough to do so

Some years back, when a different dispensation was in office in Sikkim, a “high-level” team of the State Pollution Control Board visited a hydel project site, and as a parting shot, told the project developers that if they did not meet certain stipulations, they would not be issued a Consent For Operation certificates.

The meaning of the certificate is self-explanatory. But that does not mean that it is of any relevance. As per the performance audit on “Effectiveness in the Functioning of State Pollution Control Board” by the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, out of the 256 “industries” registered in Sikkim, 86 were operating without this Consent For Operation. That was for the year 2015-16. Industries have to renew these CFOs sixty days before the lapse of the consents, but the policy-makers have conveniently not included a penalty clause in case of delays, some units tend to get their Consents renewed up to 180 days after it has lapsed. What this effectively means is that for the period that they had no CFO, they were irregular/ unauthorized operations and this alone can be interpreted in a host of different ways to dodge accountability for, in this case, pollution caused during this period. Apparently, the Board is processing the file to include a penalty clause, but it is anybody’s guess on how long that could take since the Board has remained oblivious to such a requirement for the past twenty-five years. SPCB was set up in 1992.

The point being made here is that the SPCB, if anyone wants it to be an effective defence against pollution by polluting industries and activities, should be reminded of its charter and pushed to become serious about its responsibilities. Its only priority is Sikkim and its environment, and that is how it should conduct itself. But it hasn’t. The Board, when it was formed in 1992 and again in 2008 when it was separated from the State Land Use and Environment Board, was tasked to “plan a comprehensive programme for the prevention, control or abatement of pollution of streams, wells and air in the State and to secure the execution thereof”. To make sure that the Board at least appeared to be doing all this, it was directed that Annual Action Plans be prepared defining various activities and sub-activities proposed to be taken up including physical and financial targets to be achieved in the ensuing year in line with the vision and long/short term goals of the Board. The Board, until 2015-16, had never prepared any Annual Action Plan! Does its less-than-influential role in keeping polluting units in check surprise then?

This casual approach towards its responsibilities manifests in worrying situations where industrial units can pollute without worry in Sikkim. A site visit by CAG auditors to 16 water polluting industries in East Sikkim (there were 65 such industries all over the State at the time and there surely more now) revealed that three units – a fruit preservation unit, a pharmaceutical unit and a distillery – did not have any effluent treatment plants at all! Two other units had ETPs, but they were non-functional and another, which had a functional ETP, did not to use it! Until the auditors visited, the SPCB had preferred not to notice any of these illegalities.

It is clear that the Board which has an important role to play, is handicapped by an ad-hocism which has gone on for too long and works to the benefit of only one section. The Board needs to revisit its charter of institution and begin approaching its spelled-out tasks in earnest. It would help if the Board was allowed to genuinely function as an independent body staffed by adequately qualified personnel.

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

A Universal Influenza Vaccine May be One Step Closer

PATRICIA L. FOSTER
theconversation.com

A bad year for flu can mean tens of thousands of deaths in the U.S. Getting vaccinated can protect you from influenza, but you have to get the shot every year to catch up with the changing virus and to top up the short-lived immunity the vaccine provides. The vaccine's effectiveness also depends on correct predictions about which strains will be most common in a given season.

For these reasons, a one-and-done universal vaccine that would provide lasting immunity over multiple flu seasons and protect against a variety of strains has been a long-term goal for scientists.

Researchers are now one step closer to hitting that target. Scientists recently completed the first human trial of a vaccine created by recombinant genetic technology to fool the immune system into attacking a part of the virus that does not change so fast and is common among different strains.

I am a microbiologist interested in infectious diseases, and I’ve followed the seasonal flu epidemic for several years. I’m excited by this news, which could mark the turning point in the quest for a universal flu vaccine. Here’s how it all works.

BIOLOGY OF THE INVADING INFLUENZA VIRUS

Like the virus that causes COVID-19, the influenza virus has a protein shell that is coated by a lipid membrane. Sticking through the membrane are multiple copies of three types of proteins: haemagglutinin, abbreviated as HA; neuraminidase, abbreviated as NA; and the matrix protein, M2.

It’s the properties of the HA and NA proteins that distinguish the different strains of the virus. You’ve probably heard of strains like H1N1 and H3N2, both of which are infecting people in the U.S. this year.

The HA molecule is shaped a bit like a flower bud, with a stalk and a head. Once someone inhales the virus, the tip of the HA molecule’s head binds to a receptor on the surface of the cells that line the person’s respiratory passages.

This initial binding is crucial as it induces the cell to engulf the virus. Once inside, the virus gets to work replicating its own genetic material. But the enzyme that copies its single-strand RNA is very sloppy; it can leave two or three mistakes, called mutations, in every new copy.

Sometimes the genetic changes are so drastic that the progeny viruses don’t survive; other times they are the start of new flu strains. Based on viral samples collected from around the world, the flu virus that arrives one year will have about seven new mutations in the gene for HA and four in the gene for NA compared to the previous year’s virus.

These differences are a big part of why the same influenza vaccine won’t be as effective from one year to the next.

FIGHTING OFF A FLU INFECTION

When infected with the flu virus, your immune system produces antibodies to fend it off. Most of these antibodies interact with the HA head and prevent the virus from getting into your cells.



But there’s a downside to that strong reaction. Because the immune response to the virus’s head is so vigorous, it pays little attention to other parts of the virus. That means that your immune system is not prepared to fend off any future infection with a virus that has a different HA head, even if the rest of the virus is identical.

Current flu vaccines are inactivated versions of the influenza virus and so also work by inducing antibodies targeted to the HA head. And that’s why each version of the vaccine usually works only against a particular strain. But, as the flu spreads, the rapid rate of genetic change can produce new versions of the HA head that will evade the antibodies induced by the vaccine. These newly resistant viruses will then render even the current season’s vaccine ineffective.

The stalk portion of the HA molecule is much more genetically stable than the head. And HA stalks from different flu strains are much more alike than their head regions are.

So, an obvious way to protect people against different flu strains would be to use just the HA stalk in a vaccine. Unfortunately vaccination with only a headless stalk doesn’t seem to prevent infection.

Scientists are currently pursuing several different solutions to this problem.

A NEW KIND OF FLU VACCINE

A team of scientists led by Florian Krammer at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai just completed the first human clinical trial of what they hope will be a universal flu vaccine.

The researchers used recombinant genetic technology to create flu viruses with “chimeric” HA

proteins – essentially a patchwork quilt built from pieces of different flu strains.

Volunteers for the clinical trial received two vaccinations separated by three months. The first dose consisted of an inactivated H1N1 virus with its original HA stalk but the head portion from a bird influenza virus. Vaccination with this virus induced a mild antibody response to the foreign head, and a robust response to the stalk. This pattern meant that the immune systems of the subjects had never encountered the head before, but had seen the stalk from previous flu vaccinations or infections.

The second vaccination consisted of the same H1N1 virus but with an HA head from a different bird virus. This dose elicited, again, a mild antibody response to the new head, but a further boost in response to the HA stalk. After each vaccine dose the subjects’ stalk antibody concentrations averaged about eight times higher than their initial levels.

Researchers found that even though the vaccine was based on the HA stalk of the H1N1 virus strain, the antibodies it elicited reacted to HA stalks from other strains too. In lab tests, the antibodies from vaccinated volunteers attacked the H2N2 virus that caused the 1957 Asian flu pandemic and the H9N2 virus that the CDC considers to be of concern for future outbreaks. The antibodies did not react to the stalk of the more distantly related H3 viral strain.

The antibody response also lasted a long time; after a year and a half, the volunteers still had about four times the concentration of antibodies to the HA stalk in their blood as when the trial started.

Since this was a phase 1 clinical trial testing only for adverse effects (which were minimal), the researchers didn’t expose vaccinated people to the flu to test if their new antibodies protected them.

