



**'BROOKLYN NINE-NINE'
TO CONCLUDE WITH
SEASON EIGHT**
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RESCUING VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING

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**JACK BLACK JOINS CAST OF
'BORDERLANDS' MOVIE**

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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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READ AND GROW

Book Fair cum Book Donation Drive by Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's SKM Students Wing was inaugurated by Urban Development Minister, Arun Upreti, today at MG Marg. The book fair, which will conclude on 14 Feb, has books from 13 recognized languages of the state along with stalls from publishing houses from outside the state.

3 new cases, 19 vaccinated

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 12 FEB:

Nineteen persons were vaccinated for COVID-19 in Sikkim on Friday. The vaccination was carried out only at Rangpo Primary Health Centre in the East District, where 19 persons have taken the vaccine.

In the meantime, Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 has reached 6116 with three new cases of novel coronavirus reported in the last 24 hours in the State. On the

other hand, four more patients of COVID-19 were discharged from isolation facilities on Thursday to improve the figure of recovered cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim to 5824. There are now only 61 active cases of novel coronavirus in the State.

In his daily health bulletin on Friday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia informed that three new cases of novel coronavirus were reported in the testing of 155 samples on

Thursday. He added that all new cases were found in the RT-PCR testing of 133 samples, while 14 samples tested by TrueNat and eight samples through rapid antigen testing were reported negative for COVID-19.

While giving details of new cases, he informed one person from Zero Point, Rangrang, North District, one from Tibet Road, Gangtok, East District and one from Bermiok-Martam, West District tested positive for COVID-19.

Broken Wings to tell story of love amidst Gorkhaland andolan

SAGAR CHETTRI GANGTOK, 12 FEB:

Touted as the first Nepali-Hindi Bollywood film from the Hills, 'Broken Wings' is all set to hit OTT platform and even the big screen in Sikkim and other parts of the country in the next few months.

Around 2 hours and 07 minutes long, the feature film is a tragic love story directed by Shennenn Khymnar and produced under the banner of A Monk & The Warrior Production. The film is mainly inspired by true incidents that took place between 1986 to 1992 during the Gorkhaland agitation in Darjeeling hills.

Broken Wings is the directorial debut of Shennenn Khymnar, who is also the producer and scriptwriter of the film. He established his production house, A Monk and the Warrior Productions in 2008 and has already made documentary films and



Broken Wings is his first feature film. This Hindi, Nepali, English and Bangla mix feature film features veteran Bollywood actor, Vinay Pathak and has debutants Endo Mrinal and Sunakshi Grover in lead roles and many other new artists from Darjeeling hills and Sikkim. Addressing a press conference here this afternoon, Shennenn Khymnar said, "I am originally from Darjeeling and went to the United States 25 years back, so I had

witnessed the Darjeeling agitation for Gorkhaland in 1986 during my teenage years. This film is not based on true incidents but inspired by true incidents to tell untold stories of struggles and pain of the people of hills."

Darjeeling has been shown in many feature films in romantic versions all the time, but it is time for the people to know about the pain and struggle of the people of hills, he said. He added that this feature film

has a tragic love story to show the pain in the heart of the hills.

"Youth of our hills are full of talent in all areas, but they still lack the proper platforms and opportunities. So, as a social and moral responsibility I took a big risk to take out this feature film by taking fresh and young artists from the Darjeeling and its surrounding hills," he said.

Mr Khymnar mentioned that the film got delayed due to the pandemic but now the

feature film has been completed.

"The film has come out well and the people of the hills would be proud of this film as world-class equipment and top technicians of the country used in Bollywood and Hollywood were used for shooting and all post-production works have been done in the best studios of the country," he said. He added that the film has been made for the international audience. **turn to pg02**

JUS mourns passing away of Samiran Chettri 'Priyadarshi'

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 12 FEB:

Journalists' Union of Sikkim [JUS] has expressed deep sorrow on the demise of an eminent Nepali writer and senior journalist, Samiran Chettri 'Priyadarshi' who passed away at his residence at Kolanari in Siliguri this morning. He was 86.

A JUS press release conveys that JUS and the entire media community of Sikkim mourns

the passing away. He leaves behind a daughter, a son and grandchildren.

The late Mr Chettri was conferred the Khangchendzonga Kalam Puraskar in 2015 and had started his journalism career with the Nepali newspaper Nivedan in 1983.

JUS remembers him as a dedicated scribe, who, in his over three decades in the

profession, edited several Nepali newspapers like Himali Abha Dainik, Himalchuli, Darjeeling Times, Himali Bela and Jhilkha.

He started his literary journey in 1964 and is was conferred the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2009 for his collection of stories, Gairi Gaon ki Chameli, and had also received the first Padre Ganga Prasad Pradhan

Patrakarita Puraskar in 2005, it is informed.

The late Mr Chettri contributed regular columns and articles in several newspapers and journals and in 2018, he was also awarded with Kashiraj Pradhan Lifetime Journalism Award.

We, the press fraternity, would like to extend our deepest condolences to the bereaved family, the release adds.

SABA felicitates Jaslal Pradhan on election to Boxing Federation of India



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 12 FEB:

Sikkim Amateur Boxing Association organised a felicitation programme to fete Jaslal Pradhan, the first Sikkimese to hold the position of vice president Boxing Federation of India and president East Zone Boxing Federation of India.

Mr Pradhan was elected as vice president and president of the two organisations at

elections held on 02 January at Gurugram, Haryana.

Mr Pradhan, an Arjuna awardee, is a former champion boxer and retired from the Indian army.

Also felicitated today were Kuber Pradhan and CR Pradhan.

The event had Advisor, Sports and Youth affairs Department, Meg Nath Sharma, along with Kuber Bhandari of Sikkim

Olympic Association.

Addressing the gathering, Mr Jaslal Pradhan expressed gratitude towards SABA and encouraged the youth to focus on sports not only to secure a nice career, but also to achieve good health.

Mr. Bhandari also spoke at a length about the need for parents to extend encouragement and support towards the children and their passion for sports.

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15-day Rukum Taar Eco Tourism Fest begins in celebration of Sherpa Losar



AARON RAI

GANGTOK, 12 FEB:

Rukum Taar Eco Tourism cum 15-day Sherpa Losar Festival 2021 began today at Rukum Taar under Temi Namphing constituency which is located between Ganchung village and Tendong hill.

Chief Guest, Tourism Minister BS Panth, who is also the area MLA, announced that 20 homestays would be provided to Ganchung village under the mega project to be launched by the Sikkim government in April this year.

Rukum Gangjung Tourism Development Society organizes the Sherpa Losar Festival every year.

turn to pg02

Adieu, Samiran Chhetri 'Priyadarshi'

INMEMORIAM SUBASH RAI

A sad text flashed on my cell phone at around 7 am today - Samiran Chhetri 'Priyadarshi' was no more.

I was shocked by the news but after a while was calmed by the thoughts of the incredible things he had achieved in his life! Because he had gifted enough lessons to me and also to the upcoming generations [especially those who are in the field of literature and journalism].

My first meeting with Samiran 'Daju' was at a press conference of former Chief Minister of Sikkim, Late Nar Bahadur Bhandari at Hotel Tibet, Hospital Dara in the mid 90's. As an employee of Sikkim Observer owned by Jigmi N Kazi [Jigmila], it was my first assignment in journalism.

In our official briefing, Jigmila had directed me to tag along with senior journalists like Samiran Chhetri and others, and to note down every word said by Mr Bhandari.

One thing to be mentioned here is that during the 90's the only weekly paper used to be published from Sikkim. This could be the reason why almost all the press conferences used to be called after 8 pm only. I was fortunate to sit alongside Samiran Daju, who would have a glass filled with Whisky in his



right hand as he asked Late Mr. Bhandari why he lost the 1994 elections?

After every question, Samiran Daju used to tell me, "Note down everything, what he [Mr. Bhandari] is saying. I'll take all the details from you."

It was around 11 pm inside Hotel Tibet's conference hall, Samiran Daju said, "Subash bhai, maathi gari samma purai dew."

I looked around. I was alone and was the youngest scribe to get him to the road, where a white Gypsy was parked to take him home.

From this meeting, I became his favourite 'chela', and used to visit his home frequently.

In the early 2000s, I was employed with Gangtok Times under Late CD Rai. Samiran Daju

had started staying out of the media circle but his articles used to be published in various newspapers and also in book form. During this time, I met his son, Roshan Chhetri, who is one of the pioneers in newspaper designing. I got the opportunity to learn most of the newspaper designing skills [Pagemaker, Photoshop, Prakasak, etc.] from him. Because of this relationship, I would often meet Samiran Daju at his Deorali School Road residence. Later, he would spend most of his time at his Siliguri residence, where he breathed his last this morning.

After meeting Roshan Daju, my relationship with Samiran Daju transitioned to 'Baba-Chora' from 'Daju-Bhai'.

"Newspaper ma kaam garera paisa kamaunu sakdaina tara Zindagi ma naam chai baanchi rahancha hai," Samiran Daju told me in 2009, when I interviewed him for Sikkim NOW! just a day after he was conferred with the Sahitya Academy Award for his book 'Gairi Gaon ki Chameli'.

At the age of 86, Samiran Baba has left more than a dozen literary works for Nepali scholars and a Nepali weekly newspaper 'Zhilka' for upcoming journalists. Rest in peace 'Priyadarshi'!

Cleanliness drive by Pragati Sangh



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 12 FEB:

A cleanliness drive was organized by Pragati Sangh on the occasion of Losar in Tokal Bermiok today.

The main aim of the drive was to clean the area and create awareness regarding cleanliness, a press release informs.

The plastic wrappers

and bottles lying scattered in the area and roadside were collected during the event. The waste collected was transported to dumping area in Phongla.

Pragati Sangh is a group composed of 20 volunteer students from Tokal Bermiok region along with Primary Teacher, Nevika Kafley and Devi Basnet.

Muk Zek Ding Rum Faat celebrated by SLYA

SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 12 FEB:

Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association [SLYA] celebrated the indigenous ritualistic festival - Muk Zek Ding Rum Faat - near Pangthang Junior High School, East Sikkim, today, a press release informs.

This ritualistic festival which is a prayer offering to Mother Nature for its bountiful blessings, not only for humans but also for animals, birds and insects was performed



by prominent Bongthing of Sikkim, Sangay Romgkup (Labi), Nim Tshering Rongkup (Nandok) and Dup Tshering Rongkup (Tathangchen).

On the sidelines of this ritualistic

festival some cultural and literary items like Lepcha folk dances, poetry recitation were also performed by the students of schools and colleges. Besides a book titled 'Meeglot' a collection of Poem

authored by Ongchen Rongkup was also released during the occasion.

The festival was also addressed by various dignitaries like TN Densapa, OT Lepcha (MP, Rajya Sabha), Chewang Rinzing Lepcha (Chairman, PTWB) and Y T Lepcha (MLA, Gangtok).

All the dignitaries in their address congratulated the Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association for organizing the festival and assured every possible help from the government.

Optimised resource management and infrastructure development will propel Tea industry, opine experts

Gangtok, 12 Feb (PIB): Entrepreneurial Talent add to Capacity Building of Tea Industry with bolstered efforts of 'Stand Up India- Startup India', experts opined in a Webinar organised by Press Information Bureau, Guwahati on the topic 'Infrastructure including Waterways, Roads and Railways Growth impetus to Tea Industry' here today. Experts from Industry, Government sector along with academicians deliberated and discussed about the potential of North East from cultural, socio-economic growth, development and policy perspective.

Psychologist, Sayantani Sinha said that Infrastructure provides the competitive advantage to Tea industry in marketability. She said that Tea Industry has very environment friendly growth and employment to the local entrepreneurial talent adds to colony and Human Resources Development in tea cultivation region. She said that Market demand analysis for domestic and international market along with market segmentation for various customers adds to the market potential of tea. She said that Government initiatives in infrastructure such

as the Rupsi Airport in Assam, Pakyong Airport in Sikkim, Lumding-Hojai Rail doubling project (about 45 km) in Assam, work on roads Kalitakuchi to Barpeta (about 58.5 km) and Tamulpur to Paneri (about 43 km) would provide impetus to tea marketability.

Assistant Professor, Prof (Dr) Mohd Jamshed, Department of Management, Jamia Hamdard University, New Delhi said that Tea Industry has tremendous market potential. He said that Tea entrepreneurial opportunities are evolving as market is also huge. He said that proper resource utilisation including timely market strategy with infrastructure development is playing as vital export potential of the country. He said that Assam along with Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, North Dinaipur and Cooch Behar has the climate and strategic advantage for marketability to foreign countries. He said that tea gardens provide employment opportunities and the vistas of entrepreneurial and marketing activities are also evolving.

