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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Bear makes it to Raj Bhavan, eats chickens; rescued

GANGTOK, OCT 21 (PTI): A Himalayan black bear was rescued from the Raj Bhavan complex in Gangtok on Thursday after a gruelling operation that lasted for hours, officials said.

The bear was first spotted by the Raj Bhavan staff around midnight, following which the Forest Department was informed, they said.

The bear ate some chickens at the staff quarters of the complex, leading to more panic among the people, officials said.

Forest officials patrolled the complex the entire night to keep the bear at bay and as soon as the day broke, an operation was started to capture it, they added.

The animal was captured around 12 pm after being tranquilised, officials said.

"The bear was hiding under a culvert. We had to shoot it twice as we missed the first shot," said Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Dechen Lachungpa.

The bear would be released in the Pangalakha Wildlife sanctuary, officials said.

The Himalayan black bear is enlisted as a highly endangered species, they said.

Last year, a Himalayan black bear had strayed into the BSNL building near MG Marg and injured a staff.

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82.32 of adult population fully vaccinated in Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 OCT:

Covid vaccination has picked-up again in Sikkim with 2,188 doses of Covishield administered on Wednesday. Of these, 2,120 people completed their vaccination schedule with their second dose and 68 people received their first shot yesterday.

Sikkim has thus far administered 9,47,071 doses of the vaccine. Nearly 5.22 lakh people in the State have received at least the first dose, of whom 4,25,598 people are now fully vaccinated, having received both doses of the vaccine. 82.32% of the adult population in

the State is now fully protected against the virus.

Meanwhile, the state's Covid-related death toll held at 393 today with no new fatality reported in the last 24 hours.

The State recorded 19 new cases in the last 24 hours taking Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases since testing began on 28 Feb, 2020, to 31,819.

Of the 19 new cases, 05 cases were registered in East District, 10 in West District and 04 in South District.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of Health Department, these 19 cases were reported from

the testing of 365 samples giving the State a daily test positivity rate of 5.2%.

While 15 people tested positive in rapid antigen testing of 221 samples, four more cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 142 samples.

Also in the last 24 hours, nine more persons were discharged from home isolation yesterday to further improve the number of recovered cases to 30,923. The current recovery rate of COVID-19 in Sikkim stands at 98.1%.

There are 185 active Covid cases in the State at present, of whom six are currently admitted in ICU facilities at STNM Hospital and Central Referral Hospital.

Roads & Bridges Minister inspects Rangpo bridge

WANGCHUK BHUTIA

RANGPO, 21 OCT:

Minister for Roads and Bridges Department, Samdup Lepcha, inspected the Rangpo Bridge, today. Heavy rainfall had increased the Teesta's flow due to which the support pillars of the bridge were washed away early morning on 20 Oct.

The Minister inspected the old bridge as well as the new one, which is under construction.

Meanwhile, the Executive Director of NHIDCL assured to complete the ongoing work before March 2022 within the stipulated time.

On his way, the Minister stopped along NH-10 at Topakhani and interacted with the officials of NHIDCL, wherein he enquired about the condition of the ongoing construction of the



tunnel and stressed on completing the work on war-footing.

He also directed the contractor and other stakeholders of NHIDCL to execute clearance of landslide areas at the

earliest.

Thereafter, the Minister reviewed the surveyed sites of landslide prone areas at various locations in Pani House and Adampool new link road.

During the inspection, the Minister was accompanied by Secretary (R&B), T.P Sangdarpa, along with Principal Chief Engineer (R&B), Dadul Bhutia, Chief Engineer of National High-

way, K.C Sharma, Additional Chief Engineer, Basant Tamang, DE Planning, Chewang Zigmee

VP's Sikkim visit postponed, again

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 OCT:

Weather continues to play foul with Vice President of India, M Venkaiah Naidu's plans to visit Sikkim, and today, for the second time in three days, news arrived that the VP will not be keeping his rescheduled date of 22 October either.

This is the second time in as many days that the Vice President has been beaten back by the weather in Sikkim. The VP, it may be recalled, was scheduled to arrive in Sikkim on a three-day visit on 20 October. After weather warnings from the IMD, the VP's Office rescheduled his tour to 22 October.

Inclement weather is being offered as the reason why the visit is being postponed yet again. This time, no future date has been provided, at least not till the time of filing of this report.

The Home Department has stated that it was awaiting communication from the Vice President's office on the matter.

Petrol, diesel prices hiked again; diesel above Rs 99/litre from Srinagar to Chennai

NEW DELHI, OCT 21

(PTI): Petrol and diesel prices on Thursday were hiked by 35 paise per litre each, the second consecutive day of increase that took pump rates across the country to record high levels.

The price of petrol in Delhi rose to its highest-ever level of Rs 106.54 a litre and Rs 112.44 per litre in Mumbai, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

In Mumbai, diesel now comes for Rs 103.26 a litre; while in Delhi, it costs Rs 95.27 per litre.

This is the second consecutive day of price hike. There was no change in rates on October 18 and 19, prior to which prices were hiked by 35 paise per litre each on four straight days.

While petrol has al-

ready hit the Rs 100-a-litre mark or more in all major cities of the country, diesel has touched that level in over a dozen states and is treading towards that mark in places from Srinagar to Chennai.

Diesel costs Rs 99.14 a litre in Srinagar while it is priced at Rs 99.59 in Chennai.

The costliest fuel was in the border town of Ganganagar in Rajasthan, where petrol comes for Rs 118.59 a litre and diesel for Rs 109.41 per litre.

Since the ending of a three-week-long hiatus in rate revision in the last week of September, this is the 18th increase in petrol price and the 21st time that diesel rates have gone up.

Prices differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local taxes.

Women in Ladakh's Phyang village secure economic confidence via homestay route

TRISHA MUKHERJEE

LEH, OCT 21 (PTI):

Opening their picturesque homes for tourists has been the way towards empowerment, both social and financial, for women in Ladakh's Phyang village who have long worked unseen as cook, cleaner and farm worker and are now finding new confidence as mini-entrepreneurs.

With many of the men working for the Army and away from home for months, the women of Phyang, a mountain village about 15 km from Leh with great views of rugged peaks and cloud laden blue skies, are slowly coming into their own as homestay hosts.

After all these years of being at home, I feel like I am not even smart enough to talk to people but I think being a host will help me

interact with more people, and also help brush up my Hindi, Tsering Dolker, a 36-year-old host, told PTI.

Her husband is currently posted as a hawaladar in Berchok glacier, and is home for barely two months in a year.

Tsering, who gave up her job as a data operator in Doordarshan soon after she got married, has spent much of the years since bringing up her two boys aged seven and 13, and farming, selling the wheat and potato from her land to make a living.

The opportunity of earning a living by hosting travellers in her home has come as a convenient solution to all her problems.

At this point, we don't have many money issues because my husband has a good salary. But he will retire in another two

years and the cost of our children's education is only expected to increase. So earning through this homestay will help a huge deal, she said.

Tsering has a traditional Ladakhi home, with five rooms, two of which the family has kept. The remaining have been registered on Airbnb.

The online travel portal has tied up with non-profit organisation Self Employed Women's Association of India (SEWA) for Hum Sab Ek, an initiative that is looking at empowering women to become micro-entrepreneurs by helping them turn into homestay hosts.

As part of this SEWA-Airbnb partnership, 10 homes in Phyang village have been listed on the travel portal, and the number is expected to increase in the coming

years.

We are proud to extend our partnership with SEWA in Ladakh and help empower local women Hosts on Airbnb to secure their financial independence and bring valuable tourism dollars into their communities.

As part of our broader efforts to help rebuild tourism for the benefit of local communities, we aim to work together with these micro-entrepreneurs to promote sustainable and responsible travel and stays that contribute to resilient local economies and support jobs, said Amanpreet Bajaj, general manager, Airbnb India, Southeast Asia, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The initiative is critical to the process of empowerment, both social as well as financial, in Phyang village.

In most households here, women are the central figure doing all kinds of jobs, including cooking and cleaning within the homes and farming outside. Their work, much like household work throughout the country, has traditionally gone unrewarded and unrecognised.

But change is afoot and the women, visibly shy and under confident, are looking at becoming arbiters of their lives and that of their families.

Like Tsering, turning homestay host has opened windows for Tsewang Dolma, whose world came crashing down in 2010 when her husband suddenly passed away. Tsewang, now 50, had spent much of her life being dependent on first her father, then her husband.

...turn Pg2

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Hon'ble Education Minister,
Government of Sikkim

Special Guest:
Sh. G.P. Upadhyaya (IAS)
Addl. Chief Secretary (Education),
Government of Sikkim

Special Guest:
Prof. Saroj Sharma
Chairperson, NIOS
Government of India

Date: 24th October, 2021 **Time:** 10:00 am **Venue:** Mayfair Spa Resort & Casino, Gangtok

Prof. Madhulika Kaushik
Chairperson
BOSSE, Sikkim

Dr. Kuldeep Agarwal
Vice Chairperson
BOSSE, Sikkim

SSB observes Police Commemoration Day



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 21 OCT:

Sashastra Seema Bal Gangtok Sector observed Police Commemoration Day to pay homage to martyrs of the police force, a press release informs.

Every year, the commemoration day is observed on 21 Oct to remember the supreme sacrifice of 10 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel who

died fighting Chinese aggression at Hot spring, Ladakh on 21 Oct, 1959.

DIG Sector Hqrs, Bishwajeet Kumar Pal, SSB Gangtok along with the Officers paid tribute to the slain Police and CAPF personnel at Martyrs' Memorial at Sector Headquarters Campus Marchak. Mr Pal laid the wreath and paid homage to the police personnel who laid down their lives in the line of duty.

Addressing the troops, DIG Sector Hqrs SSB Gangtok read out the names of the martyrs who have made the supreme sacrifice during the last one year from 01 Sept, 2020 to 31 Aug, 2021. Total 377 Police and CAPF personnel laid down their lives in the service to the Nation, out of which 05 belong to SSB.

Apart from manning

India-Nepal & India-Bhutan borders, SSB is also deployed in anti-naxal operations in Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand and Bihar, for counter insurgency operations as well as internal security duties in the UT of Jammu & Kashmir. Majority of the personnel laid down their lives in fighting militancy in the UT of Jammu & Kashmir, Naxals and other law and order duties.

CBI Chief “potential accused” in case against Anil Deshmukh: Maharashtra Govt

MUMBAI, 21 Oct [PTI]: Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) director Subodh Jaiswal himself should be considered a “potential accused” in the central agency's probe against former Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh, the state government told the Bombay High Court today.