However, they did inject the subjects’ blood serum, which contains the antibodies, into mice to see if it would protect them against the flu virus. Getting a shot of serum taken from volunteers a month after receiving the booster shot, when antibody levels were high, led to mice being 95% healthier after virus exposure than mice who got blood serum from nonvaccinated volunteers. Even the mice who received serum that was collected from vaccinated volunteers a year after the start of the trial were about 30% less sick.

These results show that vaccination with a chimeric flu protein can provide long-lasting immunity to several different strains of the influenza virus. Scientists will need to continue optimizing this approach so it works for different types and strains of influenza. But the success of this first human trial means you may one day get a single shot and, at last, be free from the flu.

[the writer is Professor Emerita of Biology, Indiana University]



Expert in Fluid Dynamics Explains How to Reduce the Risk of COVID-19 Airborne Transmission Inside a Car

VARGHESE MATHAI
theconversation.com

It’s important to have good ventilation. This means you get as much outside air as possible to mix with the air inside the cabin and then flush it out.

You can do this in a couple of ways. One is by turning on the heating system, which takes in fresh air from outside, and opening windows through which it can be flushed out. Another way is to just have the windows open. The benefit of having windows open is that if you are riding at 20 miles an hour or faster, a lot of air is flushed out just by the speed of the car.

Having windows open allows more air to be flushed out than by just having the heating or air conditioning turned on.

WHICH WINDOWS SHOULD BE KEPT OPEN AND CLOSED TO ENSURE OPTIMAL AIRFLOW?

We think the best configuration is to have all

windows open, and if possible fully open. If this is not practical, then it would be good to have two windows open. Preferably one in the rear and one in the front.

What we found out from computer simulations is that the air enters through the rear window, turns around behind the rear passenger and exits through the front window. This way, many of these aerosol particles inside the cabin can be flushed out.

WHAT ABOUT BARRIERS AND SCREENS BETWEEN THE PASSENGER AND THE DRIVER?

Many taxis and ride-share services like Uber and Lyft have been using a barrier or a screen between the front and rear areas of the cabin. These help in reducing transmission through larger droplets. These are the kinds of droplets that are released through coughing, sneezing or talking loudly. Decontaminating surfaces helps against the fomite transmission. But airborne transmission would not be reduced much by these barriers be-

cause there are always gaps and holes in barriers through which air can pass through.

HOW DID YOU CONDUCT THIS STUDY?

For this study we used computer simulations, specifically computational fluid dynamics simulations, which are widely used for studying flows around cars and airplanes. We used it because of its quick turnaround time, so that we could compare different open and closed window configurations and qualitatively predict which might be better in terms of removing these airborne particles.

After this publication was out we did go in and do a number of field tests to get some kind of validation of the airflows that were simulated. We released smoke at different locations inside the car and looked at the pathways of the smoke as it was released inside the car. It was more or less the same as what we found from the computer simulations.

[the writer is Assistant Professor of Physics, University of Massachusetts Amherst]

Bengal Govt tables resolution against Farm Laws in Assembly, BJP walks out

KOLKATA, 28 JAN [PTI]: Amid a noisy walkout by BJP MLAs, the TMC government Thursday moved a resolution in the West Bengal assembly demanding repeal of the three contentious farm laws.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said the Centre should either withdraw the new laws or step down.

Speaking after the resolution was moved by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Partha Chatterjee amid vociferous protests by BJP lawmakers, Ms Banerjee demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi convene an all-party meeting to discuss the process of withdrawal of these laws.

The assembly witnessed unruly scenes in the morning after Mr Chatterjee moved



the resolution, with BJP MLAs led by their legislative party leader Manoj Tigga rushing to the Well of the House, claiming the TMC government has

launched a "misinformation campaign" against the laws.

Mr Tigga, along with his party MLAs, subsequently walked out

shouting "Jai Shri Ram" slogans. "We oppose the anti-farmer laws. We demand their immediate withdrawal. Either the Centre should withdraw

the laws or step down," the chief minister said.

Ms Banerjee said the Union government, which has in the past, waived corporate loans, should also extend the same benefit to farmers.

She also said the Delhi police "mishandled" the tractor parade by farmers which resulted in the situation going out of hand on the Republic Day.

"Delhi police is to be blamed for that. What was the Delhi police doing? It was a complete intelligence failure. We will not tolerate farmers being branded as traitors. They are the assets of this nation," she said.

Ms Banerjee appealed to the Congress and the Left Front to keep aside ideological differences and come together in support of the farmers.

Bombs hurled near Bengal minister's residence, six held

KOLKATA, JAN 28 (PTI): A few motorcycle-borne miscreants have hurled country-made bombs near the residence of a West Bengal minister in the city, and six people were arrested in this connection, police said on Thursday. No one was injured when the criminals threw the bombs near the house of Indranil Sen, minister of state for information and culture, in Kasba area on Wednesday night, they said.

The singer-turned-politician was not at his home when the incident happened.

Six people were apprehended for their alleged involvement in the case and three two-wheelers and a cache of country-made bombs seized from their possession, a Kolkata Police officer said. "We have identified these persons after scrutinising the CCTV footage of the area. We are interrogating them," he added.

Of elephants, cheetahs and operations strategy!

NEW DELHI, JAN 28 (PTI) How are elephants and cheetahs related to operations strategy? A new book uses these metaphors inspired by nature as a means to arrive at a better appreciation of the system being studied. "Elephants and Cheetahs: The Beauty of Operations" is about the beauty inherent in business models seen from an operations perspective.

Saral Mukherjee, who teaches at IIM Ahmedabad, says his book is not about biology or the animal kingdom but about operations strategy.

"The origin of this book can be traced to my sessions in the core courses of Operations Management I and Operations Management II in the PGP first-year curriculum, and the difficulties I faced in explaining the notion of operational trade-offs," he says.

"Students would learn about how time-based competition differed from competing on costs and yet come back and ask why we can't have both. The metaphor of the cheetah was a very powerful tool to intuitively explain the differences in strategic choice, and the students could immediately grasp that an elephant is not structured to run as a cheetah, and we cannot have both cost efficiency and time responsiveness beyond a point," he writes.

Based on a popular elective at IIM Ahmedabad, the book in the book, published by Penguin Random House India, looks for answers in the hard trade-offs inherent in the design of operating systems and business models. It encourages business leaders to ask two different sets of existential questions: Does the organisation have a soul, and if so, what are the strategic choices that enable its synthesis (external orientation)?

Mukherjee says the purpose of writing this book is to reach out to a larger set of students, to enable them to see beauty in operations.

"The word 'beauty' is conspicuous by its absence in operations texts; my purpose is to make you open your eyes to it." He says he tried to bring back systems orientation in teaching operations.

"I tried to bring aesthetics into a field obsessed with quantification. I tried to appreciate operations systems and see parallels in nature. I tried to connect them with literature, with music, with arts. I tried to dig deeper into the case studies of organisations to identify the core set of tensions which ran through them. I tried to see meaning in an otherwise meaningless existence," he says.

So is there anything called an elephant or a cheetah in operations? "An elephant is an idea, just like a circle is an idea, an abstract form. There exists no perfect circle in reality, yet we instinctively call something as circular when we see an approximation. Circles are different from triangles, even though there does not exist in reality either a perfect circle or triangle," the author writes.

"Elephants are different from cheetahs, even though there does not exist in reality either perfect elephants or cheetahs. An elephant is ultimately an idea - a firm competing on cost leadership. A cheetah is ultimately an idea - a firm competing on time responsiveness," he adds.

Book addresses key issues of agrarian crisis

NEW DELHI, JAN 28 (PTI): As India witnesses its biggest-ever farmers' agitation, a new book by journalist Kavitha Iyer takes a close look at several of the deeper issues that have afflicted the farming community for decades.

"Landscapes Of Loss: The Story of an Indian Drought" tells the story of Marathwada - with its stunning basalt hills, scorched brown earth, the flaming reds and pinks the locals wear - through the accounts of its people: marginal farmers, Dalits, landless labourers, farm widows and children.

