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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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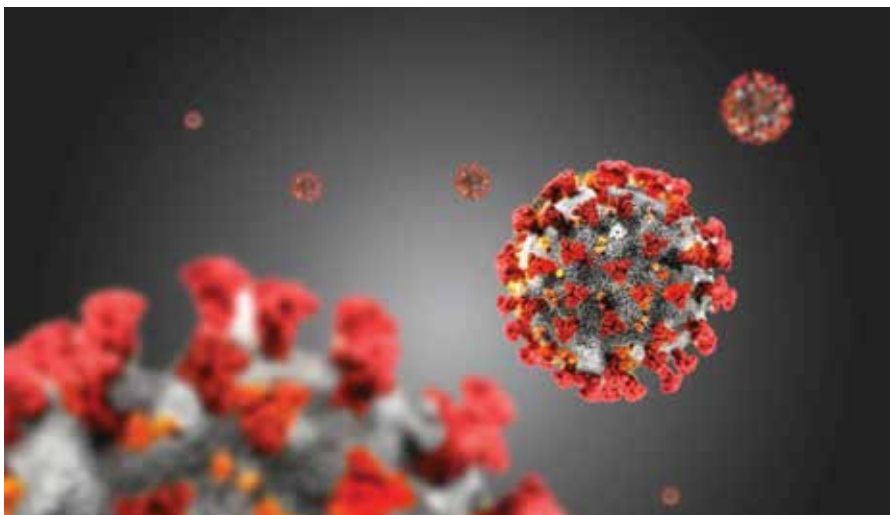
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## Covid number continue to dip in Sikkim, only 9 more cases on Sunday



**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 03 JAN:**

Covid numbers continued to stay low in the State with only nine new cases being detected in tests carried out on Saturday. If one were to ignore the outbreak in the Namchi and Gangtok jails, Novel Coronavirus infections in the State have reduced substantially over the past week when cases [except the spike in the jails] have remained more or less below 20 per day.

In details made available on Sunday morning, Sikkim had registered only nine cases, all from East district, from 146 samples tested on Saturday, eight of which were found positive in RT-PCR testing of 116 samples and one in TrueNat testing of 5 samples.

The state's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported so far now stands at 5,920.

Meanwhile, the figure of recovered cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim has further improved to 5,190.

At present, there are 506 active cases of novel coronavirus in Sikkim, of whom three are currently admitted in the ICU facility of the COVID-dedicated STNM Hospital.

In the daily health bulletin on Sunday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam

Gyaltsen Bhutia detailed that one person from below Lingdum Monastery, one from Penlong, Navey-Sotak, one from Raj Bhawan quarters, one from Melli, one from Lamaten, Rongli, one from Nandugaon, Jorethang and one from the Labour room at STNM Hospital have tested positive for COVID-19.

He informed that a 30-year-old lady from Daragoan and a 27-year-old male from Tadong who have tested positive could not be reached on the phone numbers provided by them during testing and urged them to contact the concerned authorities immediately.

## State Youth Festival gets underway at Paljor Stadium

**SAGAR CHHETRI**

**GANGTOK, 03 JAN:**

State Youth Festival 2021 got underway on Sunday with Forest Minister, Karma Loday Bhutia, inaugurating the three-day event here at the Paljor Stadium complex.

The festival is being organized by the Sports & Youth Affairs Department under the aegis of the Ministry of Sports & Youth Affairs. The State Youth Festival will also be serving as the selection trial for the 24th National Youth Festival scheduled to be held from 12 to 19 January on virtual and hybrid mode.

More than 300 participants from all the four districts are participating in 24 events ranging from music, dance, theatre, regional attire, expression of arts, visual arts, yoga, knowledge session and other categories at the festival.

A panel of 20 judges evaluating different disciplines will shortlist the top-three participants



in each category to represent Sikkim at the National Youth Festival.

These finalists will perform on 06 and 07 December at Manan Kendra and a recording of that performance will be sent to the national level.

In his inaugural address, the Minister highlighted that the festival was presenting an apt platform for local talent to showcase the culture, tradition, costumes and

rich heritage of Sikkim at the national level.

He added that such events provided exposure at higher levels to local artists and further boosts their confidence. He encouraged local artists to always work to preserve and promote local tradition and cultural heritage.

The Minister conveyed his best wishes to all participants and encouraged them to give

their best to represent the State in the National Youth Festival.

Earlier, in his welcome address, Secretary, SYA Department, Raju Basnet, mentioned that the National Youth Festival was an annual event but was being conducted this year on virtual and hybrid mode this time due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

He also expressed happiness over the encouraging participation of artists

from different pockets of the State and shared that the festival was following all safety protocols recommended for COVID-19.

Competitions began at different venues around the Paljor Stadium complex after the inaugural ceremony.

The Minister, accompanied by the Secretary, Additional Director Doma Tshering and other officials of SYA Department also met and interacted with participants.

## Two PNGS students to participate in Youth Forum Switzerland

**SUMMIT REPORT**

**GANGTOK, 03 JAN:**

Two students from PNG School, Disha Thapa (IX advance) and Sudiksha Pradhan (XI Science), have been selected as part of the first Indian team to participate in the "Youth Forum Switzerland: Global Changemakers Project 2020," a press release informs.

"They will be a proudly and responsibly representing, not only their School, but the Country in YFS:GCP 2020, a global forum that addresses pressing global issues and empowers student-changemakers to come up with innovative solutions," a press communiqué from PNG School shares.

The team received the invitation from the



International School of Zug and Luzern, Switzerland, confirming their participation in the event, recently.

YFS 2020 is expected to host over 1,000 students from Europe, USA and India among other countries.

Over the course of the program, students will get the chance to interact with leaders with special focus on their preferred UN Sustainable Development Goals, it is informed.

The final event will



be held from 25 to 29 January and will be held virtually.

Ivan Dorjee Lepcha, PGT Physics and ATL-in-Charge, has mentored the two students and will be coordinating their roles in the event.

Earlier this year, Mr Lepcha also as part of the Indo-Russian collaboration between AIM (NIT Aayog) and SIRIUS (Russia) as an Assistant Mentor to one of the innovation teams.

## India records 18,177 new Covid cases, 1.03 Cr cases so far

**NEW DELHI, 03 JAN**

**[NDTV]:** India reported 18,177 new infections in the last 24 hours - 4.7 per cent lower than yesterday - taking the total Coronavirus cases to 1,03,23,965 on Sunday, government data this morning showed.

With 217 deaths related to the virus in the same period, the total number of fatalities in the country has risen to 1,49,435.

The COVID-19 case fatality rate stood at 1.45 per cent.

The number of active cases in the country stood at 2,47,220 while the number of recoveries is at 99,27,310 with 20,923 people recuperating from the disease in the last 24 hours.

Meanwhile, an expert panel of India's central drug authority on Saturday recommended granting permission for restricted use of Bharat Biotech-developed indigenous COVID-19 vaccine

Covaxin in emergency situation. The recommendation for Bharat Biotech's vaccine came a day after the panel cleared the Serum Institute of India's emergency use authorisation application for the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine Covishield.

A third vaccine - developed by American pharma giant Pfizer - had also applied for emergency use authorisation and is currently being reviewed by the panel.

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan appealed to people on Saturday not to be misguided by "rumours" regarding the safety and efficacy of the coronavirus vaccine, and said, "We will not compromise on any protocol before approving a vaccine."

The government will give priority to 1 crore healthcare workers and 2 crore frontline workers when India begins the rollout of Covid vaccine, said the Health Minister.

## A Covid-19 Trip that turned Manipur's first female autorickshaw driver into a hero

**RATNADIP CHOUDHURY**

**IMPHAL, 03 JAN [NDTV]:** One day last May, between selling smoked fish and taking care of her acutely diabetic husband, 52-year-old autorickshaw driver Laibi Oinam of East Imphal made an eight-hour, 140-kilometre road-trip for a Covid warrior. That journey made history - and a hero out of her.

Today Ms Oinam is counting her blessings as that one act of courage on her part let her tide over a difficult period, thanks to the Manipur Chief Minister's Health Card she received as reward. It helped her make ends meet during the two months of her husband Rajendro Oinam's hospitalisation following a severe foot

injury that almost led to amputation.

Having just returned home, Ms Oinam, Manipur's first female autorickshaw driver told NDTV about her adventure and the call of duty that she attended to.

On May 31, the mother of two saw two men pleading hard with taxi drivers in Imphal's Dewlahland market. A young nurse, Somichon Chithung, who had just recovered from COVID-19, had to be transported from the hospital to her home in a remote village 140 kilometres away along the Myanmar border. Nobody was keen on making the trip.

"I volunteered for the journey. The two elderly men were relieved at this. 'How much would the fare

be?' they asked. I said ₹ 5,000. They offered ₹ 5,500," said Ms Oinam, who took along her husband on the journey.

The trip, made in her trusted autorickshaw took eight arduous hours, and was anything but easy. The road was treacherous and visibility poor thanks to the fog. It was very cold, too, she recalls.

Ultimately, she did take Ms Chithung safely home. A decade of driving the autorickshaw, somehow, seemed to have finally borne fruit.

Ms Oinam has two ways of earning a living otherwise: selling vegetables and smoked fish in the morning and driving the vehicle. "I took up the autorickshaw after my husband

became unwell. I had to start earning to feed the family and school the children," she said.

Her courage and dedication soon drew attention - and admiration.

"Laibi is our locality aunty. She works very hard. She is the symbol of women power. She is my hero," said Chandini Oinam, a neighbour.

Soon her story reached Chief Minister Singh who rewarded her with ₹ 1.1 lakh, ensured her family got its own ration card, and also a Chief Minister's Health Card.

"The health card that the CM gave was very helpful in paying for my treatment in the hospital," her husband Rajendro Oinam said.

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## Rain, waterlogging cause inconvenience to farmers protesting at Delhi borders

**NEW DELHI, 03 JAN [PTI]:** Waterlogged tents, soaked firewood and blankets, and cold conditions -- farmers camping at Delhi borders in protest against new farm laws had a difficult morning on Sunday due to overnight rains.

The continuous downpour led to waterlogging at agitation venues and waterproof tents did not help much, according to the protesters.

Farmer leader Abhimanyu Kohar, who is a member of Sankyukt Kisan Morcha, said farmers have waterproof tents but they cannot protect them from biting cold and waterlogging.

"The situation is very bad at protest sites due to rain which has caused waterlogging. There is so much cold after the rains, but the government is not able to see our misery," he said.

Gurwinder Singh, who is camping at Singhu Border, said there is waterlogging at some places as civic facilities are not up to the mark but asserted that the weather will not dampen the spirit of farmers who have been protesting for over a month.

"Despite facing several problems, we will not move from here until our demands are met," he said.

According to a MeT Department official, heavy rainfall was reported in areas across Delhi and minimum temperatures have increased due to clouding and easterly winds.

"Safdarjung observatory recorded a minimum temperature of 9.9 degrees Celsius, an increase of 6.7 degrees with 25 mm rain. Palam observatory recorded a minimum temperature of 11.4 degrees Celsius with 18 mm rain. Rain with hail storm is expected until January 6," the official said.

Thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab and Haryana, have been camping at three Delhi border points --- Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur -- for more than a month, demanding a repeal of three farm laws and a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP) and other two issues.

Bharatiya Kisan Union Ugrahan leader Sukhdev Singh, whose Union is leading the protest at the Tikri border, said arrangements made by farmers to brave the cold weather are not helping much because of rains and subsequent waterlogging.

Veeral Singh, a protesting farmer, said their blankets, clothes, and wood are soaked. "Our clothes are soaked due to waterlogging caused by rains. Besides, we are facing difficulties to cook food as rain water has also soaked firewood. We do have an LPG cylinder but not everyone here has it," he said.

Dharmveer Yadav, who is camping at the Ghazipur border protest site, said farmers will not move an inch from their agitation venues.



