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# Summit **TIMES**

Vol 05 | Issue 321 | Gangtok | Thursday | 10 December 2020

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | ₹ 5

**Farmers to step up protests, reject tweaks on new farm laws**

**RUPAM JAIN & MANOJ KUMAR**  
**NEW DELHI, 09 DEC (REUTERS):** India's farmers on Wednesday rejected the government's proposal to amend three controversial laws and said they would step up protests seeking withdrawal of these laws which they said would harm their economic interests while helping big food retailers.

Farmers have been demonstrating since late last month over reforms enacted in September that loosened rules around the sale, pricing and storage of farm produce, that had protected farmers from an unfettered free market for decades.

"The farmers have rejected the government's proposals," Darshan Pal, president of Krantikari Kisan Union, told reporters after the meeting of over 30 farmers' unions.

Farmers leaders said they would intensify nationwide protests from Saturday that would include boycott of the leaders of Modi's ruling party, blocking of national highways and picketing at toll plazas.

Expressing their anger towards some large domestic corporations and retailers, including Reliance Industries and Adani Enterprises, farmer leaders said they would boycott the products and services of these companies.

There was no immediate comment from both the companies.

The majority of farmers believes the news laws could pave the way for some of India's leading corporations to enter the Indian agriculture trade, leaders said.

In a separate statement, Adani Group said the company had no role in the direct purchase or sale of the farm produce, and was only hired by the government agencies for storage of the produce.

Earlier, Indian government officials looked for ways to tweak new laws liberalising the agricultural sector, after they put off a second day of talks with farmer organisations that have mobilised mass protests.

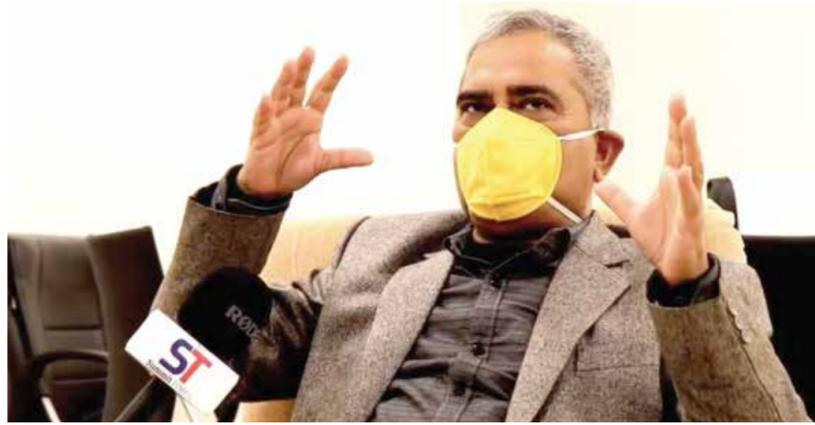
Small growers, in particular, fear that they will be at the mercy of big business if they are no longer assured of floor prices for staples such as wheat and rice sold at government-controlled wholesale markets.

Unhappy with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's liberalisation, farmers set up protest camps and blocked roads surrounding the capital New Delhi, and on Tuesday mounted a nationwide strike.

## STNM struggles with fatigue and frustration

**MEDICAL SUPERINTENDENT COMPLAINS OF LACK OF EXECUTIVE SUPPORT FOR COVID EMERGENCY**

**AARON RAI**  
**GANGTOK, 09 DEC:** STNM Hospital is facing a series of problems ranging from manpower shortages to funds crunch caused by a felt lack of administrative support for the requirements of the State's only COVID-dedicated hospital. The continuing inability of the decision-makers to appreciate the stress and demands of the pandemic has left the staff at STNM Hospital fatigued and frustrated, the hospital's Medical Superintendent, Dr CS Sharma, shared while speaking to SummitTimes on Wednesday. [Go to our Facebook page for complete interview]



The Covid-wing, it may be recalled, was recently shifted from the main hospital building to an adjacent facility after nearly eight months. While this shift is expected to allow other services at STNM like the general wards and super-speciality wings to

function smoothly, the MS is not sure this will be possible despite this having been the reason why the Covid unit was segregated.

The new Covid-unit is a five-storeyed complex. When accommodated at STNM Hospital's main building till recently, it was operating out of three floors. Now, these floors have been freed to be delegated to the hospital's super speciality facilities.

But there is a catch. Dr Sharma points out that no additional staff has been appointed. This, despite repeated reminders to the "head office" that the hospital was in desperate need for Medical

Officers so that the specialists and super-specialists can focus on treating patients they are trained to cure.

In the eight months that the STNM Hospital has handled the medical challenges of COVID-19 in Sikkim single-handedly, only one additional "MBBS doctor" has been appointed. As a result, specialists and super-specialists continue to be put on COVID duty. This pulls them away from consultations they have expertise in for a task, which, if delegated to other doctors provided they had been hired, would have ensured that all wings of the super-speciality

turn to pg 02

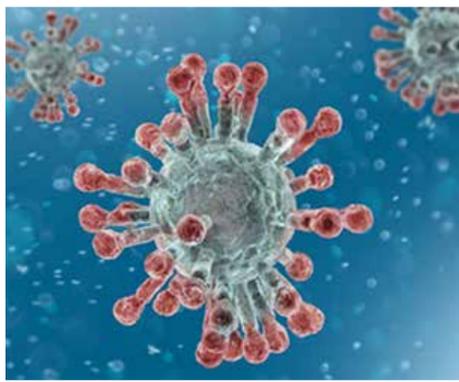
## With 24 new cases, Sikkim's Covid count reaches 5239

**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 09 DEC:** Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 reached 5,239 on Wednesday with the detection of 24 new cases in the preceding 24 hours.

Of the 24 new cases in the State, 17 are in East District, two in West District and five in South District.

Meanwhile, the number of discharged COVID-19 patients has further improved to 4,661 with the release of 19 patients from hospital and home isolation.

There are currently 368 active cases of novel coronavirus in the State, of whom seven are admitted in the ICU facility of the COVID-dedicated



STNM Hospital.

In the daily health bulletin on Wednesday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltzen Bhutia, informed that the 24 new cases were reported from the screening of 264 samples on Tuesday.

While 16 cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 212 samples, eight more were picked up in rapid antigen testing of 42 samples. All the ten samples screened by TrueNat returned negative, it is informed.

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## India's COVID-19 caseload rises to 97.35 lakh; recoveries cross 92 lakh

**NEW DELHI, DEC 9 (PTI):** India's COVID-19 caseload rose to 97.35 lakh on Wednesday, while the number of people who have recuperated from the disease crossed 92 lakh, pushing the national recovery rate to 94.66 per cent, according to the Union health ministry.

The total coronavirus cases mounted to 97,35,850 with 32,080 new infections being reported in a day, while the death toll rose to 1,41,360 with 402 new fatalities, data updated by the ministry at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated

from the disease surged to 92,15,581, pushing the national recovery rate to 94.66 per cent, while the COVID-19 case fatality rate stood at 1.45 per cent.

The COVID-19 active caseload remained below four lakh for the third consecutive day.

There are 3,78,909

active coronavirus infections in the country now which comprises 3.89 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed 20 lakh on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23 and 40 lakh on September 5. It went past

turn to pg 02

## Round-the-clock RTGS from Dec 14

**MUMBAI, DEC 9 (PTI):** The Real Time Gross Settlement System (RTGS) for high-value transactions will be available round-the-clock on all days from 00:30 hours of December 14, making India one of the few countries to operate the system 24x7.

In October, the RBI had announced that RTGS will be available round-the-clock on all days of the year.

"Accordingly, RTGS 24x7x365 will be launched with effect from 00:30 hours on December 14, 2020," the central bank said in a statement.

The RBI said India will become one of the few countries in the world to operate its RTGS system round-the-clock throughout the year.

This comes within a year of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) operationalising NEFT 24x7. NEFT is the popular mode for small-value transactions.

RTGS, which started on March 26, 2004 with a soft launch involving four banks, presently handles 6.35-lakh transactions

daily for a value of Rs 4.17 lakh crore across 237 participant banks. The average ticket size for RTGS in November 2020 was Rs 57.96 lakh, making it a truly large-value payment system.

RTGS uses ISO 20022 format which is the best-in-class messaging standard for financial transactions. The feature of positive confirmation for credit to beneficiary accounts is also available in RTGS.

"Round the clock availability of RTGS will provide extended flexibility to businesses for effecting payments and will enable introduction of additional settlement cycles in ancillary payment systems.

"This can also be leveraged to enhance operations of Indian financial markets and cross-border payments," the RBI said. Earlier, the RBI had decided not to levy charges on transactions through NEFT and RTGS in order to promote digital transactions, and had asked banks to pass on the benefits to customers.

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**BIODIVERSITY OF DARJEELING-SIKKIM HIMALAYA**  
Pathways to resilience

Online kura-kani on International Mountain Day

With Panelists:

- Sunita Pradhan, Conservation Biologist, ATREE
- Pema W Dorjee, Consulting Editor, SummitTimes
- Rinzi Lama, Anthropologist, NBU
- Priyadarshinee Shrestha, Team Leader, WWF- India, KCL

Moderator: Roshan P Rai, DLR Prerna

11 December, 2020 11:00 AM

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## ATMA East Governing Board meets

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 09 DEC:

Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA) East under Agriculture Department held its Governing Board meeting in the office of the District Collector [East] on 08 December.

The programme was chaired by the DC East, Raghul K, who is also the chairman of the Board and was attended by Additional Director, Agriculture, Additional Director, Animal husbandry, Joint Director, Agriculture, Joint Director, Horticulture, Joint Director, Animal Husbandry, Deputy Director, Fisheries Department and staff of ATMA East District.

The welcome address was given by Joint Director Agriculture cum Deputy Project Director ATMA, Rachna Gurung. In her address, she thanked all the line Departments for constant support provided to ATMA.

A full-fledged report on farm oriented activities of 2019-2020, 2020-2021 was presented by Additional Director, Bina Rai, Agriculture Department through Power Point Presentation.

The chairman, Mr Raghul applauded the work done by the Agency and directed all the line Departments to work in co-ordination to implement the schemes sponsored under ATMA.

## Nine new COVID-19 cases in Mizoram

AIZAWL, DEC 9 (PTI):

Nine more people, including four Border Security Force (BSF) jawans have tested positive for COVID-19 in Mizoram, pushing the state's coronavirus tally to 3,977, an official said on Wednesday.

Of the nine cases, five were reported from Lunglei district, two from Lawngtlai and one case each was reported from Serchhip and Khawzawl districts, he said. Five patients, including four BSF jawans, have returned from other states.

According to the official, the number of active COVID-19 cases in the state now is 199 while 3,772 people have recovered from the virus.

The recovery rate is 94.85 per cent while the infection rate is 2.49 per cent.

The state has so far reported six COVID-19 fatalities and all the victims belonged to Aizawl district.

Altogether, 1,59,750 samples have been tested till date, including 906 in the last 24 hours.

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# West meets to formalize task force for Mahila Shakti Kendra

GYALSHING, 09 DEC [IPR]:

An introductory meeting regarding formation of District Task Force for Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK) was held at Zilla Bhawan, Kyongsha today.

The meeting was chaired by District Collector, Karma R Bonpo, who is also the MSK chairperson, accompanied by TW Bhutia, SP-West, ADC/Dev (Gyalshing & Soreng), HB Shan-ker, CDPO-West, JD (Agriculture), Maneka Chettri, Women Welfare officer (DLCW, MSK), representative from lead banks and officials from various departments.