Senior counsel Darius Khambata, who appeared for the Maharashtra government, told a bench of Justices Nitin Jamdar and SV Kotwal that during 2019 to 2020, when Subodh Jaiswal was the state Director General of Police (DGP), he was also part of the Police Establishment Board.

The senior IPS officer was thus involved in decisions on transfers and postings of police officers which the CBI is now probing, the lawyer said.

The Maharashtra government has challenged before the high court summons issued by the CBI to state chief secretary Sitaram Kunte and present state DGP Sanjay Pandey to record statements in connection with the agency's probe against Anil Deshmukh.

Recommendations

for transfers and postings were approved by Subodh Jaiswal in his capacity as DGP during Deshmukh's tenure, Darius Khambata said.

“A CBI probe is ongoing into transfers and postings of state police officers made during former home minister Anil Deshmukh's tenure. Then the next in line (to be probed) is the Director General of Police, who is the fulcrum, who is at the heart of the issue of transfers and postings. So having the former DGP head the investigation is like having Anil Deshmukh investigate himself,” the state's lawyer said.

The CBI is probing allegations of corruption made by former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh against Anil Deshmukh, an NCP leader.

Following an order of the Bombay High Court on April 5, 2021, the CBI conducted a preliminary inquiry into the allegations made by Singh against Deshmukh and later registered an FIR.

In September this year, the CBI summoned Maharashtra chief secretary Sitaram Kunte and

the present DGP Sanjay Pandey for recording statements in the case.

The Maharashtra government has moved the HC challenging the summons.

Advocate Khambata also pointed out that the HC's April 5 order had said that whoever was part of the alleged corruption, even the complainant himself, must be investigated.

He showed the court the minutes of meetings where Subodh Jaiswal, as part of the police establishment board, had approved transfers of several police officers.

Subodh Jaiswal was present at every meeting on transfers, Darius Khambata claimed.

“So shouldn't the CBI ask Jaiswal why he recommended these transfers? But to do this, a CBI officer will have to summon and question his own director. Even in theory, it is absurd. It is the very antithesis of a fair investigation when the CBI director is a potential accused,” the state's lawyer added.

Subodh Jaiswal, who was known to be an “up-right officer,” must him-

self state that the CBI cannot go on with its probe, advocate Khambata said.

“It will be absurd if a junior CBI officer will have to put these questions to his director. And it boggles my mind that a potential accused is heading the agency,” he said.

Senior counsel Khambata urged the HC to appoint a retired judge or some other suitable person to head the probe against Deshmukh and monitor it.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta and Additional Solicitor Generals Aman Lekhi and Anil Singh, who appeared for the CBI, opposed the state's plea.

“The state's stand is disingenuous. It is a misconceived petition to delay and derange the investigation,” Mr Lekhi claimed.

The court said it could not grant any interim stay to the summons as it would mean making comments on the merits of the case.

It granted liberty to the CBI to file a reply and posted the matter for further hearing on October 28.

Colombia. Heat, drought, water availability and ineffective government make Afghanistan specifically worrying, the official said. Water disputes are also a key “geopolitical flashpoint” in India and the rest of South Asia.

The report identifies two additional regions of concern to US intelligence agencies. Climate change is “likely to increase the risk of instability in countries in Central Africa and small island states in the Pacific, which clustered together form two of the most vulnerable areas in the world.”

The report notes disparities around global approaches to tackling climate change, saying countries that rely on fossil fuel exports to support their economies “will continue to resist a quick transition to a zero-carbon world because they fear the economic, political, and geopolitical costs of doing so.”

India sees over 18K new COVID-19 cases, 160 deaths



NEW DELHI, OCT 21 (PTI): A single-day rise of 18,454 fresh cases pushed India's COVID-19 tally to 3,41,27,450, while the number of active infections rose to 1,78,831, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Thursday.

The death toll from the pandemic climbed to 4,52,811 with 160 new fatalities, showed the data updated at 8 am.

The daily rise in new coronavirus infections has been below 30,000 for 27 straight days and less than 50,000 daily new cases have been reported for 116 consecutive days now.

The number of active cases has increased to 1,78,831, comprising 0.52 per cent of the total infections -- the lowest since March 2020

Shashi Tharoor credits Centre for Covid jab feat, his colleague disagrees

NEW DELHI, 21 OCT [NDTV]: Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Thursday said credit should be given to the government for achieving the 100-crore COVID vaccine dose landmark in the country, drawing a sharp response from party colleague Pawan Khera, who asserted that giving credit is an “insult” to millions of families that “suffered due to the mismanagement” of the pandemic.

India achieved a major milestone in its vaccination programme against COVID-19 as the cumulative vaccine doses administered in the country surpassed the 100-crore mark on Thursday.

Reacting to the development, Mr Tharoor tweeted, “This is a matter of pride for all Indians. Let's give the Government credit.”

“After severe mismanagement of the second COVID wave & botching the vaccination orders that might have prevented it, Govt has now partly redeemed itself. It remains accountable for its earlier failures,” the Lok Sabha MP from Thiruvananthapuram said.

Tagging Mr Tharoor's tweet, Mr Khera, a Congress spokesperson, said giving credit to “the government is an insult to millions of families who suffered and are still suffering from the after-effects and side effects of widespread COVID mismanagement”

-- while the national COVID-19 recovery rate was recorded at 98.15 per cent, the highest since March 2020, the Health Ministry said.

An increase of 733 cases has been recorded in the active COVID-19 case count in a span of 24 hours.

Also, 12,47,506 tests were conducted on Wednesday, taking the cumulative number of tests conducted so far for detection of COVID-19 in the country to 59,57,42,218.

The daily positivity rate was recorded at 1.48 per cent. It has been less than 3 per cent for the last 52 days. The weekly positivity rate was recorded at 1.34 per cent. It has been below 3 per cent for the last 118 days, according to the ministry. The number of people

who have recuperated from the disease surged to 3,34,95,808, while the case fatality rate was recorded at 1.33 per cent.

The cumulative doses administered in the country so far under the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination drive has exceeded 100 crore.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 2020; 30 lakh on August 23; 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28; 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29; 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed one crore on December 19.

India crossed the grim milestone of two crore novel coronavirus cases on May 4 and three crore on June 23.

The 160 new fatalities include 82 from Kerala, 21 from Maharashtra and 20 from Tamil Nadu.

A total of 4,52,811 coronavirus-linked deaths have been reported so far in the country, including 1,39,886 from Maharashtra, 37,976 from Karnataka, 35,948 from Tamil Nadu, 27,084 from Kerala, 25,090 from Delhi, 22,898 from Uttar Pradesh and 19,007 from West Bengal.

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

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

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Women in Ladakh's Phyang village secure economic confidence via homestay route....

When her husband died, she had to fend for herself and her three children, the oldest of whom was only 10 at the time. She monetised the one skill she had cooking but that got her no more than Rs 8,000 a month. Life would have continued in much the same manner had it not been for the SEWA-Airbnb Hum Sab Ek initiative.

“I am really excited about becoming a host. I have worked so hard all my life to earn the bare minimum. It wasn't easy to earn a living, and take care of three children. But now, I can work from my home, be close to my children and still earn enough,” she said.

Chery Dolker, half Tsewang's age at 25, has also found a new mission with Hum Sab Ek.

A Nepali by birth, Chery was adopted by a Ladakhi couple as a child and, as grateful as she is to them, she has always wanted to make something of herself.

With the family her parents, brother, his wife and child -- perpetually caught in a too-many-mouths-to-feed situation, Chery dropped out of school early on to take care of the house.

The family has a two floor house with a lovely garden patch in the front where fruits and vegetables of all kinds are grown. The produce sold in the Leh market was the family's primary source of income.

But becoming a host will change everything, she said optimistically.

The tariffs for rooms at these homestays in Phyang is Rs 2,000 per night. These come with all basic room amenities, great views as well as an opportunity for travellers to experience Ladakhi life in its truest form.

The kitchens and dining spaces in these houses are stocked with Ladakhi food, including traditional breads, local fruits such as apricots and seabuckthorn berries, which are also consumed as jams and juices.

Homestays in Phyang come as a welcome addition to the tourism scene in Ladakh which has homestays in popular destinations, including Leh, Nubra Valley, Alchi, Siachen and Pangong.

Phyang is not among the well known tourist destinations in the Leh-Ladakh region, but being a 20-minute drive from the airport makes it a strategically perfect overnight stopover.

According to Tejas Raval of SEWA, the location of these homestays will allow tourists to have a day of rest to acclimatise to the altitude while having a culturally enriching experience with local families.

From these homestays in Phyang, one can explore some must-visit destinations like the Gurudwara Pathar Sahib, the serene Sangam, the confluence of the Indus and Zaskar rivers, and the much talked about Magnetic hill, before moving on to Leh.

The great thing about the homestays is that they will give you the luxury of resting without having to spend a lot more in hotels. Also, the experience, unlike hotels, would not be impersonal. Tourists can interact with the hosts and know much more about their lives, Raval said.

Similar homestay initiatives for empowering rural women have been created by SEWA and Airbnb in Gujarat, an initiative which they are planning to expand throughout the country.

India among 11 “countries of concern” on Climate Change for US agencies

WASHINGTON, 21 OCT [REUTERS]: Afghanistan, India and Pakistan were among 11 countries singled out by US intelligence agencies on Thursday as being “highly vulnerable” in terms of their ability to prepare for and respond to environmental and societal crises caused by climate change.

In a new National Intelligence Estimate, the Office of Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) predicts that

global warming will increase geopolitical tensions and risks to US national security over the next four decades, a senior intelligence official involved in drafting the report said.

Such estimates are broad US intelligence community assessments. Thursday's report identifies as particular “countries of concern” Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Myanmar, Iraq, North Korea, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and

Colombia.

Heat, drought, water availability and ineffective government make Afghanistan specifically worrying, the official said. Water disputes are also a key “geopolitical flashpoint” in India and the rest of South Asia.

The report identifies two additional regions of concern to US intelligence agencies. Climate change is “likely to increase the risk of instability in countries in Central Africa and

Week-long Limboo folk dance training in Gangtok



SAGAR CHETTRI

GANGTOK, 21 OCT:

A training on traditional Limboo folk dance, Yahlak-Pallam began here at Yakthung Him in DPH Road on Thursday. The week-long training is being organized by Sukhim Yakthung Sapsok Songchumbho [SYSS] in collaboration with Sikkim Akademi.

Thirty youths from different parts of the State participated in this training programme which has four experts in Yahlak-Pallam; BB Subba, Bhim Maya Subba, Ranjana Subba and

Sunu Limboo.

The inaugural function of the training had Sikkim Akademi president, SR Subba, as the chief guest.

