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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## CM launches Gift Milk scheme



### SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 09 FEB:

Chief Minister, PS Tamang launched 'Gift milk' scheme for girl students of Government schools in Sikkim through which more than 1500 girl students will receive 200 ml of milk per day. The event was organised by the Sikkim Co-operative Milk Producers' Union Limited sponsored by National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) and National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL).

"This a praiseworthy initiative and I express my gratitude to the officials of NDDB and NHIDCL for taking a step towards eradicating malnutrition and other health problems among the younger generation. I sincerely hope that we can continue with it and extend it to a larger scale," the CM wrote on his Facebook page.

Speaking about the increase in milk production in the last few months with the dairy incentive launched last year by the Government, he encouraged the youth to embrace farming and agricultural practices. Those with an educational background in the field can utilise their knowledge and benefit from it, he added.

The CM applauded the Sikkim Co-operative Milk Producers' Union Limited for the excellent work they have been doing behind the scene and encouraged them to carry on with the same enthusiasm.

He also talked about suicide among students where he urged everyone to help and support each other.

## Sikkim scores Zero for two days in a row on Covid infections

### SUMMIT REPORT

#### GANGTOK, 09 FEB:

Sikkim scored a reassuring zero for two days in a row when it comes to Novel Coronavirus infections. While the no-new-cases on Monday was primarily because no RTPCR tests are conducted on Sundays, the zero count for today comes despite the reasonably high number of tests carried out on Monday when a total of 197 samples were screened for the virus, 165 by RT-PCR alone.

With this, Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 has remained frozen at 6,110 for the last two days.

In his daily health bulletin on Tuesday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia informed that 165 samples tested by RT-PCR, nine by TrueNat and 23 through rapid antigen testing all returned negative for COVID-19 today.

In the meantime, four more Covid patients were released from home isolation on Monday, improving the figure of recovered cases in Sikkim to 5,817. The number of active cases has accordingly further reduced to 63.

And while the infections fall, vaccination continues on a smart clip with 954 more people receiving the CoviShield vaccine in different parts of the State on Tuesday.

37 were vaccinated at STNM Hospital, 120 at Central Referral Hospital, 75 at Rongli, 78 at Rhenock and 149 [69 health care workers and 80 frontline workers] at the Urban PHC here in Gangtok, 117 at Soreng and 134 at Dentam in West District, 149 at Phodong in North District and 95 at Temi-Tarku in South District.

## NABARD CONVENES STATE CREDIT SEMINAR

# Sikkim's Credit Potential pegged at Rs 634.90 cr for 2021-22



**GANGTOK, 09 FEB [PIB]:** NABARD organized a State Credit Seminar here at Lemon Tree Hotel on 09 February.

LN Sharma, Minister, IAS, Chief Secretary, Government of Sikkim released the 'State Focus Paper: 2021-22' and booklet titled "NABARD in Sikkim" prepared by NABARD on the occasion of 'State Credit Seminar'.

The seminar was attended by AK Yadav, Additional Chief Secretary, Department of Agriculture & Co-operation, CS Rao, Principal Secretary, RDD, RV. Sangvai, Chief General Manager, Reserve Bank of India, Regional Manager, SBI and top officials from State Govt. Departments, Banks, Research institutions, NGOs etc.

The State focus paper for 2021-22 released by NABARD estimated a total credit potential of Rs.634.90 crore under priority sector in the state for the year 2021-22. Out of which, the credit potential for agriculture loans covering farm credit, agri infrastructure and agri ancillary activities is estimated of Rs.301.03 crore and under MSME sector and Other Priority Sector (OPS) it is estimated as Rs.194.35 crore and Rs. 139.52 crore respectively.

LN Sharma, Minister, appreciated the efforts made by NABARD for support towards rural infrastructure

creation and its farmer friendly programmes. He also requested bankers to make concerted efforts to translate the exploitable potential into bankable projects. He emphasized on sustainability of production and adequate marketing of organic produce and also advised all stakeholders to identify innovative approach towards various developmental initiatives in the State.

Dr Diwarkar Hedge, General Manager / Officer in Charge, NABARD, Sikkim Regional Office in his inaugural address, presented the interventions by NABARD for strengthening of Agricultural Marketing and Other Infrastructure in the State. He added that NABARD has also played an important role in development of infrastructure by extending finance to State Govt under RIDF and NIDA for construction of rural roads, bridges, rural markets, irrigation projects, drinking water supply projects, etc. He highlighted about concessional refinance schemes of NABARD for PACS as MSCs, Micro food enterprises, WASH programs and for credit in watershed/Wadi areas. Also as per the theme of SFP this year NABARD is promoting collectivisation efforts

under both Farm and Off Farm sectors in order to enhance farmers income.

In his special addresses were delivered by C S Rao, Principal Secretary, RMDD, GoS emphasized on the need for credit linkage of SHGs and AK Yadav, IAS, APC, Agriculture Department appreciated the bottom up approach of credit planning by NABARD.

As a prelude to the seminar, the SHGs, FPOs, skill trained youth, springshed farmers, NGOs have setup stalls at the venue displaying various products manufactured by them like handlooms, handicrafts, candles, incense sticks, vegetables etc.

RV Sangvai, Chief General Manager, Reserve Bank of India, Sikkim Regional Office, Gangtok emphasized on the role of entrepreneurs in the economy and hence the necessity to groom them by providing credit plus services. He highlighted the Financial inclusion efforts being made by all stakeholders in the state.

G Ramesh Kumar, DGM, NABARD, made a presentation on various interventions of NABARD in the State of Sikkim as also briefly explained the credit projections made in the State Focus Paper 2020-21. Bhama Deuri, AGM coordinated the entire meeting and SR Jaggi, DGM, NABARD presented vote of thanks.

## Uttarakhand glacier disaster highlights pressure on Asia's rivers, warn experts

**KUALA LUMPUR, 09 FEB [AFP]:** A glacial burst that triggered a deadly flash flood in the Himalayas at the weekend was a disaster waiting to happen, and one likely to be repeated in a region transformed by climate change and unchecked infrastructure development, experts warn.

Asia is home to some of the world's biggest waterways, from the Ganges and the Indus in India to the Yangtze and Mekong originating in China, that snake for thousands of kilometres.

They support the livelihoods of vast numbers of farmers and fishermen, and supply drinking water to billions of people, but have come under unprecedented pressure in recent years.

Higher temperatures are causing glaciers that feed the rivers to shrink, threatening water supplies and also increasing the chances of landslides and floods, while critics blame dam building and pollution for damaging fragile ecosystems.

"Rivers are really at risk from development projects, dumping of solid waste and liquid waste, sand mining and stone mining," Himanshu Thakkar, from the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People, told AFP.

"Climate change is a longer-term process that has already set in. The impacts are already happening.

"So in every respect, rivers are under greater threat."

The disaster was apparently



triggered by a glacial burst, that unleashed a wall of water which barrelled down a valley in Uttarakhand, destroying bridges and roads, and hitting two hydroelectric power plants.

Dozens have been killed and more than 170 others are missing after the accident on the Dhauliganga river, which feeds into the Ganges.

### - SHRINKING GLACIERS -

It is not yet clear what damaged the glacier and triggered the accident, but there are suspicions that construction of hydro-power projects -- in an area that is highly seismically active -- may have contributed.

"This area is prone to vulnerability, it is not appropriate for this kind of bumper-to-bumper hydro-power development," Mr Thakkar said.

"Proper planning, impact assessment, proper geological

assessment -- this has not happened here."

Patricia Adams, executive director from Canada-based environmental NGO Probe International, said dam building in such an area was simply too dangerous, as it makes hillsides unstable and causes landslides.

Some have also pointed to rising temperatures as a contributing factor.

A major study in 2019 suggested Himalayan glaciers had melted twice as fast since the turn of the century as in the 25 preceding years.

"The impacts of climate change in the Himalayas are real," said Benjamin P. Horton, director of the Earth Observatory of Singapore.

As well as greater danger of accidents, glacier loss in the Himalayas deprives local communities of water to drink and for agriculture, he said.

There have been other flooding disasters in the region in recent years. In 2013, some 6,000 people died when flash floods and landslides swept away entire villages in Uttarakhand as rivers swollen by monsoon rains overflowed.

### - RECORD DELUGES -

In neighbouring China, flooding has also worsened on major rivers.

Last year the Yangtze, Asia's longest waterway, suffered record deluges that killed hundreds of people and submerged thousands of homes, with environmentalists saying it indicated climate change impacts were growing.

China has also built a vast dam network, although authorities insist this infrastructure helps mitigate flooding rather than adding to the problem.

Like in India, this has proved controversial, with some blaming the structures for contributing to earthquakes and landslips.

Beijing's dam building has faced criticism outside the country particularly on the Mekong River, which begins on the Tibetan Plateau in China and winds through Southeast Asia.

Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam all battled severe drought in 2019, as the tide of the river fell to record lows.

While some pointed to climate change, there were also calls for China to be more transparent about its dam operations -- Beijing has constructed 11 dams on its section of the river.



# DCPU East holds awareness program

**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 09 FEB:**

District Child Protection Unit, East Sikkim, organised Awareness Cum Sensitization Program for the Block Level Child Protection Committee (BLPCPC) and Village Level Child Protection Committee (VLPCPC) at RakdongTintek BAC today, a press release informs.

The resource person from DCPU East, Amrit Sharma highlighted the issues related to Child



Rights, POCSO Act by the Department of stakeholders and various support to the children. The representatives systems provided Committees consist from departments

like ZillaPanchayats, Panchayats, HRD, DCPU, Health dept., civil societies to make the Child Protection Scheme functional at the grassroots level.

The functions of the Block and Village Level Committees were explained to the members by the resource person. Tshering Norgyal Theeng, BDO RakdongTintek, in his address stressed on spreading the message of child protection to every individual of the society.

## Block Level Sports Talent Hunt at Nandugaon

**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 09 FEB:**

Block Level Sports Talent Hunt 2020-21 was organized by Poklok-Nandugaon Block Administrative Centre, South District at Nandugaon senior secondary school playground on Tuesday, a press release informs.

A total of 45 students from seven schools participated in the selection trials. The selection trial was held in the presence of Panchayat President of Salghari GPU, Pravin



Rai and Principal of Nandugaon senior secondary school, BK Sharma along with members of Poklok-Nandugaon sporting

club, school heads, teachers and PETs of surrounding areas.

The selection trial witnessed the participation of students

from Nandugaon SSS, Jorethang SSS, Bhaishalgaon JHS, Dong Ambotey JHS, Tinik Chisopani JHS, Salghari Secondary School and

Suntaley Primary School, Nandugaon. The trial concluded with the vote of thanks by PET, Sobha Gurung from Poklok-Nandugaon BAC.