## CM'S ONE MILE RUN IN DARAP:

A run was organized at Darap Senior Secondary School playground in West Sikkim on Sunday under the Chief Minister's One Mile Run Mission. Organised under the aegis of the Sports & Youth Affairs Department, the program was attended by Sports ED, West, Principal and staff of Darap School and other guests and had Marathon Man, Amar Subba, flag off the run. [from SAN]JAY AGARWAL]

## BJP-Sikkim thanks Centre and PM for hike in SC scholarship

**SUMMIT REPORT**

**GANGTOK, 03 DEC:**

Bharatiya Janata Party's scheduled caste front in Sikkim has thanked the Centre and the Prime Minister for the five-fold increase in scholarships provided to students from the Scheduled Caste community.

While expressing gratitude towards the

PM, the party has appealed to students in the State to take full benefit of this scheme.

A press release from the BJP-Sikkim's SC cell president, Birendra Paurali, states that the Union Cabinet on 23 December decided to enhance the scholarship five times and spend around Rs 6,000 crores annually.

## Zyudus Cadila gets nod for phase 3 trials of its Covid vaccine candidate



**NEW DELHI, 03 JAN**

**[PTI]:** The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) has approved conducting phase III trials of the country's first DNA vaccine candidate against COVID-19 being developed by Zyudus Cadila, the Department of Biotechnology said on Sunday.

The vaccine candidate has been supported by the National Biopharma Mission (NBM) under the aegis of Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), a PSU under the DBT.

"The nation's first indigenously developed DNA vaccine candidate against COVID-19, Zy-CoV-D, by M/s Zyudus Cadila, has been approved by Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI), for conduct of the Phase III clinical trials," the DBT said.

Zyudus Cadila completed Phase-I/II clinical trials of this DNA vaccine candidate in more than 1,000 participants and "interim data indicated that the vaccine is safe and immunogenic when three doses were administered intradermally", the DBT said.

"Based on the recommendations of the Subject Expert Committee, which reviewed the interim data, the DCGI has accorded permission for conducting Phase-III clinical trial in 26,000

Indian participants," the DBT added. DBT secretary and BIRAC chairperson Renu Swarup hoped that the candidate vaccine continues to show positive outcomes.

"The Department of Biotechnology, has partnered with Zyudus Cadila to address the need for accelerated development of an indigenous vaccine for COVID-19. The partnership exemplifies that such research endeavours demonstrate the government's focus on creating an ecosystem that nurtures and encourages new product innovation with societal relevance," she said.

She noted that the establishment of the country's first DNA vaccine platform is an important milestone for an "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" and a big leap forward for scientific research.

The DCGI on Sunday approved Oxford COVID-19 vaccine Covishield, manufactured by the Serum Institute, and indigenously developed Covaxin of Bharat Biotech for restricted emergency use in the country, paving the way for a massive inoculation drive.

Dr Reddy's Laboratories is conducting phases 2 and 3 clinical trials of Russian vaccine Sputnik V, while Biological E is conducting phase 1 trials of its indigenously developed vaccine candidate.

## No efficacy data for one of two Covid vaccines cleared by government



**NEW DELHI, 03 JAN**

**[NDTV]:** The Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) confirmed today that it had not received Phase 3 efficacy or effectiveness data of one of the Covid vaccines that the government's drug regulator has cleared for emergency use.

Asked specifically to comment on the efficacy of Covaxin, the drug manufactured by Bharat Biotech, Dr Balram Bhargava, the Director General of the Indian Council of Medical Research, told NDTV, "The indicators are that it has a very high efficacy," but declined to provide any specific detail. An efficacy report, he said, "would be (available) within weeks."

Dr Bhargava did, however, explain that preliminary data for Covaxin had been generated from "animal studies, small animals and large animals" and that there is efficacy data from Phase 1 and Phase 2 trials which have showcased "a tremendous amount of immunogenicity and safety data."

The other drug which has been cleared today is the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine being manufactured by the Serum Institute of India.

"Pfizer, Moderna and Astra-Zeneca-Oxford - these are the only

three vaccines which have proven to work," said Adar Poonawalla, the chief of Pune-based Serum Institute. "Everything else has proven to be safe - just like water is safe. But the efficacy -- to know how well a vaccine works -- 70%, 90%, 80% - has only been proven in these three vaccines."

In a statement this evening, Chairman and Managing Director of Bharat Biotech Dr Krishna Ella said, "COVAXIN has generated excellent safety data with robust immune responses to multiple viral proteins that persist."

"The Phase III human clinical trials of COVAXIN began mid-November, targeted to be done in "26,000" volunteers across India, this is India's first and only Phase III efficacy study for a COVID-19 vaccine, and the largest phase III efficacy trial ever conducted for any vaccine in India. COVAXIN has been evaluated in approximately 1000 subjects in Phase I and Phase II clinical trials, with promising safety and immunogenicity results, with acceptance in international peer reviewed scientific journals," read the statement from Bharat Biotech.

The two vaccines that got approval today could

be rolled out within a week, though the health ministry has to take the final call, Dr Bhargava said. The government is yet to announce a date for the vaccine launch.

Asked when the rollout will happen, he said it should happen very soon.

"Both these companies have been stockpiling. Both these companies have been getting their bottling done... It (the vaccination) had a dry run recently. So from that perspective we are ready to roll it out very, very soon," Mr Bhargava told NDTV.

Pressed for an exact date, he said, "The Health Ministry will be in the best position to comment on the exact date... but I think within a week we should be able to definitely start rolling it out". Mr Bhargava said the government has taken a "pro-active and pre-emptive approach" with the UK variant of the virus -- believed to be 70 per cent more infectious -- surfacing in the country.

Dr Randeep Guleria, the chief of Delhi's All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, suggested that for the next few weeks, the Serum Institute vaccine that will be the main vaccine and Bharat Biotech will remain as "backup for emergency use".

## Discoms' outstanding dues to power gencos rise 35 pc to Rs 1.41 lakh cr in Nov

**NEW DELHI, JAN 3 (PTI):** Power producers' total dues owed by the distribution firms rose over 35 per cent to Rs 1,41,621 crore in November 2020, reflecting stress in the sector.

The distribution companies (discoms) owed a total of Rs 1,04,426 crore to power generation firms in November 2019, according to portal PRAAPTI (Payment Ratification And Analysis in Power procurement for bringing Transparency in Invoicing of generators).

The portal was launched in May 2018 to bring in transparency in power purchase transactions between the generators and discoms.

In November 2020, the total overdue amount, which was not cleared even after 45 days of grace period offered by generators, stood at Rs 1,29,868 crore as against Rs 93,215 crore in the year-ago period.

According to the latest data on the portal, total outstanding dues in November increased on a month-on-month basis

as well. In October 2020, the total outstanding dues of discoms stood at Rs 1,39,057 crore.

The overdue amount in November 2020 has increased from Rs 1,26,444 crore in October 2020.

Power producers give 45 days to discoms to pay bills for electricity supply. After that, outstanding dues become overdue and generators charge penal interest on that in most cases.

In order to give relief to power generation companies (gencos), the Centre enforced a payment security mechanism from August 1, 2019. Under this mechanism, discoms are required to open letters of credit for getting power supply.

The central government had also given some breathers to discoms for paying dues to power generating companies in view of the COVID-19-induced lockdown. The government had also waived penal charges for late payment of dues in the directive.

## ANTHYESTI KRIYA

The Anthyesti Kriya (13th day rites) of Late. DK Gajmer (IAS), former Principal Secretary and Chief Information Commissioner who left for heavenly abode on 26th December 2020 falls on 7th January 2021 (Thursday).

Prayers for the departed soul are being performed at our residence opposite State Bank of India (SBI) ATM, Development Area, Gangtok.

We would like to thank each and every one of you for being there for us at this time of bereavement.

At the same time, we would also like to request all to kindly adhere to the prescribed COVID-19 protocols please.

**Pamela Gajmer (Wife),  
Vaishnav and Binita (Son and Daughter  
-in-law), Deepkant (Son),  
D.B. Gajmer (Brother) and the  
entire Gajmer family.  
Contact: (98320 92256/ 97332  
89642 / 99320 31526)**



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### LAND FOR SALE

Two plots available -- 30X40 sq ft and 50X30 sq ft  
Junkeri Dara, Samlik Marchak

Price negotiable  
Contact : 6296366498,  
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. at Upper Phong near Phong SS, Namthang South Sikkim is on sale. Cost Rs 60 Lakhs (Negotiable). Interested may contact : 8145829309, 7864937800, 9749897695.



## BVP DONATIONS IN RANIPOL:

Bharat Vikas Parishad distributed blankets and sweaters to underprivileged beneficiaries in and around Ranipool over the weekend, a press release informs. While 50 blankets and 160 sweaters donated by Yashpaul Gupta, a former national chairman of the BVP, were distributed at Kalyan Ashram, Ranipool, on 02 Jan, the Sikkim unit of the group also distributed similar aid among those in need in the area over the weekend.





## BADMINTON TOURNEY UNDERWAY IN BHURUNG:

An open, outdoor badminton tournament, organised by Rising Sun Club, is underway at Bhurung under Central Pendum constituency in East Sikkim. On Sunday, the second day of the tournament, Bebek Chettri, more popular as B-Hottie88, was present as the chief guest accompanied by Bhola Acharya as special guest. Played exclusively in double's format, the final match of the tournament is scheduled for 07 Jan, a press release informs.

## Barahimizong greetings from CM

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 03 JAN:**

Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang has extended warm greetings and best wishes to the people on the occasion of the Mangar festival of Barahimizong.

In his message, the CM has prayed for the well-being of Sikkim and her people and points

out that the festival presented a moment of harmony and unity and an occasion to celebrate the spirit of giving.

He shares that Barahimizong is one of the most significant festivals of the Mangar community when they come together and pay homage to their ancestors and ancestral deities.

## Asaduddin Owaisi visits Bengal, holds meeting with religious leader

**KOLKATA, 03 JAN [NDTV]:**

AIMIM supremo Asaduddin Owaisi on Sunday arrived at Futura Sharif in Bengal's Hooghly district and held discussions on the state's political scenario and upcoming assembly polls with prominent Muslim leader Abbas Siddiqui, sources in his party said.

This is Asaduddin Owaisi's first visit to West Bengal following his announcement to contest elections in the state.

Asaduddin Owaisi wanted to keep the meeting a secret as we were apprehensive that the TMC government would stop him from exiting the airport. From Kolkata airport, he went straight to Hooghly to meet Abbas Siddiqui. He will leave for Hyderabad in the afternoon," AIMIM state secretary Zameerul Hassan said.

Earlier, Asaduddin Owaisi had decided to hold a virtual meeting with Siddiqui, but he changed his mind at the eleventh hour and flew down to Bengal to pay him a visit.

Siddiqui, a pirzada (religious leader) from Futura Sharif, has been speaking out against the state government over a host of issues, of late.

According to the sources, he is planning to float a minority outfit of his own.

Asaduddin Owaisi, whose party put up a good show during Bihar polls last year -- bagging five seats in the region bordering Bengal

-- might have also held talks with Siddiqui on a possible seat-sharing deal, they said.

The AIMIM chief's visit to Futura Sharif, however, evoked sharp reactions from the ruling TMC.

"The AIMIM is nothing but a proxy of the BJP. Asaduddin Owaisi is well aware that Muslims here are mostly Bengali-speaking, and won't support him. He is trying to forge ties with Abbas Siddiqui, but that won't yield any result."

"Muslims in Bengal stand firmly by Mamata Banerjee," senior TMC leader and party MP Sougata Roy asserted.

A deciding factor in nearly 100-110 seats in the state, minorities especially Muslims have acted as a bulwark of the TMC against its rivals till the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

Prominent Muslim leaders in the state, nonetheless, have claimed that equations are likely to change with the entry of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM).