Marathwada - a historically-backward part of Maharashtra, adjoining the distressed Vidarbha region and home to the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Ajanta and Ellora caves - has seen a surge in farmer suicides. At the heart of the crisis is a cyclical drought that has persisted for almost a decade. Multiple relief packages and loan waivers have not reversed the trend.

On the contrary, the stories of dystopia grow more tragic every year as thousands of farmer families flee to the big cities, while those who stay back are plagued by bad credit and crop loss.

Iyer says our response to the ongoing farmers' struggle is evidence, once again, of how distant and disconnected one half of the country is from the other.

"It's time to grapple with the wider questions of how to feed a world of 10 billion people by 2050 while also caring for our scarce resources, so we can ill afford to be so alienated from the cyclical tragedies visiting the vast majority

of Indian agriculturists," she says.

According to Iyer, if there is one ray of hope in Delhi's current siege, it is not that a broken system can find a quick fix but that the rest of India will be able to see and meet India's farmers, hear their accounts, view their long struggle in the context of their life's work, not just vis-a-vis the three new laws and their blockade.

"The current recriminations do not present the wider story of the Indian farmers trapped in lifetimes of cyclical losses," she says.

She also says that her hope with "Landscapes of Loss" was to do just that: "to introduce readers to real people, their very real everyday struggles, their occasional triumphs and their unremitting agitations requesting justice."

In writing about the cyclical drought, the author presents a story representative of the unrest in large parts of rural India.

"From Nashik to Delhi, from Marathwada's flooded fields and losses this La Nina year to the unpaid dues of Uttar Pradesh's sugarcane farmers, the message from the fields is that Indian agriculture is broken," she says.

"And farmers, landless labourers, tenant farmers and women farmers have all described the fault lines in great detail. And yet, in a world more connected than ever, the two Indias couldn't be farther apart, or more mistrustful of each other, unheeding and unseeing," Iyer writes in the book, published by HarperCollins India.

Nepal slips four places in global Corruption Perception Index

KATHMANDU, 28 JAN [KATHMANDUPOST]: Nepal's position on the latest Corruption Perception Index has been downgraded from that of last year by four places. The country is now placed 117th place among 180 countries and territories surveyed in this year's Corruption Perceptions Index 2020 released on Thursday.

In the annual report of Transparency International, a global anti-corruption group based in Berlin, measures the perception of corruption in a country. In the 2019 report, it had ranked 113th.

This is a significant drop in Nepal ranking, especially when it had managed to move up 11 spots up in the annual of 2019 compared to 2018 when it had been ranked 124th.

This year Nepal's score is 33. The index ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, draw-

ing on 13 expert assessments and surveys of business executives. It uses a scale of zero to 100, where zero is most corrupt and 100 is least corrupt. In South Asia, while Bhutan is the highest-ranked at 24th place, Nepal is behind Maldives (75th), India (86th), Sri Lanka (94th) and Pakistan (124th). Bangladesh (146th) and Afghanistan (165th) trail behind Nepal in the region.

With a score of 88, New Zealand continues to be one of the two top performers on the CPI in the world, according to the latest report. Denmark too has a score of 88 points. Syria, Somalia and South Sudan come at the bottom, with 14, 12 and 12 points respectively.

In the Asia-Pacific, New Zealand is followed by Singapore (85), Australia (77) and Hong Kong (77) while Cambodia (21), Afghanistan (19) and North Korea (18) earn the lowest

scores in the region. The anti-corruption group in its press release has said widespread corruption is weakening Covid-19 response, threatening global economic recovery and contributing to democratic backsliding amid the pandemic.

Nepal, which is reeling under a multi-sectoral impact of Covid-19 pandemic, also witnessed irregularities while responding to the pandemic. There were reports of corruption while procuring medical supplies from China.

"Covid-19 is not just a health and economic crisis. It is a corruption crisis. And one that we are currently failing to manage," Delia Ferreira Rubio, Chair of Transparency International, was quoted as saying in its press release. "The past year has tested governments like no other in memory, and those with higher levels of corruption have been less able to meet the challenge.

Assam's Solution Centre to help prove citizenship



GUWAHATI: 79-year-old Saeed Ali, a farmer from Kalgachia in Assam's Barpeta district, has been a worried man since 1997, when he was declared a doubtful voter. Unable to vote and excluded from the National Register of Citizens (NRC), Mr Ali is waiting for trial to begin at a foreigners' tribunal, which will provide his only chance to prove his citizenship. Barely literate, Mr Ali, however, has no awareness about his constitutional rights.

"In rural areas, people are very less educated. Many of us don't have documents like birth certificates, school certificates, and that's why we have been facing trouble and harassment. But we are Indians, we have a constitution, but we hardly know the rights bestowed upon us since we were never made aware of them," he told NDTV.

To help people like Mr Ali, a Samvidhan Kendra

or solution centre has been set up in the area to provide legal aid on citizenship-related cases.

Three similar centres recently started in other parts of Assam, where para-legal volunteers are educating people from rural parts of the state about their constitutional rights.

"If they explain these details, help us in legal understanding, it will be a big help. We never got such help in the past though we had approached politicians and leaders," said Abdul Samad, another villager from Kalgachia.

The initiative was started by a group of lawyers who wanted to bridge the disconnect between the constitution and its people. Apart from making people aware of their rights, the group will also help the doubtful voters or those excluded from the NRC in understanding the legalities of the exercise. The

leader of the group of lawyers, Amand Wadud, talked to NDTV about his vision.

"The preamble starts with the words 'We the people'. But in reality, there is a huge disconnect between the constitution and the people. The idea is to bridge the gap, take the constitution to them... Indian citizens are randomly accused of being foreigners or illegal migrants. You strip them off their dignity. This right is protected under constitution - this needs to be installed in them," he said.

"The problem of Samvidhan is everywhere, since our constitution is in danger these days. But in Assam the situation is different. Nowhere in India will you find doubtful voters, but in Assam, you have doubtful voters. This is unconstitutional. So the centres and I will try to help them," Barpeta MP Abdul Khaleque said.

Webley & Scott to launch 'Made in India' revolvers

HARDOI (UP), JAN 28 (PTI): The home-grown revolver of Webley and Scott, the renowned British firearms company, is being manufactured in HarDOI town of Uttar Pradesh under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Make in India' initiative.

The firearm is likely to be launched by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath next month, following which it will reach the market, Sial Manufacturers director Surendra Pal Singh said on Thursday.

Singh, however, stressed that time had not yet been allotted by the chief minister's office for it and efforts were being made to schedule its launching next month.

The British firm had entered into an understanding with Luc-

know-based Sial Manufacturers to manufacture firearms. According to Singh, the unit in Sandila, around 55 km west of Lucknow, is the first of Webley and Scott in the country.

The preparations are on for the launching of the firearm and one revolver each has been placed in the gun house of the Sial group in Lucknow and Kanpur in view of people's curiosity to see it, Singh said, stressing that the displayed ones were not for sale.

The Ordinance Factory Kanpur has checked the revolver and preparations are on for setting up a firing range in the Sandila unit for the next testing, Singh said.

Webley and Scott is an arms manufacturer founded in Birmingham,

England. Webley produced handguns and long guns from 1834-1979 when the company ceased to manufacture firearms and instead turned its attention to producing air pistols and air rifles. In 2010, Webley and Scott restarted the production of shotguns for commercial sale.

Webley is famous for the revolvers and automatic pistols it supplied to the British Empire's military, particularly the British Army, from 1887 through both World War I and World War II.

Singh said an understanding has been reached with 15 gun houses in different states of the country till now for selling the revolver. The company will not sell directly but through gun houses, he said.

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Thomas Tuchel offers fresh Chelsea direction and hope for Havertz

BARNEY RONAY

LONDON, 28 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Welcome, then, Thomas. At times such as these it is traditional to say something along the lines of: "If the manager wasn't aware of the task facing him in the white heat of this, the English Premier League, then he will be now." These are of course anything but ordinary times. But at the end of this enervating, slow-burn 0-0 draw with Wolves, during which Chelsea's new appointment was probably the single most animated presence inside Stamford Bridge, it seemed unlikely Thomas Tuchel would find himself struggling with the fabled "intensity" of English football.