The Ministry of Women & Child Development has introduced the Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme aimed to provide one-stop convergent support services for empowering rural women with opportunities for skill development, employment, digital literacy, health and nutrition.



The District Task Force was constituted for West District comprising District Collector as the Chairperson, Women Welfare Officer as Member Secretary and Departmental officers as members.

Addressing the gathering, DC West said that the District Task Force shall oversee, monitor, co-ordinate, review and

make course-corrections of the functioning of the schemes being implemented by the centre and the state Government for empowerment of women.

He suggested all the concerned departments to sensitize students of colleges and schools to generate awareness in rural areas which will have a lasting impact on

their region and people at large.

He also highlighted the role of students to encourage the spirit of voluntary community service and gender equality and these students volunteer will serve as "agents of change".

He also said that the scheme will provide an interface for rural wom-

en to approach the Government for availing their entitlements and empowering women through awareness generation, training and capacity building. DC West said, rural women are deprived of many social needs and such schemes are an opportunity to improve their lives in a better way.

## Krishnamaya Memorial school 1986 batch meets



SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 09 DEC:

A meeting of the 1986 batch of students of Krishnamaya Memorial High School was held at Baral garden in Pharabari, West Bengal, on Wednesday. The meeting was attended by students from that batch

from Pokhara, Nepal and Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong, Dooars, Kolkata and other parts of India.

The meeting discussed a magazine 'Ran-ko' published in 1985 as an initiative of Class X students of Krishnamaya Memorial High School, which

had Arjun Piyush as chief editor and Bikash Karki and Ashok Prashant as assistant editor.

The meeting decided to restart the publication of the magazine from Krishnamaya Memorial High School and further decided to form a social organisation.

## BJP's women's wing convenes coordination meet

Summit Report  
Gangtok, 09 Dec:

A coordination meeting of Sikkim Mahila Morcha [East District], the women's wing of Bharatiya Janata Party, was held at the party's office at Singtam on Wednesday.

The meeting, which was chaired by Sikkim Mahila Morcha president, Karma Choki Bhutia, was also attended by the BJP state president, DB Chauhan, general secretary Bharat Dulal, East District president Bhanu Dahal and executive members of Mahila Morcha and other party workers, informs a BJP press release.

The release informs

that the State president spoke on various issues related to women's empowerment and welfare schemes of the Central Government aimed at women.

He stressed that Mahila Morcha has an important responsibility to reach these schemes to every woman in the State.

The BJP state spokesperson, Navin Bhattarai, in his address, detailed the various central schemes for women.

Likewise, Sikkim Mahila Morcha president urged every member to play an active role at their respective levels to empower women in Sik-

kim by providing them the full benefit of central schemes meant for women.

She also urged all members to expedite the organizational expansion programme of the morcha.

The release informs that after the meeting, a joining programme was held under the chairmanship of Kishan Morcha president, Mohan Gurung, where three members of Sikkim Democratic Front - Basant Gurung and Uttam Lepcha from Gnathang-Machong constituency and Prana-y Gurung from Singtam-Khamdong constituency formally joined BJP.

## South holds co-ordination meeting on Govt schemes

NAMCHI, 09 DEC (IPR): DC South, M Bharani Kumar chaired a co-ordination meeting at the conference hall of DAC, Namchi today. He was accompanied by SP (South), Thakur Thapa, ADC (South), Satyen Kr Pradhan, ASP (South), J Jayapandian, SDM (HQ), Chiran Rizal also present amongst others were SDMs, BDOs from the district and HODs of various line departments.

Addressing, the gathering DC, M Bharani Kumar spoke about the aim of the meeting which is to assess the status of schemes currently ongoing under the various line departments. He also reviewed about the action plan on tourism, road condition, health, water problem and other projects which is continuing under the line departments. He urged for better planning between all line departments and underlined that prompt assistance should be provided by the responsible HoD to complete the work so that the public of the district should not undergo any complication of any kind.

The DC also emphasized regarding effective and clear communication amidst the concerned department, higher authorities and the masses. Additionally, he exhorted for timely submission of status reports and said that the officials should be available whenever required.

The meeting also talked through the issue of solid waste management in which Mr Bharani instructed the accountable department to expedite the process to discard the waste materials in a responsible manner after proper segregation. He also enquired about the vehicles, landfill accessible and amount of gar-

bage produced and how the litter is processed. He further informed that a meeting will be conducted at the earliest concerning the solid waste management of the south district.

Matters relating to handling and transporting of bodies due to COVID-19 were also looked into.

Moreover, the officials along with DC evaluated the ground-level scenario and discussed measures to deal with any issues which can crop up while carrying out any Government related programmes.

SP (South), Thakur Thapa put forward few affairs relating to road construction problem at different locations in the district and requested the concerned department to quicken the procedure to complete the construction work as traffic snarls has started. He further touched upon streamlining of the expanse marked for parking by the liable department and underlined that the South district is witnessing parking problems which is compounding by the day and requested the authority to mark safe parking space adhering to standards and norms. Additionally, he said when departments are conducting programs to make use of bigger and spacious ground available in and around Namchi rather than accumulating at Central Park as it gets worrisome for people who come to visit the market and directly oppose the COVID-19 rule.

During the course of the meeting an interactive session was also conducted wherein the participants discussed regarding the difficulty faced by them while implementing their task, they also brought in suggestions as well.

## With 24 new...

Among the new cases reported from in and around Gangtok, are three persons from Police quarters Gangtok, three from Tadong [two from 5th Mile and one from the ICAR complex], two from near Shivalaya Mandir in Upper Sichey, one from Swastik, one from Arithang, one above STNM hospital Socheygang, one from Deorali and one from VIP Colony.

Likewise, one person from Assam Lingzey and a person, who was on duty at Mintokgang and currently at SICUN COVID Care Centre also tested positive for COVID-19.

Additionally, a person from Rabongla, one from Ghurpisey, one from Temi and one from Turung in South District and one person from Arithang, one from Middle Gyalshing and one from Sombaria in West District also tested positive for COVID-19.

Mr Bhutia added that samples of a 58-year-old male from Development Area and a 60-year-old male from 6th Mile-Tadong were found positive for COVID-19 but they remain unreachable since their phones are switched off. He urged them to immediately contact the concerned authorities.

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## India's COVID-19...

50 lakh on September 16, 60 lakh on September 28 and 70 lakh on October 11. The figure crossed 80 lakh on October 29 and surpassed 90 lakh on November 20.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), 14,98,36,767 samples have been tested up to December 8, with 10,22,712 such examinations being conducted on Tuesday.

The new fatalities include 57 from Delhi, 53 from Maharashtra, 49 from West Bengal, 31 from Kerala, 30 from Punjab, 23 from Uttar Pradesh and 20 from Rajasthan.

The total number of deaths reported so far in the country includes 47,827 from Maharashtra, 11,880 from Karnataka, 11,822 from Tamil Nadu, 9,763 from Delhi, 8,820 from West Bengal, 7,967 from Uttar Pradesh, 7,042 from Andhra Pradesh and 4,964 from Punjab.

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

"Our figures are being reconciled with the ICMR," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

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Two plots available - 30X40 sq ft and 50X30 sq ft  
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Price negotiable  
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9641878315, 9593262407

### LAND FOR SALE

A land measuring an area for 50x32 1/2 at Roadside just below housing colony is for sale. It is just a one minute walking distance from Namchi bazaar taxi stand. Interested party may contact 9593373387 and 9434406761

### LAND FOR SALE

An area measuring 1 acre at Sadam South Sikkim near Loretto Convent School at Gupti road. Price negotiable any one interested can contact: 78640-04501,62970-03235, 98320-48410

### FOR RENT

Two and half storeyed (1st to 3rd floor) complex is available for rent in the heart of Ranipool Bazaar (Opposite UCO Bank). The building area is 35'x60' appx. in each floor and is fit for offices, shopping complexes, guest houses, banks etc. Contact: 8509755220, 8348007688.

### GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

General land sale at Lower Sichey, suitable for construction, good locality, near the road, Total size: 90x55ft, (30x55ft each plot). genuine person may contact@9734122366.

### Building for sale

A two storey building constructed on plot area 50x40 ft. Situated at Upper Phong near Phong SS, South Sikkim is on sale. Cost Rs 60 Lakhs (Negotiable). Interested may contact : 8145829309, 7864937800, 9749897695.

## STNM struggles...

hospital continued to function properly.

The MS adds that while the requirement for Medical Officers has been stressed several times, the only additional appointments have been of dental surgeons, physiotherapists and Ayush doctors. While recognizing the hard work that these new appointees have been putting in, Dr Sharma pointed out that they cannot share the Covid responsibilities of Medical Officers since they do not have the training for it.

As a result, the existing medical team continues to be pressed into service on rotation basis.

Already, around 130 medical per-

sonnel of STNM Hospital have contracted the virus. While this has affected their health, it also pulls them away from the roster since they are required to go for quarantine and treatment. With no replacements, the human resource pool at STNM hospital gets further stressed.

Unfortunately, even when emergency hiring was verbally allowed to meet the Covid-challenge, administrative back-up was missing.

There have been whispers about how several frontline workers hired for Covid duty have not received their salaries, and when questioned, Dr Shar-

ma admitted that around 40 frontline workers - safai karmacharis, drivers and ward attendants - were hired when there was acute shortage of housekeeping and support staff at the hospital.

This support staff has not been paid their salaries since their appointment because the file seeking administrative approval for their appointment remains in process. Dr Sharma admits that in addition to the fear of exposure to the virus, this group was also dealing with the stress of uncertainty over their salaries.

Apparently, the file was sent for clearance by the hospital more than

three months back and has still not returned, Dr Sharma informs.

There is a lot that could be done to allow doctors stationed at STNM Hospital to discharge their responsibilities better, and a recognition of the immense stress they have been put under would be a good place to begin. Don't do that, and more and more staff members will seek transfers out. And even that is happening, and again the administrative disconnect continues. When asked, Dr Sharma confirmed that personnel have been transferred out of STNM Hospital without replacements being sent in.

**Musical instrument documentation program**

**SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 09 DEC:**

A special program on documentation and collection of musical instruments of the Himalayan region was conducted today by the Himalayan Heritage Research & Development Society Sikkim and Himalaya World Museum with support from Ministry of Culture, Government of India, a press release informs.

The documentation and collection highlighted the damphu as a percussion instrument similar to a large tambourine which is used by the Tamang people to play the melodious Tamang Selo. According to folklore, the damphu was invented by Pem Dorje, a Tamang king who named it after a bird.

**William Dalrymple's son to debut with book on Partition**

**NEW DELHI, DEC 9 (PTI):** Historian William Dalrymple's son Sam will come out with his debut book in 2022 which will look into five partitions in Asia and also offer a new assessment of Indian independence.

In a pre-emptive co-publication deal with HarperCollins India, William Collins publishing director Arabella Pike has bought world rights of the book by Sam Dalrymple from David Godwin.

"Five Partitions: The Making of Modern Asia" promises an important corrective to the history of Asia and the root causes of the tensions the region faces today, the publishers said.

Weaving original testimonies from survivors, Sam brings together into a single history the Partition of Burma, the Great Partition, the Partition of Princely India, the Partition of Arabia and the Partition of Pakistan.

"Sam Dalrymple brings a fresh perspective to the legacy of Britain's imperial past across Asia," Pike said.

