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Summit **TIMES**

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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SICA to host first Two-Tier Club Cricket Tournament



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 14 FEB:

The Sikkim Cricket Association (SICA) will be conducting the First Two-Tier Club Cricket Tournament starting this month, a SICA press release informs.

The aim of organizing this tournament is to promote and spread the "Gentleman's Game" to the far-flung parts of Sikkim. It also aims to

unearth fresh talent especially among budding cricketers at the Under 16 and Under 19 levels; to encourage Clubs to register them with the Government of Sikkim and with SICA; to create a "pool" of cricketers who will then be eligible for selection to Sikkim State Cricket Teams to participate at National Level tournaments of the Board of Control for

Cricket in India (BCCI).

The Tournament will commence this month at the Intra District level. Registration Forms can be downloaded from the SICA website. The last date for submission of the duly completed forms is 22 Feb, 2020.

Fifty percent of the teams from each District shall then qualify for the "Knock-Out Stage" of the Tournament. Further-

more, Clubs who register and adhere to/fulfill the norms and rules and regulations as laid down with SICA, over a period of time, will eventually be eligible for Voting Rights to SICA. This is a big incentive and privilege for Clubs to register and participate in this tournament.

Special stipulations for the tournament are that the playing Eleven

from each Club must include two players each from the Under 16 and Under 19 category. Each club may include a maximum of three Under 23 or Senior players who have represented the State of Sikkim in the season 2019-2020. Each club may include a maximum of two "non-local" players who can furnish documents such as a Bank Statement from a bank in Sikkim for the past 12 months in their parents/self-name or for students a letter from the Principal /Head of The institution on the Institution Letterhead providing proof of their enrolment.

The top eight clubs that qualify for the Quarter Final stage will be deemed to form the "A Division" of Cricket Clubs which will then be eligible to participate in forthcoming tournaments. The remaining 9 to 16 club will be considered as "B Division".

The final match of the tournament will be held during the inauguration of the SICA Cricket Ground at Rangpo.

Technology and Machinery Demonstration Mela 2020



RANIPOL, 14 FEB (IPR): A daylong Technology and Machinery Demonstration Mela 2020 was held at the College of Agricultural Engineering and Post Harvesting Technology (CAEPHT), Ranipool today. The programme was organised by ARCPRs on UAE, ESA, FIM and PET, CAEPHT.

Agriculture Minister, Lok Nath Sharma attended the inaugural ceremony as the chief guest.

Minister Sharma, in his address, congratulated the Agriculture University and faculty members for developing farm friendly machineries and improved technological equipments for enhancing productivity with ensuring convenience and safety of farmers. He also claimed that the farmers will have sustainable income in future and motivated them to feel honoured for producing crops and vegetables for the consumers.

The Minister also informed about the financial incentives to be dedicated to milk producers and vegetable growers from next financial year 2020-21 and encouraged them to increase production with proper utilization of unproductive barren land as well. He also assured to provide

compensation against wildlife interference. The Minister also added that the economy of the state will be strengthened through agriculture sector in future period and drew lights on provision of subsidised loan for the farmers.

Minister Agriculture thanked university for supporting farmers in terms of facilities and urged to monitor and follow up their progress.

He also emphasised on planning and programmes of the state government for marketing facilities and advised for surplus production of Ginger, Turmeric, Cardamom and Buckwheat. He also assured to strengthen and transform the VLW centres in near future.

Secretary Horticulture, MT Sherpa informed farmers about the financial benefits of Rs 6000 dedicated to small and marginal farmers under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Samman Nidhi to be released in three installment and urged them to get register their name with same contact number throughout the process of receiving the amount through Direct Bank Transfer.

He also encouraged farmers to use newly improved agricultural tools

and Equipments. Secretary Sherpa also advised to take contact no. of concerned VLW and officials and assured them to provide on-site support for the convenience of the farmers.

Dean of College of Agricultural Engineering and Post-Harvest Technology (Central Agricultural University, Imphal) Ranipool Gangtok, Prof PP Dabral proposed welcome address and also informed on the purpose of Mela to educate farmers about the newly developed agricultural technology in Production, Processing and Harvesting process.

Later, the Minister Sharma visited the stalls of Technology and Demonstration Mela and interacted with the exhibitors of All India Coordinated Research Project on Farm implements and Machinery, Ergonomics and Safety in Agriculture, Utilization of Animal Energy with Enhanced System Efficiency, Renewable Energy Designed and Developed Equipments, Industrial Distributors, Plasticulture Engineering and Technology, Vegetable Growers and University students. He also visited Farmer's Produce Processing-cum-Skill Development Centre.

Will not extend deadline for sale of BS-IV vehicles: SC

NEW DELHI, FEB 14 (PTI): The Supreme Court Friday rejected the plea filed by an association of automobile dealers seeking extension of the April 1, 2020 deadline by one more month to sell Bharat Stage-IV norms compliant vehicles across the country.

The apex court had on October 24, 2018 said no Bharat Stage-IV vehicle would be sold or registered in India from April 1, 2020.

Bharat Stage (BS) emission norms are standards instituted by the government to regulate output of air pollutants from motor vehicles. The BS-IV norms have been enforced across the country since April, 2017. In

2016, the Centre had announced that India would skip the BS-V norms altogether and adopt BS-VI norms by 2020.

The plea filed by the association came up for hearing on Friday before a bench of Justices Arun Mishra and Deepak Gupta which made it clear that the apex court would not extend the deadline even for a day.

The counsel appearing for the Federation of Automobile Dealers Association told the bench that the apex court's order would come into force on April 1, 2020 but dealers would face the issue of unsold inventory of BS-IV compliant vehicles.

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Jeeudo special screening on Sunday



SAGAR CHETTRI GANGTOK, 14 FEB:

A special screening of Nepali feature film, Jeeudo, will be held here at Manan Kendra on Sunday.

The film, carrying the tagline 'A tale of Love, Myth and Fate,' is being presented under the banner of Aalmist Productions and has been written and directed by

Aalmist Subba who also stars in film along with Shradha Sharma, Pranisha Ghatraj and has Birbal Subba in the lead role.

The film is scheduled to be released for Sikkim and North Bengal region on 28 February, following which it will release in other regions of the country and Nepal.

Addressing a press

conference here this afternoon, Mr Subba said that two shows will be held as part of the special screening - at 12:30 PM and 4 PM.

"Many artists in the film are from Sikkim and the neighbouring hills so we decided to hold a special screening before the premiere and then release

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Love boat: Valentine's Day on a quarantine cruise

TOKYO, FEB 14 (AFP): "Cupid's avocado" for dinner, heart-shaped messages for the crew, but also painful separation: for those trapped on board the quarantined Diamond Princess cruise ship, Friday is no ordinary Valentine's Day. Wearing a red dress and a red hair tie, the ship's entertainment manager Natalie posted a Valentine's Day video on Twitter to try to keep spirits up.

"I just wanted to check in with everybody and say that we are all hanging in there, doing fine and keeping together as a big family," she said, admitting with a smile: "This hasn't been my regular attire for the last week or so." Passenger

Matt Smith, 57, was marking Valentine's Day on board with his wife of 21 years, Katherine Codekas, also 57 -- and admitted this was not their first-choice location for the special day. "After 21 years of marriage, we don't make a big deal of it, but I usually get Katherine a card at least," he told AFP from the ship.

"I think she was a little disappointed with our setting," he added. "Facebook reminded me this morning that three years ago we were in Las Vegas. Way to rub it in!" Passengers on board were being offered a "Valentine's Day" breakfast, Smith said. "We were reminded what day it was by the deliv-



ery of what the crew member said was a 'special' breakfast," he said. "Not sure why hard-boiled eggs, sausage, and sauteed mushrooms are special." The dinner menu, on the other hand, promises several special treats in honour of the day.

"Cupid's Avocado and

Shrimp salad" to start, followed by "Shrimp Valentine Japanese style with rice and vegetables."

The main course is the French classic Coq au Vin with mashed potato and vegetables, and a "Valentine's Day surprise dessert of the day" is promised.

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INVITATION

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NISHTHA training at Chakung centre concludes



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 14 FEB:

The fifth and last batch of training of teachers under NISHTHA concluded on Friday at Chakung centre. 110 teachers and 10 school heads of Primary and Junior High School under Sorong, Chumbong and Daramdin BACs attended the five-day programme which started on 10 Feb, 2020, a press release informs.

Key Resource Person, Prashant Mani Kar ki conducted classes on ICT in teaching learning processes, school based assessment and pedagogy of science. Dhanpati Sharma took sessions on Art Integration and Pedagogy of Social Science.

Sessions on school safety and initiatives in School Education were conducted by Suman Singh supported by Deepika Subba and Dr Chandrani Chhetri who conducted various sessions on health and well being, personal social qualities, pedagogy of English and EVS and art integrated learning besides taking classes on generic issues. State Resource Person, Suraj Kumar Sharma conducted different sessions on school leadership and other topics for school heads and In-charges of Primary and Junior High School.

The valedictory programme was attend-

ed by Press Advisor to CM, CP Sharma, along with Principal Chakung SSS, Assistant Director of three BACs, Mamta Rai, Resource Persons (NISHTHA) and other block level staff.

Assistant Professor (NCERT-NERIE), Dr Brajyanti Devi, Assistant Professor (Azim Premji University), Tirang Ransanmai and Dr Nim Tshering Lepcha from SCERT were also present as observers on the 4th and 5th day of the programme to monitor the training programme.

The programme begins with welcoming of guests and RPs by centre in charge MK Khewa followed by feedback from teachers and school head. Suraj Kumar Sharma, SRP presented a brief report on the NISHTHA programme and urged the teachers and heads to implement the inputs in the school.

Dr Brajyanti also spoke on the occasion and shared the future prospects of NISHTHA. The chief guest in his speech stressed upon the need for all to attend training on various occasions to update ourselves.

The participants were awarded with certificates by the chief guest. The participants also felicitated the RPs by offering khadas and gifts as a token of love.

Road Safety Awareness at Namchi



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 14 FEB:

Awareness program on Good Samaritans cum 31st Road Safety Week 2020 was observed at South District Officers Club in Namchi, South Sikkim, a press release informs.

The program was organised by Motor Vehicles Division, Transport

Department, Government of Sikkim with the theme "Sadak Suraksha Jeevan Raksha".

During the program, Zilla Adakshya, Tshering Dem Bhutia was present as the chief guest and was accompanied by Sr RTO (HQ) cum State Nodal Officer (Road Safety), KS Gurung, Concerned RTO, Ram Hang Sub-

ba, ARTO (HQ), Nirmal Sharma, Legal Cell (Advocate), Kumar Sharma, students, representatives from Medical Cell, traffic police and drivers.

Chief guest, Tshering Dem Bhutia thanked Motor Vehicles Division for organizing the awareness program.

During the program, Nodal Officer, KS Gu-

rung highlighted the new Motor Vehicles Act and rules.

Kumar Sharma (Advocate) from Legal Cell highlighted third party insurance, Motor Vehicles Act and Prosecution of Offence.

Likewise, ASI Traffic, Markush Dunghel highlighted the traffic rules and safety measures.

