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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Power shutdown in East and North on 09 Feb

GANGTOK, 07 FEB (IPR): As per official communication received from Power Department, Government of Sikkim, the Department is undertaking Complete Shutdown of Grid (which supplies power to Entire North and East Districts of Sikkim) on 09.02.2020 from 8am to 5pm.

Reason for the complete shutdown is to re-arrange the 66KV Circuits at LLHP Switchyard as the installation of HTLS Conductor between 132/66KV PGCIL Switchyard to 66/11KV LLHP Sub-Station is completed.

Affected areas are entire North and East Districts except Rangpo Division which caters load from Melli Station.

Cash-strapped Kerala enhances fair value of land, motor vehicle tax; hikes welfare pension

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB 7 (PTI): Battling severe financial crisis, the Left government in Kerala on Friday raised the fair value of land and motor vehicle tax to mobilise an additional resource of Rs 1,103 crore, even as it raised all welfare pensions and allocated enhanced share for pro-women schemes.

A total of 2.5 lakh new water connections, 1000 cost-effective food courts providing meals at Rs 25, one lakh new houses/flats for homeless people by 2020-21 and 'shelodge' enterprises in all cities were among the popular announcements in the budget, presented with an introduction of the state's cash-strapped condition.

Presenting his fifth budget for the 2020-21 fiscal, state Finance minister TM Thomas Isaac announced Rs 2,000 crore and Rs 1,000 crore worth special packages for flood-hit high ranges-- Wayanad and Idukki-- respectively.

The minister set aside Rs 1,000 crore for coastal area development and Rs 2,400 crore for the second Kuttanad package, eyeing the development of the 'rice bowl' of the southern state.

"The tax rate of motorcycles, not exceeding value up to Rs 2 lakh, will be increased by 1 per cent and that of motor cars and private service vehicles for personal use, not exceeding value of Rs 15 lakh, will be increased
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Employees' group thanks Govt for removing 'junior' tag

Junior tag was used by SDF Govt to deprive employees of benefits

ARPAN PRADHAN
GANGTOK, 07 FEB: "The previous Government had imposed the 'Junior' tag in various posts under various departments, just to take away their rights, benefits and to provide low salary," alleged president of All Sikkim Government Group C&D 15,10,5 years regularized employees committee, Pema Doma Bhutia.

Speaking during a press conference today, Ms Bhutia said that due to pressure from the then Muster Roll and other Temporary employees, the State Government regularized these employees but downgraded their posts and denied them various facilities.

The junior tag was not



only humiliating, it deprived us of our rights and benefits and even after being equivalent to other similar grade and rank employees, we were not treated as equals, she alleged.

"We suffered a lot during the tenure of the last Government and not only the association but some of us were targeted individually too," said Ms Bhutia.

In this context, members of the association thanked the present Government and specially the Chief Minister for removing the 'Junior' tag from various posts.

The committee has also thanked DoPART, other Departments and the Chief Secretary.

It may be mentioned that the State Government had recently

announced that posts with the prefix 'Junior' will cease to exist.

The committee has also welcomed the decision of providing health insurance to all government employees that covers more than 89,000 employees and 5 dependents. The committee has also welcomed the decision of regu-

larizing employees who have completed 8 years and 5 years on 31 Dec 2018.

"We are thankful to the present government and the Chief Minister for fulfilling promises made before the elections and removing the Junior tag from our posts. It is indeed a New Year Gift for all of us from the New Govern-

ment," said Ms Bhutia.

On the other hand the decision and announcement of the State Government to give only Two Saturdays as Government Holidays has also been welcomed by the All Sikkim Government Group C&D 15,10,5 years regularized employees committee.

The committee has placed various demands on behalf of the employees which includes the re-introduction of Pension system in place of CPF, promotion for Work-charged employees, pay-band increase of employees above the grade of HR, Golden handshake or Retirement Package to Retired Work-charged employees and others.

The committee has also decided to organize a special program to thank the Chief Minister.

The conference also had the presence of executive members of the committee and representative from various districts.