Assistant Professor, Pallavi Gogoi, University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya said that Tea is not

just energizing or an aromatic beverage, it is also related to culture of Assam. Talking about Rajasthan and Assam and Government awareness initiatives on 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat', she said that any guests coming to a house are welcomed and tea is regarded as a beverage for hospitality. She said that tea garden adds to the value-addition of other allied business opportunities for youth such as eco-tourism, medical tourism and adventure tourism. She said that the tea gardens have potential for employment to women and thereby, the society has socio-economic development.

Media and Communication Officer, Smita Saikia, PIB Guwahati said that consumption of tea in a region adds to the local tea market potential. She said that infrastructure development with supple and nimble connectivity with markets adds to the timely Tea management including productivity. Talking about Government efforts including 'Stand Up India- Startup India', she said that connectivity via roads, air and rivers with market strategy is vital for development of Tea Industry. She said that optimised, efficient,

productive and effective connectivity adds to its timely marketability.

Field Publicity Officer, W Panthoibi Singha, Field Outreach Bureau, Tezpur said that Tea industry has various disciplined and timely activities with process optimisation emphasis. She said that efficacy of processes with better work management including work environment for this labour-intensive industry has huge potential for value-addition in production. She said that strategic effect on entrepreneurial talent management too.

The webinar was managed and coordinated by Joint Director, Samrat Bandyopadhyay, PIB, Guwahati.

The interactive Webinar had enthusiastic participation of students, academicians and Industry fraternity of Assam and North East. Field Exhibition Officer, Hiramani Das, Regional Outreach Bureau, Guwahati welcomed all as the webinar delved into details on the various aspects of the topic such as Tea Industry of NE and its entrepreneurial potential, Culture, Infrastructure and socio-economic development of North Eastern region, among others.

Odisha Assembly to go paperless next week, some other states to follow

BHUBANESWAR, 12 FEB [PTI]: The Odisha Legislative Assembly is all set to go paperless with the implementation of the 'e-Vidhan project' from the upcoming budget session starting on February 18, an official said today.

Speaker SN Patro held a review meeting with the government officials during the day before adoption of the electronic process, he said.

"From the governor's address to the budget presentation, questions and the proceedings of the Assembly will be through National e-Vidhan Application

(NeVA)," Mr Patro said. The state budget for 2021-22 will be presented in the Assembly on February 22.

NeVA aims at bringing all the legislatures of the country on a single platform, creating a massive data depository.

Paperless Assembly or e-Assembly is a concept involving the use of electronic devices to facilitate proceedings in the House, the official said. It enables automation of the entire law-making process, tracking of documents and sharing of information.

Assembly secretary

Dasarathi Satapathy made a presentation on the 'e-Vidhan' initiative during the meeting.

Finance secretary AK Meena and electronics and information technology department secretary Manoj Kumar Mishra were also present there.

With the adoption of the new process, the state government will be able to reduce its expenditure, the Speaker said.

A technical team of NeVA will be present in the House during the budget session, the official said.

Mr Patro has convened an all-party

meeting on February 17, a day before the beginning of the budget session, he added.

Union Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs is the 'nodal ministry for the implementation of 'e-Vidhan'.

A memorandum of understanding for the implementation of NeVA has been signed with Bihar (Assembly and Council), Punjab, Odisha, Meghalaya, Manipur, Gujarat, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Puducherry, Tripura.

NeVA project has been sanctioned for Punjab, Odisha, Bihar (both Assembly and Council) and Nagaland.

Edu Dept holds district level coordination meeting



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 12 FEB:

Three days long district level coordination meeting cum school visits programme was organised by Education Department, East District, in collaboration with State Project Office Samagra Shiksha from 09 to 11 Feb, a press release informs.

On the first day of the programme on 09 Feb, a district level coordination meeting was held at the conference hall of Regu BAC. The meeting was chaired by Secretary Education Department, Anil Raj Rai.

The main agenda of the meeting was to review the reports of activities done, works in progress of the district and the blocks for the academic session

2020-21 and also to discuss their needs and concerns, and set a plan for upcoming session 2021-22, the release mentions.

The block level annual reports were presented by block officials of ten BACs under East District. Block profile, activities undertaken, achievements, future planning and issues related to shortage of manpower in schools, construction and repairing of schools building, refresher training for HOIs and teachers were placed in the presentation.

After the presentations, an interactive session was initiated where various issues were raised and discussed in detail. Some of the major issues

that were brought to light were; registration and status of private schools, admission Drive, collection of valid and authentic data.

On 10 February four school visit teams were constituted and different schools under Regu, Rhenock, Parakha, Pakyong and Duga BAC were visited by the officials from Head, District, Block Office and SCERT.

Similarly, on 11 February the team headed by Director Elementary Education cum SPD Samagra Shiksha, Joint Director Elementary Education cum Samagra Shiksha, Joint Director East, Deputy Director Sports, State Yoga

Coordinator and officials of BAC Rakdong Tintek visited Machelakha PS, Tumin SS and Samdong Sr Sec School. The team also attended the inaugural programme of self-defence training of girl students of all government schools of Sikkim held at Samdong Sr Sec school on the day.

The objective of the visit was to take stock of the available infrastructure, teaching learning activities of the schools and to facilitate and support the schools. As desired by the district head such visits and inspections in schools shall be made routine programme under East District to provide academic and administrative support to the schools in upcoming session, the release adds.

Broken Wings to tell story....

He mentioned that talks are on to release the film on OTT platform of Netflix soon and will also be released on the big screen at Vajra in Sikkim and theatres in other parts of the country and even abroad.

"I think I took a brave step and risk to highlight untold stories. I think we should not only complain, but tell stories intellectually as well," he said.

Mr Khymzar mentioned that the film was shot mainly in his hometown, Kurseong and some parts in Siliguri. He added that 50% of artists in the film are freshers from Darjeeling and its neighbouring hills.

He also said that he has stories ready to be filed for the next 15 years while scripts of six films are ready. He added that his next feature film would be a true story titled "Patleybas" and if everything goes well then the shooting will be held in Sikkim.

Lead actors, 20-year-old Endo Mrinal expressed his happiness and satisfaction on getting the opportunity to work with a veteran actor like Vinay Pathak and other experts in the film line. He also stated it was a great experience to witness post-production work of the film in Mumbai.

"I have watched videos available on YouTube of Gorkhaland agitation and other trends of that time to prepare for the film," he said. He stated that the director and the entire team were very supportive during the entire film and the production house also conducted acting workshops for artists of the film.

The press conference was also addressed by musicians of the film, Vedant Raj Baraily and Aswath Rumba and playback singer, Rinchen Tamang. They also expressed their happiness on being part of the film. There are five songs in the film of which four were sung by Rinchen Tamang and one by Aswath Rumba.

15-day Rukum Taar Eco....

Speaking on the occasion, BDO Temi, Prem Kumar Subba who is also advisor of the Organizing Committee, said that the purpose of the program was to introduce the hidden tourist destination of Rukum Taar to the people of Sikkim.

He said that they have been working tirelessly to make the place a major tourist attraction as they see a bright future for the place.

A total of 54 teams are participating in the open football tournament being held during the festival. Traditional food and drink of different communities, Sherpa dance, bird watching, horse riding, are also some of the highlights of the event.

The chief guest also contributed Rs 1 lakh to the organizing committee.

It is informed that Chief Minister, PS Tamang is scheduled to be the chief guest on 19 February.



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.





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BAC level badminton and chess tourney at Yangang



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 12 FEB:
The opening day of the BAC Level Badminton and Chess Tournament organised by Yangang Sports Committee began with a great pomp and fare today at Yangang Senior Secondary School Auditorium. Secretary, Department of Mines

and Geology, Bhuwan Prakash Pradhan, who is also Chief Advisor, Sikkim Chess Association attended the event as its chief guest. He was joined by Sujata Subba, SDM Yangang, Mahendra Dhakal, General Secretary, Sikkim Chess Association, Mukesh Jairu, AE Roads & Bridges,

Yangang Subdivision, Pusparaj Dhungel, Principal, Yangang Senior Secondary School, Panchayat Presidents of Yangang Rangang GPU & Sripatam Gagyang GPU and guests. The primary objective of Yangang Sports Committee is to uplift up and coming sporting talents from Yangang.

India's active COVID-19 cases falls to 1.3 Lakh, only 1 state with over 1,000 cases: Centre

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB [PTI]: India's tally of active COVID-19 cases has fallen to 1.35 lakh comprising only 1.25 per cent of the total infections, while the distribution of new cases in a span of 24 hours shows only one state reporting over 1,000 cases, the Union Health Ministry said today. The distribution of daily deaths among states and union territories also reflects a significant decline with 18 states and union territories not reporting any new deaths in a span of 24 hours. Thirteen states and UTs have reported between 1-5 new deaths, it highlighted.

The country's total active number of cases has seen a sharp decline, falling to 1.35 lakh (1,35,926) and comprises only 1.25 per cent of the total cases. "The day-to-day change of active cases in the last few weeks shows a consistent decline. "The distribution of new cases in India in the last 24 hours shows a positive picture with only one state reporting over 1,000 cases while the rest of the states and UTs reporting less than 1,000 new cases," it said. States and union territories that have not reported any new cases in a span of 24 hours. "The distribution of daily deaths among states and UTs also reflects a significant decline with 18 states

and UTs not reporting any new deaths in a span of 24 hours. A total of 13 states and UTs have reported between 1-5 new deaths," the ministry said. The ministry said while 9,309 new confirmed cases were recorded in a span of 24 hours in the country, 15,858 new recoveries were registered in the same period. The national recovery rate (97.32 per cent) continues to be one of the highest globally. The continued high rise in the recoveries has led to progressively improving national recovery rate, the ministry underlined. The total recovered cases have surged to 1,05,89,230. "The gap between active and recovered cases is continuously increasing and stands at 1,04,53,304," it said. Till 8 AM on February 12, over 75 lakh (75,05,010) beneficiaries have received vaccination under the countrywide COVID-19 vaccination exercise. The total cumulative vaccination coverage of 75,05,010 includes 58,14,976 healthcare workers (HCW) and 16,90,034 frontline workers (FLWs). A total of 1,54,370 sessions have been conducted so far. India is the fastest country to cross the 70 lakh (7 million) vaccination mark, the ministry said. On day 27th

(February 11) of the vaccination drive, 4,87,896 beneficiaries (HCWs-1,09,748 and FLWs-3,78,148) were given jabs across 11,314 sessions. The number of beneficiaries being vaccinated everyday has shown a progressive increase, the ministry said. A total of 10 states and UTs have vaccinated 69 per cent of the total beneficiaries. Uttar Pradesh alone accounts for 10.2 per cent (7,63,421) of the total beneficiaries, it said. The ministry said 86.89 per cent of the newly recovered cases are recorded in six states. Maharashtra has contributed the highest number to the newly recovered cases (6,107), followed by Kerala (5,692) and Chhattisgarh (848). Also, 79.87 per cent of the new cases are from six states. Kerala has reported the highest daily new cases at 5,281, followed by Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu with 652 and 481 new cases, respectively. A total of 87 case fatalities have been reported in a span of 24 hours. Six states account for 75.86 per cent of these. Maharashtra has reported the maximum fatalities with 25 new deaths, followed by Kerala with 16 new daily deaths.

PM Modi threatens farmers but can't stand up to China: Rahul Gandhi

JAIPUR, 12 FEB [PTI]: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday of trying to clear the path for his "friends" through the three new farm laws, saying he is threatening farmers when he cannot stand up to China. Addressing a farmers' "mahapanchayat" in Pilibanga town of Rajasthan's Hanumangarh district, Mr Gandhi claimed the laws will impact 40 per cent of Indians. After demonetisation and the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the new farm laws are another blow to the people of the country, he said. He also referred to the India-China agreement

on disengagement of troops in eastern Ladakh, alleging that the PM Modi government ceded territory between fingers 3 and 4 on the banks of Pangong lake. "He would not stand before China but threatens farmers. This is the reality of Narendra Modi," Mr Gandhi charged. This was the first of two farmers' meetings organised by the Congress in Rajasthan on Friday. Instead of chairs, cots were placed on the dais for party leaders to sit upon. He was scheduled to speak next in Sri Ganganagar district. Mr Gandhi said the new laws do not affect just the farmers, adding that his party will ensure

that they are withdrawn. "Forty per cent people who include farmers, traders and labourers will be hit by the implementation of the laws," he claimed. "Earlier, it was the demonetisation and I had said it was not a fight against black money, and the backbone of the country was being broken. But people didn't understand this at that time," he said. "Later, it came to be known that loans of three or four persons were waived and your money went to the banks," he said, without substantiating the charge. "After this, the GST was implemented, which was an attack on small and mid-size businesses.