West farmers trained on raising vegetable seeds



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 14 FEB:

Mevedir service provider agency organized an awareness program cum training on raising vegetable seeds inside tunnel houses for progressive farmers of Chengba Gaon and Saprenegi ward, West Sikkim on 13 Feb, a press release informs.

The resource person of this program was Suzan Ahmed (Mevedir Agronomist), Rupen Tamang (Field Supervisor) along with Field staff, Passang Dawa Sherpa & Phurba Namgyal Sherpa.

Main purpose of this daylong training program was to get enhanced yield and to increase production of selected horticultural crop of these areas. The technical backstopping for preparing sowing beds and raising seedlings inside the tunnel houses would be provided

by technical manpower of Mevedir. Mr Ahmed explained how to raise seeds inside the poly tunnel beds and the requirement of materials and equipments during raising of these vegetable seedlings.

Likewise the technology of preparation of soil mixture for raising vegetable seedlings in pot tray was also explained and hands-on training was provided to all the participants. Some of the common mistakes which many growers make during undertaking such operations were highlighted and measures to avoid mistakes were explained to the farmers.

Thereafter, transplanting the planting materials in outdoor fields when seedlings are ready was demonstrated.

Meanwhile, Rupen Tamang explained the importance of fungicides

like trichoderma viride and how these can be used as fungicides for treating the seeds and soil during sowing. The application of this bio-fungicide in the field and the dosage and frequency details were explained to the farmers.

The farmers were provided pot-trays and seeds for sowing and they were informed that the planting material would be provided to them so that they can undertake production in this coming kharif season. The farmers were assured that the produce would be lifted by Mevedir and they need to set example of best practices so that others in the cluster can also be motivated to undertake production in the coming season.

More than 20 farmers attended this training cum awareness program, the release mentions.

ADC-West chairs meeting on KCC and PM-KISAN

GYALSHING, 14 FEB [IPR]: A meeting in connection with Kisan Credit Card and PM-KISAN [Prime Minister's Krishi Saman Nedhi] beneficiaries was held in the office of Additional District Collector, West Sikkim, here at the District Administrative Centre today.

The meeting was chaired by the ADC-West, Karma L Lepcha, and attended by DDM, NAB-ARD, Rupen Kr Lamichhane, LDM SBI, Sandip Chandra, JD In-charge Horticulture, Karma Sherpa, and ADO Agriculture, GK Gurung.

The ADC spoke about the KCC and its objectives and appealed that all farmers be covered under PM-KISAN.

He also pointed out that every farmer will be provided financial as-



sistance in three instalments of Rs 2,000 each and praised the schemes conceptualized by the Government of India to facilitate universal access to concessional institutional credit for all PM-KISAN beneficiaries.

Farmers can avail the benefits of PM-KISAN under KCC once they submit the required documents.

A total of 7,118 applications for KCC have

been received from West District till date and 3,078 have been re-verified and uploaded.

The ADC added that all farmers should apply for KCC and take the benefit of the scheme.

The Horticulture Deptt JD highlighted the guidelines for KCC and selection process of beneficiaries. Farmers are required to apply by 23 Feb, 2020.

Insurgency on decline in Northeast: Eastern Army Commander

KOLKATA, FEB 14 (PTI): Eastern Army Commander Lt Gen Anil Chauhan said on Friday that insurgency is on a decline in the Northeast and expressed hope that the situation will further improve in the future.

Overall, militancy-related incidents have declined by about 12 per cent and the arc of violence in the entire Northeast has shrunk primarily to an area which is the tri-junction between Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and north Nagaland, the officer said.

"In the hinterland, the situation is under control and we are confident that things will only improve in the future," General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (GOC-in-C), Eastern Command, Lt Gen Chauhan said.

Speaking to reporters after the 'Defence Investiture Ceremony 2020' at Command headquarters Fort William here, he said that 40 per cent of last year's violence occurred in this area at the tri-junction.

"In Nagaland, the government is engaging with the Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) and NSCN(I-M) and hopefully, there will be a positive outcome of these talks," Lt Gen Chauhan said.

He said that the agreement between factions of the NDFB, the ABSU, the Assam government and the Centre is a welcome step and may be seen as a precursor to a lasting solution in the state.

The officer said that with the insurgency level having gone down in the Northeast, the focus of the Eastern Command has shifted towards non-combat operations. A large number of civil-military projects have been taken up by the Army, which includes infrastructure development, setting up of medical camps and national integration.

He said that with the betterment in the situation, troops are being sent to barracks in Karbi Anglong and the Army is also contemplating withdrawing some of its forces from the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts in Assam.

Love boat...

"Coq au Vin, yes please," tweeted Yardley Wong, who has been posting her efforts to keep her young son entertained on the quarantined vessel.

"A special meal for Valentine's Day, a reserved bottle of red," she added, with her usual hashtag #hangin-thereDiamondPrincess and a picture of a bottle of wine. She also posted a drawing by her six-year-old son for Valentine's Day, with the caption "Stay strong, we are with you Diamond Princess."

American passenger Jackie joked that she had big plans for Valentine's Day on the cruise, which has proved far from the gala holiday everyone planned.

"We're going to have a formal night on Valentine's Day in our cabin. Take some pics, have some laughs," she tweeted.

Another passenger cut out paper hearts and left them on her door for the crew to read, with messages including: "Thank you for all your hard work" and "Thank you for taking care of us."

More than 200 people on board the ship have been diagnosed with the newly named COVID-19 and taken to local hospitals. Those remaining on board will be in quarantine until at least February 19.

While passengers are battling isolation, fear and boredom, some members of the crew have voiced concerns about their conditions, including eating together and sleeping two to a cabin.

But the coronavirus has also ripped some couples apart for Valentine's Day, including at least one on their honeymoon.

Kent Frasure was forced to say goodbye to his partner Rebecca, who has contracted the virus and is now in isolation in hospital. "We said 'goodbye, see each other later' and gave each other a hug. We didn't have a goodbye kiss because we didn't really know what was going on," Kent told CNBC.

"Then I watched her walk down the hallway, turn the corner and then she was gone."

Jeeudo special...

the film first in Sikkim and North Bengal on 28 February," he said.

Mr Subba shared further that although the movie is based in these parts, it was a complete Nepali feature having artists from Sikkim and the neighbouring hills and Nepal to reach out internationally.

The film has been produced on a budget of over Rs 45 lakh and has five songs.

"This is also the debut film for me as the writer, director and actor. It was really challenging but the entire team has given its best to bring out a better film for the people," he said.

He informed that artists in the film were chosen through auditions conducted in different places.

Lead artist, Shradha Sharma expressed that this was her first feature film and has been a wonderful learning experience.

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KUTSE SHEGU



The 49th days Kutse Shegu of our late father Ren Rey Mondal or Tenzing Lepcha, who left for heavenly abode on 29th December 2019 falls on 15th and 16th February, 2020.

All relatives, family, friends and well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence at Rey Busty, Rumtek

East Sikkim. We also express our gratitude to all the well wishers who stood by us during our time of bereavement.

9832015083 Nima Lepcha
2. 8167734336 Mingur Bhutia
3. 7550819886 NT Lepcha
4. 9434407296 Rinchen Lepcha
5. 7908711074 PW Lepcha

Will not extend...

"Up to March 31, 2020, we can sell it (BS-IV vehicles). We should be given one more month's time," the lawyer said, adding, "There is slowdown in the automobile industry. Kindly allow us to sell BS-IV vehicles to clear the stock."

The bench, while referring to the prayer made in the application filed by the association, said the order was passed by the apex court one and half years ago.

"You should not have produced BS-IV vehicles after that. Even after filing this application, you have produced these vehicles," the bench said.

"The application is dismissed," the bench said, adding, "We will not give even one day."

When the association's counsel urged the court that their application was like a "mercy plea," the bench said, "No".

In its October 2018 order, the top court had said that any extension of time in introducing new emission norms would adversely impact the health of citizens as the pollution has reached an "alarming and critical" level.

It had said there cannot be any compromise on the health of citizens which has to take precedence over the "greed" of a few automobile manufacturers who want to stretch the time-line to make a "little more money".

The court had passed the order in 2018 while deciding the issue of whether BS-IV compliant vehicles should be permitted to be sold in India after March 31, 2020.

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CRH launches two manuals on antibiotic and infection control policies



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 14 FEB: Central Referral Hospital (CRH) launched two hospital manuals, Antibiotic Policy and Hospital Infection Control Policy, on 13 Feb, a press release informs. The manuals were released by Vice Chan-

cellor, Sikkim Manipal University, Lt Gen, Dr MD Venkatesh in presence of Brig Dr VK Mehta Dean SMIMS, Medical Superintendent, Dr Gautam Dey, CRH, Head Operations, Dr Mingma Lhamu Sherpa, CRH amongst others. The Vice Chancellor

congratulated the Hospital Infection Control Committee (HICC) for the dedicated effort in bringing out these booklets. He also said it will be a great help in maintaining quality in patient care and asked the team to continue with the work and not be complacent.

The Antibiotic policy is a safe and effective strategy for antibiotic use which involves prescribing an antibiotic only when it is needed and selecting an appropriate and effective agent at the recommended dose, with the narrowest spectrum of antimicrobi-

al activity, fewer adverse effects and low cost. Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has been detected in all parts of the world and currently it is one of the greatest challenges to global public health (WHO 2014).

The manual of Hospital Infection Control (HIC) is a reference guide containing policies as well as procedures to prevent nosocomial infection among patients and staff. The overall aim of HIC manual is to provide evidence-based information on the prevention and control of infection.

The manual brought out by the Infection Control Committee of the Central Referral Hospital is an effort towards better infection-free health care practices by the management of the hospital, the release mentions.

DPT Surveillance State Launch Workshop



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 14 FEB: The State launch workshop of Diphtheria, pertussis and Neonatal tetanus surveillance workshop for Sikkim supported by the World Health Organisation was held in Hotel Lemontree, Gangtok, on 11 and 12 Feb, 2020, a press release informs.

The workshop was inaugurated by Principal Secretary, Health and Family Welfare, Government of Sikkim. This workshop was attended by Additional Director-RCH cum State Immunization Officer, Additional and Joint Director of Health and Family Welfare Government of Sikkim, District RCH

Officers, District Surveillance Officers, Medical and paediatric specialist from NEW STNM hospital and CRH Manipal, MO/ICs of all the PHCs of Sikkim, District Public Health Nursing Officers (DPHNO), LHV's. The officials trained in this workshop will further impart training to district and PHC health workers to start this DPT surveillance in Sikkim tentatively from June 2020.

This training was conducted by Regional Team leader (East)-WHO India, Dr Punnet Mishra, Deputy Surveillance Team-WCO India, Dr Preeti Nigam, Sub Regional Team Leader (WB)-WHO India, Dr JK

Mehta, Surveillance Medical Officer, Dr SK Ray, WHO India.

In 2017, India reported 5,293 cases of diphtheria, 23,766 cases of pertussis and 295 cases of neonatal tetanus to WHO and UNICEF through the joint reporting form (JRF).

The WHO NPSP field units will provide technical support for establishing a functional laboratory-supported surveillance system for DPT (Diphtheria, Pertussis and Tetanus). Their primary functions will be capacity building of health care providers/surveillance staff, monitoring and evaluation of the key components of surveillance, data analysis and providing feedback.

