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SummitTIMES

Vol 06 | Issue 258 | Gangtok | Saturday 09 October 2021

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | Rs. 5

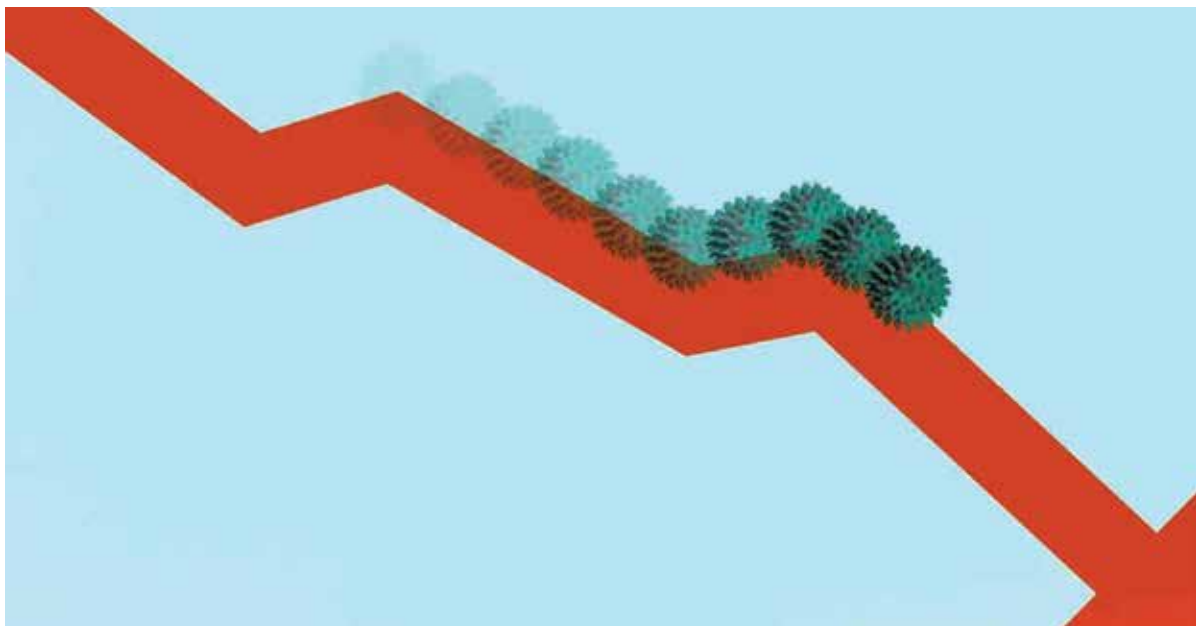
Active cases drop to 326 in Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 08 OCT:**

The number of active Covid cases in Sikkim declined further to 326 on Friday with 74 new recoveries recorded in the past 24 hours. The count of fully recovered cases in Sikkim now stands at 30,606 and the state boasts a recovery rate of 97.7%.

The recovery rate will keep improving from hereon given that most of the Covid-positive people on their way to recovery under home or facility isolation and hospitalization is very low. There were only three new hospitalizations among Covid patients yesterday and there are five in ICU.

What is more, Covid fatalities have also reduced substantially and the State has now gone five days without any Covid deaths and the toll holds steady at 388.



On continuing positive note, Sikkim's daily test positivity rate continues to remain sub-5 and came in at 4.9% today with 33 of the 673 samples screened yesterday testing positive.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim issued by the Inte-

grated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department this morning, while 18 cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 254 samples, 15 others tested positive in rapid antigen testing of 418 samples.

Of the 33 new cases

in the State, 21 were reported in East District, six in West District and six in South.

The State's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 detected in the State since testing began on 28 Feb, 2020, stands at 31,636.

Meanwhile, the State

administered 4,258 doses of Covishield on Thursday. While 4,050 completed their vaccination schedule with the second dose yesterday, 208 received their first dose.

4,05,946 people in Sikkim are now fully vaccinated.

Sikkimey Nagarik Samaj extends solidarity to Dzongu's anti-dam stand

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 08 OCT:**

Sikkimey Nagarik Samaj has reiterated its demand for scrapping of Teesta Stage IV hydroelectric project and extended solidarity to residents of Dzongu who recently reaffirmed their opposition to the project.

The protection and preservation of customs, traditions, environment and ecology is the prime duty of all Sikkimese people, SNS states in a press release issued by its general secretary, Pasang Sherpa, today.

The release has also registered its concern over the reported incident of cow slaughter in Sikkim and remarked that it was unfortunate to see this in a state with a BJP alliance in government.

SNS has also spoken about that "negligence and carelessness" displayed by the State Government in its overnight

decision to shift a major taxi stand in Gangtok and inconveniencing everyone.

"It seems that the Government is more sympathetic to mall developer than general Sikkimese people," the release states.

"The incompetence of SKM-BJP led Government is exposed with the fact that much hyped Su-Swastha Yojna was withdrawn as the company hired by state turned out to be bogus. The state has awarded many educational institutes, hydro projects and shopping malls to bogus companies having no credentials and have jeopardised the future of Sikkim," the release adds.

The release stresses that the state government must "immediately stop" patronizing bogus companies and provide opportunities to local entrepreneurs and contractors instead.

Solar fencing introduced to curb wildlife raids in West and North Sikkim



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 08 OCT:**

To address the issue of human-wildlife conflict solar fencing was undertaken by WWF-India, Sikkim, under the UNDP-SECURE Himalaya Project of the Forest and Environment Department, a press release informs.

Fencing work has been completed along private farmlands in two villages which had high conflict with wild animals. Chongri village in West Sikkim is located right on the boundary of Khangchendzonga National Park and has seen farms raided by barking

deer, wild boars, and porcupines. Bitchu village in Lachung, North Sikkim, has the Himalayan Black Bear as the main "conflict animal."

At both these villages, the main routes used by wild animals to come into the farmland were identified for fencing. The fencing covers an area of around 0.2 hectares on three sides of the two villages.

These sites were selected after meetings with owners of the farmlands, Forest Department and UNDP- SECURE Himalaya Project Officials and based on Human

Wildlife Conflict Assessment conducted as part of the SECURE Himalaya project by ATREE, the release informs.

The entire solar fencing work was carried out by local youth from Talkharka village in East Sikkim, Sewan Rai and Navin Rai along with WWF-India Team, Pemba Tshering Bhutia and Rikchen Zimba. These youth were trained by WWF-India as part of an earlier intervention in Talkharka for Human Wildlife Conflict management.

Sewan Rai mentioned that the earlier pilot conducted at Talkharka had proved beneficial for the communities with a reduction in crop-loss due to wild animals such as porcupines and barking deer. They were happy to have received the opportunity to expand the solar fencing initiative to other villages that were also suffering from the same challenges.

In Sikkim, communities which depend on agriculture, **turn to pg02**

Cops try to make South Sikkim cyber-secure

**BIKASH CHETTRI
NAMCHI, 08 OCT:**

There can never be enough awareness about a problem which has fooled not just the internet-ignorant but also a chief accountant and a whole crowd of engineers and teachers. Yes, cyber-cons are back in the news, and South Sikkim Police undertook another attempt at getting people to see the scam behind obviously fraudulent ways to profit and organized an awareness programme on cyber-security at Panchsheel Bhawan in Jorethang today.

The problem is very real in Sikkim, and the victims, unlike suspected, are not just "illiterate, innocent" people from the villages.

ASP-South, Rinzing

Chopel Rai, present as one of the resource persons today, informed that even a chief accountant with a corporation lost Rs 32 lakh to cyber frauds, as did an assistant professor who lost Rs 92 lakh, and many JEs, AEs, teachers and others, people one would believe to be better informed, have fallen prey to the cyber frauds

The 'Sikkim Against Fraud Action Initiative' is into its second week now. Nayabazar Jorethang Nagar Panchayat chairperson, Pabitra Manav, was present as chief guest for the programme attended by students, teachers, businesspersons, drivers, and others.

PI Neeraj Khatiwada SHO of Jorethang Police Station, Cyber Specialist Dr Palchen Sherpa, and

representatives from RBI were also present as resource persons.

The South District Cyber Cell covered topics like online shopping frauds, social media ethics of responsible netizens, preventive action and redressal to online banking frauds.

The problem has become so acute in the district, which incidentally set up a cyber crimes cell recently, that police here has a 'Cyber Security Awareness Month' underway at present. The first week saw awareness sessions in Namchi, the second week is in Jorethang, and the third and fourth weeks will see similar sessions in Rabongla and Namchi.

Voice NGO has supported the campaign right since the start.

Petrol, diesel price hiked again



NEW DELHI, OCT 8 (PTI): Petrol price on Friday was hiked by 30 paise a litre and diesel by 35 paise per litre as domestic fuel prices witnessed possibly the largest rally in rates.

The price of petrol in Delhi rose to its highest-ever level of Rs 103.54 a litre and to Rs 109.54 per litre in Mumbai, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

Diesel rates too touched a record high of Rs 92.12 in Delhi and inched closer to the Rs 100-a-litre mark in Mumbai. It currently costs Rs 99.92 a litre in Mumbai.

Prices differ from state to state depending

on the incidence of local taxes. Shedding its modest price change policy, state-owned fuel retailers have since Wednesday started passing on the larger incidence of cost to consumers. For three days in a row, petrol price has been hiked by 30 paise a litre and diesel by 35 paise - the biggest rally in rates.

This is because the international benchmark Brent crude has soared to over USD 82 per barrel after the decision by OPEC+ not to increase output more than 0.4 million barrels per day, fuel rates are being increased by a larger proportion.

A month back, Brent

was around USD 72 per barrel.

Being a net importer of oil, India prices petrol and diesel at rates equivalent to international prices.

The surge in international oil prices ended a three-week hiatus in rates on September 28 for petrol and September 24 for diesel.

Since then, diesel rates have gone up by Rs 3.5 paise per litre and petrol price has increased by Rs 2.35.

Prior to the July/August price cuts, the petrol price was increased by Rs 11.44 a litre between May 4 and July 17. Diesel rate had gone up by Rs 9.14 during this period.

Uphaar Fire Tragedy: Court convicts Ansals in evidence tampering case

NEW DELHI, 08 OCT [PTI]: A Delhi court on Friday convicted real estate barons Sushil and Gopal Ansal for tampering with evidence in the 1997 Uphaar cinema fire case.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Pankaj Sharma also held a former court staff Dinesh Chand Sharma and individuals P P Batra and Anoop Singh guilty in the case. The court is likely to hear arguments on quantum of sentence on Monday.

The case is related to tampering with the evidence in the main

fire tragedy which had claimed 59 lives, in which the Ansals were convicted and sentenced to 2-year jail term by the Supreme Court.

The top court however released them taking into account the prison time they had done on the condition that they pay 30 crore fine each, to be used for building a trauma centre in the national capital.

Two other accused, Har Swaroop Panwar and Dharamvir Malhotra, died during the course of the trial.

Nobel Peace Prize awarded to journalists Maria Ressa, Dmitry Muratov

OSLO, 08 Oct [AFP]: The Nobel Peace Prize was on Friday awarded to journalists Maria Ressa of the Philippines and Dmitry Muratov of Russia for their fight for freedom of expression in their countries.

The pair were honoured "for their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace," said the chairwoman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Berit Reiss-Andersen.

"They are representatives of all journalists who stand up for this ideal in a world in which democracy and freedom of the press face increasingly

adverse conditions," she said.

Ressa, 58, told Norwegian TV2 she was "shocked" and "emotional" to receive the honour, which she said would give her and her colleagues "tremendous energy to continue the fight."

In 2012, Ressa co-founded Rappler, a digital media company for investigative journalism, which she still heads, while Muratov is one of the founders of the independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta.

Rappler has "focused critical attention on the Duterte regime's controversial, murderous anti-drug cam-

paign," Reiss-Andersen said.

"The number of deaths is so high that the campaign resembles a war waged against the country's own population," Reiss-Andersen said.

Ressa and Rappler have also documented how social media is being used to spread fake news, harass opponents and manipulate public discourse.

Ressa, a former CNN correspondent who also holds US citizenship, is currently on bail pending an appeal against a conviction last year in a cyber libel case, for which she faces up to six years in prison. Muratov, 59, has

defended freedom of speech in Russia for decades, under increasingly challenging conditions.

In 1993, he was a founder of Novaya Gazeta, which has a "fundamentally critical attitude towards power" the committee said. He has been its editor-in-chief since 1995.