In his address, the chief guest mentioned that Sikkim Akademi has been working to preserve and promote all local languages of Sikkim. He expressed that this programme would help to groom master trainers who can further train youth in their respective areas.

While expressing his best wishes to partici-

pants, Mr Subba encouraged all participants to complete the training and work for the preservation and development of culture, tradition and language. He assured to conduct similar programmes in the future.

Speaking to media persons, SYSS president, CS Subba mentioned that Yahlak-Pallam is a unique Limboo folk dance which is disappearing fast. On the same, he said that this event aims to revive and preserve these ancestral dances of the Limboo community and

to pass them on to the younger generation.

This training is the first phase and SYSS will continue with such initiatives to preserve and promote culture, tradition and language of the community, he informed.

Likewise, SYSS general secretary stated that this training to preserve and promote folk dances of the community is the first-of-its-kind in the State. As folk dances are related to folklores, the week-long training will include theoretical and practical classes by the experts.

Workshop on Swachh Survekshan Grameen 2021

GANGTOK, 21 OCT [IPRI]:

The State level launch and Workshop on Swachh Survekshan Grameen 2021 was held at the conference hall, Rural Development Department on 21.10.2021. The programme was chaired by the Principal Secretary RDD, C.S Rao and was joined by the Special Secretary-cum-Mission Director SBM(G), Sarika Pradhan. The programme had in attendance ADCs (Dev) North and East Districts along with their respective officials/ District Coordinators. ADCs (Dev) from South and West Districts with their coordinators joined the programme via Video Conference.

The Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti has been carrying out Swachhata Survekshan Grameen (SSG) since 2018. The objective of the Swachh Survekshan Grameen 2021 is to encourage large scale citizen participation, rank states and districts according to key swachhata parameters, compare the performance of districts and states, ascertain progress of



swachhata on the ground through a survey, engage and solicit feedback from citizens and evaluate implementation of solid and liquid waste management arrangements in the districts.

The Swachh Survekshan Grameen 2021 will be conducted by IPSOS Research Private Limited (Survey Agency). 88 villages across Sikkim shall be randomly surveyed for this year's SSG.

The workshop was held to inform, engage, familiarize and support the state and district

level officials on the various facets of the survey methodology, survey process and indicators of the new SSG protocol.

The resource person from IPSOS, Sahabuddin Sheikh, made a detailed presentation on SSG 2021. In his presentation, he explained that the on field data collection will be done sometime in mid November and eventually the states and districts shall be ranked. The protocol document has been prepared for the states and districts to have a clear understand-

ing of the tasks to carry out their assessment in the survey.

The programme was also addressed by the Principal Secretary RDD and the Mission Director SBM(G). Pertinent queries raised by participants during the course of the programme were cleared by representatives of IPSOS (survey agency) and consultants from Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti who had joined the meeting via video conference.

Heavy rainfall submerges houses in Uttarakhand's Rudrapur

RUDRAPUR, 21 OCT: Residents of Shivpuri town in Rudrapur district of Uttarakhand are struggling after continuous heavy rains which have submerged their houses, damaged household goods and left them hungry.

Suman Yadav a resident said, "On the night of October 18, our houses got flooded with 5 feet of water. This ruined all our household belongings. More than half of items in our shops also were submerged. We are borrowing clothes from others. We have lost at least 1 lakh rupees."

Their house also developed some cracks due to rain.

Meenakshi, another resident says, "Our clothes, TV, Coolers etc. have been ruined. We

had ₹ 1000 in our house but we have lost that too. We also lost 30 kilograms of rice. We had our food in a school for 2 days but now we are cooking at our home."

Residents are trying to put their household items to use once again by drying them. Television sets, inverters and refrigerators were damaged by the rainwater in many households. Many people are left with no food supplies, which has left many people struggling with hunger.

Another resident, who was evacuated from her house said, "At around 2:00 AM when we were sleeping, our house got flooded with water. Due to consistent rains, people were inside their houses anyways. All of our household items

were left submerged. I do some clothing-related work for living and all the clothes were ruined by the rainwater. We have lost everything."

Consistently heavy rains in the state left many areas submerged in water, due to which a lot of people struggled to find their way out of the rainwater and the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) rescued them.

People have complained that the administration has failed to provide help to them during such tough times.

However, Rudrapur MLA Rajkumar Thukral who was also in the town on Wednesday said, "I was here on October 19 as well and I have been coming here regularly. I have been providing food

to people as well, at times using my own money. I have pressurised the administration to provide compensation to the people as soon as possible and an in-charge has been appointed for each area for the purpose of compensation. They will start their work from today. I have requested that a compensation of ₹ 50,000 be provided to the ones affected by heavy rains. People can talk to me in case they need any help, I am here for them.

NDRF Inspector Monu Sharma, who has been rescuing people said, "Our team has been conducting operations here (Shivpuri) for last two days. 10 teams have been formed which have rescued 600-700 people in two days using our

boats. Food has been distributed to at least 1,300 people as well. We have also saved people from Jagatpura and Thakur Nagar areas. We will go in these areas to find if anyone is still stuck and ask people if they need our help."

He said that the team encountered challenges like broken wires and rainwater but still managed to rescue people.

Amid torrential rains, the hilly state has witnessed flooded roads, buildings and overflowing rivers leaving people stranded in various places.

The death toll in rain-battered Uttarakhand has mounted to 46 following several incidents of flash floods and landslides in the past few days.

Freida Pinto says she secretly married fiancé Cory Tran

LOS ANGELES, OCT 21 (PTI): Actor Freida Pinto has revealed she tied the knot with her fiancé and photographer Cory Tran when they were in lockdown amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The "Slumdog Millionaire" star said when they got engaged in November 2019, they thought they will have "this most magical wedding" but the pandemic played a spoilsport.

"I should clear the air. I wasn't planning a big fat Indian wedding. It was just going to be something pretty and simple. But then COVID happened and it's still happening and we just realized we were going to be planning this for the rest of our lives and probably never doing it," Pinto said during an appearance



on "The Kelly Clarkson Show" on Wednesday.

The 37-year-old actor, who is expecting her first child with Tran, said the couple eventually went to the Honda Center in Anaheim, California and got married.

"Honestly, I have to say if any of you have planned a wedding, you probably know this, I do not want stomach ulcers from planning my own wedding. This was perfect! We got married and then we got to go home and take an afternoon nap," she added.

Pinto also shared she meet Tran, 34, through actor Aaron Paul, her co-star in the drama series "The Path".

She told Clarkson that she was happily single while shooting their television show in New York when Paul said, "I want you in my life forever, Freida, so I'm going to introduce you to my friend."

The actor recalled telling Paul she did not want him playing matchmaker and added, "But he still did it and turns out I got engaged to Cory, his friend."

Centre approves additional release of DA installment

NEW DELHI, 23 OCT [PTI]: The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved an additional release of Dearness Allowance (DA) instalment to the Central government employees and Dearness Relief (DR) to the pensioners. The decision will be effective from July 1, 2021.

The DA and DR hike announcement will benefit around 47.14 lakh Central government employees and 68.62 lakh pensioners respectively.

Impact on the exchequer on account of both DA and DR would be around ₹ 9,488.70 crore per annum.

Earlier in September, the Department of Expenditure, under the

Ministry of Finance, had issued a memorandum stating the retired central government employees will receive cash payment and gratuity.

Prior to this, the Centre had approved an increase in DA and Dearness Relief (DR) given to central government employees and pensioners from 17 per cent to 28 per cent.

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, the government had frozen additional installments of the DA and DR.

Spotlights On Local Markets

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NOTICE

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Not Honking? Good!

Let's try and curtail mobile phone urges now

Drive out to any section of road in Sikkim where traffic cops are unlikely to spy on the driving habits of the hands controlling the wheels, and you are bound to come across drivers chatting away on their mobile phones. An occasional driver might have the hands-free option to service his telecom-dependence, but a majority will have a hand pressed to their ears to keep conversations going. The frequency of such sightings is unnerving, but the practice continues. As the town limits approach, so do the artful dodges to evade detection. And this is only one of the risks and irritations one suffers on Sikkim roads.

Driving into Gangtok is not an experience recommended for those short on patience. The windfall of EMI-option ownerships has littered the roads with more vehicles than can move unhindered on the capital's hemmed by buildings roads. For a highway, a national one at that, NH10 in Gangtok is ridiculously ambushed by bottlenecks in its course up the Gangtok hill, and any drive to town needs lurching and stalling through serpentine stretches of idling vehicles and groaning engines and moaning passengers. What is now noticeably missing from the experience is the harassment of near ceaseless honking by the more impatient drivers who used to believe that the horn helps clear jams. Well, they didn't, at least not in Sikkim, but the relative calm of reduced honking on Gangtok roads has made the traffic snarls slightly less stressful. This, largely thanks to the bordering on facetious sight of traffic police personnel who went to town to discourage honking. Initially, of course, like most things in Sikkim, it started with an outright ban. Drivers and commuters are not used to traffic cops making 'appeals', given that its reprimands or tough traffic management that they are normally seen doing, and it was perhaps for that reason that the placard effort was initially either not noticed, or suspected of being even a prank. But the uniform is a powerful medium to convey messages it seems, and thus, without any challans being cut or drivers embarrassed on the highway, the Gangtok propensity to honk every time the vehicle ahead so much as slowed down, has been quelled. Of course, the occasional instinctive pressing of the horn still happens, but more and more drivers are learning to control their urge only because the cops have been strict.

The honking on Gangtok roads has come down for this reason and not because of a realisation that it is irritating, disturbing, unnecessary or [noise] pollution-causing, and with that is reinforced the dejection that despite everything, even etiquette, unfortunately, needs to be enforced. Since the traffic personnel have achieved so much so quickly for Gangtok and Sikkim's other towns, it is hoped that they also fashion some means of saving commuters from irresponsible driving common on Sikkim roads, the perpetually talking on phone syndrome requiring immediate attention. And this effort needs to move beyond the city roads and needs interventions along the otherwise not-policed stretches.

LAURA REVELL

THECONVERSATION.COM

Microplastics are found in the most remote places on land and in the ocean as well as in our food. Now several studies around the world have confirmed they are also present in the air we breathe.

In our research, published today, we investigated for the first time how airborne microplastics behave in the atmosphere and whether they contribute to a warming or cooling of Earth's climate system.

Other types of airborne particles (aerosols) such as dust, sea spray and soot either scatter or absorb sunlight, and as a consequence they cool or warm the climate system. We found microplastics do both.

In this first study to link airborne microplastics and climate change, we highlight just how widespread microplastic pollution is and the potential it has to influence climate on a global scale.