## Vaccine deadlines announced, Phase-1 mop-up rounds end on March 6

**NEW DELHI, 09 FEB [PTI]:** The Centre today issued a series of deadlines for vaccination of health workers and frontline workers in view of the tardy progress of some states. At least a single dose of vaccine has to be given by February 20, the mop-up rounds will have to be finished by February 24. For Frontline workers, the dates are March 1 and March 6.

"The failure of beneficiaries to get vaccinated in the mop-up rounds would automatically push them to their age-appropriate vaccination category," the Union health ministry said today. This means those who miss the scheduled dates or mop-up rounds, would be vaccinated according to their age and co-morbidity.

The third phase of vaccination -- for people above the age group of 50 and those with co-morbidities like diabetes or hypertension -- is expected to begin in March.

While answering a question in Parliament on Friday, Union health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan had said, "It is difficult to announce any fixed date right now but it is expected that the third phase of the vaccination drive will start in the second, third or fourth week of March".

The government's announcement comes amid concerns of government officials and public health experts about the slow rate of vaccination in some states.

So far, 12 states have vaccinated less than 40 per cent of their registered healthcare workers. States that need to improve includes Tamil Nadu, which

vaccinated 28.4 per cent beneficiaries, Punjab (34.1 per cent), Delhi (38.9 per cent), Puducherry (15.4 per cent), Manipur (21.3 per cent) and Nagaland (21.5 per cent).

Several public health experts have pointed to vaccine hesitancy -- people's reluctance to go ahead with the vaccination -- as a key reason for the slow pace. Mr Paul, however, said today that vaccine hesitancy "has ended".

"It may still be there at an individual level, but largely it is not there," he said, adding the country is heading towards 1 crore vaccinations soon and the pace is going to pick up further.

"We had told you last time about our vaccination feedback database... 7.75 lakh people gave us feedback. 97.35 per cent people are satisfied with the overall experience of vaccination," he added.

In the backdrop of concerns over the vaccines, all of which have been newly developed, Mr Paul said they have no concern about the efficacy of Covishield. "More vaccines are coming up," he said, citing the Russian-made Sputnik and one from Cadilla (Zydus Cadilla)... Serum's Novavax developments are being watched," he said, adding that a nasally administered vaccine is also going on trial.

Asked when vaccines will be available in the open market, Mr Paul, Chairman of National Expert Committee on Vaccine Administration) said, "Our public health goal is 30 crore people first. If vaccine availability is over and above this, then other options will open. But right now we have to wait and watch".

## Livestock exhibition in Phodong



**WANGCHUK BHUTIA**  
**MANGAN, 09 FEB:**

A district-level livestock show and exhibition was held today at Phodong Senior Secondary School in North Sikkim by the North district office of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services

Department today.

Farmers brought in different breeds of livestock and even dogs to display in the exhibition.

Forest Minister Karma Loday Bhutia, who is also the area MLA, was present as the chief guest. Also today, farmers

who have excelled in goater, poultry, piggery and cattle were awarded today.

CEO, Sikkim Livestock Development Board, Dr Karma Doma Bhutia, underlined conservation efforts underway for the indigenous Siri cow-breed.

## Top Court dismisses plea challenging colonial era provision of sedition

**NEW DELHI, 09 FEB [PTI]:** The Supreme

Court Tuesday dismissed a plea which challenged the Constitutional validity of colonial era provision of sedition under the Indian Penal Code, on the ground that it is being used to stifle freedom of speech and expression of citizens.

A bench of Chief Justice Bobde and Justices AS Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian dismissed the plea saying that there was no cause of action and the petitioners are not the affected parties.

During the brief hearing, senior advocate Anoop George Chaudhary, appearing for the petitioners who are advocates, said that this is a public interest matter and people are being charged under the provision.

The bench observed that a law cannot be challenged without appropriate cause of action.

"You are not facing any prosecution under the Section. What is the cause of the action? We don't have any case before us right now. We don't have any case in front

of us where somebody is rotting in jail. If someone is in jail then we will consider. Dismissed", the bench told Mr Chaudhary.

The plea filed by three advocates Aditya Ranjan, Varun Thakur, V Elanchezhian said that section 124-A of IPC (sedition), the provision which was used by the British against Mahatma Gandhi and Bal Gangadhar Tilak is still stifling the freedom of speech and expression in the country if they choose to express dissent against policies of the Governments in power.

"It is submitted that under the continuously expanding scope of the fundamental rights, a colonial provision like section 124-A which was intended to subjugate the subjects of British crown should not be permitted to continue in a democratic republic," the plea said.

It said that a constitution bench of the top court had in 1962 upheld the validity of section 124-A of IPC in Kedar Nath Singh versus State of Bihar by reading

down the provision and preferring a narrow interpretation of "sedition" to save the provision from unconstitutionality.

"However, after six decades of experience with the sedition law, it is clear that the said judgment requires reconsideration especially in the light of spate of sedition charges imposed against various persons speaking out against the governments of the day and their policies. Section 124-A has a chilling effect on any dissenting free speech and/or criticism of the government which is an essence of democracy," it said.

The plea sought declaring of section 124-A as ultra-vires of the constitution and alternatively direction to DGPs to ensure that top court's 1962 verdict is strictly followed.

The lawyers in their plea submitted that the continuance of a draconian colonial provision like section 124-A in the penal code without corresponding safeguards as provided under the UAPA is "unreasonable and unwarranted".

# Demand for Sonada Rangbull block



**SMRITAKHAWAS**  
**DARJEELING, 09 FEB:**

A rally was organised today by Sonada Rangbull KshetriyaEkikritSamaj demanding separate blockforSonadaRangbull. They also submitted a memorandum to the district magistrate of Darjeeling.

President of Sonada Rangbull KshetriyaEkikritSamaj, Dawangla Bhutia said, "We are an apolitical organization with around 145 samaj as members. We have come together

to fulfill our demand for a separate block because our people are facing lots of problems to complete official work. Even the workers of tea gardens which fall under Sukia block have to face problems while undertaking officials work since they cannot get holiday as needed and because of that the workers of tea garden have to take one day leave without pay."

As per the census of 2011, SonadaRangbull area and its population

is much larger compared to Mirik which has SDO office, Court and Municipality office, said Mr Bhutia.

"We appeal to the ruling government and all the political parties of our Hills to support us in our demand," he added.

He informed that the Chief Minister of West Bengal has called them for a meeting in Kolkata on 11 Feb at 1 pm. A delegation of the organization will leave for Kolkata on Wednesday, he said.

## Waste Management Training in South



**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 09 FEB:**

Waste Management Training Cum Awareness Program was held at Gram

Prashasan Kendra Barfung Jarrong, South Sikkim, today, a press release informs. Under Secretary, Anupama Rai, Officials

from UDD, BO,BI,FF-SIRD & PR and president Bazaar Development Committee were present as resources persons in the program.

**to book advertisements in SummitTimes, call 03592-208698 9734152541**

### LOST

Class X Compartmental Examination Results 2018 of Lalit Majhibearing roll no 3155198 from NTL Senior Secondary School, Volk, South Sikkim.

## RUCHI DIAGNOSTIC CLINIC

Behind telephone Exchange Near Old STNM Hospital. Gangtok

PH: 03592-203333, 204876, 8509373970

### EXISTING FACILITIES:

- ULTRASOUND
- DIGITAL X-RAY
- ECHOCARDIOGRAPHY
- COLOR DOPPLER
- PATHOLOGY
- MICROBIOLOGY
- BIOCHEMISTRY
- ENDOSCOPY
- B M D
- E C G
- DENTAL O P G
- GASTRO CLINIC
- PAEDIATRIC CLINIC
- MEDICAL CLINIC
- ORTHO CLINIC
- E N T CLINIC
- GYNEA CLINIC
- PHYSIOTHERAPY
- SPECIALISED TESTS

### BLOOD COLLECTION CENTRES AT :

- Sushruta Medical, Ranipool.
- Arihant Medical, Opp. CRH gate, 5th Mile.

### COMPLETE E N T FACILITIES UNDER ONE ROOF

**ENT O P D Monday to Friday**  
10.00 am to 2.30 pm

1. ENT OPD CLINIC
2. ENT ENDOSCOPES
3. MICROSCOPIC PROCEDURES
4. MINOR O T PROCEDURES
5. VERTIGO MANAGEMENT
6. AUDIOMETRY, TYMPANOMETRY AND HEARING AIDS.

### CONSULTANT ENT SURGEON

DR. ONGDEN GYATSO, MS (AIIMS)

### GASTRO CLINIC & O P D

8.00 am to 9.00 am

### MEDICAL CLINIC & O P D

9.30 am

### ORTHO AND GYNEA

CLINICS & O P D

3.00 pm

### PAEDIATRIC CLINIC & O P D

8.00 am And 6.00 pm

### VACCINATION CLINIC



## SSB Gangtok personnel get Covid-19 vaccine

GANGTOK, 09 FEB (PIB):

Sashastra Seema Bal Gangtok Sector joined the rest of the nation for COVID-19 vaccination programme.

B.K. Pal DIG, Sector Hqrs SSB Gangtok along with Officers & Officials get first shot of COVID-19 vaccine at COVID19 vaccination centre old STNM hospital Gangtok. Total 35 personnel of Sector Hqrs SSB Gangtok got first shot of vaccine today and approximately 72 Personnel will get first shot of vaccine tomorrow.

B.K. Pal, DIG, SHQ SSB Gangtok addressed



the personnel of Sector Hqrs SSB Gangtok and motivated them for

vaccination and hoped that the vaccination drive would bring an end to

the hardships faced by all due to the pandemic.

## Parents Concerned About Online Safety Of Children Amid COVID-19: Report

NEW DELHI, 09 FEB

[PTI]: A large number of parents are concerned about the online safety of their children amid a significant rise in digital influence amid the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a report by Google. While many aspects of everyday life have moved online, right from buying groceries to paying bills, edutech has seen one of the strongest adoption in the country. Google, in a blogpost on Tuesday, said it had conducted recent research alongside its Trust Research team in Asia-Pacific (Australia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam) and Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico).

The research found that parents with children attending school online were

more concerned about online safety than ones whose children attended school in-person, it noted. About 72 per cent of Indian parents surveyed expressed increased concern about online safety during the COVID-19 pandemic, it added. About 38 per cent parents said they were concerned about safety of child's information and cited common issues like scams and account hacking.

Parents were also concerned about children receiving unwanted attention from strangers, and seeing inappropriate content online. More than a third (40 per cent) parents interviewed said they have never spoken to their children about online safety, and approximately 62 per cent parents said they are using online family safety features.

Google Online Safety Education Lead Lucian

Teo suggested ways to keep children safe online. He suggested that children should be taught to choose strong passwords that cannot be easily guessed, and to opt for platforms that have a strong reputation for user safety. Mr Teo also advised parents to know who their children are talking to online.

"Social isolation is a difficult outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic, and our children connect with their friends online, whether through messaging apps or voice chat while playing games. It is important for parents to be aware that these channels can also be used by ill-intentioned strangers to reach out to our children," he said.