Most businesses in Nepal still operating in the red despite end of lockdown, report says

KRISHANA PRASAIN KATHMANDU, 12 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: Most Nepali businesses are still operating in the red even though the total lockdown imposed by the government to contain the spread of the coronavirus was lifted in July, a study reported. The survey of 37 businesses conducted by the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies from November 2 to December 1 revealed that 89.19 percent of firms are operating partially while 10.81 percent have been closed completely. Among the firms that have shut down, 75 percent are small and micro enterprises. Seventeen small and micro enterprises, 8 small-scale, 4 medium-scale and 8 large-scale businesses and factories were included in the study. According to the report, only 13.22 percent of the businesses surveyed had made a profit. Among the profit-making firms, 66.67 were large-scale enterprises. "Micro, cottage, small and medium-scale firms ran out of cash which resulted in many people losing their jobs," the report said. The firms are facing problems of raw material supply, labour mobilisation and marketisation of their manufactured goods and services, the report said. The Department of Industry said that

the ongoing political situation will have a negative impact on industry and investment that is already having a hard time due to the pandemic. Jiblal Bhusal, director general at the Department of Industry, said the government was expected to launch special programmes and packages to assist the industrial sector in the upcoming fiscal year's budget. "The government is conducting the necessary studies and discussions. A meeting of the revenue advisor committee is going to be held to determine the types of tax subsidies to be provided to the industrial sector," he said. The study has recommended that all subsidies promised by the government be given immediately. "Effective implementation of the monetary policy is a must," Bhusal said. He admitted that there might be procedural delays, and added that things would improve in the coming days. The study included manufacturing enterprises like jewellery, beverage, cement, copper, brass utensils, hydropower, handicraft and readymade garment besides consultancy and other service enterprises. According to the study, industry has not

been able to operate at full capacity even though the lockdown ended last July. The study shows that the production capacity of 54 percent of businesses has declined by 50 percent. Production has fallen by 75 percent among 32.43 percent of businesses while 23.52 percent of cottage industry firms have lost 75 percent of their production. The study also revealed that micro and cottage industry firms saw 82.35 percent of their production being impacted by the pandemic. Similarly, 76.47 percent of micro and cottage industry firms faced problems in accessing raw materials and labour while 88.24 percent of cottage industry firms could not market their production. With regard to small-scale industry, 87.5 percent of the businesses which participated in the study said their production was directly impacted by the pandemic. Half of the medium-scale businesses surveyed also found it difficult to access raw materials, and 75 percent faced problems related to labour mobilisation. Most of the workers employed in micro-scale industry lost their jobs. "More male workers were put out of work compared to female workers," the study said.

Industry insiders had urged the government to provide a special waiver on interest, provide loans at subsidised interest, waive tax, fix electricity charges on the basis of production, extend the repayment period for loans, return value-added tax, provide refinancing service and waive rent in order to put the sector on the recovery path. Electricity charges need to be reduced, the minimum wage should be frozen for at least two years, and excise duty and VAT should be re-evaluated, they added. Micro and cottage industries are expecting policy from the government that can support them. They also want the sector to be declared a peace zone for two years, the report said. Small-scale industry expects the government to prioritise the sector, reduce electricity charges and cancel the energy bills for the period the country was under lockdown, the report said. The customs policy needs to be stabilised and the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) needs to be reviewed, the industrialists said as per the study. The survey has recommended that large-scale industry be provided a complete waiver on advertisement tax for three years and 50 percent waiver on

income tax for three years. A special facility in tax policy needs to be provided to companies impacted by Covid-19, the report has recommended. Multinational companies that have been paying maximum tax and providing employment to a large number of people need to be prioritised while preparing policy, the report said. Customs and VAT waiver on essential raw materials and supporting raw materials for medicine production needs to be provided, the report said. Industry insiders also suggested providing loans at minimum interest after observing the past transactions of the company. The subsidised loan amount provided to large industry needs to be increased, and subsidised loans should be provided for at least two years, they said. Among other recommendations, a special compensation package should be created for projects affected by Covid-19, the financing modality of hydropower projects should be changed, the payment schedule should be revised, and exclusive refinancing should be made available to energy projects to revive the sector hit by the coronavirus pandemic, the report said.

Revered Surma Sarovar in Nepal's Bajhang dries up

BASANTA PRATAP SINGH In early January, Ganesh Bohara, a resident of Surma Rural Municipality in Bajhang, made his way towards Surma Sarovar lake. It was his annual trip to the lake to collect medicinal herbs. But what greeted him when he reached the destination was a dry barren lake bed. "My initial thought was that I must have taken the wrong road and reached somewhere else. The water in the lake has completely dried up, exposing the dry bed with cracks running across the surface," said Bohara. Surma Sarovar, also known as Mini Kailash by Hindus, is a holy lake

in Bajhang district in far western Nepal situated at an altitude of 4,333 metres. To reach there, one has to walk for four days from the district headquarters, Chainpur, across the Chande Shikhar Nagna pass at 4,859 metres above sea level. Hindus believe the lake is the abode of Surma Devi, a Hindu goddess. "The lake used to be at its most beautiful during December-January. It's saddening to see all that beauty gone now. In my more than 15 visits, this is the first time I have seen the lake dried up," said Bohara. Hindu devotees from Bajhang and other hilly

districts of Sudurpaschim Province flock to the lake during major Hindu festivals. The residents of Chhabis Pathibhera, Durgathali and Surma rural municipalities and Jayprithvi Municipality in Bajhang have expressed concerns about the lake drying up. They consider it a bad omen. "The deity must be angry for the lake to dry up completely," said 60-year-old Kuya Bohara in Surma. Nara Bahadur Bohara of Surma Rural Municipality says the lake did not dry up even during the 11-month-long

drought in the area five years ago. Tourists and regular visitors to the lake have also expressed grave concerns about the current state of the lake. "I was there four years ago and the lake was filled with water. There should be a detailed study done to know what happened here. How did the lake dry up?" said Kishwor Khadka, a tourism entrepreneur from Bajhang. According to experts on water issues and climate change, they can ascertain the reasons for the lake drying up only

after conducting a proper study and research. "There could be many reasons but we can't say for sure," said Ajaya Dixit, a water resources engineer who has expertise on issues of water and climate change. "It could be the environmental degradation or the rapid evaporation of water given the increase in temperature in the hilly and mountainous regions. Another reason could be the drying up of water sources in the watershed area of the lake or leakage of water due to some geological changes."

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VACCINATION CLINIC

Rescuing Victims of Trafficking

We all have a responsibility help them heal

Rarely does a week go by without news of missing girls or information arriving about the rescue of others from the web of trafficking. Of course, not every incident of the former kind is of someone being stolen away for trafficking and much as one is relieved by news of the latter kind, that feeling has to be tinged with worry over the fact that human trafficking continues on a disturbing scale. It is important that human trafficking is contained, and there are many agencies devoted to the task. They need to be supported more for their efforts to bear more long-lasting results. Meanwhile, the rehabilitation of victims of trafficking requires more engagement to ensure that they heal, recover and re-assimilate into the society they were stolen away from.

An episode from a few years ago will help establish the argument better. Some years ago, a raid on a Pune brothel led to the rescue of three girls from the region who had been enticed away from their homes while they were still minors and had lived around five years in the brothel suffering horrific abuse. One of the rescued victims was from Sikkim and while the families of the other two victims were contacted and the girls returned home, contact could not be established with the family of the girl from Sikkim for a long while. She was too traumatised from her experience and understandably, in the absence of family members, unwilling to return. She recuperated at a rehabilitation centre in Pune for the physical and psychological trauma suffered during her years as a victim of trafficking. She did not remember the exact address of her parents and was probably from a family of migrant labourers and since the rescue happened at least five years after she had gone “missing” from Sikkim, and since not all missing persons are reported to the police, her family could not be traced. At that time, she was taken in by an NGO and was later engaged as an outreach counselor. Hopefully, she leads a “normal” life now. Despite normalcy being a relative term, even in its most basic interpretations, it, many times, evades survivors of the flesh trade. The mental and physical trauma, the social stigma and the psychological scarring is not something that few months at a half-way home and some months of vocational training can heal. And while conviction of pimps and traffickers is important, it is important to bear in mind that punishing the perpetrators does not heal the survivors. They are more effective in alleviating the society's guilt over having failed the victims and could also serve as deterrents for others planning to prey on the underprivileged.

Human trafficking also holds up the mirror to the society for having failed to keep the vulnerable away from harm. And, if nothing else then as penance for this failure, it should be the collective responsibility of the society at large to help victims get over the trauma. Unfortunately, this battle is invariably lost. Victims of trafficking are almost always from the already underprivileged section of society. Whether they are enticed away by promises of ‘good, well-paying jobs’, blatantly ‘purchased’ to be sold into sexual slavery, of stolen away with promises of marriage, it is their destitution that sets them up as prey. The privation that makes victims out of them, need not always be economic poverty, it can also be a poverty of opportunities or the violence of denial; social conditions that make the victims take risks (by responding to obviously impossible offers), and even make their families ignore the obvious risks of sending them away. The warped sense of priorities of a disinterested society and the still prevalent gender discrimination puts the girl child and women in harm's way. A lot needs to be done to keep them safe.

Meanwhile, it is wrong to believe that pulling victims out of brothels or other abusive conditions is rescuing them. Victims of trafficking go through acute physical and psychological trauma; a change of address is not enough. They have to undergo proper and extensive counseling before they can have a shot at leading normal lives. Many rescued victims have been known to return to prostitution and/or become alcoholics. This is not a reflection on their ‘character’, as many paint it to be, but a manifestation of the societal disinterest in their condition which fails to comfort and rehabilitate them adequately enough. When it comes to victims of trafficking, their rehabilitation demands that they receive, apart from psychological counselling, state support to acquire employable skills and then receive the financial assistance to become economically independent. Deny them these, and they remain defenceless, primed to become victims again.

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Myanmar: Memes and Mantras of a New Generation of Democracy Protesters

RICHARD DOLAN
THECONVERSATION.COM

What do the internet memes Doge and Cheems, the Hollywood film franchise The Hunger Games, and a sachet of instant tea have in common? They are all part of a rich lexicon of protest now being deployed by young activists contesting Myanmar's military coup. The country has been in turmoil after the army took control of the country on February 1, detaining political leaders including the country's popular state counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

As a new generation of protesters take to the streets of the country's towns and cities in growing numbers, they are drawing on a range of internet memes, slogans, cartoons, and cultural symbols to make themselves heard and mobilise support within the country and across the region.

The three-finger salute, initially appropriated from the hugely popular The Hunger Games trilogy by young democracy activists protesting the 2014 military coup in neighbouring Thailand, is their shared signal of defiance, enumerating the need for equality, freedom, and solidarity as they find themselves engaged in a similarly dystopian struggle with an unscrupulous tyrant.

They deploy cartoon characters including Pepe the Frog and the internet memes Doge and Cheems to ridicule senior general Min Aung Hlaing and other junta leaders. Their placards are in English as much as Burmese, and they now set the protest songs employed by previous generations of the country's pro-democracy activists to western rap and hip-hop soundtracks.

Myanmar's young protesters epitomise a culture of transnational activism now favoured by a generation of technically savvy and increasingly cosmopolitan young people intent on resisting the imposition of authoritarian agendas.

SHARING A TASTE FOR (MILK) TEA

As the authorities suspend the internet and block social media platforms such as Facebook, many are resorting to VPN access to get their



message out on Instagram, TikTok and Discord through an avalanche of rapidly mutating hashtags. Likeminded netizens in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Thailand are working in support through the Milk Tea Alliance, a movement pushing for democratic change across south-east Asia and beyond.

This diffuse, largely online, democratic solidarity movement unites young people confronting riot police in downtown Yangon and Mandalay with Thai youth in Bangkok campaigning for reform of the monarchy, pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong contesting Beijing's National Security Law, and young Taiwanese nationalists countering the increased presence of Chinese trolls and bots from the internet cafes of Taipei.