Instead a debut Tuchel selection reconfigured into an attacking back three looked quite a lot like the last few selections of the sadly departed Frank: a team still baffled by its own shadow, and lacking clear idea of how it wants to play. As is often the case on these occasions, the greatest point of interest was the new head coach himself, this agreeably angular and awkward footballing technocrat who seemed determined to make an uncharacteristically breezy first impression.

Before kick-off Tuchel was startlingly carefree in front of the BT Sport cameras. There he was suddenly, smiling the warm friendly smile of a man who has only this morning looked up the words "warm friendly smile" in a medical dictionary, practised in his hotel mirror the precise physical movements required, and who remains cautiously happy with the results. "I'm very excited," Tuchel said, which is good to know, although also kind of assumed. The best bit came at the end of a hyper-fluent live TV English language test, when he simply turned on his heel and walked off. That brusqueness is the real thing. He might need a fair bit more of it.

Tuchel may be a genuine, scale-appropriate replacement for Frank Lampard, an actual established football manager with his own energy and his own methods. But the first real obstacle is that everyone has to like him. How to put this? Tuchel has never seemed that interested in being liked. He doesn't look cuddly or warm. What does he look like? An angular Bavarian tactician with a thorn in his side. A surprisingly irritable graphic designer. A 1930s intellectual trying, unsuccessfully, to disguise himself as a middle-aged dance music producer.

All managers take time to find a comfortable touchline style in a new league. How you look, how you occupy that space. It all transmits. Even in the dark times Antonio Conte had the grace to at least look like the executive arm of a high-end jewel heist ring. There is a theory the Chelsea crowd never really got over the first sightings of Maurizio Sarri in his dog-walkers tracksuit, fag-butt drooping from his lower lip. And it was Sarri's shadow that seemed to hang over this Chelsea team as they settled into sustained periods of tame possession at Stamford Bridge.

Tuchel also has a midfield obsession. He likes ball-hogging central controllers. At which point, enter Jorginho, a fine player, but one who still carries about him a mild, yellowing whiff of something Sarri-ish. With an hour gone Jorginho and Mateo Kovacic had touched the ball 200 times between them, although not necessarily in a way you'd notice. Kai Havertz made a first home league start since early December, stationed as a kind of narrow inside forward. For the neutral this is perhaps the most exciting part of Tuchel's arrival. Havertz has been a flaccid, meandering presence in English football. But he is an enchanting presence when the parts align. Here there were glimpses and sparks, and one powerful driving run from the centre circle. On the whole he was a slightly less flaccid meandering presence.

Otherwise Chelsea dominated the ball. In the first half they had 79% possession and made 433 passes to Wolves' 90, most of them a private conversation among the blue shirts. But then this is still a group of players who lack the certainty to swarm forward with any conviction, to take chances, to move out of their positions.

Midway though the first half Tuchel could be seen "doing some coaching", barking out instructions at a break in play to Callum Hudson-Odoi, who did his best to frown urgently and look like he was actually taking it all in mid-match. In between he leapt and skipped on the touchline, a slightly scarecrow-ish in his quilted blue nylon suit. Tuchel is a barker and a flincher, a manager who doesn't so much kick every ball as sense every avenue of spade, read every zonal overlap.

Are England ... good again? Five key questions as they head for India

DANIEL HARRIS

LONDON, 28 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: ARE ENGLAND A FORCE AGAIN? The signs are good but we cannot be sure because the South Africa and Sri Lanka sides England have beaten are not, to borrow a footballing phrase, "in a good moment". Still, winning five straight Tests away from home cannot happen by mistake and, along with the home victories over West Indies and Pakistan, give reason to believe that something is building.

In two of these series and many of these matches, England have had to come from behind, so there are obvious areas for improvement. But Test matches last five days with undulations and fluctuations part of their nature. While repeatedly being battered by West Indies in the 80s and Australia in the 90s, England still had their moments. So what is telling is not that they have had to reverse the flow but that they are able to reverse the flow, no longer hoping to win but expecting to win – even when missing players as important as Ben Stokes, Jofra Archer and Rory Burns.

There now exists the expectation that when things need dealing with, someone will assume the responsibility, which speaks of a happy, balanced team that believes in what it is doing. There is plenty of improving still to be done, but the direction of travel is clear.

IS JOE ROOT GOOD AGAIN?

Of course he is, because he always was. But not that long ago, Root was routinely discussed alongside Virat Kohli, Steve Smith and Kane Wil-



liamson as a prospective great, only to be left behind. There is no shame in not being as good as such geniuses but there is frustration, because the distinguishing factor is not one of skill – you do not fail to convert half-centuries into centuries because the bowling side suddenly find you out when you pass 50. Rather, there are other factors at play, particularly the ravages of leading a losing side.

A team constantly fielding for long periods and batting for short periods will inevitably take a mental and physical toll on a captain who comes in at four, all the more so if he is forced up the order to three behind a sketchy opening partnership. Now, though, things have changed – the top order is better, the bowling is threatening and the stress of selection concerns which quality players to leave out, so it is no surprise to see Root in such fine form, especially after time at home.

Batting is an art best per-

formed when calm and Root sounds like someone who has rediscovered himself, finding equilibrium in the process. When at his best, there is a destructive serenity about his work that is equal parts relaxing and exhilarating. It was moving to hear how reverentially his teammates discussed the inspirational, educational joy of watching him thrive.

The most important aspect of leadership is performance and in that aspect Kohli, Smith and Williamson are touchstones, boasting significantly higher averages when in charge than when in the ranks. For the first time in a long time, Root looks ready to join them.

DO ENGLAND HAVE RELIABLE SPINNERS?

Who knows? Sri Lanka did not fold in the first innings of the first Test and third innings of the second Test because they were bamboozled by the devastating origami of Dom Bess and Jack Leach, but the



pair certainly accentuated the creases, so it is possible to be cautiously positive; both came on tour under pressure and when their team needed them to deliver, they did.

Without the former's batting, England would have conceded a substantial first-innings lead that would likely have settled the match while tying the series and no less a maven than Kumar Sangakkara surmised that Bess and Leach "bowled enough balls in the areas that matter" to turn the contest.

Unless they also bowl few enough balls in the areas that do not matter, that will not be enough to challenge India, but they have played just 12 Tests each, are still improving and will be competing for selection with Moeen Ali. It's not a perfect state of affairs, but it's a slightly better one than it was.

CAN ENGLAND PICK BROAD AND ANDERSON TOGETHER?

When I moved in with my

girlfriend, now wife, I was faced with a smorgasbord of new Indian takeaways. Naturally, she directed me to the best dish at the best place – lamb dhansak, madras hot, at the late lamented Neyas now that you ask – but I still couldn't help myself, trying all the things I thought I might like more in all the places I thought I might like them more, before slinking back to where I started.

So it is with England quicks. It's easy to think particular conditions demand particular styles, but there is no style more effective than enduring brilliance. As such, England's starting point should not be Broad or Anderson but Broad and Anderson. Though there may be reasons to deviate from them, the burden of proof should be upon those reasons rather than upon players who are not just in the form of their lives but in the form of English cricket's life.

WILL ENGLAND BEAT INDIA IN INDIA?

After their rabid and affirming win in Australia, the hosts will be feeling invincible and with good reason. But they are not and England are nicely settled into subcontinental conditions. They've already had some luck with Ravindra Jadeja's injury and need more from the four tosses, amusing though it would be to watch them take last dig on a raging Bunsen.

Most likely, India in India are too much at this point, but if England can bat first and score heavily – a task that ought not to be beyond them – the introduction to their attack of SB Pressure might just compensate for the absent WC Spinner.