4996 new voters registered last month

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 07 FEB:

The final publication of Electoral Roll w.r.t 1.1.2020 as qualifying date was released today by the Chief Electoral Officer, Sikkim, R. Telang, in the presence of Special Secretary, RDD, Anil Raj Rai, Roll Observer, Tshering Bhutia, SDM, East, Chopel Lepcha, Joint Director and Bikash Rai, Dy. Director, Printing & Stationary, and representative of all recognized political parties.

A press release informs that the Election Commission of India conducts Special Summary Revision every year for up-dation of Electoral Roll. This year the revision com-



menced from 17 Dec 2019 and continued till 15 Jan 2020 with final publication slated on 07 Feb 2020.

A soft copy of final roll of electoral roll was handed over to the representative of recognized political parties.

Final Roll reflected 1.03% net increase in the final roll from the draft electoral roll published during 17 Dec 2019.

There has been total number of 4,26,126 electors, Male-216852 and Female-209274.

Out of 4996 voters added, 75% of the voters are from the new voters who are from the age group of 18-19 years.

There has been total addition of 4996 voters and deletion of 659 voters during this revision.

Muslim voters balance fears over CAA-NRC with development issues

NEW DELHI, FEB 7 (PTI): A Bollywood song from the 1980s plays somewhere outside and Imtiaz Hussain, sitting in his office in southeast Delhi's Batla House, listens attentively, nodding in agreement at the words of unity, oneness and love for the country.

On Friday evening, with just a few hours to go before the Delhi assembly elections, "Mera karma tu, mera dharma tu...Hindu Muslim Sikh Issai, Hum vatan hum naam hain" from Dilip Kumar starrer "Karma" strikes a particularly emotive chord for Hussain.

"Pakistan, Hindu-Muslim divide have been the focal point of this election. I have never seen such a polarised election," said the 68-year-old who was born in Old Delhi and has been living in the Okhla area for the last 15 years.

"Non-issues have been made issues," he said, pointing to a poster declaring "No-CAA, No-NRC, No-NPR". In his view, these should not be electoral issues at all.

Similar posters can be seen in the congested lane that houses his office and other shops, just two kilometres from Shaheen Bagh, the epicentre of the anti-CAA protests that became the core of the BJP's

campaign. Hussain is clear he will consider the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the National Register of Citizens and the National Population Register along with issues such as water, electricity and sanitation when he votes on Saturday. Caught between bread and butter issues and the CAA-NRC-NPR that they feel threaten their identity as Indians, many other Muslims across the city agree with Hussain.

In a city where Muslim voters constitute 13 per cent of the electorate and are scattered through Ballimaran, Matia Mahal, Mustafabad, Okhla, Babarpur and Seelampur and other localities, the CAA and NRC have emerged main issues alongside everyday development issues.

The Aam Aadmi Party, which is pitching for a second term in power, has rolled out several free schemes and has promised to continue them if it comes to power.

But Abrar Ahmed, 32, a businessman in northeast Delhi's Seelampur locality, isn't sure if it will work for his community.

"If we are not citizens of this country, what will be the use of free electricity, water and wi-fi?

We want this Act to be revoked," Ahmed said. However, potable water is a major issue in his area, he added. "I was suffering from cancer and completed my chemotherapy three months ago. The doctors told me to drink only packaged water for at least three months," Ahmed said. He is also unhappy that the AAP did not take any stand against CAA-NRC, Article 370 and triple talaq.

"Women have been staging a protest at Shaheen Bagh and the chief minister has not uttered a single word on the matter," he said.

But Hussain is not too concerned. "We know who has worked and who has not," he said.

According to Muhammad Javed, 50, who owns a printing press in Ballimaran in old Delhi, the polarising campaign could reap some electoral dividends but it would be limited at best. "The common man wants to earn a decent living and live his life without bothering anyone. They have never, and they will never, root for fights between Hindus and Muslims.