According to a senior leader in the Hyderabad-based party, Asaduddin Owaisi has seen in West Bengal a fertile ground for his expansion plans, as Muslims constitute around 30 per cent of the state's population.

Of the 30 per cent, however, at least 24 per cent are Bengali-speaking Muslims.

Elections to the 294-member West Bengal Assembly are likely to be held in April-May.

## MUSS reaches essential commodities to orphanages and old age homes



**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 03 DEC:**

The Sikkim branch of Manav Utthan Sewa Samiti launched its mission of distributing essential commodities to the underprivileged simultaneously with the organisation's nationwide initiative which

kicked off from New Delhi on Sunday.

MUSS-Sikkim distributed essential commodities different orphanage and old age homes in the State today, informs a MUSS press release.

The release details that these supplies were

provided to Children's Home Child Care Institute at Bojoghari, Kapilanj Children's Home at Rabongla, Himalayan Old Age Home in Ranka-Lingdum and to Specialized Adoption Agency, Gyalshing.

The mission will continue till 17 January.

## Global ayurveda festival from March 12-19

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JAN 3 (PTI):**The fourth Global Ayurveda Festival (GAF2021), aimed at a global discussion and development of ayurveda, would be held from March 12 to 19 as a virtual meet, Union Minister of State V Muraleedharan said on Sunday.

The Union Minister, who is also the Global Ayurveda Festival chairman, said the fest would feature 12 seminars per day at five venues.

"The conference will focus on the relevance of ayurveda in the post-COVID-19 world and the potential of ayurveda

in enhancing immunity. This time the exhibition will be held in virtual and have stalls of ayurveda companies from all over the world," Muraleedharan said in a press release.

The festival, scheduled to be held in Angamaly from May 16 to 20, 2020, was postponed due to the pandemic.

The festival is organised in collaboration with various departments of the Central and state governments and delegates from different countries would share their experiences.

"The requirements

will be put forward and the possibility of its participation will be discussed. Steps have already been taken to attract ayurvedic products manufacturers and other stakeholders inside and outside Kerala, including foreign investment. The ayurveda exhibition will showcase technologies, products and services focusing on medical tourism, herbs and research," the release said.

The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FICCI) is the festival partner and industry partner.

## 21 dead in roof collapse at Ghaziabad cremation ground



**GHAZIABAD (UP), JAN 3 (PTI):** Twenty-one people, most of them attending a funeral, were killed and at least 20 others injured when the roof of a shelter at a cremation ground in Uttar Pradesh's Muradnagar collapsed on Sunday, police said.

Several people had taken shelter under the structure as it rained. Most of them were relatives of Jai Ram, who was being cremated at that time, officials said.

Rescue workers sifted through the building's rubble for hours to ensure that more victims were not trapped there.

A National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was also sent to the spot in Muradnagar's Ukharsa village.

Apart from the 21 dead, 20 others were admitted at different hospitals, officials said Sunday evening.

They added that the number of the injured could be higher as some others were taken away from the site by their relatives.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath expressed grief over the loss of lives. He announced Rs 2 lakh as financial relief for the

families of each person killed.

The chief minister also directed Meerut's Divisional Commissioner and Additional Director General of the police zone to submit a report on the incident.

Union minister V K Singh, who is a Member of Parliament from Ghaziabad, and several senior police and administration officials visited the accident site.

Uttar Pradesh Health Minister Atul Garg, who is the local BJP MLA, met some of the injured at the government hospital here.

## MUSS launches Mission Medicine Campaign

**SUMMIT REPORT**

**RANGPO, 02 JAN:**

Manav Utthan Sewa Samiti's Sikkim branch started its Mission Medicine Campaign across the state today. The campaign seeks to leverage the Samiti's extensive organizational reach to divert unused medicines to those who require it but cannot afford the same.

As Milan Thatal and

Pavitra Thatal of Rangpo Suyesh Satsang Dham pointed out today, "There are many families in the country who are not in the best position to buy medicines prescribed by doctors, and on the other side purchased medicines are not used in many homes and are being thrown away after reaching expiry date. Such medicines will be

collected before their expiry date and then provided to the needy as prescribed by doctors."

MUSS plans to donate these medicines to district hospitals, health centres and sub-health centres where doctors can prescribe and hand them over to patients who cannot afford to purchase the same in the open market.

## Results not age key factor for Federer now, says Woodbridge

**LONDON, 03 JAN (REUTERS):** Roger Federer's results in 2021 are more likely than any age milestone to determine when his glittering career comes to an end, said Australian Todd Woodbridge, who thinks the Swiss master may yet have another Wimbledon triumph in him.

Last week the holder of 20 Grand Slam singles titles confirmed that fitness issues after two knee operations in 2020 mean that fans will not see him in action at the Australian Open in February for the first time in more than two decades.

"A player of his stature, at some point when you're not winning, you start to wonder about why you're only making the quarter-finals, when you're used to being in the final," Woodbridge told Channel Nine this week.

"It doesn't give the same adrenaline rush as it always has, and that's when you start to think to yourself that you've got other things to do with your life."

A semi-final defeat in Melbourne in 2020 was Federer's last competitive match, and playing five-setters in the Australian summer heat after a lengthy injury and 14 days quarantine would have been a tricky proposition for the

39-year-old. Federer has not missed a trip to Melbourne Park since a loss in qualifying in 1999. Yves Allegro, Federer's fellow Swiss and former doubles partner, feels skipping the Australian Open was a logical decision.

"All his career, Roger Federer only lined up if he was 100% physically," Allegro told the 20min website ww.20min.ch. "So he made the right decision, especially since he has plenty of time left to prepare for his main goals of Wimbledon and the Olympics."

Participating at a fifth Olympics featured prominently in Federer's agenda, and the postponement of the Tokyo Games by a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic worked perfectly for the Swiss, who would otherwise have missed it due to injury.

The last of his major titles might have come on the Melbourne hardcourts in 2018, but Federer may see Wimbledon's grasscourts, where he has won eight titles and made the final in 2019, as the most realistic surface to add to his tally. "For Roger to continue on, he'll have to be able to manage his body when he does come back," said Woodbridge, who won 22 Grand Slam doubles titles.

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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.

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## Culture Matters

*...which is why it should be nurtured not 'protected' into suffocation*

Turn to any corner of the world, click to any group on social media or tune into any conversation on identity or future prospects, and one will definitely be eavesdropping on voices of complaint ruing about a culture under threat, a way of life nearing extinction.

While there are always external elements like the influence of globalisation and the pressure to homogenise which eat away at the edifice of individual cultures, the biggest risk comes from those who refuse to let cultures breathe - those who view it as a relic which needs to be preserved even at the cost of nurture which would keep it organic, relevant and exciting. Nurturing is the more difficult enterprise because it requires allowing 'culture' to adapt, incorporate and grow and that can happen only in an environment of proud confidence; an environment which is open and indulgent. Unfortunately, we live in times of easy paranoia and quick outrage and there are too many who see cultures as perfect and view any influence or adaption as a blemish. They refuse to accept that culture is not something that can be pickled for posterity. Culture, because it is about a people, is vibrant, alive and current. It is spontaneous, almost instinctive, and not something that can be taught or directed. It is imbibed. Since culture forms a part of evolution, it is also subject to fresh interpretations, nuances and expressions.

Because culture is about people, it cannot survive on state patronage alone - that would be relegating it to the status of departmental undertaking and a by-the-numbers presentations because the state will not risk taking responsibility for vibrancy which some sections might see as contamination. It also needs to be accepted that if a people reject their culture as ripe for extinction, no amount of preservation helps. Yet, a culture should not be dismissed even before one has understood it. It is important that the repository of culture is passed on to the next generation to nurture and craft as it feels right. And yes, even discarded if it wants to, but only after it has understood and lived it. If anything, what the State needs to ensure is adequate defences against the snuffing out of a culture due to persecution. In olden times, this happened by way of invasions and was an automatic result of state formation with the subsuming of ethnic identities to suit a nationalistic agenda/ identity. A similar snuffing out is at play in the current times as well, and even though the pressures might be different, they remain real threats to cultures, some of which are on re-discovery mode. And yet, cultures survive even intentional, persistent and state-endorsed onslaught like in the case of Tibetans who hold on to a rich and colourful culture and tradition in exile even as the same is wiped out at home. Closer home, the manner in which the Limboo people kept their language and faith alive despite having lost their land, should provide for some inspirational models.

The lesson is simple, when the desire to sustain a way of life is strong enough, no assault can deliver a fatal blow. Similarly, one needs only look at the cardboard caricatures of 'culture' choreographed to entertain tourists across the country to realise that forced performances rob a culture of its soul. Confusing? Well, that is how life is and that is how things will be with culture and traditions because they are a part of life. There are no easy answers and no checklist of things to do... The only hope lies in earnest commitments and open minds.

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# The Long Shadow of Colonial Forestry is a Threat to Savannas and Grasslands

SUSANNE VETTER  
*theconversation.com*

Tree planting to restore forests, capture carbon and improve the land has gained strong momentum in recent years. The Bonn Challenge and its offshoots such as AFR100, initiatives focused on forest restoration, have persuaded developing countries to commit millions of hectares of land to these projects. Funding for AFR100 has been secured from international donors with more than a billion US dollars pledged over the next 10 years.

This is a potential threat to drylands, grasslands, savannas and the rangelands they support.

Large areas targeted for forest restoration in Africa, Asia and South America are covered by savanna and grassland. These open ecosystems are incorrectly mapped as degraded forest in the publicly accessible Atlas of Forest and Landscape Restoration Opportunities.

They are in fact ancient, productive and biodiverse and support millions of livelihoods. They also provide many important ecosystem services, which would be lost if converted to forests.

Savanna and grassland store up to a third of the world's carbon in its soils. They keep streams flowing, recharge groundwater, and provide grazing for livestock and wildlife.

Grasslands can store carbon reliably under increasingly hot and dry climates. The same conditions make forests vulnerable to die-back and wildfires. Restoring grasslands is also relatively cheap and has the highest benefit-to-cost ratio of all the world's biomes.

Instead of providing guidance on how to restore healthy grasslands and savannas, documents guiding forest landscape restoration focus entirely on increasing tree cover. Rangelands and grassy biomes are barely mentioned on the websites of the Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration, the Bonn Challenge and AFR100.

A recent review of forest landscape restoration

projects in Africa found no examples of grassland restoration. Projects instead focused on afforestation – planting trees where they didn't previously occur – regardless of vegetation type. This threatens the biodiversity of grasslands and savannas, which is rapidly lost under dense tree cover and is slow and difficult to restore.

FOREST TARGETS THAT AREN'T BASED ON SCIENCE

Meeting the international targets for forest restoration requires large-scale afforestation. Nearly half the land pledged for forest restoration is earmarked for plantations, mostly of fast-growing exotic species. These provide a fraction of the ecosystem services of the natural vegetation they replace. And they store 40 times less carbon than naturally regenerating forests.

Forest restoration initiatives tend to be driven by targets, with little regard for local ecological context. This commitment to fixed areas of forest cover encourages tree plantations in ecologically inappropriate sites and conditions.

For example, Malawi has reportedly pledged 4.5 million hectares to forest restoration. This is over a third of the country's total area. Planting trees and restoring community woodlots, plantations and riverbanks is presented as addressing food and water insecurity and restoring biodiversity. Yet studies have shown that Malawi's vegetation has been mostly savanna and grasslands for thousands of years.

The National Mission for a Green India aims to put a third of the country's area under forest cover, no matter what natural vegetation existed originally. Large areas of natural grassland-forest mosaics have been replaced with commercial plantations. In many areas these species have become invasive and difficult to control.

Why does forest restoration continue to ignore the local ecological context? What is the science that underpins these massive schemes?