He added that parents should try and talk to kids about the games played or videos watched, and also the people they play with online. "We need to work hard to reassure

our children that we are here to guide and protect them," he said. He pointed out that when assessing if a game is suitable for the child, it is important to check not only the content of the game, but also whether the app allows online communications with others.

"Some multiplayer games allow only a few options for social interaction, like a thumbs up rather than a text chat. This reduces risks of unwanted social interactions by quite a lot," Mr Teo said. Another time-tested tip is to allow children to use the internet only in common areas in the home such as the living room. "At the end of the day, the core of our parenting journey lies in the relationships we build with our children. They require our guidance on the internet as much as they do in the real world," he said.

## "Like a Royal Bengal Tiger..": Mamata Banerjee responds to JP Nadda

KOLKATA, 09 FEB

[NDTV]: A defiant Mamata Banerjee invoked the spirit of the Royal Bengal Tiger on Tuesday, as she and BJP chief JP Nadda traded barbs while on the campaign trail ahead of the Assembly election.

"I am not weak. I am strong. I will walk with my head held high till the time I am alive. I will live like a Royal Bengal Tiger till the time I live," Ms Banerjee roared, even as senior leaders quit - the most recent of whom was former Forest Minister Rajib Banerjee - and join the BJP.

The Chief Minister was in East Bardhaman and Murshidabad districts and JP Nadda flew into Tarapith in Birbhum before moving on to Lalgah in Jhargram - a former Maoist hotbed where the BJP seems to have gained some ground.

In Tarapith, Mr Nadda said: "(Under) Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, ₹ 14,000 has been distributed to 11 crore farmers... but 73 lakh farmers in Bengal were denied this. If Modiji comes to power, in our first cabinet meeting we will ensure this money is given."

Ms Banerjee's response was scathing: "BJP only lies. They say Mamata is blocking farmers' money (but

did you not get Krishak Bandhu (a state scheme for farmers) money? Now tell Modi to send the money he promised. We have sent names (but) they don't send the money... lie every day."

She also attacked the centre over the farmers' protest against the new agriculture laws.

"See what is happening in Delhi. They have put nails on the road to stop farmers. Those bills will finish farmers. Adani will get everything... they have to repeal everything," she said.

BJP chief JP Nadda addressed rallies in Tarapith and Lalgah on Tuesday

Ms Banerjee also had a message for ex-Trinamool leaders who have joined the BJP in recent weeks. She referred to the popular Bengali saying "dushtu gorur che phanka gowaal bhalo", which translates as: "An empty cowshed is better than one full of naughty cows".

"There is no reason to try and scare me... to think I am weak. Those who want to join BJP should leave. There is no place for such people in our party," she declared.

To this Rajib Banerjee shot back: "There will no cows left in your cowshed in a few days."

The Chief Minister

also responded to charges about the safety of women in her state.

Mr Nadda had earlier claimed "domestic violence is most in Bengal... rape is happening the most here and human trafficking is the also most".

"In Bengal the freedom our mothers and sisters have... it doesn't exist anywhere. The peace and respect they have doesn't exist elsewhere. Go and see what is happening in UP," Ms Banerjee said.

Mr Nadda also

accused the Chief Minister of appeasement and referred to the Bengal government permitting Muharram celebrations during the lockdown but not allowing Saraswati Puja celebrations.

"They are lying about Hindus. Are we not Hindus? But we don't say that just because we are Hindus we will hate Muslims... We don't say that just because we are Hindus we will hate Buddhists... that is not in our culture," Ms Banerjee responded.

## India backs Astra Zeneca, orders 10 Million new doses

NEW DELHI, 09 FEB [PTI]:

India said on Tuesday it had no concerns over the efficacy of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine despite South Africa putting it on hold, and ordered 10 million more doses of the shot for its own huge immunisation campaign.

South Africa delayed use of the vaccine after researchers found it offered minimal protection against mild-to-moderate COVID-19 disease caused by the country's dominant coronavirus variant.

India, with the highest number of infections after the United States, has yet to detect the South African variant and will continue to use the vaccine in an inoculation drive that has covered 6.3 million front-line workers since January 16.

"Our vaccination programme is robust and valid, and I assure you

that we are going ahead with it, not worried at the moment," Vinod Kumar Paul, a top vaccine official in the country, told a news conference.

"We will intensify our surveillance and we will be watching other developments in due course."

The Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's biggest vaccine maker, has licenced the vaccine from AstraZeneca and Oxford University and markets it as COVISHIELD for low-and middle-income countries.

India has ordered 10 million more doses of COVISHIELD on top of 11 million supplied earlier, an SII spokesman told Reuters on Tuesday. SII has agreed to sell at least 100 million doses to the government at a discounted price of Rupees 200 each, though the government says firm orders will be staggered

based on its needs, and also on vaccine shelf-life.

Covishield is about 72% effective, based on late-stage trials done abroad, says the country's drug regulator.

The country is also using the COVAXIN shot developed at home by Bharat Biotech with Indian Council of Medical Research. Bharat Biotech has supplied 5.5 million doses to the government and is selling 4.5 million more, a company spokeswoman told Reuters.

The government wants to cover 300 million people by August, reaching the elderly and those with existing conditions by March.

India has reported 10.85 million infections and more than 1,55,000 deaths - though cases have fallen sharply since September.

MAKE IN INDIA

Mr Paul said Johnson

& Johnson could manufacture its shot in India. He also said many more vaccines, including Russia's Sputnik V, Cadila Healthcare's ZyCoV-D and a Novavax product, were in the queue.

"India is fortunate to have two great made-in-India vaccines, and as many as six-seven vaccines in the pipeline and perhaps many more," he said, days after Pfizer Inc pulled an application seeking emergency-use authorisation in the country.

The U.S. company had declined to immediately do a small local safety study for its shot and produce it in India, unlike the other vaccine developers.

New Delhi, meanwhile, is aggressively pushing the SII and Bharat Biotech vaccines abroad as part of a diplomatic campaign to recoup ground lost to China.



### TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tenders are invited for Mahindra Holidays and Resorts India Ltd., Unit Club Mahindra Gangtok from reputed parties for the supply of following products & service for the period 1st April 2021 -31st March 2022.

\*Milk & Milk products \*Ice Cream \*Snacks \*Indian Sweets \*Local Breads \*Vegetables \*English Vegetables \*Organic Vegetables \*Fruits \*Mutton \*Chicken \*Eggs \*Local Chicken \*Groceries \*Provisions \*General Cleaning items \*Chemicals \*Gel Fuel \*Printing & Stationary \*Souvenir Shop \*Spices \*Travel Desk \*Condiments \*Dry Fruits \*Engineering (Electrical, Plumbing, Hardware etc.) \*Soft Beverages \*Hard Liqueur \*AMC for LPG servicing \*AMC for DG Servicing \*Pest Control \*Security Service.

Applications should be collected from the materials office on any working day between 10,00 A.M. - 5.00 P.M. with- in 17 February 2021. The management reserves the right to accept /reject any tender without assigning any reason whatsoever Sealed Tenders should reach the following address by 17 February 2021,

**5.00 P.M. Finance Department,  
Cell No 7003155139, 6294846485  
Club Mahindra, Gangtok  
Pin No - 737103.**

**Specialized Dental Clinic of Siliguri  
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**No. 18-08/2020- DD-III**  
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**Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan)**  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Pt. Deendayal Antyodaya Bhawan, CGO Complex, Lodhi Road, New Delhi - 110003

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(Director)

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## Finnish First

*Let's learn some things from Finland*

Finland is today (as ranked by independent agencies on a range of international indices), the most stable, the safest and the best governed country in the world. With a population of 55 lakh, it is also ranked the third wealthiest, the third least corrupt, the second most socially progressive and the third most socially just. Its judicial system is recognized as the most independent and the highest levels of personal freedom is lavished on its citizens, and hence it should come as no surprise then that in these times of shrinking trust and ugly profiteering, Finland's police is the most trusted, its banks the most stable and companies the second most ethical. Sitting as it does, among a clutch of Scandinavian countries which ace these rankings, this is a major achievement for Finland because geography has been harsh to the land and history rather vicious to its people. The last ever famine in Europe was 150 years ago, and in Finland, then a backwater under the Russian empire, the famine wiped out 10% of the population. This must have been a staggering setback and the country has been independent only for a 100 years, meaning, it could begin pulling itself out of its privations only a century back, a time by when its neighbours had leaped ahead and its human resource was at its lowest. And yet, the country has done so handsomely well for itself and its people.

Most people, those in Sikkim included, look at Finland and see its primary school education system and want to learn from it, which is good, but rather incomplete. When one looks at Finland, its experience and its indices, one realizes that excellence does not come in isolation or piecemeal. Once the right environment has been created to install the best primary education systems in place, it is not just schools that are touched but everything else benefits as well – from the environment to social justice to democracy. Yes, that last one as well. Finland, did we mention, is the third most gender-equal country in the world and has the second freest elections.

Researchers and other societies have been trying to get a handle on what makes Finland so excellent. Even accepting that the Finnish experience cannot be replicated, understanding it will at least tag the societal instincts necessary to deliver so well. One does realize that these things are not packaged and delivered top-down and are instead manifestations of how the larger community behaves and responds to situations. Tarja Halonen, Finland's president from 2000 to 2012, said at one time, "We live in a cold, harsh and remote place. Every person has to work hard for themselves. But that is not always enough. You have to help your neighbours."

He was responding to a query on what contributed to the Finnish Miracle.

But it is not just instinctive cooperation, but also perseverance and complete commitment to common pursuits. Their geography and challenges are not kind to fickleness and the Finns clearly know this well. They also have a name for the "dogged, courageous persistence regardless of consequence" that defines them – "sisu". A historic manifestation of "sisu" was in 1939-40, when 3.50 lakh Finnish soldiers twice fought off Soviet forces three times their number, and inflicted losses five times heavier than those they sustained themselves. And this attitude has served them well in peaceful times as well.

Their survival has traditionally depended on working together, collaborating, but interestingly, not by subsuming individuality, but by allowing equal expression and representation. The Finns have leveraged the absence of traditional hierarchies (within themselves) to ensure that while collaborations and community participation was quick and genuine, ideas can be freely shared and individuality safely expressed without running the risk of being judged or scoffed. This attitude celebrates excellence and allows ideas to germinate and merit an expected outcome. In such environments, while mediocrity is tolerated, it is not celebrated as is common in more feudal settings of even democratic societies with authoritarian tendencies; people believe in each other and are not second-guessing every gesture and don't allow their prejudices to rule their judgment. Such a people look ahead and not stare into the past. That is a nice place to be. And it is not as if everyone is happy and smiling all the time in Finland. Their free society means that free expression is genuinely on offer and criticism, even ridicule, is frequent and harsh. But there is also trust and faith.