"Their demands are simple:

turn to pg 02



Save Paljor Stadium from miscreants

NISIM SUBBA
GANGTOK, 07 FEB:

Karate Coach, Binam Gurung has raised concern over the inadequate security measures in place at the Paljor Stadium complex which has led to miscreants damaging the public property.

He expressed the need for CCTV cameras and manpower to guard the complex to discourage miscreants from damaging property and disposing

garbage in the area.

Mr Gurung informed that guards are on duty only when the Sikkim Police is conducting training or if there is any tournament being held in the complex.

At all other times, miscreants are free to do as they like at the complex. He expressed hope that the authorities will look into the matter since the complex is an asset for the public, especially the youth, who come for practice every day.

Word from Modi's speech in Rajya Sabha expunged

NEW DELHI, FEB 7 (PTI): In a rare move, a word from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech in Rajya Sabha was expunged from records.

Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu expunged the word used by Modi on Thursday during his reply to the discussion on a motion thanking the President for his address to the joint sitting of both Houses of Parliament at the start of the Budget session.

"Chairman was pleased to direct expunction of a certain portion of the proceedings of Rajya Sabha dated February 6 at about 6.20 and 6.30 pm," a statement issued by the Rajya Sabha Secretariat said.

Naidu routinely expunges any remark found unsuitable from Rajya Sabha's records after going through the



proceedings of the day. This has been done on several occasions but rarely was any remark of Modi expunged.

Modi had made the remark as he launched a strong defence of the NPR saying the country's population register was being updated with demographic information for better targeting of government's welfare schemes.

He had targeted the opposition Congress for making a U-turn, saying the party had brought

the NPR in 2010 and was later updated in 2015 by adding photographs and some biometric information.

Naidu also expunged a word from Leader of the Opposition and senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad's statement made after Modi had finished his speech.

Azad had stated that the Congress was in favour of giving citizenship to persecuted migrants from Pakistan but was against framing of a law based on religion.

Sikkim shares organic mission success story

GANGTOK, 07 FEB [PIB]: Agriculture is the core of India's developmental goals and exports are the key to reforming the agriculture sector said Commerce Secretary, Anup Wadhawan in his inaugural address at the 2nd National Workshop on the implementation of the Agri Export Policy (AEP) and cluster development in New Delhi today organized by the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA).

It is the States/ Union Territories (UTs) that will have to strengthen their institutional mechanisms for putting in place the AEP and development of clusters added Commerce Secretary. He further said that this is an opportunity for the States/ UTs to formulate a comprehensive plan, covering all key areas of the AEP, across all sectors in agriculture like horticulture, fisheries, animal husbandry, dairying, food processing,

floriculture and watershed development. The institutional framework of the AEP must be outcome oriented and all States/ UTs must provide a budget for it added Commerce Secretary.

Commerce Secretary emphasised that the best agronomic practices in all the sectors of agriculture must be followed in the State AEP because quality of India's agri products should never be compromised. States/ UTs should not only concentrate on quantitative output of agri produce but be extremely meticulous about the quality. Best practices must be followed at every step so that there is no compromise whatsoever in the quality of India's agri products stressed Commerce Secretary.

He further said that the AEP must have a decentralised focus that is built up from the cluster level to the district and the state level plan and the policy must link up with all schemes of Gov-

ernment of India across all Ministries and Departments and project the vision for the agriculture sector for the next five years.

APEDA organized the 2nd workshop with all States/ UTs in order to assess the progress made by them for the implementation of the AEP and development of agri clusters in districts. Twenty-seven States and one UT attended the workshop today where Chairman APEDA spelt out the expectations from State Governments/ UTs for successful implementation of AEP so that farmers income may double and India's agri export may reach the target of USD 60 billion by 2022.