India forex reserves soar to record USD 473 billion

MUMBAI, FEB 14 (PTI): The country's foreign exchange reserves rose by USD 1.701 billion to a lifetime high of USD 473 billion in the week to February 7 on account of increase in foreign currency assets, according to RBI data.

In the previous week, the foreign exchange reserves had swollen by USD 4.607 billion to USD 471.3 billion.

In the reporting week, foreign currency assets, a major component of the overall reserves, rose by USD 1.938 billion to USD 439.186 billion.

Expressed in dollar

terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

In the reporting week, gold reserves declined by USD 218 million to USD 28.779 billion.

The special drawing rights with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were down by USD 2 million to USD 1.436 billion.

The country's reserve position with the IMF was down by USD 16 million to USD 3.599 billion, the data showed.

Press Club executive committee calls on Governor



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 14 FEB: Governor of Sikkim, Ganga Prasad, today granted audience to a 12-member delegation of the newly elected executive committee of Press Club of Sikkim. It was a courtesy call by the PCS team following their election held recently and was led by its president, Joseph Lepcha.

As per a Raj Bhavan press release, the Governor extended good wishes to the members and wished them a memorable term in their respective offices. He also underlined the role of media, considered the fourth pillar of democracy, in the modern progressive society. He

Further stated that

media, may it be print, electronic or digital, can make remarkable contribution to the society and the nation if made responsible and sensible.

The Governor urged the media fraternity to promote Sikkim with positive stories and achievements and contribute towards building a right perspective and opinion among the masses. He asked the members representing different media group to make impact in the society with their pen and remain committed towards positive journalism.

President of Press Club of Sikkim, Joseph Lepcha, apprised the Governor about various issues confronting the organisation and sought

Governor's continuous patronage and blessings for the wellbeing of press fraternity in the State. Governor also assured all support towards the PCS in their quest of responsible journalism and development of media in Sikkim.

In another engagement earlier on the day, Vice Chancellor of Sikkim Manipal University Lt General (Retd), MD Venkatesh called on the Governor and extended invitation to Governor to inaugurate the Atal Incubation Centre at SMIT Complex, Majhitar. The first such centre in the North East, being funded by NITI Ayog, under Atal Innovation Mission, will be inaugurated by the Governor at SMIT Majhitar on 15 Feb, 2020.

Exports dip 1.66pc in Jan

NEW DELHI, FEB 14 (PTI): The country's exports contracted for the sixth month in a row by 1.66 per cent in January to USD 25.97 billion, according to the data released by the commerce ministry on Friday.

Imports too declined by 0.75 per cent USD 41.14 billion, leaving a trade deficit of USD 15.17 billion during the month under review.

The trade deficit was USD 15.05 billion in January 2019.

During April-January 2019-20, exports slipped 1.93 per cent to USD 265.26 billion, imports declined by 8.12 per cent to USD 398.53 billion, leaving a trade deficit of USD 133.27 billion.

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Manjhi disapproves of prohibition in Bihar; govt fumes

PATNA, FEB 14 (PTI): Hindu-stani Awam Morcha president Jitan Ram Manjhi's comment that "a few drinks is like sanjivni (life-giver) for a working-class person" on Friday drew sharp reaction from the Nitish Kumar government that had brought in a stringent prohibition law in 2016.

The Congress, which was sharing power with Kumar's Janata Dal (United) when the law was enacted, now seemed to be in agreement with Manjhi, its current ally.

Manjhi made this statement on Thursday at Purnea where he was questioned about a photograph showing a middle-aged man in an inebriated state at a rally addressed by the former chief minister.

The photograph has gone viral on social media.

"I do not know whether the man was drunk or not. But let us stop making a big fuss about liquor consumption. Daar (al-

cohol) sometimes also serves as dawa (medicine). I have a firsthand experience. A concoction saved me when I was afflicted by cholera long back," he told reporters.

"A few drinks serve as sanjivni for a working-class person who returns home after a day of back-breaking labour," the HAM chief said.

People who take exception to drunken behaviour should realise that this happens because poor people often drink on an empty stomach which accentuates the intoxicating effects of liquor, Manjhi said.

It is not that the well-off - bureaucrats and politicians included - who drink are blessed with some intrinsic virtues that they stay sober after a few pegs, the HAM chief said.

"We must not expect our people to remain sober after failing to provide them with two square meals a day," he said.

Land Reforms Minister Ram-

narayan Mandal, a BJP leader, lashed out at the HAM president accusing him of "seeking to justify his own habits" and claimed that "people are happy with the ban on alcohol and it is going to stay forever".

A former close aide of Kumar who turned his bitter critic after he was made to step down as chief minister in 2015 to facilitate the return of his mentor, Manjhi has been a strident critic of the prohibition law.

Kumar brought in the law in April, 2016 fulfilling an electoral promise he had made to the state's women who had been complaining that their menfolk splurge their earnings on liquor, get drunk and cause nuisance at home.

Demanding that the Nitish Kumar government rationalise the prohibition law, AICC media panellist Prem Chandra Mishra said the state government should ponder why no other state is banning alcohol despite

his repeated exhortations.

"Forget about the states ruled by the Congress, even BJP-ruled states have refused to toe the line," Mishra, who is also a member of the state Legislative Council, said.

The prohibition law in Bihar is often termed as draconian by critics as it seeks to penalise not just sale, but also consumption and being in possession of alcohol. Skeptics view it as a reaction to the criticism that the state had faced for having allowed, in the past, proliferation of liquor shops.

After the prohibition law came into effect, truckloads of liquor are seized frequently in the state, triggering suspicions that bootlegging was thriving with police and the administration in cahoots and the political establishment turning a blind eye.

On some occasions, even policemen have been caught selling seized liquor from police stations.

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NATIONAL HYDROLOGY PROJECT

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER WATER RESOURCES & RIVER DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

Bid No: NHP-04 Online Tender -01 of 2019-20

E-Procurement Notice

Assignment Title: "Hiring of agency for providing services of technical experts Incremental Staff for the SPMU Office."

The Superintending Engineer, State Project Monitoring Unit, Water Resources and River Development Department, Government of Sikkim invites eligible registered Suppliers to indicate their interest in providing the above Services. Complete details are available in the website <http://sikkimtender.gov.in>.

Superintending Engineer, NHP, SPMU, Sokeythang, Tadong, East Sikkim -737102
E-Mail: sikkimwrdd@gmail.com.

R.O. No. 359/IPR/Pub/Classi./19-20 Date: 10.02.2020

What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV

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

Precautions to Prevent nCoV

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

Treatment

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

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

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

One Pea, One Field at a Time

From farms to markets on govt or pvt enterprise?

Farmers from Himachal Pradesh are unlikely to vacation in Hong Kong or Japan. Scratch that. Given the coronavirus in the air, it is unlikely that anyone will be visiting those parts at present, but that is not the point. The point being made is that even until last year, a decade since they began trading in those markets, they have been holidaying in Hong Kong and Japan as well. But that would not have been the case in the year 2007, a year when, if they found themselves in Hong Kong or Japan and decided to visit the sabzi mandis there, they would have ended up buying peas they produced for nearly ten-times the cost they sold them at. Some 600 tonnes of peas grown in the valleys of Himachal Pradesh were purchased by a Punjab-based company and exported with huge success to Japan and Hong Kong in the year 2007.

No, the Himachali farmers were not conned.

They made bulk sales at a handsome Rs. 25 per kg [remember, we are talking year 2007 here]. Peas, even in the inflated markets of Sikkim, are selling in the current 'season time' [thirteen years later] for around Rs 100 per kilo. It is safe to say that 600 tonnes purchased at Rs. 25 per kg in 2007 ensured a major windfall for farmers in Himachal Pradesh, who, as per the agri-data [NHB 2011-12] produce only 6.90 percent of the nation's pea production. This high rate accrued to them becomes even more significant in light of the fact that the exporters had also supplied the seeds to the farmers... for free! Flash forward to the present times. The opportunity opened by exporters from neighbouring Punjab has been seized by growers in HP who now have their own registered food processing partnership specialising in peas and the turnover has been increasing every year.

The lesson here for Sikkim is not necessarily to start growing peas more [although that would not be a bad idea], but to accept that market success soars on the wings of private enterprise, not governmental spoon feeding. Government largesse, and for that matter even private sector indulgence, needs to be capitalised by the real stakeholders and harnessed for sustainable prosperity. Opportunities have to be recognized and unanimously pursued. One is not seeing this follow-up enough in Sikkim as is reflected in the still continuing need to hold "awareness programmes" to convince people of the benefits of organic farming or the ban on import of a slew of vegetables grown in chemically-spiked farms outside. One may have issues with the ban route to boost local enterprise or even be unconvinced about the nature of the ban, but what cannot be ignored is that an opportunity had been force-created for farms here. What one could not also help notice was that this development never triggered the kind of excited engagement and preparation that would have been expected from the growers. For instance, does anyone, including growers, even visit the much touted Kisan Bazar in Gangtok anymore?

It goes without saying that farmers should have rediscovered organic solutions from previous generations and should have been demanding better market access by now, their fields already organic certified and their produce tagged and prepped for markets which value organic farming. Clearly, the ban regime flowed from the palpable absence of this mood in the fields, which is unfortunate because such engagement would also have kept the concerned agency sharp and on its toes and not recklessly lackadaisical as they continue to appear.

On a similarly note, it was around twelve years ago that the State Government had brought Orchid suppliers from Holland to Sikkim. What became of that initiative? It is probably floundering because while the State Government did its part by bringing the potential partners over, from thereon the local entrepreneurs who should have taken over probably did not. Or maybe the babus tied up the potential in miles of red tape. International flower festivals have also been held in Sikkim. What was the take away for florists from there? It is easy to blame bureaucratic indifference and even interference, but market realities are different now and private enterprise can overcome these attitudes. But an effort has to be made; something on the lines of what farmers from the Kangra valley of Himachal Pradesh did with peas...

Women in Arab countries find themselves torn between opportunity and tradition

ALAINNA LILOIA
theconversation.com

Arab women, long relegated to the private sphere by law and social custom, are gaining new access to public life.

All countries of the Arab Gulf now have workforce "nationalization policies" that aim to reduce dependency on migrant labor by getting more women into the workforce. Saudi Arabia set a goal of 30% female labor participation by 2030. In Kuwait, female citizens outnumber male citizens in the workforce. And across the Gulf, women outnumber men in higher education enrollment.

Women are making political inroads in the region, too. In Qatar, four women have been appointed to ministerial positions since 2003. Eleven women have held cabinet positions in Kuwait since 2005, including health minister, transportation minister and finance minister.

Even Saudi Arabia, which notoriously restricts women's rights, reformed the guardianship system that grants authority over women to their male relatives. Since August 2019, women may obtain passports, travel abroad and register marriages and births on their own.

These changes have real world benefits for Arab women, giving them greater economic independence and a voice in domestic and international affairs.

But Arab Muslim women in the Middle East still face substantial social and legal inequalities. Even as governments in the region tout female advancement abroad, my research on women in the Arab Gulf finds, at home they still enforce traditional gender roles.

WOMEN AS SYMBOLS OF ISLAM

The discovery of oil in the Arab Gulf in the 1930s turned these Islamic monarchies into global players. One result of this globalization was that Western leaders put pressure on the region to "modernize" their laws and customs.