Manchester United title hopes hit by Sheffield United defeat

LONDON, 28 JAN [AFP]:

Rock-bottom Sheffield United put a huge dent in Manchester United's Premier League title hopes on Wednesday, beating Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's off-key side 2-1 at Old Trafford. United knew they had to respond after Manchester City leapfrogged them at the summit with a 5-0 hammering of West Brom on Tuesday but they were well short of their best on a frustrating night.

Kean Bryan gave the visitors a shock first-half lead that former Blades defender Harry Maguire cancelled out, only for Oliver Burke's heavily deflected strike to seal a first away win against Manchester United since 1973. The result leaves United on 40 points -- one behind City -- but Pep Guardiola's side now have a game in hand and are looking increasingly likely to win a third title in four seasons. Solskjaer told BT Sport the "magic was missing" from his side, who slipped to their first league defeat since November 1, and said the referee had made two mistakes.

"They defended well, fair play to them but we didn't have the right ideas or solutions," said the Norwegian. "The first goal is a foul, Billy Sharp runs into David de Gea. At the other end, no foul for the disallowed goal for us but it's that kind of season. Two mistakes by the referee." Even in such an



unpredictable season, this result stood out as one of the biggest shocks of the campaign. Before the match Sheffield United had just five points to show from 19 games -- the worst haul in Premier League history -- and had not beaten the Red Devils since 1993.

- SLOPPY MAN UTD - Manchester United's Marcus Rashford flashed an early shot narrowly wide but they were short of ideas against the battling away team.

The Blades broke the deadlock midway through the first half when Bryan rose to glance home John Fleck's corner after De Gea failed to punch clear.

Billy Sharp appeared to nudge the Spanish goalkeeper from behind but the goal was allowed to stand.

Manchester United had the ball in the net after half an hour's play but Anthony Martial's effort did not count because

referee Peter Bankes had already blown his whistle for a foul by Maguire on goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale. United lacked urgency as the first period wore on, struggling to get behind Chris Wilder's organised back line.

Bruno Fernandes fashioned half a chance for United when he ran beyond the last line of defence and hooked the ball back but Martial could not get enough purchase on the header.

The home side tried to step up a gear at the start of the second half but still lacked sharpness in their passing, with Rashford off the pace.

Mason Greenwood, who scored in United's FA Cup win against Liverpool on Sunday, snatched at a chance after a fine through ball from Fernandes.

United were now showing more urgency but David McGoldrick went close to doubling Sheffield United's lead with a clever effort with

the outside of his right foot. Solskjaer's men were level in the 64th minute when an outswinging corner from Alex Telles was met with a thumping header by Maguire past the diving Ramsdale. Edinson Cavani replaced Greenwood moments later as United looked to turn the screw.

But Sheffield United were back in front again in the 74th minute when Manchester United failed to clear and Burke's strike took a wicked deflection off Axel Tuanzebe and went into the underside of the bar. Solskjaer threw on Luke Shaw and Donny van de Beek as United desperately sought an equaliser but they had to face the intense frustration of three dropped points.

"There will be no big inquest," said Solskjaer. "There have been so many odd results this season but with the world as it is we have been the most consistent team. It hit us today."

Leading Paralympian says lockdown needs of disabled people ignored

PAUL MACINNES

LONDON, 28 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: The fitness industry and online influencers are ignoring the needs of disabled people during lockdown, according to one leading Paralympian who says the lack of visibility for one of the most vulnerable groups in society "blows my mind".

Sophie Carrigill, a star of the Team GB women's wheelchair basketball team who are ranked second in the world ahead of this year's Paralympic Games, has called for more to be done to help disabled people benefit from physical activity during the pandemic.

Her remarks come as physical activity among disabled people has been shown to fall away sharply during the pandemic with only 23% able to exercise for 30 minutes five times a week last autumn due to lockdown restrictions. "As an athlete I know how to adapt workouts or do my own. I'm very lucky," Carrigill said. "If I wasn't an athlete the only option would be to go out for a push, go out of my front door, and that's not possible for everyone."

"I know we are surrounded by inequality. And [that includes] access for your average disabled person to fitness resources online. The fitness industry blows my mind in how unequal it is. It's all on social media and you don't see a single person doing an accessible workout. You see all these Instagram bloggers

who are doing workouts for the able-bodied population. We've got ways to go." With activity a key tool in combating not only the physical but mental effects of lockdown Carrigill said disabled people needed their own equivalent of Joe Wicks classes. "You saw Joe Wicks every morning supporting the kids at school," she said. "It was brilliant, fantastic – exactly what was needed. But where was his thought around the disabled child in that class?"

"I think it is important that they are represented. Disabled people are not represented as well as they should be in the media and that's where inequality stems from. You can't be what you can't see."

Carrigill was speaking in the wake of the publication of Sport England's 10-year strategic plan, Uniting the Movement, which takes as a guiding observation: "People with the most to gain from being active have been the least able to take part." As part of the strategy, Wheelchair Basketball is to receive funding to support 800 'activators' to help bring an extra 8,000 people into the sport over the next four years.

"The ambition within the Sport England 10-year strategy is about resetting the inequality that's been there in my entire life", said Lisa Pearce, the chief executive of British Wheelchair Basketball. "This is about creating an opportunity for everyone in their community."

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Oregon puts debate over race in vaccine rollout to test

PORTLAND, ORE. (AP): The role that race should play in deciding who gets priority for the COVID-19 vaccine in the next phase of the rollout is being put to the test in Oregon as tensions around equity and access to the shots emerge nationwide.

An advisory committee that provides recommendations to Oregon's governor and public health authorities will vote Thursday on whether to prioritize people of color, target those with chronic medical conditions or focus on some combination of groups at higher risk from the coronavirus. Others, such as essential workers, refugees, inmates and people under 65 living in group settings, are also being considered.

The 27-member committee in Oregon, a Democratic-led state that's overwhelmingly white, was formed with the goal of keeping fairness at the heart of its vaccine rollout. Its members were selected to include racial minorities and ethnic groups, from Somalian refugees to Pacific Islanders to tribes. The committee's recommendations are not binding but provide critical input for Gov. Kate Brown and guide health authorities crafting the rollout.

"It's about revealing the structural racism that remains hidden. It influences the disparities we experienced before the pandemic and exacerbated the disparities we experienced during the pandemic," said Kelly Gonzales, a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma and a health disparity expert on the committee.

The virus has disproportionately affected people of color. Last week, the Biden administration reemphasized the



importance of including "social vulnerability" in state vaccination plans — with race, ethnicity and the rural-urban divide at the forefront — and asked states to identify "pharmacy deserts" where getting shots into arms will be difficult.

Overall, 18 states included ways to measure equity in their original vaccine distribution plans last fall — and more have likely done so since the shots started arriving, said Harald Schmidt, a medical ethicist at the University of Pennsylvania who has studied vaccine fairness extensively.

Some, such as Tennessee, proposed reserving 5% of its allocation for "high-disadvantage areas," while states like Ohio plan to use social vulnerability factors to decide where to distribute vaccine, he said. California has developed its own metrics for assessing a community's level of need, and Oregon is doing the same.

"We've been telling a fairly simple story: 'Vaccines are here.' Now we have to tell a more complicated story," said Nancy Berlinger, who studies bioethics at The Hastings Center, a non-

partisan and independent research institute in Garrison, New York. "We have to think about all the different overlapping areas of risk, rather than just the group we belong to and our personal network."

Attempts to address inequities in vaccine access have already prompted backlash in some places. Dallas authorities recently reversed a decision to prioritize the most vulnerable ZIP codes — primarily communities of color — after Texas threatened to reduce the city's vaccine supply. That kind of pushback is likely to become more pronounced as states move deeper into the rollout and wrestle with difficult questions about need and short supply.

To avoid legal challenges, almost all states looking at race and ethnicity in their vaccine plans are turning to a tool called a "social vulnerability index" or a "disadvantage index." Such an index includes more than a dozen data points — everything from income to education level to health outcomes to car ownership — to target disadvantaged populations without specifically

citing race or ethnicity.