Thai artist Sina Wittayawiroj's illustration of a set of fists defiantly holding aloft steaming cups of milk tea – fast becoming the unofficial logo of the alliance – has now been joined by one bearing the Myanmar flag. Images of Royal Myanmar “Teamix” sachets, featuring its distinctive milky brew much like Thailand's orange-hued and Taiwan's boba tea, are being enthusiastically disseminated on social media and emblazoned on street placards.

Like other members of the alliance, they are quick to blame

China (where tea is of course traditionally served without milk) as they accuse Beijing of lending the Myanmar military logistic support as well as working to undermine democratic rights and freedoms elsewhere in the region.

Solidarity is being expressed by the alliance in other ways. Some young activists in Myanmar are wearing hard hats like the “flashmobs” in Hong Kong, and others have created impromptu “Lennon Walls” on bridges and underpasses redolent of those created by the Umbrella Movement there. These, in turn, were inspired by anti-communist street propaganda in Europe's former Eastern bloc shortly after the assassination of the Beatles front man.

Young members of Thailand's Progressive Movement and anti-establishment organisation Ratsadon (The People) have organised solidarity protests banging pots and pans as anti-coup demonstrators are doing nightly in Myanmar to drive out evil spirits which have torn down their fledgling democracy.

One young aerobics instructor in the the Myanmar capital Naypyidaw happened to record a video of her regular workout session in front of the Burmese government buildings as armoured personnel carriers moved into the shot. This has subsequently been set to an

Indonesian protest anthem which has gone viral.

Art and music are being expertly employed to articulate messages of protest and solidarity that bridge cultural and linguistic divides and unite political interests.

THE PAST IS A FOREIGN COUNTRY

Not for the first time, young people – particularly educated young people – are playing a decisive role in Myanmar's growing civil disobedience movement. Student protests in 1920, 1936, 1962, 1974, 1988, 2007 and 2015 have been part of the long struggle for independence and democracy. They ignited the momentous democratic uprising in 1988, and the so-called “Saffron Revolution” in 2007, when the country's monks joined them on the streets in a defiant show of moral support.

For the most part, these popular uprisings were violently crushed. It is estimated that hundreds if not thousands died in the 1988 uprisings alone. How is this latest expression of dissent likely to be any different? Already we hear of police brutality and with the protests gathering momentum it is likely the authorities will respond with increasing force.

Indeed, the stage is set for just such a confrontation as the commitment of young people – largely innocent of history but with a brief taste of freedom – encounter the dark forces of authoritarian rule that have yet again undermined a democratic future for their beleaguered country.

And yet there is hope that this generation of young activists might succeed where others have failed. They are politically and technically literate. They inhabit a wider world than young pro-democracy activists in Myanmar have done in the past. They have access to new places and spaces of protest thanks to the technological benefits of globalisation. They are actively forging new networks of solidarity and resistance beyond their country and communities. They are, in short, on the right side of history.

[the writer is Post-doctoral researcher, University of Oxford]

How the Pandemic May Damage Children's Social Intelligence

JIANFENG FENG
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Do you remember the excitement and anticipation of your first day at school? Perhaps you were looking forward to making new friends. Or maybe you were shy and anxious. Research shows that such excitement and stress are the two most common reactions to starting school. It is telling that a large part of this emotional response is social.

Children are keen social learners, developing skills such as sharing, conflict solving and empathy at a rapid pace. These days, many children have already attended parent and toddler groups or nursery before they start school. So even if they have no siblings, their emotional and social cognition has already started developing.

But during the COVID-19 lockdowns, many opportunities for social learning have been lost. How will this affect children's development – and what can we do about it?

Brain development begins soon after conception and continues at least through young adulthood. It is shaped by a complex interplay between genes and the environment. There is evidence for critical periods in brain development, such as adolescence, when it comes to social cognition.

Social cognitive development, however, begins in the first year of life, when children begin to develop “theory of mind” – understanding what others are thinking – which continues through age five. Play is an important part of this process, as it involves a lot of physical contact and development of friendships, helping children to cope with emotions and stay mentally strong.

Researchers are yet to fully understand the ways in which lockdowns will affect children due to reduced or delayed social interactions. But a recent study provides evidence that some adults' social cognition has indeed been affected by the COVID-19 lockdowns. The study showed that people experienced a reduction in positive feelings – making them biased to think negatively – which



was significantly related to how socially connected they were. Those who were less socially connected were more affected.

It is likely that children are even more vulnerable when it comes to long term effects of a delay or absence in peer-to-peer interaction. We know that social brain development is a two-way street – the environment, in this case social interaction between peers, affects the brain and the brain affects the emotional and behavioural response to peers.

Social cognition is not only required for success in school and work environments and personal relationships, but also in “hot cognition” in general, which is essentially emotional reasoning taken as a whole. And we know that such cognition is a building block for “cold cognition”, which involves skills such as attention, planning and problem solving.

For example, if children are not able to have creative play with other children, learning to empathise, compromise and manage their emotions, language development and social communication is likely to be affected too. Indeed, it has been shown that children with higher social cognition do better in secondary school.

WAYS FORWARD

For young children in lockdown, Zooms and remote meetings just don't do it. One mother, having to cope with perpetual lockdowns, put the problem very clearly to us. “My six-year-old suddenly gets very shy when talking to his class mates on Zoom,” she said, continuing:

And kids aren't just missing out on seeing their peers, grownup role models such as grandparents and teachers are suddenly gone too. Most young children I know don't really like video calls, so it's not a substitute for social interaction the way it can be for adults.

Some children, including those who are shy or anxious and those with neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), may be especially affected. In regard to this latter group, it is important that psychological and pharmacological treatments begin at an early age, which involves social interaction. One recent study showed that it is possible to improve ASD symptoms in young children of three to six years of age with severe ASD.

Therefore, the best thing that you can do as a parent right now is to ensure your young child has opportunities for play and social interaction with other children as soon as the lockdown is over and it is safe to do so.

Governments should also develop special programmes for toddlers and children to help gain back the critical period of social brain development that they have lost. There is some evidence that children can benefit from social cognitive training, such as reading and talking about emotional stories.

Loneliness affects all ages and is detrimental to physical and mental health and wellbeing. Fortunately, we now know that our brains are still in development until early young adulthood and therefore, the possibility for relearning lost skills may still be possible.

[the writer is Professor of Science and Technology for Brain-Inspired Intelligence, Fudan University]

Bengal schools reopen after 11 months for classes 9-12

KOLKATA, FEB 12 (PTI): Schools in West Bengal reopened on Friday after a gap of 11 months for classes 9-12, with strict adherence to the COVID-19 protocol.

The educational institutions were shut in March last year in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Though most educational institutions registered good attendance, students who take local trains to reach their schools faced problems due to railway blockades as part of the 12-hour state-wide bandh called by the Left Front.

The administration has asked the school authorities to ensure strict adherence to COVID-19 guidelines to prevent a surge in fresh cases.

Many schools have reopened only for classes 10 and 12, while some have restarted for all four

classes.

Schools that have reopened for classes 10 and 12 will hold physical classes on a rotational basis every alternate day.

"Students of classes 9-12 will study in schools from today. The government has requested the school authorities to strictly follow the COVID-19 guidelines. I greet all the students and teachers on the occasion. We all have to be careful," Education Minister Partha Chatterjee said.

Pupils also seemed elated over attending physical classes which they missed for almost a year.

"We were waiting for this day. Even though the situation is not normal like pre-COVID times but we are happy to meet our friends and teachers. Besides, studies will be more interactive," a class 10 student said.

However, some students said they failed to reach their schools due to railway blockades, while parents protested at a private educational institution demanding online examinations.

The school authorities said they are on alert to strictly adhere to the COVID-19 guidelines in the wake of reports of a surge in cases in Kerala after the reopening of educational institutions.

Renowned Kolkata schools like Ram Mohan Mission have reopened for all four classes, while some others like Delhi Public School, Haryana Vidya Mandir and Hindu School have restarted for the two classes, officials said.

The state government has given the flexibility to the schools to decide on holding physical classes with strict adherence to the COVID-19 protocol.

Nepal's proposed travel rule change may not help control women's trafficking, experts say



CHANDAN KR MANDAL & SAMIKSHA BARAL, KATHMANDU, 12 FEB [KATHMANDUPOST]: A group of youth gathered outside the office building of the Department of Immigration at Kalikasthan on Thursday afternoon, protesting against proposed changes to the immigration rules that make it difficult for women under 40 to travel abroad on visit visas on their own.

Holding their passports in their hands, the youths said they would return them to the state if they are not allowed to live with dignity. "Let us live with dignity or take back our passports," shouted the protesters, most of them women.

Soon, the venue of the protest witnessed an informal debate between a department official and the protesters.

"If we have to seek permission from the ward office before going abroad, then we will submit our passports to the ward office and also apply for a visa from the office," said Bhawana Raut, one of the protesters.

"This rule infringes upon our fundamental rights. We will not tolerate it." "The new rule shows how the state sees women," said another protester. "This is a reflection of the state's patriarchal mindset."

Tek Narayan Paudel, the department official witnessing the protest, was prepared to defend the government. "We are also committed to protecting the rights of citizens. We aren't going to introduce any rules that go against [the principles of] human rights," Paudel told the group. "We have not made a final decision [on the issue]. Only a proposal [on the issue you are referring to] was prepared by a committee under the Home Ministry."

Not convinced, one protester retorted, "If the new rule was not criticised massively, it would already have become law, and the general public would only know about it after it is enforced."

The official continued to assure the group that no laws will be made to encroach upon the citizen's fundamental rights. But the protesters weren't convinced.

The proposed rule, if implemented, will make it mandatory for women under 40 to get consent from their family members and a recommendation from the local ward office before leaving the country on visit visas. The rule has been met with a barrage of criticism from members of the general public, women rights defenders, and lawyers, calling it 'regressive'.

A m n e s t y International, Nepal on Thursday said that the new proposed rule regarding foreign travel of women under 40 is discriminatory. It called on the government to halt such arbitrary proposals.

"This policy proposal is blatantly discriminatory towards women and completely disregards their right to free movement," said Nirajan Thapaliya, director of Amnesty International, Nepal. "In the name of 'protecting' its citizens, Nepali authorities must not introduce measures that violate the fundamental rights and freedom guaranteed in the Constitution to all, irrespective of their gender."

National Network for Safe Migration, a body of organisations working in the field of migration, on Thursday, also called the rule a "twisted move" to ultimately ban women from going abroad.

W o m e n ' s Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), a non-governmental organisation working for the protection and

promotion of human rights, said the new rule portrays women as the culprit and is the outcome of a gender-biased mentality, which will further strengthen structural discrimination faced by Nepali women.

However, the government has defended the proposed rule saying it is only meant to protect women from potential trafficking, other abuses or getting stranded abroad.

Following massive criticism, the Department of Immigration, in a statement, said the proposed rule would be applicable only for first-time travellers going to the Gulf and African countries where the risk of abuse is high.

The government has been defending the move to keep a check on Nepalis leaving on visit visas, which has seen a worrying surge lately, making them vulnerable to various abuses in the future.

Experts in the field of women's rights and labour migration doubt that such measures would work to address the problem, given the country's experience.

"The rule must have been proposed with the intention of protecting its citizens," said Sharu Joshi Shrestha, a gender and labour migration expert. "But how can such a move be effective when we have a 1,800-km-long open border with India?"

Nepal shares a 1,850 km-long porous border with five Indian states. Indian routes have often been used by traffickers for smuggling Nepali women into the Gulf and east-Asian countries.

Every time, the state comes up with rules that restrict women's movement, it seems to

backfire. Unable to fly via the country's lone international airport, due to a series of bans in the past, women have been compelled to take unsafe land routes.

Nepali women have managed to go to war-torn and unsafe countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria even when Nepal barred them from working and living in these countries. Nepali women have also been found to have made their way into African countries such as Kenya, where they have worked in captive-like situations. Similarly, a large number of Nepali women are working in Lebanon as housemaids despite a government ban on doing so.

Women rights activists have been saying that the state's protectionist approach has failed to yield expected results as women have continued to go abroad through illegal routes and face abuse at the hand of traffickers.

According to the annual human trafficking report of the National Human Rights Commission for 2018-19, nearly 1.5 million Nepalis are at risk of various forms of human trafficking. The report estimated that nearly 35,000 Nepali citizens—15,000 men, 15,000 women, and 5,000 children—were trafficked during the period.