THE COLONIAL ROOTS OF TREE PLANTING

Historical research shows that the fascination with tree-planting has its origins in colonial forestry. This in turn was rooted in the centuries-old (and now disproven) theory that forests bring rain and deforestation cause areas to dry up. The colonial forestry approach was to plant trees to make up for deforestation caused by local people. The latter often lost control over their land in the process.

Initially applied in Algeria, this approach was adopted throughout Francophone Africa, Madagascar, and eventually also the British colonies in East Africa and India. Since historical forest cover of Europe was estimated at roughly one-third, this became the target in other places too.

This led to over two centuries of planting forests as a solution for a variety of ills, including drought, warming temperatures, soil erosion and lost biodiversity. It's remarkable how today's science-policy platforms continue this narrative.

PROMOTING APPROPRIATE SOLUTIONS

Forest landscape restoration has become a powerful instrument for guiding global efforts and funding. Its proponents have a responsibility to ensure that the framework is scientifically sound. Rather than setting ambitious but ecologically flawed targets for planting trees, landscape restoration should be appropriate for local social and ecological contexts.

No amount of ecosystem restoration will solve the climate crisis if its underlying causes are not addressed. The clearing of forests and other ecosystems for commodity agriculture and timber urgently needs to be regulated. Emissions from burning fossil fuels need to be drastically reduced.

Rather than targeting developing – and rapidly urbanising – countries for afforestation, incentives should aim to reduce fossil fuel emissions, convert to renewable energy and build energy-saving infrastructure.

*[the writer is Associate Professor in Plant Ecology, Rhodes University]*



## Seat Belts and Smoking Rates Show People Eventually Adopt Healthy Behaviors – but it can take time we don't have during a pandemic

RANDY P. JUHL  
*theconversation.com*

Why do we do things that are bad for us – or not do things that are good for us – even in light of overwhelming evidence?

As someone with a long career in pharmacy, I have witnessed some pretty dramatic shifts in public health behavior. But I won't sugarcoat it. It generally takes years – or even decades – of dragging people, kicking and screaming, to finally achieve new and improved societal norms.

This plodding time course seems to be an innate human defect that existed long before the current-day pandemic mask and social distancing conundrums. Historically, people aren't fond of being told what to do.

NOTABLE VICTORIES

Attitudes toward smoking have undergone dramatic changes over the past 50 years. Although there has been a gradual decline in smoking, from 42% of the American population in 1965 to the low teens today, there still are a lot of smokers in the U.S. – and premature deaths due to smoking. Even health care workers fall prey to this unhealthy and highly addictive habit.

There was a strongly held view that smoking was a personal decision that do-gooders and the government should keep their noses out of – until the issue was framed differently by studies showing harm caused by secondhand smoke. You are welcome to do what you want to yourself, but it becomes a horse of a different color when it affects others.

Today, public smoking restrictions have become commonplace.

But this change in societal behavior didn't happen overnight or without painful discourse. The journey from the initial 1964 surgeon general's report on smoking and health to the 2006 surgeon general's report on secondhand smoke to today was a fractious one.

Another about-face has been the adoption of seat belts. Seat belts save lives. And most people now use them as a result of the nagging warning alarm, the marketing of automobile safety, the law and the data.

This change in behavior, however, followed a rocky road over many years. In my earlier days, I can remember more than one occasion when I hopped into a friend's car, put on my seat belt and was then chastised for having so little faith in my friend's driving ability.

Seat belts were required to be installed in new cars starting in 1964 and New York enacted the first seat belt use law in 1984. In the U.S., seat belt use rose from 14% in 1983 to 90% in 2016.

CONTINUING CHALLENGES

In the medical arena, much effort has been expended in promoting healthy behaviors – diet, exercise, sleep hygiene, adherence to prescribed drugs and immunizations. Frankly, the success has been mixed.

Studies have suggested many possible variables associated with not following accepted medical advice: age, gender, race, education, literacy, income, insurance copays, level of physician and pharmacist care – and plain old stubbornness. But there is no single, easily addressable cause of nonadherence to healthy behaviors.

For example, properly prescribed

cholesterol-lowering drugs called statins literally add years to patients' lives by reducing heart attacks and strokes. Even in people with insurance coverage and minimal side effects, 50% of patients discontinue statin therapy within one year of receiving their first prescription.

Vaccines and immunization offer another window into the puzzle of human behavior. Life expectancy in the U.S. rose from 40 years in 1860 to 70 years in 1960. These gains resulted largely from decreased infant and child mortality due to infectious diseases. A better understanding of infectious diseases along with scientific advances, vaccines and antibacterial drugs were the primary factors for this profound increase in life expectancy.

Common sense alone makes the value of vaccines abundantly clear; how many people do you know who are suffering from polio or smallpox? Yet some intelligent, thoughtful friends, family and neighbors are convinced vaccines are not helpful and are even harmful. Some believe wearing a mask is nothing more than a "feel good" placebo. I believe these contrarian beliefs make better press and are therefore more frequently reported than mainstream ones, but clearly there is reason for concern.

THE CURRENT CRISIS

Historically, changes in societal behavior that benefit public health occur in fits and starts – and never fast enough for the individuals who fall victim before society comes around.

The urgency imposed by the coronavirus has actually resulted in com-

paratively swift behavioral changes (masks, hand-washing, distancing) in the U.S. – as scientists learned how the coronavirus is spread, how dangerous it can be and which groups are more susceptible. But these behavioral changes were not as complete or as fast as they should – or could – have been when judged by far better outcomes in other countries.

I am discouraged by the battle between the scientific method and political ideology when it comes to public health. Ideology never seems to change and is therefore more comforting to some – while science evolves as new findings debunk old ideas or confirm new ones. It is clear to all who want to listen: controlling the virus and maintaining the economy is not an either/or choice – they are interdependent.

At the same time, I am buoyed that the tide seems to be turning. As a better understanding of treating COVID-19 has emerged and with more than one highly effective vaccine on the horizon, the "idiot scientists" are gaining ground, both in the lab and at the bedside. Even the most prominent ideologues run to the hospital to get the best treatments science can offer when the effect of their maskless behavior rears up to bite them.

But as history suggests, the science, no matter how great, is only the beginning of implementation in a divided population. Ultimately, both the citizenry and the economy will benefit from a shot in the arm.

*[the writer is Dean Emeritus and Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of Pharmacy, University of Pittsburgh]*



## Mizoram's COVID-19 caseload rises to 4,223

**AIZAWL, JAN 3 (PTI):** At least four people, including a Border Security Force (BSF) jawan and a minor girl, tested positive for novel coronavirus in Mizoram, pushing the caseload to 4,223, an official said on Sunday.

The fresh cases include two persons who had recently returned from West Bengal and Assam, he said.

Mizoram now has 104 active cases, while 4,111 people have recovered from the disease so far. The state has reported eight COVID-19 deaths.

Altogether, 1,81,166 samples have been tested till date, including 545 on Saturday, the official added.

## Nepal Govt gives green signal to reopen schools

**KATHMANDU, JAN 3 [MYREPUBLICA]:** The schools across the country that remained closed for more than nine months due to the COVID-19 pandemic are now to be reopened.

The COVID-19 Crisis Management Committee (CCMC) on Sunday took the decision to let schools, gyms and cinema halls resume their services. However, the CCMC has given the authority of closing these institutions, if necessary, to the District COVID-19 Management Committee.

With this decision in effect, schools, gyms and cinema halls are now free to open again after a hiatus of more than nine months, adopting appropriate COVID-19 safety protocols.

## Nepali Congress announces nation-wide protest against house dissolution

**KATHMANDU, JAN 3 [MYREPUBLICA]:** Nepal's oldest democratic party Nepali Congress (NC) has unveiled programs of nation-wide protests against the dissolution of the House of Representatives on Sunday.

A central committee meeting of NC held Sunday afternoon took the decision of staging nation-wide protests from January 9 to January 21.

The party will be staging protests in all local units and electoral constituencies across the country during this period, according to Nabindra Raj Joshi, a central committee member of NC.

"NC will stage protests in all electoral constituencies on Jan 9, in all rural municipalities and municipalities on Jan 16 and in all ward offices on Jan 21," Joshi said.

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Com

# India's approval of homegrown vaccine criticised over lack of data

Krishna N Das  
**NEW DELHI, 03 Jan (Reuters):** India on Sunday granted emergency approval to Bharat Biotech's COVAXIN but faced questions after taking the step without publishing efficacy data for the homegrown coronavirus vaccine.

The news, announced by the drugs controller general of India (DCGI) who did not take questions, was hailed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his ministers as a success in India's self-reliance push. The government also approved the use of a vaccine developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University which will be the lead vaccine in India's immunisation programme until other shots are approved.

COVAXIN was jointly developed with a government institute and means India joins a small list of countries to have approved its own coronavirus shot.

Bharat has partnered with drug developer Ocugen Inc to co-develop it for the U.S. market, and Brazil has signed



non-binding letters of intent to buy the shot.

The company has said it is in discussions with more than 10 countries about COVAXIN.

"While this vaccine addresses an unmet medical need during this pandemic, our goal is to provide global access to populations that need it the most," Bharat Bio-

tech Chairman Krishna Ella said in a statement.

"COVAXIN has generated excellent safety data with robust immune responses to multiple viral proteins that persist."

Neither the company nor India's Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation would reveal its efficacy re-

sults. A source with knowledge of the matter told Reuters its effectiveness could be more than 60% with two doses. China also did not publish detailed efficacy data for a vaccine it authorised on Thursday but its developer has shared interim data.

"On what basis was this approval given when Bharat Bio-

tech has NOT shown enough data proving safety & efficacy?" transparency activist Saket Gokhale asked on Twitter.

Gokhale has filed a request under India's right-to-information law asking the government for safety and other data for the two vaccines approved on Sunday.

CRITICISM

COVAXIN has been fast-tracked like no other vaccine in India. The company said in November it was likely to be launched in the second quarter of 2021, while a government scientist had suggested it might be February or March.

Opposition lawmakers and former ministers on Sunday questioned the lack of transparency in approving it.

"Approval was premature and could be dangerous," said opposition lawmaker and former minister Shashi Tharoor, asking Health Minister Harsh Vardhan for an explanation.

"Its use should be avoided till full trials are over. India can start with the AstraZeneca vaccine in the meantime."

Vardhan urged Indians to trust that "stringent protocols" had been followed to ensure the safety and efficacy of the two approved vaccines.

In the largest such trial in India, Bharat Biotech said it had recruited 23,000 volunteers out of a target of 26,000 for an ongoing Phase III trial of COVAXIN which began in November.

## Assam's healthcare gets super speciality boost

**GUWAHATI, 03 JAN [SHILLONGTIMES]:** A super specialty hospital along with an eye bank was opened at Guwahati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) here on New Year's Day, in a major boost to Assam's health sector.

State health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that the 257-bed super specialty hospital, which was earlier serving as a COVID hospital, has state-of-the-art equipment to provide the best of healthcare in the country," Sarma said.

Sarma said that the second wing of the super-specialty hospital is expected to be ready by February.

"We are also giving a symbolic message (by making the state-of-the-art facility functional) on New Year's Day that we are returning to a normal life after dealing with the pandemic," he said, addressing a programme at GMCH after inaugurating the super specialty hospital.

He further said that COVID has taught us the



importance of having adequate health infrastructure to meet any eventuality.

"As it is, we have enhanced our healthcare infrastructure as an emergency response, be it setting up intensive care units across the state, laboratories in all the medical colleges, oxygen providing facilities at GMCH besides recruitment and training of adequate frontline staff in the past one year," Sarma added.

The health minister also said that a master

plan to transform GMCH into one of the biggest facilities in the country has been prepared.

"Work on a 300-bed cancer hospital is going on in the right side of GMCH. A 500-bed mother and child hospital will be ready in the next two years as well. So along with the super-specialty hospital, GMCH will soon have over 3000 beds, which make the hospital one of the biggest in the country," he said.