By doing so, the index includes many minority groups because of the impact of generations of systemic racism while also scooping up socio-economically disadvantaged people who are not people of color and avoiding "very, very difficult and toxic questions" on race, Schmidt said.

"The point is not, 'We want to make sure that the Obama family gets the vaccine before the Clinton family.' We don't care. They can both safely wait," he said. "We do care that the person who works in a meatpacking plant in a crowded living situation does get it first. It's not about race, it's about race and disadvantage."

In Oregon, health leaders are working on a social vulnerability index, including looking at U.S. census data and then layering on things like occupational status and income levels, said Rachael Banks, public health division director at the Oregon Health Authority.

That approach "gets beyond an individual perspective and to more of a community perspective" and is better than asking a person to prove "how they fit into any de-

mographic," she said. The committee's recommendations also will undergo a legal analysis, Banks said. That makes sense to Roberto Orellana, a social work professor at Portland State University who launched a program to train his students to do contact tracing in Hispanic communities. Data shows that Hispanic people have roughly a 300% higher risk of contracting COVID-19 than their white counterparts in Oregon.

Orellana hopes his students, who are interning at state agencies and organizations, can put their knowledge to use both in contact tracing and in advocating for vaccines in migrant and farmworker communities. Vaccinating essential workers, prisoners and those in multigenerational households will reach people of color and put them at the heart of the vaccine plan, he said.

"I don't want to take away from any other group. It's a hard, hard question, and every group has valid needs and valid concerns. We shouldn't be going through this," Orellana said. "We should have vaccines for everybody — but we're not there."

Russia detains Navalny's allies, warns social networks

MOSCOW (AP): Russian authorities on Thursday detained several allies of opposition leader Alexei Navalny and issued warnings to social media giants after tens of thousands of people took to the streets in over 100 Russian cities last weekend to demand his release.

The detention of Navalny's brother Oleg, his top ally Lyubov Sobol, Dr. Anastasia Vasilyeva from the Navalny-backed Alliance of Doctors and Maria Alyokhina from the Pussy Riot punk collective comes as authorities try to stem another wave of protests set for Sunday.

All four were detained for 48 hours as part of a criminal probe into alleged violations of coronavirus regulations during the weekend's protests.

The 44-year-old Navalny, the most well-known critic of President Vladimir Putin's government, was arrested Jan. 17 upon his return from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. Russian authorities have rejected the accusations.

A court in Moscow is to consider his appeal against the arrest later on Thursday.

The overnight detentions came after more than a dozen searches of apartments and offices of Navalny's family, associates and supporters in connection to the probe. Those sites included Navalny's apartment, where police detained his brother, and a rented

apartment where Navalny's wife, Yulia, has been living.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the searches and detentions were a legitimate part of police efforts to investigate the alleged violations during Saturday's rallies.

"Law enforcement agencies are doing their job," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters. "There were numerous violations of Russian laws, and law enforcement agencies are at work."

Russian prosecutors on Thursday also issued warnings to Facebook, Google, Twitter, TikTok and Russian social networks demanding that they block calls for more protests.

"The state doesn't want the social networks to become a platform for promoting such illegal actions," Peskov said.

Asked if their refusal to remove such content could prompt Russian authorities to block them, Peskov responded it would be up to relevant government agencies to consider a response.

"All pros and cons will be weighed and, if necessary, measures envisaged by the law will be taken," he said.

Earlier this week, Russia's state communications watchdog Roskomnadzor said it would fine Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube and two Russian social networks for their failure to block calls on minors to join Saturday's protests.

Also Thursday, Russia's Investigative Com-

mittee said it opened a criminal probe against Navalny's top strategist Leonid Volkov, accusing him of encouraging minors to participate in unauthorized rallies. Volkov, who lives in Germany, rejected the charges.

In a challenge to Putin two days after Navalny's arrest, his organization released an extensive video report on a palatial seaside compound allegedly built for the president. It has been viewed over 98 million times, further stoking discontent.

Demonstrations calling for Navalny's release took place in more than 100 cities across the nation last Saturday, a strong show of rising anger toward the Kremlin. Nearly 4,000 people were reported detained at those protests and some were handed fines and jail terms.

Navalny fell into a coma while aboard a domestic flight from Siberia to Moscow on Aug. 20. He was transferred from a hospital in Siberia to a Berlin hospital two days later. Labs in Germany, France and Sweden, and tests by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, established that he was exposed to the Soviet-era Novichok nerve agent.

Russian authorities have refused to open a full-fledged criminal inquiry, citing a lack of evidence that Navalny was poisoned.

Navalny's arrest and the harsh police actions at the protests have brought wide criticism from the West and calls for his release.

French police face sanction for Macarena party amid virus

PARIS (AP): At least two dozen French police officials are facing internal punishment for holding a party inside a police station where they were filmed dancing the Macarena and violating multiple virus protection rules.

A police headquarters spokesperson said Thursday that those involved in the party in the Paris suburb of Aubervilliers were

ordered to file reports on their actions and that "sanctions are planned." He wouldn't detail the planned punishments.

Parties and other "convivial gatherings" are banned in all police facilities, while masks and social distancing are required and the number of people allowed in any room is limited to keep the virus at bay, the spokes-

person said. In a video of the event posted by online media Loopsider, several people are seen dancing closely together without masks in a crowded room.

The video prompted criticism at a time when French police are out every night enforcing a 6 p.m.-6 a.m. virus curfew, and are under scrutiny for abuses during violent protests and identity checks.

'Take every shift as it comes': No respite for UK hospitals

LONDON (AP): When the U.K. surpassed 100,000 coronavirus dead this week, it was much more than just a number to Justin Fleming.

Lying in a hospital bed with COVID-19, he knew how easily he could have become one of them, were it not for the medics and other staff who worked to save his life.

"I thought I might not see my partner again, my mum — be a dead friend, be just a stat," said 47-year-old Fleming, who was rushed to King's College Hospital in mid-January struggling for breath. His condition improved after two weeks of receiving oxygen on an acute care ward.

The scale of Britain's coronavirus outbreak can seem overwhelming, with tens of thousands of new infections and more than 1,000 deaths added each day. But on hospitals' COVID-19 wards, the pandemic feels both epic and intimate, as staff fight the virus one patient at a time, and with no end in sight.

Fleming says he was amazed by the diversity of the "incredible" staff — including recently qualified medics, a nurse newly arrived from the Philippines and staff drafted from dental wards and brain injury teams — who eased his isolation and saved him from joining the roster of the dead.

"Because you have to be isolated (with COVID-19), you feel like you've just vanished," he

said. "It's almost like you can become a non-person within a week."

Fleming is one of more than 37,000 coronavirus patients being treated in Britain's hospitals, almost double the number of the spring surge. King's College Hospital, which sits in a diverse, densely populated area of south London, had almost 800 COVID-19 patients earlier this winter. A new national lockdown has seen the number fall to a still-challenging 630.

Critical care consultant Dr. Jenny Townsend works on a 16-bed intensive care ward that currently has 30 patients, with two beds squeezed into each bay designed for one. In normal times, one intensive care nurse looks after one patient. The ratio is now as high as one to four.

"We all feel very stretched and everyone's mucking in to help each other with each of the roles that is required," Townsend said.

"We're doing the best we can, and we're doing it in very difficult circumstances. We try and deliver as close to what we do normally, but occasionally because of the number of patients, we have to prioritize what we can and can't do," she said.

That is especially difficult because coronavirus care is labor-intensive. It takes a village of people and skills to treat each critically ill patient.

One recent day on the ward, Townsend oversaw a tracheos-

tomy, inserting a small tube into a patient's windpipe to help him breathe without a ventilator — a small step toward possible recovery. Down the hall, family liaison officer Berenice Page held a video call to relatives from a patient's bedside. More than half a dozen staff worked to "prone" another patient, carefully flipping them onto their stomach to help them breathe more easily.