Novaya Gazeta's opponents have responded with harassment, threats, violence and murder.

Since the newspaper's start, six of its journalists have been killed, including Anna Politkovskaya who wrote revealing articles on the war in Chechnya.

turn to pg02



ALL FIRED UP FOR CLEANLINESS

MANGAN, 08 OCT: The firefighters of North Sikkim joined the 'Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav' campaign today with a massive cleanliness drive at BAC Mangan. The drive by Sikkim Fire & Emergency Service was conducted under the supervision of FSO, BB Limboo, and undertaken by the staff of Mangan Fire Station.

IMI invites nominations for Dr RS Tolia Award, entries for Indian Himalaya Online Photography Contest

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 08 OCT:

The Integrated Mountain initiative has invited nominations for the annual Dr RS Tolia Award given to encourage passionate individuals to carry forward the cause of integrated mountain development. Also today, IMI opened entries for the Indian Himalaya Online Photography Contest 2021.

An IMI press release informs that the award carries a cash prize of Rs 1,00,000 and was insti-

tuted to recognise and reward exemplary work of individuals whose work has created an impact or has the potential to impact sustainable prosperity and well-being of the people of the mountain states in India. The last date for recommending nominations is 31 October, 2021.

The photography contest, meanwhile, is jointly organised by IMI and its state chapter, Darjeeling Himalaya Initiative (DHI), as a part of IMI's flagship event Sus-

tainable Mountain Development Summit.

The theme for this year's photography contest is 'Food Cultures for the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR)'.

The deadline for entries is 15 October and winners will be announced during the SMDS X, being held from 18 to 20 November 2021. Submissions must be sent to progcoordinator@inmi.in, more details to the contest are available on the IMI website: <https://www.mountaininitiative.in/>.

North health-workers oriented on 21 disabilities



MANGAN, 08 OCT [IPR]:

An orientation programme on 21 types of disabilities, evaluation and procedure for certification was organised by the Social Welfare Division, Social Justice and Welfare Department at Mangan today.

The programme was attended by Joint Secretary cum Nodal officer for Disabilities (SJ&WD)

Abinash Rai accompanied by Joint Commissioner for Persons With Disabilities Dr MB Chettri, CMO (North) Dr Tempo T Kaleon, DMS (North) Dr Rinzing Doma Bhutia, UDID State Coordinator Sameer Pradhan and doctors, nurses and staff of the District Hospital and PHCs of North District.

Solar fencing introduced...

agro-forestry and animal husbandry as their main source of livelihood, are severely impacted by wildlife depredation. Crop raiding by animals such as wild boar, black bear, barking deer, monkeys, civets, peafowl and more has reached such heights that in some instances, farmers have called off agriculture, leading to significant drop in household income.

In a study conducted by WWF-India, villages situated in the fringes of 3 Sanctuaries, revealed that crop damage ranged from 10% to as high as 64% of the estimated yield across crops such as maize, potatoes and legumes. The nature of conflict is complex and layered and is often overlooked

which cause a considerable economic loss to the farmers, further damage to property, attacks on livestock as well as humans, particularly by bears, which is on the rise.

After the installation, training was also imparted to the owners of the farmland on basic maintenance and monitoring of the same. Close monitoring results on the conflict post installation of the fence would be an important data to understand the impact of solar fencing, based on same the fencing work can be scaled up in future. WWF- India has been working with communities and the relevant departments to manage conflict and reduce the income loss suffered by farmers.

ANTHEYESTI KRIYA

The Antheyesti Kriya of Late Dhanapati Kharel, who left for his heavenly abode on 30th September, 2021, falls on 12 October, 2021. We invite all friends, family and well-wishers to join us in prayers (13th day rites) for the departed soul at our residence in Rawtey Rumtek.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who stood by us in our time of bereavement.



Dr M P Kharel, H P Kharel, Prakash Kharel (sons)
Kamala Devi Kharel, Tulashi Kharel, Indira Kharel, Sangita Kharel (daughters)
Bimala Kharel, Hima Kharel, Rajani Ratna Pandey (daughter in law)
Dr Hari Krishna Shiwakoti, D N Sharma, D R Thapa (son in law)
Vinod Kharel, Sunny Kharel (grandsons)
And entire Kharel Family.
Contact: 8918237123, 9434241044, 9434164765

100+ farmers receive awareness and aid at Pabyuik function

GANGTOK, 08 OCT [IPR]: An awareness cum token distribution programme for the farmers of Syari constituency, East District, was held at Pabyuik Community Centre under Bhusuk Naitam Gram Panchayat Unit today.

The Minister for Education Department cum Area MLA, Syari constituency, Kunga Nima Lepcha graced the occasion as the Chief Guest while the Minister for Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services Departments Lok Nath Sharma was present as the Guest of Honour.

Approximately one hundred and above farmers of the Syari Constituency received various farming machinery equipment and tools including, power tiller, chaff cutter, power weeder, brush cutter, spices grinder, garden hand tools, farm machinery, under Agriculture Department. Similarly, the farmers were handed over tokens of Tubular Structure Green House and Functional Pack House under the Horticulture Department. The Chief Guest and the Guest of Honour also handed over tokens of the silage bag, chaff cutter, sheep farming, goat farming and construction of Raceway Fisheries Tank to the beneficiaries under the Animal Husbandry Department. Besides, a token of a Custom Hiring Centre of Rs. ten lakh was also presented to the farmers of the constituency.

Minister-cum-Area MLA, Kunga Nima Lepcha expressed gratitude to the Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services Departments for making a commendable effort to benefit the farmers of Syari Constituency. He stated that the programme is dedicated to making people aware of the opportunities availed by the State Government and added that they need to utilise availed benefits with utmost care for a sustainable source of livelihood.

He articulated that the rural part of the Syari constituency is blessed with an abundance of natural resources and farming potential and further advised the farmers to be more progressive and dedicated to achieving prosperity. He added that the State Government has been working tirelessly in various sectors including health, agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, education and other areas and said that people have been wit-



nessing its impressive output within a short period.

He informed that the State Government has started the construction of a playground in every village and also apprised on the notable construction work of one hundred school buildings, which will be completed in one phase in near future.

He also threw light on developmental works like new road connectivity, house upgradation and upcoming infrastructural development in the constituency.

The Agriculture Minister Lok Nath Sharma said that the State Government has come forward with farming friendly policies and facilities with a prime motive to make them self reliant and economically sound.

He urged the beneficiaries for optimum utilisation of the equipments and tokens. Minister Sharma also articulated several exemplary sources of livelihood by the farmers within two years of duration through the same kind of token and equipment provided by the department.

He also underlined Mukhya Mantri Krishi Atmanirbhar Yojana, Mukhya Mantri Pashudhan Samridhi Yojana, Macha Utpadan Yojana and highlighted the financial benefits and purpose of initiating such visionary schemes.

He informed that the department has received a newly allocated fund of dairy incentives recently, thus, the financial incentives of Rs 8/per litre of milk will be deposited in the bank account of farmers, at the earliest. He informed that the Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang has always been concerned for the progress and benefit of the farming community.

The Minister also announced to provide a Community Water Tank of 30 thousand litres at Naitam and directed the concerned officials to constitute Water User Committee.

Secretary Agriculture Rinzing C. Bhutia, in his address, informed that the department has conducted a field survey in

recent days and underlined the future scope and potential of farming in the constituency. He also advised the Farmer Producers Organization of the locality to be more proactive at the community level. Bhutia also articulated the objectives of the State Government to work for conversion and transformation of the agricultural sector into entrepreneurship and industrial oriented.

He highlighted the implementation of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Samman Nidhi (PMKISAN) in the state and also urged left out farmers to get enrolled to the benefit of Rs. 6000/- per annum.

Approximately ten thousand farmers have been benefited under the scheme in the state within two years, he added. He also informed the farmers on various programmes and encouraged them to acquire insurance of crops/vegetation.

Secretary, AH&VS, Dr Sangey D Bhutia informed about the departmental programmes and schemes being implemented by the State Government including financial incentives in the dairy sector and piggery farming.

He also highlighted the criteria of Mukhya Mantri Pashudhan Samridhi Yojana and mentioned that the scheme would encourage piggy farming particularly breeding. He also shared about the status of fund allocation by the State Government under various schemes.

Principal Director, Horticulture Sadan Tamang spoke on the programmes of the Horticulture Department. He elaborated detailed provision of Horticulture Mission for North East and Himalayan State, Restructured National Bamboo Mission and various other schemes implemented to benefit the farmers.

The programme began with the welcome address by Additional Director, Agriculture, Smt. Bina Rai and concluded with the vote of thanks presented by Joint Director Horticulture (E) Pas-sang Tamang.



NYK cleans

NAMCHI, 08 OCT [IPR]: Volunteers of Nehru Yuva Kendra, South Sikkim, conducted a Clean India Campaign by collecting all single-use plastics waste from the surroundings of Namchi District Hospital IEC in front of NYK office.

Nobel Peace Prize...

"Despite the killings and threats, editor-in-chief Muratov has refused to abandon the newspaper's independent policy," Reiss-Andersen said.

"He has consistently defended the right of journalists to write anything they want about whatever they want, as long as they comply with the professional and ethical standards of journalism."

Free, independent and fact-based journalism helps protect against abuse of power, lies and war propaganda, Reiss-Andersen said.

"Without freedom of expression and freedom of the press, it will be difficult to successfully promote fraternity between nations, disarmament and a better world order to succeed in our time," Reiss-Andersen said.

Media watchdogs had been tipped as contenders for the prestigious prize ahead of Friday's announcement.

Last year, the honour went to the UN's humanitarian agency fighting famine, the World Food Programme (WFP).

The award's image has been hit hard over the past years as one of its previous laureates, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, became embroiled in a war. Another, Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi, was accused of defending the massacre of members of the Rohingya minority.

The prize -- consisting of a diploma, a gold medal and a cheque for 10 million kronor (980,000 euros, \$1.1 million) -- is traditionally awarded on December 10, the anniversary of the 1896 death of prize creator Alfred Nobel.

The Peace Prize is the only Nobel to be awarded in the Norwegian capital. However, it is not yet known whether Ressa and Muratov will be able to travel to Oslo to pick up the award, due to the pandemic.

The Nobel Institute in Oslo is due to decide in the coming days whether to hold its ceremony online or in person.

Next week, the Nobel season wraps up on Monday with the announcement of the Economics Prize.

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Training to promote accessible election for PwDs

SAGAR CHETTRI

GANGTOK, 08 OCT:

The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Sikkim, organized a training on "Accessible Election for Persons with Disabilities [PWDs]" in association with Sikkim Divyang Sahayata Samiti [SDSS], Gangtok, here at its office at Baluwakhani on Friday.

The training was aimed to ensure well-ordered functioning of electoral rolls and facilitation of accessible election for persons with disabilities.

Joint Chief Electoral Officer, Pema Laden Lama, and other officials explained the annual exercise of the special summary revision to be held from 01 to 30 November this year and the voter helpline app to help voters fill their form from phones, and special provisions and other related information for the PWD voters.



Speaking to Summit Times, the Joint Chief Electoral Officer informed that the main aim of the training was to generate awareness about the Voter App for PWDs to allow them to fill forms related to summary revision on the app itself.

"ECI has decided to have a very inclusive electoral roll so we want to take PWD voters along with us to make our elec-

toral roll more dynamic and inclusive. This training is a beginning and we are also requesting PWD voters to download the app and register. We also urge them to take this message to others as well," she said.

After the training programme, SDSS president Droupadi Ghimiray mentioned that the organisation has been working among PWDs to make them self-reliant and

many of them have been working successfully in their respective fields.

She spoke about various activities of the organisation in reaching out across the state to support PWDs.

On the occasion, SDSS also felicitated its working president, Ramesh Periwal, on having received an Honorary Doctorate from World Human Rights Protection Commission recently.

GPU-level awareness programmes on Biological Diversity Act

GANGTOK, 08 OCT [IPR]:

Sikkim Biodiversity Board organized awareness programmes on the Biological Diversity Act of 2002 at various Gram Panchayat Units in the State over the past week. These sessions were held at Lingdok Namphong on 22 Sept, Tarpin on 24 Sept, East Pandam on 28 Sept, Namcheybong on 30 Sept and Bering-Tareything on 02 Oct.

The programme was mainly aimed at raising awareness about the importance of biodiversity and the associated Act among the general public.

The programmes were attended by the Panchayats, officials

from RDD, Horticulture Department, Forest Department, Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs), IFMC members, and the general public including the senior citizens. The SBB officials were accompanied by PBR Coordinator Thalam Sapkota and Dharmendra Lamsal.