Sarma said the left side of GMCH would be

decongested and dedicated to medicine and general surgeries once the new facilities are ready to function.

The health minister also inaugurated an eye bank at GMCH, which he said would be a "boon not only for Assam but for Northeast as a whole."

"The eye bank has been set up by the Assam government in collaboration with the Tata Trusts, Hans Foundation and the LV Prasad Eye Institute which is a novel step towards eye care in the region," he said.

## Explain curb on day visitors to Meghalaya: Ampareen

**SHILLONG, JAN 2 [SHILLONGTIMES]:** Congress MLA Ampareen Lyngdoh has asked the state government if it had consulted all the stakeholders before taking a decision of not letting in tourists who visit Meghalaya just for a day.

According to a government notification, a tourist coming to the state for a day will no longer be allowed in as it would lead to difficulty in operations of the tourism screening centre at Umling.

"I am wondering whether all the stakeholders were taken into confidence before such a huge decision was taken. I am sure the move will create a lot of problems for tourism-related activities," Lyngdoh said on Saturday.

Officials in Ri Bhoi district said more than 100 tourists have been sent back from the Umling entry gate as they wanted to visit the state only for a day. There are thousands of people from Assam who used to come to Shillong in the morning and leave by evening.



The Congress leader also sought clarity from the government on whether the tourists are expected to come with an RT-PCR negative report or they have to rely on the RAT done at the Umling entry point.

"The government should also clarify if a tourist would remain indoors for

five days in their hotels or they can move freely after entering the state," Lyngdoh said.

Concerned with the fact that many people from the state who returned from outside

have tested COVID-19 positive, she asked if this was a correct time to invite tourists when India has already seen several cases of mutation of the virus.

Lyngdoh said the government must ensure that incoming tourists are COVID-free while asking the government to be transparent about its preparations in handling any mutated strain of the coronavirus.

She said the Meghalaya government cannot yet claim that the state is COVID-free and advised it not to lower its guard.

## 131 films to be screened at 26th Kolkata film festival

**KOLKATA, JAN 3 (PTI):** Ray's classic 'Apur Sansar' -- the third of a trilogy featuring Soumitra Chatterjee -- will be screened at the inauguration of 26th Kolkata International Film Festival (KIFF), to be held from January 8 to 15, West Bengal minister Arup Biswas said.

The seven-day festival will commence by paying tribute to two greats -- auteur Satyajit Ray on his birth centenary, and Chatterjee, who died of post-COVID complications in November last year, the PWD minister said during a press

meet here on Saturday.

Biswas, who has been actively involved in organising the festival over the last few years, said a total of 131 films -- in feature, short and documentary formats -- will be screened at different theatres of the city, including Nandan and Rabindra Sadan.

Minister of State for Cultural Affairs Indranil Sen, who was also present at the meet, told reporters that the organising committee received 1,170 entries from 45 countries, of which 131 were selected for the film carn-

ival. The annual Satyajit Ray Memorial Lecture, an important part of the festival, will be delivered by director Anubhav Sinha, this year's topic being 'Social Responsibility in mainstream Indian cinema'.

Actor-director Parambrata Chatterjee, a member of the organising committee, said six films of Federico Fellini will also be screened at the week-long gala.

Tickets for the festival and delegate cards will be available online, he added.

## Odisha logs 192 new COVID-19 cases, three more deaths

**BHUBANESWAR, JAN 3 (PTI):** Odisha's COVID-19 caseload on Sunday mounted to 3,30,309 with 192 more people testing positive for the infection, while three fresh fatalities pushed the toll to 1,883, a health department official said.

Of the 192 cases, 109 were reported from various quarantine centres, and the rest detected during contact tracing, the official said.

Six districts -- Bhadrak, Gajapati, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Keonjhar and Malkangiri -- did not report any new case since Saturday.

Sundargarh district recorded the maximum number of fresh cases at 33, followed by Angul at 24 and Bolangir at 17.

Three deaths were reported from Bolangir, Ganjam and Sundargarh districts.

Odisha currently has 2,408

active cases, while as many as 3,25,965 patients have recovered from the highly infectious disease. Fifty-three COVID-19 patients in the state died due to comorbidities.

The coastal state's positivity rate stands at 4.71 per cent, the official said.

Over 70 lakh samples have been examined so far, including 12,049 on Saturday, he added.

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# Ryan García comes off floor to stop Luke Campbell for interim lightweight title

AUSTIN [TEXAS], 03 JAN [AP]: Ryan García says he had never been knocked down before when an early blow sent the rising star to the canvas in his biggest test yet against Luke Campbell.

The 22-year-old Californian had an impressive response, staggering Campbell with a body blow to win a WBC interim lightweight title fight on a seventh-round knockout Saturday night.

García was in control when his left hand crushed Campbell's right side and sent the English fighter to one knee at 1:58 of the seventh. Campbell couldn't get up, giving the undefeated García his 18th knockout in 21 fights.

"That was the hardest shot I was ever hit with," Campbell said. "I tried and tried to get up, but I couldn't. I felt him coming on, and I was moving back, and when you move back, my body relaxed a little bit and that's the exact time he hit me."

Campbell (20-4) knocked down García with a left hook in the second round, but didn't land many other punches while García was the more aggressive fighter until the decisive blow.

The bout was postponed about a month because Campbell tested positive for Covid-19.



It was moved to Texas because of coronavirus restrictions in García's home state.

"I've never been dropped in my life," said García, who is matching his large social media following with a flair for the dramatic inside the ring. "I think I got a little too excited in the moment."

Campbell had lost two previous title fights after winning a gold medal at his home Olympics in London in 2012.

It was the fifth straight knockout for García since what his camp considered a disappointing majority decision over Carlos Morales in 2018.

"This is the kind of fight where superstars are made," promoter Oscar De La Hoya said. "Down on the mat early for the first time in his career, Ryan got up, rallied, broke down his man and got the knockout."

García easily won the first round before Campbell's left hook midway through the second. García regained control by continuing to attack and by the fourth round asserted himself with a right-left combination and a quick answer to a strong right from the lefty Campbell.

"I was a little dizzy with the knockdown, but I wasn't worried," García

said. "He's not used to going forward, so I just knew I had to cover up."

Late in the fifth round, García sent Campbell staggering to the ropes just and confronted the 33-year-old after the bell had rung. García tried to pick up where he left off at the start of the sixth, but backed off after an aggressive start to the round.

García did most of the attacking, while Campbell seemed content to counterpunch.

"He never fights coming forward, so I knew he would back up throughout the fight," García said. "I'm naturally a counterpuncher.

But today I showed that I can be aggressive, go forward and take it to somebody."

All three judges had García comfortably ahead when Campbell went down, with two of them giving the Los Angeles-area fighter four consecutive rounds before the seventh.

Asked about his next fight, García said he wanted to face Gervonta Davis but also mentioned Devin Haney.

"I didn't let anything stop me from being a champion tonight," García said. "Even when he dropped me, I knew that couldn't stop me from being champion."

## Rahane is born is to lead, he's brave and smart captain: Chappell

NEW DELHI, JAN 3 (PTI): Describing Ajinkya Rahane as a "born leader", legendary Ian Chappell has credited stand-in skipper's "smart and brave" captaincy apart from his valuable contribution with the bat for India's historic win in the Melbourne Test.

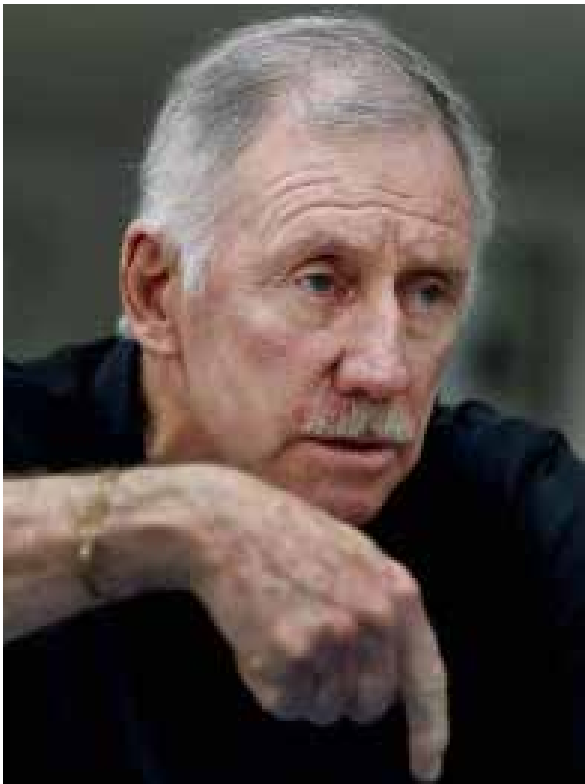
Under Rahane, India made a remarkable comeback after their humiliating loss in the first Test in Adelaide by winning the second Test by eight wickets.

"It was no surprise that Ajinkya Rahane captained India flawlessly at the MCG. Anyone who saw him in charge in Dharamsala in 2017 would have recognised a man born to lead cricket teams," Chappell wrote in his column for ESPNcricinfo.

In that Dharamsala match in 2017, India had beaten Australia by eight wickets in the fourth Test to warp up the series 2-1. Rahane remained not out on 38 in India's run chase -- just like at the MCG -- after scoring 46 in the first innings.

"There were a lot of similarities between that 2017 match and the one at the MCG. Firstly it was between the same two highly competitive rivals, then there was the valuable first-innings lower-order contribution from Ravindra Jadeja, and finally Rahane aggressively accumulating the required runs in a nervy pursuit of a moderate victory total," Chappell wrote.

"The moment that caught my attention in the Dharamsala match was the time Rahane called on debutant left-arm wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav when David Warner and Steve Smith were involved in a century partnership. 'This is a brave move' I thought, and it turned



out to be a very smart one."

Yadav quickly claimed the wicket of Warner, caught by Rahane at first slip, and that prompted a five-wicket slide for Australia to lose the match.

"That's part of Rahane's success as a skipper: he's brave and smart. However, there's much more to his leadership than just those two important qualities. He is calm when things could easily get out of hand," said the former captain and a respected figure in world cricket.

"He has earned the respect of his team-mates, one of the most important aspects of good captaincy. And he gets runs when they are needed, which adds to the respect his team has for him."

Chappell also praised the performance of Indian bowlers Jasprit Bumrah, R Ashwin and Mohammed Siraj as well as the debutant Shubman Gill's show with the bat.

Despite the valuable performances from other Indian players, Chappell said "the Johnny Mullagh medal-winning contribution from Rahane turned

the match firmly in India's favour.

"The captain's century came at a time when India could easily have faded to a two-nil deficit, and it was this performance that gave his team the conviction that victory was attainable.

"A former resident of Mumbai told me his wife lip-read Rahane say the words 'Come on, India' when he reached his MCG century. That is another thing that defines Rahane's captaincy: he's all about the team."

Chappell said the tantalising series is far from over and despite the departure of Virat Kohli on paternity leave and injuries to Mohammed Shami and Umesh Yadav, the visitors "have fewer selection headaches than Australia".

"It's helpful that they have a strong, calm leader and a vibrant spirit that has built up under the Kohli-Rahane-Ravi Shastri coalition.

"If India do go on to repeat their last tour's success in Australia, the Mullagh medal won't be the only gong Rahane receives.

## Real Madrid see off Celta to return to La Liga summit

MADRID, 03 JAN (REUTERS): Real Madrid beat an in-form Celta Vigo 2-0 at home on Saturday thanks to a goal and assist apiece from Spanish pair Lucas Vazquez and Marco Asensio, putting the side above city rivals Atletico Madrid at the top of La Liga.

The win took the Spanish champions to the summit on 36 points, one ahead of second-placed Atletico who have three games in hand and on Sunday visit Alaves.

Real were smarting from a surprise 1-1 draw at struggling Elche in their last match and were missing captain Sergio Ramos, who was out with a stomach bug.