The current concentration of microplastics in the atmosphere is low and they have only a very small influence on global climate at this point. But given projections for a doubling of plastic waste over coming decades, we expect microplastics could have a larger impact on Earth's climate system, unless we take action to address plastic pollution.

A PLASTIC CYCLE

Microplastics are tiny fragments or fibres shed during the degradation of larger pieces of plastic. They are light enough to be transported by the wind over large distances.

Recently, researchers have confirmed microplastics in remote mountain catchments, in Arctic snow and in conservation areas. Earlier this year, we reported them in atmospheric fallout collected in New Zealand.

Other studies have shown that once microplastic pollutants enter the ocean, they don't necessarily remain there but can leave the sea with sea spray and, driven by wind currents, return to the atmosphere.

This has led us to think of a plastic cycle: microplastics don't stay in soils, rivers, the ocean or



air, but move between different parts of the Earth system.

Initially, we expected airborne microplastics would scatter sunlight like most aerosols, which act like tiny disco balls and reflect sunlight back to space. This has a cooling effect on Earth's climate.

Most types of aerosols in Earth's atmosphere scatter light – therefore in general, aerosols have partially offset greenhouse gas warming in recent decades. One exception is soot (or black carbon), which is good at absorbing sunlight and has a warming effect.

We found that, overall, airborne microplastics are efficient at scattering sunlight, which implies a cooling effect on climate. However, they can also absorb radiation emitted by the Earth, which means they contribute, in a very small way, to the greenhouse effect.

MICROPLASTIC IMPACTS ON CLIMATE

The highest reported concentrations of airborne microplastics (thousands of fragments per cubic metre of air) were measured at urban sampling sites in London and Beijing.

We don't know yet how far up into the atmosphere microplastics have reached, but an aircraft-based study found them at altitudes of up to 3.5 kilometres.

This presents additional questions whether microplastics could alter atmospheric chemistry by providing surfaces for chemical reactions to occur on, and how they interact with clouds.

The magnitude of microplastics' influence on climate varies in our climate model simulations, depending on assumptions we made about how the plastic fragments are distributed throughout Earth's atmosphere.

Because airborne microplastics research is so new, we had a limited number of studies to inform our research.

Our study shows the influence of microplastics on global climate is currently very small, and a cooling effect dominates. However, we expect it to increase in future, to the point that airborne microplastics exert a climate influence comparable to other types of aerosols.

An estimated 5 billion tonnes of plastic waste has already accumulated in landfills or the environment to date. This figure is projected to double over the next three decades. Without serious efforts to address microplastic pollution, mismanaged plastic waste will continue to increase the abundance of airborne microplastics, and their influence on the climate in the future.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer in Environmental Physics, University of Canterbury]

COVID: new antibody treatment could offer up to 18 months' protection against severe disease

REBECCA AICHELER

THECONVERSATION.COM

A new treatment could soon help protect people from developing severe COVID. AstraZeneca has just released results from a phase 3 clinical trial – the final stage of testing before a drug is authorised – that suggest its new COVID treatment, AZD7442, is effective at reducing severe disease or death in non-hospitalised COVID patients.

The treatment contains antibodies, which are usually produced naturally in response to a COVID infection or vaccination. They work by recognising specific parts of SARS-CoV-2 – the virus that causes COVID – and either attack these directly or bind to them to stop the virus from working and flag it for destruction by other parts of the immune system.

After they've done their job of clearing the virus, the antibodies remain in the body for a period of time, making up part of our immunological memory. If what they target is encountered again, they can leap into action.

The new treatment, AZD7442, uses special antibodies called monoclonal antibodies. These are antibodies produced in a lab that imitate the body's natural defences – in this case mimicking the immune system's response to COVID.

Artificially developing antibodies to fight disease isn't a new technique. This technology is already used to treat many diseases, including leukaemia, breast cancer and lupus. In fact, this isn't even the first time the technique has been used for COVID. The first COVID monoclonal antibody treatment was approved in the UK in August 2021.

HOW DOES ASTRAZENECA'S TREAT-



MENT WORK?

AZD7442 is a cocktail of two monoclonal antibodies – tixagevimab and cilgavimab – that are designed to reduce the severity of a SARS-CoV-2 infection and so prevent people from getting severely ill.

Both of these antibodies bind to different parts of virus's spike proteins, which cover its outer surface and are what the virus uses to infect cells. It's thought that attaching to these proteins is what gives the medicine its effect, as this stops the virus from being able to get inside cells and reproduce.

The two monoclonal antibodies in the cocktail are based on antibodies taken from patients who survived COVID. Scientists at AstraZeneca took blood samples from patients and isolated immune cells called B cells,

which are the antibody factories of the human body. They then grew more of these B cells in the lab, and used them to make large quantities of the two antibodies, which they had identified as specifically targeting the coronavirus's spike protein.

But the key difference between this and other antibody-based treatments is that in AZD7442, the antibodies have been modified so they stay in the body for longer.

Studies using similarly modified antibodies against another respiratory virus – respiratory syncytial virus – have shown that this approach gives long-term protection, with the modified antibodies having triple the durability of conventional antibodies. It's hoped that a single dose of AZD7442 could offer 12 to 18 months protection

from severe COVID, though we'll have to wait to see exactly how long protection lasts.

HOW WELL DOES IT WORK?

AstraZeneca's phase 3 trial investigated the effectiveness of the treatment when given to patients who were infected with SARS-CoV-2.

The study looked at 822 participants who were over the age of 18. Only around 13% were 65 years and over, but 90% had health conditions that put them at high risk of severe COVID, such as cancer, diabetes, obesity, chronic lung disease or asthma, cardiovascular disease or a weakened immune system.

The trial results show that of the 407 people who received AZD7442, 18 developed severe COVID or died, compared with 37 of the 415 people who received a placebo. This suggests that those in the AZD7442 group were 50% less likely to develop severe COVID than those taking a placebo.

The trial also looked specifically at patients who received treatment quickly – that is, within five days of their symptoms starting. In this group, AZD7442 reduced the risk of severe disease or death by 67%, suggesting that early treatment with AZD7442 provides greater protection.

It's important to note, however, that these results have been released by AstraZeneca but don't yet appear to have been formally reviewed by other scientists. So any findings need to be treated with caution.

HOW USEFUL WILL IT BE?

These results suggest that AZD7442 could be a valuable tool for patients in need of instant immunity against COVID, such as those who have not

responded to vaccines because of a weakened immune system or those in other high-risk groups.

However, more detail of the characteristics of the patients who did and did not benefit from the medicine is required to fully understand who will benefit most from receiving this drug.

And when considering how useful AZD7442 could be, it's important to consider when in the course of the disease the treatment will be given. For many, severe disease with COVID isn't caused by the virus replicating, but by the immune system going awry.

This means that to prevent severe disease, drugs such as AZD7442 need to be given early in infection, before the overzealous immune response kicks in. Give them too late, and treatments like this that target the virus directly are unlikely to offer much benefit (unlike those that can control inflammation and immune overreaction, such as dexamethasone or tocilizumab).

But one thing that could help the treatment be deployed early during infection is the fact that it only needs to be injected into a muscle, rather than be given intravenously. This means it can be given at a clinic, without patients needing to come into hospital.

However, monoclonal antibody treatments are notoriously expensive, and the cost of AZD7442 has not yet been released. This could be the biggest barrier to the drug having a big impact worldwide – assuming, of course, that its phase 3 results pass the scrutiny of regulators and the drug is approved.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer in Immunology, Cardiff Metropolitan University]

Women in Ladakh village turn homestay hosts

LEH, OCT 21 (PTI): Opening their picturesque homes for tourists has been the way towards empowerment, both social and financial, for women in Ladakh's Phyang village who have long worked unseen as cook, cleaner and farm worker and are now finding new confidence as mini-entrepreneurs. With many of the men working for the Army and away from home for months, the women of Phyang, a mountain village about 15 km from Leh with great views of rugged peaks and cloud laden blue skies, are slowly coming into their own as homestay hosts.

After all these years of being at home, I feel like I am not even smart enough to talk to people but I think being a host will help me interact with more people, and also help brush up my Hindi, Tsering Dolker, a 36-year-old host, told PTI.

Her husband is currently posted as a hawaladar in Berchok glacier, and is home for barely two months in a year.

Tsering, who gave up her job as a data operator in Doordarshan soon after she got married, has spent much of the years since bringing up her two boys aged seven and 13, and farming, selling the wheat and potato from her land to make a living.

The opportunity of earning a living by hosting travellers in her home has come as a convenient solution to all her problems.

At this point, we don't have many money issues because my husband has a good salary. But he will retire in another two years and the cost of our children's education is only expected to increase. So earning through this homestay will help a huge deal, she said.

Tsering has a tradi-



tional Ladakhi home, with five rooms, two of which the family has kept. The remaining have been registered on Airbnb.

The online travel portal has tied up with non-profit organisation Self Employed Women's Association of India (SEWA) for Hum Sab Ek, an initiative that is looking at empowering women to become micro-entrepreneurs by helping them turn into homestay hosts.

As part of this SEWA-Airbnb partnership, 10 homes in Phyang village have been listed on the travel portal, and the number is expected to increase in the coming years.

We are proud to extend our partnership with SEWA in Ladakh and help empower local women Hosts on Airbnb to secure their financial independence and bring valuable tourism dollars into their communities.

As part of our broader efforts to help rebuild tourism for the benefit of local communities, we aim to work together with these micro-entrepreneurs to promote sustainable and responsible travel and stays that contribute to resilient local

economies and support jobs, said Amanpreet Bajaj, general manager, Airbnb India, Southeast Asia, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The initiative is critical to the process of empowerment, both social as well as financial, in Phyang village.

In most households here, women are the central figure doing all kinds of jobs, including cooking and cleaning within the homes and farming outside. Their work, much like household work throughout the country, has traditionally gone unrewarded and unrecognised.

But change is afoot and the women, visibly shy and under confident, are looking at becoming arbiters of their lives and that of their families.

Like Tsering, turning homestay host has opened windows for Tsewang Dolma, whose world came crashing down in 2010 when her husband suddenly passed away. Tsewang, now 50, had spent much of her life being dependent on first her father, then her husband.

When her husband died, she had to fend for

herself and her three children, the oldest of whom was only 10 at the time. She monetised the one skill she had cooking but that got her no more than Rs 8,000 a month. Life would have continued in much the same manner had it not been for the SEWA-Airbnb Hum Sab Ek initiative.

"I am really excited about becoming a host. I have worked so hard all my life to earn the bare minimum. It wasn't easy to earn a living, and take care of three children. But now, I can work from my home, be close to my children and still earn enough," she said.

Chery Dolker, half Tsewang's age at 25, has also found a new mission with Hum Sab Ek.