During the awareness programme, DFO (SBB) Bhumika Rai spoke on how the Biological Diversity Act 2002 came into existence. She focused on the process of BMC constitution, funding provisions, their roles and responsibilities and their powers and functions. Additionally, she also highlighted the People's

Biodiversity Register (PBR), documentation of which is the primary function of the BMCs.

Scientific/Technical Associate (SBB), Dr Bharat Kumar Pradhan specifically stressed the biodiversity and its conservation issues in Sikkim, highlighting the fast disappearing biodiversity associated with traditional knowledge.

He stressed the need for an individual's contribution to biodiversity conservation for providing food, water and environment security to the future generation and urged the participants to assist BMC in preparing the best People's Biodiversity Register.

The SBB officials informed the general public about the various initiatives of the SBB, such as organizing exposure trips for the best performing BMCs, the nomination of traditional animal breed savers from Lachen for the India Biodiversity Award, facilitating the BMCs in setting up the Seed Banks for traditional crop varieties and local land races and the future course of action.

They further requested the participants to put up a proposal to SBB for declaration of BHS of such sites in their respective GPU's, which are of biodiversity, cultural and historical significance.

Nets say Irving ineligible to play in home preseason game

NEW YORK (AP): The Brooklyn Nets listed Kyrie Irving as ineligible to play in their home exhibition game Friday, another strong indication he has not met New York's vaccination requirement.

Irving has not been with the Nets for any of their practices in New York, where professional athletes are required to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to practice or play. The Nets are prevented by law from revealing whether he has been vaccinated, but listed him as "ineligible to play" in the injury report for their preseason game Friday against Milwaukee.

There is nothing related to the NBA that would cause a player to have that designation. Unless Irving is vaccinated, he would have to miss the Nets' 41 home games and their two road games against the New York Knicks.

Red Ribbon HIV+ Quiz completes prelims round

GANGTOK, 10 OCT [IPR]:

Sikkim State AIDS Control Society, in its endeavor to engage young minds from across schools and colleges, to break the taboo towards people living with HIV and AIDS in Sikkim organised a state-level inter-institution quiz competition for Secondary, Senior Secondary schools and colleges across Sikkim.

The prelims concluded on the 07 October

with 112 schools and 8 colleges participating.

A link consisting questionnaires was sent to participating students and a time limit set for every question, it is informed.

The top-eight contestants from four districts will compete for a place in the State-level semifinals and final. The semifinals and final will be telecasted live through Facebook page of SSACS

and associated partners post the completion of the finals.

The winning institutions of the preliminary quiz competition are: Singtam Senior Secondary School, Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College, Holy Cross School, ICFAI, Singhik Secondary School, VCGL Senior Secondary School, Lower Bermoik Secondary School, and Govt Senior Secondary School, Yangyang.

Portal opened for post and pre-Matric scholarships

GANGTOK, 08 OCT [IPR]: Secretary, Social Justice and Welfare Department, Tshewang Gyachho, launched the online scholarship portal for students today.

The Secretary informed that the online portal can be visited by the students through socialwelfare.scholarships.sikkim.gov.in.

A tutorial video will play automatically when a person enters the website.

The portal is meant for post-matric and pre-matric students belonging to Scheduled Tribe, Scheduled Caste, Economically Backward Classes and Central OBC.

He further informed that the students who fall under the Minority Affairs Scholarship scheme have to visit a different portal i.e. scholarships.gov.in. The eligibility




of students is also done through family income, which must not exceed Rs. 2.5 lakh, annually. The last date for admission is 30 November, 2021.

The Secretary requested the eligible students to take full advantage of the scheme provided by the Government of Sikkim. He further asked the students to

utilise this opportunity and avoid errors when inserting details as the new portal is dynamic and user-friendly.

The Secretary was accompanied by Director, SJ & WD, Karma Sonam Bhutia, Additional Director Suman Gurung and AD, IT Cell, SJ & WD, Vaishnav Gajmer and concerned officials.



**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF TEXTILES
OFFICE OF DEVELOPMENT COMMISSIONER FOR HANDLOOMS**

Applications are invited from Handloom Awardees/Clusters for selection of their participation in the various Crafts Mela-2021-22 and Dilli Haat during the year 2021-22 enabling them to exhibit and sell handloom products as per details given below:-

Craft Melas

Sl. No.	Name of Crafts Mela	Location	Period of Crafts Mela
1	Surajkund Crafts Mela	Faridabad (Haryana)	01 st to 15 th February, 2022
Eligibility :- Sant Kabir Award/National Award/National Merit Certificate Holder/ India handloom Brand (IHB) registered holder/ State Awardees are eligible to participate. The National Awardees, National Merit Certificate holder And State Awardees who have participation in Surajkund Mela in 2019 and 2020 are not eligible to apply. However Sant kabir Awardees can apply irrespective of previous participation in every year. Individual Weavers are not eligible to apply.			
2	Toshali National Crafts Mela	Bhubaneswar (Odisha)	15 th to 27 th December, 2021
3	Shilparamam	Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh)	15 th to 31 st December, 2021
4	Shilparamam	Udaipur (Rajasthan)	21 st to 30 th December, 2021
5	Shilparamam	Madhapur, Hyderabad (Telangana)	15 th to 30 th December, 2021
6	Taj Mahotsav	Agre (Uttar Pradesh)	18 th to 27 th February, 2022
Eligibility- All handloom Awardees/Cluster which include Co-operative Societies/Producer companies, Self Help (SHG) and Federations are eligible to participate. Awardees/Clusters which include Co-operative Societies/Producer companies, Self Help (SHG) and Federations, who have participated in the year 2020 are not eligible. However Sant kabir Awardees can apply irrespective of previous participation in every year. Individual Weavers are not eligible to apply.			
7	Master Creation Programme	Dilli Haat, INA Market, New Delhi	01 st to 15 th December, 2021
Eligibility- Only Sant kabir Awardees, National Awardees and National Merit Certificate holders can apply. Those National Awardees, National Merit Certificate holders participated during 2020 are not eligible to apply. However Sant kabir Awardees can apply irrespective of previous participation in every year.			


Dilli Haat

Sl. No.	Slots	Sl. No.	Slots
1.	1 st to 15 th October, 2021	7.	16 th to 31 st January, 2022
2.	16 th to 31 st October, 2021	8.	1st to 15 th February, 2022
3.	1 st to 15 th November, 2021	9.	16th to 28 th February, 2022
4.	16 th to 30 th November, 2021	10.	1st to 15 th March, 2022
5.	16 th to 31 st December, 2021	11.	16th to 31 st March, 2022
6.	1 st to 15 th January, 2022		

Eligibility


- All Handloom Clusters which include Co-operative Societies/ Producer companies, Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Federations are eligible to participate
- Agency will be considered for participation after gap of one year from previous allotment to ensure adequate rotation.

All Eligible clusters are required to fill up only one application for all the above slots of Dilli Haat in the prescribed format and submit to their nearest Weavers Service Centre (WSC) with intimation to the office of the Development Commissioner for (Handloom). The last date for submission of application from for Crafts Melas and Dilli Haat will be fifteen days from the date of publication in the newspaper. For more details, applicants may contact their nearest Weavers Service Centre or log on to the website of the Development Commissioner for Handlooms: www.handlooms.nic.in.



Development Commissioner (Handlooms)
Govt. of India, Ministry of Textiles, Udyog Bhawan, New Delhi-110011

dayp 41102/11/0010/2122



India Post Payments Bank
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RECRUITMENT OF VACANCIES (INCLUDING BACKLOG) IN SCALE II, III, IV, V, VI & VII ON REGULAR/DEPUTATION BASIS

Advertisement No.: IPPB/HR/CO/REC/2021-22/01

Applications are invited for appointments to the following posts on Regular/Deputation Basis:

Department	Scale	Post/Designation	Type of Employment	No. of Vacancies
Technology	V	AGM - Enterprise/ Integration Architect	Regular	1
	IV	Chief Manager - Digital Technology	Regular	1
	IV	Chief Manager - IT Project Management	Regular	1
	IV	Chief Manager - Banking & Payment Solution Architect	Regular	1
	III	Senior Manager - Network/ Infrastructure Administration	Regular	1
	III	Senior Manager - System/ Database Administration	Regular	1
Information Security	II	Manager - Digital Technology	Regular	1
	IV	Chief Manager - Security Architect	Regular	1
Product	III	Senior Manager - Security Administration	Regular	2
	V	AGM - BSG (Business Solutions Group)	Regular	1
Operations	IV	Chief Manager - Retail Products	Regular	1
	IV	Chief Manager - PG Acquiring	Regular	1
	VII	GM-Operations	Deputation	1
	V	AGM -Operations	Regular	1
	IV	Chief Manager -Operations	Regular	1
Risk Management	III	Senior Manager -Operations	Regular	1
	II	Manager -Operations	Regular	1
Finance	VI	DGM -Risk/Chief Risk Officer	Regular	1
	IV	Chief Manager - Fraud Monitoring	Regular	1
CEO Office	VI	DGM-Finance & Accounts	Deputation	1
	V	AGM- Financial Planning, Budgeting and Analysis	Regular	1
	III	Company Secretary	Regular	1

Post/Grade/Scale	Age (as on 01-09-2021)	Experience in Officer Cadre	Pay Scale
Manager (MMGS-II)	23 to 35 years	3 Years	31,705 – 45,950
Senior Manager (MMGS-III)	26 to 35 Years	6 Years	42,020 – 51,490
Chief Manager (SMGS-IV)	29 to 45 Years	9 Years	50,030 – 59,170
Assistant General Manager (SMGS-V)	32 to 45 Years	12 Years	59,170 – 66,070
Deputy General Manager (TEGS-VI)	35 to 55 Years	15 Years	68,680 – 76,520
General Manager (TEGS-VII)	38 to 55 Years	18 Years	76,520 – 85,000

IMPORTANT DATES:

(i)	Opening date for On-line Registration of Applications	09.10.2021 : 10.00 AM
(ii)	Last date of On-line Submission of Applications with Fee	23.10.2021 : 11.59 PM

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Place: New Delhi
Date: 09.10.2021

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Sd/-
Chief HR Officer

Small, Marginal and Ignored

The real farmers of Sikkim need some real engagements

So, as per the Agriculture Census of 2010-11, there were 74,928 farmers in Sikkim. It is anybody's guess whether this number has grown or fallen in the eight years since because at least as far as officials in departments which work with farmers, such matters as data, planning or preparation do not command much priority. The number of farmers, it appears, has been worked out from the number of land-holdings in the State and that offers some interesting insights. While the overall number of farmers in the State appears robust, when one break it down to how much land individual farmers have access to for cultivation, the bubble bursts. 40,476 of the farmers, 54% of the total lot, till barely 14% of the landholdings, managing with less than a hectare of farmland. This, in official records, makes them "small farmers". Next, 23% of the farmers have landholdings between one to two hectares making them "marginal farmers" in official records. Small and marginal farmers, accounting for 76% of the landholdings, possess only 33% of the agricultural land. The top-level, those with farming tracts of more than 4 hectares, count barely 780 (1.04% of the total number of farmers) but occupy 11.53% of the total arable land. The biggest portion of land available for agriculture in Sikkim, 55.46% of the landholding area, sits in the hands of big landholders owning between 2 to 4 hectares; there are 16,731 of them, roughly 22% of the farmers in Sikkim.

Of course, not everyone who "owns" farming land is a farmer, and very few, if any, of the two hectares and above owning "farmers" are actually hands-on agriculturists. What is clear is that agriculture and horticulture production in the State relies on the 76% small and marginal farmers of Sikkim who possess an average of 0.61 hectares. As their classification as "small and marginal" suggests, they are also ones most at risk of exploitation and short-changing by middlemen since they are also more at risk of suffering due to the vagaries of weather patterns. Any price support mechanism or addition of value to their produce would hence go a long way towards alleviating their condition. In this regard, the Organic Mission was best suited for them because it offered them an opportunity to earn more their small fields. That would have required more than awareness camps on organic farming, they already know how to do that rather well except perhaps the bureaucratic procedures of getting organic certification. What they required with convincing that that organic route would fetch them higher returns, and for that they needed more focused marketing assistance instead of being talked down upon by service providers how good organic farming was for people's health and Sikkim's environment. That marketing support has been sorely lacking. Is still lacking despite the monopoly extended to them by the ban on non-organic farm produce in Sikkim.