# COVID: Why Are Swedish Towns Banning Masks?

**TINE WALRAVENS & PAUL O'SHEA**  
**THECONVERSATION.COM**

Officials in Halmstad municipality, Sweden, recently forced a teacher to remove their mask and prohibited the use of masks and all forms of PPE in schools. The municipality said there was no scientific evidence for wearing masks, citing the Swedish public health agency. At the time, agency guidance stated that there were "great risks" that masks would be used incorrectly. This guidance has since been removed.

To someone unfamiliar with the Swedish response to COVID-19, this mask ban might sound shocking. After all, while masks are not foolproof, there is evidence that indicates that they do help reduce the spread of COVID-19, especially in situations where maintaining distance is impossible – such as schools.

The municipality eventually backed down. But new examples of mask bans keep popping up in Sweden. Librarians in the affluent town of Kungsbacka, for example, have been instructed not to wear masks.

How on earth did we end up in this situation? Well, everything the Halmstad and Kungsbacka officials have said about masks is in line with the Swedish public health agency's statements. These local mask bans are a logical product of nine months of consistent anti-mask statements by the Swedish state, which we argue is an example of poor risk communication.

**A EUROPEAN OUTLIER**  
Outside of Sweden, most Europeans are now used to wearing masks indoors whether in the supermarket, on public transport or when visiting the doctor. It has become such an ingrained habit that we can easily forget that, for the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic,

many of us were not wearing masks at all. In those early days, the main message was the rather simple "wash your hands" and the rather more difficult "don't touch your face".

The European Centre for Disease Control first recommended the public use of masks as early as April, though it was not until June that the World Health Organization (WHO) followed suit. England waited until July, and finally in August, Norway, Denmark and Finland brought in masks requirements.

Sweden, as we have seen, chose a different path. The Swedish public health agency has consistently stated that masks are ineffective and that their use could actually increase the spread of COVID-19 – a common view at the beginning of the pandemic but a rare one now.

In July, the health minister, Lena Hallengren, explained that the Swedish government did not have a culture or tradition of making decisions about protective clothing such as masks, and that her government would not overrule the public health agency.

Sweden's mask policy even went beyond its national borders, into international anti-mask activism. In April, the country's chief epidemiologist, Anders Tegnell, wrote an email to the European Centre for Disease Control (which happens to be based in Stockholm), warning it not to recommend the use of masks. The reasoning was that this "implies the spread is airborne", which would "seriously harm further communication and trust".

**RISK COMMUNICATION**  
How did we get here? Back in spring 2020, when SARS-CoV-2 was still a new and poorly understood virus, the Swedish communication around COVID-19 was a simple and consistent tripartite mantra: wash

your hands, keep distance, stay home if you are sick. This will be familiar to people in many other countries, and is a textbook example of effective risk communication, which should be clear, straightforward and easy to act upon.

The WHO guidelines for effective risk communication in public health crises emphasise that uncertainties should be explicitly stated, that the information is consistent and easy to understand, and that the messaging contains specific and realistic recommended actions.

The initial stages of Swedish risk communication ticked two of these boxes, while failing to communicate uncertainty, which was the case in many countries which also chose very simple messages.

As scientific understanding of the virus developed, however, the Swedish risk communication around masks did not change. In August, for example, when mask-wearing was becoming widespread in other European countries, Tegnell said that the evidence for mask-wearing was "astonishingly weak" and that their use could increase the spread of the virus.

**A MUDDLED MASK MANDATE**  
Swedish authorities maintained their anti-mask position until December, when the prime minister, Stefan Lofven, announced a U-turn on the use of masks on public transport.

But Lofven's new policy was not a simple rule to wear masks when travelling. Instead, it recommends the use of masks from 7am to 9am and 4pm to 6pm, for those born "in 2004 and before" who do not have a reserved seat. If this sounds overly complicated, that's because it is.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that compliance has been low, with only half of commuters actually wearing masks during rush hour.

And it's not just the general

public. Two weeks after the recommendation was introduced, the director of Sweden's public health agency, Johan Carlson, was spotted without a mask on a bus during rush hour. When asked about his failure to comply with his own recommendations, he said, "I simply failed to notice that the time had become commuting time," which nicely illustrates the problem with overly complex risk communication.

**CONFUSING AND COMPLEX**  
If the head of the public health agency is incapable of following his own rules, one can hardly blame the public for their lack of compliance.

At the start of the pandemic, the Swedish government's initial risk communication (the tripartite mantra) was straightforward and easy to understand. But by December, authorities had been warning of the risks of mask-wearing for months. So the public transport announcement was not only confusing due to its complexity but also due to the fact that its content directly contradicts the mask guidance from March until December.

In this context, it's no wonder that libraries and schools in Sweden are sending mixed messages about whether people should wear masks.

It's the product of months of bad risk communication on a simple public health measure that has been widely adopted elsewhere. This failure to communicate could have very worrying results: potentially increased infection in a country which is on the brink of a third wave.

[Tine Walravens is Assistant Professor, Department of International Economics, Government and Business, Copenhagen Business School; Paul O'Shea is Senior Lecturer, Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University]

# Will the COVID-19 Vaccine Work as Well in Patients With Obesity?

**CATE VARNEY**  
**THECONVERSATION.COM**

When researchers began to develop what they hoped would be an effective COVID-19 vaccine, they already knew that H1N1 influenza – a novel virus, like COVID-19 – more severely affected patients with overweight or obesity. Patients with a body mass index of 30 or above had a higher risk of hospitalization and death from H1N1.

This is not the first time such a link has been found. A 2017 study from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill discovered the flu shot was less effective in patients who had excess weight or obesity. This study included only 1,022 participants, but other small studies show similar results.

Flash forward to today, when the COVID-19 vaccine has been created, tested on more than 40,000 patients and is now being distributed across the nation. The data is promising; the two authorized vaccines offer more than 90% protection from the virus.

But doctors and researchers are mindful of the H1N1 and UNC findings. As a physician who specializes in obesity medicine, I'm one of them. Now all of us want to know this: Will the COVID-19 vaccines be equally effective in patients who have excess weight or obesity? Initial data shows this to be the case, but additional data will need to be collected after many more patients are vaccinated.

**WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS**  
The answer to this question is crucial. Adult patients who have excess weight or obesity are among the most impacted by COVID-19, and they make up more than 70% of the U.S. population. Indeed, as I read through the Pfizer vaccine trial data, I saw that very familiar group: 70% of the Pfizer COVID-19 trial participants, like the U.S. demographic, had overweight or obesity. A collective cheer from obesity specialists could be heard around the world for creating a group that best represented our current U.S. population.

COVID-19 has been devastating here in the U.S. for those with overweight and obesity, particularly younger patients. Initially, doctors thought younger patients as a whole had less risk of severe complications due to their age. But for



people younger than 50 who have obesity, the obesity negated the protective effect of age.

The COVID-19 vaccine is promising because it activates B and T immune cells, critical for long-term protection against viruses. B cell activity and levels have been shown to be lower in both mice and human subjects that have obesity following infections.

These immune cells can quickly produce new antibodies even if antibody levels fall over time and there are few left from previous vaccinations. Antibodies block the virus from getting into a cell and infecting it, but B and T cells destroy the virus-infected cells and prevent further replication of the virus and spread to other cells. But this may not be true for people with obesity. Researchers believe that obesity negatively impacts the function of the immune system.

Although patients with obesity can produce adequate antibodies, multiple studies show they have a lower level of those B and T cells following an infection with the H1N1 influenza. This can alter the typical immune response, leaving the body one step behind after the virus invades. An important question is whether this altered immune response is also present after a COVID-19 infection. And because of this, we want to know whether the vaccine will be as effective in patients with obesity for as long as other patients who do not suffer from this disease.

**VACCINE STILL A MUST**  
Even with this concern, patients with overweight or obesity should still get the

COVID-19 vaccine. Even for those patients with obesity who receive the flu vaccine but still get the flu, there's almost a 40% reduction in hospitalization and 82% reduction in ICU admissions.

In short, the data released from Pfizer and the FDA show the vaccine is not only effective in participants as a whole, but in particular, patients with obesity.

It is encouraging that Pfizer wanted to show the vaccine was just as effective in those who have excess weight or obesity. Researchers are recognizing these patients are more at risk

and now design studies to reflect that.

**BEHAVIORS THAT WILL HELP**

Two things might encourage people with excess weight or obesity to exercise and improve their dietary habits: Previous studies show a positive association between regular exercise before receiving a vaccine and your response to the vaccine, producing up to four times as more antibodies after being exposed to a virus or bacteria. This means that antibodies are higher in those who exercised prior to vaccine administration versus those who did not engage in exercise. Also, it seems the type and amount of your gut bacteria may impact the vaccine response. Foods containing prebiotics and probiotics may assist with this and other disease prevention and treatment. Prebiotics can be found in barley and garlic, while yogurt, sauerkraut and some cheeses contain probiotics.

More data is needed before we know precisely how patients with excess weight and obesity respond to vaccines when compared to the rest of the population. But that data is coming quickly. Even just one year from now, we will look back and be amazed at all we have learned about COVID-19. From that research will come the knowledge we need to create a better way to deliver health care to all of us.

*[the writer is Clinical Physician, University of Virginia]*

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# Odisha to have COVID Warriors memorial



**BHUBANESWAR, FEB 8 (PTI):** Odisha government will construct a COVID-19 Warriors Memorial at the Biju Patnaik Park here to keep alive the memory of the supreme sacrifice made by them, an official said on Monday. The proposed memorial will be inaugurated on Independence Day, he said adding that the works department has been assigned the job of constructing the structure.

Many people including health workers, police personnel,

teachers and sanitation workers have laid down their lives while working as frontline workers during the pandemic.

COVID-19 is once in a century pandemic and In order to keep it (sacrifice) in the memory of people as well as to recognize the sacrifice and service rendered by the COVID-19 warriors who have lost their lives fighting the pandemic, the government has decided to construct a COVID-19 Warrior Memorial, additional chief secretary to the

health and family welfare, P K Mohapatra said.

Odisha DGP Abhay said that 48 police personnel have laid down their lives while fighting against the pandemic.

He said police personnel had also donated the highest number of plasma units for the treatment of the critical COVID-19 patients.

The police personnel form 46 per cent of the total plasma donors in the state, he said.

In a twitter post he

said there are 2,166 plasma donors in Odisha of which 1002 are the Odisha Police.

The first plasma donors of Odisha Police are two members of Odisha State Armed Police 3rd Battalion, Koraput.

They donated plasma at SCB Medical College and Hospital, Cuttack on 24, July 2020, the DGP said.

As police personnel are listed as frontline COVID-19 warriors, their vaccination drive began in the second phase on February 6.

## Mizoram Assembly Budget Session from Feb 23

**AIZAWL, FEB 9 (PTI):** The Budget session of Mizoram Assembly will be held from February 23 to March 17, an official said.

The meeting of the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) chaired by Assembly Speaker Lalrinliana Sailo on Monday chalked out the detailed programme for the upcoming budget session as per which the session will last till March 17, Assembly Secretary H Lalrinawma said.