Championing women's advancement is one way Gulf rulers can present a positive international image. This helps maintain good political, military and trade relationships with Europe and the United States and allays criticisms of human rights violations.

In recent years, Arab Gulf women have also fought hard for their rights. Saudi women successfully campaigned for the right to drive, which was granted in 2018. In Kuwait, activists are now pushing

for better protections against domestic violence.

But Gulf rulers still need the support of conservative citizens and influential religious leaders, too. And these sectors of the population have repeatedly raised fears of Westernization threatening local language, dress styles, food and cultural traditions.

One way Gulf rulers manage this tension, I've found, is by promoting Quranic interpretations that relegate women to traditional roles like bearing and raising children and caring for their families. Celebrating women's domesticity is an easy way to signal their government's commitment to what they consider Islamic values.

In Qatar, for example, the National Vision 2030 – an economic and social development blueprint – states that "Qatar has maintained its cultural and traditional values as an Arab and Islamic nation that considers the family to be the main pillar of society."

And the Qataris propping up this pillar are women.

"Through their nurturing of language, codes of ethics, behavioural patterns, value systems and religious beliefs, women play an indispensable role in upholding traditional familial and cultural values," reads a government document building on the proposals laid out in the National Vision 2030.

RELIGION AND GENDER

There are, of course, more gender-equal interpretations of the Quran. Islam itself does not require repressing women.

But throughout history male leaders in the Gulf have associated patriarchal gender roles with religious purity. And clerics, who have significant social and political influence in the region, enforce conservative readings of Islamic law that subordinate women.

For example, women in all of the Gulf states must receive the approval of a male guardian to marry. In Qatar, single women under 25 require permission to travel abroad, and Qatari men can argue in court to stop their wives from traveling. In Saudi Arabia, men can file a "disobedience" complaint against female relatives for leaving the house without permission.

In Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain, a man can stop his wife from working if he feels her employment interferes with her domestic responsibilities or religious conduct.

As a result, women in Gulf countries find themselves caught between two contradictory agendas for the 21st century.

WHAT WOMEN WANT

Many Qatari women I've interviewed say they struggle to balance the conflicting expectations between domestic responsibilities and emerging professional opportunities.

Sheikha, an unmarried Qatari in her late 20s who works as an academic adviser, told me she often wonders: "I have a job and future plans. Why should I marry?"

"I don't want to say that marriage erases the dreams," she said, "but sometimes with the family commitment you can't do it."

Qatari women like Sheikha tend to face significant social pressure to settle down and have children by a certain age and to make sure their education and career goals do not get in the way of domestic responsibilities.

Not all the pressure is external. Many women I met hold conservative views on marriage and the family, too.

"I started work when my last daughter got married," Amina Al-Ansari, an associate professor at Qatar University, told me. "Before that, I took care of the house and kids."

Al-Ansari, like all 15 Qatari women I interviewed, believes caring for the family is a woman's religious duty.

STILL CAN'T HAVE IT ALL

Conservative Qataris also view women working or studying in a gender-mixed environment as a violation of Islamic values and a sign of Westernization.

That's why Amal Al-Shammari, a 32-year-old Qatari who now runs a cultural association for expatriates and tourists called Embrace Doha, attended Qatar University – the country's only gender-segregated university.

"My parents wanted me to go there to keep a good reputation. Guys assume you have lots of relationships if you go to gender-mixed universities," she told me. "My parents wanted me to stay with the conservative way."

As political and religious leaders in the Gulf push their national agendas, women must find their own ways to balance newfound freedoms with existing social and religious pressures.

"There is always development, improvement, but always tradition, religion, and culture," the professor, Al-Ansari, told me, summing up these tensions.

"We are living under the umbrella of religion."

[the writer is Ph.D. Student, University of Arizona]

9 ways to talk to people who spread coronavirus myths

CLAIRE HOOKER
theconversation.com

The spread of misinformation about the novel coronavirus, now known as COVID-19, seems greater than the spread of the infection itself. The World Health Organisation (WHO), government health departments and others are trying to alert people to these myths.

But what's the best way to tackle these if they come up in everyday conversation, whether that's face-to-face or online? Is it best to ignore them, jump in to correct them, or are there other strategies we could all use?

Public health officials expect misinformation about disease outbreaks where people are frightened. This is particularly so when a disease is novel and the science behind it is not yet clear.

It's also the case when we still don't know how many people are likely to become sick, have a life-threatening illness or die.

Yet we can all contribute to the safe control of the disease and to minimising its social and economic impacts by addressing misinformation when we encounter it.

To avoid our efforts backfiring, we need to know how to do this effectively and constructively.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK

Abundant research shows what doesn't work. Telling people not to panic or their perceptions and beliefs are incorrect can actually strengthen their commitment to their incorrect views.

Over-reactions are common when new risks emerge and these over-reactions will pass. So, it's often the best choice to not engage in the first place.

WHAT CAN I DO?

If you wish to effectively counter misinformation, you need to pay more attention to your audience than to the message you want to convey. See our tips below.

Next, you need to be trusted.

People only listen to sources they trust. This involves putting in the time and effort to make sure your knowledge is correct and reliable; discussing information fairly (what kind of information would make you change your own mind?); and being honest enough to admit when you don't know, and even more importantly, when you are wrong.

the harms their false beliefs will cause.

But if we are emotional, what we communicate is not our knowledge, but our disrespect for the other person's views. This usually produces a defensive reaction.

Manage your own outrage first before jumping in to correct others. This might mean saving a discussion for another day.



Here's how all this might work in practice.

1. UNDERSTAND HOW PEOPLE PERCEIVE AND REACT TO RISKS

We all tend to worry more about risks we perceive to be new, uncertain, dreaded, and impact a large group in a short time – all features of the new coronavirus. Our worries increase significantly if we do not feel we, or the governments acting for us, have control over the virus.

2. RECOGNISE PEOPLE'S CONCERNS

People can't process information unless they see their worries being addressed. So instead of offering facts ("you won't catch coronavirus from your local swimming pool"), articulate their worry ("you've caught colds in swimming pools before, and now you're worried someone might transmit the virus before they know they are infected").

Being heard helps people re-establish a sense of control.

3. BE AWARE OF YOUR OWN FEELINGS

Usually when we want to correct someone, it's because we're worried about

4. ASK WHY SOMEONE IS WORRIED

If you ask why someone is worried, you might discover your assumptions about that person are wrong.

Explaining their concerns to you helps people explore their own views. They might become aware of what they don't know or of how unlikely their information sounds.

5. REMEMBER, THE FACTS ARE GOING TO CHANGE

Because there is still considerable uncertainty about how severe the epidemic will be, information and the government's response to it is going to change.

So you will need to frequently update your own views. Know where to find reliable information.

For instance, state and federal health departments, the WHO and the US Centers for Disease Control websites provide authoritative and up-to-date information.

6. ADMIT WHEN YOU'RE WRONG

Being wrong is likely in an uncertain situation. If you are wrong, say so early.

If you asked your family or employees to take avoidance measures

you now realise aren't really necessary, then admit it and apologise. This helps restore the trust you need to communicate effectively the next time you need to raise an issue.

7. POLITELY PROVIDE YOUR OWN PERSPECTIVE

Phrases like, "here's why I am not concerned about that" or "I actually feel quite confident about doing X or Y" offer ways to communicate your knowledge without attacking someone else's views.

You can and should be explicit about what harms you worry misinformation can cause. An example could be, "I'm worried that avoiding Chinese restaurants will really hurt their business. I'm really conscious of wanting to support Chinese Australians right now."

8. ON SOCIAL MEDIA, MODEL THE BEHAVIOUR YOU WANT TO SEE

It's harder to be effective on social media,

where outrage, not listening, is common. Often your goal might be to promote a reasoned, civil discussion, not to defend one particular belief over another. Use very reliable links.

9. DON'T MAKE IT WORSE ONLINE

Your online comment can unintentionally reinforce misinformation, for example by giving it more prominence. Check the Debunking Handbook for some strategies to avoid this.

Make sure your posts or comments are polite, specific, factual and very brief.

Acknowledging common values or points of connection by using phrases such as "I'm worried about my grandmother, too", or by being supportive ("It's so great that you're proactive about looking after your staff"), can help.

REMEMBER WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

The ability to respond to emergencies rests on having civil societies. The goal is to keep relationships constructive and dialogue open – not to be right.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer and Coordinator, Health and Medical Humanities, University of Sydney]

Cong boycotts Odisha Gov's budget address

BHUBANESWAR, FEB 14 (PTI): The opposition Congress Friday boycotted Odisha Governor Ganeshi Lal's address to the state Assembly on the opening day of the budget session saying it did not contain measures to help farmers in distress, contain rising crimes against women and corruption.

As the governor began reading out his 48-page speech, Congress Legislature Party leader Narasingha Mishra stood up and announced his party's decision to boycott the address.

Following this all the nine Congress MLAs staged a walk out.

There is nothing in the governors address to help farmers facing problems across the state, the worsening law and order situation - particularly crime against women, and rising corruption, Mishra told reporters outside the House.

BJP, which is the principal opposition, however, was present at the House during the governor's address.

In his one-hour long speech, Lal dwelt on the successes of the Naveen Patnaik government, its public welfare schemes and the plan of the state for 2020-21.

On the states fiscal situation, the governor said: My government is committed to increase investment in priority sector within prudent



fiscal norms and at the same time, it is capable of increasing capital investment to above five per cent of GSDP.

He said the state government has achieved debt sustainability from a position of debt stress. The debt-GSDP ratio has been brought down from 50.7 per cent in 2002-03 to 16.8 per cent in 2018-19. The interest payment to revenue receipt ratio has been brought down from 40.2 per cent in 2001-02 to 5.8 per cent in 2018-19.

"Prudent level of debt stock has given us an opportunity to go for higher capital investment for accelerating the growth momentum," the governor said.

Stating that the state government is committed to the welfare of sections of the society,

he told the House that it proposes to sanction 100 hostels with accommodation capacity for 10,000 OBC and Socially and Educationally Backward Caste (SEBC) students to help them access higher education in 14 major urban educational hubs in Odisha.

He spoke of the states efforts to promote education among the scheduled tribe and scheduled caste students by opening hostels and providing scholarships - both for pre-matric and post-matric stages.

On the welfare measures for farmers, the governor said their income has more than doubled and Odisha is poised to multiply it through more proactive developmental interventions in line with the national agenda of doubling the

farmers income. The government has remained watchful of the development of the people of low-income group and introduced the KALIA scheme for this purpose.

A goal has been fixed to include 50 lakh small and 25 lakh landless farmers families under this scheme in the coming days, the governor said.

The state government has brought services of agriculture under the 5Ts and Mo Sarkar programmes from December, 2019 with the objective of enhancing the delivery mechanism and reaching out to every corner of the state.

"Every district has in place a 'Mo Sarkar' desk to take on the programme at a great pace, he said. The state government, he said, believes in

peoples participation in administration and in this direction the programmes like 5Ts and Mo Sarkar are important enterprises.

'Mo Sarkar', which means 'My Government' in Odia, is a transformative initiative of 5-T programme, which was introduced by Naveen Patnaik after he returned to power as the chief minister of the state for a fifth consecutive term in 2019. The '5-Ts' are transparency, teamwork, technology and time leads to transformation.