What should also have arrived alongside the Organic push was credit support for them to revitalize their farms and invest in their handkerchief size landholdings (because accept it, 0.61 hectares is not much farmland to work with). It would have been desired that credit support formed an integral part of the Organic Mission and increased alongside the mission engagement to make Sikkim organic. Unfortunately, that did not happen either. The State Focus Paper 2018-19 for Sikkim prepared by NABARD as a bank credit projection for the State reveals that credit flow to the agriculture sector has been low and erratic over the past three years. Banks achieved only 22.36% of the projected target for credit to agriculture in 2014-15, improved it dramatically to 40.87% of the target in 2015-16 and then collapsed to 15.37% in 2016-17. To get a perspective, here are some numbers- against Rs 16,725 lakh projected by NABARD for credit to agriculture in Sikkim, the banks released only Rs 3,739 lakh in 2014-15. Undeterred by this shortfall, NABARD projected a target of Rs 19,901 lakh for agriculture in 2016-17. The banks responded by releasing even less than the credit they had provided in 2014-15 and released only Rs 3,058 lakh by way of loans in 2016-17. Even factoring in the over-ambitious ideal-situation enthusiasm of such projections, concerned officials still expect at least 40% achievement of targets. Instead, banks in Sikkim gave agriculture 22%, 41% and 15% achievement over the past three years. Apart from disinterest among the banks, there were clearly no efforts at coordination by the State's agencies either. In contrast, industries received 241% of the projected credit potential in 2014-15 and even in 2016-17 received a handsome 60% of the projected credit flow for the sector. Housing and transport sector were also favoured by banks and maintained a high 70's percentage till 2016 which dipped to 51% in 2016-17, a drop perhaps forced by the demonetization experiment.

The point being made here is that Sikkim's small and marginal farmers need special attention, not romanticizing but some real engagements which address their issues and not just the requirements of everyone else who claims to be working for them.

WRITE US:

Readers are invited to comment on, criticise, run down, even appreciate if they like something in this paper. Letters carrying abusive/ indecorous language and personal attacks, except when against people responsible in this newspaper (who are fair game), will have to be ignored. Letters which carry forward a conversation or initiate a dialogue will command immediate attention and receive prominence. Mail us at: news@summittimes.com

Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen testified that the company's algorithms are dangerous – here's how they can manipulate you

FILIPPO MENCZER
theconversation.com

Former Facebook product manager Frances Haugen testified before the U.S. Senate on Oct. 5, 2021, that the company's social media platforms "harm children, stoke division and weaken our democracy."

Haugen was the primary source for a Wall Street Journal exposé on the company. She called Facebook's algorithms dangerous, said Facebook executives were aware of the threat but put profits before people, and called on Congress to regulate the company.

Social media platforms rely heavily on people's behavior to decide on the content that you see. In particular, they watch for content that people respond to or "engage" with by liking, commenting and sharing. Troll farms, organizations that spread provocative content, exploit this by copying high-engagement content and posting it as their own, which helps them reach a wide audience.

As a computer scientist who studies the ways large numbers of people interact using technology, I understand the logic of using the wisdom of the crowds in these algorithms. I also see substantial pitfalls in how the social media companies do so in practice.

FROM LIONS ON THE SAVANNA TO LIKES ON FACEBOOK

The concept of the wisdom of crowds assumes that using signals from others' actions, opinions and preferences as a guide will lead to sound decisions. For example, collective predictions are normally more accurate than individual ones. Collective intelligence is used to predict financial markets, sports, elections and even disease outbreaks.

Throughout millions of years of evolution, these principles have been coded into the human brain in the form of cognitive biases that come with names like familiarity, mere exposure and bandwagon effect. If everyone starts running, you should also start running; maybe someone saw a lion coming and running could save your life. You may not know why, but it's wiser to ask questions later.

Your brain picks up clues from the environment – including your peers – and uses simple rules to quickly translate those signals into decisions: Go with the winner, follow the majority, copy your neighbor. These rules work remarkably well in typical situations because they are based on sound assumptions. For example, they assume that people often act rationally, it is unlikely that many are wrong, the past predicts the future, and so on.

Technology allows people to access signals from much larger numbers of other people, most of whom they do not know. Artificial intelligence applications make heavy use of these popularity or "engagement" signals, from selecting search en-

gine results to recommending music and videos, and from suggesting friends to ranking posts on news feeds.

NOT EVERYTHING VIRAL DESERVES TO BE

Our research shows that virtually all web technology platforms, such as social media and news recommendation systems, have a strong popularity bias. When applications are driven by cues like engagement rather than explicit search engine queries, popularity bias can lead to harmful unintended consequences.

Social media like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and TikTok rely heavily on AI algorithms to rank and recommend content. These algorithms take as input what you like, comment on and share – in other words, content you engage with. The goal of the algorithms is to maximize engagement by finding out what people like and ranking it at the top of their feeds.

On the surface this seems reasonable. If people like credible news, expert opinions and fun videos, these algorithms should identify such high-quality content. But the wisdom of the crowds makes a key assumption here: that recommending what is popular will help high-quality content "bubble up."

We tested this assumption by studying an algorithm that ranks items using a mix of quality and popularity. We found that in general, popularity bias is more likely to lower the overall quality of content. The reason is that engagement is not a reliable indicator of quality when few people have been exposed to an item. In these cases, engagement generates a noisy signal, and the algorithm is likely to amplify this initial noise. Once the popularity of a low-quality item is large enough, it will keep getting amplified.

Algorithms aren't the only thing affected by engagement bias – it can affect people too. Evidence shows that information is transmitted via "complex contagion," meaning the more times people are exposed to an idea online, the more likely they are to adopt and reshare it. When social media tells people an item is going viral, their cognitive biases kick in and translate into the irresistible urge to pay attention to it and share it.

NOT-SO-WISE CROWDS

We recently ran an experiment using a news literacy app called Fakey. It is a game developed by our lab that simulates a news feed like those of Facebook and Twitter. Players see a mix of current articles from fake news, junk science, hyperpartisan and conspiratorial sources, as well as mainstream sources. They get points for sharing or liking news from reliable sources and for flagging low-credibility articles for fact-checking.

We found that players are more likely to like or share and less likely to flag articles from low-credibility sources when players can see that many other users have engaged with those articles. Ex-

posure to the engagement metrics thus creates a vulnerability.

The wisdom of the crowds fails because it is built on the false assumption that the crowd is made up of diverse, independent sources. There may be several reasons this is not the case.

First, because of people's tendency to associate with similar people, their online neighborhoods are not very diverse. The ease with which social media users can unfriend those with whom they disagree pushes people into homogeneous communities, often referred to as echo chambers.

Second, because many people's friends are friends of one another, they influence one another. A famous experiment demonstrated that knowing what music your friends like affects your own stated preferences. Your social desire to conform distorts your independent judgment.

Third, popularity signals can be gamed. Over the years, search engines have developed sophisticated techniques to counter so-called "link farms" and other schemes to manipulate search algorithms. Social media platforms, on the other hand, are just beginning to learn about their own vulnerabilities.

People aiming to manipulate the information market have created fake accounts, like trolls and social bots, and organized fake networks. They have flooded the network to create the appearance that a conspiracy theory or a political candidate is popular, tricking both platform algorithms and people's cognitive biases at once. They have even altered the structure of social networks to create illusions about majority opinions.

DIALING DOWN ENGAGEMENT

What to do? Technology platforms are currently on the defensive. They are becoming more aggressive during elections in taking down fake accounts and harmful misinformation. But these efforts can be akin to a game of whack-a-mole.

A different, preventive approach would be to add friction. In other words, to slow down the process of spreading information. High-frequency behaviors such as automated liking and sharing could be inhibited by CAPTCHA tests, which require a human to respond, or fees. Not only would this decrease opportunities for manipulation, but with less information people would be able to pay more attention to what they see. It would leave less room for engagement bias to affect people's decisions.

It would also help if social media companies adjusted their algorithms to rely less on engagement signals and more on quality signals to determine the content they serve you. Perhaps the whistleblower revelations will provide the necessary impetus.

[the writer is Luddy Distinguished Professor of Informatics and Computer Science, Indiana University]

Squid Game: the real debt crisis shaking South Korea that inspired the hit TV show

SARAH A. SON
theconversation.com

Squid Game is anything but your typical, saccharine, soft-glow Korean television drama. In this biting commentary on life in South Korea today, viewers are presented with a twisting, technicolour story of violence, betrayal and desperation. All of this is set around a series of macabre games in which players literally fight to the death. Despite its brutal content, the show has captivated audiences globally, becoming Netflix's top show in at least 90 countries.

The drama takes viewers on a high-suspense ride across nine episodes where a group of people mired in debt and personal misfortune enter a series of six survival games, modelled on familiar South Korean children's games. The losers will die by a ruthless process of elimination, and the single winner will take away 46.5 billion South Korean won (around £29 million).

Early episodes show the circumstances that have led central characters to place everything on the line. Audiences see a series of very different lives, but each is mired in debt and misery. A man who was made redundant and then indebted by failed business ventures and gambling is joined by an unsuccessful fund manager. An elderly man dying of cancer plays the game alongside a North Korean defector. A Pakistani migrant worker and a gangster, along with hundreds of other equally hapless individuals who have fallen foul of South Korean capitalism, gamble it all. Squid Game adds to other recent

South Korean screen productions, most notably the 2020 Oscar-winning film Parasite, in providing a sharp critique of the socio-economic inequality that plagues the lives of many in South Korea. More specifically, it speaks to the deepening household debt crisis affecting the lower and middle classes.

SOUTH KOREA'S STRUGGLE WITH HOUSEHOLD DEBT

Household debt in South Korea has risen sharply in recent years to over 100% of its GDP – the highest in Asia. The top 20% of earners in the country have a net worth 166 times that of the bottom 20%, a disparity which has increased by half since 2017.

There has been rising debt relative to income and a recent hike in interest rates. This has left those who lack the resources to deal with unplanned events, such as a sudden redundancy or a family illness, in an even more precarious position.

The Gini Index measuring national wealth distribution puts South Korea roughly on par with the UK and in a better position than the US. However, growing youth unemployment, soaring house prices and the global pandemic have reversed the modest reduction in inequality experienced in recent years under the progressive Moon Jae-in Government.

It's not just families that are putting themselves in debt to pay for housing and education costs – an essential expense for middle classes hoping to secure entry to a desirable university for their children. In August, the South Korean

government announced new lending curbs aimed at bringing down debt among younger people. Millennials and those in their 30s are in the most debt relative to their income.

But attempts to curb borrowing have led to some people turning to higher cost and higher risk lenders instead. Such a choice leaves many at the mercy of debt collectors if the slightest change in their circumstances causes them to default on repayments. While few may find themselves in the hands of gangsters threatening to harvest their organs for sale, as shown in Squid Game, the burden of overwhelming debt is a deepening social problem – not to mention the leading cause of suicide in South Korea.

PLAYERS, WINNERS AND LOSERS

Squid Game's inclusion of other characters representative of South Korea's disadvantaged minorities highlights the consequences of socio-economic inequality for these groups also. A factory employer's callous exploitation of a migrant worker who is forced to enter the game is representative of the barriers to upward mobility for those from south and south-east Asia. North Korean defectors feature too, as individuals who must fight on many fronts to achieve both financial stability and social inclusion.

The show mocks Christianity repeatedly expressing the growing turn in opinion of South Korea's rapid development during the 1970s and 1980s and its connection with the growth of the church at the time.

The supposed Protestant work ethic was a cornerstone of South Korea's authoritarian-era economic "miracle", during which three decades of ambitious economic plans transformed the country into a high income economy. Throughout this time, worldly success was seen as a sign of blessing and mega-churches were booming.

However, corruption was rife among politicians and chaebol (conglomerate) families who served as church elders while embezzling funds and building their private empires. Unsurprisingly, disillusionment with some members of the political elite and the church has led many in an increasingly secular country to dispute the truth of Christianity's claim to serve the poor and oppressed in South Korea.

This is not a story unique to South Korea of course. Squid Game's characters, their troubles and their humanity resonate with the experiences of societies globally. Economies similar to South Korea are experiencing many of the same challenges, exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic.

Squid Game brutally reminds the winners of each stage, and the show's global audience, that those who succeed often do so at the expense of those who failed by way of weakness, discrimination, poor judgement, or just bad luck. The final episode hints at the possibility of a second series, but even if it doesn't continue, Squid Game makes it clear that the larger story it represents is far from over.