But they got off to an ideal start thanks to a towering header from Vazquez, who out-jumped two Celta defenders to power home a cross from Asensio.

Vazquez returned the favour early in the second half to tee up Asensio after Madrid had recovered the ball high in Celta's half. Zinedine Zidane's side comfortably saw out the victory, ending Celta's unbeaten run of six games under new coach Eduardo Coudet.

"We said before the game that after slipping up against Elche we wanted to show our usual aggression and win the ball back high up the pitch," said Vazquez.

"Right now every game is key, we are on a good run, we didn't expect to draw the other day but the team is in good shape and if we keep playing like this we'll be fighting for everything."

## Lacazette double rounds off Arsenal's demolition of West Brom in snow



PAUL DOYLE WEST BROMWICH, 03 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Fairweather footballers? Not Arsenal, at least not here. Mikel Arteta's team made light of fierce conditions and desperate opponents to produce possibly their best performance of the season.

Kieran Tierney, Bukayo Saka and Alexandre Lacazette scored beautiful goals and, along with 20-year-old Emile Smith Rowe, delivered outstanding displays, helping to give Arsenal a third consecutive victory and renewed hope of a bright future. For West Brom the forecast is bleak.

Sam Allardyce has relished jabbing at the fragilities of Arsenal teams down the years and must have been rubbing his hands before kick-off here, and not just to keep warm. Heavy snow around the Hawthorns put a bracing new twist on the wet-and-windy-night-in-Stoke maxim, and although the pitch was cleared by the time the match began, Allardyce no doubt urged his side to test how much Arsenal fancied going into battle on a freezing night when even the air felt like it had fangs.

The visitors took it all in their stride, outclassing West Brom, who have conceded 17 goals in their last four home matches. Allardyce was brought in last month to guide this team to survival but has yet to find a way to stop them bleeding

goals. Allardyce had billed this as a fight between relegation rivals but Arteta is looking up after three wins in a week. "The table looks much better," said Arteta. "Wins bring a different momentum and energy and the players have the handbrake off.

"We were very close against West Brom to what I want. There was a lot of movement, good energy and real purpose."

Sam Johnstone has been the Premier League's busiest goalkeeper this season and it took less than three minutes for Arsenal to force him into another save, with the keeper using his feet to deny Hector Bellerin. He then had to deny Saka as Arsenal looked smooth, as unperturbed by the elements as they were by opponents who played some pretty stuff at times but had neither the precision nor physicality to unsettle the visitors.

Although Saka tormented the makeshift wing-back Grady Diangana, Arsenal's breakthrough came from the other flank, from where Tierney produced a brilliant solo goal in the 23rd minute. After knocking the ball past Darnell Furlong, Tierney dashed to retrieve it and then tricked his way into the box and curled a superb right-footed shot into the far corner. The snow, having suddenly resumed, fell like confetti on Arsenal's celebrating players.

They rejoiced again five minutes later after increasing their lead thanks to a glorious collective move orchestrated by two of their youngest and most exciting talents. Smith Rowe and Saka combined with Lacazette to cut through the heart of the nonplussed home defence before Smith Rowe squared for Saka to prod into the net from close range.

Allardyce put Diangana out of his misery at half-time as West Brom switched to a back four. They briefly looked more coherent. But Arsenal plundered a third goal on the hour thanks to a blend of their own excellent play and slapstick defending. Saka instigated it, gliding down the right and floating over a cross that Sami Ayiji smashed against his own post. Johnstone saved Smith Rowe's follow-up but could not stop Lacazette from whacking the rebound into the net.

West Brom have a tendency to concede goals in clusters and Arsenal soon struck another, Lacazette escaping his markers to prod a cross by Tierney into the net from close range.

Johnstone remained the main barrier in preventing Arsenal scoring a fifth goal, while at the other end Bernd Leno denied Rekeem Harper a crumb of comfort in the last minute, tipping away a fine shot from distance by the substitute.

## Rani Rampal-led Indian women's hockey team leaves for Argentina tour



NEW DELHI, JAN 3 (PTI): The Indian women's hockey team, led by Rani Rampal, on Sunday left the country for the tour of Argentina, looking to gain international match exposure after nearly a break of one year due to COVID-19 pandemic.

The Indian team was forced to train at the Sports Authority of India centre in Bengaluru for several months as international competition came to a halt due to the pandemic.

The Indian team is scheduled to play four matches against the world number two Argentina side (January 26, 28, 30, 31). Before that, it will play two matches each against Argentina's junior and B sides.

"It feels amazing to be touring again. We have worked very hard on our game in the last few

months and the time has come for us to execute our skills in an international match," skipper Rani said ahead of departure.

"Playing in international matches is going to be a bit different this time, since we will be in a bio bubble, however, the team is excited to be back on the field in the best possible manner at the moment," she said.

Hockey India and the host country's national association have created a bio bubble for both the teams.

The Indian team will stay at a hotel where there will be provisions for separate rooms/halls for all the meals, team meetings and sessions.

The entire Indian contingent underwent a COVID-19 RT-PCR test 72 hours prior to their departure. Though there

is no requirement for quarantine upon arrival in Argentina, the team will still be following all safety and health measures as advised by the respective governments of India and Argentina, a release said.

India's vice captain and goalkeeper Savita thanked Hockey India and SAI for arranging the tour of Argentina.

"We desperately needed to get back into competitive mode as there's not much time left to go for the Olympics. We have been doing well in practice sessions, but an international match is always the real test for any sportsperson," said Savita.

"We are really looking forward to a great tour and hopefully, we start playing to our full potential right from the first match," she added.



# Greta Thunberg at 18: 'I'm not telling anyone what to do'



**LONDON, 03 JAN [PA MEDIA]:** The environmental campaigner Greta Thunberg says she has stopped buying new clothes and holds no grudges against people who fly.

In an interview to mark her 18th birthday, the Swedish activist offered a relaxed view

when asked about celebrities who trumpet their environmental awareness yet contribute to carbon emissions by using passenger aircraft.

She did say, however, such figures could be accused of hypocrisy. "I don't care," Thunberg, who usually travels over-

seas by boat, told the Sunday Times magazine.

"I'm not telling anyone else what to do," she said, "but there is a risk when you are vocal about these things and don't practise as you preach, then you will become criticised for that and what you are saying

won't be taken seriously."

Asked about campaigners who say having children is irresponsible at a time when the planet is under pressure, Thunberg said she did not consider it selfish to have children, adding it was "not the people who are the problem, it is our

behaviour".

She said her ideal birthday present would be for people to do more to help the planet – though a physical gift of new headlights for her bicycle would also be welcomed.

But unlike many teenagers, new clothes are not on her birthday list, due to the environmental impact of clothing production and demand.

"I don't need new clothes," she says. "I know people who have clothes, so I would ask them if I could borrow them or if they have something they don't need any more. The worst-case scenario, I guess I'll buy secondhand."

Thunberg also said she felt guilt over the pressures brought on her family – including death threats – by her three years in the public eye. She said she did not care what people said about her online, but "when it impacts the people around you, then it becomes something else".

## Iran steps up nuclear plans as tensions rise on anniversary of Suleimani's killing



**TEHRAN, 03 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]:** Iran has announced plans to enrich uranium up to 20% purity, just a step away from weapons-grade levels, as tensions with the US ratchet up during the final days of Donald Trump's presidency.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) confirmed it had been notified of Iran's decision to increase enrichment at the Fordow facility, buried in a mountainside to protect it from military strikes, although Tehran did not say when the process would begin.

The weekend also marks the first anniversary of a US drone strike that killed top general Qassem Suleimani, with Washington apparently bracing for possible retaliation.

After the US stepped up military deployments and threatening language, Iran's foreign minister, Javad Zarif, accused it on New Year's Eve of trying to set up a "pretext for war".

In an apparent attempt at de-escalation the Pentagon has abruptly withdrawn the aircraft carrier Nimitz from the region, the New York Times reported.

The US president-elect, Joe Biden, has made clear that he hopes to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which was abandoned by Trump in 2018. The deal limited Iran to enriching uranium to 3.67%. It also called for Fordow to be turned into a research and development facility.

Iran began violating the deal in 2019, in response to America's withdrawal and imposition of sanctions. But it has also signalled a desire to rejoin the deal, in return for sanctions relief.

November's IAEA report, the latest available, said that Tehran was still allowing inspections, and although it was enriching uranium beyond 3.67%, it was not exceeding a 4.5% threshold.

Other signatories of the deal, including the EU, France, Germany, UK, China and Russia, have been playing for time, hoping the agreement could be restored under Biden.

The German foreign minister, Heiko Maas, has said the change of administration in the US means that there is "a last window" for progress that "shouldn't be wasted".

But Biden will be managing a very high-stakes relationship – and attempting to rekindle an always-controversial deal in the face of significant opposition inside both countries – at a time when the domestic fight against Covid is sucking up huge amounts of government time and energy. Iran originally began 20% enrichment under former headline president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, heightening concerns that it was pursuing a nuclear weapons programme, although Tehran has always insisted it has only peaceful aims.

The 2015 deal aimed to extend the country's breakout time for cre-

ating a nuclear weapon from a few months to at least a year. If Iran resumes the higher level of enrichment, the international tensions that preceded the agreement could return.

The latest move came after Iran's parliament passed legislation following the November assassination of a top nuclear scientist, in an attack blamed on Israel.

The new law calls for the country to produce at least 120kg of 20% enriched uranium a year – a key step towards weapons-grade, which is 90% enriched – and put an end to IAEA inspections designed to check its programme is only for peaceful use.

Ali Akbar Salehi, the US-educated head of the civilian Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, offered a military analogy to describe his agency's readiness to take the next step in uranium enrichment.

"We are like soldiers and our fingers are on the triggers," Salehi told Iranian state television. "The commander should command and we shoot. We are ready for this and will produce [20% enriched uranium] as soon as possible."

He said natural uranium in centrifuges at Fordow would need to be switched out for material enriched to 4% if the further enrichment was to proceed. "It should be done under IAEA supervision," Salehi added.

Fordow is nestled in mountains near the holy city of Qom, about 90km south-west of Tehran.

## Tokyo reports 816 new COVID-19 cases as governors push for state of emergency

**TOKYO, 03 JAN (REUTERS):** Tokyo reported 816 new daily coronavirus cases on Sunday, a day after governors from the capital and neighboring prefectures called on the Japanese government to announce a state of emergency to combat a recent surge in cases.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has resisted calls for a second national state of emergency; the government first introduced that measure in April during an earlier wave of the pandemic. Suga is scheduled to speak publicly on Jan. 4.

Japan's economy minister told reporters on Saturday the government needed to consult with health experts before deciding on a new declaration.

As an interim measure, restaurants and karaoke parlors in the To-

kyo area are being asked to close at 8 p.m., while businesses that serve alcohol should close at 7 p.m., he said.

The previous state of emergency relied on voluntary business closings and travel restrictions rather than the sort of rigid lockdown measures seen elsewhere in the world. Tokyo raised its COVID-19 alert to its highest level on Dec. 17. New infections in the capital hit a record 1,337 on Dec. 31.

Japan's health ministry said on Sunday there were 3,045 new confirmed cases of the new coronavirus across the country.

Since the start of the pandemic, Japan has reported more than 240,000 cases of the novel coronavirus and 3,548 deaths, according to the health ministry.

## US judge rejects lawsuit against Pence over electoral count

**WASHINGTON, 03 JAN [REUTERS]:** A federal judge has rejected a lawsuit from a Republican congressman that sought to allow Vice President Mike Pence to reject Electoral College votes for Joe Biden when Congress meets on January 6 to certify his victory over President Donald Trump.

The latest long-shot attempt by Trump's Republican allies to overturn the November 3 election result was dismissed on Friday by one of Trump's own appointees to the federal bench, Jeremy Kernodle.