According to Sam, growing up in Delhi and studying South Asian languages at Oxford, the spectre of Partition has been present in much of his life.

Co-founder of Project Dastaan, a South Asian peacebuilding organisation, Sam said in his work with this initiative, he realised that Partition's tragic legacy looms over a much wider region than is generally understood.

"It's an extraordinary story that explains so much about what is still unraveling today, from the insurgencies in Kashmir to the Rohingya crisis. Bizarrely it's never before been told as a single tale," he added.

Udayan Mitra, publisher (literary) at HarperCollins India, said "Five Partitions: The Making of Modern Asia" will prove to many readers to be a new way of looking at history, making connections that are not generally made. India was the heart of Britain's imperial project.

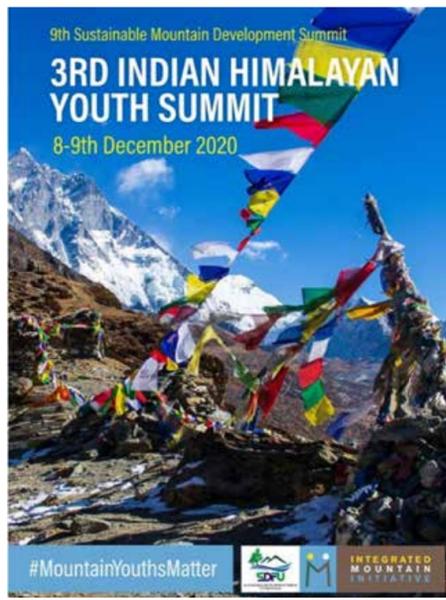
**3rd Indian Himalayan Youth Summit concludes**

**SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 09 DEC:**

The second and concluding day of the 3rd Indian Himalayan Youth Summit saw two sessions being held. The first session reflected on the deliberations of Day 1 on five themes, namely: SDG, Sustainable Tourism, Migration, Natural Resource Management and Skill & Entrepreneurship which was dovetailed into a set of recommendation to the Government and Civil Society.

As per a press release, a draft of the Youth Declaration was also prepared. The valedictory session witnessed the presentations of different breakout groups in the presence of CEO, Dr Amitabh Kant, NITI Aayog and Principal Economic Advisor, Dr Sanjeev Sanyal, GoI.

Dr Sanyal said that the pandemic was a good lesson to humanity and exposed the world of risk and uncertainty that we live in. He stressed on the need to light the fire of entrepreneurship and requested to bring forth the problems of bureaucratic hurdles and policy regulation so that the change could be brought about



at the policy level.

He asked the youth to now take charge and become the agent of Change to bring sustainable development in the entire Himalayan re-

gion. He emphasized the need to invest in digital technology to diffuse geographical constraints and at the same time stop the loss of human capital and talent.

He emphasized the need to de-cluster talent and create knowledge capital in the region where they have been staying in the hills. He further emphasized the need to have a relook at all our institutions and revamp these institutions to cater to the need to the region. Special targeted discussion on plastic waste and on mental health issue in the hills was mentioned

in a big way and he recommended having a national debate on this.

Dr Kant recognized the programmes of Integrated Mountain Ini-

tiative as an intellectually rigorous platform that has brought forward the issues and concerns of the Himalayan region in policy dialogues. He acknowledged the youth summit to bring about some relevant and innovative ideas for bringing about the change that we all yearn for. He stressed more on entrepreneurship and the damage that COVID19 has brought around.

He emphasized that this was a befitting time to understand the needs and opportunities in the area where the youth have been stationed during this pandemic. He requested that the youth must explore the opportunities in their local areas and plan for sustainable growth of the region.

He asked the youth of the Himalayan region to take benefit of the various schemes and exulted the people of the region to identify the strengths of a culturally, linguistically diverse and resource rich Himalayan region to unleash the power of innovation and unleash economic benefits to its fullest potential.

He further called on the youth to

participate in the competitive federalism by analyzing the challenges and prospects by using local skills and expertise in providing gainful employment to the youth of the Himalayan states.

The session was addressed by president of IMI, PD Rai and Chairperson of Sustainable Development Forum of Uttaranchal (SDFU), Dr Rajendra Dobhal. Dr R Dobhal raised the need to have a Pan-Himalayan University and better integration of existing institutions to collaboratively create knowledge and help cater critical data for policymaking in the Indian Himalayan Region.

PD Rai encouraged the youth of the Himalayan region to work collectively and with entrepreneurial spirit to take the region forward. Krishan S Rautela moderated the session. Amba Jamir coordinated to make happen the 3rd Indian Himalayan Youth Summit possible. The programme ended with an open invitation to all the members of civil society and government agencies to join the Inaugural programme of SMDS-IX on the 11 December.

**NIT Sikkim hosts program on cyber security**

**SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 09 DEC:**

The Department of Computer Science and Engineering, National Institute of Technology Sikkim has organized a Faculty Development Program on Cyber Security virtually from 01 - 05 Dec 2020 with financial assistance from AICTE Training and Learning (ATAL) Academy, Ministry of Education, Govt. of India.

As per a press release, 145 participants

representing 22 states of the country attended the program which had 15 sessions covering all aspects of cyber security, starting from basic to advanced stage. Each session had distinguished speakers from Academia and Industry in India and abroad, the release mentions.

In the inaugural session, Padmashri Prof. Bimal Kumar Roy, who is Former Director, Indian Statistical Institute Kolkata and present Head, R. C. Bose Centre for Cryptology and Security, Indian Statistical Institute Kolkata was present as the chief guest.

Professor Vijay Varadharajan, the Global Innovation Chair Professor in Cyber Security at the University of Newcastle, Australia and the Director of Advanced Cyber Security Engineering Research Centre at Newcastle was the guest of honor.

Both delivered keynote lectures giving insight and research direction in the field of Cyber Security. The Director of the Institute, Prof. M.C Govil spoke at length regarding several initiatives taken by the Government of India and Institute for Cyber Security awareness.

The program coordinator Dr. Sangram Ray elaborated on the need of Cyber Security in the present virtual world and thanked all the distinguished speakers and participants for making the program a success.

**Naya Modh, a collection of stories released**



**SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 09 DEC:**

A collection of stories, 'Naya Modh' written by Laxmi Prasad Parsai was released

during the third edition of Kavya Gosthi of Gajal Manch here at Tadong on Wednesday. The event had senior litterateur, KN Sharma as the

chief guest. During the function, the writer expressed his gratitude to all individuals who supported him in writing the book.

**Shantinagar holds Ward Sabha**



**SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 09 DEC:**

Shantinagar Ward Sabha meeting was held at Badminton Court near Ranikhola Walkway today, a press release informs.

President, Krishna Chettri, Shantinagar Gaon Sudhar Samiti [SGSS] was the chairperson of the meet which was also attended by Panchayat, Deepa Chettri, Shantinagar Ward, Chief Advisor, LN Pradhan, Shantinagar Gaon Sudhar Samiti, Vice President, PP Upretti, SGSS, Arun Lama, BB Tamang, Sakila Subba, Dal Bdr Thapa

and Mina Baraily.

The meeting started with the reading out of last year's demand. Vice president, SGSS, PP Upretti, asked about updates on different demands that were put up last year at the Ward Sabha. Answering the queries, Ward Panchayat, Deepa Chettri, said that due to the COVID-19 pandemic much of the work is yet to be completed.

Chief Advisor, LN Pradhan, requested the Ward Panchayat to follow up on the demands and fulfill them for the development of the village.

Speaking on the occasion, president, SGSS, Krishna Chettri, appealed to the Ward Panchayat to carry forward last year's demand to this year's list; adding two proposals of box drainage on the lower belt of Shantinagar and hydrain at Shantinagar Sai Mandir on the ongoing RMDD water work.

Land donated by HN Sharma for the village footpath from NH10 till Rani Khola Walkway was also discussed during the meet. Despite different documents provided, the footpath has not materialized, said Mr Chettri.

**5 new COVID-19 cases in Andamans; tally rises to 4,778**

**PORT BLAIR, DEC 9 (PTI):** Andaman and Nicobar Islands COVID-19 tally rose to 4,778 as five more persons tested positive for the virus, a health department official said on Wednesday.

Of the five fresh cases, one was detected during contact tracing, while four have travel history, he said.

Sixteen more people were cured of the disease, taking the total number of recoveries in the archipelago to 4,647, the official said.

The Union Territory now has 70 active COVID-19 cases, while 61 people have so far died due to the infection, he said.

The Andaman and Nicobar administration has conducted 1,42,665 sample tests for COVID-19 so far, he added.



**Saraswati Shishu Vidyalaya holds coordination meet**

**SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 09 DEC:**

Coordination meeting of parent and school steering committee of Saraswati Shishu Vidyalaya located in West Sikkim, New Bazaar, was held today. Guardians of students from Classes I to V attended the meeting, a press release informs.

The meet discussed online studies, upcoming annual exam, forthcoming academic session, promotion, planning, new admission. The discussions were chaired by secretary of the committee on Vidya Bharti Sikkim, Govind Lohagan through Mohan Sharma.

This meeting was conducted by the school Principal, Khusain Rai.

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

**Symptoms of nCoV**

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

**Treatment**

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

**Precautions to Prevent nCoV**

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

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

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE**  
**GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM**

## No Cut & Paste Preparedness Plans, Please

### Customise Sikkim's response to disasters

A policy has been in the making for a while now to make earthquake resistant buildings a reality for the State. There have even been interesting demonstrations on Earthquake Onsite Early Warning and Security Systems in the past, but clearly nothing came of them. All they achieved were distractingly comforting signs that policy was being focused in the right direction.

Sikkim always knew that its narrow valleys sit on a seismically active zone, but it was when a Big One rattled through the State in September 2011 that people and policy-makers realized just how vulnerable everything here was. There had been major earthquakes in the past, but people and policy-makers tend to have short memories, which, in the past, have not even lasted as long as even the relief and rehabilitation efforts. But the temblor of 2011 and the Nepal quake shortly after appear to have forced some sustained seriousness on these matters; now to ensure that these valid concerns lead to more robust safety and preparedness measures.

The little over nine years that have passed since the 18 September Earthquake have been unevenly spent on taking stock, prepare repair and reconstruction proposals, sourcing funds and getting over the shock. Gangtok and the other urban centres of Sikkim no long sport any scars of the earthquake, but a visit to the interiors continues to throw up reminders of the harrowing episode from that year. There are still schools which have not received full repairs and roads remain fragile in the worst-hit areas of North Sikkim and no one has really done a proper drill on whether the communication networks have been reinforced adequately or not. The priorities in Gangtok, where all major decisions continue to be made, appear to have moved on from earnest disaster mitigation and settled back to the disconcerting disinterested tokenism which catches the State on the wrong foot every time a natural disaster or any significance strikes. Awareness campaigns continue to remain embarrassingly superficial and disaster drills have become events. Cut and paste presentations on disaster preparedness or the occasional drills and demos will not make Sikkim any safer. In fact, as more time and attention is diverted to these exercises, the eroding of traditional safety mechanisms will make Sikkim even more vulnerable.

The first step towards effective disaster preparedness will need to source resource persons from rural Sikkim. Ditto, by the way, for any preparatory efforts to cushion climate change impact here. Funding from UNDP and GoI are welcome, but these have to be invested in customizing Sikkim's response to the challenge of natural disasters. The traditional knowledge base, which has already been severely compromised by the impracticality of centralized planning, has to be salvaged and distilled to inform Sikkim's response to its perennial challenges posed by the land and the climate.