[the writer is Lecturer in Korean Studies, University of Sheffield]

Guwahati airport's operations handed over to Adani Group

GUWAHATI, OCT 8 (PTI): The LokpriyaGopinath-Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati was handed over to the Adani Group for operations, management and development responsibilities on Friday.

Beginning the process of developing and modernising the North-east's foremost airport, the symbolic key of the airport was handed over by Ramesh Kumar, Airport Director of the Airports Authority of India (AAI), to UtpalBaruah, Chief Airport Officer of the new airport operator at an event held mid-night, a press statement said.

In 2018, the government of India included the Guwahati airport in the group of six airports -- Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Mangalore, Jaipur and Thiruvananthapuram -- set for privatisation for operations, management and development (OMD) for a period of 50 years.



Adani Enterprise Limited emerged as the successful bidder for all the six airports.

The concession agreement between the AAI and Adani Enterprise Limited was signed on January 19 this year in New Delhi.

From Friday onwards, the operations, management and devel-

opment responsibilities of Guwahati's LokpriyaGopinathBordoloi International Airport will be handled by the new airport operator -- Adani Guwahati International Airport Limited (AGIAL) -- the statement said.

Amidst the sonorous traditional tune of 'taal-khol' and 'Bihu', in presence of the Adani Group's

representatives, the charge handover moment was witnessed by several staff and officers of the airport with their families.

In the initial three years, the new airport operator will be supported by the employees of the AAI. Speaking on the occasion, Kumar wished luck to the new operator and assured his support

in the initial phase.

Baruah, in his address, thanked the AAI for bringing in noticeable changes to LGBI Airport.

He appealed to each individual at the airport and public at large for wholehearted support to make the airport a world class facility which will bring pride to the nation, the statement said.

Ladakh reports 12 new Covid cases

LEH, OCT 8 (PTI):Ladakh recorded 12 fresh COVID-19 cases, taking the virus tally to 20,843 while the active cases in the union territory was 57 Friday, officials said.

Ladakh has registered 207 Covid-related deaths -- 149 in Leh and 58 in Kargil -- since the outbreak of the pan-

dem ic last year. Four patients of coronavirus virus were cured and discharged from hospitals, thereby taking the number of recoveries to 20,668, officials said.

All the 12 fresh cases were reported from Leh, they said. No death was reported due to Covid in Ladakh Thursday.

2 new COVID-19 cases in Andamans, tally rises to 7,629

PORT BLAIR, OCT 8 (PTI): The COVID-19 tally of Andaman and Nicobar Islands rose to 7,629 on Friday as two more people tested positive for the infection, a health bulletin said.

The Union territory now has 11 active cases, while 7,489 people have

been cured of the disease, and 129 patients have succumbed to the infection so far, it said.

The administration has thus far tested over 5.64 lakh samples for COVID-19, and inoculated over 2.90 lakh people, of whom 1.62 lakh have been fully vaccinated.

USAID launches new forest monitoring tool in Bihar

PATNA, OCT 08 (PTI): The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Bihar's Department of Environment, Forest and Climate Change on Friday jointly launched a new forest monitoring tool, which will use satellite images and geo-analytics to improve forest monitoring, planning, and management in the state.

While speaking on the occasion, USAID's India Deputy Mission Director, Karen Klimowski, said in India, USAID invests in forest conservation, management, and restoration to build a sustainable and climate-resilient future ... (we are) hopeful that this new tool will increase the accuracy and consistency of forest landscape monitoring in the state of Bihar.

The launch was organized at AranyaBhawan' here on Friday. Dipak Kumar Singh, Principal Secretary (Forest) in the Bihar Government, thanked USAID and said the government would "scale up the use of the

monitoring tool--which was tested in Gaya--to other parts of Bihar.

The USAID, in partnership with the Government of India, is improving rehabilitation and management of more than one million hectares of India's forests. These better managed forests pull more carbon out of the air, enhance water yields, and improve livelihoods for indigenous and tribal communities.

With a quarter of India's population dependent on forests, support for these communities is critical not only to combat climate change, but advance inclusive development and economic growth for communities in rural areas.

The new tool provides reliable baseline information through remote sensing, instead of relying solely on field visits, which will help the state government reduce the time and resources required to implement and plan forestry interventions. Importantly, the tool is also low cost and easy to navigate.

HNLC militant surrenders in Meghalaya



SHILLONG, OCT 8 (PTI): A militant of the outlawed Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) surrendered before a senior official in East Jaintia Hills district, Meghalaya Home Minister LakhmenRymbui said.

The militant identified as Emanuel Suchen, wanted in two IED attacks in the district earlier this year, surrendered before the senior district official at the district headquarters town of Khliehriat on Thursday, the minister said.

"Better sense prevailed for Suchen, he surrendered himself to the police. He surrendered himself before the Additional District Magis-

trate of East Jaintia Hills district in Khliehriat," the Home minister told PTI.

He said due process of law in dealing with surrendered militants will follow.

According to the Home minister, Suchen joined the HNLC in 2002, was arrested in 2008 and was jailed for three years only to return to the militant group after his release.

The minister said, "preliminary investigation revealed Suchen has a hand in the two IED attacks in the district at a cement factory and at the police barrack."

In the past three months, the HNLC targeted their IED attacks in the state capital.

On August 10, a powerful IED went off behind a busy busy market in Shillong injuring two persons and causing damages to the nearby buildings. Three persons were arrested in this connection and the former leader of the HNLC, CheristerfieldThangkiewicz was gunned down in an encounter two days later.

On October 4, the outlawed organisation planted another IED outside the city office of the ruling NPP but the IED did not explode.

The HNLC was formed in 1997. It was declared an outlawed organisation by the Union Home Affairs Ministry in 2019.

Homeopathy is a "Science", Best method of treatment: Union Minister

Minister of Ayurveda and Homeopathy (AYUSH) and ex-Chief Minister of Assam SarbanandaSonowal said that students of Homeopathy should work hard to prove that it is the best method of treatment.

Kolkata: Minister of Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH) SarbanandaSonowal on Thursday said homeopathy is a "science" and students of it should work hard to prove that it is the best method of treatment.

Experts of the more popular treatment option, allopathy, do not consider homeopathy as a science.

MrSonowal, who was

addressing a programme at the National Institute of Homeopathy in the city, asked the students to prove that alternate medicine is the best way of treating diseases.

"I ask all the students to work hard to show the strength of homeopathy and AYUSH in the 22nd century. We have to prove that these too are science," he said.

"To take homeopathy forward we will have to work very hard and prove to the people this is the best method of treatment," he added.

The central minister urged the students of homeopathy to work in a way such that, in any place in the world they

may be, people begin to respect homeopathy.

MrSonowal had tabled the National Commission for Homoeopathy (Amendment) Bill, 2021 in the Lok Sabha this August.

It proposed to amend the National Commission for Homoeopathy Act, 2020 to provide a medical education system that improves access to quality and affordable medical education.

MrSonowal, who was accompanied by Minister of State MahendraMunjapara at the programme, inaugurated a hostel for girl students of the institute and announced an increment in the stipends of the residents.

Independent U'Khand MLA joins BJP

NEW DELHI, OCT 8 (PTI): Ram Singh Kaira, an independent MLA from Uttarakhand, joined the BJP on Friday, becoming the third legislator from the state to do so in recent weeks as the ruling party bolsters its ranks ahead of the assembly elections there.

The Bhimtal MLA joined the BJP in the presence of Union minister SmritiIrani, party's general secretary Dushyant Kumar Gautan and its media head and an MP from

the state, Anil Baluni.

Kaira said the hilly region has been developing under the BJP rule with Prime Minister NarendraModi at the helm at the Centre.

The BJP is full of nationalism and works for people, said the former Congress leader, who had won as an independent in the last assembly polls.

Welcoming Kaira in the BJP, Irani said it is a matter of happiness that he joined the party after being impresses by the government's work.

Baluni noted that Kaira was the third MLA from Uttarakhand to join the BJP in recent weeks, and said there is a strong pro-BJP wave in the state.

Uttarakhand BJP president MadanKaushik lauded his work as an MLA and said his presence will further strengthen the party.

The state is likely to see a straight contest between the BJP and the Congress, even as the Aam Aadmi Party makes vigorous efforts to make its presence felt.

Odisha logs 524 fresh COVID-19 cases, 4 new fatalities



BHUBANESWAR, OCT 8 (PTI): Odisha had registered 524 new COVID-19 cases including 75 children which took the state's caseload to 10,30,518 while four fresh fatalities pushed the coronavirus death toll to 8,238, a health department official said.

Though there has been significant improvement in the COVID-19 situation across the state, two coastal districts - Khurda and Cuttack -, continued to remain as points of concern as they together accounted for 62 per cent of the state's daily caseload.

Of the 524 new cases, Khurda and Cuttack reported 325 fresh infections, which is 62 per cent of the total cases reported during the day. While 306 cases were from quarantine centres, the remaining 218 were local contact cases.

Six districts - Bargarh, Boudh, Gajapati, Jharsuguda, Nabarangpur and Subarnapur - did not report any new cases, he said, adding that Boudh district is now COVID-19 Free as it has

no active case. Odisha had registered 582 cases on Thursday and 593 on Wednesday.

The state's daily test positivity rate (TPR) was 0.78 per cent as 525 cases gave positive results from among 66,724 samples put for examination on Thursday. The TPR was 0.75% on Thursday, 0.82% on Wednesday, and 0.77% on Tuesday.

The H&FW department informed that with four fresh fatalities, one each from Cuttack, Nayagarh, Kandhamal and Sundergarh districts, the state's COVID-19 death toll mounted to 8,238.

Odisha currently has 5,111 active COVID-19 cases while 10,17,116 patients including 522 on Thursday, recovered from the highly infectious disease.

The state has thus far conducted over 2.05 crore sample tests while its positivity rate stands at 5.02 per cent. Over 91.95 lakh people have so far been fully inoculated with double dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

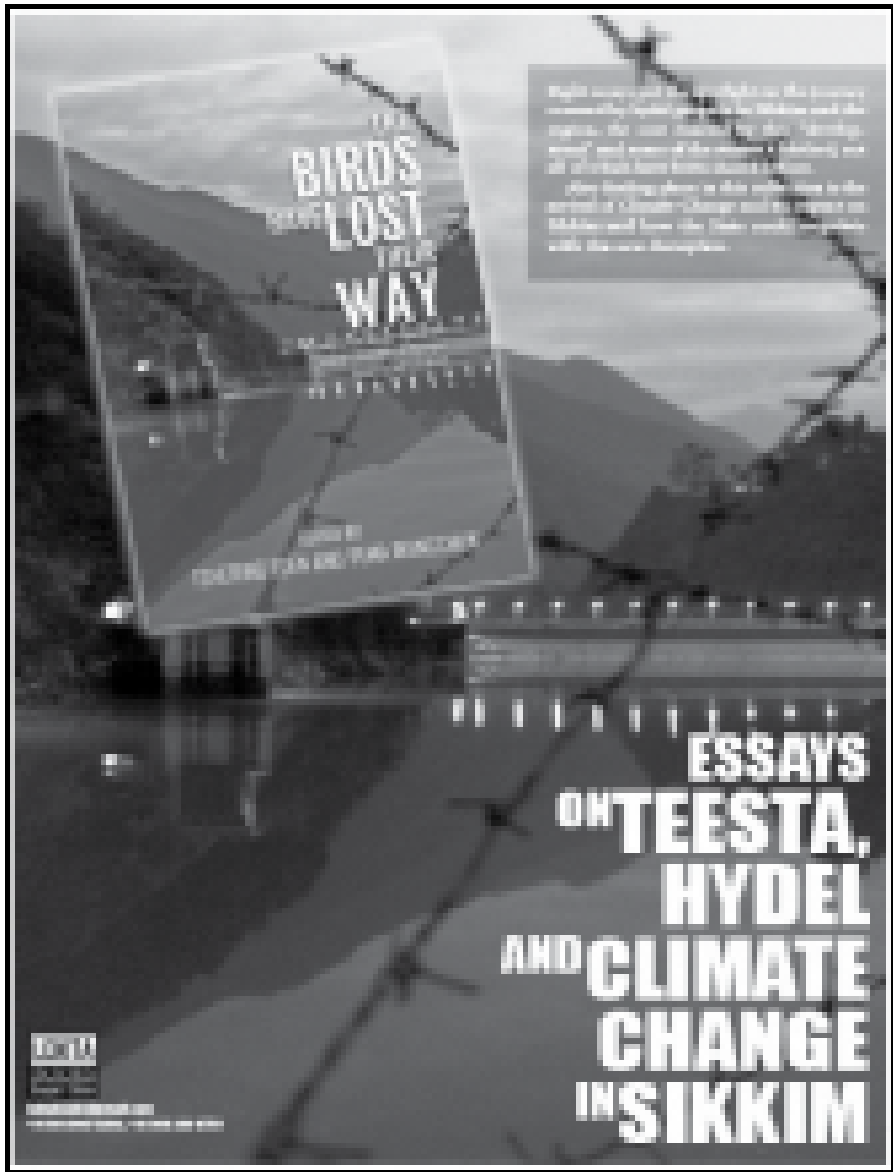
Meanwhile, Odisha cautioned the people to

remain alert for the next three months in order to prevent the transmission of the virus.