There will be 15 sittings between February 23 and March



17, he said.

State Governor P S Sreedharan will deliver his address on the first

day of the session, while Chief Minister Zoramthanga, who holds the Finance portfolio

will present the annual budget for fiscal 2021-2022 on March 1, he added.

## 3 new cases push Mizoram's COVID-19 tally to 4,386

**AIZAWL, FEB 9 (PTI):** Mizoram's COVID-19 tally rose to 4,386 on Tuesday as three more people tested positive for the infection, a health official said.

Two cases were reported in Aizawl and one in Lawngtlai district, he said.

The state now has 24 active cases, while 4,353 people have recovered from the disease and nine patients have succumbed to the infection so far, the official said. Mizoram has so far tested over



2.16 lakh samples for COVID-19, including 1,179 in the last 24 hours, he said.

A total of 10,937 health workers have been vaccinated to date, he added.

## Meghalaya Lokayukta issues notices to CS, others over illegalities

**SHILLONG, 09 FEB [SHILLONGTIMES]:** On a day when the central government gave its endorsement to the MDA Government's claims that no illegal coal mining was taking place in Meghalaya, the ruling NPP-led government faced a major embarrassment after the Lokayukta issued notices to the Chief Secretary and several other senior officials over the allegations of illegal mining and transportation of coal in the state.

Despite demands from some quarters, the government remained defiant all along by not ordering an independent probe.

The Lokayukta issued the notices after Congress leader Mukul Sangma had written to the Chief Secretary last month, complaining that there was no let-up in illegal mining of coal and its transportation.

A copy of the letter was marked to the Lokayukta.

In an order issued on Monday, PK Musahary, chairperson of the Lokayukta, said the complaint petition filed by Sangma had been registered.

The Lokayukta also issued the notices to the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police of West Jaintia Hills, the first informant M Syrti, the Officer in-

charge of Raliang Police Station, the Divisional Mining Officer (DMO) and the Director of Mineral Resources (DMR), Jowai.

Syrti has been asked to file his response while the OC of Raliang Police Station has been asked to file the status report.

The DMO and the DMR have been asked as to why they should not be impleaded as respondents to file response within 15 days.

The Lokayukta asked the Chief Secretary as to why he should not be asked to prepare an action plan to fight coal racket.

The Director General of Police has been

directed to provide necessary police protection to complete the inquiry.

In his petition submitted to the Chief Secretary, Sangma had alleged that illegal coal mining was still taking place in violation of the MMDR Act, 1957 as well as the ban issued by the National Green Tribunal.

The issue of illegal mining and transportation of coal has haunted the state's National People's Party-led coalition government since it was installed.

The allegations about the illegality were made by political parties as well as various civil society groups from time to time.

## A win is a win: '20 Australian champ Kenin gets by in 2 sets

**MELBOURNE, FEB 9 (AP):** Sure, Sofia Kenin struggled in her first match as a defending champion at a Grand Slam tournament.

The 22-year-old from Florida struggled with jitters at the Australian Open. Struggled with her shots. Struggled against an opponent who's never won a tour-level match.

Kenin, though, knows all that really matters: Who can claim the final point. And, eventually, she managed to do just that Tuesday (Monday EST) at Melbourne Park, setting aside an early deficit and beating 133rd-ranked Australian wild-card entry Maddison Inglis 7-5, 6-4.

"I'm obviously not too happy with the way I played, Kenin said with a chuckle, "but a win is a win." Inglis is still searching for one: She fell to 0-6 for her career.

Still, boosted by a crowd of locals at Rod Laver Arena, she did not make things easy on Kenin, who nevertheless managed to avoid becoming the first woman since Jennifer Capriati in 2003

to lose in the first round at the Australian Open a year after winning the championship.

"First round, it's obviously nerves for me, said Kenin, who followed up her first major title last year by reaching the final at the French Open.

The woman Kenin defeated for the title in last year's final in Melbourne, two-time major champion Garbi e Muguruza, also advanced to the second round, defeating Margarita Gasparyan of Russia 6-4, 6-0.

Muguruza dropped only 11 points in the second set and improved to 9-0 in first-round matches at the Australian Open.

In other early results on Day 2 on a sunny day with the temperature in the low 70s Fahrenheit (low 20s Celsius), 17-year-old Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz became the youngest man to win a Grand Slam match since Thanasi Kokkinakis was one day younger at the 2014 Australian Open.

Alcaraz eliminated Botic Van de Zandschulp, a 25-year-old from the

Netherlands who is ranked 151st, by a score of 6-1, 6-4, 6-4.

A seeded woman exited the tournament when Ann Li, a 20-year-old American, defeat No. 31 Zhang Shuai 6-2, 6-0 in just 47 minutes to improve to 5-0 this season.

Li is ranked 69th and competing in only her third career Grand Slam tournament.

She is coming off an unusual accomplishment at a tune-up tournament at Melbourne Park last week: Li shared the title of the Grampians Trophy with Anett Kontaveit because organizers decided not to hold a final so as not to wear out the players right before the Australian Open.

That warmup event was created for players such as Li who had to go into a hard lockdown after potentially being exposed to COVID-19. They were not allowed out of their hotel rooms for practice or any other reason during a two-week quarantine upon arrival in Australia.

## AJT&A joins the strike on petrol and diesel hikes in Meghalaya



**JOWAI, 09 FEB [SHILLONGTIMES]:** The All Jaintia Tourist and Commercial Vehicles Association (AJT&A) has decided to join the strike which was called by the Meghalaya Joint Action Committee of Commercial Vehicles (MJACCV) on Wednesday

last and still continuing. The strike is a move to pressurise the state government to reduce the prices of petrol and diesel in the state as the state government is allegedly charged an extra amount on the fuels.

The AJT&A has taken

the decision to join the strike in a special meeting held here in Jowai on Monday.

The meeting was attended by representatives of tourist cabs drivers from West and East Jaintia Hills districts.

"All Tourist vehicles

under the banner of the AJT&A will stay off the road from Monday mid night to join the strike spearheaded by the Joint Action Committee of the Meghalaya Tourist and Commercial Vehicles", AJT&A President, Paila Lyngkot informed.



the official said.

The administration has tested over 2.36 lakh samples for COVID-19 so far, he added.

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## 4 new cases take COVID-19 tally of Andamans to 5,005

**PORT BLAIR, FEB 9 (PTI):** The COVID-19 tally of Andaman and Nicobar Islands rose to 5,005 on Tuesday as four more people tested positive for the infection, a health official said.

The Union territory's coronavirus death toll remained unchanged at 62 as no fresh fatality was reported, he said.

The archipelago now has 11 active cases, while 4,932 people have recovered from the disease so far,



# James Anderson leads England to 227-run victory over India in first Test

ALI MARTIN

**MUMBAI, 09 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]:** Never in his wildest dreams could Joe Root have imagined his 100th Test match unfolding like this. To celebrate the milestone with a double-century was one thing but to see his England team then turn this into a resounding 227-run victory and take a 1-0 lead over India truly was the stuff of fantasy. This was one of England's greatest away wins, sealed on the fifth afternoon in Chennai when Jofra Archer found the edge of Jasprit Bumrah's bat for the simplest caught behind by Jos Buttler. India, set an improbable 420 to win and looking to bat out the day to prevent just their second home defeat in more than eight years, were all out for 192 despite a typically defiant 72 from Virat Kohli.

Root's epic 218 in the first innings was the foundation for all this, allowing England to control the match after posting 578 on the board in their first innings. But equally impressive was the performance by his bowlers, claiming 20 wickets on the red soil of Tamil Nadu to defy a good number of pre-series predictions.

After all, this was the ground where four years ago England shipped a record 759 for seven for a harrowing innings defeat. Yet here they prevailed, hunting as a collective throughout and on



a final day that saw Jack Leach finish with figures of four for 76, and Jimmy Anderson produce a masterclass in his three for 17.

Like an ice-cream on the neighbouring Marina Beach, any anxiety Root might have been feeling after the debate about his non-declaration the previous evening soon melted away during a remarkable five-wicket morning that left the result tracking in one direction thereafter.

Anderson was irresistible, while Archer was blood-curdling in a burst before lunch that saw Ravichandran

Ashwin sustain nasty blows to hand, wrist and head. But the initial impact of Leach, whose removal of Rohit Sharma the previous day saw India resume on 39 for one, should not be overlooked.

Kohli may be India's kingpin – and his 72 augurs well for the hosts as they look to strike back on the same ground from next Saturday – but Cheteshwar Pujara presented arguably the most significant impediment for England to overcome given the home side's task for the day and his adhesive qualities. But just shy of 30 minutes

into proceedings Leach repeated much of the drifting, spinning delivery that bowled Rohit Sharma before stumps on day four, this time finding the shoulder of the bat to pop a catch to Ben Stokes at slip via Pujara's hip.

Root had opened with Archer, holding Anderson back in until the 27th over to furnish him with the SG ball at its most ripe for reverse swing; what followed was a spellbinding burst of seven overs, four maidens, three for eight that rank among the very best of a career already assured of its greatness.

There was no easing into his spell from the 38-year-old either; no loosening of the limbs with a few gentle ones. Instead, just two balls into his work another eye-catching innings of 50 by Shubman Gill was vaporised, the ball hooping into the opener and finding a gap between bat and pad to send the off-stump cartwheeling.

New man Ajinkya Rahane did well to survive a repeat delivery second ball. An impassioned appeal for lbw was declined on the field and though Hawk-Eye showed it to wiping out middle, England's review was struck down on umpire's call due to possible impact outside the line.

There was no doubt about the follow-up, however, with Rahane's off-stump going

the same way as Gill's with another lavish inswinger. This was a truly devastating over from Anderson, the kind that can only send shockwaves through an opposing dressing room.

Rishabh Pant was first out, fresh from an eye-popping 91 in India's first innings of 337 all out. But the hope of repeating his final heroics in Brisbane last month were soon wiped out by Anderson, as a smart off-cutter saw the left-hander bunt the ball tamely to Root at short cover.

With Dom Bess teasing an edge behind off Washington Sundar, on a day when the off-spinner served Kohli a feast of full tosses and struggled to recapture the control witnessed during his first-innings four for 76, India found themselves limping into the lunch break on 144 for six.

Ashwin had shown considerable courage up to this point but shortly after the resumption gave into temptation, feathering a catch behind to Buttler off Leach. It left Kohli stood on the burning deck until Stokes, underused during the match, bowled the India captain with one that shot along the ground.

Thereafter it was simply a matter of time, Leach claiming his fourth with the wicket of Shahbaz Nadeem, before Archer inflicted the coup de grace to spark England's celebrations out in the middle.

## Italy's Stefano Okaka: 'I need people to love me – this is how I am'

WILL UNWIN

**ROME, 09 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]:** "You cannot understand what it means for me to be back in the national team at 31 years old after a few troubles on my way," Stefano Okaka says of his return to the Italy team four years after his previous appearance.