Natural disasters are not new to Sikkim, so a good place to begin will be the compilation of a proper data base and then linking it to how local societies have managed such challenges and/ or avoided them. This knowledge should then be crunched with scientific models now at hand and a collection of region and village specific disaster plans put together to bind the State's preparedness. The proposal to ensure earthquake-resistant construction practices needs to be evaluated with this in mind. There is no arguing the fact that earthquake resistant buildings should be made the norm for Sikkim, but the rules and laws for it need to be customized for Sikkimese realities and situation. They have to be practical and enforceable and then they should be made watertight for implementation. A cut and paste job borrowed from somewhere else will defeat a welcome policy intervention.

### 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](mailto:news@summittimes.com)

# What Psychology Can Tell Us About Why Some People Don't Wear Masks – and How to Change Their Minds

HELEN WALL, ALEX BALANI & DEREK LARKIN  
*theconversation.com*

While the world is eagerly waiting for COVID-19 vaccines to bring an end to the pandemic, wearing a mask to help prevent viral transmission has become more or less mandatory globally. Though many people embrace mask wearing and adhere to public health advice, some rebel and argue that wearing a mask has been imposed upon them against their will.

With mask wearing and social distancing, it's down to the individual to decide whether or not to comply, yet what influences compliance isn't straightforward. Demographic factors such as income level, political affiliation and gender have all been associated with whether people choose to wear a mask and socially distance.

However, psychology can go some way to explaining why behavioural differences occur. Past research has shown that psychological factors such as an individual's perception of risk and tendency towards risky behaviour influence adherence to health behaviours. This is now being seen in the current pandemic.

One preprint study (yet to be peer reviewed) has shown that a greater propensity for risky decision-making goes hand in hand with being less likely to appropriately wear a mask or maintain social distancing. In another piece of research, perceptions of the risk of COVID-19 are cited as a driver of whether people decide to socially distance.

And there may also be a further psychological explanation: the phenomenon of "psychological reactance". This is where people vehemently believe they have freedom to behave how they wish, and experience negative emotions when this freedom is threatened, and so become motivated to reinstate it.

This means that when told to wear a mask and socially distance, some people may perceive their

behavioural freedom to be under threat. Anger and other negative emotions then follow. To reduce these uncomfortable feelings, these individuals may then attempt to restore their freedom by not complying with the advice.

ple are more likely to comply with public health guidelines if they are clear, precise, simple and consistent – and if they trust the source from which they come.

But the effectiveness of these sorts of "one-size-fits-all" approaches to persuasion and behavioural change are likely to be limited. Initial findings in the area of personalised persuasion suggest it might be more effective to try bespoke approaches for people, based on combinations of their key characteristics (their "psychographic profiles").

For example, in a recent piece of non-COVID research we identified three main personality profiles. Those who are more shy, socially inhibited and anxious tend to report being more likely to be persuaded by those in authority, whereas those who are more self-oriented and manipulative tend to feel the opposite; they report being less likely to be influenced by authority figures.

Moreover, those in the third group – who are agreeable, extroverted and conscientious – report being more likely to be persuaded to do something if it is consistent with what they have done before, and less likely if it requires them to change their position. This means if they have decided in the past that wearing masks is a bad thing, they're more likely to resist any subsequent efforts to make them wear one.

A recent article concluded that shouting at people to wear masks won't help, and this research into personalised persuasion backs this up. Only those in the shy and anxious group would be likely to respond well to such a direct and heavy-handed tactic. A far better strategy would be to try an empathetic approach that seeks to understand the varying motivations of different groups of people – including whether there is psychological reactance at play – and then tailor messages to individuals accordingly.

[Helen Wall is Senior Lecturer in Psychology, Edge Hill University; Alex Balani is Senior Lecturer in Psychology, Edge Hill University; Derek Larkin is Senior Lecturer in Psychology, Edge Hill University]



The potential problem of psychological reactance has been discussed since early on in the pandemic, and is now being investigated specifically regarding masks.

### HOW TO ENCOURAGE MASK WEARING

Just as psychology can help explain why people may reject masks, it can also offer guidance on how to get people to accept them. A variety of techniques from social psychology can be used to persuade people to comply with health advice such as mask wearing, social distancing and self-isolating.

One key persuasion method is portraying consensus. When you show people that an attitude is shared (or not) by others, they are more likely to adopt it. Seeing someone wearing a mask makes it more likely that others will do the same. Persuasion strategies could therefore focus on making sure that people perceive mask wearing as widespread – perhaps by depicting it frequently in the media or by making it mandatory in certain places.

We also know from previous studies that peo-



## Conspiracy Theories May Seem Irrational – But They Fulfill a Basic Human Need

LISA BORTOLOTTI & ANNA ICHINO  
*theconversation.com*

There has been a proliferation of conspiracy theories about COVID-19 that either reject the existence of the virus altogether or question the official account of its origins, its mode of transmission, its effects and its remedies. Many of these theories are highly implausible and harmful and it has become commonplace to describe them as irrational – even delusional.

But it is not plausible to describe them as signs of mental illness. Quite the opposite. Our research has shown that many irrational beliefs are attempts to protect mental health by responding to the human need for control, understanding and belonging.

The most radical theory about COVID-19 is denialism: the virus does not exist or is not as dangerous as is commonly believed. For some deniers, COVID-19 cannot be caught at all because germ-based transmission itself is a myth. For others, it is just a "common cold" and its alleged lethal effects are overplayed. Powerful individuals and organisations (such as Bill Gates or Big Pharma) are considered responsible for the hype, with motives ranging from making money to suppressing freedom.

Another popular theory denies that the virus passed from non-humans to humans accidentally. It was, instead, intentionally crafted by the Chinese in a lab in Wuhan. Other theories blame the quick and devas-

tating proliferation of the virus on genetically modified crops or to the roll out of 5G technology.

All these theories share some common features. There is always some sort of murky plot that conflicts with official accounts, and they are usually based on limited or discredited evidence. But these common features are grounded in some basic needs that all humans share.

### SEEKING HOPE – AND AN EXPLANATION

Why do people fall for a plot? At the bottom, there is a powerful drive for causal understanding. In a novel situation, people need a causal map to navigate the environment. They may settle for an explanation before they have all the relevant information, because uncertainty is hard to tolerate. In a pandemic scenario, the explanation may be filling a gap caused by doubt and division among experts. This is definitely the case with COVID-19. Scientists have expressed disagreement about many aspects of COVID-19, from the severity of the threat to the effectiveness of face coverings (this is, of course, the process of scientific research).

As our previous research highlighted, people tend to prefer explanations that make reference to a person's intentions over explanations that present the event as accidental. In particular, they tend to blame a threat on "agents" they may already have reason to distrust. This is why various COVID-19 conspiracy theories blame "the Chinese" who have

long been political targets in Europe and the US, or pharmaceutical companies whose influence is criticised in the anti-vax and anti-psychiatry movements.

Seeing the event as planned rather than accidental allows people to maintain a sense of control over a reality that is confusing and unpredictable. If there is someone to blame, we can restore some kind of balance to the universe by seeking to punish the culprits for their evil conduct. Also, we can prevent them from harming us next time. This illusion of control contributes to our optimism about the future and helps us cope effectively with adversity.

### REJECTING EVIDENCE

But why do people commit to a theory that is incompatible with accepted wisdom even when the evidence for it is inconclusive? The conflict with an official version arises from distrust towards institutions such as governments, scientists, the media and medical authorities. This distrust drives the belief in a conspiracy and is central to the identity of groups that people already associate with.

Conspiracy theories tend to originate within so-called "epistemic bubbles". These are social structures in which opposing voices are, more or less deliberately, excluded. This typically happens in self-selected social media networks like Facebook groups or Twitter exchanges where those with a different view are blocked. Within these bubbles, theo-

ries about COVID-19 become something that defines who the people are and what they stand for.

Each bubble has its own standards to evaluate expertise and evidence. Some conspiracy theorists mistrust statistics and for some COVID-19 deniers the experts are not the epidemiologists, but the holistic health gurus. If people are trapped in an alternative bubble it may not be irrational (from their point of view) to endorse a theory that is consistent with their previous convictions and matches the testimony of others in their group. The theory is a way of imposing meaning on a constantly changing world.

This suggests that to counter the spread of conspiracy theories, we should find other ways to fulfil the needs from which they arise, such as the need for control or for causal understanding. Although we have no control over the fact that there is a pandemic, it can be empowering to realise that our behaviour in response to it – such as wearing a mask or respecting social distance – can make a difference to its outcomes. And although experts cannot always provide the unflinching certainties people crave, friendly and accessible scientific communication can help debunk conspiracy theories and satisfy the human desire for knowledge and understanding.

[Lisa Bortolotti is Professor of Philosophy, University of Birmingham; Anna Ichino is Postdoctoral Fellow in Philosophy, University of Milan]

## Will not allow NRC in Bengal, says Mamata

**BANGAON, DEC 9 (PTI):** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday asserted that her government will not allow implementation of National Register of Citizens (NRC) or National Population Register (NPR) in the state.

Maintaining that all the residents of the state are citizens of the country and no one can change that, Banerjee accused the BJP of trying to play divisive politics using the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

Addressing a public meeting here in North 24 Parganas district bordering Bangladesh, she said, "I, as the chief minister, say that you are citizens and no one can change that. We will not allow NRC or NPR."

Banerjee also claimed that these are the BJP's ploy to throw people out of the state.

BJP national general secretary and in-charge of West Bengal Kailash Vijayvargiya last week said that the CAA is likely to be implemented from January next year, as the Centre is keen to grant citizenship to the large refugee population in West Bengal.

Wooing the Matua community who hold considerable sway over a number of Assembly constituencies in North 24 Parganas and neighbouring Nadia district, Banerjee said that a slew of development programmes have been taken up for the community.

"We will not allow Bengal to be turned into Gujarat," the TMC supremo asserted, claiming that the BJP has destroyed the country



through its "divisive politics."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has brought three laws against the interests of farmers to take away their produce at will, Banerjee alleged.

She also alleged that the BJP-led government at the Centre has allowed hoarding of potato, onion and other necessary food items by removing these from the list of essential commodities leading to price rise.

The chief minister accused the BJP of making false allegations over providing monetary relief to the victims of cyclone Amphan.

"Just because one or two elements did some mischief, you (BJP) are seeking the accounts of Amphan relief. How much money have you given that you are asking for it?" she said.

The Calcutta High Court has recently directed the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) to audit cyclone Amphan-related relief amid allegations of ir-

regularities.

"The prime minister made a dramatic visit to Basirhat (after the cyclone) for publicity and announced Rs 1,000 crore (for relief). It is our money which he has simply sent in advance," she said, claiming that the central government has only given the money from what was due to the state.

She questioned how the Centre asks for accounts when it is the state government which is making roads and providing people with electricity, drinking water and other facilities.

"The central government is denying the state of its GST compensation dues," she said, while maintaining that the TMC dispensation is going ahead with several development schemes in the state despite its tight financial position.

"Despite such a financial situation, I am giving a lot to the people. If anyone else can do the same, I will resign the same day," Banerjee said.

A small section of

people who waved placards with their demands written on those during the meeting, she urged people not to hurt her.

"If you hurt me, I sometimes feel maybe I should not remain (in the chief ministers post) they don't want me," an emotional Banerjee said.

She urged them not to raise placards with demands at her meetings. "You can always write to me and I will look into your issues," the chief minister said.