Chairman APEDA informed that States/ UTs must put in place the state agri export action plan, set up state level export monitoring committee, designate a nodal agency for agri export, identify agri clusters, set up district agri export action plan, pro-

mote farmer producer organization (FPOs) and farmer producer cooperatives (FPCs) identify infrastructure and logistics gap. Chairman APEDA further stated that States/ UTs must formulate the budget for implementation of AEP and seek assistance from line Ministries of the Central Government for existing schemes when required. Reforms under APMC Act and abolition of Mandi Tax for export procurements must be done urgently he said. He further stated that district authorities must ensure control of excessive use of pesticides and sale of unauthorized pesticides and chemicals.

He informed that around 15 States have put in place the nodal agency, nodal officer, state level monitoring committee and cluster facilitation cell for the implementation of the AEP.

APEDA has initiated some steps for the implementation of AEP: an MoU was signed with

National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) in January last year to include cooperatives in the AEP; a farmer connect portal has been set up on the APEDA website for providing a platform for FPOs, FPCs to interact with exporters and more than 1000 FPOs have registered on the portal; buyer-seller meet cum workshops between exporters and FPOs have been organized in association with state nodal agencies; cluster level meetings have been held by APEDA in 25 potential clusters in the country and a market intelligence cell has been constituted to disseminate e-market intelligence report and also analyse the data received.

During the day long workshop presentations were made by line Ministry of Food Processing Industries, Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries and NABARD. Exporters of agri produce also presented their success

stories and issued faced by them to export agri products. Success stories of clusters developed in Varanasi for vegetables and banana in Andhra Pradesh were shared with the other States/ UTs. The state of Sikkim which has declared itself an organic State made a presentation on implementation on the Organic Mission in the agriculture sector. The Indian State of Sikkim is first to be certified as fully organic by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and has shown that conversion from traditional to organic agriculture is not only possible but necessary as a more profitable solution for local economies.

The workshop was attended by Director General, DGFT, senior officials of the Ministries of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Civil Aviation, departments of Commerce, Logistics, Food Processing Industries and Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries.

Kerala budget cover depicts Gandhi's assassination

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB 7 (PTI): The Left-ruled Kerala government on Friday triggered a row by depicting Mahatma Gandhi's assassination on the cover of the budget document presented by Finance Minister T M Thomas Isaac who attacked the BJP over the Citizenship Amendment Act and NRC.

The cover page, designed by renowned artist Tom Vattakuzhi, shows Gandhi lying among his followers after being shot by his assassin Nathuram Godse.

Isaac said the cover was a "message" to the Centre.

"The message is, yes, we remember that Mahatma was murdered. Murdered by Hindu communalists who are today revered by the ruling party and the central government.

We just want to say that we will remember it, people will not forget it," Isaac told reporters.

The finance minister, in his over two-hour-long budget speech was vocal in criticising the centre and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the National Register of Citizens (NRC). "These are very different times that we live in.

For the centre, NRC is the greatest and the most

urgent reform that needs to be implemented.

It is a divisive attempt to mobilize population on communal lines. This has to be countered at every level," Isaac said. Isaac, who quoted various poets and writers including Rabindranath Tagore, said the amended Act was posing threat to the basic credentials of the Constitution and the country was witnessing the biggest protests ever in post-Independence era.

"Students and women are at the forefront of the anti-CAA agitations and the hope of the country lies in the youth who hit the streets vowing that they would not let the country down," he said.

Isaac also cited the unanimous resolution passed by the state assembly against the CAA.

Coming down heavily on the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre, Isaac said a "communalised" government machinery, leaders who talk only about "disgust and hatred" and their party workers who consider violence as their duty was the current reality in the country. Leader of the Opposition in the state assembly, Ramesh Chennithala (Congress) felt the picture could have been avoided.

Muslim voters...

better government schools, cheap electricity, safe water and affordable health facilities. Whichever party gives them this will get the votes, and I believe that AAP has done reasonably good on these count and hence would win the elections," said Javed.

Farida Begum, 55, who has been protesting at Shaheen Bagh since the protest began in December said the only factor for her will be the repealing of CAA.

The young appear to have their own concerns.

Shoaib Malik, 24, who is doing his masters in Urdu from Jamia Millia Islamia, and Shamas Malik, 19, a first time voter said they have given a youth manifesto to AAP and Congress.