A Nepali by birth, Chery was adopted by a Ladakhi couple as a child and, as grateful as she is to them, she has always wanted to make something of herself.

With the family her parents, brother, his wife and child -- perpetually caught in a too-many-mouths-to-feed situation, Chery dropped out of school early on to take care of the house.

The family has a two

floor house with a lovely garden patch in the front where fruits and vegetables of all kinds are grown. The produce sold in the Leh market was the family's primary source of income.

But becoming a host will change everything, she said optimistically.

The tariffs for rooms at these homestays in Phyang is Rs 2,000 per night. These come with all basic room amenities, great views as well as an opportunity for travellers to experience Ladakhi life in its truest form.

The kitchens and dining spaces in these houses are stocked with Ladakhi food, including traditional breads, local fruits such as apricots and seabuckthorn berries, which are also consumed as jams and juices.

Homestays in Phyang come as a welcome addition to the tourism scene in Ladakh which has homestays in popular destinations, including Leh, Nubra Valley, Alchi, Siachen and Pangong.

Phyang is not among the well known tourist destinations in the Leh-Ladakh region, but being a 20-minute drive from the airport makes

it a strategically perfect overnight stopover.

According to Tejas Raval of SEWA, the location of these homestays will allow tourists to have a day of rest to acclimatise to the altitude while having a culturally enriching experience with local families.

From these homestays in Phyang, one can explore some must-visit destinations like the Gurudwara Pathar Sahib, the serene Sangam, the confluence of the Indus and Zaskar rivers, and the much talked about Magnetic hill, before moving on to Leh.

The great thing about the homestays is that they will give you the luxury of resting without having to spend a lot more in hotels. Also, the experience, unlike hotels, would not be impersonal. Tourists can interact with the hosts and know much more about their lives, Raval said.

Similar homestay initiatives for empowering rural women have been created by SEWA and Airbnb in Gujarat, an initiative which they are planning to expand throughout the country.

Heroin worth Rs 4 crore seized, 2 arrested in Assam



DIPHU (ASSAM), OCT 21 (PTI): Two persons were arrested and heroin worth Rs 4 crore was seized from their possessions in Assam's Karbi Anglong district on Thursday, police said.

During a regular vehicle-checking drive at Laharijan, police seized 584 gm of heroin packed in 48 soap boxes from two persons travelling

in a Guwahati-bound bus coming from Manipur.

The two persons hailing from Manipur were taken into custody and further investigation was underway, a police officer said.

In the district's Khatkhati area, heroin worth Rs 10 lakh was seized last week, while the drug worth Rs 2.5 crore was seized on October 9.

Nepalese national raped in Delhi's Amar Colony area



NEW DELHI, OCT 20 (PTI): A Nepalese national has allegedly been raped by a man in south-east Delhi's Amar Colony area, police said on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, the Greater Kailash police station received information regarding sexual assault of a woman by a person known to her, they said.

During inquiry, the place of incident was found to be within the jurisdiction of the Amar Colony police station, police said.

Later, the Greater Kailash police came to the Amar Colony police station along with the complainant and her

brother, and produced her statement, they said.

On the basis of the complaint, her counselling report and existing circumstances, a case under sections 376 (rape) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code was registered, a senior police officer said.

Police have interrogated Mayank Sharma (41), a resident of Noida in Uttar Pradesh. During interrogation, it was learnt that the complainant started a live-in relationship in 2013-14. The accused has been arrested and further investigation is in progress, the officer said.

3 sisters drown in pond in UP's Bahraich

BAHRAICH, OCT 21 (PTI): Three sisters, including an infant, drowned in a pond in Uttar Pradesh's Bahraich district, police said on Thursday.

The incident took place in Nandoliya village under Kaiserganj police station area on Wednesday evening, they said.

Superintendent of Police (SP) Sujata Singh told reporters that one Saira Bano had taken her cattle for grazing near the pond in Nandoliya. She was accompanied by her four children -- sons Kaif (8) and Mohammad Faiz (3), and daughters Masrum (7 months) and Qashrum

(4).

Kaif entered the pond while watching fish and started drowning. Hearing his cries for help, Bano entered the pond holding Masrum in her arms and her other two children followed her, she said.

Though Bano managed to save Kaif, the

other three children drowned, she added.

The three bodies were later fished out of the pond and sent for a post-mortem examination, the SP said.

Kaif is undergoing treatment at a government health centre and his condition is stated to be stable, she said.

No new COVID-19 case in Andamans, tally at 7,646

PORT BLAIR, OCT 21 (PTI): Andaman and Nicobar Islands did not record a single fresh COVID-19 case in the last 24 hours, a health department official said on Thursday.

The caseload in the archipelago remained at 7,646.

The death toll stood at 129 as no new fatality due to the infection was reported during the peri-

od, he said.

One more patient was cured of the disease on Wednesday, taking the total number of recoveries to 7,510.

The Union Territory now has seven active cases, the official said.

The local administration has adopted an approach of tracking, testing and treating to contain spread of the disease, he said, adding

that people arriving here from the mainland are mandatorily required to undergo COVID test.

Altogether, 4,70,203 people have been inoculated with 1,77,820 of them having received both doses of the vaccines.

The Andaman and Nicobar administration has conducted over 5.83 lakh sample tests for COVID-19 so far, and the

positivity rate stands at 1.31 per cent, he said.

Meanwhile, Congress MP from the archipelago, Kuldeep Rai Sharma, appealed to the local authorities to resume cultural programmes at Marina Park, Corbyn's Cove and other tourist spots to attract travellers and support local artistes as the COVID situation improved.

17 trekkers missing in Himachal Pradesh's Kinnaur

SHIMLA, OCT 21 (PTI) Seventeen trekkers have gone missing in Himachal Pradesh's Kinnaur district, a senior official said on Wednesday.

The trekkers had left Harshil in adjoining Uttarakhand's Uttarkashi for Chitkul in HP's Kinnaur on October 14, but they reportedly went missing during inclement weather from October 17 to 19 in Lamkhaga

pass, he said.

The Lamkhaga Pass is one of the toughest passes which connects Kinnaur district with Harshil in Uttarakhand.

Police and Forest Department teams, and a quick response team have been sent to the spot, Kinnaur Deputy Commissioner Abid Husain Sadiq said.

The DC said the help of Indo-Tibetan Border



Police was also sought for their search.

The search operation

will be started in the wee hours on Thursday, he added.

VIDEO NEWS SECTION

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T10, Hundred can co-exist with other formats: Roy

ABU DHABI, OCT 21 (PTI): Prolific England opener Jason Roy believes that the much-debated new formats of the game -- the Hundred and the T10 -- can co-exist with the T20, ODI and Test cricket.

There has been a push for the T10 format's entry into the 2028 Olympics while the ECB has its own version -- the 100-ball cricket.

"They are co-existing now, aren't they?" Roy, who will be turning out for Delhi Bulls in the Abu Dhabi T10 league, said during a virtual interaction.

"The talent of players coming to the T10 is extremely high, the talent of the Hundred was extremely high, and that was during COVID as well."

Roy, who is all set to return to the Abu Dhabi T10 after three years, said the T10 version would help in enhancing their power hitting skills in a big way.

"You've got red ball cricket, one day cricket and T20 cricket and those are your three games that you need to work on. But now you add in the Hundred and T10, it's extremely fun, loads of fun especially for players like myself who have played all these other formats.

"To now come in and learn a new skill is great, it's refreshing, it keeps you young which is good. I think they can co-exist very easily together."

Asked whether a T10 World Cup is realistic in future, he said: "That would be a lot of fun mate. It's a great idea but it's going to be quite hard to fit that into the international schedule, with Tests, ODIs, T20Is."

"But yeah, why not imagine that. Imagine obviously the internationals going head to head. It'll be some of the most iconic cricket. So, yeah, maybe something for the future for sure."

On the challenges for a batter in T10 format, he said, "It's just power hitting pretty much from ball one and pushing for those 100-plus scores."

"It's another skill set for the players to learn, it's exciting for players like myself, who are playing."

The fifth season of the Abu Dhabi T10 League will be held from November 19-December 4.

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With eye on Super 12s stage, Ireland and Namibia clash in must-win game

SHARJAH, OCT 21 (PTI): Their future in the tournament at stake, Namibia and Ireland will look to put their best foot forward when they clash in a battle of survival in a Group A game of the T20 World Cup here on Friday.

Both teams have lost to Sri Lanka and beaten the Netherlands and thus have two points each.

With Sri Lanka already through to the Super 12s stage and Netherlands out of the equation, the winner of Friday's clash between the two will become the second side from Group A to advance to the next stage.

Going ahead, Ireland will hope for a better display with the bat. They made short work of the Dutch in their campaign opener but everyone failed to cope against the formidable Sri Lankan bowling attack barring skipper Andrew Balbirnie (41) who fought a lonely battle in the side's 70-run loss.

Pacers Curtis Campher (4 wickets), Joshua Little (5 wickets) and Mark Adair (5 wickets) have done well with the ball and Ireland will be counting on the trio to get the job done against Namibia.

Talking about Fri-



day's clash, captain Balbirnie said, "We are excited. They are the games you want to play in when you grow up watching cricket and see the knock-out games. They are the ones we want to be part of, so we will rest up and be ready."

"We started the week really well and put in some really good performances against the Dutch. We knew if we lost that game, we would be playing catch up. We have a massive game on Friday now and it is all to play for."

On the other hand,

debutants Namibia will be high on confidence having completed their highest-successful chase in a T20I to notch up their maiden World Cup win on Wednesday against the Netherlands.

Having been bowled out for 96 in their opener, the Namibian batters did well to overhaul the target of 165 with one over to spare against the Netherlands.

The chief contributor with the bat was experienced all-rounder David Wiese, who displayed his sensational power-hitting skills.

With openers Stephan Baard and Zane

Green failing in the two games so far, Wiese alongside skipper Gerhard Erasmus and Craig Williams will need to shoulder the responsibility of putting runs on the board while the bowlers will also have their task cut out.

With the tournament moving to Sharjah, the two teams will have to quickly adapt to the slow pitches. In the recently concluded IPL, bowlers who were able to vary their pace found more success here.

The Teams (From): Namibia: Gerhard Erasmus (c), Stephen Baard, Karl Birkenstock.

Ireland: Gary Wilson (c), Mark Adair, Andy Balbirnie, David Delany, Gareth Delany, George Dockrell, Shane Getkate, Kevin O'Brien, Boyd Rankin, Simi Singh, Paul Stirling, Harry Tector, Stuart Thompson, Lorcan Tucker and Craig Young.

Match starts at 3:30pm IST.