Like others, this hospital had to adapt fast when COVID-19 first struck in early 2020, finding room for more patients and redeploying medical staff to work in unaccustomed roles. Wards were converted, staff were drafted in from other departments to the new COVID wards and expanded intensive care units.

Then, after a summer respite when cases plummeted, the hospital had to do it all over again when the virus came roaring back in the fall. Many staff find the struggle harder the second time around.

"In the first wave, people's energy levels were better because we were dealing with the unknown and we learned as we went along," said Felicia Kwaku, the hospital's associate director of nursing. "In this second wave it's worse, because the patients are much sicker, the numbers are higher, the wave feels longer."

Coronavirus patient Fleming, having seen the pandemic up close, says Britain's overbur-

dened medics "need credit now — and help and support."

"This is a significant historical moment and they protected the country," he said.

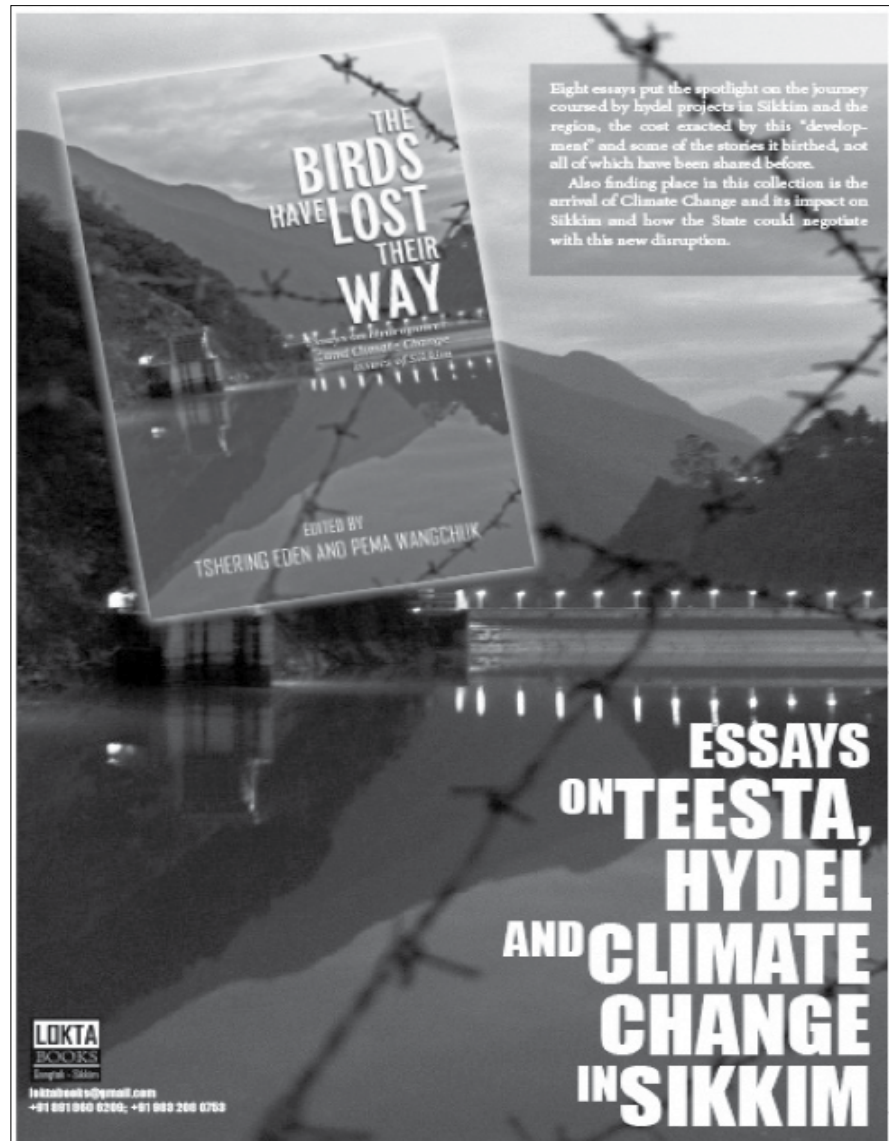
While the number of patients being admitted to London hospitals with COVID-19 is gradually diminishing, pressure on medics will only ease slowly because of the time lag between infections, hospitalizations and — for the sickest patients — transfers to intensive care.

That means ongoing challenges for staff like family liaison officer Page. Each day she phones patients' relatives to update them on their condition, then takes a tablet computer around the ward, so that family members, barred from visiting, can at least see their unconscious loved ones.

"I find it a real privilege to be to be able to talk to them," said Page, whose usual job is as a resuscitation coordinator.

"You get a glimpse of the patient's life when you're doing the video calls, and you see (the relatives) sitting in their homes and some of them have got young children. And, yes, I do feel their despair. But I also I also know what a difference it makes," she said.

"We're often talking to people whose relatives are going to die. It's a very difficult situation. ... I think that when they speak to us. I can say that they find some there's some peace for them," she added.



Bernie Sanders' mittens, memes help raise \$1.8M for charity

About those woolly mittens that U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders wore to the presidential inauguration, sparking endless quirky memes across social media? They've helped to raise \$1.8 million in the last five days for charitable organizations in Sanders' home state of Vermont, the independent senator announced Wednesday.

The sum comes from the sale of merchandise with the Jan. 20 image of him sitting with his arms and legs crossed, clad in his brown parka and recycled wool mittens.

Sanders put the first of the so-called "Chairman Sanders" merchandise, including T-shirts, sweatshirts and stickers, on his campaign website Thursday night and the first run sold out in less than 30 minutes, he said. More merchandise was added over the weekend and sold out by Monday morning, he said.

"Jane and I were amazed by all the creativity shown by so many people over the last week, and we're glad we can use my internet fame to help Vermonters in need," Sanders said in a written statement. "But even this amount of money is no substitute for action by Congress, and I will be doing everything I can in Washington to make sure working people in



Vermont and across the country get the relief they need in the middle of the worst crisis we've faced since the Great Depression."

Sanders' mittens were made by Jen Ellis, a Vermont elementary school teacher who has a side business making mittens out of recycled wool. His inauguration look, also featuring the winter jacket made by Burton Snowboards, sparked countless memes from the photo taken by

Agence France-Presse: The former presidential candidate could be found on social media timelines taking a seat on the subway, the moon and the couch with the cast of "Friends," among other creative locales.

Ellis said on social media over the weekend that Sanders called to tell her that "the mitten frenzy" had raised an enormous amount of money for Vermont charities although she was not authorized to

disclose the amount, yet.

"But it's BIG and it's amazing! Thank you!! Generosity brings joy," she tweeted.

She also said she made three more pairs of mittens and donated them for fundraising to Passion 4 Paws Vermont, Outright Vermont, and would be auctioning off a pair on eBay for her daughter's college fund.

The groups that will benefit from the proceeds of the "Chairman Sanders" items include Area Agencies on Aging to fund Meals on Wheels throughout Vermont, Vermont community action agencies, Feeding Children in Vermont and Bi-State Primary Care for dental care improvements in the state, Sanders' office said.

Sander's attire has also sparked other charitable endeavors. A crocheted doll of Sanders in his garb was auctioned off online and Burton Snowboards donated 50 jackets to the Burlington Department for Children and Families in Sanders' name, his office said.

Getty Images confirmed that it will donate its proceeds as part of the licensing agreement to put the photo on the merchandise to Meals on Wheels of America.

Cannes Film Festival, canceled in 2020, is postponed to July



NEW YORK (AP): The Cannes Film Festival, canceled altogether last year by the pandemic, is postponing this year's edition from May to July in hopes of having an in-person festival.

Cannes organizers announced Wednesday that this year's festival will now take place July 6-17, about two months after its typical period. The French Riviera festival, which had run for nearly 75 years with few interruptions, is currently hoping the coronavirus recedes enough by summertime.