"We have made a youth manifesto and given both the parties. 'Gyms in each ward', 'library & book bank for the area', 'gynaecologist and special camps for women health', 'skills development centre cum counselling desk for the youth' and 'free wi-fi' are some of our demands," said Shoaib.

Mohammad Saad, 17, a student of the Jamia Secondary School, is clear about what he would like to do if he could exercise his franchise.

"Good infrastructure, good education are the issues I would have voted for. There was no need for CAA when our economy is struggling," Saad said.

Manav Milan Nepal Keshari founder on Sikkim visit



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 07 FEB:

Founder of Manav Milan Nepal Keshari, Dr Manibhadra Muni ji Maharaj and Virag Muni ji Maharaj reached Sikkim today and were welcomed by Governor, Ganga Prasad at Rangpo, a press release informs.

The two followers of Bhagwan Mahavir Swami are on a 20-day tour

in Sikkim. They travel on foot spreading the message of Mahavir Swami, the release mentions.

Dr Manibhadra Muni ji Maharaj presented the book 'Manav Milan' to the Governor.

Sikkim Bihari Jagran Manch Central Committee president, Swaminath Prasad, Aam Bihari Kalyan national president, Chotel Prasad, Driver Associ-

ation president, Roshan Mangar, members of Jain and Marwari communities, members of different organisations were present to welcome the duo.

On 08 February at the duo will reach Singtam on 08 Feb, Ranipool on 09 Feb and after reaching Gangtok they will hold various programs up to 23 Feb. They are scheduled to return on 26 Feb.

Kaluk BAC installs dustbins along road to Rinchenpong

GYALSHING, 07 FEB (IPR):

As an initiative towards Swachh Bharat Mission (G), BAC Kaluk, installs dustbins along the roadside from Kaluk to Rinchenpong and organised a 'cleanliness drive'. Students, Panchayat members and members of civil society participated in the event.

BDO Kaluk stated, "As future members of our society students were encouraged to spread



awareness on cleanliness and zero waste".

Dustbins were also presented to local NGO, school and shops. In at-

tendance were Panchayat President Tadong GPU, BDO Kaluk, BAC staff and Teachers and students of Rinchenpong School.



Quality Control Office inaugurated at SNT Siliguri

SILIGURI, 07 FEB (IPR): Food Minister, Arun Kumar Upreti today inaugurated the Quality Control Office (Legal Metrology & Consumer Protection Cell) at SNT Goods Office Complex, Pariwahan Nagar, Matigara, Siliguri in the

presence of various officials from the SNT & FC&CS and CA departments. The Minister in his brief address congratulated the officials and appealed them to make best use of the office with sincerity and dedication.

World Cup champs USA face Mexico for Olympic women's football berth

LOS ANGELES, FEB 7 (AFP): The United States and Mexico will duel for a trip to the Tokyo Olympics when they meet Friday in the semi-finals of the CONCACAF women's football qualifier.

The reigning World Cup champion United States sailed through the group stage of qualifying, winning all three of their matches with 18 goals scored and no goals allowed.

Eight players have scored for the Americans, Lindsey Horan leading the way with five goals.

The United States were ousted by eventual runners-up Sweden on penalties in the quarter-finals of the 2016 Rio Games.

It was the United States' earliest exit from the Games, but since then they've basked in a dominant World Cup triumph in France.

History is on their side as they try to qualify for a seventh straight Olympic Games. The United States have won the last four editions of the regional qualifier.

Mexico, meanwhile, will be trying to get back to the Olympics for the first time since 2004 when they take on the mighty Americans at Dignity Sports Park in Carson, California.

They produced a strong group-stage performance with two wins and one defeat, with three goals from Renae Cuellar.

Mexico's lone defeat in the tournament was to Canada, which like the United States swept their group matches without allowing a goal.

Canada will battle for one of the two Olympic berths from the region when they take on Costa Rica in the other semi-final. The Canadians are riding high after out-scoring opponents 22-0 in the group stage.