Few, including Okaka, could have anticipated such a turn of events when he left Watford for Udinese in January 2019 after three appearances in six months in a tumultuous period at Vicarage Road. Back in Serie A, however, Okaka has been one of the league's most effective strikers, scoring 10 times in 42 appearances since he made the move permanent the following September.

"The people around Udinese helped me a lot," he says. "Since the first day I regained my confidence. I came here to show my quality to help the team and get them back to a good level but I need the people to love me because this is how I am. After one month it was love and I think we have done a good job to restart things on and off the pitch."

Roberto Mancini is the latest to want to show Okaka the love he needs, knowing the player could add something very different to the Azzurri's arsenal. The Italy coach put his faith in a striker who has two goals this season but has proved his worth for an



Udinese side who have not finished above 12th in the past seven campaigns. Okaka came on against Poland in November, earning his fifth cap.

"Mancini knows my style and is a really fantastic coach. He's built a really incredible atmosphere in the team. He has done an incredible job because Italy was in a strange time; it had changed a lot. He has worked to build a team and a dressing room with a lot of young, talented players. He has built with his coaches around him a fantastic ambience. There are experienced players, young players who play like experienced players."

Okaka is one of few black players to have represented Italy since Fabio Liverani became the first in 2001. Domestically, incidents of racism have been well documented and the limited punishments imposed highlighted. Okaka sees an improving picture in the country and a bright future for a diverse national team.

"It is not a problem about one stadium, one pitch, one country – it is a global problem. We have to educate the people, educate the children and this is going to make things better. When you say to the children that it does not matter about

the colour, it matters about the heart, loyalty.

"The world has changed, football has changed, it is going to become a habit to see different colours in one national team because the colour of the skin is not important, it is important where you are born, where you learn your life. I was born in Italy, I grew up in Italy, like a lot of people who do or don't play football. This is our country and we should be grateful to defend the colour of our country."

Loyalty was not a trait seen too often during Okaka's period at Vicarage Road, where 23 of his 36 league appearances came from the bench. He had six managers in his three and a half years at the club, where he suffered spells out in the cold.

"Three years ago I was in the starting XI, I scored against Liverpool, the first goal for my team in the league, when we drew 3-3. After there were problems with the coach [Marco Silva] and he did not put me back in the squad. It made no sense and he gave me no reasons and you can imagine when you have scored the first goal against Liverpool and then the next game you are out of the squad, what can you do? You can do nothing.

"I left Watford and I restarted my career for my third or fourth time, as a lot of things have happened in

my career but my health has never left me. I love this sport, so every time I go down, I try to fight back. I continue to fight and show what I can do on a football pitch and I will continue to do this until I finish my career."

If Okaka is called up for next summer's Euros, he would have the chance to follow in the footsteps of his twin sister, Stefania, who won a European championship – at under-19 level – during an international volleyball career curtailed by injury.

Stefania repeatedly overcame injury setbacks but now works as a "mental coach". Okaka is full of admiration. "[To start] another life after the injuries stop you ... What can I say? I don't have words to explain about my twin."

The summer is a long way off for a man who missed the last two months through injury but made an impact on his return off the bench on Sunday to help defeat Hellas Verona. His style, though, is liked by Mancini and Gianluca Vialli, who is working alongside his former Sampdoria teammate with the Azzurri.

"I want to remain humble, I want to help the coach and the national team," Okaka says. "I don't want to think what could happen in one year; everything can happen between now and then. I need to do my job with my team and after that we will see."

## Luis Suarez strikes twice but Atletico Madrid stumble against Celta Vigo

**MADRID, 09 FEB [AFP]:** Atletico Madrid slipped up in La Liga for the first time in nine games on Monday as Celta Vigo snatched a late equaliser to deliver a ray of hope to Barcelona and Real Madrid. Luis Suarez scored twice at the Wanda Metropolitano to overturn Santi Mina's opener for Celta, with Atletico on course to restore their 10-point lead at the top of the table. But Facundo Ferreyra slid in to score in the 89th minute to earn a deserved 2-2 draw for the visitors, meaning Atletico's advantage at the end of the weekend is reduced to eight, still with a game in hand.

"We played quite well but they had a strong finish and a draw was probably fair," said Diego Simeone.

Atletico still have a considerable cushion but after Real Madrid and Barca beat Huesca and Real Betis respectively, there is at least room for encouragement for the chasing pack. Real Madrid can cut the gap to five points if they win at home to Getafe on Tuesday.

Suarez shows no sign of letting up, the Uruguayan now with 11 goals in his last nine games and 16 for the season.

Those 16 goals in 17 games played for Atletico make him the fastest player to score that many for a La Liga club in the 21st century, one game faster than Cristiano Ronaldo after he joined Real Madrid.

Atletico have been hit hard by coronavirus in recent months, the club confirming another two

positive cases on Monday afternoon.

Thomas Lemar and Hector Herrera join Mario Hermoso, Joao Felix and Moussa Dembele on the list of those currently out after contracting the illness.

"We have to make the best of it," said Simeone. "We have footballers who can take advantage of the opportunities and we hope that the boys recover."

Celta, who stay 10th, were the better side in the first half, dominating possession and taking a deserved lead after 13 minutes when Hugo Mallo curled in a cross from the right for Mina to head in.

Atletico rarely troubled Celta but managed to go in level, Suarez scoring with their first shot on target. Marcos Llorente's driven cross evaded four sets of Celta toes and found him at the back post.

Lucas Torreira came on at half-time for Felipe -- Atletico reverting to a back four -- and within five minutes they were ahead.

Geoffrey Kondogbia floated a ball out to the left and Renan Lodi volleyed it across goal, where the sliding Suarez arrived on his knees to finish.

Celta almost had a second when Iago Aspas bundled through but Kondogbia darted back to make a superb tackle, just as the striker was about to shoot.

Atletico were moments away but caved with one minute left, a brilliant through ball by Aspas freeing Augusto Solari, whose cross found Ferreyra two metres out.

## Nagal blown away by Berankis, exits Australian Open

**MELBOURNE, FEB 9 (PTI):** India's Sumit Nagal exited the Australian Open with a first-round defeat, struggling to cope with the power-packed game of Lithuanian Ricardas Berankis, here on Tuesday.

Nagal's challenge deflated in a matter of minutes as Berankis' powerful ground strokes proved to be too good for the Indian, who lost 2-6 5-7 3-6 in two hours and 10 minutes.

Nagal had lost to the world number 72 in the last week's tune-up event too.

The 23-year-old Nagal reeled off four straight games in the second set in his bid to stage a comeback but the initial dominance by Berankis largely dictated the outcome of the match.

While Nagal made an impression on his previous two Grand Slam appearances, the world number 144 could only play well in patches on Tuesday.

The precise and solid ground strokes of Berankis left Nagal playing defensively.

He did fight hard and played better as the game progressed but Berankis did not falter on key points.

Serving at 2-3, the

Indian hit a forehand long to give Berankis three breakpoints in the sixth game and the Lithuanian converted the second with a forehand winner to go up 4-2.

Nagal himself had three chances to draw the first blood in the third game, going up 40-0 on Berankis' serve, but could convert none.

The Indian tried to fight fire with fire but the intensity shown by Berankis blew him away and he found himself serving to stay in the set.

In the second set too, it was Berankis who dominated the proceedings. Two breaks pegged Nagal back and he went down 0-4.

Nagal struggled to get on the board, missing two break points offered by Berankis in the fifth game but managed to break his rival in that game.

As he started to play more aggressive, Nagal found a way to claw his way back, making it 4-4.

Berankis was guilty of unforced errors in that short phase, giving easy points to Nagal.

However, Berankis won the key points to ensure he stood on the right side of the result.

India's singles challenge is over and now all eyes will be on doubles players -- Rohan Bopanna, Divij Sharan and Ankita Raina.

## Denis Shapovalov throws a toilet tantrum, rants at umpire "I Have To Pee!"

MELBOURNE, 09 FEB

**[AFP]:** Denis Shapovalov claims he's got the smallest bladder on tour and the Canadian was not impressed when an umpire at the Australian Open denied his request for a toilet break. The world number 11 had dropped the fourth set of a five-set epic against Italian teenager Jannik Sinner that finished in the early hours of Tuesday and desperately needed to relieve himself. "What happens if I go?" asked the 21-year-old, "Do I get



a fine? I don't care!" he ranted at German umpire Nico Helwerth, who turned down his request. "What do you mean, I can't go? Are you going to disqualify me? I have to pee!"

He stepped up his tirade when it became clear the umpire would not relent.

"I'm going to piss my pants!" he said. "I'm going to piss in a bottle."

After coming through the high-pressure first-round match 3-6, 6-3, 6-2, 4-6, 6-4 in just under four hours, he explained that he needed to use the bathroom more than

other players.

"First of all, I was just blowing off steam, just kind of cooling my head, getting rid of it," he said.

"But also I do think it's a dumb rule. Especially for me, I've got the smallest bladder ever, so I literally got to take a piss every set. So it's difficult, especially when you're on that court for so long.

"Before the match I'm trying to hydrate as much as possible, so yeah, I gotta pee, man."

The tournament rules that state players are

entitled to just one toilet break during a best of three sets match and two for a five-setter.

"I do think that we should be able to take more breaks and go to the wash room, because we are forced -- not forced, but we could be on the court for three, four hours," added Shapovalov.

"So I think even taking those little breaks ... I think we deserve it."

Shapovalov next plays Australian Bernard Tomic.



## UN chief reaches out to Asian leaders to call for collective action for reversal of coup in Myanmar

YOSHITA SINGH

**UNITED NATIONS, FEB 9 (PTI):** Reiterating his concern over the situation in Myanmar, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has been reaching out to regional leaders in Asia to call for collective and bilateral action to create conditions for the recent military coup in the country to be reversed, the UN chief's spokesperson has said.

Myanmar's military last week toppled the government and seized power for one year, detaining top political figures, including de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The military accused Suu Kyi's government of not investigating allegations of voter fraud in recent elections. Suu Kyi's party swept that vote and the military-backed party did poorly. The state election commission has refuted the allegations.

The Secretary-General continues to follow the situation in Myanmar closely and with grave concern. He and his Special Envoy have been reaching out to key international actors, including regional leaders, in calling for collective and bilateral action to create conditions for the recent coup in Myanmar to be reversed, Spokesman for the Secretary-General Stephane Dujarric said at the daily press briefing on Monday.

Dujarric said the UN welcomes the fact that there are discussions for a Human Rights Council special session to take place soon, which will help to keep the momentum following the Security Council's discussion on the situation earlier this month.

Dujarric said the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy on Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener will continue to mobilise the international community, including through engaging members of the Security Council to carry out calls for a return to democracy, pursuance of dialogue and reconciliation in accordance with the will and interests of the people of Myanmar, and for the immediate release of those detained.

We remain in close contact with national actors, including civil society organisations whose protection is paramount. We are concerned at the restrictions on civil society, journalists and media workers, Dujarric said.