This data was compiled when the government ban on Nepali women for taking up housemaid jobs in the Gulf region was still on.

"The state's protectionist approach has entirely failed so far. Such moves have put constraints on their right to movement and work guaranteed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and CEDAW," said Mohana Ansari, former national human rights commissioner. "Women face various forms of discrimination when it comes to issues such as wages while working at home or abroad."

The new decision

shows the state treats women as second-class citizens, the decision will only increase the incidents of sub-agents and traffickers luring women into slavery, said Ansari.

The new rule, if implemented, will once again force job-seeking women to turn to other routes to reach destination countries, experts fear.

"They will start going abroad via India. They do not have to go through the airport in Kathmandu," said Shrestha, also an executive member at Nepal Policy, a think tank "Are there enough jobs at home to employ women? The government has fixed Rs13,450 as the minimum monthly wage, but domestic helps get around Rs4,000-Rs5,000. Is the government monitoring that? Where is the guarantee of decent jobs and a dignified working environment?"

The proposed rule, which is likely to limit the free movement of women, also comes four months after a parliamentary committee asked the government to relax the existing ban on Nepali women to work in the Persian Gulf as domestic workers. The move was welcomed.

"If the parliamentary committee had made the decision, then the government agencies should have moved ahead in implementing that particular decision," said Shrestha. "The latest decision shows there is a lack of coordination among concerned agencies."

After more than three years of imposing a ban on Nepali women from taking up domestic jobs in the Gulf countries, the committee had lifted the ban to allow them to work as domestic help in those countries.

"Restricting mobility has never proved to be the right strategy in curbing trafficking," said Anurag Devkota, a human rights lawyer. "This was evident especially because the country has witnessed a surge in human trafficking cases whenever the government comes up with impractical bans."

Over 700 households in Assam's Golaghat get electricity

GUWAHATI, FEB 12 (PTI): Over 700 households in Assam's Golaghat district received electricity with the help of solar power, as per an official statement issued on Friday.

Besides, three villages in Jorhat, Majuli and Karbi Anglong districts also received electricity, it said.

The state-run Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL) along with The Energy and

Resources Institute (TERI) implemented the project.

In Golaghat, the work began in 2016 and covered 720 households across 18 villages in three phases, the NRL said.

Two types of solar domestic systems were designed, which included one with four light points and another with one fan and two light points, it said.

Additionally, a mobile charging point and a portable lantern were also provided.

The solar domestic systems are able to operate up to four-six hours during a day in their full capacity.

The user paid 10 per cent of the total cost as an advance, while NRL paid the balance amount using its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) fund.

Tripura man gets 12-year jail for cheating, raping woman

AGARTALA, FEB 12 (PTI): A 32-year old man was awarded 12-year prison term and fined Rs 60,000 by a local court here for cheating and raping a woman on the pretext of marriage.

Additional District and Session Judge Dhiman Debbarma ordered authorities concerned to fix deposit the penalty -- to be paid as compensation to the woman -- in a nationalized bank for a period of five years.

The judge also asked the district legal service authorities to give Rs 3-4 lakh to the woman as legal aid.



According to additional public prosecutor Arobindo Deb, the 32-year-old, a resident of Amtali here, had engaged in a physical relationship with the woman in 2013, but refused to marry her

when she got pregnant.

The woman filed a complaint with the Amtali police station here, following which an investigation was carried out into the matter, and a chargesheet filed in June 2015.

Book tells how yoga can help in turbulent times

NEW DELHI, FEB 12 (PTI): Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, a new book brings together yoga guru B K S Iyengar's inspirational messages and his recommendations on asanas that can help an individual cope with trauma.

"Imagine If: Stories of Ordinary People with Extraordinary Grit", written by Rajvi H Mehta, who studied directly under Iyengar, is a glimpse into how yoga can transform someone who opens himself or herself to it.

Iyengar, credited with spreading the gospel of yoga across the world, began to practise it as a young boy. He was, in those days, constantly unwell, and his brother-in-law thought yoga would help him

cope.

Over time, learning from his own experiences, he refined and then redefined what he was taught. A disease-free state was no longer his goal; health, he had come to believe, included well-being of the body, mind, emotions, intellect, c o n s c i o u s n e s s , morality, sociality and conscience.

He was the founder of Iyengar Yoga, which, nutritionist Rujuta Diwekar says, is "probably the most underrated tool for improving quality of life".

The book, published by Westland, has stories of people with grit and determination who overcame various challenges - amputated limbs, cancer and emotional trauma

- with the help of Iyengar Yoga.

Mehta says Iyengar was born during the influenza pandemic of 1918.

"In fact, his mother suffered from influenza when she was pregnant with him. He was born a sickly child and was incidentally introduced to yoga by his brother-in-law so that he could gain freedom from his never-ending illnesses," she writes.

On COVID-19, Mehta says it has literally destroyed the health of the world - not just of those afflicted but also of those who have not even been exposed.

"It has generated fear, and the genuine fear of its spread has led to locking down of towns and cities, affecting the world economy. It

has led to physical, mental, emotional and economic destruction," she says.

"Our cumulative human strength is not able to contain this virus which travels with total freedom, cutting across all our man-made boundaries," the author writes.

She says we can curtail the spread of any infection by social isolation but argues whether that is a real, practical solution.

Stressing on immunity, she says it reduces one's risk of being susceptible to infections.

But how to have a strong immune system?

"Modern science is aware of the mechanisms of building muscles and the cardiovascular

system through exercise, but not the immune system. Vitamins, a healthy diet and a hygienic lifestyle are supposed to help, but there does not seem to be anything at the moment that can specifically help build the immune system," she says.

Mehta goes on to mention several asanas but says these may not prevent illness, but will surely build one's ability to withstand illnesses.

So how can asanas and pranayama be of help in trying times like this disaster?

"Specific postures performed in a specific sequence for a specific period of time alter the breath and our state of mind, bringing clarity and emotional stability," the author says.

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The story behind Barcelona's disastrous rejection of Luis Suárez

SID LOWE

MADRID, 12 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: “Madness,” Lionel Messi called it, but even he hadn’t imagined it being this mad.

One Friday in September Messi walked into the dressing room at Barcelona’s Sant Joan Despí training ground and it hit him. After six years his best friend wasn’t there, so he sent him a message. “It’ll be strange seeing you in another shirt,” it said, and two days on he discovered how strange when Luis Suárez made his Atlético Madrid debut. Introduced as a sub against Granada, 90 seconds later, Suárez had provided an assist. By the end of the 90 minutes, he had scored two.

Something had started. Suárez has scored 16 in 17 appearances, averaging a goal every 82 minutes. He has more than any Atlético player last season and is La Liga’s top scorer, three clear. He has scored in 11 matches and has been directly responsible for 12 points, more than anyone in Spain: points that put Atlético five clear at the top with two games in hand. No debutant has had a better start this century.

Not bad for a free transfer who was finished, for a man they were so desperate to get rid of they paid for him to go.

“I can’t understand how Barcelona let him go,” Diego Costa said after the Granada game and with every passing week someone echoes his words. “Barcelona made a mistake: even if you know nothing about football you know he’s still got it,” said Diego Forlán. “He’s an incredible striker; give him half a chance and it’s in. It’s hard to understand how Barcelona let go of a No 9 like him,” insisted his teammate Ángel Correa. “I was surprised Barcelona let him go and surprised they let him go to Atlético,” Jan Oblak said.

Nor was this only a release; it was a rejection. “You deserved to depart as one of the most important players in the club’s

history, not for them to kick you out like they did,” Messi said. Suárez insisted players have to accept when their time is up, but the way his spell at the Camp Nou drew to a close brought anger and hurt. He felt that what he had done was forgotten fast and used the word desprecio – contempt or dismissiveness – to describe the club’s treatment of him, and that drove him.

“It was a cock-up, but then they were suffocated by the wage bill,” Celta Vigo’s Iago Aspas said this week, before facing his former Liverpool teammate, and watching him score two more. And yet the economic benefit was minimal, no salvation in the sale and on a sporting level it has been disastrous. Not necessarily because he has gone – that’s a different debate and many fans still consider his departure the right decision – but where he has gone. “What they did seemed like madness to me,” Messi said. “He went free, [with us] paying up his contract, and to a team competing for the same things as us.”

Suárez joining Atlético had not been part of Barça’s plan but it is a decision that could cost a league title. He has scored more goals than Antoine Griezmann, Ansu Fati, Ousmane Dembélé, Martin Braithwaite and Francisco Trincão put together and his contribution has Atlético eight points clear of his former club, with a game in hand. It is not as if they weren’t warned, either: David Villa left Barcelona for Atlético on a free in 2013 and immediately won the title, in the Camp Nou, against Barcelona.

Last summer, faced by an economic crisis, an ageing squad and political pressure, defeated 8-2 by Bayern Munich – a game in which Suárez got his first “away” goal in four years in the Champions League – Barcelona had been keen to get rid of the third highest goalscorer in their history and the second highest earner in their squad. He had struggled with his



knee, slowed and seen his level drop (last season he scored only 21 goals in 36 games); they wanted to distance him from Messi. It was an open secret to which Suárez was not deaf, even calling publicly for the club to speak to him directly about their plans. When it finally came, the phone conversation in which Suárez was actually told to leave was short and blunt.

The call lasted a minute, the regret rather longer.

The decision had been made by the club – “I’m not the bad guy in this film,” the new manager, Ronald Koeman, insisted – but he delivered the news, playing the role of executioner, and was seeking a new style with younger, more dynamic players. Suárez didn’t ask for an explanation and didn’t get one. Fine, he replied, but they would have to fix his contractual situation. If he was to leave on their say so, he would do so on his terms – as a free agent.

Suárez didn’t speak to the president, Josep Maria Bartomeu. He was told he didn’t have to train, but reported for duty. There was nothing to stop him saying: ‘OK, I stay, you pay.’ And it wasn’t impossible that he would end up playing. Koeman even hinted as much publicly one day. Yet Barcelona had been unequivocal: it was time, and Suárez suspected that whatever went wrong would be laid on him. Pride pushed him too. So his lawyers and Barcelona

started to negotiate.

Clubs started to call, including Juventus. Via a mutual friend, contact was made with Andrea Berta, Atlético’s sporting director. Diego Simeone had long been an admirer. “I haven’t got a bad word to say about Suárez,” he had said years before. He had described the Uruguayan as “wonderful, tremendous, extraordinary, strong, aggressive and intense”. And called him “the best pure No 9 a team can have”.

Now perhaps that could be his team. If Suárez could get out of Barcelona fully paid off, half his salary effectively covered, Atlético could afford him. Suárez didn’t want to leave Spain and there was a swift connection with Simeone. “Many people said I couldn’t perform at the highest level but he was convinced,” Suárez told Onda Cero. It was agreed. First, though, Barcelona had to fulfil their decision to force him out.

On 21 September a deal was drawn up to rescind his contract, ready to sign the next day. It included a list of clubs Suárez would not be allowed to join and Atlético were not on it, a possibility no one had thought of. When, at the 11th hour, the press mentioned then, Bartomeu panicked and reneged on the agreement, or tried to. But, backed into a corner, if there was one thing Bartomeu thought worse than Suárez joining Atlético it was Suárez staying –

and, like Messi, telling the world exactly why.

An agreement was reached which allowed Barcelona to save face and Atlético to get their man. Suárez rescinded his contact. There was no fee but Atlético agreed to performance-related payments at the end of each of the two seasons. At most, they will pay €6m. The good news – if it can be called that – is that he’s playing so well that meeting those criteria is likelier now, driven by a charismatic coach who has convinced him, a communion building.

“I’m happy to feel valued here,” Suárez said. “People thought it was easy to play at Barcelona and score 20 goals. No, it’s not easy. It is nice to show there’s merit in what I did, that I can play in the elite, and not just because I was at Barcelona with the world’s best player alongside me.”

Suárez is 34 and sometimes he looks it. The impression, though, is partly false. Watch him off the ball and he can look rigid, limping, as if it hurts to walk. But he is watching, waiting, moving into position. Then watch the ball come into shot and he is immediately transformed, first to it, ready to provide the finish. His legs don’t go particularly fast, but his mind does and he finds a way to the ball. He can appear to do nothing, but then appear and do the thing that matters most. Each time he does is another twist of the knife.