India has some serious match winners going to World Cup: Smith

MELBOURNE, OCT 21 (PTI): Seasoned Australia batter Steve Smith says a "terrific" Indian team is packed with some serious match winners going into the T20 World Cup, alluding that Virat Kohli's side will be one of the favourites to lift the title.

India thumped Australia by eight wickets in a warm-up game with Rohit Sharma (60), K L Rahul (39) and Suryakumar Yadav (38) all getting some runs under their belts.

Kohli did not lead the side but came out to bowl as India were still figuring out their sixth-bowling option.

"They're a terrific side, they have got all bases covered and some serious match winners in there," Smith was quoted as saying by 'Sydney Morning Herald'.

"They've obviously been playing in these conditions during the last couple of months with the IPL so they'll be used to that," he added.

Smith himself scored 57 off 48 balls in the game, crossing the 50-run mark for the first time since he struck 86 for NSW against Queensland in March.

"It was nice to spend a bit of time in the middle again. It's never easy when you're three down.

"You have to rebuild for a period there and I thought we did that pretty well. The partnerships with Stoin (Marcus Stoinis) and Maxi (Glenn Maxwell) were obviously important."

Smith, who had given the tours of the West Indies and Bangladesh due to an elbow injury, said he is feeling "good and ready to go now".

He featured in two games for the Delhi Capitals in the second leg of the recently concluded IPL.

"I haven't obviously played too many games with the IPL but I've spent a lot of time in the nets and getting used to the conditions, which has been nice," he said.

Hima Das tests negative for COVID-19

NEW DELHI, OCT 21 (PTI): Star Indian sprinter Hima Das on Thursday announced that she has tested negative for COVID-19, a week after contracting the virus.

The 21-year-old had tested positive for COVID-19 on her return to the national camp at Patiala last week.

One of the most exciting talents in Indian athletics, Das, who is making a comeback from a hamstring injury, took to Twitter to announce the development.

"I am pleased to tell everyone that I have tested negative for Covid-19. Thank you all for the loving messages. Can't wait to get back on track. Hope everyone is safe and healthy. #Tested-NegativeButStayingPositive #BackOnTrack," she wrote.

Das had failed to make the cut for the Tokyo Olympics after missing the 200m qualification mark of 22.80s as she clocked 23.21s in the Federation Cup in March this year.

The hamstring tear later spoilt her Olympic qualification chances in the Nationals as wel. She had subsequently taken a short break to nurse the injury.

Das burst onto the scene after winning 400m gold in the World Junior Championships in Finland in 2018, becoming the first Indian sprinter to win a world title.

Besides winning an individual 400m silver, she was also a part of gold-winning women's 4x400m relay and mixed 4x400m relay teams in the 2018 Asian Games.

La Palma: Hundreds more evacuate to flee volcano lava

MADRID (AP): Hundreds of people were evacuated during the night on the Spanish island of La Palma as a river of molten rock crept deeper into a coastal town during a protracted volcanic eruption, authorities said Thursday.

Emergency services helped some 500 people leave their homes, the mayor of Tazacorte, Juan Miguel Rodríguez, told public broadcaster RTVE.

A total of around 7,500 people have been forced to flee since the Cumbre Vieja began erupting more than a month ago. Scientists say the eruption could go on for three months.

The tension of not knowing whether the slow-moving molten rock would entomb their homes, farmland and businesses is taking a toll on local people, Rodríguez said.

"There is already a certain degree of despondency and des-

peration, waiting for the volcano to subside," he said.

Though most of the island of 85,000 people off northwest Africa is unaffected by the eruption, part of the western side has seen the lava ruin livelihoods and destroy homes.

The molten rock has covered more than 866 hectares (2,100 acres) and crushed or damaged around 2,185 buildings.

The volcano's constant roar and numerous earthquakes have also kept locals on edge. The National Geographical Institute counted 38 quakes since midnight, the strongest recording a magnitude of 4.3.

The economy of La Palma, part of Spain's Canary Islands, is based mainly from tourism and banana plantations. The Spanish government has pledged millions of euros (dollars) to help rebuild damaged infrastructure.



MANCHESTER, OCT 21 (AP): Cristiano Ronaldo fell to his knees at the final whistle and looked to the sky as Manchester United's fans sang his name.

The Portugal star had saved his team again in the Champions League.

The greatest scorer in the competition's history soared to head in an 81st-minute winner as United erased a two-goal halftime deficit to beat Atalanta 3-2 in a wild match at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

"That's just what he does," United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said.

Ronaldo's record-extending 138th goal in the Champions League came three weeks after he scored in the fifth minute of stoppage time to snatch a victory over Villarreal in the second

round of games.

This time, the goal came earlier and was a trademark header with hang time and unerring accuracy after meeting a cross from Luke Shaw that was whipped in from deep on the left.

His leap, his timing it was the perfect header, United captain Harry Maguire said.

He has come up with a massive goal again in the Champions League.

United keeps doing it the hard way in this season's competition.

There was the surprising loss to Young Boys in the first game, after Aaron Wan-Bissaka's first-half red card. Then a come-from-behind 2-1 win against Villarreal after being outplayed for large parts at Old Trafford.

Now this comeback

against Atalanta, which moved United into first place in Group F two points above the Italian side and Villarreal.

Atalanta took a two-goal lead thanks to goals by Mario Pa alic a tap-in in the 15th minute after United's defense was caught off guard by a quickly taken free kick and Merih Demiral's header from a corner in the 29th.

United, which came into the game with just two wins from its last seven games in all competitions, was jeered off the field at halftime.

However, Solskjaer's team showed a different side in the second half, laying siege to Atalanta's goal as Marcus Rashford on his first start this season after injury reduced the deficit in the

53rd with a calm finish following a delicious outside-of-the-foot pass behind the defense by Bruno Fernandes.

Maguire, who was partly at fault for Atalanta's goals, swept in the equalizer in the 75th after Fernandes' cross made its way past a number of players and to the back post where the England defender was lurking.

Ronaldo had the final say, not just through his goal his sixth in eight games since returning for a second spell at United but also through his last-ditch clearance in the final seconds that sparked a roar from the home fans.

Ronaldo was playing his 300th game for the club.

The win relieves some of the pressure on Solskjaer, who vowed

Israeli minister sees opportunity at UN climate conference

JERUSALEM (AP): Israel's new environmental protection minister has set some ambitious goals: She believes she can use her office to play an important role in the global battle against climate change while also promoting peace in the volatile Middle East. Tamar Zandberg laid out her agenda in an interview with The Associated Press ahead of the upcoming U.N. climate conference in Glasgow. She says Israel, despite its small size and own inability to reach the global goal of zero net emissions by 2050, has the potential to be a key player.

Zandberg said the country is eager to share its expertise in green technologies. Israel is widely considered a world leader in areas such as solar energy storage, sustainable protein alternatives, agriculture technology and desalination.

"These are fields where Israel is already in the cutting edge frontier of global innovation, and we hope that this is something that small Israel can contribute to bigger countries than us to adjust better to the new climate reality," she said.

Major countries, including China and India, have become important markets for Israeli environmental technologies. Zandberg said she already has held a pair of meetings with her counterpart in the United Arab Emirates, which established diplomatic ties with Israel just over a year ago, and that the two countries have teams working together on issues like agriculture and water in the arid Middle East.

Israel and Jordan last week held a signing ceremony on a new water-sharing agreement, and Zandberg said the two countries are having "extensive talks" on various environmen-



tal issues.

"Our neighbors share our region and share our climate," she said. "So it's only natural that we will face them together. That can contribute to climate change, but also to the regional stability and to our peace in the Middle East."

Zandberg took office in June as part of Israel's new government — a diverse patchwork of small and midsize parties spanning the political spectrum. This includes deep ideological differences over how to handle the decades-long conflict with the Palestinians.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett heads a religious, ultranationalist party that opposes the establishment of a Palestinian state, and Bennett, a former leader of the West Bank settlement movement, has ruled out peace talks with the Palestinians.

Zandberg's Meretz party is the most dovish member of the eight-party coalition and supports a two-state solution with the Palestinians. As part of the coalition deal, forged to prevent the country from plunging into a fifth election in a two-year span, all members were forced to compromise on their core beliefs.

Zandberg acknowledged some frustration with the limitations created by the political

reality, but said environmental cooperation provides an opportunity to improve the atmosphere and lay the groundwork for future negotiations. She said she has met with her Palestinian counterpart, and that professional teams meet regularly to work on issues of mutual concern, such as protecting shared water resources.

"We live here together and we share the land and we share the air and share the water," she said. "The better we communicate, the better our peoples will live."

At home, Zandberg has a long to-do list.

Israel has acknowledged it will fall short of the goal of the international community to reach zero net emissions by 2050. It expects to reduce emissions by 85% by that time. Environmentalists have cited a lack of political will by previous governments and the country's reliance on newly discovered natural gas for energy for the lower target.

Zandberg said this figure was calculated based largely on a situation inherited from previous governments. She also said Israel's relatively high population growth is an obstacle. And while Israel lags on its own renewable energy goals, she said the government is determined to help the world

reach the zero-emissions target through its technology exports and to do more on the domestic front.

"That's our goal to close that gap," she said. "We are working on new climate legislation for the first time in the Israeli parliament. We are working on the series of implementation plans, how to take the low carbon economy governmental declaration and make it a reality in sectors of energy, transportation, waste, agriculture. So we are serious."

There are other challenges. The Dead Sea, which is actually a salty lake situated at the lowest place on earth, is slowly shrinking. This is the result of years of water diversion from the Jordan River for drinking and agriculture and from damage caused by mineral-extraction companies. A secretive oil pipeline deal between Israel and the United Arab Emirates has raised fears that an oil spill might one day destroy the Red Sea coral reefs, prized by scientists for their unique resilience against warming seas.

Water resources that traverse Israel and the occupied West Bank are threatened by sewage and pollution.

Zandberg said her team is involved in negotiations to ensure that

Dead Sea factories, which are among Israel's worst polluters, address environmental concerns as licenses are renewed in the coming years. The Israel-UAE pipeline is now under review by the government, "and we will express our concerns in those discussions," she said. Zandberg has been pushing for a new tax on single-use plastics to go into effect next year.

Gidon Bromberg, the Israeli director of EcoPeace, an environmental advocacy group with offices in Israel, Jordan and the West Bank, said it is too early to judge Zandberg's performance. But he said her appointment has raised hopes that Israel can finally make some progress on long-fester issues.

"We're in a very unique position where we have a minister of environment who is extremely committed to the issue and wants to succeed," Bromberg said. "You have an environment minister who's an environmentalist."