Cash-strapped...

by 2 per cent," the minister said detailing the motor vehicle tax hike.

A total of Rs 200 crore additional revenue was expected through this measure, Isaac said.

Another Rs 250 crore was planned to be mobilised by making an increase of 10 per cent in the existing fair value of land and hiking the fair value of notified land near large-scale projects at a maximum of 30 per cent.

The annual luxury building tax, levied on residential buildings, was revised under four slabs, expecting an additional revenue of Rs 16 crore.

By imposing a fee of Rs 200 for issuing location map and Rs 100 for issuing Record of Right (thandaper) by village offices, an additional revenue of Rs 100 crore is expected, the minister said.

"The expected gain in GST collection has not been materialised....recession has also adversely affected tax collection. It is expected that there will be a shortfall of Rs 10,113 crore in the anticipated tax income of this year," Isaac said.

Even amid the crisis, the Left minister showed special attention to enhance various welfare pensions, given by the government.

"The previous government had disbursed Rs 9,311 crore for welfare pensions. Now, on completion of its fourth year, the LDF government has crossed Rs 22,000 crore.

Social security pension has been given to 13 lakh old age people...all welfare pensions are enhanced to Rs 1,300 (which is Rs 1,200 now)," the minister said.

Against Rs 760 crore during the year 2016-17, the total outlay for schemes for women was enhanced to Rs 1,506 crore in the present budget, which is 7.3 per cent of the plan outlay, Isaac said.

"If the special component for women in other 50 schemes is also taken into account, the total share for women will come to 18.4 per cent," he said.

With the commencing of the third stage of Life Mission, an ambitious housing project of the CPI(M)-led LDF government, in 2020-21, 40,000 houses would be made available to the scheduled community and fisherfolk, he said.

As part of cost cutting, curbs would be imposed on the purchase of new cars by government departments and restriction would be imposed on the creation of new posts.

In his two-and-half hour budget speech, Isaac attacked the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre for reducing central assistance and excluding the southern state from flood relief assistance of 2019.

Alleging that the aim of the Centre's economic policy was to "strangle" the state government financially, he said the state's borrowing limit had been reduced besides central grants cut short.

The state's share of GST compensation for December was yet to be paid, besides huge amount was pending to be released from centrally sponsored schemes.

There will be a total shortfall of Rs 8,330 crore in the central assistance, including loans, for January, February and March 2020 and this has put unprecedented financial constraints on the state exchequer, the minister said.

The cumulative deficit at the end of the year was pegged at Rs 98.80 crore, the minister added.

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Fully furnished 3BHK flat available for rent/ lease at Church Road near DPH. Roadside and five minutes walking distance from MG Marg. **For more details: 9083826462 /9832556698**

GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

General land 30X40 (3 Plots) available for sale at Tadong 6th Mile next to Harka Maya College. Flat land No cutting required. Price 27 Lakhs (negotiable). **Contact: 9800201335**

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

Governor attends Senior Citizen Day at Mellidara

MELLI, 07 FEB (IPR): Governor, Ganga Prasad attended the 9th Senior Citizen Day at Mahatma Gandhi Park, Village Administrative Centre at Mellidara Paiyong GPU, today. He was accompanied by SDM (Jorethang), R. B. Bhandari, SDPO (Jorethang), S. K. Shrestha alongside other officials, senior citizens and Panchayats alike.

Addressing the gathering, the Governor extended warm wishes on the occasion of Senior Citizens Day. He commended the Gram Panchayat Unit of Mellidara Paiyong in successfully organizing this day and urged other GPU's to also emulate the same.

The Governor urged the youths of the locality to acknowledge the contributions and knowledge of the elderly and implement the same for the upliftment of the civil society. Citing, the example of 99 years old elder



person who was present during the celebration the Governor advocated to take inspiration from him through his valuable life experience and inculcate these experiences in our day to day life.

Speaking about the work of the Panchayats he emphasized that the labour done at the grassroot level is of paramount importance. He

also highlighted that Sikkim is renowned as an Organic State and said that focus should be laid on farming and added that for farming water is absolutely necessary.