Koeman was asked recently if paying Suárez to take Atlético to the top of the league might go down as one of the greatest errors in the club’s history. The question had touched a nerve; he touched on the truth. “You only ask me about him when he scores,” the Barcelona manager said, which is exactly why they ask so often. Those who thought he was finished are given an almost weekly reminder of the life left in him, the numbers brokering little argument.

Nor is it only the goals. It is the

leadership, determination, and attitude. “A warrior’s spirit,” Costa called it, qualities appreciated even more here. It is the awareness and technique, the subtlety and cleverness, qualities sometimes overlooked in Suárez. It is the passing, the lay-offs, the control, the facilitation of others. Amid the 198 Barcelona goals, there were 98 assists in Spain. At Atlético, he has nudged that to a hundred.

With him, Atlético’s style has shifted: more possession, higher up. “All generated by Suárez’s presence,” Simeone said. “We’ve changed radically and he fits us like a glove,” Koke insisted. João Félix, one of the beneficiaries, calls Suárez “perfect.”

Suárez’s is the voice you hear echoing around empty stadiums, his command sometimes less a shout, more a scream, even a squawk: sharp and urgent. Other times, he directs: not where he wants the ball but where others do, even if they don’t know it. He calls the play, sounding like a commentator who has got out of sync, voice arriving before the pictures. A goal against Elche was radio-controlled by Suárez, talking his team through each move, every step, every pass all the way to the final moment when he arrived to put the ball in the net, the plan coming together.

“He has leadership, ascendancy, is always ‘in’ the game and plays intelligently,” Simeone says. Efficiently, too: his 16 goals have come from 22 shots on target.

And all that at 34, when even those on his side wondered if it might be almost over. Suárez himself admits he didn’t expect it to go this well and knows it may not continue. This is a better start than at any of his former clubs, so good that Simeone was asked if he might even be the best signing Atlético have made under him. “I can’t stop to think about arguments like that,” he said, “but he’s extraordinary and we’re happy he’s with us.”

Broad, Moeen Ali in England squad after four changes

CHENNAI, FEB 12

(PTI): Veteran pacer James Anderson made way for Stuart Broad, while experienced off-spinner Moeen Ali came in for Dom Bess in England’s 12-man squad for the second Test against India as skipper Joe Root announced four changes to the one that clinched the lung-opener.

Ben Foakes has been included as a wicketkeeper-batsman in place of Jos Buttler as was expected with the latter returning home after the first Test.

Bowling all-rounder Chris Woakes and rookie pacer Olly Stone will be vying for a final spot in the playing eleven.

“We are going to make four changes. Jimmy, Jofra (injured), Jos, Dom Bess are out with Foakes, Ali, Stone, Broad and Woakes coming in to the XII,” Root said in a virtual media conference on the eve of the second Test.

England lead the four match series 1-0 after defeating India by a massive 227 runs in the first Test.

The touring party also received a setback after their strike pacer Jofra Archer was ruled out of the second Test with an elbow injury.

“Of course it is a slight setback but the good news is that it looks like he should be able to get himself fit and ready for the game.

“So as long as he



uses the next couple of weeks wisely and looks after he should be fully fit ready to go,” Root said about Archer’s unavailability.

Bess, who picked the prized scalp of Virat Kohli en route to a five-wicket match haul, misses out after a slump in form in the second innings with Ali set to play his first Test since August 2019.

“...it wasn’t an easy decision, Dom’s contributed well and had a real impact. With him missing out, the message for him moving forward is to keep working at that consistency of his game, deliver that skill time and time again,” Root said about the off-spinner’s exclusion.

“He is very young. He’s very much at the start of this, it doesn’t mean that you get a big push back down the pecking order.

The 33-year-old Ali would look to make a return after overcoming COVID-19 earlier this

month soon after arriving in Sri Lanka.

“...he’s worked really hard, he’s obviously had a rough tour, the rough end of it having to deal with COVID and quarantine and and do an extra time in his room but since then he’s applied himself extremely well. He’s a very good senior pro in that respect,” Root said.

“It gives Moeen a great opportunity to come back into things with all of his experience. Someone who’s bowling extremely well in practice.”

Olly Stone and Chris Woakes will vie for the place left vacant by Archer.

The 27-year-old Warwickshire pacer Stone had claimed 3/29 on his Test debut against Ireland in 2019 but only to succumb to a stress fracture of the back before disappearing from the scene last year.

But Root backed

Stone to make a mark, should he get a chance in the XI.

“He’s made the most of every opportunity, certainly looking very good in and around training... there might not be a lot of game time in there but there is freshness of mind, freshness of body and a huge amount of excitement about playing.

“He has a huge amount of skill and pace as well, and he will give variety to the attack if he gets the opportunity to play,” he said on Stone.

Chris Woakes too had to battle COVID-related turbulence after he was identified as a close contact of Ali and was forced to quarantine during their Sri Lanka tour and he would look to make a solid return as well.

“He brings reverse swing massively into the game as well,” Root said on Woakes.

Kyrgios and Thiem provide drama as Melbourne counts down to lockdown

JONATHAN HOWCROFT

MELBOURNE, 12 FEB

[THEGUARDIAN]: 7pm, five hours until lockdown. Nick Kyrgios emerges into the John Cain Arena for his third-round tie with Dominic Thiem. The sky overhead is Australian Open blue, and there’s something special in the air.

Kyrgios is in full wiseguy mode. There’s a glint in his eye that Joe Pesci would approve of; playfully malevolent. This is his stage, and he knows it. Before a ball is struck in anger the 25-year-old urges the crowd to interact.

Then someone coughs and reality bites. Everyone in Victoria has been ordered to stay home for the next five days, from midnight. The pandemic is on the doorstep but because epidemiologists have to give public health officials a head start there are thousands of people crammed together screaming themselves hoarse. The stadium announcer reminds patrons they must be home by 11.59pm. Sandwiches are two for the price of one in a Garden Square fire sale. Nobody will eat them tomorrow.

8pm, four hours until lockdown. Kyrgios breaks Thiem in the opening game. The noise is primal. The US Open champion is being fed to the lions. Before the end of

game two Kyrgios has attempted an underarm serve and a half-volley between his legs at the net. He communes with the crowd during the change of ends. It is part tennis, part megachurch rapture.

Kyrgios’s huge serve pushes Thiem’s returning position close to the back wall. In his white top the Austrian could be mistaken for an English cricketer fielding on the fence in front of a braying Bay 13 at the neighbouring MCG. “Please!” chair umpire Damien Dumusois beseeches throughout the night, but to little avail. The roar that greets Kyrgios wrapping up the first set 6-4 is volcanic.

9pm, three hours until lockdown. The backhand exchanges, from Thiem’s cultured single-hander to Kyrgios’s blunt two-handed bunt are precise. The forehands from both men are huge, especially when Thiem connects on the move. Even Kyrgios is full of admiration. “That’s beautiful,” he purrs when a backhand fizzzes past him down the line. “That’s a hell of a shot,” he offers to a crosscourt pass, before winning the second set 6-4 with an underarm serve.

The only person in the arena sitting down is Dumusois. The noise is ear-splitting. Arms appear from rows behind to hammer the

seats in front. The All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club this ain’t.

For two hours Kyrgios has raged against the machine. But unfortunately for the world No 47, unless there’s a malfunction, machines just keep going. It took Thiem 11 service games to earn a break point, but when he does he finds three, and converts one of them.

No more Mr Wiseguy. Kyrgios starts shaking his head and muttering. The hushed crowd allows the warning for an audible obscenity to be heard clearly. Thiem wins consecutive service games to love. We’re going deep.

10pm, two hours until lockdown. Thiem’s fortitude is astonishing. For three sets he has been jeered and heckled from the stands. Implacable in the face of the onslaught, there are no histrionics as the pendulum turns. A change of coach two years ago has helped liberate the 27-year-old, and he has matured from promising clay-court star to a season-long contender.

The same cannot be said about Kyrgios. After inciting a mob for an hour and a half he then begins a running battle with Dumusois over the umpire’s inability to control the crowd. To the surprise of nobody, the Australian has two

opponents to deal with, Thiem, and the demon hijacking his own limbic system.

The match is now on Thiem’s racket, and Thiem’s racket swings truly for a majestic forehand cross-court winner to secure his second break of the night. Kyrgios repeatedly rams the strings of his device into his forehead. They’re going five. Of course they are.

You can see the plot unravelling like spools of Spiderman’s webbing as Kyrgios arcs his fingers in despair. But he has the sense to copy Thiem and take a toilet break. When he returns the madness hasn’t disappeared, but there is more method to it.

The Hollywood shots are back, so are shorter points and rowdier involvement from the stands. But all the while Thiem just keeps on keeping on, like a lighthouse in a storm.

At 3-3 it’s a toss up, but Thiem finds four winners in the 46th game of the match to unlock a decisive third break. He follows it up with a hold to love that ends with the shot of the match, a backhand half-volley winner from the baseline that was equal parts balletic and brutal. It concludes a searching examination passed with flying colours.

Singer fined by German court for son’s stage performance

BERLIN (AP): A Bavarian court found a folk singer guilty Friday of violating Germany’s strict child labor laws for having his 4-year-old son perform on stage with him during an evening concert.

Angelo Kelly, 39, was fined 3000 euros (\$3,600) by the Hassfurt administrative court for the 2019 appearance at an open air summer concert with his son William, who sang “What a Wonderful World.” The boy is the youngest of Kelly’s five children.

“During this performance, the child William stood for at least 30 minutes on the stage where he played along, sang along and interpreted his own song,” the court said, according to the dpa news agency. “This is is considered work by the Youth Labor Protection Act.”

Kelly, who is popular in Germany, said on his Facebook page that he

would appeal the verdict.

“As a father, the well-being of my children is the most important thing for me,” he wrote. “William was and is never obliged to appear with us at our shows. If he did it, it was because he wanted to.”

Children ages 3 to 6 can take part in musical performances under German law for up to two hours a day, but only with official approval of an exception and only between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., dpa reported. William, who is now 5, appeared on stage until 8:20 p.m., according to authorities.

Kelly’s attorney, Julian Ackermann, blasted the ruling, saying that interpreting a “brief appearance on the stage in the presence of one’s mother and siblings at a concert given by one’s own father” as child labor was legally wrong and “far removed from the facts.”

Some asylum-seekers waiting in Mexico to be allowed in US

SAN DIEGO (AP): The Biden administration on Friday announced plans for tens of thousands of asylum-seekers waiting in Mexico for their next immigration court hearings to be allowed into the United States while their cases proceed.

The first of an estimated 25,000 asylum-seekers in Mexico with active cases will be allowed in the United States on Feb. 19, authorities said. They plan to start slowly with two border crossings each processing up to 300 people a day and a third crossing taking fewer. Administration officials declined to name them out of fear they may encourage a rush of people to those locations.

The move is a major step toward dismantling one of former President Donald Trump’s most consequential policies to deter asylum-seekers from coming to the U.S. About 70,000 asylum-seekers were enrolled in “Remain in Mexico,” officially called “Migrant Protection Protocols,” since it was introduced in January 2019.

On Biden’s first day in office, the Homeland Security Department suspended the policy for new arrivals. Since then, some asylum-seekers picked up at the border have been released in the U.S. with notices to appear in court.

Biden is quickly making good on a campaign promise to end the policy, which the Trump administration said was critical to reversing a surge of asylum-seekers that peaked in 2019. But the policy also exposed people to violence in Mexican border cities and made it extremely difficult for them to find lawyers and communicate with courts about their cases.

“As President Biden has made clear, the U.S. government is committed to rebuilding a safe, orderly, and humane immigration system,” said Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas. “This latest action is another step in our commitment to reform immigration

policies that do not align with our nation’s values.”

Homeland Security said the move “should not be interpreted as an opening for people to migrate irregularly to the United States.” Administration officials have said repeatedly that the vast majority of people who cross the border illegally are quickly expelled under a public health order in place since the pandemic struck in March, but releases of some asylum-seeking families in Texas and California has worked against that messaging.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Thursday that she was concerned that limited releases in the U.S. may encourage others to cross illegally because “we don’t want people to put themselves in danger at a time where it is not the right time to come, because we have not had time to put in place a humane and moral system and process.”

Hearings for people enrolled in “Remain in Mexico” have been suspended since June due to the pandemic. Getting word out on when to report to the border for release in the United States may prove a daunting job.

Homeland Security said it would soon announce a “virtual registration process” available online and by phone for people to learn where and when they should report. It urged asylum-seekers not to report to the border unless instructed.