"October, November and December are crucial and people should avoid crowded places and unnecessary travel during this period," Director of Health Services, BijayMohapatra told reporters here.

He mentioned that December is a month with many holidays and people visit several destinations during this period. But, they should avoid travels in December, Mohapatra said, adding that if people do not stay vigilant, positive cases will further increase.

On the Corona situation in Bhubaneswar, the DHS said the rate of infection in the state capital has always been a cause for concern. Every day, 200 to 400 infections are being detected in the City. The Covid graph in the city is fluctuating. Therefore, people should strictly adhere to Covid appropriate behaviour in order to prevent the transmission of the virus, he said.



18 ex-NBA players charged in \$4M health care fraud scheme

NEW YORK (AP): Eighteen former NBA players were charged Thursday with pocketing about \$2.5 million illegally by defrauding the league’s health and welfare benefit plan in a scam that authorities said involved claiming fictitious medical and dental expenses.

“The defendants’ playbook involved fraud and deception,” U.S. Attorney Audrey Strauss told a news conference after FBI agents across the country arrested 15 ex-players and one of their wives in a three-year conspiracy that authorities say started in 2017.

According to an indictment returned in Manhattan federal court, the ex-players teamed up to defraud the supplemental coverage plan by submitting fraudulent claims to get reimbursed for medical and dental procedures that never happened.

Strauss said prosecutors have travel records, email and GPS data that proves the ex-players were sometimes far from the medical and dental offices at the times when they were supposedly getting treated.

In one instance, she said, an ex-player was playing basketball in Taiwan when he was supposedly getting \$48,000 worth of root canals and crowns on eight teeth at a Beverly Hills, California, dental office in December 2018.

The indictment said the scheme was carried out from at least 2017 to 2020, when the plan — funded primarily by NBA teams — received false claims totaling about \$3.9 million. Of that, the defendants received about \$2.5 million in fraudulent proceeds.

Strauss said each defendant made false claims for reimbursements that ranged from \$65,000 to \$420,000.

In a statement, the NBA called the allegations “particularly disheartening” because the benefit plans provided by the NBA and the



National Basketball Players Association are critically important to support players’ health and well-being throughout their careers and post-retirement lives.

“We will cooperate fully with the U.S. Attorney Office in this matter,” the statement added.

Michael J. Driscoll, the head of New York’s FBI office, said the case demonstrated the FBI’s continued focus on uncovering fraud scams that cost the health care industry tens of billions of dollars a year.

Strauss said the conspiracy was led by Terrence Williams, who began his career as a first-round NBA draft pick in 2009. The indictment said he submitted \$19,000 in fraudulent claims to the plan in November 2017 for chiropractic care. The claims led to a \$7,672 payout for Williams.

The indictment said he then recruited other former NBA players to defraud the plan and offered to provide fraudulent invoices from a chiropractor and dentist in South-

ern California and a wellness office in Washington state.

At least 10 of the ex-players paid kickbacks totaling about \$230,000 to Williams, according to the court papers. A lawyer who has represented Williams in the past declined to comment.

What was then the New Jersey Nets picked Williams as No. 11 in the 2009 draft. He went on to play with four franchises — the Nets, Boston, Houston and Sacramento — over four seasons as a role player, averaging 7.1 points per game. He was waived by Boston two days after his 26th birthday in 2013 and hasn’t appeared in the league since.

Among others charged was Tony Allen, a six-time All-Defensive team selection and a member of the 2008 champion Boston Celtics. His wife was also indicted. Tony Allen was not in custody as of Thursday afternoon. The Memphis Grizzlies announced weeks ago that they plan to retire Allen’s

number at a Jan. 28 game versus the Utah Jazz.

For the most part, though, the ex-players charged had journeyman careers playing for several different teams and never reached anywhere close to the enormous stardom or salary that top players command.

Still, the 18 players combined to make \$343 million in their on-court NBA careers, not counting outside income, endorsements or what any may have made playing overseas.

Strauss declined to speculate on their motivations or financial situations, saying to do so would go beyond the facts in the indictment.

Another former player charged in the scheme was Sebastian Telfair, a one-time high school star in New York who was highly touted when he turned pro, though his NBA career with eight franchises never brought the stardom some had expected. Telfair’s finances

qualified him for a court-appointed attorney at an appearance in Manhattan before a magistrate judge, who set bail at \$250,000, although Telfair was freed on his signature alone.

His lawyer, Deborah Colson, declined comment. Telfair, in running clothing and green sneakers, did not respond to requests for comment outside the courtroom, where Colson had entered a not guilty plea on his behalf.

Milt Palacio, one of those charged, was placed on administrative leave from his role as an assistant coach with the Portland Trail Blazers, the team said Thursday. The Blazers declined further comment “pending the outcome of the legal process.”

Those charged also included three NBA champions besides Allen. Glen Davis was also part of that 2008 title team in Boston. Shannon Brown won two championships with the Los Angeles Lakers, and Melvin Ely won a title

with San Antonio in 2007. Among others who were charged, Anthony Wroten, Ruben Patterson and Darius Miles were the only players who averaged double figures in their NBA careers.

Arrests occurred in Washington state, California, New York, Alabama, Illinois, Florida, Nevada, Georgia and Tennessee.

All were charged with conspiracy to commit health care fraud and wire fraud, which carries the potential penalty of up to 20 years in prison.

Williams was also charged with aggravated identity theft, which carries a potential penalty of up to two years in prison.

Strauss said the charge was lodged because Williams tried to frighten a co-defendant into paying a kickback by impersonating an employee from the health plan’s administrative manager, claiming there was an issue with an invoice that might require the co-defendant to pay back money he’d received.

It wasn’t immediately clear who might represent any of the accused players other than Telfair in court or comment on their behalf.

There was no immediate response to efforts to contact Ely, Miles, or Patterson through attorneys or entities that have been associated with them, or to emails sent to possible addresses for the Allens. A person who answered the phone at the home of Ely’s relatives said they were unaware of the case.

No working phone number or email address could immediately be found for Davis or Wroten. An email was sent to a possible address for Palacio.

The charges came just weeks after former NFL players Clinton Portis, Tamarick Vanover and Robert McCune pleaded guilty for their roles in a nationwide health care fraud scheme.

Hamilton leads from Verstappen in 1st Turkish GP practice



ISTANBUL (AP): Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton posted the fastest time ahead of title rival Max Verstappen in Friday’s first practice session for the Turkish Grand Prix.

This season’s narrow championship leader was .43 seconds ahead of the Red Bull driver in warm conditions. Ferrari’s Charles Leclerc was .48 behind Hamilton in third spot with Hamilton’s Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas fourth.

There is a second practice later Friday at Istanbul Park.

Hamilton leads Verstappen by two points with seven races to go including this one.

But the Mercedes driver’s lead could well be lost on Sunday as Hamilton starts the race with a 10-place grid penalty for going over his allocation of three engines for the season. Mercedes fitted a fourth combustion engine on Friday.

The Istanbul track proved much more reliable than last year, when it had just been re-laid to host an F1 race for the first time since 2011 and was far too slippery.

Drivers complained last year about the sur-

face on the 5.3-kilometer (3.3-mile) course, with Verstappen comparing it to an ice rink. He placed sixth in that race after qualifying in second spot, while Hamilton rose from sixth on the grid to win and clinch a record-equaling seventh world title.

Red Bull is powered by Honda engines, but the Japanese manufacturer is pulling out of F1 at the end of 2021. In honor of Honda, both Red Bull and feeder team AlphaTauri have special liveries on their cars for this race, which replaced the Japanese GP after it was canceled because of coronavirus concerns.

The Red Bulls used a predominantly white livery, inspired by the Honda that American driver Richie Ginther powered to victory at the 1965 Mexican GP. Pierre Gasly and home favorite Yuki Tsunoda’s AlphaTauris had “Arigato” — Japanese for “thank you” — written on the rear wings.

Verstappen is a major threat to Hamilton’s bid for an eighth world title to surpass Michael Schumacher and stand alone among F1 greats. He leads Hamilton 7-5 for wins this season and 7-3 for pole positions.

FIFA plans to postpone Club World Cup until 2022

LONDON (AP): FIFA plans to postpone the Club World Cup until early next year due to hosting challenges linked to the pandemic, people familiar with the planning said.

Coronavirus restrictions led to Japan withdrawing from staging the seven-team tournament this December, and South Africa then abandoned a bid due to the need to get more of the country vaccinated. FIFA is now ex-

ploring staging the event in January or February, the people told The Associated Press. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss ongoing talks.

Qatar is an option — like in February when Bayern Munich won the delayed 2020 edition in Doha — to help the Gulf nation test venues for the men’s national teams’ World Cup that starts in November 2022.

FIFA is already due to stage the Arab Cup competition in December in Qatar as part of World Cup preparations. The Club World Cup could attract a more global fanbase, with Chelsea qualified as Champions League winners. It will disrupt a Premier League weekend for the west London club, as would have been the case if the tournament was contested as planned in December.

An extended 24-team

Club World Cup was due to debut this year in China but it was shelved because the pandemic required the rescheduling of national team competitions in June and FIFA was unable to raise the necessary funding for the planned quadrennial event. So the seven-team format was extended for another year, with the six continental club champions joining the domestic league winner from the host nation.

Kim Clijsters loses in 3 sets in 1st round at Indian Wells

INDIAN WELLS, CALIF. (AP): Kim Clijsters hit another detour in her comeback to pro tennis, losing in three sets in her first-round match Thursday at the BNP Paribas Open.

She was beaten 6-1, 2-6, 6-2 by Katerina Siniakova, a three-time major doubles champion from Czech Republic. Siniakova teamed with countrywoman Barbora Krejčíková to win a gold medal in doubles at the Tokyo Olympics.

Clijsters, a 38-year-old Hall of Famer, also lost in the first round at the WTA Tour stop in Chicago last week. The four-time major champion and mother of three originally came back last year, but her attempt was interrupted by knee surgery last October and a bout with COVID-19 in January.

Clijsters committed nine double faults against Siniakova, who converted six of nine break points in the match. Clijsters received a wild-card into the tournament she won in 2005 and 2003. She was runner-up to Serena Williams in 2001.

Former world No. 1 Andy Murray opens play Friday night against French left-hander Adrian Panarin. Murray is working his way back from hip surgery and



received a wild card. U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu also begins Friday, taking on Aliaksandra Sasnovich of Belarus.

Americans Lauren Davis and Alison Riske advanced to the second round with straight-set victories. Davis beat Nuria Parrizas-Diaz 6-2, 7-5 and Riske defeated Liang En-shuo 6-2, 6-2.

On the men’s side, six Americans advanced at the combined ATP and WTA event.

Marcos Giron defeated Botić van de Zandschulp 6-7 (9), 6-2, 6-4, and Maxime Cressy got by Laslo Dera 6-7 (3), 6-1, 7-5. Tenny Sandgren beat Thiago Monteiro 6-4, 6-3, and Mackenzie McDonald defeated James Duckworth, 6-3,

6-3. Tommy Paul beat 40-year-old Feliciano Lopez, 6-3, 7-6 (3). Frances Tiafoe moved on with a 6-4, 6-4 win over Benoit Paire.

McDonald next plays top-seeded Daniil Medvedev, the U.S. Open runner-up. Cressy plays 11th-seeded Diego Schwartzman and Sandgren plays No. 21 Cameron Norrie.

Veteran Sam Querrey lost to Daniel Altmaier, 6-2, 6-4, J.J. Wolf lost to Vasek Pospisil 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 and Steve Johnson was beaten by 22-year-old Alejandro Davidovich-Fokina of Spain 6-7 (5), 6-3, 7-5.