In this regard, the Governor spoke in brief about Central Government's scheme named 'Jal Jeevan Mission' (JJM) which is aimed at increasing water available

to households. The goal of JJM is to provide functional tap connection to every household. This Mission plans to augment local water sources, recharge existing sources and promote water harvesting and de-salination, wherever required.

It may be mentioned that the Governor also provided monetary provision for the upliftment

of the VAC, Mellidara Paiyong.

Speaking about today's observance, panchayat president, Kusum Dhakal spoke in brief about the Senior Citizens Day celebration which is being held at Mellidara since the past many years. She also said that various activities to attend to the needs of senior citizens including that of medical check-up, pilgrimage tours and various other substantial ventures have been undertaken by the panchayats and the people of the locality.

During, the course of the program Area co-ordinator, Balam Sharma was also felicitated by the Governor and other officials. The program was marked by colorful cultural extravaganza prepared by different Self Help Groups and local artists. The Governor also distributed blankets to the senior citizens.

Agri Minister goes on air to interact with farmers



GANGTOK, 07 FEB [IPR]: Agriculture Minister Lok Nath Sharma along with the Secretary, Agriculture Department, Rinzing C. Bhutia, and Director [Horticulture], Padam Subba, attended the "Live Phone-in Grameen Karyakram," a special broadcast dedicated to farmers at All India Radio, Gangtok, this evening.

Minister Sharma highlighted the various schemes and programmes of the state government implemented by the Departments of Agriculture,

Horticulture and Animal Husbandry and interacted with the farmers during the live programme broadcast from 6:05 PM to 6:35 PM on All India Radio, Gangtok.

While interacting with the farmers, Minister Sharma fielded questions from farmers and explained provisions of subsidised loans for farmers, compensation/ ex-gratia for cultivation damaged by wildlife, marketing perspectives, etc.

During the programme farmers from Regu, Labdang, Nam-

cheybong, Temi, Lingmoo and other phoned in their queries.

The Minister also spoke about the financial incentives on offer for dairy farmers delivering more than five litres of milk at the collection centres on daily basis from the financial year 2020-21 onwards.

He also spoke about the marketing facilities established by the State Government and urged farmers to increase the production of turmeric, cardamom, ginger and buckwheat.

Singtam's worrying garbage woes

YOGEN THATAL

SINGTAM, 07 FEB:

Singtam Nagar Panchayat had taken a strict stand against unauthorised dumping and littering last year, but the resolve appears to be failing now and several spots in and around Singtam wear a desolate layer of garbage.

Take the accompanying photograph of Rong Chu [Singtam Kholi] for instance and the scat-

tered refuse from households, construction sites, neighbourhood canteens etc bring home not only lack of civic sense among stakeholders, but also the failure of the concerned authorities.

The disinterest is infectious it appears and even the riverside walkway, which the people used to take pride in and jointly take care of remains neglected nowadays.

Kerala FM begins budget presentation with anti-CAA remarkks

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB 7(PTI):

Kerala Finance Minister T M Thomas Isaac on Friday began presenting the fifth budget of the CPI(M)-led LDF government for the 2020-21 fiscal by making remarks against the Citizenship Amendment Act and the unanimous resolution passed by the state assembly against it.

Stating the amended act was posing a threat to the basic credentials of the Constitution, he said the country was witnessing the biggest protests ever in the post-Independence era.

Students and women are at the forefront of the anti-CAA agitations and the hope of the country lies in the youth who hit the streets vowing they would not let the country down, he said.

Coming down heavily on the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre, Isaac said a communalised government machinery, leaders who talk only about "disgust and hatred" and their party workers who consider violence as their duty was the current reality in the country.

"Generally speaking, it is the present India... The concerns triggered by Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) are beyond words. The fear of detention centres are hanging above the head of over 19 lakh people of Assam who have lived as Indians till yesterday," he said.