Asylum-seekers will be tested for COVID-19 before entering the U.S.

The announcement provides no relief to people whose cases were dismissed or denied, though administration officials did not rule out additional measures. Advocates argue that communication problems, including lack of working addresses in Mexico, caused some to miss hearings and lose their cases as a result.

More people are getting stopped crossing the border illegally since Biden took office.

Kim lays blame at officials for N Korea's economic failures

SEOUL, FEB 12 (AP): North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ripped into the performance of his Cabinet and fired a senior economic official he appointed a month ago, saying they’d failed to come up with new ideas to salvage an economy in decay.

The report by state media on Friday comes during the toughest period of Kim’s nine-year rule. The diplomacy he had hoped would lift US-led sanctions over his nuclear program is stalemated, and pandemic border closures and crop-killing natural disasters last year deepened the damage to an economy broken by decades of policy failures.

Some analysts say the current challenges may set up conditions for an economic perfect storm in the North that destabilizes markets and triggers public panic and unrest.

The current challenges had forced Kim to publicly admit that past economic plans hadn’t succeeded. A new five-year plan to develop the economy was issued during the ruling Workers’ Party congress in January, but Kim’s comments during the party’s Central Committee meeting that ended Thursday were rich with frustration with how the plans were



being executed so far.

During Thursday’s session, Kim lamented that the Cabinet was failing in its role as the key institution managing the economy, saying it was producing unworkable plans while displaying no innovative viewpoint and clear tactics.

He said the Cabinet’s targets for agricultural production this year were set unrealistically high, considering limited supplies in farming materials and other unfavorable conditions. He said the Cabinet’s targets for electricity production was set too low, showing a lack of urgency when shortages could stall work at coal mines and other industries.

The Cabinet failed to play a leading role in mapping out plans of key economic fields and almost mechanically brought together the

numbers drafted by the ministries, the KCNA paraphrased Kim as saying.

The KCNA also said that O Su Yong was named as the new director of the Central Committee’s Department of Economic Affairs during this week’s meeting, replacing Kim Tu Il who was appointed in January.

Kim Jong Un during the January party congress called for reasserting greater state control over the economy, boosting agricultural production and prioritizing the development of chemicals and metal industries. He also vowed all-out efforts to bolster his nuclear weapons program in comments that were seen as an attempt to pressure the new Biden administration.

Sectors such as metal and chemicals would be crucial to

North Korean hopes to revitalize industrial production that has been decimated by sanctions and halted imports of factory materials amid the pandemic. However, most experts agree that North Korea’s new development plans aren’t meaningfully different from its previous ones that lacked in substance.

South Korean intelligence officials have said there are also signs that the North is taking dramatic steps to strengthen government control over markets, including suppressing the use of US dollars and other foreign currencies.

Such measures, which are apparently aimed at forcing people to exchange their foreign currency savings for the North Korean won, demonstrate the government’s sense of urgency over its depleting foreign currency reserves, analysts say.

Russia clashes with US and West over conflict in Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, FEB 12 (AP): Russia clashed with the United States and its Western allies Thursday over the nearly seven-year conflict in eastern Ukraine, and the U.N. warned that the current fragile cease-fire risks being reversed if peace negotiations become deadlocked.

Russia called the Security Council meeting to mark Friday’s sixth anniversary of the signing of the Minsk peace plan brokered by France and Germany. It aimed to resolve the conflict between Ukraine and Russia-backed separatists that flared in April 2014 after Russia’s annexation of Crimea and its support for the separatists in the mostly Russian-speaking industrial east called Donbass.

Russia’s UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia accused Ukraine of failing to implement the 2015 Minsk agreement saying: Over those six years, we still haven’t gotten an answer to two very important questions: How exactly does Ukraine intend to peacefully resolve the conflict, and how does Kiev envisage special status of Donbass within Ukraine?

The answers to those questions will entirely determine any prospects for a settlement because after the beginning in 2014 of Kiev’s use of force and the ongoing shellings of residential areas by the Ukrainian army, which continue to this day the people, of Donbass have not felt any connection with Ukraine,

he said.

The United States and European allies France, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Norway, Belgium and the United Kingdom blamed Russia for fueling the conflict, which has killed more than 14,000 people, by providing financial and military support to the separatists.

US political coordinator Rodney Hunter, speaking on behalf of the Biden administration, said Russia instigated the conflict in Donbass and has blocked meaningful progress in diplomatic negotiations while arming, training, funding, and leading its proxy forces and supporting the self-proclaimed ‘authorities’ on the ground.

The United States reaffirms its unwavering commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, he said, accusing Russia of escalating its oppression of any dissent to its brutal occupation of Crimea.

We will never recognize Russia’s attempted annexation of Crimea, Hunter said. As a result, US sanctions on Russia in response to its aggression in eastern Ukraine and occupation of Crimea will remain in place unless -- and until -- Russia reverses course.

The Minsk agreements envisage that Ukraine can regain control over its border with Russia in the separatist-held regions only after they are granted broad self-rule and hold local elections.

The accord helped reduce the scope of hostilities, but Ukrainian

forces continued to exchange artillery salvos and gunfire.

While the July 2020 cease-fire has largely held up, UN political chief Rosemary DiCarlo said there has been an increase in security incidents in several hotspots in recent months.

This dangerous trend needs to be quickly reversed, she said.

The cease-fire deal was reached by members of the Tripartite Contact Group that includes representatives of Russia, Ukraine and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe known as the OSCE. It followed a meeting in Paris in December 2019 of the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany -- the so-called Normandy group -- who expressed support for the Minsk deal and agreed to revive the peace process.

DiCarlo told the council that continuing discussions in these groups are no reason for complacency and no substitute for meaningful progress.

The risk of backsliding is real if negotiations become deadlocked, she warned.

Russia’s Nebenzia said the Minsk agreement didn’t say anything about direct dialogue with the two separatist governments of Donetsk and Luhansk in Donbass, or about agreeing on any special status for the region.

Instead of that, fantasies about establishing some sort of international

China bans BBC from broadcasting

BEIJING, FEB 12 (PTI): China has banned BBC World News from broadcasting in the country for seriously violating its guidelines for reporting, its television and radio regulator has announced.

The move comes a week after the UK revoked the license of Chinese state-owned broadcaster China Global Television Network’s (CGTN).

China has criticised the BBC for its reporting on the deadly coronavirus pandemic and the persecution of ethnic minority Uighurs and lodged a protest with the British broadcaster.

The BBC said it was “disappointed” by China’s decision to ban it.

The Chinese regulator, National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) has made the announcement on Thursday night on pulling BBC World News off the air in the country for serious content violation.

NRTA said BBC World News was found to have seriously violated regulations on radio and television management and on overseas satellite television channel management in its China-related reports, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

The BBC coverage went against the requirements that news reporting must be true and impartial, and undermined China’s national interests and ethnic solidarity, it said.

“As the channel fails to meet the requirements to broadcast in China as an overseas channel, BBC World News is not allowed to continue its service within Chinese territory. The NRTA will not accept the channel’s broadcast application for the new year,” NRTA said in a statement.

China’s ban followed British media regulator Ofcom revoking state broadcaster CGTN licence to broadcast in the UK.

Ofcom’s decision to revoke the license of CGTN came after it found

that the Chinese state television licence was wrongfully held by Star China Media Ltd.

CGTN was also found in breach of British broadcasting regulations for airing the allegedly forced confession of UK citizen Peter Humphrey.

Reacting to China’s ban the BBC said in a statement: ‘We are disappointed that the Chinese authorities have decided to take this course of action. The BBC is the world’s most trusted international news broadcaster and reports on stories from around the world fairly, impartially and without fear or favour.’

The commercially-funded BBC World News TV channel broadcasts globally in English. In China it is largely restricted and appears only in international hotels and some diplomatic compounds, meaning most Chinese people cannot view it, the BBC report on China’s ban said.

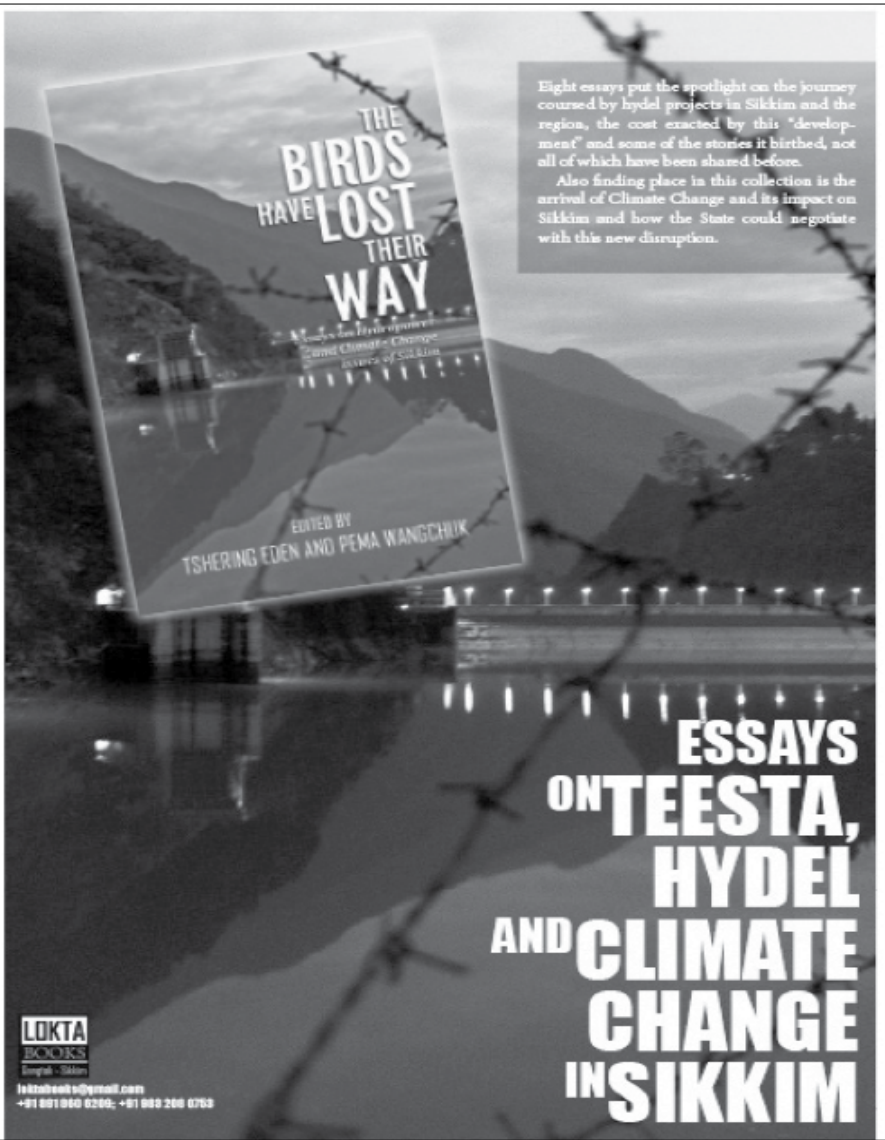
British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab called the move an “unacceptable curtailing of media freedom”.

The US State Department condemned the decision, calling it part of a wider campaign to suppress free media in China.

Relations between China and the UK have seen a serious deterioration in recent months over Hong Kong, where Beijing introduced a controversial new security law after a large pro-democracy movement swept the ex-colony.

In January the UK introduced a new visa that gives 5.4 million Hong Kong residents the right to live in the UK and eventually becomes citizens because it believes China is undermining the territory’s rights and freedoms, the BBC report said.

China’s tiff with BBC followed Beijing’s spat last year with three US newspapers resulting in the expulsion of some journalists from those media outlets.



Jack Black joins cast of 'Borderlands' movie

LOS ANGELES, FEB 12 (PTI): Actor Jack Black is the latest addition to the cast of Lionsgate's "Borderlands" movie.

An adaptation of popular video game of the same name, the movie will be directed by Eli Roth from a script by Emmy-winning "Chernobyl" creator Craig Mazin.

The new project reunites Black with his "The House with a Clock in Its Walls" co-star Cate Blanchett and director Roth.

The cast also includes Jamie Lee Curtis and Black's "Jumanji" movies co-star Kevin Hart, reported Deadline.

The "Borderlands" video game series launched in 2009, with Gearbox Software. The latest version of the



game, "Borderlands 3", came out in September 2019.

In the film, Blanchett will play the legendary thief Lilith, while Hart will essay the role of skilled soldier Roland.