Whether she succeeds, he said, will depend in part on her political skills, largely her relationship with Bennett. Despite their different backgrounds, Bromberg said that so far they appear to have a good rapport.

"It's still very early days. The issues are enormous," he said.

Strong winds cause damage, disruptions in western Europe

PARIS (AP): A powerful autumn storm, named Aureo, blasted parts of western Europe on Thursday, knocking out power to a quarter of a million French homes and damaging buildings in at least four countries.

Train services were disrupted by uprooted trees littering tracks in France, Germany and the Netherlands and roofs were ripped off many buildings, including at part of the stadium used by the professional soccer club in the Belgian port city of Antwerp.

A tornado early Thursday caused damage in Schwentinal, a town near the German Baltic Sea port city of Kiel. Fire service official Kai Laessig told German news agency dpa that it destroyed greenhouses and brought down trees, which hit cars, but no one was injured. Several houses were damaged.

Local media reported that four people were injured in the Dutch town of Barendrecht, on the southern edge of Rotterdam, as strong gusts ripped tiles off roofs and uprooted trees in a residential neighborhood in the early hours of the morning.

The storm also hit parts of southern England with heavy rainfall and strong winds.

The storm that started by hitting the French

region of Brittany's Atlantic Coast Wednesday afternoon blew eastward through the night, felling trees and collapsing roofs in some areas, according to images posted online. France's national weather service maintained storm warnings Thursday in the country's northeastern corner that borders Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg.

Wind speeds reached 175 kilometers per hour (109 mph) in the Normandy town of Fecamp, according to the weather service.

Blown-down trees toppled power lines, and the Enedis utility said 250,000 homes were without electricity as of Thursday morning.

Train travel was disrupted in Normandy and Champagne-Ardenne region, as well as on some commuter routes in the Paris region, according to the SNCF national rail authority.

The Dutch rail network also was disrupted Thursday morning by trees that had blown onto railroad tracks.

Germany's national railway operator, Deutsche Bahn, suspended all long-distance trains in North Rhine-Westphalia state — the country's most populous, which borders the Netherlands and Belgium. The company said there were cancellations

and delays in other parts of Germany as well.

Firefighters in the Belgian town of Westerhoek, close to the Dutch border, tweeted that they had been called out dozens of times over night to deal with storm damage.

The storm hit northern Belgium hard around Antwerp, snapping countless trees, spilling scaffolding onto the streets and blowing some trucks off roads. It also tore off part of the roof of Antwerp FC's stadium.

Germany's national weather service warned of gusts ranging up to 105 kph (65 mph) in the north and northeast of the country on Thursday, and up to 120 kph in mountainous areas. But there were no immediate reports of significant damage.

In Delmenhorst, in northwestern Germany, a man was hit by a falling branch on Wednesday evening but only slightly injured. During the night, a freight train collided with a fallen branch in Bad Godesberg, a suburb of Bonn.

Berlin's two zoos closed as a precaution for the day because of the forecast high winds and the animals were brought into indoor enclosures. In Erfurt, in central Germany, cemeteries were closed as a precaution.

Moscow tightens restrictions as infections, deaths soar

MOSCOW (AP): The authorities in Moscow on Thursday announced a plan to shut restaurants and non-food stores and introduce other restrictions later this month as Russia registered the highest daily numbers of new coronavirus infections and deaths since the start of the pandemic.

The government coronavirus task force reported 36,339 new confirmed infections and 1,036 deaths in the past 24 hours that brought Russia's death toll to 227,389 — by far the highest in Europe.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday responded to rising contagion and deaths by ordering Russians to stay off work for a period starting Oct. 30 and extending through the following week, and Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin followed up Thursday by introducing a slew of restrictions in the capital.

He said all restaurants, cafes and non-food stores, gyms, movies and other entertainment venues in the Russian capital will be shut for a period from Oct. 28 to Nov. 7, and schools and kindergartens will also be closed. Access to museums, theaters and other venues will be limited to holders of digital codes proving vaccination or past illness, a practice that will also remain in place after Nov. 7.

"The situation in Moscow is developing according to the worst-case scenario," Sobyenin wrote on his blog, adding that the number of infections in the capital is nearing all-time highs.

Russia's daily infections have been surging for weeks and coronavirus mortality numbers topped 1,000 for the first time over the weekend amid

low vaccination rates, lax public attitudes toward taking precautions and the government's reluctance to tighten restrictions. Only about 45 million Russians — roughly a third of its nearly 146 million people — are fully vaccinated.

The nonworking period, which includes a two-day state holiday, should help limit the spread by keeping people out of offices and off crowded public transportation. The government also urged local authorities to restrict access to restaurants, theaters and other entertainment venues during the period.

Putin said that in some regions where the situation is the most threatening, he said the nonworking period could start as early as Saturday and be extended past Nov. 7.

Until now, the Kremlin ruled out a nationwide lockdown like the one early in the pandemic that dealt a heavy blow to the economy and sapped Putin's popularity, instead empowering regional authorities to decide on local restrictions.

Many of Russia's 85 regions already have restricted attendance at large public events and introduced digital codes proving vaccination or past illness for access to restaurants, theaters and other venues. Some have made vaccinations compulsory for certain public servants and people over 60.

But Moscow had avoided restrictions until now, with restaurants and movie theaters brimming with people, crowds swarming nightclubs and karaoke bars, and commuters widely ignoring mask mandates on public transportation even as ICUs have been filling quickly.

German gas station attendant assaulted by customer over mask

BERLIN (AP): A gas station attendant in Germany was punched and kicked by a customer after an argument over the latter's failure to wear a mask, police said Thursday.

The incident in Bremen on Wednesday came about a month after a gas station clerk was fatally shot in western Germa-

ny by a man who refused to wear a mask. Doing so remains mandatory in shops and some other indoor situations in Germany.

Police said the argument started when the 21-year-old customer walked into the gas station shop without a mask to pay for his fuel. The 67-year-old attendant

pointed out that wearing a mask was obligatory and an argument ensued.

The customer then returned wearing a mask, punched the attendant and kicked him as he lay on the floor. He then fled, according to a police statement. The attendant was taken to a hospital for outpatient treatment.

S Korea test launches 1st domestically made space rocket

SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA (AP): South Korea test launched its first domestically produced space rocket on Thursday in what officials describe as an important step in the country's pursuit of a satellite launch program.

It wasn't immediately clear whether the three-stage Nuri rocket succeeded in delivering a dummy payload — a 1.5-ton block of stainless steel and aluminum — into orbit 600 to 800 kilometers (372 to 497 miles) above Earth.

Live footage showed the 47-meter (154 foot) rocket soaring into the air with bright yellow flames shooting out of its engines following blast-off at Naro Space Center, the country's lone spaceport, on a small island off its southern coast.

The launch, which was observed by South Korean President Moon

Jae-in, was delayed by an hour because engineers needed more time to examine the rocket's valves. There had also been concerns that strong winds and other conditions would pose challenges for a successful launch.

Officials at the Korea Aerospace Research Institute, the country's space agency, said it would take about 30 minutes to determine whether the rocket successfully delivered the payload into orbit.

Nuri's largest first stage, the core booster stage, was expected to land in waters southwest of Japan after separation, and its second stage was expected to fall in remote Pacific waters east of the Philippines, about 2,800 kilometers (1,740 miles) away from the launch site. The smallest third stage carries the payload

and is designed to place it into orbit.

After relying on other countries to launch its satellites since the early 1990s, South Korea is now trying to become the 10th nation to send a satellite into space with its own technology.

Officials say such an ability would be crucial for the country's space ambitions, which include plans for sending more advanced communications satellites and acquiring its own military intelligence satellites. The country is also hoping to send a probe to the moon by 2030.

Nuri is the country's first space launch vehicle built entirely with domestic technology. The three-stage rocket is powered by five 75-ton class rocket engines placed in its first and second stages.

Scientists and engi-

neers at KARI plan to test Nuri several more times, including conducting another launch with a dummy device in May 2022, before trying with a real satellite.

South Korea had previously launched a space launch vehicle from the Naro spaceport in 2013, which was a two-stage rocket built mainly with Russian technology. That launch came after years of delays and consecutive failures. The rocket, named Naro, reached the desired altitude during its first test in 2009 but failed to eject a satellite into orbit, and then exploded shortly after takeoff during its second test in 2010.

It wasn't clear how North Korea, which had been accused of using its space launch attempts in past years as a disguise for developing long-range missile technology, would react to Thurs-

day's launch.

While pushing to expand its nuclear and missile program, the North had shown sensitivity about South Korea's increasing defense spending and efforts to build more powerful conventionally armed missiles.

In a speech to Pyongyang's rubber-stamp parliament last month, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un accused the U.S. and South Korea of "destroying the stability and balance" in the region with their allied military activities and a U.S.-led "excessive arms buildup" in the South.

While Nuri is powered by liquid propellants that need to be fueled shortly before launch, the South Koreans plan to develop a solid-fuel space launch rocket by 2024, which possibly could be prepared for launch more quickly and also be more cost effective.

The Big Pic



PREMIERE NIGHT! Actress, Angelia Jolie posed on the red carpet at the Eternals premiere in Los Angeles.

Shahid Kapoor to play a paratrooper in his next film Bull'

MUMBAI, OCT 21 (PTI): Bollywood actor Shahid Kapoor is set to star in an action film titled Bull', the makers announced on Thursday.

Bhushan Kumar of T-Series has collaborated with producers Amar Butala and Garima Mehta for the upcoming film that is set in the 1980s.

Bull marks the directorial debut of Aditya Nimbalkar, who has worked extensively with filmmaker Vishal Bhardwaj.

The story and screenplay are penned by Aseem Arrora and Parveez Shaikh of "Bellbottom" fame.

Kapoor said he feels excited and honoured to play the role of a paratrooper in the movie inspired by real-life events. Bull' is a full-blown action film inspired by real events from the life of Brigadier Bulsara. It is a privilege to play a paratrooper who leads his boys through a historic and selfless mission that has now become iconic for its precision and bravado. The opportunity to play a paratrooper is exhilarating and truly an honour, the 40-year-old said in a statement.

Kumar, Managing Director, T-Series said he is happy to team up with Kapoor again after their 2019 blockbuster Kabir Singh.

We're all set to bring the audience an action extravaganza with our second col-



laboration with Shahid after Kabir Singh'. I'm elated that my association with Amar Butala and Garima Mehta could hold the key to great cinema, he said.

Butala, partner, Guilty By Association said the film is dedicated to all the brave men who save the nation.

We dedicate this film to men in uniforms and our soldiers who brave through unimaginable turmoil to guard this great nation's sovereignty. Shahid will be seen in an exciting avatar. This is also our first association with T-Series and I look forward to it, he added.