Kei Nishikori beat Joao Sousa 6-7 (5), 6-3, 6-2 and Philipp Kohlschreiber lost to Taro Daniel 6-2, 6-4.

Barcelona to play away from Camp Nou during stadium overhaul

BARCELONA, Spain (AP): Barcelona will play at another stadium for up to a year when the club starts its planned modernization of Camp Nou stadium, president Joan Laporta said Friday.

Laporta said that he wants to begin the long-delayed overhaul of Camp Nou in the summer of 2022. He added that the work will last three to four years, but that the team will only need to find another home for a maximum of 12 months.

“We are considering different possibilities, but the strongest candidate is the Johan Cruyff Stadium,” Laporta told Catalan radio Rac1 on Friday.

Johan Cruyff Stadium is where the women’s team plays and forms part of the club’s training complex on the outskirts of Barcelona.

With a capacity to seat only 6,000 spectators, Laporta said the club wants to increase that to 50,000 if the men’s team plays there.

Another option, Laporta said, would be for the team to play at the city’s Montjuïc Stadium. The municipal facility hosted the opening ceremonies of the 1992 Summer Olympics and was home to Barcelona rival Espanyol for several years.

Camp Nou is already Europe’s largest soccer stadium with 99,000 seats. The club wants to increase its capacity to 110,000 while also refurbishing its surrounding area, which includes a pavilion for the club’s other sports, the museum and stores.

To finance the operation, Barcelona is in talks with Goldman Sachs for the investment bank to loan the cash-strapped club 1.5 billion euros (\$1.74 billion). The financing plan needs to win a vote by the club’s members.

Laporta inherited a club near bankruptcy when he won elections in March. He had also led the club from 2003-10.

“(The new Camp Nou) is fundamental for the viability of the club and its immediate future,” Laporta said. “The impact it will have for Barça is critical so that we can compete with our competitors who have already done what is needed.”

Real Madrid took advantage of last year’s pandemic lockdown, when no fans could attend matches in Spain, to spruce up its Santiago Bernabéu.

Barcelona’s plans to redo Camp Nou have met with several delays over the past decade.

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Israel, Palestinian militants use bodies as bargaining chips

ABU DIS, WEST BANK (AP): More than a year after his son was killed by Israeli forces under disputed circumstances in the occupied West Bank, Mustafa Erekat is still seeking his remains.

It is one of dozens of cases in which Israel is holding the remains of Palestinians killed in conflict, citing the need to deter attacks and potentially exchange them for the remains of two Israeli soldiers held by the Palestinian militant group Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinians and human rights groups view the practice of holding bodies as a form of collective punishment that inflicts further suffering on bereaved families.

“They have no right to keep my son, and it is my right for my son to have a good funeral,” Erekat said.

The Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center, a Palestinian rights group, says Israel is holding the bodies of at least 82 Palestinians since the policy was established in 2015. It says many are buried in secret cemeteries where the plots are only marked by plaques of numbers. Hamas holds the remains of the two Israeli soldiers killed during the 2014 Gaza war in an undisclosed location.

Last year, Israel’s Security Cabinet expanded the policy to include the holding of the remains of all Palestinians killed during alleged attacks, and not just those connected to Hamas. Israel considers Hamas, which rules Gaza, a terrorist group.

Defense Minister Benny Gantz said at the time that holding the remains deterred attacks and would help ensure the return of Israeli captives



and remains. The Defense Ministry declined to comment on the policy.

One of the bodies is that of Erekat’s son, Ahmed, who Israeli officials say was shot and killed after deliberately plowing into a military checkpoint in June 2020. Security camera footage shows the car veering into a group of Israeli soldiers and sending one of them flying back. Ahmed steps out of the car and raises one of his hands before he is shot multiple times and falls to the ground.

His family says it was an accident. Mustafa said his son was passing through the checkpoint on his way to the nearby city of Bethlehem to buy clothes for his sister’s wedding later that night. The shooting attracted widespread attention, in part because Ahmed was the nephew of Saeb Erekat, a veteran Palestinian spokesman and negotiator who died last year.

Ahmed was to get married soon, his father said: “He had a house that was ready for him.”

To this day, he has no idea where his son’s remains are.

Omar Shakir, the Israel and Palestine director at the New York-based Human Rights Watch, said Israel has turned “corpses into bargaining chips.” The policy is “deliberately and unlawfully punishing the families of the deceased, who are not accused of any wrongdoing,” he said.

Israel has a long history of exchanging prisoners and remains with its enemies. In 2011, it traded more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners for an Israeli soldier who had been captured by Palestinian militants five years earlier and was being held in Gaza.

In 2008, it traded five Lebanese prisoners, including a notorious militant, and the remains of nearly 200 Lebanese and Palestinians killed in

fighting, for the remains of two Israeli soldiers captured by the Lebanese militant Hezbollah group two years earlier.

Egypt has been mediating negotiations over a similar agreement that would return the remains of the two soldiers, as well as two Israeli civilians believed to be alive, held by Hamas in Gaza.

In the meantime, the Erekat and other Palestinian families must turn to Israel’s Supreme Court in a process involving multiple hearings that can drag on for years.

The court denied a recent appeal by the Erekat, citing confidential information submitted by the military. Mustafa Erekat says the system is rigged. He accused the court of dragging its feet until the policy on holding the remains was expanded and then relying on secret evidence.

Mohammed Aliyan, spokesman for six Palestinian fami-

lies who filed a Supreme Court petition for the return of their relatives’ bodies in 2016, said the judges initially sided with the families before an appeal from the military

“They always go along with the military’s demands,” Aliyan told The Associated Press, “They are afraid to take any decision against them.”

Liron Libman, an expert on military law at the Israel Democracy Institute, said there are situations where certain pieces of information can’t be made public for fear of exposing protected sources or special operations.

“Each side has the right to request a postponement of the hearing, and the court will accept the request if it believes it is for a justifiable reason,” Libman told the AP.

Even if a family’s petition is successful, locating relatives’ bodies for exhumation can pose further challenges, especially in cases when bodies were buried decades ago.

Rami Saleh, the director of Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center, said his organization has dealt with cases where Israeli authorities were unable to locate bodies and also those where Palestinian family members needed to take DNA tests to confirm the remains of a relative.

Mustafa said he has not given up hope and intends to challenge the Supreme Court’s decision. In the meantime, he and Aliyan, the spokesman for the other families, attend weekly sit-ins calling for the release of all bodies held by Israeli authorities.

“The feeling of not being able to bury your relative’s body is more painful than their death,” Aliyan said.

At flooded restaurant near Bangkok, the special is a splash



NONTHABURI, Thailand (AP): A flood-hit riverside restaurant in Thailand has become an unlikely dining hotspot after fun-loving foodies began flocking to its waterlogged deck to eat amid the lapping tide.

Now, instead of empty chairs and vacant tables, the Chaopraya Antique Café is as full as ever, offering an experience the canny owner calls “hot-pot surfing.”

If you like your food washed down with plenty of water, this is the place for you. Shortly after the water tops the parapet, the first diners arrive. Before long, the deck is crammed with carefree customers happily tucking in as if dining in a deluge is the norm.

The wait staff — some clad in rubber boots — step gingerly through the swirl that quickly rises to more than 50 centimeters (20 inches). The restaurant, in Nonthaburi near Bangkok, opened in February in a riverside location that perfectly complements its antique architecture and décor.

But a recent severe tropical storm and heavy monsoon rains combined to raise the river’s water level. Add in the tides and the result has been daily inundation.

Coming straight after a monthslong coronavirus shutdown, it could have spelled disaster. Instead — boosted by publicity in the Thai media — it’s now so popular that customers need to make reservations.

“This is a great atmosphere. During this flood crisis this has become the restaurant’s signature attraction. So I wanted to challenge myself and try out this new experience,” 24-year-old Siripoj Wai-inta said as he munched his food with the water creeping up his shins.

The owner has dubbed the experience “hot-pot surfing.” When a passenger boat motors past you find out why. The delighted scramble to avoid a soaking from the wave is the moment everyone waits for, and with one passing every 15 minutes, no one goes home disappointed. It’s TV presenter Titiporn Jutimanon’s first restaurant venture. He says he was worried what would happen when the floods came.

“It turns out the customers have a great reaction. They are happy. We can see the atmosphere of customers enjoying the experience of eating in the water. So a crisis has turned into an opportunity. It encourages us to keep the restaurant open and keep customers happy.”

Best of all, he says, it means he can keep his staff happy by keeping them employed. So, even amid harsh economic times, the only thing that needs a bailout is the restaurant itself.

Finland joins other Nordic nations in curbing Moderna shots



COPENHAGEN, DENMARK (AP): Finland has joined other Nordic countries in suspending or discouraging the use of Moderna’s COVID-19 vaccine in certain age groups because of an increased risk of heart inflammation, a rare side effect associated with the shot.

The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare said Thursday that authorities won’t give the shot to males under age 30. They will be offered the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine instead. The government agency said it found that young men and boys were at a slightly higher risk of developing myocarditis.

The move by Finland followed similar decisions by three neighboring countries on Wednesday. Sweden suspended the use of Moderna for

people under 30, Denmark said those under 18 won’t be offered the Swiss-made vaccine, and Norway urged those under 30 to get the Pfizer vaccine instead.

All four countries based their decision on an unpublished study with Sweden’s Public Health Agency saying that it signals “an increased risk of side effects such as inflammation of the heart muscle or the pericardium” — the double-walled sac containing the heart and the roots of the main vessels. It added: “The risk of being affected is very small.”

The preliminary information from the Nordic study has been sent to the European Medicines Agency’s adverse reaction committee to be assessed.

1 dead, others trapped after Hong Kong scaffolding collapses

HONG KONG (AP): One worker died and others were trapped Friday when a major rainstorm blew traditional bamboo scaffolding off the side of a building under construction in Hong Kong, officials and reports said.

The southern Chinese city was battered by heavy rain and high winds as other parts of the country also experienced dangerous weather conditions.

Local media reported that construction workers and several other people trapped in two cars were rescued by emergency workers after the scaffold collapsed.

The Hong Kong Ob-

servatory reported that Tropical Storm Lionrock was southwest of the regional financial hub, which has a population of 7.5 million. Maximum sustained winds were measured at 61 kilometers (38 miles) per hour.

It said outer rain bands associated with Lionrock would continue to bring widespread heavy rain to the coast of Guangdong province just across the border from Hong Kong in mainland China. It also issued warnings of stormy seas and possible flooding.

The island province of Hainan south of Hong Kong and other parts of the southern coast were

also preparing for the storm.

Elsewhere in China, the Ministry of Natural Resources and the China Meteorological Administration issued warnings of possible landslides and flooding in the north and west, including the provinces of Shanxi, Sichuan, Shaanxi and Gansu.

A flood warning was also issued along the middle and lower segments of the Yellow River, China’s second-longest, which has a long history of bursting its banks but in recent years has seen water levels drop considerably because of overuse.

This year has brought

unusually wet weather to much of China’s central and northern regions, with torrential rains and flooding in July causing the deaths of at least 292 people in Zhengzhou, a major city in the central province of Henan, including some trapped in the city’s subway.

Seasonal flooding strikes large parts of China each year, especially in its central and southern regions. China’s worst floods in recent years were in 1998, when more than 2,000 people died and almost 3 million homes were destroyed, mostly along the Yangtze, China’s mightiest river.

Ireland buckles to pressure, joins global corporate tax deal

LONDON (AP): Ireland has agreed to join an international agreement establishing a minimum corporate tax of 15% around the world, ditching the low-tax policy that has led companies like Google and Facebook to base their European operations in the country.

The Irish government, which initially rejected the agreement, said Thursday it had decided to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s global minimum tax accord after compromises that would protect the country’s economic interests. Ireland’s 12.5% corporate tax rate has been a cornerstone of the country’s economic policy since 2003. The announcement came before a meeting Friday where representatives of 140 countries are expected to approve the

agreement designed to ensure that multi-national corporations can’t reduce their tax bills by shifting operations to low-tax jurisdictions. U.S. President Joe Biden has been one of the driving forces behind the agreement as governments around the world seek to boost revenue following the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I believe that the upsides of being in such a historic international agreement far outweigh the downsides of staying out,” Finance Minister Paschal Donohoe said Thursday. “This is a difficult and complex decision but I believe it is the right one.”

The agreement has two prongs, first reallocating corporate profits proportionally based on where products and services are consumed, then imposing a minimum

15% effective tax rate on companies with global revenue of at least 750 million euros (\$866 million).