Banerjee said that out of the 10 crore population of the state, 9.5 crore are beneficiaries of the schemes of her government.

She claimed that the BJP government at the Centre is selling off and privatising banks, railways, defence, Steel Authority of India (SAIL) and coal mines.

"The central government buys only 70,000 metric tonne of rice from farmers in West Bengal, while it purchases a lot more from several other states," the chief minister said, accusing it of

partisan behaviour. She said that her government buys 45 lakh metric tonne paddy from farmers of the state to provide them adequate support.

Alleging that the BJP has brought outsiders to the state, who are going door to door to make divisive campaigns, Banerjee said that the saffron party has divided the "Matua family" through its divisive politics.

The NRC and the CAA had led to a sharp division within the Matua Mahasanga, an apex body of the Hindu refugee sect, with one group supporting the TMC and another backing the BJP.

Maintaining that she keeps her words, she said, "I am not like the BJP who makes promises before elections, but runs away later."

She said that Rs 10 crore was sanctioned for the development of the community and assured them that a holiday would be announced on the birth anniversary of founder Harichand Thakur, the founder of the Matua sect.

## What COVID-19? Life is all normal in Lakshadweep

**KOCHI, DEC 9 (PTI):** The world may be in the grip of COVID-19 pandemic, disrupting daily schedules and robbing many of their weekend getaways, but life seems to be normal in the small Lakshadweep islands, which is yet to record the first positive case of coronavirus.

No masks, no sanitisers, and many rules of COVID-19 are not in place and every human activity, including marriages and public gatherings continue, thanks to strict Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that bars easy entry of people to the island in the Arabian sea.

According to PP Mohammed Faizal, who represents the islands in the Lok Sabha, Lakshadweep has staved off the COVID-19 pandemic since its outbreak earlier this year, reporting zero cases as of December 8.

"So far not a single case of coronavirus has been reported from Lakshadweep because of the exemplary precautionary measures we have taken," Faizal told PTI.

Gaining entry to the 36 sq km island comes with its set of strict measures.

Whether it is a common man, officials or people's representatives-- they will have to fulfill the measures including a mandatory seven-day quarantine at Kochi, the only point from where transportation via ships and helicopters to the Union Territory is allowed.

Faizal said no COVID-19 restrictions have been imposed on the people in the islands. "No masks, no sanitisers because it is a green area.

Lakshadweep is the only place where the schools are open and classes are being conducted. From September 21 onwards, the Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) has allowed to open the schools."

"It is like normal. All the functions, including religious ones and others like marriages are being held as usual. Everything is normal here", the two-time MP said.

The smallest UT in the country, Lakshadweep is an archipelago consisting of 36 islands with an area of 32 sq km.

He said both Soni and Pal are on the run and police are looking for them.

The accused duo has been booked under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) including murder and under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

## Two kill man for 'touching' their food in MP village



**CHHATARPUR (MP), DEC 9 (PTI):** A 25-year-old man died after he was allegedly assaulted by two men apparently for touching their food while they were partying together in Madhya Pradesh's Chhatarpur district, police said on Wednesday.

The deceased Devraj Anuragi, a Dalit, had gone to attend a party hosted by the accused, Bhura Soni and Santosh Pal, in Kishanpur village under Gaurihar police station area, about 100 kms from

the district headquarter, on Monday night.

"As per statements given by the family members of the deceased, Soni and Pal, who are also residents of Kishanpur village, had invited Anuragi for a party at a field," Superintendent of Police Sachin Sharma told reporters. Anuragi's family members told police that after returning home, he told them that Soni and Pal had thrashed him for touching their food, he said.

"Anuragi's kin also claimed that he had inju-

ries on his back suggesting that he was attacked with a stick. Few minutes later (on Monday night), he complained of chest pain and died," Sharma said.

He said both Soni and Pal are on the run and police are looking for them.

The accused duo has been booked under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) including murder and under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

## Attempts to show black flags to Nadda in city

**KOLKATA, DEC 9 (PTI):** Alleged Trinamool Congress supporters Wednesday attempted to show black flags to BJP national president J P Nadda from a spot outside the newly opened election office of the saffron party at Hastings area of the city when he was inside it.

About 50 people tried to wave black flags from the spot located some distance away from the newly opened office. They also shouted

"BJP go back" when Nadda entered the building.

On hearing the commotion BJP workers came out of the building and tried to confront the protestors, who later told reporters they did not belong to any political party.

They said that they only wanted to voice their protest as common people against the passage of three firm bills in Parliament by the NDA government at the Cen-

tre. The situation was controlled as the two sides were prevented from coming close following intervention of BJP leaders and the police. The protestors left soon after.

A local BJP leader claimed some of the protesters were known faces in the area and close to a Trinamool Congress minister.

"There was no clash or scuffle. Both sides left the spot peacefully," a police officer present at the spot, said.



All the islands are 220 to 440 km away from the coastal city of Kochi in Kerala. According to Census 2011, it has a population of 64,000.

Faizal said the moment Kerala reported the first case of COVID-19, also the country's first, in January, the local administration mounted a strict vigil.

The first concern was to stop the arrival of tourists-- both international and domestic.

"In the month of March 2019, we stopped it," the MP said.

The administration then stopped the entry permit to each of the islands from the mainland and allowed access only to capital Kavaratti from Kochi with the approval of the administrator, officials said.

By curtailing the issuance of entry permit, the administration could control the inflow of non-islanders to Lakshadweep, they added.

For the entry of islanders who work in other parts of the county and abroad, officials deployed in Lakshadweep and those who travel to mainland for treatment purpose, a standard operating procedure was formulated.

Accordingly, those who want to come to Lakshadweep will have to undergo seven days institutional quarantine in Kochi, with the administration bearing the cost involved in it.

To ensure proper testing of samples of islanders quarantined in Kochi, the administration has provided a testing machine to the Kalamassery Government Medical College.

"Those who tested negative will be allowed to come to Lakshadweep. Once they reach their particular island, again they have to be home quarantined for a week.

That has been strictly monitored by medical and police departments," Faizal said.

The Parliamentarian said he has travelled thrice to Delhi during the pandemic period and followed all the sets of laid down rules before returning to the islands, including getting quarantined for seven days in Kochi.

"After testing negative, I come back to Lakshadweep where I undergo one (more) week of quarantine at my house," said Faizal, who attended the monsoon session of Parliament and two official meetings in Delhi during the period.

He said many cases of coronavirus were reported when they were quarantined in Kochi.

"Those infected people will be shifted to the administration's special facility in Kochi where they will have to stay for 10 days," he said.

After 10 days they will be tested again.

"If they test negative they will have to spend 14 more days in the administration's facility and taken to the island only after conducting one more test", he said.

A Kerala Health department official said those outsiders who test positive for the virus in the state will be included in its list of cases but the states they belong will be mentioned along with it.

Faizal further lauded the steps taken by late administrator of Lakshadweep, Dineshwar Sharma, for being instrumental in making Lakshadweep green. "He was so particular to make our island green in all the ways possible. He has gone the extra mile for this and he was such a nice person", Faizal said.

Sharma died at a Chennai hospital on December 4 following severe lung disease.

## Ex-Bengal CM Buddhadeb hospitalised, condition critical

**KOLKATA, DEC 9 (PTI):** Former West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya was admitted to a hospital in south Kolkata on Wednesday afternoon as his breathing-related problems aggravated and his health condition is stated to be critical, officials said.

Bhattacharya, 76, has tested negative for COVID-19, they said.

He has been put on ventilator support at the critical care unit of the private hospital, the sources said.

"Mr Bhattacharya's RT-PCR test showed he was COVID- negative and that is good news. The CT scan of his brain showed old lacunar infarcts. He is undergoing treatment at the CCU," a senior official of the hospital said.

"He is presently on non-invasive ventilation (BIPAP) and maintaining an oxygen saturation of 95 per cent. He remains critical but responding to current treatment," he added. Bhattacharya's pulse and blood pressure are stable and the veteran politician is on IV antibiotics and other supportive medications, said a statement released by the hospital.

His oxygen saturation deteriorated to 70 per cent in the morning and he became unconscious, following which he was rushed to the hospital.

A two-member team of senior doctors was constituted to monitor

the health condition of the veteran CPI(M) leader. Bhattacharya, who was the chief minister of West Bengal from 2000 to 2011, has been suffering from COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) and other old age-related ailments for quite some time.

He had stepped down from the CPI(M)'s politburo, the central committee as well as the state secretariat in 2018.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee expressed her concern over Bhattacharya's health condition and prayed for his quick recovery.

"Concerned to hear that former Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya has been hospitalised with breathing problems. Praying for his speedy recovery and wishing him well," she said.

Governor Jagdeep Dhankar also wished him a speedy recovery.

State Urban Development Minister Firhad Hakim visited the hospital and spoke to doctors.

After speaking to the doctors, Hakim briefed the chief minister about Bhattacharya's present health condition. CPI(M) state secretary Surjya Kanta Mishra urged the people to cooperate with the hospital authorities.

"Comrade Buddhadeb Bhattacharya has been admitted for treatment of acute exacerbation of his respiratory problems in Woodland.

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Ronaldo tops Messi with 2 goals in Juve's 3-0 win at Barca

**BARCELONA, DEC 9 (AP):** Cristiano Ronaldo got the better of Lionel Messi by scoring two penalties to lead Juventus to a 3-0 win at Barcelona, dealing the Spanish side its first home defeat in the Champions League in seven years.

Ronaldo on Tuesday converted spot kicks for Juventus' 13th-minute opener and a third goal early in the second half after US midfielder Weston McKennie doubled the advantage in the 20th.

Messi and Ronaldo briefly embraced with one arm behind each other's back and exchanged a few words before kick-off at a Camp Nou that remains empty because of coronavirus restrictions.

But only Ronaldo enjoyed the revival of their longstanding rivalry that enthralled fans for almost a decade when he played at Real Madrid before leaving for Italy in 2018.

Twice Ronaldo celebrated with his trademark leap, twist, and thrust of both arms downwards as he roared out his goals.

While Ronaldo benefited from errors by Barcelona's defense, Messi was left to carry the workload for the frustrated hosts. The Argentina star was unable to beat Gianluigi Buffon on his five strikes between the posts.

Juventus clinched first place in Group G on goal difference with the two sides finishing level on 15 points. Both teams had already qualified for the knockout round prior to the match.

Ronaldo was unable to play in Barcelona's 2-0 win in Turin in October after the Portugal forward had tested positive for COVID-19.

Barcelona's record of 38 home games without a loss in Europe's top-tier tournament began in September 2013.

Sevilla beats Rennes 3-1 in Champions League

**RENNES, DEC 9 (AP):** Youssef En-Nesyri scored twice as Sevilla ended its Champions League group stage campaign with a 3-1 win over already eliminated Rennes.

There was nothing at stake for either side at Roazhon Park, with Sevilla already through in second place behind Chelsea and Rennes guaranteed to finish last in Group E in its first Champions League campaign.

Defender Jules Koundouput Europa League champion Sevilla ahead in the 32nd minute with a goal from the edge of the penalty area, and En-Nesyri headed his team 2-0 up in first-half stoppage time. He added Sevilla's third goal in the 81st off a pass from scar Rodriguez.

Rennes recorded 18 shots to eight for Sevilla, but couldn't make the chances count until 18-year-old forward Georginio Rutter scored a penalty on his Champions League debut in the 86th minute.