He ruled that US Representative Louie Gohmert of Texas and a slate of Republican electors from Arizona could not show they suffered any personal harm "fairly traceable" to Pence's allegedly unlawful conduct and, therefore, lacked legal standing to bring the case.

The standing requirement "helps enforce the limited role of federal courts in our constitutional system. The problem for plaintiffs here is that they lack standing," Kernodle wrote. A spokesman for

Trump referred questions to Pence's office. A spokesman for Pence declined to comment, while a spokeswoman for Gohmert did not immediately comment.

Trump has refused to concede defeat to Democrat Biden and has repeatedly falsely claimed the election was tainted by widespread fraud.

He and his allies have lost dozens of court efforts seeking to reverse the election results. Biden beat President Donald Trump by a 306-232 margin in the Electoral College and is set to be sworn in on January 20. Under the Electoral College system, "electoral votes" are allotted to states and the District of Columbia based on their congressional representation.

Gohmert's suit argued that Pence had the discretion to decide what votes should count.

They also asked the judge to bar Pence from following the Electoral Count Act of 1887, which lays out how objections to votes are handled by Congress.

## Fifth Afghan journalist killed in two months

**KABUL, 03 JAN [ALJAZEERA]:** An Afghan journalist has been shot dead in a car ambush in the central province of Ghor, the fifth media professional to be killed in the war-torn country in two months, officials said.

Bismellah Adel Aimaq, 28, the editor-in-chief of Sada-e-Ghor (Voice of Ghor) radio station, was killed near Firoz Koh city, the capital of Ghor, on Friday.

"Unfortunately, Bismellah Adel Aimaq, the head of Sada-e Ghor Radio, was killed by unknown gunmen this

evening in Firoz Koh. He was 28 years old, and started working with Sada-e-Ghor Radio since 2015," said Habibollah Radmanesh, the deputy governor of Ghor on Saturday.

No armed group has claimed responsibility for the killing, which was condemned by President Ashraf Ghani.

He said his government was committed to supporting and promoting freedom of expression.

"The Taliban and other terrorist groups could not silence the legitimate

voices of journalists and the media by carrying out such attacks," he said in a tweet.

A civil society activist was also killed on Friday by unknown fighters.

Targeted killings of journalists, government officials and rights activists have increased rapidly in recent months as violence surges in Afghanistan despite peace talks being held between the government and the Taliban.

The Taliban last month said it was not involved in the killing of media professionals.

## Gunmen kill many Hazara coal miners in southwest Pakistan



**QUETTA, 03 JAN [ALJAZEERA]:** Gunmen have opened fire on a group of minority Hazara Shia Muslim coal miners after abducting them, killing 11 in the southwestern Balochistan province, a Pakistani official has said.

Moazzam Ali Jatoti, an official with the Levies Force which serves as police and paramilitary in the area, said the attack took place early on Sunday near the Mach coalfield, about 48km (30 miles) east of the provincial capital, Quetta.

Jatoti said armed men took the coal miners to nearby mountains where they opened fire on them. He said six miners died on the spot and five others were critically wounded and died on the way to hospital.

Jatoti said an initial investigation revealed the attackers identified the miners as belonging to the Hazara Shia community and took them away for execution, leaving others unharmed.

Local television footage showed security troops surrounding a desolate mountainous area diverting traffic and guiding ambulances to pick up the bodies. Security forces were also seen spreading out in the mountains to search for the attackers.

No group has immediately claimed responsibility but Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a banned Sunni hardline group, has targeted the minority Hazara community in Balochistan province in the past.

Quetta is home to roughly 600,000 Hazara Shia Muslims, largely confined to two fortified enclaves on either side of the city.

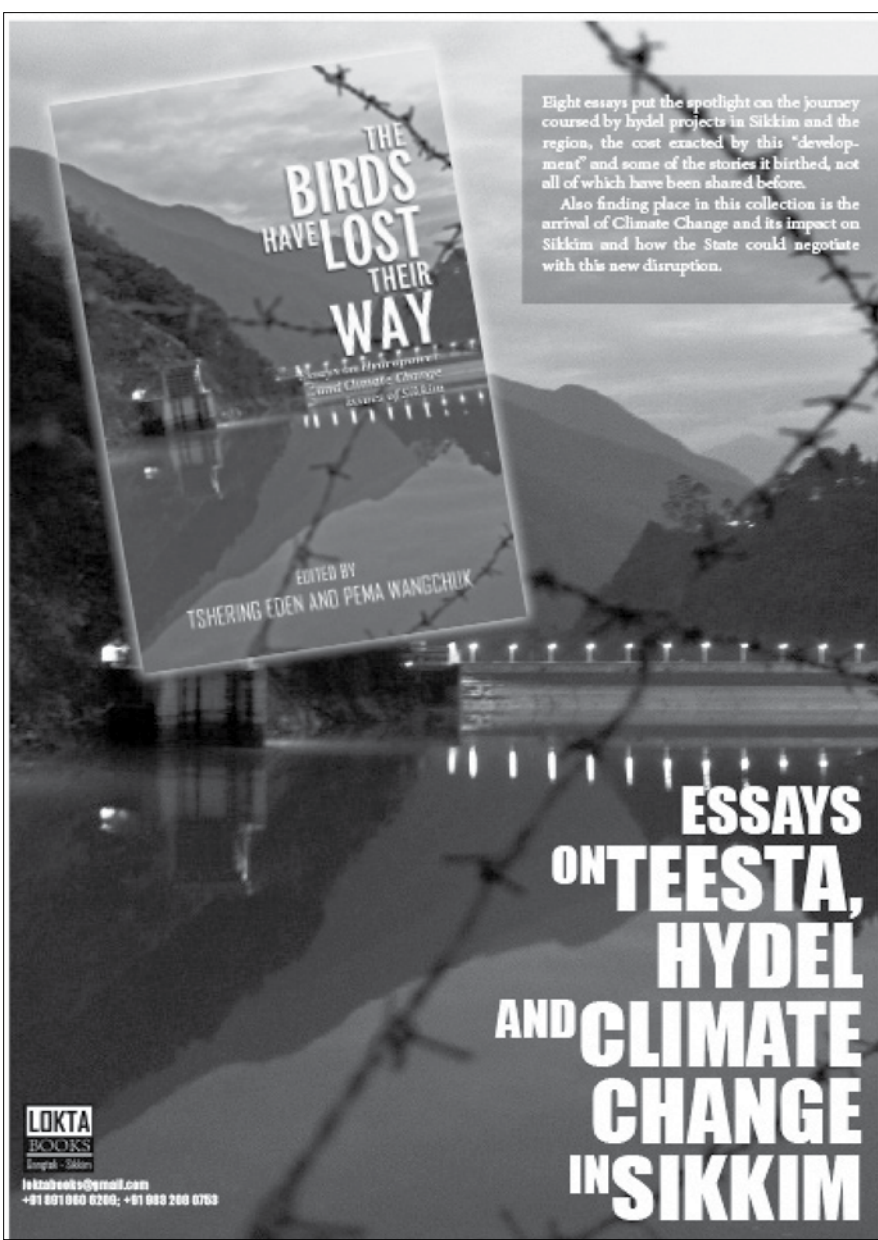
The enclaves are ringed with high walls topped with barbed wire, and many checkpoints are manned by paramilitary personnel.

Members of the community have long complained that security restrictions have cut them off from the rest of the city, not allowing them to effectively manage businesses or send their children to school.

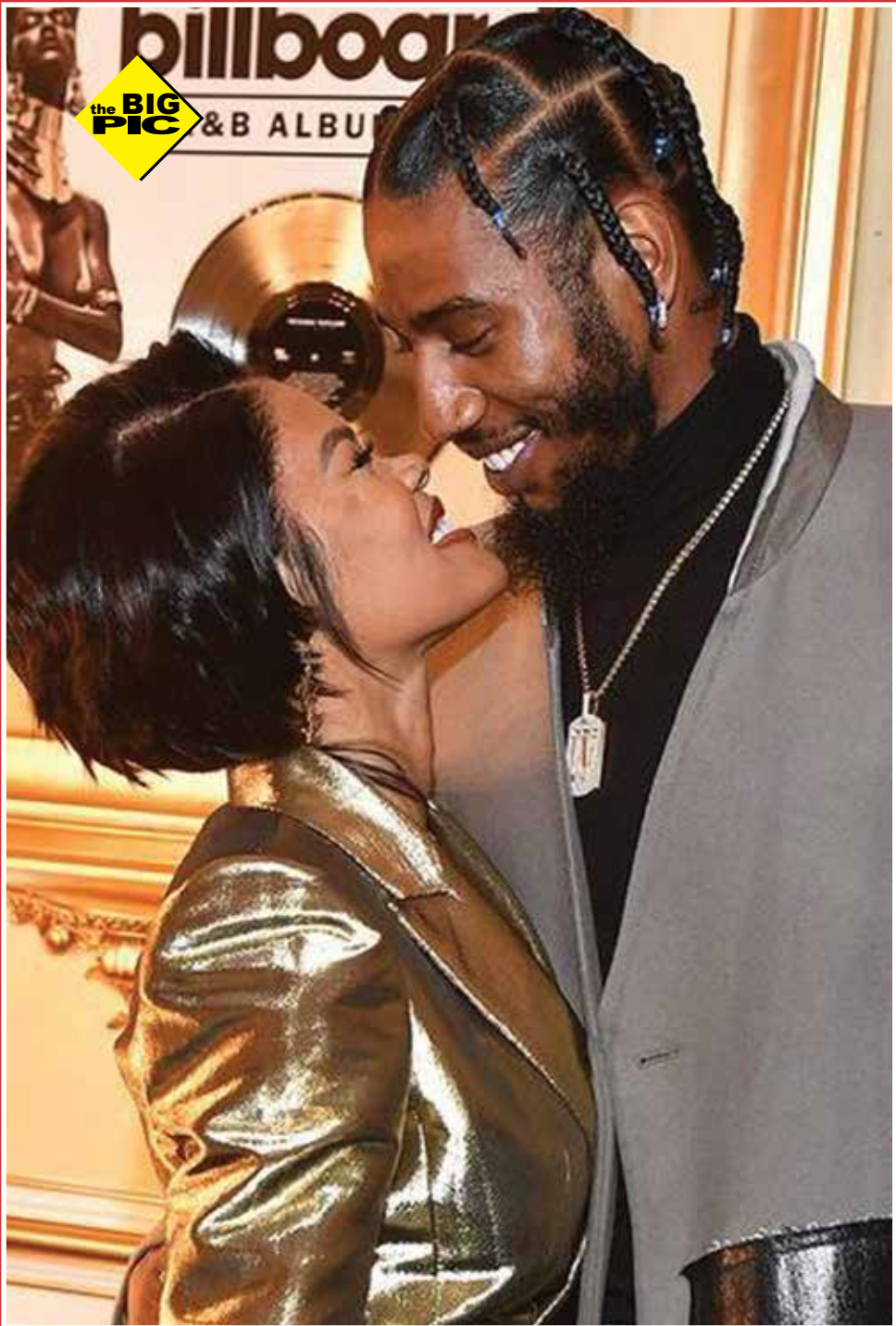
Balochistan faces multifaceted threats from several armed groups, including the Taliban, which have targeted Shia Muslims and nationalist groups seeking independence for the province.

Attacks against workers from other provinces, especially those working on projects initiated by China under a \$62bn investment plan, are common.

On December 26, gunmen attacked a security post and killed seven soldiers in Harnai district of the province.







**NEW YEAR CUDDLES!** Star couple Teyana Taylor and Iman Shumpert looks loved up and happy attending their Black Tie Masquerade NYE Party in Georgia, USA.