Ireland decided to join the regime after other countries agreed to set the rate at 15%, removing language that could have allowed a higher minimum rate, Donohoe said. Ireland also will be allowed to retain the 12.5% rate for companies with revenue of less than 750 million euros.

This means that 160,000 companies that employ 1.8 million people will see no change in their tax rate, Donohoe said.

The new 15% tax rate will apply to 1,500 foreign-owned companies and 56 Irish multinationals employing a total of 500,000 people, the government said.

CORONAVIRUS PRECAUTIONS & SAFETY TIPS

DON'T LOWER THE GUARD

LOCKDOWN HAS BEEN LIFTED, BUT UNFORTUNATELY, THE THREAT OF COVID-19 HAS NOT YET SUBSIDED.

As we adapt to the new normal, here is a reminder of the precautions you must take—

WEAR A MASK
Always wear a mask to prevent droplets from going outside

GET A FLU VACCINATION
Get your flu shot to develop an immune response before flu season begins, particularly if you have comorbidities

WASH YOUR HANDS
Wash your hands often, for about 20 seconds each, with soap & plenty of sanitizer

MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING
Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms' length) from other people

GET TESTED
Get tested if you have symptoms of COVID-19. Stay at home until you get the result.

COVER YOUR MOUTH & NOSE WHILE SNEEZING, OR COUGHING
Before stepping outside, make sure to carry a handkerchief or a pocket of tissues

FOLLOW PRECAUTIONS BEFORE STEPPING OUT
Carry your sanitizer, water bottle and, most importantly, avoid crowded areas

CHECK YOUR TEMPERATURE
Monitor your temperature on regular basis

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COOL SHADES! The model, Bella Hadid keeps it casual in a denim shirt and Adidas shoes while out and about in NYC.

Berlin Film Festival sets in-person event for 2022 edition, reveals dates

LONDON, OCT 8 (PTI): The Berlin Film Festival will return to being an in-person event with its 2022 edition, the organisers announced on Thursday.

In a statement, posted on the famed film gala's official website, the organisers said the 72nd edition of the festival will be held from February 10 to 20, 2022.

The festival, also known as Berlinale, was one of the last major international festivals to be held in person before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

This year, the festival was held in an online-only format.

The organisers also revealed the dates for the festival's parallel events -- the European Film Market from February 10 to 17; the Berlinale Co-Production Market from February 12 to 16; and Berlinale Talents February 12 to 17.

Furthermore, the World Cinema Fund will focus on on-site offerings and will also provide online formats.

"We're very pleased to bring the festival back to the big screen in February: with a multifaceted programme, the red carpet, stars and the amazing Berlinale audiences,"

said festival directors Mariette Rissenbeek and Carlo Chatrion.

"The need for a physical festival experience and face-to-face encounters is strongly evident in both the industry and the public. The experiences of the last months have



shown that on-location events can take place safely and successfully, and how important they are for dialogue and exchange," they added.

The organisers also said the 2022 festival programming would be "roughly similar" to Berlinale's pre-COVID-19 edition in 2020.

Short films, which were struck from the Generation sidebar for this year's festival, will return to the section in 2022.

Want to build a versatile filmography, says Mrunal Thakur

NEW DELHI, OCT 8 (PTI): Actor Mrunal Thakur says her upcoming films such as cricket drama "Jersey" and war epic "Pippa" are in sync with her end goal - to experiment with genres.

The 29-year-old actor was last seen in the boxing drama "Toofaan", which was released on Amazon Prime Video in July.

"All these films that I'm doing are very different from one another. The audience will get to see me in a very different avatar, including 'Pippa'. That has been my aim. To be versatile, keep experimenting with different genres and keep entertaining the audience," Thakur told PTI in an interview.

"Jersey" will be released theatrically on December 31. Also starring Shahid Kapoor, the film is the Hindi remake of the 2019 Telugu movie of the same name.

"Pippa" is set against the backdrop of 1971 Indo-Pakistan war and stars Ishaan Khatter as Brigadier Balram Singh Mehta of the 45th Cavalry tank squadron who, along with his siblings, fought on the eastern front. Thakur wrapped filming on "Pippa" yesterday.

Her other film projects include the family comedy "Aankh Micholi", the Hindi remake of 2019's Tamil movie "Tha-

dam" and HanuRaghavpudi's Telugu movie with Dulquer Salmaan.

The actor said she was yet to sign any new project as she was completing her prior film commitments.

"I haven't signed any other project as

muse for noted couturier JJ Valaya, who presented his collection 'Rumeli' at the second 'phygital' edition of the FDCI X Lakme Fashion Week.

The actor said working with Valaya was a "wonderful" experience.



I was trying to finish all the films that I had committed to before the pandemic. There is a lot of work that still needs to be done. That's why I don't think I'll be able to take up any other film until the end of this year," she added.

On Wednesday night, Thakur turned

"I adore the collection. There was so much effort that went into the making of the lehenga. It was handmade. I absolutely love his vision that 'less is always more'," she added.

The fashion gala will conclude on Sunday.

Siddhant Chaturvedi wraps up Portugal schedule of 'Yudhra'

MUMBAI, OCT 8 (PTI): Actor Siddhant Chaturvedi on Thursday announced that he has finished shooting for the Portugal schedule of his upcoming film "Yudhra".

The romantic action-thriller, backed by Ritesh Sidhwani and Farhan Akhtar's Excel Entertainment, went on floors in August.

Chaturvedi took to Instagram and posted a reel, which featured him getting up from his bed and walking to the beach to work out.

"Daddy's home. #PortugalWrap #Yudhra," the 28-year-old actor posted. Directed by Ravi Udyawar, best

known for Sridevi's swansong "Mom" (2017), "Yudhra" also stars Malavika Mohanan. Chaturvedi, the breakout star of "Gully Boy", will also be seen in two more projects from Excel Entertainment -- supernatural-comedy "Phone Bhoot", co-starring Katrina Kaif and Ishaan Khatter, and "Kho Gaye Hum Kahan" with Ananya Panday and Adarsh Gourav.

The actor will also star in YRF's "Bunty Aur Babli 2", which is set to release on November 19, as well as an untitled movie from filmmaker Shakun Batra in which he features alongside Deepika Padukone.

Telugu filmmaker B Gopal bags Satyajit Ray Award

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, OCT 8 (PTI): Well-known Telugu filmmaker B Gopal, alias Bejawada Gopal, has been chosen for the fourth Satyajit Ray Award for his overall contribution to the Indian cinema.

Instituted by the Satyajit Ray Film Society Kerala, a state-based organisation, the award comprises Rs 10,000 cash prize, a memento and plaque.

He was selected by a panel comprising Malayalam filmmaker Balu Kiriya, music director Perumbavoor G Raveendranath and others.

Eminent filmmaker and Dada Sahab Phalke awardee, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, actress Madhabi Mukherjee and

producer Mohan G were the earlier recipients of the honour.

Gopal has directed 30 films Telugu films and two Hindi moves in his decades-long tinsel town career, the organisers said in a statement.

The award would be presented to him in a function to be held in Hyderabad on October 13, they said.



Disney+ Hotstar sets premiere date for 'Hum Do Hamare Do'

MUMBAI, OCT 7 (PTI): Actors Rajkumar Rao and Kriti Sanon's comedy drama "Hum Do Hamare Do" will be released on Disney+ Hotstar on October 29.

The film is about a couple who 'adopt' their parents and also stars Paresh Rawal and Ratna Pathak Shah.

Sanon took to Twitter and posted the film's new poster along with its release date.

"Our hero, his love and his adopted Mom-Dad will celebrate Diwali with you. #HumDoHamareDo, streaming 29th October, on @DisneyPlusHS," she wrote.

Produced by Dinesh Vijan's Maddock Films, the movie is directed by Abhishek Jain.

"Hum Do Hamare Do" also stars Aparshakti Khurana, Manu Rishi Chadha and Prachin Shah Paandya.

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Aries:
We've got a classic retrograde pickle at hand. The return of a certain somebody from your past that you have unresolved karma with. The chemistry here is undeniable. But, that doesn't make the connection any less lethal. Word for the wise: make merry, but don't cross a line. If you are already coupled, you want to be all mindful of how your actions could affect the other person.
Tip: Boundaries, wild one.

Taurus:
Taurus, you may find yourself in a classic earth sign quandary: too much on your plate and not enough time. Word for the wise: it's time to become mindful of your limitations. It's time to learn that 'no' is a complete sentence. The only person you are letting yourself down by overcommitting is yourself. But, it's not too late now, beautiful! It's not too late to call upon your tribe and ask for their assistance.
Tip: It's time to rethink how much you are committing to.

Gemini:
Time and space heal all wounds, Gemini. Time and space heal all wounds. Today, you may find yourself looking at the rearview mirror with a bitter-sweet song in your heart. You understand fully why

things didn't work out. You understand fully why you had to move away and walk your own path. There is nothing to feel sorry about or regret for it all transpired in perfect order to teach significant life lessons.

Tip: The darkness too is a beautiful gift.

Cancer:

You've been going back and forth on this idea for a while now, Cancer. So, how about you trust your instinct for a change? How about you follow the steps that are being presented to you by your higher self? We see a significant change coming up for you in the realm of your finances. As such, you may find yourself thinking about savings and investments more actively than you have in the recent past.
Tip: It's a good idea to practice prudence.

Leo:

The cup has runneth over, Leo. The cup has runneth over. This is a time of nurturing your bonds with both your beloved and your tribe, whilst honouring the sacred threads that keep you together. Those who have been manifesting a soulmate will find that fate is pulling some strings on their behalf. The cards speak of a partner who's kind, loving, and compassionate. Somebody who is committing

to growing side-by-side, and will meet you where you are.

Tip: Here's to love and other intoxicants.

Virgo:

When we're fixated on the idea of how things should be or shouldn't be, we're unable to recognise the grand plan as it is unfolding. Release the reins, beautiful. Release the reins. Allow the divine forces to step in and do right by you. As such, this is a time of looking within. A time of prioritising meditation and mindfulness. Don't let your worldly engagements keep you from nurturing your inner temple.
Tip: Loosen the grip and "allow".

Libra:

It's been a long and lonely road, Libra. It's been a long and lonely road. But, that doesn't mean you must settle for less than what you deserve. But, that doesn't mean you should make do with a love that doesn't celebrate you for who you are. You deserve to be seen and heard, beautiful. You deserve somebody who shows up for you consistently, even when it is inconvenient to. So, stay in the vibration of what you're calling in without doubting that the Universal forces are working in your favour.
Tip: Stay in the vibration of what you're calling, darling!

Scorpio:

Nobody is perfect, Scorpio, and that includes you. You have attracted this relationship into your life for a reason, and you're meant to work through certain karmic lessons together. So, get on the same team. Confront the problem rather than going against each other. We see a peaceful resolution on the cards for you, and we see it soon. Lead with your heart.
Tip: Confront the problem, not each other.

Sagittarius:

Love is hardly convenient, Sagittarius. Sometimes, it calls for great sacrifices. At other times, it requires you to jump into the dark abyss together. But, if you've been giving your time and energy to somebody who isn't willing to show up consistently, we've got a problem at hand, beautiful. The Universe is holding up a mirror at this point. PS: We hope that you will do right by *you* this time around.
Tip: Pay attention to what is being shown to you. They may not be as invested as you've allowed yourself to believe.

Capricorn:

You've got your head in the clouds, Capricorn. You've got your head in the clouds. Instead of oscillating like a pendulum, make a decision and stick to it. Remember, this is not just about you. There are other people

involved. Single Saturnians are being reminded that you're not doing anybody a favour having so many tabs open. It's time to tune into your heart space and figure out what it is that you wish to create as you go forth.

Tip: Take a call and stick to your decision.

Aquarius:

They're in for the long haul, Aquarius. They're in for the long haul. So, instead of bringing your past baggage into the equation, trust what you're being shown. The time for you to create a new reality for yourself has come, beautiful. As such, you're likely to feel that creative spark as well this weekend. So, make sure you put your idea down on paper and create magic in your studio!

Tip: This connection is turning out to be everything you desire and more.

Pisces:

You've got 99 problems at hand, Pisces, and you're in the mood to solve none of them. What you want to prioritise today: striking 'work' out of your to-do list and focusing on rest and rejuvenation. So, listen to meditative music and catch up on your sleep. While you're at it, take a breather from social media and spend some time contemplating.
Tip: Take a breather, beautiful.