Lal described the state governments steps for development of infrastructure facilities around the Jagannath Temple in Puri and said similar measures are also being taken to transform the facilities near the Lingaraj Temple in Bhubaneswar.

After the devastation by Cyclone Fani, the state government had approved 15 projects in 2019 with likely cost of Rs 2,308 crore for the development of Puri into a world class heritage site, the governor said.

Another six projects with cost of around Rs 900 crore have also been planned to be taken up to add to the heritage glory of Puri city, he said.

In his speech Lal also highlighted the governments' achievements in various sectors like health, education, technology and agriculture.

Mamata criticises shooting incidents in Delhi, attack on rape victims' kin in UP



DURGAPUR (WB), FEB 13 (PTI): West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday criticised recent incidents of shooting in Delhi and attacks on family members of rape victims in Uttar Pradesh, and said the law-and-order scenario was not like this in her state.

She said police in West Bengal always takes up all complaints on priority basis and then verifies them.

"There are incidents of shooting in Delhi over trivial issues. In Uttar Pradesh, in a rape case they are either killing the parents or putting the victim girl on fire. In West Bengal, cases are first registered, verified and then action is taken," Banerjee said at an administrative meeting held here.

She further advised

police to verify complaints and prepare case diaries properly.

The Trinamool Congress supreme claimed that there were several agencies working in the garb of NGOs to spread hatred among people.

Referring to the Malda mass marriage, Banerjee alleged that it was an attempt at religious conversion.

"We will not allow any religious conversion here in West Bengal. We do not want to live on anybody's mercy. In the name of mass marriage of young people, they tried to go to religious conversion," she said.

"If needed, police will fix up such marriages through community development programmes," the chief minister said.

She also claimed that surveys were being conducted by banks and

post offices as they were "used" by the Centre to collect data in order to "manipulate" the CAA-NRC-NPR.

"I have full respect for bank officials. But there are a few people who are planning it politically. I am repeatedly telling the municipalities not to conduct any surveys. There are some people who are trying to do this," she said.

Banerjee also criticised state-run oil marketing companies (OMCs) for substantially raising the price of non-subsidised domestic cooking gas across the country. "The price of gas cylinders has gone up by Rs 300 in seven months' time. It's too much," she said.

The increase was announced a day after the Aam Aadmi Party won the Delhi Assembly polls.

5 arrested with elephant tusks in Odisha's Badipada

BARIPADA (ODISHA), FEB 14 (PTI): Five persons were arrested in Odisha's Badipada after two elephant tusks were seized, officials said on Friday.

The seizure was made on Thursday night, said officials of the Baripada Forest Division.

It is suspected that the tusks belonged to a male elephant of about nine years old. They might have killed the

elephant in Similipal National Park, said Baripada forest range officer Laxmidhar Behera.

Following a tip-off, forest officials intercepted an auto-rickshaw near Titia on Baripada-Udala Road, from which the tusks were recovered, he said. A case has been registered against the accused under the Wild Life Protection Act, Behera added.

Kerala look to halt Bengaluru ascendancy



KOCHI, FEB 14 (PTI): A budding rivalry will be renewed on Saturday when Kerala Blasters take on Hero Indian Super League defending champions Bengaluru FC at the Jawaharlal Nehru stadium here.

There is no love lost between the two sets of supporters and one can expect the hosts, Kerala Blasters, to come out all guns blazing.

Eelco Schattorie's side, placed eighth on the table, might be out of the reckoning for a play-off spot but would love to get one over a South Indian rival. They are coming off a goalless draw against NorthEast United which extended their winless run to four matches.

Many things have gone wrong for Kerala Blasters this season, with defensive mistakes, in particular, costing them a fair few games. However, their attack has fared better with the likes of Bartholomew Ogbeche and Raphael Messi Bouli leading the charge.

While both the forwards have plundered goals, there has been a lack of support from the rest of the team. In fact, the duo scored 18 of the 23 goals Kerala Blasters scored this season. But

their task will be cut out against a Bengaluru FC team who have conceded just nine goals this season.

The Kochi-based side have struggled with creativity in midfield as well, with Sahal Abdul Samad relegated to a substitute role mainly while the likes of Sergio Cidoncha have failed to impress.

However, Schattorie will be confident of coaxing a performance out of his team against Bengaluru.

"Their strength is that they are a top club. They have been always up there. So structurally they are doing something very well and they have got the right formula. They have a strong mentality," said Schattorie.

"But I know exactly how to beat them. I know where their weaknesses are," he added.

Carles Cuadrat's side are coming off a 0-0 draw too, against Chennaiyin FC and know that they cannot finish top of the league anymore. Though they have already qualified for the play-offs, they will still want to fight for the second spot which makes it imperative that they pick up a result against Kerala Blasters.

"Every game is important. It is good news

that we are already in the playoffs. It was one of the targets before this season," said Cuadrat.

However, there are a couple of concerns for him. Captain Sunil Chhetri and defensive lynchpin Juanan Gonzalez are suspended after collecting yellow cards in the last game.

Without Chhetri in attack, Bengaluru's attack has looked mediocre with Udanta Singh, Ashique Kuruniyan and Deshorn Brown failing to set the league alight so far.

But Cuadrat will hope a 9-1 spanking of Paro FC in an AFC Cup qualifier recently that saw the likes of Thongkhosiem Haokip and Brown run riot will infuse some confidence in their attack.

"The win (against Paro) will make the players confident. We were not getting a lot of goals but maybe from that game, they get a new dynamic which will help them to get more goals," he added.

The presence of Dimas Delgado and Erik Paartalu in the midfield provides physique and quality in the middle of the park, something that comes in handy during set-piece situations as well.

Churchill face Aizawl FC at home

MARGAO, FEB 14 (PTI): Hosts Churchill Brothers will have their task cut out when they lock horns with a revitalised Aizawl FC in an I-League match here on Saturday.

Churchill Brothers FC are placed eighth on the points table with 13 points and have had mixed fortunes in the league so far.

Aizawl, on the other hand, have a point more but have also played two games more than the Red Machines.

Churchill have been heavily dependent on their captain and lead striker Willis Plaza, who has scored five goals so far, but the erratic form of the team overall has been a deterrent.

In their last encounter, Churchill lost to

Chennai City FC at home 1-2 via an injury-time goal. Speaking before the match, Plaza said, "We still have 11 matches in hand and it is important for the team to play better. We have been conceding goals and that hasn't helped the team so far.

"Our focus in the next match will be to play harder when we don't have ball possession and hold a tight defensive line to ensure that we don't let the opponents get away easily.

"Aizawl is a tough opponent. They have speed on their side, which often causes a lot of problems and they have a very strong short pass game. They have done well in the last few encounters and I am sure they will

be coming with full force against us," he added.

Aizawl FC will be coming on the back of a win against TRAU FC in Imphal. The star of the last match was Abdoulaye Kanout, who scored a brace.

Kanoute looked positive and stressed on the mood in the dressing room saying, "After the last defeat against Real Kashmir FC, we talked to each other and also our staff helped us a lot in coming out of a mindset where we were feeling that results aren't going our way.

"At Aizawl, we play as a family and everyone in the dressing room is all cheered up at the moment and we will go into the game with a very positive approach.

Protests over LPG price hike disrupt traffic in Kolkata



KOLKATA, FEB 14 (PTI): Activists of the CPI(M)'s women's wing and the Youth Congress protested on Friday against the hike in LPG cylinder prices at two important junctions of the city, leading to major traffic snarls in some areas of north and south Kolkata, police sources said.

Youth Congress members, armed with placards and banners, blocked the APC Road in Rajabazar for around 30 minutes at 3 pm, throwing traffic out of gear.

Members of the CPI(M)-backed All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) also staged a demonstration outside the Indian Oil Corporation office in Dhakuria in the southern part of the city.

The AIDWA protest caused traffic snarls for around an hour on the Dhakuria bridge, police sources said.

LPG price was increased to Rs 858.50 per 14.2 kg cylinder from Rs 714 previously, making it the steepest hike in rates since January 2014.

Eight essays put the spotlight on the journey caused by hydel projects in Sikkim and the region, the cost exacted by this "development" and some of the stories it birthed, not all of which have been shared before. Also finding place in this collection is the arrival of Climate Change and its impact on Sikkim and how the State could negotiate with this new disruption.

THE BIRDS HAVE LOST THEIR WAY
EDITED BY TSHERING EDEN AND PEMA WANGCHUK

ESSAYS ON TEESTA, HYDEL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN SIKKIM

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Liverpool look to extend lead as top-four battle recommences

LONDON, FEB 14 (AFP): Liverpool are expected to take another step towards clinching a long-awaited Premier League title at bottom-of-the-table Norwich, while behind the run-away leaders the battle for Champions League places takes centre stage this weekend.

The Reds can extend their mammoth 22-point lead over Manchester City at Carrow Road on Saturday as they aim to not only win the league for the first time in 30 years, but smash the record books in the process.

Jürgen Klopp's men have dropped just two points all season and are on a run of 16 consecutive league wins.

That march towards the title began on the opening night of the season when Norwich visited Anfield and were 4-0 down inside 42 minutes.

An injury to Alisson Becker was the one big concern of that victory for Klopp as the Brazilian was sidelined for two months.

After taking some time to get back to his best form, Alisson has saved 26 of the last 27 shots he has faced, with Liverpool racking up an aggregate score of 23-1 in that time.

"We want to win the title and for winning the title, you need to win everything," Alisson told Premier League Productions. "The way we play, you need to enjoy that because if you don't enjoy that then you cannot play all the games with our intensity." A massive 55 points separate Norwich from the champions-elect with the Canaries seven points adrift of safety.

Daniel Farke's men desperately need to start turning good performances into points to beat the drop.

However, they have shown an ability to upset the odds with one of their four league wins this season coming against Manchester City. - **RODGERS WELCOMES A REST** -

For a long time, Leicester were Liverpool's closest challengers at the top of the table, but the Foxes' form before a two-week winter break had faded with just one win in four league games.

An eight-match winning streak earlier in the season means Brendan Rodgers' men still have a 10-point cushion in the race for a Champions League place and can even move back up to second with victory at Wolves on Friday.

And Rodgers is hoping a fortnight's rest, without any overseas training camp, will have been the perfect tonic to recharge his side for the run-in. "There's improvements to be made, no doubt," said the former Liverpool boss. "We will now regain a bit of stability."

"We're all fresh ahead of this final third of the season." Wolves have also suffered a mid-season dip with one win from their last six league games, albeit two of those fixtures were against Liverpool.

The three-way battle for the Bundesliga title

JASON HUMPHREYS
LONDON, 14 FEB [ENGLISCHE-WOCHE]: People up and down Germany braced themselves for Storm Sabine to hit last Sunday but, before the gales began to swirl around Munich, there was time for RB Leipzig to visit the city, deny Bayern victory and leave with a point. The goalless draw was a good result for Leipzig – and anyone who wants to see a title race in Germany. Bayern roared out of the winter break, winning three games in a row and banging in a dozen goals in the process. With Leipzig and Dortmund both dropping points in 2020, it looked as if the champions were going to resume their usual procession to the title.