# PSG v Istanbul Basaksehir suspended after fourth official accused of racism

**SACHIN NAKRANI & MICHAEL BUTLER**  
**PARIS, 09 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]:** Uefa has announced it has launched an investigation after players from Paris Saint-Germain and Istanbul Basaksehir left the pitch in the 23rd minute of their Champions League fixture in the French capital following alleged racism by the fourth official, Sebastian Coltescu.

Play was immediately suspended and while an attempt was made to restart the game with a new fourth official it was ultimately abandoned after the visiting side refused to return to the pitch. The remaining minutes of the match will resume from 5.55pm GMT on Wednesday.

"Following an alleged incident involving the fourth official, the match was temporarily suspended," read a Uefa statement. "After consultation with both teams, it was agreed that the match would restart with a different fourth official. Uefa will thoroughly investigate the matter and further communication will be made in due course."

The walk-off occurred after Basaksehir's Cameroonian assistant coach Pierre Webo was shown a red card in the 16th minute for protesting against a refereeing decision. That led to the Basaksehir



substitute Demba Ba confronting Coltescu over what the official said as he called on the referee, Ovidiu Hategan, to dismiss Webo, which Reuters reported as being: "The black one over there. Go and check who he is. The black one over there, it's not possible to act like that."

In response, a clearly incensed Ba could be seen in video footage saying to Coltescu: "You never say 'this white guy', you say: 'These guys'. So, listen to me, why when you mention a black guy do you have to say 'this black guy'?" Ba could also then be seen

in footage confronting Hategan and saying to him: "Why he say negro?" There followed heated discussions before the players departed down the tunnel.

On Twitter, Basaksehir said: "Our players have taken a decision NOT TO go back on the pitch after our Assistant Coach Pierre Webo has been exposed to racist behaviour by the 4th Official." The same account also posted the message: "NO TO RACISM Respect."

PSG also issued a statement on Twitter: "After a red card is given by the referee to

a member of opposition staff, discussions continue between players and staff of both teams with the referee. The Basaksehir players decide to go back to the locker room, the Parisians follow them."

The show of support from PSG players was swift and decisive. The central defender Presnel Kimpembe could be seen saying: "Is he serious? We are heading in. We're heading in. That's it, we're heading in," as tensions rose. The striker Kylian Mbappé posted on Twitter: "SAY NO TO RACISM. M WEBO WE ARE WITH YOU."

Players walking off the pitch in protest against racism is rare and that those both teams did so was especially striking. It could also prove a turning point in football's fight against discrimination and there will be much focus on Uefa's investigation and the sanctions the governing body issues should Coltescu be found guilty of racism.

Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's president, said on Twitter on Tuesday night: "We are unconditionally against racism and discrimination in sports and in all areas of life."

Regardless of the result

in the rearranged game on Wednesday evening, Thomas Tuchel's side have qualified for the knockout stages of the Champions League following Manchester United's 3-2 defeat against RB Leipzig.

PSG have nine points, the same amount as United, and even if they remain on that after what will be their final Group H fixture the French champions will progress on the back of having a better head-to-head record.

A victory against Basaksehir would enable PSG to leapfrog Leipzig and progress to the last 16 as group winners.

## Chelsea and City face uphill task to unseat Lyon from WCL throne



**SUZANNE WRACK**  
**LONDON, 09 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]:** Every year, on the eve of the Champions League, there is really only one question to be asked: will any club have done enough to challenge Lyon, who have won the past five titles?

In recent seasons the answer has been a resounding no. The French club have not lost in the competition since April 2017, when they lost 1-0 at home against Manchester City. It didn't matter. They had settled the tie with a 3-1 away win.

Since then their unbeaten run has stuttered twice, with draws against Manchester City in April 2018 and Chelsea in 2019. On both occasions they had done enough in the preceding legs to progress.

The strength of the Women's Super League, fast developing into the most competitive league in the world, is both a boon and a burden to English teams attempting to unseat the holders.

On the one hand, English teams are stronger than ever. This season's contenders, Manchester City and Chelsea, are not homes to a few world-class players but have squads dripping with talent. City have added the World Cup winners Sam Kerr and Rose Lavelle, the dynamic England winger Chloe Kelly and, from Lyon, the 2019 European player of the year Lucy Bronze and the left-back Alex Greenwood. Chelsea, who signed the Australia striker Sam Kerr in January after a lengthy pursuit, have added the one player to have perhaps marginally ruffled Lyon's

feathers in recent years, the former Wolfsburg forward Pernille Harder.

Harder scored nine goals to help power Wolfsburg into last August's final, and scored first in added time in the 2018 final before the German side collapsed to a 4-1 defeat.

However, although the WSL is strengthening as the top clubs invest, English teams still sit below Europe's elite when it comes to spending. Chelsea's manager, Emma Hayes, said before her team's last-32 first leg at Benfica on Wednesday that the finances available to clubs such as Lyon, Wolfsburg, Paris Saint-Germain and Barcelona were "probably double that of English clubs" (with the gap to Lyon even starker).

"That's the case," Hayes said. "I'm not saying I don't have quality in our ranks but you can't just acquire one or two players to be at that level and I think depth is the key to it. Look at Lyon last year, they played what they would say is their third-choice No 9 in the final. Nobody has that resource."

Hayes and her City counterpart Gareth Taylor (and his predecessor Nick Cushing), have had to play the long game, building their squads bit by bit, though this year's bigger outlay will increasingly become the norm should it reap dividends in Europe.

The competitiveness of the WSL also means it is impossible for English teams to focus solely on the Champions League in the buildup to the games. To an extent Lyon can do just that. The

French champions, who suffered their first domestic defeat in four years last month, play the Italian champions Juventus in the last 32. They cruised to a 3-1 win against Le Havre on Saturday and play Issy and Reims either side of their Champions League home leg. Those three teams have 21 points in the league combined; Lyon have 27.

Manchester City eased past Everton 3-0 on Sunday but have a testing clash with Arsenal after their game at Göteborg on Wednesday, and play an increasingly hardy Birmingham City after the home leg.

Chelsea have a kinder run, with Brighton and then Tottenham either side of their home leg against the Champions League debutants Benfica. At this stage these calendar nuances are fairly insignificant but, as the tougher teams start to meet in the latter rounds, playing in a weaker domestic league can create a sizeable advantage.

On Wednesday we get the first look at how these bolstered squads handle a heavy schedule. No English team have reached a final since Arsenal won the historic quadruple, in 2007. Be it this season or next, the WSL appears to be increasingly primed for a new era of competitiveness in Europe. The addition from next term of a group stage and the possibility of three English teams qualifying will aid that quest. Can they topple Lyon this year? That is probably still a step too far.

## Joshua and Fury deserve to split purse of a unification fight, says Hearn

**DONALD MCRAE**  
**LAS VEGAS, 09 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]:** "I've always felt that, commercially, Anthony Joshua is on another planet to Tyson Fury," Eddie Hearn said while also stressing that Britain's two world champion heavyweights will agree to a 50-50 split of a huge purse should their planned unification fight happen next year.

Hearn promotes Joshua and, during a media conference call, he inevitably set about boosting his fighter's economic credentials before agreeing that Fury's achievements in the ring mean that they deserve to share the proceeds.

"You've only got to look at AJ's endorsement deals and the money he makes," Hearn said. "The reason that Tyson Fury couldn't fight in December is that they couldn't generate the pay-per-view money or the American TV money that AJ can. But Tyson Fury is still a huge star and if you don't offer him 50/50 then he ain't going to take it. Do I think he should get 50/50? Commercially, no. But achievement-wise and on recent performances? Yeah, I do."

Joshua defends his IBF, WBA and WBO world titles against Kubrat Pulev at London's O2 Arena on Saturday night. Pulev is a decent fighter, and one of boxing's proverbial tough nuts, but Joshua is backed so heavily that the momentum for a definitive showdown against Fury continues to build. Fury became the WBC champion after his crushing stoppage of Deontay Wilder in February.

"Our job over the next couple of weeks is to get that [unification] fight in

place," Hearn said. "If AJ beats Pulev, we want to go to the governing bodies and say: 'Deal agreed, contracts signed and this is the proposed date. Will you sanction it as an undisputed fight?'"

Hearn was unequivocal that calls for the fight to be held in London need to be balanced by hard-nosed economic realities. After Joshua spoke last week about his possible willingness to accept a reduced purse to fight Fury in Britain, Hearn said: "I'm more brutally honest. We'll discuss with both management teams the opportunities that are out there in terms of site fees and money in the pot. AJ has consistently earned a lot of money and will care less about the number in the pot than Fury? Probably. But he's not going to do it for half the money because it sounds nice. His team is going to make the right decision for his career."

The promoter suggested that "everybody" in the two camps "would prefer the fight to take place in London."

He added: "But we have to rely on revenue generated via the gate and not the revenue generated by a tourism board or by a government to bring an event like that to another country. It will probably be a 50% pay cut to do the fight in the UK and that's how brutal it is."

Hearn suggested the ideal time to stage the fight would be "the end of May." But it is unclear whether the vaccine against Covid-19 will have been introduced successfully in the UK by then while, in the Middle East, which remains the probable location,

Hearn pointed out that "you have Ramadan from April to early May."

He was asked what he would do if, in an unlikely scenario, both boxers insisted that they fight in the UK. "We do it in a heartbeat. But it's not how it works in sport and especially not in the fight game. And it shouldn't. Everyone says Daniel Dubois quit, that he's got no heart [after the young British heavyweight suffered a serious eye injury and chose not to continue against Joe Joyce last month]. The other argument is: 'Actually, he could have lost his eyesight in there.' You're basically saying the fighter should put his health on the line without getting the maximum reward financially for that risk. If it's close, if it's marginal, all day long do it in the UK. But half the money shouldn't even be considered."

Hearn believes a Fury-Joshua bout would generate sufficient interest to result in a rematch. "One of those fights, in my opinion, must take place in the UK," he said. "But, particularly the first fight, both teams will say to me: 'Show us how this fight works, show us the finances.' I'll present every option to them."

Before then Joshua needs to beat Pulev in front of British boxing's first crowd of the pandemic. One thousand fans will be allowed into the arena and Hearn said he is "excited but nervous" about both the event and Saturday's headline fight. "If anything goes wrong it affects boxing moving forward. Listen, I'm nervous about the fight. We have never seen AJ box in an environment like this - but I actually think it could suit him. But it's all the unknown."

# Ethiopia rejects independent probes into Tigray conflict

**NAIROBI, KENYA (AP):** Ethiopia's government is rejecting calls for independent investigations into the deadly conflict in its Tigray region, saying it "doesn't need a baby-sitter."

The declaration comes amid international calls for more transparency into the month-long fighting between Ethiopian forces and those of the fugitive Tigray regional government that is thought to have killed thousands, including civilians. At least one large-scale massacre has been documented by human rights groups, and others are feared.

Senior government official Redwan Hussein told reporters on Tuesday evening that Ethiopia will invite others for assistance only if it feels that "it failed to investigate." To assume the government can't carry out such probes "is belittling the government," he said.

Frustration is growing as the northern Tigray region remains largely cut off from the outside world, with food and medicines desperately needed by the population of 6 million — some 1 million of them now thought to be displaced.

The lack of transparency, as most communications and transport links remain severed, has complicated efforts to verify the warring side's claims.

It also hurts efforts to understand the extent of



atrocities that have been committed since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed on Nov. 4 announced that fighting had begun with the TPLF, which dominated Ethiopia's government and military for nearly three decades before he came to power and sidelined it.