Cannes last year first looked at postponement its 73rd festival to June or July before ultimately canceling altogether. The festival still went ahead with a selection announcement to celebrate the films it had planned to include in its prestigious lineup.

This year, organizers

are intent on having a festival, one way or another. No details were announced Wednesday on what shape a 2021 edition might take.

If Cannes were to go forward with attendees in theaters in July, it would be the first major film festival to do so since the Venice Film Festival mounted a festival in September, with masked moviegoers and social distancing on red carpets. On Thursday, the premier independent film festival, Sundance, launches with virtual screenings and drive-in events scattered around the U.S. The Berlin Film Festival, scheduled for March in Germany, is planning a virtual event.

During the pandemic, Cannes' central hub, the Palais des Festivals, has been used for hospital beds and, more recently, as a vaccination center.

Queen Latifah 'stoked' to land post-Super Bowl slot for show

LOS ANGELES (AP): Queen Latifah thrives on going big. From writing and rapping at the start of her career to being an Oscar-nominated actress to producing, she has upended expectations for years.

Her latest chapter comes in the new CBS series "The Equalizer" as the first Black woman to portray the role in the franchise.

The show debuts Feb. 7 in the coveted timeslot following the Super Bowl, typically the year's most-watched program. The series settles into its regular Sunday night slot on Feb. 14.

The football game offers the potential of a huge lead-in audience to introduce Latifah as Robyn McCall, an ex-CIA officer who uses her skills to defend those who can't help themselves while pursuing her own redemption. Her co-stars include Chris Noth, Lorraine Toussaint and Adam Goldberg.

The post-Super Bowl slot has provided monstrous ratings over the years for shows like "Friends," "Survivor" and "Undercover Boss."

"I'm so stoked that we're coming on after the Super Bowl," Latifah said Wednesday on a video call. "It was a great boost for our crew that has been working really hard under difficult conditions. It just gave us all a boost around here and made us go even harder and work even harder."

Latifah is getting her licks

and kicks in on three sets built inside Meadowlands Arena in East Rutherford, New Jersey, her home state.

The arena where fellow Jerseyites Bruce Springsteen and Frank Sinatra, as well as the NBA and NHL, once played closed in 2015 after nearly 40 years. Tax credits from the state have helped lure TV and film projects to the sprawling site.

"We're across the street from Giants Stadium, for cryin' out loud," said Latifah, a self-proclaimed "huge" football fan. The crime drama is being reimaged, following the original series from the 1980s with a white man (Edward Woodward) in the title role. That show spawned films in 2014 and 2018 starring Oscar winner Denzel Washington.

"I did watch the original series as a kid," Latifah said. "What Denzel did with the feature films has been incredible. We wanted to do something different."

Latifah's character is a divorced single mom to a teenage daughter. On the job, her character is strong, cool and skilled, but at home she's thrown off-balance.

Debra Martin Chase, an executive producer on the show, said she believes Latifah is just the fourth Black woman to play the lead on an hour-long network drama, joining Teresa Graves, Kerry Washington and Viola Davis — all of whom were Golden Globe-nominated for their roles.



FUN FARRAH! Celeb Farrah Abraham enjoyed a day at the beach in Santa Monica, California.

Aries:

There are times when we push and push against the flow. Yet, the things we're manifesting continue to evade us, taking us further down the rabbit hole of agony and self-pity. And then, there are times when minimum efforts yield maximum results. You are at such a point in your life, Aries. So, continue to work in tandem with the mysterious forces and know that big things are about to happen for you.

Tip: That glow on your face tells us everything we need to know!

Taurus: You could take the easy way out and hit the jackpot if you wanted to. But you know that this kind of success won't last. You're all about the big goals and long term vision. You know that your sweat, blood and tears will yield magnificent results eventually. So don't get distracted, Taurus. Continue to pursue your dreams with single-minded focus and remember that the mysterious forces are supporting you at every step along the way.

Tip: Your patience and dedication will pay off.

Gemini:

Tapping into your inner humanitarian is a big theme for you this week, Gemini. You're actively pursuing social welfare and syncing your forces with those who believe in laying the foundation of better work. Leading by example is a skill you're being asked to acquire. Know that by standing up for what you

believe in (even if you're standing alone), you will be inspiring others to look beyond their self-serving ways.

Tip: It's Aquarius season, after all!

Cancer:

You are where you need to be, Cancer. We repeat: you are where you need to be. So instead of comparing your journey with that of others (which is only lowering your vibration), shift your gaze on what you came here to create. Focusing on your long term vision is the secret to emerging victorious eventually.

Tip: Let go of the need to compare your journey with that of others.

Leo:

Dreams, visions, and downloads—your inner life is where the magic is at, Leo, and you don't need a Hogwarts degree to tap into the unseen realms. Maintaining a psychic journal is a wonderful way to keep a track of these messages. If you tend to receive these downloads when you go to bed, consider maintaining a dream journal. Remember, we live in a hyper-masculine world in which rational thinking is given much importance. Learning to trust your inner voice (without letting your logical side interfere) is a skill you're being asked to acquire consciously.

Tip: It's time to tap into the unseen realms.

Virgo:

So your parents weren't the shining examples of truth, honesty and integrity that you would have liked them to be. But their behavioural patterns are a reflection of their unhealthy beliefs—beliefs that have subconsciously become a part of your story. Today, instead of playing the blame game, look at your circumstances from a higher perspective. Recognise the wounds that you have carried into adulthood as you consciously let go of all that is false. Making peace with the past will make space for a better future, Virgo.

Tip: Make peace with the past, accept what transpired, and move on.

Libra:

There are no shortcuts to success. No magic formula that helps you arrive at the desired destination. It has taken a whole lot of blood, sweat, and tears to get where you are, however, the journey has been so, so worth it. What you're being asked to make space for under this lunation is prosperity and abundance. The Universe is in the mood to give and give some more. Allow yourself to receive, beloved!

Tip: Ka-ching!

Scorpio:

Scorpio, you may find yourself playing the role of the jester as life throws one curveball at you after another. If there's anything your awakening has taught you, it's that there is nothing more spiritual

than humour. So, laugh and make others laugh with you. Trust that your acceptance and surrender will alleviate your troubles *and* help your soul level up.

Tip: Laugh and make others laugh.

Sagittarius:

It takes a lifetime to be an overnight success. Read that again, Sagittarius. This week, you are accepting where you are (which is a magical place) and realising that you are your only competition. So, let go of the need to compare your journey with that of others as you continue to focus on your own dreams with single-minded focus. PS: If the cosmic cues are anything to go by, your patience and dedication will pay off in the long run.

Tip: Focus on your own dreams with single-minded focus.

Capricorn:

This phase of your life isn't so much about the new as it is about doing the same things differently. Think out of the box, Cancer. While you're at it, let go of the need to colour within the lines too. You will discover newer aspects of yourself as you break your own rules. Creative writing is also going to be a big theme for you. So have fun with poet, or try your hand at prose. Remember, this copy is for your eyes only. Let go of the idea of perfection and allow yourself to have fun.

Tip: Your ability to think out of the box will be rewarded.

Aquarius:

Aquarius, you may find yourself stepping into the role of a mentor or guide, and helping those who are following the same path as yours. Remember, you were chosen for this mission for a reason. Stop doubting yourself or your many spiritual gifts. The only thing you want to stop and ask yourself is, "Am I being driven by ego or my higher self?" Adopting a service-oriented approach will help you stay on the right track.

Tip: Focus on being of service to the world around you.

Pisces:

In his bestseller Eleven Minutes, Paulo Coelho wrote, "You can either be a victim of the world or an adventurer in search of treasure. It all depends on how you view your life." Read that again, Pisces, as you reflect upon the story that you've been telling yourself. It's true that not everything transpired in your favour. However, playing the blame game will keep you stuck where you are. So, take charge of your life as you consciously redirect the script. Remembering that you are the creator of your reality will give you a newfound sense of freedom.

Tip: It's time to stop playing the blame game.