Curtis will be portraying Tannis, an archeologist on Pandora who might have the

key to find a vault filled with alien weapon technology.

Avi Arad and Ari Arad are producing "Borderlands" via their Arad Productions banner along with Picturestart's Erik Feig. The executive producers are Randy Pitchford and Strauss Zelnick.

Salman Khan thanks fans for support after receiving reprieve from Rajasthan court

MUMBAI, FEB 12 (PTI): Superstar Salman Khan has thanked his fans for their continued love and support, hours after a Jodhpur court dismissed Rajasthan government's plea against him for submitting a false affidavit regarding his arms licence.

Taking to Twitter on Thursday night, Khan tweeted, "To all my fans, thank you for your love support and concern. Take care of yourself and your family. God bless and love you too."

The matter is linked to

a case against Khan under the Arms Act, in which the actor had been accused of keeping arms with an expired licence and using these for poaching.

Khan was present in the court through video conferencing, when district and sessions Judge Raghvendra Kachhwala pronounced the order, acquitting him of the charge on Thursday.

This is the second time the "Bharat" star has been freed from the allegation.

Earlier, the court of the chief judicial magistrate had also absolved him of the

charge, after which the state had challenged the decision in the district and sessions court.

Khan had filed the affidavit in the court in 2003 stating that he had lost his arms licence.

The public prosecutor contended that it was an act of misleading the court purposefully stating that Khan knew that his licence was not lost, but Judge Kachhwala rejected his arguments and provided relief to Khan by absolving him of the allegation.

'Brooklyn Nine-Nine' to conclude with season eight

LOS ANGELES, FEB 12 (PTI): Popular sitcom "Brooklyn Nine-Nine" will end its run on NBC with upcoming eighth season, the network has announced.

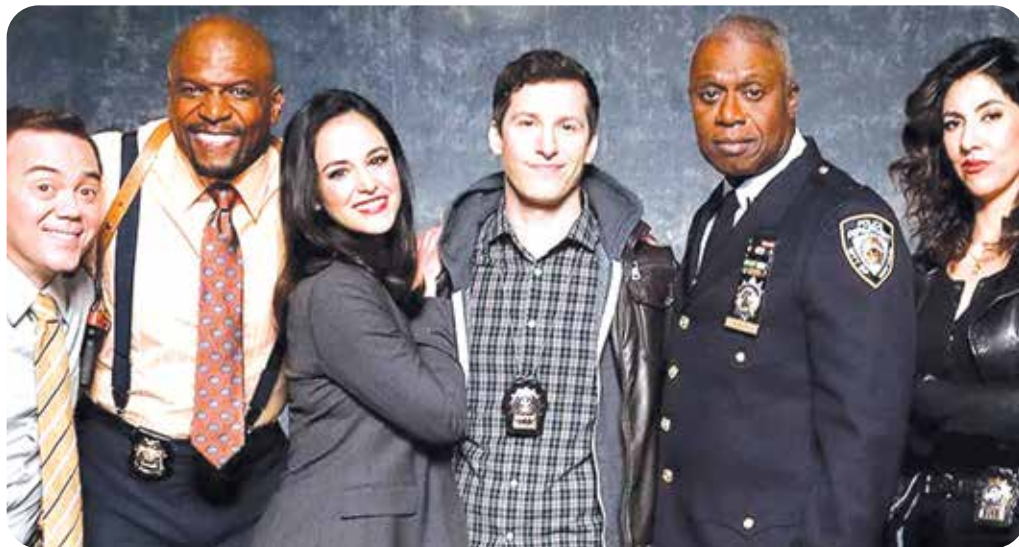
The show, produced by Universal Television, originally ran for five seasons on Fox before it was cancelled but NBC picked up the show for a sixth season that aired in 2019.

Ahead of the show's season seven premiere in 2020, it was renewed for the eighth season but the production was affected due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Season eight, which will debut during the 2021-22 broadcast season, will consist of 10 episodes, according to The Hollywood Reporter.

Created by Dan Goor and Michael Schur, the cop comedy is set in the fictional 99th Precinct of the New York City Police Department in Brooklyn.

It follows a team of detectives, headed by the overly serious, newly



appointed Captain Raymond Holt, played by Andre Braugher.

Actor Adam Samberg stars as Jake Peralta alongside Melissa Fumero as Amy Santiago, Stephanie Beatriz as Rosa Diaz, Terry Crews as Terry Jeffords and Joe Lo Truglio as Charles Boyle.

Sharing a statement on the show's official Twitter handle, Goor reminisced about pitching the show with

co-creator Mike Schur and his time on the series.

"Ending the show was a difficult decision, but ultimately, we felt it was the best way to honour the characters, the story and our viewers. I know some people will be disappointed it's ending so soon, but honestly, I'm grateful it lasted this long," he said.

Fumero shared the post, saying that being a part of the show was one of the "greatest

joys" of her life.

"I am so grateful to be able to take a victory lap with our beloved cast and crew. To our amazing fans, we love you. No tears for now, we still have a whole season to shoot!" she added.

"Brooklyn Nine-Nine" is produced by Universal Television, a division of NBCUniversal Content Studios, Fremulon, Dr Goor Productions and 3 Arts Entertainment.

Disney still committed to release 'Black Widow' in theatres

LOS ANGELES, FEB 12 (PTI): Disney CEO Bob Chapek has insisted that Scarlett Johansson-front superhero movie "Black Widow" is still on course to make its debut in theatres worldwide.

During an investor call on Thursday, Chapek said the company has no plans to send the Marvel Studios project to its streamer Disney Plus, as per Deadline.

"We are still intending for it to be a theatrical release. We are going to be watching very carefully to see whether that strategy needs to be revisited," he said.

"Black Widow", featuring Johansson in her last appearance as Natasha Romanoff / Black Widow, was originally scheduled for release in May 2020 but was delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The film is currently slated to release on May



7 this year.

During the pandemic, Disney has made some bold moves to compensate for the closure of movie theatres. It took the decision of sending its big-budget live action movie "Mulan" to Disney Plus.

The studio also sent

animated feature "Soul" to the streamer, while another movie "Raya and the Last Dragon" will be debuting simultaneously in theatres and on Disney Plus for an extra USD 30.

"Some films we will take theatrically. Some films we

will take to Disney Premiere Access. And in some cases, we will take it directly to service (Disney Plus). It's really about flexibility. We're going to steer our decision making over time given (the needs) of our subscriber base," Chapek said.

MP cops provide security to Kangana after Cong leaders' threat

BHOPAL, FEB 12 (PTI): Madhya Pradesh police have put in place thick security cover around Bollywood actor Kangana Ranaut in the wake of a threat by some state Congress leaders that they would not allow her shoot for a film if she did not apologise to farmers over her tweets, an official said on Friday.

Shooting for "Dhaakad", Ranaut's new film, is going on in Sarni area of Betul district.

Talking to PTI over phone, Sarni City Superintendent

of Police (CSP) Abhay Ram Choudhary said, "Security has been tightened for the actress after MP Home Minister Narottam Mishra directed Betul Superintendent of Police Simala Prasad to do so."

Police personnel equipped with batons and firearms are deployed around the coal handling plant (CHL) near a power project, where the shooting is on, he added.

"Police will man gate numbers two and four of the CHL, from where actors

usually enter the shooting venue," Choudhary said.

An inspector has been assigned to oversee Ranaut's safety at the resort, located around 45 kms from Sarni town, where she is during for the shoot, he said.

"We will ensure that she does not face any disturbance during the shoot," the CSP added.

As per the film schedule, her shoot at Sarni would end on February 17, the police officer said.

State Congress Sewa Dal

secretary Manoj Arya and Chicholi Block Congress Committee president Nekram Yadav had on Wednesday submitted a memorandum to a tehsildar in Betul, in which they threatened that they would not allow Ranaut to shoot at Sarni if she does not apologise by Friday evening over her comments against the ongoing farmers' protest.

The Congress leaders had alleged that Ranaut had maligned farmers.



FROLICKING FARRAH! Celeb Farrah Abraham splashed around in a bikini on the beach in Malibu, California.

ARIES:

The Magician, as the name suggests, is one of the most magical cards in the tarot deck. It depicts a magus, standing by his altar, beckoning the powerful forces, and turning thoughts to things. What makes him oh-so-special is the fact that he possesses all the tools one needs in order to manifest his dreams. His appearance is a reminder of your own superpowers, Aries. That and the fact that the resources you need are being made available to you. So, set an intention carefully as you begin this beautiful journey of co-creation. What the cards want you to remember: you are so loved and so supported.

TAURUS:

There are times we make practical decisions, and then there are times when we let our emotions get the better of us. But today, you're being asked to find a balance between the two. To honour the yin and the yang in equal measures. This will help you make a decision that is in alignment with the highest good of yourself and others. Remember, no act of kindness goes unnoticed. You will be rewarded generously for your actions—this is a promise from the Universal court of law.

GEMINI:

Once again, the cards are reminding you of your limitless potential. There is so much you're meant to create, so many ways in which you are meant to contribute to the world around you. So stop wasting your time dimming your light. Stop wasting your time playing it small. An opportunity you let go of a while ago will find its way back to you in the coming days. Do what it takes to make it yours.

CANCER:

You've done it all, Cancer. You've defied the norms and forged your own path. However, this stage of your life demands a different version of you—one who understands, honours and respects the rules. So do things by the book for as long as you're being guided to. As such, working closely with a mentor or coach you trust will also help you take your life in a whole new direction. Yes, there is a lot that is unknown about the journey ahead. Trust that your past experiences have taught you a whole lot about riding the waves.

LEO:

This is a beautiful time in the Leo HQ. A time of feeling all the feels. Of experiencing that 'ridiculous, inconvenient, consuming, can't-live-without-each-other' kind of love that you have been longing for. Remember, you

have attracted this connection into your life for a reason. So get out of your head, stop giving your fears any more power than they deserve, and start listening to your heart. Staying present to this moment is the key, wild one.

VIRGO:

Self-care is coming up as a big theme, Virgo, and the cards want you to know it's more than just bubble baths and organic face masks. It's about choosing to be in an environment that's uplifting in every way and full of people who are supportive of your earthly mission. Something tells us you're about to make a major breakthrough on that front. Things are about to take a turn for the better on the love and romance front too. You'll find yourself in the company of somebody who understands the true meaning of 'unconditional' and won't shy away from letting their feelings be known.

LIBRA:

St Valentine has something special in store for you, Libra. We're talking about a love that's full of passion and will remind you of what it's like to be fully alive. Word for the wise: don't let your head get in the way of this one. This is a fantastic time for Venusians in love too. Some of you may be planning a weekend getaway (or adventurous trip) to a place you love. Trust that this is going to

bring about a positive shift in the way that you relate with each other.

SCORPIO:

You've spent way too much time undermining your talent. You've spent too much time letting others take credit for the work you do. But, this ends right here, right now, Scorpio. Today, you're being called to step out of the shadows. You know who you are and you know what you came here to do. Unyielding faith in yourself will help you manifest your wildest dreams in the now!

SAGITTARIUS:

Quit playing games with your own heart, Sagittarius. Quit beating around the bush about what it is that you really want. If you want to make things work with them, then make things work with them. Allow your vulnerable side to show. Let go of the many masks that have been protecting you for all these years. Maybe things will work out better than you imagine. Maybe they won't. Staying in the present is a superpower, you know?

CAPRICORN:

It's easy to be the giver in every situation. In some sense, it satisfies our ego and makes us feel like the greater person. Allowing ourselves to receive, on the other hand, can be hard. The cards are advising you to stay

open nonetheless in order to bring a balance between the energy of giving and receiving. You have so many wonderful people in your life, beloved. People who want to be there for you and show you the light in the best way they can.

AQUARIUS:

Tragic tales are overrated. The best love stories are the ones where the protagonists find a way to work things out despite the odds. Who says this cannot be your story, Aquarius? The cards are urging you to get out of your head and listen to what your heart is telling you. Stop saying no when all you want to do is work things out. It isn't going to be easy. But you'll find a way to navigate through this situation as long as you stay balanced.

PISCES:

Like the Libras, you could on be on the brink of manifesting a passionate affair, one that could open you up in more ways than you can imagine. Let life happen to you, Pisces. Allow yourself to taste and smell flavours you've been afraid of for some time now. No, it's not always going to be pleasant. There is always a possibility of having your heart broken. But what you will gain in terms of experiences is far greater than what you could lose in the process.