Mehta, partner, Guilty By Association said they are honoured to be able to tell a story that celebrates soldiers.

The theme of this film will resonate with viewers across India, she said.

The principal photography is scheduled to begin in 2022.

Chappelle special spurs Netflix walkout; 'Trans lives matter'

LOS ANGELES, OCT 21 (AP): Netflix employees who walked out Wednesday in protest of Dave Chappelle's special and its anti-transgender comments were joined by allies who chanted Trans lives matter, getting pushback from counterprotesters who also showed up.

A pre-noon rally at a Netflix office-studio complex drew about 100 people, most on the side of an estimated 30 workers at the streaming giant that joined in afterward. Some were willing to identify themselves as Netflix employees, but all declined to provide their names.

Joey Soloway, creator of the groundbreaking Emmy-winning comedy Transparent, was among the speakers at the rally.

Chappelle's decision to share "his outrage as comedic humiliation in front of thousands of people, and then broadcasting it to hundreds of millions of people is infinitely amplified gender violence, they said.

"I want trans representation on the Netflix board, this (expensive) week, the writer-director said.

Ashlee Marie Preston, an activist and the event's organizer, addressed the rally and spoke to The Associated Press afterward. She said that calling out Chappelle for his remarks wasn't enough.

It was important to shift the focus to the people that sign the checks, because Dave Chappelle doesn't sign checks, Netflix does, Preston said. If we have companies like Netflix who aren't listening to their employees, who are forcing their employees to participate in their own oppression, that's unacceptable.

"We're here to keep people accountable. We're not going anywhere, she said, adding that efforts are underway to start a dialogue with Netflix executives.

There were a few moments of shoving and pushing among the competing demonstrators, but the conflict was mostly limited to a war of words.

Leia Figueroa, a student from Los Angeles, doesn't work at Netflix but said she wanted to back the walkout. While the streaming service offers positive fare for the LGBTQ community, she said, it's having it both ways by also offering a show like Chappelle's that includes disparaging comments about trans women.

If Netflix wants to be an apolitical platform then they should be that," Figueroa said. "But they're saying things like Black lives matter' and We don't stand for transphobia.' If you say things like that, then you have to be vetting all of your content to reflect your values.

As she spoke, a protestor shouted, We like jokes. I like funny jokes, and transphobia is not a joke, Figueroa replied.

Belissa Cohen, a former journalist, said she was on hand to "support Netflix's decision not to pull the special.

We want to show that there isn't unanimous support about transgender ideology when it comes to Netflix viewers, Cohen said.

She was among about a dozen people who carried placards reading Free speech is a right and Truth is not transphobic." Opposite them were those carrying signs that included Black Trans Lives Matter and Transphobia is not Funny."

Elliot Page, who stars in Netflix's The Umbrella Academy and is transgender, tweeted that he stands with the trans,



nonbinary and people of color working at Netflix who are fighting for more and better trans stories and a more inclusive workplace."

Team Trans(asterisk), which identifies itself as supporting trans people working at Netflix trying to build a better world for our community, posted what it called a list of asks being made of Netflix by trans and nonbinary workers and allies at the company.

They are calling on the company to repair its relationships with staff and the audience with changes involving the hiring of trans executives and increased spending on trans and nonbinary creators and projects.

Harm reduction is another demand, which according to the list includes acknowledgment of what it called Netflix's responsibility for this harm from transphobic content, and in particular harm to the Black trans community. It also called for disclaimers to flag content that includes transphobic language, misogyny, homophobia and hate speech.

In a statement, the media watchdog group GLAAD said it salutes the Netflix's employees, allies and LGBTQ and Black advocates calling for accountability and change within Netflix and in the entertainment industry as a whole. The employees who walked out uniformly referred reporters to the GLAAD statement.

Netflix ran into a buzz-saw of criticism not only with the special but in how internal memos responded to employees' concerns, including co-CEO Ted Sarandos' assertion that content on screen doesn't directly translate to real-world harm. Sarandos also wrote that Netflix doesn't allow titles that are designed to incite hate or violence, and we don't believe The Closer' crosses that line.

In interviews Tuesday, Sarandos said he failed to recognize that a group of our employees was really hurting," as he told The Wall Street Journal, and that his comment about the effect of TV on viewers was an oversimplification.

Terra Field, who identifies herself on Twitter as a senior software engineer at Netflix and as trans, posted tweets critical of Chappelle's special immediately after it aired and the comments were widely shared.

In her posts, Field said the comic was being criticized not because his remarks are offensive but for the harm they do to the trans community, especially Black women. Field included a list of trans and nonbinary men and women of color who she said had been killed, adding in each case that the victim is not offended.

NCB sleuths visit homes of actors Shah Rukh Khan, Ananya Pandey

MUMBAI, OCT 21 (PTI): Officials of the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) visited the residence of Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan on Thursday in connection with their investigation into a cruise drugs party case, sources said. The actor's son, Aryan Khan, was arrested with a few others on October 3 after the NCB raided a cruise ship off the Mumbai coast and claimed to have seized drugs, including charas.

The NCB team, led by senior officials of the agency, visited Shah Rukh Khan's residence 'Mannat' in suburban Bandra in the afternoon for some paperwork, sources said.

Another team of the NCB also visited actor Ananya Pandey's residence in Bandra, they said.



Pandey has been asked to appear before the NCB on Thursday to record her statement, the sources said.

Earlier in the day, Shah Rukh Khan met his son Aryan Khan at the Arthur Road jail in Mumbai where the latter has been lodged following arrest in a

case of seizure of drugs on board the cruise ship off the city coast.

A special court here on Wednesday denied bail to Aryan Khan, observing that 'on the face of it', he was indulging in "illicit drug activities on a regular basis".

His WhatsApp chats also showed, prima facie, that he was in touch with drug peddlers, the court

noted.

Aryan Khan subsequently moved the Bombay High Court to challenge the lower court's order.

The HC on Thursday said it would hear his bail plea on October 26.

ARIES:

On the cards for you this weekend: an affair to remember. The kind that's steamy and passionate all the same. The kind that challenges you to be the boldest version of yourself. Remember, there's only one way to revel in this energy, and it requires you to drop your inhibitions down to zero. Given that we're still under the influence of the full moon, your adventurous side is likely to come to the fore too. PS: A spontaneous getaway is the perfect way to honour your inherent wildness.

Tip: Drop your inhibitions down to zero.

TAURUS:

Let's talk about those creative urges, Taurus. Let's talk about the multi-dimensional visuals that are waiting to be expressed on your canvas. You are stepping into a time of infinite possibilities. So, don't get lost in the trap of your 'worldly responsibilities'. What you want to do instead: honour the Muse in your own special way and create a sacred space in order to make her feel comfortable.

Tip: Explore your creative side.

GEMINI:

Given that we're stepping into the festive season, the urge to splurge is going to be irresistible. Word for the wise: avoid any hasty decisions. It's a good idea to 'sleep over it' before you put your money on something big. You're being asked to make smarter financial decisions on the professional front as well. You've been thinking about everybody else, haven't you, Gemini? Now it's time for you to prioritise yourself.

Tip: You're being called to make smarter financial decisions.

CANCER:

Today, your spirit guides are reiterating the philosophy 'what you sow, so shall you reap'. So, honour the ideas coming through to you, as you actively lay the foundation of a new life. As far as your approach is concerned, it's a good idea to remain practical. For some of you, a prosperous beginning may be on the cards too. An answer to your prayers, if you may. Trust what you've called in as you take that big step. PS: You are prepared for the changes that are coming your way.

Tip: New, prosperous beginnings are on the cards for you today.

LEO:

Leo, the cards are talking about your side hustle. The one that's helping you pay your bills and get through these trying times. Tempted as you may be, now is not the time to let it go. Focus on creating a reserve for, one that will serve you well in the future. Some of you may be contemplating over the idea of turning your passion into your profession. If this is the case, tread cautiously. Making hasty decisions will prove to be counterproductive at this point.

Tip: Keep the side hustle.

VIRGO:

You didn't think you would make it to where you are today, yet you did. Your success is no accident, Virgo. It is a byproduct of your own hard work, patience, and persistence. Today, you're being asked to take a cue from your own story and commit to your goals with a newfound fervour. You have many mountains to move on this journey, baby! No matter what your current reality is mirroring at this point, know that you will be rewarded magnificently for your efforts.

Tip: Stay committed to your goals.

LIBRA:

There's a lot you've had to let go of in the past few months. A lot you've had to surrender to the Universe. But, have you consciously cut the cords with your past or are you repeating the story of rejection and loss? Something to think about as you sip on your morning tea, Libra. Remember, nothing that is truly meant to be yours can be taken away from you. Keep that in mind as you release the false attachments too.

Tip: The Universe is holding space for you to release the false attachments.

SCORPIO:

Escaping the scene of crime is easy, Scorpio. You know what takes an insane amount of courage? Staying where you are and fighting the fight that's worth fighting. So, tap into your warrior spirit and stand up for the truth. Remember, there is a way to do so without being venomous. On the upside, expansion is going to be a big theme for you on the work front. You're simultaneously setting new plans into motion and watching the seeds you planted earlier this year reach bloom.

Tip: Stand up for your truth.

SAGITTARIUS:

An opportunity like this one doesn't come around twice, Sagittarius. Honour where you're being led towards. Honour the opportunity to create a new life. Yes, you will have to let go of some of your old attachments. Yes, you will have to commit to a life of transformation. Trust that what you will gain is so much more magnificent than what you could be leaving behind.

Tip: Say yes to the unknown despite your own resistance.

CAPRICORN:

Once again, the cards are talking about the big manifestation energy that surrounds you. The big manifestation energy that's helping you call in a miracle or two. Expect a big change in the love and romance department. Your relationship with your business/ creative partner is going to be immensely fulfilling too. But what makes this full moon truly special is that it is helping those flying solo to attract a soulmate who is vibrating at the same frequency. So, say yes to life and go where the signs are leading you towards.

Tip: It's time to believe in miracles all over again.

AQUARIUS:

Stop trying to make fetch happen, Aquarius! Stop romanticising your connection or making it out to be anything more than what it is. It's time to take the rose-tinted glasses off, to face facts, and to let go of false attachments. If things had to work out, they would have worked out the first time around. The good thing is, you can still be part of their life. Consider laying down the foundation of a soulful friendship.

PISCES:

How do *you* measure success, Pisces? What are the breakthroughs that you consider worthy of praise? Now is a good time to hit the pause button and assess how far you have come since you embarked upon this journey. Remember, no awards or accolades are going to match up to the feeling of emerging victorious in your own gaze.

Tip: Acknowledge how far you have come since you first embarked upon this journey.