The first half of the season gave everyone hope. Bayern seemed to be doing everything possible to make things exciting. Their fortunes improved after Hansi Flick replaced Niko Kovac in November, but they looked as if they were there for the taking. But still, when Bayern click, they win, and often comfortably. Injuries made the squad look thin by their standards but, after losing back-to-back games against Leverkusen and Gladbach to give their challengers cause for optimism, Bayern have won six of their last seven.

They have not been at their best this season but they still have the meanest defensive record in the league, the top scorer and, crucially, they still sit top of the league. With Philippe Coutinho, Kingsley Coman and Lucas Hernandez among the substitutes at the weekend – and with Ivan Perišić, Javi Martínez and Niklas Süle still to return from injury – the squad looks pretty healthy. Flick has also managed to re-integrate Thomas



Müller and Jérôme Boateng, both of whom seemed to be on their way out of the club. Boateng in particular has profited from Flick's appointment, becoming a key player again. At the other end of the pitch, Robert Lewandowski has scored more goals this season than he has played matches.

Bayern lean on Lewandowski but Leipzig are perhaps even more reliant on their star striker, Timo Werner, whose form and fitness are crucial to any sustained title push. Julian Nagelsmann's team were top of the league at Christmas but they did not carry their momentum through the winter break and have dropped seven points in their first three games of 2020. Still, they are second in the table – just a point behind Bayern – and their goalless draw in Munich on Sunday gives them a good platform to build upon.

Dortmund's forward line has a different make-up. In the absence of a classic mitelstürmer, they often look

to their captain and talisman, Marco Reus, to lead the line, with an array of exciting youngsters including Jadon Sancho, Julian Brandt and Thorgan Hazard giving him support. In fact, Sancho is their top scorer with 12 goals – to go along with his 14 assists. Add in new signing Erling Braut Haaland, who has already scored seven goals in his first four league games, and it is easy to see why Dortmund are the top scorers in the league. Mario Götze, incidentally, cannot get a game. With Emre Can taking a slot next to Axel Witsel in the centre of midfield, and Achraf Hakimi and Raphaël Guerreiro flying up the flanks, Dortmund look dangerous.

However, as their 4-3 defeat to Bayer Leverkusen on Saturday highlighted once again, their problem is keeping the back door closed. Only seven clubs in the league have conceded more goals this season. Their forwards are scoring at a phenomenal rate – especially Haaland, who has a goal for every 32

minutes he has been on the pitch for the club – but they cannot be expected to keep that up all season.

For some Dortmund fans, Lucien Favre is the issue. Although he is undoubtedly a talented coach and tactician, not every supporter has taken to him. His apparent lack of passion on the touchline has been a bugbear. This may be slightly unfair, but his introverted manner is often at odds with the din bellowing around the stadium, particularly in a league where fans are accustomed to seeing managers wearing their hearts on their sleeve – which is certainly the case with Nagelsmann.

With 12 games to play, there are plenty of points up for grabs and plenty of banana skins for all three teams. Leipzig and Dortmund have a testing few weeks ahead, with Leipzig off to Schalke and Wolfsburg, and Dortmund facing a tough trip to Mönchengladbach (who are also hoping to mount a title charge) before the Revierderby against Schalke, a game

where anything can – and often does – happen. In comparison, only one of Bayern's next five league games is against a team in the top half of the table.

Dortmund cannot afford to lose ground before Bayern come to town in early April, particularly with a trip to Leipzig on the penultimate weekend of the season. Leipzig have already played Bayern both home and away. If they come through the next month or so without dropping too many points, they could be set up for a strong finish. On the same weekend as Bayern travel to Dortmund, Leipzig will host Hertha Berlin, who are having a season to forget. A home win coupled with good news from Dortmund could give them a real push in the title race, especially with games against Köln, Paderborn, Hoffenheim and Dusseldorf before they host Dortmund.

The Champions League, which returns next week, could have an intriguing and

defining influence on the title race. All three clubs have tricky last-16 matches next week, with Leipzig off to Tottenham, Bayern visiting Chelsea and Dortmund hosting PSG. The three German sides will want to go as far as they can in the competition, but there is more expectation on Bayern's shoulders.

An eighth title in a row would be unprecedented. Although, so was seven. A league title is not to be sniffed at, but surely Bayern could be forgiven for prioritising the Champions League, particularly if they overcome Chelsea – who have only won one league game this year – and are given a kind draw in the quarter-finals. Leipzig and Dortmund will be competitive with anyone over two legs, but they do not quite have Bayern's pedigree in Europe and are both slight underdogs in their last-16 ties.

The further Bayern progress, the greater the temptation will be to go all out for European glory, potentially clearing the way for Leipzig or Dortmund to emerge from their slipstream and sprint to the finish. In recent seasons, Bayern have often been able to rest players in the league to keep them fresh for big European nights. That is looking less likely this season. Bayern also have to consider the DFB-Pokal, which could add three more matches to their season – matches that neither Leipzig nor Dortmund have to worry about.

After nearly a decade of Bayern dominance, the idea of a genuine title race – and maybe even a three-horse race – is very appealing. However, to keep up the pace, the challengers will need to over-perform and hope Bayern under-perform.

Fury ready for 'war' in Wilder heavyweight title rematch

LOS ANGELES, FEB 14 (AFP): Britain's Tyson Fury vowed to deliver a career-best performance in his upcoming heavyweight title rematch with American Deontay Wilder, expecting a "war" in their February 22 showdown at Las Vegas.

The 12-round battle of unbeaten fighters for Wilder's World Boxing Council crown is a rematch of a thrilling 2018 draw at Los Angeles.

Fury was knocked down twice by Wilder in the first fight but the 31-year-old Englishman plans a more aggressive approach for the rematch.

"Never have I been as ready and focused for one fight as I am for this fight," Fury said in a conference call Thursday. "You're going to see the best Tyson Fury that Tyson Fury can be."

"I'm match fit. I'm ready. I'm confident. I'm injury free. I'm ready for a war, one round or 12."

Fury, the lineal champion, is 29-0 with one drawn and 20 knockouts while Wilder enters 42-0 with one drawn and 41 knockouts.

"If I beat Deontay Wilder, I'll be the best heavyweight of my era, standing alone," Fury said.

Fury backed up prior comments saying he would knock out Wilder in the second round, saying he felt he needed a knockout to keep the outcome from the hands of the judges.

"Won't have to wait long to find out, will we?" Fury said. "We'll see if I'm man enough to back it up."

"My own destiny lies within my own two fists. I'll be letting them fly very aggressively."

Fight promoter Bob Arum said victory would seal Fury's place among such all-time heavyweight legends as Mike Tyson, Muhammad Ali, George Foreman, Lennox Lewis and Evander Holyfield.

"Everybody would have to recognize him as one of the great heavyweight champions of all time," Arum said. "He definitely will belong with those im-

mortals." Fury says he learned from the first fight that he must press the attack when he senses weakness from Wilder.

"The mistake I made last time was not making him pay when he was hurt. This time when I get him hurt, I'll throw everything but the kitchen sink at him and he won't know what hit him," Fury said.

"I learned he can be hit and hurt quite regularly. That's the biggest thing I learned from fighting him. He's a one dimensional fighter and I'm going to prove that."

"I took his best shots and fired them back into him. He's a one trick pony. He's a knockout artist... but he couldn't finish me."

"It's not when we get put down. It's what happens when we get back up and keep moving forward."

- WILDER 'AIN'T SO BAD' -

Wilder's speed plays a bigger role in his knockout blows than his power, Fury said.

"I felt the power. Ain't so bad," Fury said. "I don't think it's so much his power. It's the speed he brings. It's tricky when you don't see it coming."

Fury claimed he wanted the victory more than Wilder, saying the champion was growing more concerned about opportunities outside the ring.

"He's what I call a social climber. He wants to be something he's not," Fury said.

"None of that stuff means anything to me."

Fury also dismissed any notion of where he might rank among the all-time greats.

"I'm not really too concerned about the legacy. The fact of the matter is I care about being active and I care about winning now," Fury said.

"What someone thinks about me when I'm gone doesn't really matter. When I'm gone, somebody comes along to replace me. That's how the food chain works."

Hasenhüttl's death-or-glory rejig revives Southampton's menace

DAVID HYTNER
LONDON, 14 FEB [THE GUARDIAN]: For Ralph Hasenhüttl and Southampton, the first three months of the season felt like an ordeal but the tone had been set from the very start. The manager took his team to Burnley on the opening weekend, full of optimism and with his first pre-season at the club behind him, only to lose 3-0 after a second-half capitulation.

"You have seven weeks to prepare for the first game and then you lose the first game and that means the seven weeks were shit," Hasenhüttl says as he prepared for the return fixture with Burnley at St Mary's on Saturday. "This is a clear message."

What had been surprising was the way Hasenhüttl set up at Turf Moor: As he had done for the vast majority of his matches since arriving at the club in December 2018, it was with a back three rather than the four defenders and, specifically, the 4-2-2-2 system that he said he favoured at his unveiling press conference. After pre-season, and all that time to work on what Hasenhüttl calls automatisms, it was presumed he would revert to what he liked best on a consistent basis. It did not happen and nor did it happen until the aftermath of the shattering 9-0 home loss to Leicester on 25 October.

Hasenhüttl did not change immediately. He persisted with three cen-

tre-halves for the two defeats at Manchester City – in the Carabao Cup and the Premier League – and one more at home to Everton in the league; as ever with various combinations in midfield and attack. But after resetting during the November international break, he went to 4-2-2-2, commonly referred to as plain old 4-4-2 in England, for the visit to Arsenal and it is no exaggeration to say the move has transformed his tenure.

Southampton were unlucky only to draw at the Emirates but their record in the league, starting with that game and playing 4-2-2-2 each time, now reads: W7 D2 L4. They have powered from second bottom to 13th place, a comfortable seven points above the dotted line and, even in the defeats, they have played some good football and created chances.

At which point the question for Hasenhüttl is as follows: why did he lose sight of what he most believed in? "Yeah, good question," he replies. "I don't really know the right answer. It's a lot of influences, [such as] when I played my first home game at the club against Arsenal with a back five and we won 3-2."

That was Arsenal's first defeat in 23 matches and it wedded Hasenhüttl a little uneasily to three central defenders, particularly as his first game – away to Cardiff – had ended in a 1-0 defeat

with a back four. "The team starts believing: 'OK, this is the way it can go, it works,' and it did work," Hasenhüttl says. "But in the end, it was not always that aggressive and, if it doesn't work, you sit very deep and you are passive. That's not really the way I want to play or the players want to play – sometimes with less possession. That's the reason why we wanted to change it."

In other words, Hasenhüttl felt he was not being true to himself. There is still an irony, though, in it taking the 9-0 to jolt him back to 4-2-2-2, the system with which he enjoyed such success at RB Leipzig. Or that his team were able to come together so soon after such a devastation.

The left-back Ryan Bertrand says: "It's strange to say but our pressing really clicked after the 9-0 – beginning at Arsenal. The City games straight after were just about not getting done nine, 10 or 11. Would that click have come without such a terrible result?"