Each government now regards the other as illegal, as the TPLF objects to the postponement of national elections until next year because of the COVID-19 pandemic and sees Abiy's mandate as expired.

Ethiopia's government has pushed back against what it calls outside "interference," from efforts at dialogue to delivering aid, drawing on its history as the rare African country never colonized, a source of deep national pride.

The government has made it clear it wants

to manage aid delivery, and on Tuesday it said its forces had shot at and detained U.N. staffers who allegedly broke through checkpoints while trying to reach areas where "they were not supposed to go."

Sporadic shooting remains in Tigray and humanitarian assistance must be escorted by defense forces, Redwan said.

The United Nations, alarmed, said it is "engaging at the highest level with the federal government to express our concerns" more than a week after it and the government signed a deal to allow humanitarian access.

The deal, crucially, allows aid only in areas under federal government control. While Ethiopia's government says the fighting has stopped, the leaders of the fugitive

Tigray People's Liberation Front have asserted that the conflict continues.

With growing allegations of massacres and attacks on refugee camps inside Tigray, the U.N. human rights office has not responded to a question about whether it has begun investigating possible war crimes.

Meanwhile, the need for aid is being called critical. The Tigray capital, Mekele, a city of a half-million people, is "basically today without medical care," the director-general of the International Committee for the Red Cross, Robert Mardini, told reporters on Tuesday.

The city's Ayder Referral Hospital has run out of supplies, including fuel to power generators, he said.

"Doctors and nurses have been forced to make

horrible life and death decisions," Mardini said. "They suspended intensive care services and are really struggling to take care like delivering babies or providing dialysis treatment."

A joint ICRC-Ethiopian Red Cross convoy with supplies for hundreds of wounded people is ready to go to Mekele, pending approval, he said. It would be the first international convoy to reach the city since the fighting began.

While the risk of insecurity remains in the Tigray capital, there is no active fighting, Mardini said.

Overall, he said, "People in Tigray have been cut off from services for nearly a month. They have had no phone, no Internet, no electricity and no fuel. Cash is running out. This of course adds to the tension."

# Minneapolis eyes deep police cuts after Floyd's death

**MINNEAPOLIS, DEC 9 (AP):** Minneapolis City Council members who tried unsuccessfully to dismantle the police department in response to George Floyd's death are voting Wednesday on whether to shrink it, a move that could imperil the entire city budget because the mayor is threatening to use his veto to protect public safety amid soaring crime rates.

The plan, which supporters call Safety for All, is the latest version of the defund the police movement that Minneapolis and other cities have considered since Floyd's May 25 death ignited mass demonstrations against police brutality and a nationwide reckoning with racism.

Eleven of the 13 council members have already cast committee votes in favor of the largest parts of the plan, signaling that passage is likely. It would cut nearly 8 million from Mayor Jacob Frey's 179 million policing budget and redirect it to mental health teams, violence prevention programs and other initiatives.

I am actively considering a veto due to the massive, permanent cut to officer capacity," Frey said in a statement Monday night. Reducing the authorized size of the force by 138 officers before enacting alternatives is irresponsible, he said.

Cities around the U.S., including Los Angeles, New York City and Portland, Oregon, are shifting funds from police departments to social services programs in an effort to provide new solutions for problems traditionally handled by police. Such cuts have led some departments to lay off officers, cancel recruiting classes or retreat from hiring goals.

In Minneapolis, violent crime rates have surged since the death of Floyd, a Black man who was handcuffed and pleading for air for several minutes while Derek Chauvin, a white former officer, pressed his knee against his neck. Chauvin and three others were charged in Floyd's death

and are expected to stand trial in March.

Police have recorded 532 gunshot victims this year as of last Thursday, more than double the same period a year ago. Carjackings have also spiked to 375 so far this year, up 331% from the same period last year. Violent crimes have topped 5,100, compared with just over 4,000 for the same period in 2019.

This summer happened because George Floyd was murdered by the Minneapolis Police Department and it wasn't an accident, it's because the system of policing we know now is not just racist, but it doesn't create safety for all, said Oluchi Omeoga, a cofounder of Black Visions, which supports Safety for All as a step toward more transformational change.

Due to austerity forced by the coronavirus pandemic, the mayor's proposal already bakes in a 14 million cut to the department compared with its original 2020 budget, mostly through attrition. Frey aims to hold the number of sworn officers around 770 through 2021 with hopes of eventually increasing the force to 888. Safety for All would cap the number at 750 by 2022. The department is already down by about 120 partly due to officers claiming post-traumatic stress disorder from a summer of unrest with more preparing to leave amid retirements and poor morale.

Passions ran hot on both sides as more than 400 citizens signed up to speak during a marathon hearing last week that ran into the early hours Thursday, with many expressing alarm that the council was even contemplating cuts.

I think we need to make bold decisions on a path forward, said Council Member Steve Fletcher, a coauthor of the proposal. While acknowledging that it would mean fewer officers, he defended the plan by saying it would reduce the department's workload by shifting 911 calls

away from armed officers to other specialists such as mental health professionals.

Combined those investments add up to a safer city for everybody and an approach that creates a more sustainable public safety system for our city, Fletcher said in an interview.

On the other side are those like Frey and Police Chief Medaria Arradondo who say there's no need for an either-or decision that it's possible to reform policing without cutting officers. The mayor and 12 of the 13 council members are Democrats; one council member is from the Green Party.

If the council approves the plan Wednesday night, Frey would have five days to veto if he chooses. The council could override him with a two-thirds majority, or nine council members.

A proposal over the summer to dismantle the department and replace it with a Department of Community Safety and Violence Prevention initially had support from a majority of the council but faltered when a separate city commission voted against putting it on the November ballot. The city was paying 4,500 a day at one point for private security for three council members who reported getting threats after supporting defunding.

Bill Rodriguez of Minneapolis, part of a community group called Safety Now Minneapolis that formed recently in response to rising crime, said his group supports police reform by funding many of the programs the council wants to fund: expanding violence prevention programs, programs aimed at intervening safely with people suffering mental health issues and finding ways to respond to some 911 incidents without police officers.

But he said cutting police officers is a bad idea and was sharply critical of council members who he said can't get beyond their vow this summer to abolish or defund police.

## Belgium seeks to ease virus rules on religious services



**BRUSSELS (AP):** Belgium's government is under pressure to change its restrictive rules on religious services during the coronavirus crisis after the country's highest court said the measures impede constitutional conditions on freedom of religion.

The Council of State ruled that, at least temporarily, the government needs to change its measures so that a possible restriction on the collective nature of religious services "is not disproportionate."

Currently, collective religious services are limited to five people for marriages and 15 for funerals, with no collective Masses allowed.

Justice Minister Vincent Van Quickenborne said he would be discussing possible relaxation measures with religious leaders later on Wednesday.

"We are looking for the right balance between freedom of religion and public health," he said in a statement.

Religious groups had complained that people could go on nonessential shopping sprees but that services continued to face tough restrictions.

The ruling on containing the virus was further compounded Wednesday with new scientific information that the recent steep decline of the main COVID-19 indicators is leveling off.

Hospital admissions have fallen by only 6 percent over the past week, and there was even an uptick on Tuesday.

Steven Van Gucht of the government health group Sciensano said that the levels of hospital admissions and new infections "remain at about two to three times the thresholds" that the government was seeking.

Belgium has been hit particularly hard by the virus and has over 17,500 deaths attributed to COVID-19. The latest figures show that just over 100 people still die every day.

## Merkel backs tougher virus curbs as German deaths hit record

**BERLIN (AP):** German Chancellor Angela Merkel advocated tougher restrictions on public life Wednesday and pleaded with her compatriots to cut down on socializing as the country reported its highest single-day death toll of the coronavirus pandemic.

Germany is gradually moving toward a tighter lockdown, at least for a limited period after Christmas, as new virus cases remain stubbornly high — and are even beginning to creep higher — despite a partial shutdown that started on Nov. 2.

The national disease control center, the Robert Koch Institute, reported 590 deaths related to COVID-19 over the past 24 hours — more than 100 higher than the week-old previous record. It counted 20,815 new daily infections, compared with 17,270 a week earlier. Germany, which has 83 million people, has now recorded nearly 1.22 million cases, including 19,932 deaths in the pandemic.

"We are in a decisive, perhaps the decisive, phase of fighting the pandemic," Merkel told parliament Wednesday. "The figures are at much too high a level," a visibly frustrated chancellor added, describing as "very alarming" the rising number of people requiring intensive care and dying.

Merkel has consistently advocated decisive action to fight the pandemic but has often had to move more slowly because, in highly decentralized Germany, the country's 16 state governments are responsible for imposing and lifting restrictions. She and the state governors meet periodically to coordinate measures.

Restaurants, bars, leisure and sports facilities are currently closed in Germany and hotels are closed to tourists, but schools and nonessential shops remain open. Germany in the spring managed to avoid the high number of infections and grim death tolls seen in other large European nations, and still continues to have a much lower overall fatality rate than countries such as Britain, France or Spain.

But the current numbers are not encouraging. Germany's new cases per 100,000 residents over the past 14 days

are now higher than in France, Belgium and Spain, and about level with Britain, though still well below Italy, Sweden and many others, according to the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control.

Merkel noted that a national academy of scientists and academics on Tuesday recommended that Germans reduce their social contacts starting next week and put in place a "hard lockdown" from Dec. 24 to Jan. 10.

"We would do well to really take seriously what scientists tell us," she said. Merkel called for state governments consider closing schools early before Christmas and said that people hopping from one mulled wine stand over the holidays to the next is "unacceptable" in view of the daily death figures.

"If we have too many contacts before Christmas and then it's our last Christmas with our grandparents, then we will have been negligent," she said.

Some state governors are already moving to tougher restrictions. The eastern state of Saxony, currently the worst-hit, will close schools and most stores on Monday until Jan. 10. Its southern neighbor, Bavaria, is introducing measures such as a nighttime curfew in its worst-affected areas and demanding more home schooling and stricter border controls.

Most Germans have supported restrictions and mask-wearing requirements, though a small but vocal minority opposes them and there have been protests drawing a wide variety of participants, including right-wing extremists and conspiracy theorists.

On Wednesday, domestic intelligence officials in the southwestern state of Baden-Wuerttemberg said they are putting a group organizing those protests, Querdenken 711, under formal observation.

The group insists it has no place for extremism. But Beate Bube, the head of the state's domestic intelligence agency, said her office has observed the group has both membership and ideological overlaps with known right-wing extremist groups.

Eight essays put the spotlight on the journey coaxed by hydel projects in Sikkim and the region, the cost exacted by this "development" and some of the stories it birthed, not all of which have been shared before.

Also finding place in this collection is the arrival of Climate Change and its impact on Sikkim and how the State could negotiate with this new disruption.

**THE BIRDS HAVE LOST THEIR WAY**

EDITED BY TSHERING EDEN AND PEMA WANGCHUK

**ESSAYS ON TEESTA, HYDEL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN SIKKIM**

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**FASHIONABLE SELENA!** Singer Selena Gomez filmed *Only Murders in the Building* in New York City.

## Alfred Molina returning as Dr Octopus in 'Spider-Man 3'

**LOS ANGELES, DEC 9 (PTI):** Veteran actor Alfred Molina is set to reprise his role as the antagonist Doctor Octopus in "Spider-Man 3", with Tom Holland in the title role.