## Shahab Hosseini to star in biopic of Iranian physicist Ali Javan

Actor Shahab Hosseini, best known for collaborations with Oscar-winning director Asghar Farhadi in "About Elly", "A Separation", and "The Salesman", is set to play Iranian-American physicist and inventor Ali Javan in an upcoming biopic.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, Kourosh Ahari, who most recently directed horror-thriller "The Night", is attached to write and direct the film.

Javan first proposed the concept of the gas laser in 1959 at the Bell Telephone Laboratories. A successful prototype, constructed by him in collaboration with WR Bennett, Jr and DR Herriott, was demonstrated in 1960.

Javan also contributed to the fields of quantum physics and spectroscopy. His original 1960 helium neon-laser device is currently on display at the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of American History.

Ahari, Hosseini and producer Alex Bretow's production banner Pol Media has acquired exclusive worldwide rights to the life of Javan.

The physicist is survived by two daughters, Maia and Lila Javan, who will executive

produce and consult on the project. Hosseini has starred in Farhadi's Oscar-winning foreign-language films "A Separation" and "The Salesman", for which he won the best actor award at Cannes Film Festival in 2016.

"The Night", directed by Ahari, is the first American production to receive a license to



release theatrically in Iran since the country's revolution. The film is slated to be released on January 29 in theatres and at home throughout North America from IFC Midnight. It set for a global release later in the year.

Bretow previously produced "The Night", also starring Hosseini, and "Generations".

Pol Media is currently scouting writers to pen the script alongside Ahari and taking the project to studios and distributors.

## Theaters look to Bond and Black Widow to spark 2021 moviegoing

Movie theater operators, after a year of dismal ticket sales during the pandemic, are hoping a lineup of superheroes, fighter pilots and cinema's most famous spy will help them stage a comeback in 2021.

Roughly two-thirds of theaters remain shut in the United States and Canada, normally the world's largest film market. Box office receipts in 2020 plunged 80% from a year earlier.

But theater owners and industry analysts see reason for optimism as COVID-19 vaccines roll out and James Bond, Black Widow and other heroes star in new blockbusters set to begin lighting up screens in the spring.

"I think we'll see a lot of improvements throughout 2021, but I do think it will take some time to get there," said Shawn Robbins, chief analyst with BoxOfficePro.com. "It won't be an overnight return to normal by any means."

The timing of any rebound is uncertain, as debut dates could change. Hollywood executives have repeatedly shuffled their schedules as they try to judge when the pandemic will fade. Initial excitement over vaccines has been tempered by slow distribution. And audiences will have more choices to stream at home. Currently, studios plan to send theaters a heavy lineup of big-budget movies that were yanked from the 2020 schedule.

James Bond thriller "No Time to Die," from MGM and Comcast Corp's Universal Pictures, is scheduled for April. "Black Widow," from Walt Disney Co's

Marvel Studios, and Universal's new "Fast & Furious" installment are set for May. Anticipated summer movies include "Top Gun: Maverick" from ViacomCBS Inc's Paramount Pictures, Universal's animated "Minions: The Rise of

said in a research note.

"This helps support the thesis that when consumers are allowed back to theaters with attractive content, they will once again become moviegoers," said Wold, who follows major chains including



Gru," and Marvel's "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings."

The theater business was buoyed by the turnout for "Wonder Woman 1984" over the Christmas holiday. While far short of a normal action movie debut, ticket sales for the movie from AT&T Inc's Warner Bros. came in higher than expected, even though U.S. audiences could stream the film at home on HBO Max. Warner Bros. plans the same dual-release strategy in 2021 for 17 films, including a "Dune" remake and "Godzilla vs. Kong."

The performance of "Wonder Woman 1984" demonstrated an appetite for the big screen, B. Riley analyst Eric Wold

AMC Entertainment and Cinemark.

B&B Theatres, which operates in nine states, sold out some of its "Wonder Woman 1984" showtimes on Christmas Day, executives said. But they offered only 25% to 50% of seats, depending on the state, to ensure social distancing.

"We're seeing week after week our attendance go up," said executive vice president Bobbie Bagby Ford. But she added she did not expect the industry to hit "any semblance of normal" until vaccinations expand and attendance limits can be lifted.

"It's probably going to be the holidays of 2021 before I see us back to full swing," she said.

## Becca Kufrin shares candid heartbreak post

Bachelor Nation's Becca Kufrin is ready to see what 2021 brings.

Taking to Instagram on New Year's Day, The Bachelorette alum reflected on her major moments from 2020, which included everything from the good, the bad and the ugly. One topic the reality TV personality touched on was how she healed her broken heart after she and Garrett Yrigoyen called off their engagement in August.

"2020. Man, you gave me a run for my money," she began her post on Friday, Jan. 1. "You have challenged me

in ways I never thought possible. You changed the trajectory of my life, you took several people I loved away, & you pushed me to the point where I almost broke. But I didn't. And after all the hell that's taken place within 365 days, all I have to say is thank you."

"Thank you for breaking my heart & allowing me to put the pieces back together in the most weird, but customized way," she shared, seemingly referencing her and Garrett's split. "... You rocked me, but ya couldn't fully knock me."

## BTS wraps up record-breaking year with New Year's Eve online concert

Global K-Pop sensation BTS celebrated New Year's Eve with an online concert on Thursday along with other K-pop groups from its management agency Big Hit Entertainment and fans from around the world.

Halsey, Lauv and Steve Aoki, who have all collaborated with BTS in recent years, joined on a special stage by connecting remotely.

Seven-member BTS also took part in a short online fan meeting, reading messages and playing a game, which fans could toggle to among

multiple screens. "I hope you wrap up the end of the year well, and I'd like to see you in person soon," Suga said.

The concert, at Goyang, northwest of Seoul, was originally scheduled to be held simultaneously online and offline, but in-person attendance was canceled due to a new wave of COVID-19 infections in South Korea.

With the concert, BTS wraps up a record-breaking year with three No.1 hits on the Billboard Hot 100 chart and becoming the first K-pop group to ever receive a Grammy Award nomination.

## MF Doom, masked rapper known for complex lyrics, dies at 49



MF Doom, a masked rapper who awed hip-hop fans and fellow musicians with intricate wordplay, has died. He was 49.

The British-born rapper rarely appeared in public in recent years without his signature mask, modeled after the Marvel Comics villain Doctor Doom. His death was confirmed Thursday by Doom's representative, Richie Abbott. Jasmine Dumile said in a statement that her husband — whose real name is Daniel Dumile — died Oct. 31. The cause of death has not been released.

Jasmine Dumile posted a photo of the rapper and a

heartfelt message on his Instagram page. She called him the "greatest husband" and father and thanked him for showing her how not to be "afraid to love."

"Thank you for teaching me how to forgive beings and give another chance, not to be so quick to judge and write off," she wrote. "My world will never be the same without you."

Dumile was born in London and raised in New York. He began his rap career in the late 1980s under the name Zev Love X as part of the group KMD, which included his younger brother DJ Subroc.

**Aries:**  
In his bestseller Eleven Minutes, Paulo Coelho wrote, "You can either be a victim of the world or an adventurer in search of treasure. It all depends on how you view your life." Today, you're being asked to reflect upon both, his golden words and the tale you tell yourself. What are you giving power to, Aries? The failures or the victories? Spirit wants you to choose both your words and your thoughts wisely, as you consciously reaffirm the good in your reality. Tip: Choose both your thoughts and words wisely.

**Taurus:**  
How do you feel about the selfless acts of giving, loving, and supporting? Do you share what's yours with a smile on your face, or by maintaining a mental excel sheet? Today, the cards are urging you let go of the calculativeness and embrace the spirit of giving. Remember, it's not about the person you are holding space for. It is the Great Spirit that you are serving through them. Tip: Give with all your heart.

**Gemini:**  
Discovering your hidden potential is going to be a big theme for you this year, with your higher self helping you realise all the ways in which you are infinite. Let go of the old stories, Gemini. Break up with the lies you have been telling yourself. If the cosmic cues are anything to go by, you will find that you are able to manifest golden opportunities that

will take you places. What's more, you'll find that the help and resources you need in every moment are available to you. So, open your arms and allow yourself to receive. Your life is about to change in ways you cannot even imagine right now. Tip: This is a lucky time.

**Cancer:**  
The trouble is, we allow the opinions of other people to determine how we feel about ourselves. But, there is nothing to heal and nothing to fix. You are whole and integrated, perfect as you are. It's time to allow the light within you to shine brighter and brighter, knowing that your unshakeable faith in yourself will help you move mountains. Tip: Nothing to heal. Nothing to fix. You are perfect as you are.

**Leo:**  
Leo, you may find yourself playing the role of the jester as things get topsy-turvy around you. But, what your journey to enlightenment has taught you is that there's nothing more spiritual than the ability to laugh, make people laugh, and turn the metaphorical lemons into limoncello. Some of you may find yourselves struggling to make an important decision. The key is to find a balance between your head and your heart. The sooner you let go of your judgement, the easier it will be for you to see things from a higher perspective. Tip: There's nothing more spiritual than the ability to

laugh and make others laugh.

**Virgo:**  
Virgo, take a moment to reflect upon the joy of receiving. That mysterious smile on your face tells us that there are very few things in life that match up to the happiness that being cared for brings. Now, wouldn't you want those you love to experience the same exhilaration that you have as a result of their presence in your life? Author Gary Chapman explains the five love languages that can make those around us feel special, and they include words of affirmation, giving presents, acts of service, quality time, and physical touch. PS: Choose one that resonates with you or work with a combination of them all! Tip: It's time to make those around you feel celebrated.

**Libra:**  
Maybe it wasn't love, Libra. Maybe you were just craving carbs. The beginning of the year finds you smiling your brightest smile, with the inner knowing that you are in paradise. It doesn't matter what went wrong in the past and how things turned out. What matters is the present moment, which you are determined to make the most of. Some of you may be drawn to meditation and mindfulness at this point. It's a good idea to start the year by cultivating a habit that will support your lifestyle. Tip: You're embracing what the present is offering

you.

**Scorpio:**  
Here's an existential question to begin the year with: Are you living, existing or merely surviving? If you're on the survival end of the spectrum, let 2021 inspire you to take all kinds of chances, let go of the limitations created by your small, three-dimensional self, and embrace your life in all of its glory despite the risk it entails. You know what they say! In the end, we only regret the chances we didn't take. Tip: It's time to take life by the horns.

**Sagittarius:**  
It's easy to feel like everything is falling apart, and that your life will never be the same. That Spirit is going out of its way to sabotage the game for you. But the truth is, you are where you need to be and you are protected even if you cannot see it. So, be here now. Adopt 'surrender' as your magic word this year. You will soon understand the higher reason behind the circumstances you have attracted. Tip: Spirit is working with, not against you.

**Capricorn:**  
It doesn't matter who said what. It doesn't matter what transpired in the past. The only thing that matters is the love that first brought you together, and that love is strong. So, focus on the good in your life. Focus on the strength of this bond. In doing so, you will be giving the positive aspects of your life the power to increase manifold. Some of you may

have to step into the role of the mediator as well. Remember, it's all good in the hood as long as the white flag helps things move forward.

Tip: Let's focus on the love!  
**Aquarius:**  
Aquarius, you are a master manifestor and you're just beginning to realise the magic that is coursing through your veins. Take a moment to revisit your intentions. If there's something sacred you missed out on, find a way to work it in. Then, sketch a visual representation of the life you're working towards (brownie points for adding colours!). Remember, you are the creative director of this film. So, align your actions with your intentions and get ready to watch the miracles unfold. Tip: It's time to creatively visualise the life you desire.

**Pisces:**  
This is a troubled time in the Pisces HQ. You may feel like the people around you are not supporting you in the way you desire and that your depressive tendencies are resurfacing right now. Here's the thing: most people are too caught up in their own heads to notice what's happening in their environment. Until you don't express your needs to them, they will be unaware of how they need to hold space for you. Word for the wise: Speak up. This silence is not serving you, or others, well. Tip: Express your needs.