The 15-nation Security Council, the most powerful organ of the world organisation, had issued a press statement on Thursday on the situation in Myanmar, three days after the military seized power in the Southeast Asian nation.

# Myanmar protesters march again, defying ban on gatherings

Yangon, Feb 9 (AP): Demonstrators against Myanmar's military takeover took to the streets again on Tuesday in defiance of new rules that make their protests illegal.

Police were arresting protesters and using water cannons to try to disperse the crowd in Mandalay, and a crowd also gathered in Yangon despite a heightened security presence.

The decrees issued Monday night for some areas of the two cities banned rallies and gatherings of more than five people, along with motorized processions, while also imposing a 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. curfew.

Yangon is Myanmar's biggest city and Mandalay its second, where thousands of people have been demonstrating since Saturday. It was not immediately clear if regulations have been imposed for other areas.

The protesters are demanding that power be restored to the deposed civilian government and seek freedom for the nation's



elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other ruling party members detained when the military blocked the new session of Parliament from convening on February 1.

In addition to the crowds in Yangon and Mandalay, demonstrations were also held in other cities, including Bago and Dawei, and in northern Shan state.

The growing defiance was striking in a country where past demonstrations have been met with deadly force and are a reminder

of previous movements in the Southeast Asian country's long and bloody struggle for democracy.

On Sunday, tens of thousands of protesters rallied at Yangon's Sule Pagoda, which was a focal point of demonstrations against military rule during a massive 1988 uprising and again during a 2007 revolt led by Buddhist monks. The military used deadly force to end both of those uprisings.

State media for the first time on Monday referred to the protests,

claiming they were endangering the country's stability.

Democracy can be destroyed if there is no discipline, declared a statement from the Ministry of Information, read on state television station MRTV. We will have to take legal actions to prevent acts that are violating state stability, public safety and the rule of law.

However, the military commander who led the coup and is now Myanmar's leader made no mention of the unrest in a 20-minute televised

speech Monday night, his first to the public since the takeover.

Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing instead repeated the claims about voting fraud that have been the justification for the military's takeover, allegations that were refuted by the state election commission. He added that his junta would hold new elections as promised in a year and hand over power to the winners, and explained the junta's intended policies for COVID-19 control and the economy.

## No hugs or high-fives: Olympic organisers unveil athlete rulebook

**TOKYO, 09 FEB [AFP]:** No socialising, no handshakes and definitely no hugs -- that's what athletes at the coronavirus-postponed Tokyo Olympics can expect this summer, according to a virus rulebook released Tuesday by organisers. The 33-page document -- the last in a series of "playbooks" drawn up in a bid to ensure the Games can go ahead safely -- also warns athletes they could be kicked out of their events if they break strict anti-virus rules. Under the guidelines, athletes will be tested for the virus at least once every four days, and will be barred from competing if they return a confirmed positive test.

Their time in Japan will be "minimised to reduce the risk of infection," and those staying at the Olympic Village will be expected to "avoid unnecessary forms of physical contact."

Organisers told AFP on Tuesday that they still plan to hand out around 150,000 free condoms to athletes, but the new rulebook urges them to "limit your contact with other people as much as possible."

"If you have been to the Games before, we know this experience will be different in a number of ways," the guidebook warns.

"For all Games participants, there will be some conditions and constraints that will require your flexibility and understanding."

The guide for athletes and team officials is set to be revised in April and again in June, and follows the release of handbooks for sports officials, media and broadcasters last week.

The document lays out further detail on virus testing for athletes, with a

negative test required within 72 hours of travelling to Japan and again immediately upon arrival.

There will be no quarantine for athletes, and they will still be allowed to attend training camps in Japan before the Games begin, but all movements must be rigorously logged and the use of public transport is subject to permission.

Athletes "must not visit gyms, tourist areas, shops, restaurants or bars" and can only go to "official Games venues and limited additional locations".

They are also advised to wear masks at all times except when they are competing, training, eating, sleeping or outside in open space.

The virus rulebooks are being released as organisers, Olympic officials and Japan's government works to build confidence that the Games can go ahead safely despite a surge in infections globally.

While vaccinations are recommended for athletes, they will not be a requirement to participate in the Games.

Support for hosting the virus-postponed event remains low in Japan, with around 80 percent of Japanese backing cancellation or further postponement -- something organisers have ruled out.

The rollout of the virus rules has been overshadowed by a row over sexist comments made by Tokyo 2020 chief Yoshiro Mori, who faces calls to resign after claiming women speak too much in meetings.

So far, he has apologised but declined to step down.

The Games are due to open in Tokyo on July 23.

## Indians advised against travelling to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait via UAE

**DUBAI, 09 FEB [PTI]:** India has asked its nationals not to travel to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait via the UAE and get stranded in this country, in view of the rising number of COVID-19 cases in the region

In a statement posted on Twitter on Monday, the Indian Embassy in Abu Dhabi said: "It has been brought to the attention of the Embassy of Indian in Abu Dhabi and the Consulate General of India, Dubai that several Indian nationals intending to travel to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have got stranded in the UAE."

"Due to COVID-related restrictions on incoming passengers, currently it is not possible for Indian nationals to transit via Dubai and Abu Dhabi to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait," the statement said.

The UAE has recorded



a slight uptick in its daily count of COVID-19 cases in the last one month, when the economy reopened.

In total, the coronavirus has claimed 947 lives, along with 332,603 confirmed cases, in the UAE, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Abu Dhabi and Dubai are major transit points for flyers from India travelling to other Gulf countries, even North

Africa and Europe.

The Indian embassy said: "All Indian nationals are, therefore, advised to kindly ascertain the latest COVID-related travel guidelines of their final destination country before embarking on an outward journey from India. They are also advised to carry enough personal provisions and funds to cater to any emergent requirements."

Saudi Arabia

suspended entry to the Kingdom for non-citizens from 20 specific countries, including India and Pakistan, as it stepped up efforts to combat the coronavirus

pandemic, the official Saudi Press Agency reported last Tuesday, citing an official source at the Interior Ministry.

Indians, who are already in the UAE en route to Saudi Arabia or Kuwait, have been advised to consider returning to India and to make their further travel plan only after the restrictions in the final destinations countries are lifted.

It may be noted that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have recorded more coronavirus-related deaths than the UAE, at 6,406 and 969 deaths respectively, according to Johns Hopkins University.

## Coronavirus testing collapses in Myanmar after coup

**YANGON, 09 FEB [REUTERS]:** Testing for coronavirus has collapsed in Myanmar after a military coup prompted a campaign of civil disobedience led by doctors and mass protests swept the country, official testing figures showed.

The number of daily tests reported late on Monday stood at 1,987, the lowest number since Dec. 29, compared with more than 9,000 a week earlier and an average of more than 17,000 a day in the week before the Feb. 1 coup. Since the coup, tests per day have averaged 9,350.

The number of cases found on Monday was just four - compared with an average of 420 a day in the last week of January.

A health ministry spokesman declined to comment. In a statement on Monday, the ministry appealed to health workers for help with a vaccination campaign that began late last month.

It said all staff members "are strongly urged to return to their duties with taking the wellbeing of patients into consideration."

Myanmar has suffered one of the worst coronavirus outbreaks in Southeast Asia with a total of 31,177 deaths from more than 141,000 cases.

Health workers have been at the forefront of a civil disobedience campaign against the coup, stopping work to demand the release of elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi and recognition of her

party's big win in a November election.

Suu Kyi's government had instituted lockdowns which helped reduce the spread of the virus and the number of fatalities from their peak in October, but also had a hard economic impact on one of the region's poorest countries. Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, whose removal and detention of the widely popular Suu Kyi prompted mass protests, promised in his first televised address on Monday to make the fight against COVID-19 a priority - including vaccinations for all.

The army seized power alleging fraud in last year's election, a claim the electoral commission had rejected.

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**SELF PORTRAIT:** The Selling Sunset star, Christine Quinn, is seen picking a portrait of herself painted by New York street artist 1Penemy!

## Diana Penty starts shooting for her Malayalam debut

Actor Diana Penty on Tuesday commenced shooting for her next, a currently untitled movie with South star Dulquer Salmaan that will mark her foray in the Malayalam cinema.

The 35-year-old actor took to Instagram to share the news, posting a picture with Salmaan.

“Cheers to new beginnings! Super excited to join @dqsalmaan, @rosshanandrews and the whole crew on this new journey - my first Malayalam film! Looking forward to the ride,” Penty captioned the post.

The film is being directed by noted filmmaker Rosshan Andrews, best known for movies like “Notebook” and “Evidam Swargamanu”.

Salmaan, popular for movies such as “Ustad Hotel”, “Bangalore Days” and “O Kadhal Kanamani”, is also backing the project through his production banner Wayfarer Films.

Formerly a model, Penty started her



acting journey with 2010’s “Cocktail”, co-starring Deepika Padukone and Saif Ali Khan. Over the years, she has acted in movies such as “Happy Bhaag Jayegi” and “Parmanu - The Story of Pokhran”.

Her upcoming projects include “Shiddat: Journey Beyond Love”, in which she will star alongside Radhika Madan, Sunny Kaushal and Mohit Raina. The film is directed by Kunal Deshmukh and produced by Dinesh Vijan.

## The biggest bombshells from Priyanka Chopra’s new book, *Unfinished*

**NATALIE FINN**

As the very title of Priyanka Chopra’s new book, *Unfinished*, implies, there’s so much more that she’s hoping to do with her life.

But the multitasking 38-year-old, who after being crowned Miss World in 2000 became a huge star in her native India before making the leap to American film and TV, has quite the story to tell about how she made it this far—and the various obstacles that threatened to derail her ambitions along the way.

Yet why release a book now, when, as she herself assures, her story is by no means complete?

“It’s probably the first time as an adult that I’ve felt the desire to look back and reflect on how I’ve gotten to this moment,” Chopra shares in her book’s preface, noting that starting a new figurative chapter after marrying Nick Jonas in 2018 definitely inspired her to become more introspective.

From four schools in four years to her pageant days that opened up a whole new world of opportunity but also introduced her to the more demoralizing side of the entertainment industry, her rise to the mountaintop as a Bollywood star to her struggles getting a foothold in Western showbiz, her desire to lead a full, independent life to falling head over heels for a Jonas Brother, Chopra dives deep in *Unfinished*, available wherever books are sold Feb. 9.

And here are some of the most compelling parts to watch out for:

### COMING TO AMERICA

Priyanka’s first trip to the United States was in 1995 with her mom, to visit Madhu’s younger sister, Kiran Mathur, and her husband and two children in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. (Priyanka refers to her aunt throughout as Kiran Masi, which translates to “like mother.”) Kiran took her to visit the local high school, and the not-quite-13-year-old liked it so much (“Seriously? No uniforms?... Girls can wear makeup and their hair down?”), she asked her mother if she could stay in America to go to school.

After a “rational, logical Chopra Family Conversation,” her parents agreed and she moved in with her aunt’s family.