"The change of system enables us to have clearer principles in our pressing and positional play. While you have no consistency in your team selection or back four or team shape or what you are going to do when you play out through the thirds or how you are going to press, the talent within the team doesn't come out." Hasenhüttl

says in simple terms the 4-2-2-2 gave "one player more in front to give earlier pressure" when compared with three centre-halves. It gets a team higher up the pitch with regard to their starting positions. But Hasenhüttl brought the detail when he talked about "filters" or layers to the press, which start with filter one up front in the shape of Shane Long and Danny Ings. Filter two is provided by the wide players, Nathan Redmond and normally Stuart Armstrong, with filter three being Pierre-Emile Højbjerg and ordinarily James Ward-Prowse.

"In this system, if we are well organised in behind, we have more filters until the ball comes to our back four," Hasenhüttl says. "Even the big teams have more problems to build up against us if we do it perfect. Also, if you work for a long time in a shape, you know every weakness, especially against the ball. You have experience of what are the areas you have to protect."

It is impossible to escape the feeling that after the nine-goal thrashing, Hasenhüttl decided that if he was to go down at Southampton, he would at least do so playing his way. It was a death-or-glory move but now his team look more flexible in the final third, more dangerous on the ball. The change to the collective mindset has been radical.

China rejects US charge of lack of transparency in sharing coronavirus info

KJM VARMA

BEIJING, FEB 14 (PTI): China on Friday rejected US allegations that it is not transparent enough in sharing the details about the coronavirus outbreak, saying it was working with the international community in an "open and highly responsible manner" to contain the global crisis.

China's comments came after Larry Kudlow, the director of President Donald Trump's Economic Council, said that the US is little disappointed over not being invited in the medical operations and the lack of transparency coming from the Chinese over coronavirus outbreak.

Stressing that unanswered questions were mounting and there was no sign of the promised cooperation, Kudlow said: "We're more than willing to work with the WHO on this (coronavirus) and they won't let us." "I don't know what their motives are. I do know that apparently, more and more people are suffering over there," Kudlow said in Washington.

The death toll in China's novel coronavirus outbreak has spiked to nearly 1,500 with



121 new fatalities reported mostly from the worst-affected Hubei province while the confirmed cases of infection jumped to nearly 65,000, health officials said on Friday.

State-run CGTN reported that 505 cases of the virus were abroad, including 15 cases of the virus in the US.

Ever since the coronavirus outbreak that shook China and the world, Beijing has not acceded to requests by the US to permit American specialists to visit the country to take part in the medical operations to counter the virus.

Instead, China has

permitted a team of the World Health Organisation (WHO) specialists to visit the country and assist it to contain the virus.

While a 15 member WHO advance team has arrived on Monday, the rest expected to reach here soon.

However, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said that China has been working with the international community to tackle the epidemic in an open, transparent and highly responsible manner.

China has been working with the international community to tackle the epidemic in an open,

transparent and highly responsible manner for the sake of global public health security and all people's health," Geng was quoted as saying during an online media briefing here by the AFP.

He also said that China has been active and open towards cooperation with the US. "China has been active and open towards cooperation with the US. Since the epidemic began, the health authorities of the two sides have been in close communication on policies, timely exchanging information on the epidemic, with the heads of the departments having talks

through phone calls and messages," he said.

Geng stated that the Chinese and American departments of disease control, medical R&D and technology as well as scientists have also been engaging in various forms of exchanges.

"We welcome foreign experts' participation in the China-WHO Joint Mission, including those from the US. US President Trump and Secretary of Health Alex Azar commended China's transparent handling of the epidemic on many occasions," he said.

China will continue working with the international community, including the US, to jointly tackle the epidemic and uphold global health security," he added.

Contrary to Kudlow's remarks US President Trump is reported to have praised China's response.

"I think they've handled it professionally and I think they're extremely capable and I think President Xi is extremely capable," he said.

"We're working with them. We're sending a lot of people," Trump is quoted as saying by the international media.

Death toll in China's coronavirus nears 1,500 with 5,090 new cases



KJM VARMA

BEIJING, FEB 14 (PTI): The death toll in China's novel coronavirus outbreak has spiked to nearly 1,500 with 121 new fatalities reported mostly from the worst-affected Hubei province while the confirmed cases of infection jumped to nearly 65,000, health officials said on Friday.

The hard-hit Hubei province, the epicentre of the outbreak, has reported 116 new fatalities and reported 4,823 new confirmed cases on Thursday, the provincial health commission said on Friday.

The death toll in China's coronavirus epidemic has gone up to 1,488, the health officials said on Friday.

The National Health Commission said, with 5,090 new cases the total number of confirmed coronavirus cases soared up to 64,894 as of Thursday.

The commission said

it received reports of 121 deaths on Thursday with 5,090 new confirmed cases of novel coronavirus infection from 31 provincial-level regions.

Among the deaths, 116 were in Hubei Province, two in Heilongjiang, and one in Anhui, Henan and Chongqing respectively, the commission said.

The number of new cases in Hubei Province included 3,095 clinically diagnosed cases, which have been seen as confirmed cases. The new deaths also include eight who were clinically diagnosed.

The latest report brought the total confirmed cases in Hubei province to 51,986, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

The World Health Organisation on Thursday said a sharp rise of 254 cases of COVID-19 (official name for coronavirus) cases in China, due to a change in counting

methods, did not represent a big shift in the epidemic.

Of the 254, Hubei and its provincial capital Wuhan reported 242 deaths, the single highest in a day so far.

"This does not represent a significant change in the trajectory of the outbreak," Michael Ryan, head of WHO's health emergencies programme, told a press conference in Geneva.

"We're not dealing, from what we understand, with a spike in cases of 14,000 on one day," he said.

"This increase that you've all seen in the last 24 hours is largely, in part, down to a change in how the cases are being reported," Ryan also said he expected members of a WHO-led international mission to China to arrive over the weekend.

Already 15-member advance WHO team has arrived in China on Monday.

Born on a boat: new baby among 87 rescued off Canary Islands

MADRID, FEB 14 (AFP): A baby born on a rickety boat bound for the Canary Islands was one of 87 migrants picked up by rescuers overnight, Spanish rescuers said on Friday.

The migrants, all of them from sub-Saharan Africa, were travelling on three boats which were picked up just south of the island of Gran Canaria, a spokeswoman for the Salvamento Maritimo rescue service said.

"A new-born baby was rescued and it seems that the mother gave birth in the boat just beforehand," she told AFP, without specifying the sex of the infant but saying both mother and baby were "doing well".

There were 54 people in the first two boats which were picked up on Thursday evening about 60 nautical miles south of Gran Canaria, and rescuers came across another vessel carrying 33 people as they were just off the island, she said.

Among those rescued were 30 women, six babies and four other chil-

dren, while the rest were men, with all taken to the southern port of Arguinerin, she said.

In early January, another baby born aboard a makeshift boat carrying 43 migrants did not survive the journey and was declared dead on arrival on the island of Lanzarote.

In January, the number of migrants reaching the Canaries soared to 708 -- 18 times the level of a year ago when it stood at 40, government figures showed, raising fears of a resurgence of migrant traffic to the Atlantic islands, a route taken by tens of thousands of people a decade ago.

As Morocco has waged a crackdown on illegal immigration, there has been an increasing number of people trying to reach the Spanish islands by boat from Mauritania, whose coastline lies 1,000 kilometres (600 miles) to the south.

As well as the Canaries route, other migrants have sought to sail to mainland Spain from Algeria's northern coast.

Erdogan raises Kashmir in Pak Parliament, says issue close to both countries



BY SAJJAD HUSSAIN ISLAMABAD, FEB 14 (PTI): Notwithstanding India's objection, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday once again raked up the Kashmir issue, vowing that Ankara will support Pakistan's stand as it is a matter of concern to both the countries.

Addressing a joint session of Pakistan's Parliament, Erdogan, who arrived here on a two-day visit, announced that Turkey will back Pakistan in its efforts to come out of the Grey List of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) which is meeting this week in Paris.

"I also want to emphasise that we will give support to Pakistan which is subject to political pressure in the Financial Action Task Force meetings," he said on the upcoming meeting of the anti-terror financing watchdog.

Voicing his country's support to Pakistan's stand on the Kashmir issue, he said it can be resolved not through conflict or oppression but on the basis of justice and fairness.

"Our Kashmiri brothers and sisters have suffered from inconvenienc-

es for decades and these sufferings have become graver due to unilateral steps taken in recent times," Erdogan said, apparently referring to India revoking the special status of Jammu and Kashmir in August last year.

"Today, the issue of Kashmir is as close to us as it is to you (Pakistanis).

"Such a solution (on the basis of justice and fairness) will serve the interests of all parties concerned. Turkey will continue to stand by justice, peace and dialogue in the resolution of the Kashmir issue," the president said.

The Turkish President, in his address, likened the "struggle" of the Kashmiris with that of his country in the World War I against foreign domination.

Drawing comparison with the battle of Gallipoli which was fought in Turkey between the Allied Powers and the Ottoman Empire in which over two lakh troops were killed on the both sides, Erdogan said "there is no difference between Gallipoli and Kashmir".

"Turkey will continue to raise its voice against

the oppression," he told Pakistani lawmakers in his address to the National Assembly and Senate, which was his record fourth address to the Pakistani Parliament over the years.

In September last year, Erdogan raised the Kashmir issue during his address at the United Nations General Assembly.

Reacting to his remarks in the UN, India said it "deeply regrets" the statement of Turkey on the Kashmir issue, and termed it an internal matter.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Ravesh Kumar called upon Turkey to have a proper understanding of the situation in Kashmir before making further comments.

India revoked Jammu and Kashmir's special status on August 5. Reacting to India's move, Pakistan downgraded diplomatic ties with New Delhi and expelled the Indian High Commissioner.

India has always maintained that Jammu and Kashmir is its integral part and ruled out any third party mediation, including either from the UN or the US, saying it is a bilateral issue with Pakistan.

Final appeal over Pell child sex conviction set for March

SYDNEY, FEB 14 (AFP): The final appeal by Cardinal George Pell against his child sex abuse convictions will be held by Australia's High Court on March 11-12, the court announced Friday.

It is the final avenue for the 78-year-old -- who is serving a six-year sentence for sexually assaulting two choirboys in a Melbourne cathedral in the 1990s -- to get out of jail.

The former Vatican treasurer, who once helped elect popes, was found guilty by a jury in December 2018 of five charges of abusing the choirboys when he was the archbishop of Melbourne.

He was sentenced the following March and lost a first appeal in August in Victoria state's Court of Appeal in a landmark decision that saw the judges split in a 2-1 verdict.

That division -- which saw two judges back the jury's verdict and the dissenting judge side with

Pell -- is at the forefront of his latest bid to overturn the convictions.

The case pitted the most senior convicted Catholic child molester against a former choirboy now in his 30s, who two of the judges found to be "very compelling" and someone who "was clearly not a liar, was not a fantasist and was a witness of truth".

The third judge, however, found the victim's account "contained discrepancies" and there was a "significant possibility" Pell did not commit the offences.

Court documents show his legal team are mounting two grounds of appeal, with the key argument being that the majority judges applied an "erroneous judicial method" in "upholding with the jury's verdict".

The second contends there was not enough time for Pell to have molested the boys in the priests' sacristy during a five to six minute period

after Sunday Mass ended and the area became a "hive of activity".

The High Court receives about 500 appeal applications each year but only agrees to hear about 35.