Sources told The Hollywood Reporter, Molina has joined the cast as Otto Octavius, a path-breaking scientist-turned-eight-limbed villain who challenged Tobey Maguire's Spider-Man in Sam Raimi's "Spider-Man 2", which was released as the 2004 sequel to the director's 2002 movie.

The actor, whose credits include films "Frida", "The Da Vinci Code" and "Feud: Bette and Joan" series, was first rumoured to be part of the upcoming Marvel-Sony film late last month, when GWW reported the actor had been spotted on set.

Apart from Molina, Jamie Foxx is also coming as Electro after playing the role in 2014's "The Amazing Spider-Man 2", which starred Andrew Garfield as the web-slinger. In October, Foxx hinted in a since-deleted Instagram post that three different Spider-Men could appear in the movie.



Spider-Man franchise stars are expected to include Zendaya, Marisa Tomei, Jacob Batalon and Tony Revolori.

Marvel and Sony had no comment on Molina's casting.

## NCB probe: Absconding accused held; Rs 2.5 cr drugs seized

**MUMBAI, DEC 9 (PTI)** The Narcotics Control Bureau has arrested an absconding accused in a drugs case linked to actor Sushant Singh Rajput's death and also seized a contraband worth Rs 2.5 crore during raids in Mumbai, an NCB official said on Wednesday.

The NCB official claimed it is the "biggest seizure" of drugs in the case linked to Rajput's death.

The accused, identified as Regel Mahakal, was arrested late Tuesday night after raids in some areas of Mumbai, including Lokhandwala, by an NCB team led by the probe agency's zonal director Sameer Wankhede, the official said.

A contraband, 'Malana cream', worth Rs 2.5 crore was seized during the raids, he said, adding that raids are still going on.

One more person was also arrested during the raids, the official said without divulging further details.

Mahakal's name had cropped up during questioning of some drugs peddlers in the case.

He allegedly used to supply drugs to Anuj Keshwani, also an accused in the case who was arrested in September this year, who was supplying it to others, he said.

Rajput, 34, was found hanging at his home in Bandra area here in June this

some WhatsApp chats involving drugs.

The central agency had earlier arrested Rajput's girlfriend, actress Rhea Chakraborty, her brother Showik, some staff members of Rajput and a few others under various sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances



year. The NCB has been probing the alleged use in some quarters of Bollywood after the death of Rajput on the basis of

es (NDPS) Act. Rhea Chakraborty, her brother, and some other accused were later granted bail.

## Carol Burnett biopic taps Tara Miele as director

**LOS ANGELES, DEC 9 (PTI):** Writer-director Tara Miele, known for her work on superhero shows like "Batwoman" and "Arrow", will helm a film about the life of comedy icon Carol Burnett.

The movie was in development at Focus Features in 2019 and according to insiders, it is now in negotiations to jump to Apple, where it will be released as an original. According to Variety, Miele will also adapt Burnett's bestselling memoir, "Carrie and Me: A Mother-Daughter Love Story", which will serve as the source material for the feature.

The book and subsequent film will track the ups and downs of Burnett's life as a working mother, star and producer, as seen through the lens of her close relationship with daughter Carrie Hamilton. Grappling with a public addiction battle as a teen, Hamilton lived as a sober adult before dying of cancer at age of 38 in 2002.

Burnett will produce with Tina Fey and Eric Gurian of Little Stranger, and Steven

Rogers. Jeff Richmond is attached to executive produce for Little Stranger.

One of the most celebrated names in comedy, Burnett is the recipient of the Kennedy Center Honors (2003), the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor (2013) and a Screen Actors Guild Lifetime



Achievement Award in (2015).

She also has the Carol Burnett Award in her name and she received the inaugural honour at the 2019 Golden Globes.

Miele's "Wander Darkly", starring Sienna Miller and Diego Luna, is a time-bending mystery with three lives at stake. It will be available in select theatres and on demand on Friday.

## Onir announces sequel to 'I Am'

**MUMBAI, DEC 9 (PTI):** Filmmaker Onir on Wednesday announced he is set to helm LGBTQ-themed feature "We Are", a sequel to his National Award-winning 2011 anthology, "I Am".

Indian-Canadian producer Shant Joshi is backing the film via Canada-based Fae Pictures along with Onir and actor-producer Sanjay Suri of Anticlock Films.

"We Are" comprises four LGBTQ-themed stories from different corners of the South Asian subcontinent.

The film, co-written by Onir and Fawzia Mirza, is aiming to go on floors next year.

"Looking forward to the sequel to our film 'I Am', 'We Are' in partnership with @FaePictures. Excited to collaborate with @

thefawz as co-writer. We will be shooting this film in 2021 as a celebration of queer lives in the subcontinent," the 51-year-old director tweeted.

"I Am", which also consisted four shorts, featured an ensemble cast of Suri, Juhi Chawla, Manisha Koirala, Rahul Bose, Nandita Das, Arjun Mathur, among others.

On their official Twitter page, Fae Pictures said "We Are", backed in association with Baby Daal Productions, will chronicle stories from Kashmir, Kolkata, Mumbai, and Bengaluru about "navigating queer love in all its forms".

Onir last helmed the 2018 romantic-drama "Kuchh Bheege Alfaaz".

## Jeremy Irons joins Ridley Scott's 'Gucci'

**LOS ANGELES, DEC 9 (PTI):** Veteran actor Jeremy Irons has boarded the cast of Ridley Scott's film about the Gucci family fashion dynasty and the murder of the grandson of founder Guccio Gucci.

Titled "Gucci", the movie will feature pop star Lady Gaga as Patrizia Reggiani, the ex-wife of Guccio's grandson Maurizio Gucci.

Reggiani was abandoned after 12 years of marriage by Maurizio Gucci in 1985 for a younger woman. She was tried and convicted of orchestrating her ex-husband's assassination on the steps of his office in Italy in 1995.

She got the nickname the Black Widow during the trial and served 18 years before being released from prison in 2016.

Besides Gaga and Irons, actors Adam Driver, Jared Leto, Al Pacino, Jack Huston and Reeve Carney are also attached to the project.

According to Variety, Irons will essay the role of Maurizio's father, Rodolfo Gucci. Driver will portray Maurizio.

The film, which hails from MGM, is based on Sara Gay Forden's book "The House of Gucci: A Sensational Story of Murder, Madness, Glamour, and Greed".

Roberto Bentivegna is adapting the book for the big screen. The project will be produced by Scott Free Productions and Kevin Walsh.

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**Aries:** We want everything to be smooth sailing at all times, but the truth is, both the ebb and flow are part of the human experience—and what you're experiencing right now is a classic example of this. Given your circumstances, it will be natural for you to feel a sense of disillusionment, or question the grand plan. Keep in mind that everything in the Universe is designed to perfection, and that this is merely a glitch along the way. So stay committed to your goals and watch how your reality transforms before your own eyes.

Tip: Stay committed to your goals.

**Taurus:**

We all have that one bad habit or detrimental pattern that threatens to bring us down, just when things are beginning to look good for us. What's your bad habit, Taurus, and how does it keep you from being the most magnificent version of yourself? Let your newfound wisdom help you free yourself from the old story, as you can finally see things clearly now.

Tip: You now have the wisdom to free yourself from past baggage.

**Gemini:**

The trouble is, we give way too much importance to how other people perceive us, and in trying to meet their unrealistic expectations, we create a prison we struggle to get out of. Look around you, Gemini. Are you stuck in a prison of your own thoughts too? Today, without bringing judgement into the equation, give yourself the permission to look beyond the perceived limitations. Give yourself the permission to visualise a reality where you are free in every sense of the word. The mantra 'act as if' could just be your way out of this endless cycle.

Tip: Choose freedom over everything.

**Cancer:**

Both the ebb and flow are part of the human experience. To expect life to only give you highs would be an act of ignorance. Cancer. So take both the good and the not-so-good in your stride. Remind yourself that things are happening for you, and not to you. In doing so, you will be able to recognise the beauty and grace in every moment.

Tip: Honour both the ebb and the flow.

**Leo:**

Statutory warning, Leo: Things are about to get chaotic around here. At any point of time, you're going to have two options. Jumping into the fire being the first. Watching the show in a detached manner being the other. We do hope you're wise enough to choose the latter. Remember, there will be moments you will feel like you're not making enough of an effort, or that you should play an active role in fixing everything around you. In these moments, remind yourself that your patience will be rewarded greatly.

Tip: Watch the show in a detached manner.

**Virgo:**

Our need for validation makes us do things we're not proud of—hiding our true selves is a good example of this. How and where are you playing it small, Virgo? What are the ways in which you are sabotaging your game in order to fulfil the unrealistic expectations of others? Today, the cards are encouraging you to remember who you are and what you came here for. It is by embracing your unique gifts that you will be able to bring about the shift that you desire.

Tip: Own what makes you unique. Own what makes you, you.

**Libra:**

The trouble is, you've been approaching the world outside-in rather

than the other way around. You've been trying to fit yourself into a box that was never meant to be yours. Today, you're being asked to start a dialogue with your inner child. To remember all the things that invoked a sense of joy and made you feel hopeful about what is yet to come. What you will discover in the process: the answer to "What is my calling?" is a lot simpler than you thought.

Tip: Start a dialogue with your inner child.

**Scorpio:**

The week ahead is going to be anything but easy. You may feel like you're walking through the fires of hell. Instead of going into that space of victimhood, ask yourself the question, "What is the Universe showing me?" Stay connected to your higher wisdom, Scorpio. Moment-to-moment awareness will help you find the answers you're looking for. When the Universe steps in to take certain things away, be grateful for that too. Your spirit guides are merely clearing the path in order to redirect you towards your true north.

Tip: Everything happens for a reason, Scorpio.

**Sagittarius:**

You weren't sent to the earthly realm to worry about your next paycheck, or how you will clear your bills in the coming months. You were sent here to experience the fullness of life and enjoy abundance in every form. While there's a part of you that believes you're being looked out for, there's another part that continues to be skeptical, and that is what you're being asked to release right now. Remember what you came here to create, Sagittarius. When you focus on fulfilling your sacred purpose, everything else will be taken care of.

Tip: The Universe is stepping in to set things right for you.

**Capricorn:**

The cards are pointing towards the physical clutter around you, which in turn is adding to the mental clutter too. It's time to be-

come mindful of your space, Capricorn. To become mindful of all the ways in which it is hindering your growth. Today, set some time aside for a massive clean-up, preferably in the first half of the day. Let go of the things that have served their purpose in your existence, as you arrange what remains in an accessible fashion. You'll be surprised by how much your productivity increases once you let go of all the stagnant energy.

Tip: Declutter.

**Aquarius:**

It's a cup-hath-runneeth-over kind of day in the Aquarius HQ, and you'll find your familial ties are taking centre stage. It's a time to get to know your tribe on a deeper level and to share both your joy and your sorrows with them. Their support will help you get through whatever it is that you're dealing with at the moment. What's more, you're feeling a sense of ease within yourself too. The dust may not have completely settled, but you're hopeful about what the future is going to bring forth.

Tip: You are where you need to be.

**Pisces:**

You didn't think you could ever make it here, yet you did! If this doesn't tell you about your inherent potential, what does? Today, you're being asked to hit the pause button, take a moment to lovingly gaze at your creations, and give yourself the validation you seek from others. Know that you deserve every bit of the success you have attracted into your Universe. Yes, there is an important lesson in here for you, Pisces—the realisation that stepping into your power makes you a magnet for miracles. Word for the wise: stop undermining yourself.

Tip: You are where you are for a reason! Acknowledge the journey.