But then Priyanka reveals that only later was she apprised of the reality: That she had already been asking her mother if she could please, please go to school in America like some of her cousins, so Madhu had asked her sister about the possibility of Priyanka living with them before they even visited. (“Though asking Priyanka’s dad what he thought of the plan did happen later, as she remembered.”)

### STICKY SITUATIONS

Competing for Miss India, aside from the fact that she found the concept of pairing a swimsuit with high heels to be rather ridiculous, she was self-conscious of what she considered the flaws on her legs, the scars from falling off her bike and climbing trees, stretchmarks and even just all-too-human dry skin.

“I was so nervous during this round that instead of sticking my butt out and sucking my stomach in the way I would now, my butt was clenched tight, like a dog with its tail tucked in,” she recalls. But she faked it till she made it, even her feigned enthusiasm winning the judges over.

After winning the Miss India World title, it was onto the 2000 Miss World pageant, where the contestants came



up with questions that were picked at random for each other to answer. Priyanka got Miss Turkey’s question: “Who do you think is the most successful woman living today and why?”

Priyanka answered, “Mother Teresa,” because “I admire her from the bottom of my heart for being so considerate, compassionate, and kind, giving up her life for people in India.”

Alas, Mother Teresa had been dead since 1997.

But the gaffe was overlooked and Priyanka was crowned the winner, her victory walk across the stage only marred by the perspiration that was causing the tape holding her dress in place to lose its stick. “I pressed my hands together in a namaste and kept them close to my body as much of the time as I could in an effort to hold my gown up,” she recalls, “and I hoped for the best. I now do a namaste at almost every red carpet—and you know the origin story.”

### A PROBLEM THAT TRANSCENDS BORDERS

Priyanka moved to Mumbai to pursue acting, and her unconditionally supportive parents joined her, assuring her they could practice medicine anywhere and that they had built their careers—now it was her time.

But they could only protect her so much. Wanting to be independent, she hired a manager and started meeting with producers and directors—one of whom, on a visit to his office one day with her manager in tow—asked her to “stand up and twirl for him.”

“I did,” she writes. “He stared at me long and hard, assessing me, and then suggested that I get a boob job, fix my jaw, and add a little more cushioning to my butt. If I wanted to be an actress, he said, I’d need to have my proportions ‘fixed,’ and he knew a great doctor in L.A. he could send me to. My then-manager voiced his agreement with the assessment.” She felt “stunned and small,” but knew enough about her self to drop that manager soon after.

### THE LOST YEARS

Priyanka’s father, Ashok, died of cancer in 2013, a devastating loss, made more so because he didn’t get to see his daughter become the first Indian female star of an American primetime network drama when she landed the lead in ABC’s *Quantico*, which premiered in 2015.

In the spring of 2016, she moved from Canada to New York to shoot *Quantico*’s second season and, lonely and still harboring so much grief, she fell into a depression (though she doesn’t think she was clinically depressed). A year later, still sad and now in mourning for both her dad and the end of a romantic relationship, she stopped going out except to work on her show’s final season. She stayed up into the wee hours every night, barely slept, and gained almost 20 pounds (which online haters made sure to point out).

“When I wasn’t feeling numb, I felt lonely, sad, and isolated. No one understood what was going on inside me, because I didn’t tell anyone,” she writes, not even her mom.

### SHIPS IN THE NIGHT

She had sworn off dating following her painful 2016 breakup, but she was getting to know Nick Jonas from afar. In fact, their first date could have been a farewell party for President Barack Obama at the White House in January 2017, which Nick invited her to—but she had to work. Palm-to-face. “Huge disappointment” is seemingly a huge understatement.

But Priyanka and Nick finally met face to face the next month at the Vanity Fair Oscar party (“You’re real. Where have you been all my life?” he famously told her), but she only had time for one drink before she had to go straight to the airport to catch a flight to India. Which she did with a big smile on her face.

They reunited as co-wearers of Ralph Lauren couture at the Met Gala that May, having drinks at the Carlyle five nights before the ball. They talked till closing, after which she invited him back to her place—where her mom was staying with her, and was up watching *Law & Order: SVU* when her daughter brought her date in.

So they talked on the patio till 1:30 a.m. and then he left, giving her “a nice little platonic hug and a pat on the back” that had her wondering, huh?

She had a great evening talking to him at the Met Gala though, after which she again had to leave the country, on a UNICEF trip to Zimbabwe. Still no kiss goodbye, but this time the hug was “lingering,” she writes.

### PERFECT TIMING... FINALLY

JoBro flirtation aside (plus, the 10-year age difference between them made her a little nervous), she didn’t really start to emerge from her consuming sadness until the end of 2017, and it was on New Year’s Eve when, spending the evening with friends, she wrote down the five nonnegotiable qualities she was looking for in a partner: Honest, appreciates family, takes his profession seriously, creative and ambitious.

Upon her return to L.A. weeks later after another UNICEF trip, this one to Bangladesh, he invited her to Beauty and the Beast at the Hollywood Bowl with him, Kevin and a couple other friends, and told her she could bring a friend. They all met for drinks first at Chateau Marmont, and Nick told her later “that the minute I walked into the bar...he’d said to himself, That’s my wife. And that the following morning he’d called his mother and told her he was going to marry me. And that shortly thereafter he’d flown to Australia to meet up with his brothers and told them, too, that he was going to propose.”

Nick also wrote “I Believe” after they had finally spent several consecutive days together—and less than two months later, he popped the question just after midnight on July 19 (waiting until the day after her birthday so as not to steal her thunder) on the Greek isle of Crete.

And then they got married a bunch of times! Tying the knot in India that December was Nick’s idea, and it involved multiple ceremonies (starting with the pre-wedding roka, which marks both families’ approval of the union), endless parties, countless outfit changes and all of their loved ones.

### ARIES:

This year is all about you, you, you! Transformation is going to be a big theme, Aries, and you plan to dedicate yourself to the inner work required to be the most magnificent version of yourself. Just keep in mind that all work and no play will make Jane a dull girl. So, be present to what each moment is offering you—not just the joy, but the sadness, the loneliness, and the melancholy too. It is by embracing the human experience in its entirety that you will be able to create heaven on earth.

### TAURUS:

Do you remember what happened the last time you decided to ignore your intuition? The cards are warning you against repeating old mistakes, Taurus. Trust your connection with the Divine. Trust the messages that are being brought to your attention by your higher self. Taking the steps that you are being guided towards will help prevent colossal damage. You’re also being encouraged to play the role of secret keeper. There are some things that are not meant to be revealed yet, and you are in awareness of what these things are.

### GEMINI:

It is said, when you feel good, you look good. Your mood exactly, Gemini. Sunday sees you prioritising health and wellness. Punishing workouts, however, are so 2000-and-late. You want to put on your Aladdin pants and choreograph your own belly dance routine. A bhangra session in your living room—preferably with your soul crew—is another idea you could be flirting with. PS: Let those feel good hormones remind you that movement meditation is the best way to get out of a funk.

### CANCER:

What if we’re all just living in a simulation? What if the things we

give so much importance to are not the things that will matter in the end? Pay attention to what you are giving all your time and attention to, Cancer. By looking at the flaws of others through a microscope, you could be magnifying them beyond measure. Today, the cards are urging you to adopt ‘acceptance’ as your magic word and hold space for the people in your life to be exactly who they are. In doing so, you will watch the negative emotions associated with this situation transmute into something higher.

### LEO:

Have you walked into an unfamiliar room and felt as if you’ve been here before, or met somebody for the first time and been overwhelmed with a sense of familiarity? Leo, you are a multidimensional being who is becoming aware of their multidimensional nature. So, pay attention to the tasks that are beginning to feel familiar despite their unfamiliarity. There’s a good chance you may have excelled at the same in another lifetime, or another time and space dimension. PS: It’s time to uncover your hidden gifts and consciously integrate them into your existing repertoire.

### VIRGO:

Maybe you’re not exhausted because you’re doing too much. Maybe you’re exhausted because you’re doing too little of what sets your soul on fire. Today, the cards are urging you to be mindful of what you are saying yes to. Every time you say yes to something that doesn’t feel right, you end up saying no to something that is right for you. Word for the wise: let go of the need to please everybody, and focus on what you have come here to do. Some of you could be struggling with the unrealistic demands of your family too. In such a case, it’s best to communicate your boundaries in a firm, but gentle manner.

### LIBRA:

It’s time to bring your A-game when it comes to social media. No, we’re not talking about taking your VSCO cam skills up a notch. We’re talking about truth, authenticity and vulnerability—about telling your story as it is meant to be told. You are who you are, Libra, and you have nothing to apologise for. Some of you could be thinking about taking the publishing world by storm, working on a script or starting your own podcast. Consider this as a green flag from the Universe, wild one!

### SCORPIO:

You’re spending too much time worrying about ‘the how’ and ‘the why’. You’re spending too much time thinking about the ways in which the given project is unlikely to work out. The truth is, you are where you are because you are meant to be here. Giving this idea a concrete form is a part of your soul’s mission. So, don’t waste time going back and forth on your decision. Simply take a giant leap towards the future you have envisioned for yourself and know that you are held and supported.

### SAGITTARIUS:

Sometimes life feels like an uphill trek. No matter what we do, the fruits of our labour seem to evade us. At other times, life shows us the true meaning of benevolence by opening significant doors, as if magically, for our evolution and growth. The latter holds true for you, Sagittarius. So, open your eyes to all the ways in which you are being loved and supported. When things work out seamlessly for you, take it as a sign that you are on the right path and that the Universe wants you to claim what’s truly yours.

### CAPRICORN:

Matters of the heart are taking centre stage, Capricorn. Your

tribe is showing up for you in a whole new way. Allow yourself to receive the love you have been giving others, and know that you deserve every bit of the goodness you have attracted into your experience. Life may not be perfect, but it is flawless in every way and you know that you’ll get through this. PS: your angels and guides are also offering you the health and support you need at this moment.

### AQUARIUS:

Sometimes, you’ve just got to put binaural beats on and surround yourself with those amethyst rocks as you put your phone on flight mode. It’s a ‘World, hold on!’ kind of day, and you’re learning to prioritise the most important person in your life, aka yourself! Remember, the world works inside out and that the microcosm affects the macrocosm. Therefore, being in a space of fullness allows us to hold space for others in the best possible way. Meditation and mindfulness are also going to be on your agenda today. You don’t have to be a yogi to experience transcendence. Close your eyes and allow the mysterious forces above to guide you. Oh, the things you will see and hear when you tune out the chatter of your monkey mind!

### PISCES:

Just because your ancestors suffered the consequences of being a certain way, does not mean you have to. Free yourself from the old story, Pisces, as you write a brand new one for yourself. You are deserving of love, you are deserving of material wealth, and you are deserving of success. You are worthy of living a life that’s full of abundance and grace. So, allow yourself to receive what the Universe is offering you and know that you are loved and protected in every way.