A spokesman said the High Court justices could announce a ruling on Pell's appeal at the end of the two-day hearing, or withhold judgement to a later date.

During Pell's trial under a court-ordered veil of secrecy, the Vatican gradually removed him from top Church bodies with little explanation.

Shortly after his conviction, Pell was removed from the so-called C9 Council of Cardinals that are effectively the Pope's cabinet and inner circle of advisers.

The Vatican later dropped him as the church's finance chief but said it would avoid launching an investigation into his conduct until after all legal avenues are exhausted.

Bopanna-Shapovalov pair enters semifinals in Rotterdam

ROTTERDAM, FEB 14 (PTI): India's Rohan Bopanna and his Canadian partner Denis Shapovalov advanced to the men's doubles semifinals of the ABN Amro World Tennis Tournament with an impressive win over fourth seeds Jean-Julien Rojer and Horia Tecau here.

The unseeded Indo-Canadian combine beat the Romanian-Dutch pairing of

Tecau and Rojer 6-2, 3-6, 10-7 in a quarterfinal played on Thursday.

Bopanna and Shapovalov had a decent first serve percentage of 67 and won three of the seven break points on offer.

They next meet the winners of the quarterfinal between Henri Kontinen and Jan-Lennard Struff, and, Jamie Murray and Neal Skupski.

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SO FRESH! The Euphoria star, Zendaya rocks an all beige outfit at the Launch of Solar Dream event hosted by Fendi in NYC.

Can't be like actors who memorise lines and leave, my struggle is to sustain quality: Neeraj Kabi

MUMBAI, FEB 14 (PTI): "Sacred Games" star Neeraj Kabi says the struggle for him now is to remain consistent in his work everyday without taking anything for granted.

Neeraj, who featured in "Ship of Theseus", "Talvar" and most recently "Sacred Games", said he is finally getting the kind of work he has been dreaming all his life.

"The struggle is to sustain the quality. When I look at my work and the kind of responses I'm blessed with, I feel I need to do so much more. You go on a set like any other worker, who has to struggle to create this. When you approach your life like that, you don't take anything for granted at all," the actor told PTI.

"Sometimes I look at other actors who are so chilled out on sets, who take their lines on the spot, memorise and then perform. I ask myself, 'why shouldn't I do that?' Then you tell yourself that this isn't why you've come here," he added.

The 51-year-old actor has found a new voice with digital steaming shows and movies. He featured in the romantic-drama "Once Again" and will be on Netflix's latest, "Taj Mahal 1989". The series explores themes of love, friendship, politics and heartbreak.

"There's a lot of opportunity on the web that you couldn't imagine some years ago.

People are experimenting at a fast rate. Today when offers come your way, you have a choice to do something new. Such a wide range of characters are being created without any fear of losing money thanks to these platforms," Neeraj says. The actor credits the changing psychology of the audience for ensuring makers come up with better content.



"They are filtering a lot. They are demanding new things and that for an actor becomes beautiful. I'm in a beautiful space where you're able to select the kind of roles you want to play."

The Lucknow-set series will encompass the old-world charm of love and the complicated nature of relationships in small town India. Apart from Neeraj, it also stars Geetanjali Kulkarni, Danish Hussain, Sheeba Chaddha, Anud Singh Dhaka, Anshul Chauhan, Paras Priyadarshan. For Neeraj, the series offered another chance to explore romantic after "Once Again".

"The fact that this was a love story made me say yes. When I met the director, I realised he had a clear idea of what he wanted from the film. His command over hindi and urdu was excellent. The script, the dialogues were a delight for an actor to read," he added.

ARIES You are not where you envisioned you would be, yet you are exactly where you need to be. Embrace the beauty of being in the now. Embrace the beauty of becoming. The best part about this phase of your life is that it is holding space for you to heal old wounds. Honour the lessons that are alleviating your soul's journey towards the light, Aries. Cosmic tip: You are integrating important soul lessons.

TAURUS: Things to remember now and forever: you're a goddamn catch, baby, and anybody would be lucky to have you by their side. So don't sell yourself short or settle for anything less than what you deserve. This month, you're being asked to understand the balance between giving and receiving. Cosmic tip: Find a balance between giving and receiving.

GEMINI: Given that you are growing and evolving, there is no reason your idea of the perfect romance won't evolve with you. Embrace the becoming, Gemini. As you do, let go of your attachment to who you used to be. There is comfort in familiarity, but familiarity does not lead to newer territories.

Cosmic tip: You are stepping into a new phase.

CANCER: You know what it's like to feel loved and appreciated. You know what it is like to be with somebody who makes you feel like the best version of yourself. So why are you settling for less-than-perfect? Why are you allowing others to overstep your boundaries and take advantage of the goodness in your heart? Cosmic tip: Love yourself like nobody's watching.

LEO: It's easy to pretend like everything is perfect on paper, because this helps create an illusion, and illusions help you stay in the territory of comfort. But what if your relationship needs a bit of discomfort? Don't be afraid to spill some truth tea, Leo. Find the courage you need to talk about the tough stuff. Trust that you will only grow and evolve from here. Cosmic tip: Freedom is the new black.

VIRGO: You are realising that giving and receiving love freely is a part of your soul's purpose in this time and space dimension. What a wonderful feeling to be able to share that goodness with somebody who has the same values and beliefs as you. The love story you are writing together will go down in the pages of history, Virgo. Cosmic tip: The cards are talking about birth,

Excited to be able to share my story with my fans: Sania Mirza on biopic

BY SHUBHA DUBEY

MUMBAI, FEB 14 (PTI): Tennis star Sania Mirza says she is excited about bringing her life story to the screen and is currently in talks with directors.

It was announced last year that Sania, the only Indian women to win a Grand Slam title (in doubles), has signed a contract with Ronnie Screwala's RSVP movies. "I've had some meetings with directors and that's why I was in Mumbai... It's still in the initial stages, Sania said about the film.

The sports star said she has always lived her life on her terms and it would be interesting for her to see her fans' reaction to her journey.

"Anybody who has followed my career, they know that I wear my heart on my sleeves. I'm not scared, it's exciting for me to be able to tell my story and for people to be able to watch, she told PTI. Sania, 33, believes athletes make for a good movie subject as people can relate to their struggle and hardwork.

"The hard work that goes into the making of an athlete, a lot of people can relate to it in different ways. We all work hard but when you play a sport, you actually work through sweat and blood.

Everybody loves champions. "Also, a lot of sports personalities, including me, come from a humble background. From having almost nothing to going into becoming huge champions and representing our country, our lives are very relatable," she said. Sania was talking on the

feels it is her responsibility to contribute to the betterment of society and help the locals. "As a public figure, I have a sense of responsibility. We have to contribute to the society in whatever way possible. I always try and set the right example and go with my heart.



sidelines of Lakme Fashion Week Summer/Resort 2020, where she walked the ramp for designer Rina Singh's label Eka.

The collection was a collaboration between Eka and Telangana State Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society Ltd (TSCO). Sania said as a public figure she

And that's how I live my life.

"So when I support this show, it is not just about fashion, it's something that's close to your heart. It was humbling to see the weavers there. It was amazing to be able to contribute to this cause, she said.

Madhubala biopic put on hold over family's opposition, says sister

BY JUSTIN RAO

MUMBAI, FEB 14 (PTI): Screen icon Madhubala's sister has revealed that a biopic that was planned on the late star with Imtiaz Ali attached as a director is not moving forward because of family's opposition.

Madhubala's sister, Madhur Brij Bhushan, said the biopic, which was to be announced on Friday on the star's 87th birth anniversary, isn't happening as of now.

"They (the family) are saying please don't go ahead with it but we will make it. Some way or the other, we will convince them and make it," Madhur told PTI. Madhur said while Ali has terminated his current contract, she's not sure the director will be attached to the project in the future.

"I wouldn't know if he would be still attached. He terminated the contract because of my family. He's a gentleman, I have nothing against him. When he saw that the family isn't agreeing, he must've felt... May be for the time being he has put it aside, he may reconsider it, you never know."

Madhur said the children of her sister, Kaneez, aren't letting her speak to Kaneez to get the required No Objection Certificate (NoC).

"I am trying my best. Her children aren't allowing me to talk to her. She is a 93-year old woman and at that age people talk something which makes no sense so maybe because of that the children aren't willing. I don't know what's happening, why aren't they allowing me to talk to her.

"If they allow me, she will be in a better frame of mind and we will be able to sort it out. She's not in India, she's in New Zealand."

The biopic was planned a year ago and Madhur says they were supposed to make an announcement at that time.

"Unfortunately, it didn't work out because people concerned were busy with their shootings. Then it got further delayed. Then family members opposed it. But I'll try my best to make it and by April-May, you'll get the good news," she added.

Celebrating life and love fuels my creativity: Manish Arora

BY SHUBHA DUBEY

MUMBAI, FEB 14 (PTI): Fashion designer Manish Arora, who has always been vocal about his support for the LGBTQIA+ community, says his passion for diversity drives him to create gender-fluid and inclusive fashion.

According to Arora, it is important for an artiste to celebrate and promote love that is not confined in a boundary.

"I've always celebrated love and diversity, in all its glory and all my collections pay homage to it. I'm so glad to be showcasing and celebrating this love with the LGBTQIA+ family that I'm so proud and passionate about," Arora told PTI on the occasion of Valentine's Day.

The designer believes people from the field of arts have been championing the idea of diversity since always. "Artists from

all walks of life have always been most vocal and passionate about diversity and boundary-less love," he added on the sidelines of the Lakme Fashion Week Summer/Resort 2020. Arora unveiled a gender-neutral and inclusive range of ensembles, titled "We Are Family" at the event.

The presentation carried a Parisian Cabaret vibe with models dressed in Arora's glamorous gowns, leggings, prints, outlandish headgear and makeup along with dramatic footwear. "For me the larger cause and message has always been about celebrating life and love with no boundaries. That inspires and fuels my passion and creativity," the designer said.

"I have always been vocal about my love for freedom and diversity and I think the arts have always been a pioneer when it comes to vocalising their feeling," he added.

Robert Pattinson makes first appearance as Batman in new video

LOS ANGELES, FEB 14 (PTI):

Filmmaker Matt Reeves has revealed the first look of Robert Pattinson as The Batman from his upcoming film about the iconic DC superhero.

The filmmaker took to Twitter to share the first camera test for the upcoming film, titled "The Batman".

In the short clip, Pattinson, dressed as the caped crusader, is approaching towards the camera that is set in a dark room saturated in red light.

First capturing the superhero's official logo on the chest, the camera then moves upward to show the actor with the iconic cowl. All this while, Michael Giacchino's thunderous and emphatic score is ringing aloud in the background.

Pattinson is taking on a part that was previously played by the likes of Michael Keaton, George Clooney, Christian Bale and Ben Affleck, among others.

Joining him in the film are Paul Dano as The Riddler, Zoe Kravitz as Catwoman, Jeffrey Wright as Commissioner Gordon, Colin Farrell as Penguin and Peter Sarsgaard in a mystery role.

Giacchino, who previously collaborated with Reeves on "Let Me In" (2010), "Dawn of the Planet of the Apes" (2014) and "War for the Planet of the Apes" (2017), is providing the background music.

The "Batman" is scheduled to be released on June 21, 2021.

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