Quoting from a poem 'Fear' by a 15-year old boy from Wayanad Dhruvath Gautham who wrote 'fear is country

and silence is an ornament!', Isaac said "even the imagination of our children is now filled with fear".

Referring to the stringent opposition raised by the Left government in the state against the CAA and NRC, the finance minister lavished praise on the joint protests led by the ruling LDF and opposition UDF against the central act.

Setting aside political differences, the rival fronts in the state had joined hands to protest when the country had faced existential threat which had become a model for other states, he said.

When Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and Leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala jointly protested at the same venue against CAA, Kerala became a model to other states, the senior leader added.

The state showcased the same unity while passing a resolution requesting the centre to repeal the CAA and filing a suit in the apex court against this under the Article 130, he said.

"The country's economy is heading towards a severe economic crisis like that witnessed in 2009," he said. Earlier, the references to anti-CAA protests had found a place in the Pinarayi Vijayan government's policy address also.

While presenting the policy address in the House, Governor Arif Mohammed Khan had read out references to anti-CAA resolution passed by the house, despite disagreeing with it.

Anand not giving up, wants to have a 'lighter' 2020

TAPAN MOHANTA

KOLKATA, FEB 7 (PTI):

He is struggling to recreate his magic on 64 squares, of late but giving up is not yet an option for five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand, who has opted for a lighter 2020 season.

Anand will skip four to five tournaments this year including the Grand Chess Tour.

He could not qualify for the Candidates 2020 and had a below-par outing at the Tata Steel Masters in Wijk aan Zee, Netherlands last month, finishing joint sixth spot with Anish Giri, Jan-Krzysztof Duda and Alireza Firouzja.

"The thoughts of giving-up comes up but at least this year, I don't think it's going to happen. I'm looking forward to playing the events that I have," Anand told PTI on the sidelines of his book launch 'Mind Master', co-authored by journalist Susan Ninan.

"I don't think about it a lot. The qualification cycle is very unpredictable so, I always figure if I qualify for something then I'll worry about it but there's no point thinking about it you know two stages earlier," Anand, who has now slipped to 15 in ranking, said.

Anand however said he does not have any regrets on missing out on the world championship bid.

"No, why should I. No, not at all. If there was, it was briefly last year but it was already clear in October that I wasn't challenging and that's it. I have accepted that and moved on."

"If I do it, it's it's fine. But I have already won the title five times. So why should I be disappointed?"

Here in the city as part of "Tata Steel Kolkata Literary Meet", Anand wants to spend time with his family and skip the qualification events and the Grand Chess Tour.

"This year it looks like it'll be a much lighter year. I will not play the

GCT events I will not play about four or five events less than last year to start off and then there is already the qualification events. I will not play something like Isle of Man and so on. So it's a much lighter year." "I decided that's nice. There are many years I wish I was playing less and so this year, you know, let's take advantage of it. Even if you're playing few tournaments, you still want to do well. So I'll try to train a lot and get ready for them."

After Anand, there is only Vidit Gujrathi and P Harikrishna inside the 2700-mark but the chess wizard said the future of Indian chess is bright with the likes of Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa, Nihal Sarin, Gukesh D and Raunak Sadhwani, all under 15. "If you look at our current crop of youngsters, I think we have a very good future. They (Nihal, Prag, Gukesh and Sadhwani) are all under 15. That means also they've got a lot of time to fulfil their potential and I'm hopeful they will."

"What is really happening is that the chess world is very competitive nowadays. So a lot of people fighting for every qualification sport, every tournament and as a result, it's very hard. Hari Krishna came up to the top-20 and he's still doing well. Vidit a bit further behind, but still a 2700 player."

Anand said he was shocked by the death of NBA legend Kobe Bryant who died in a helicopter crash last month along with his 13-year-old daughter Gianna.

"The worst thing is that probably what he's thinking when the chopper is going down. It must be an awful feeling for a father to be in that situation. If you think about it, it's really horrible."

"I followed his career in the Lakers and all and he's a huge legend in basketball. And the story is just very tragic. First of all him but his daughter was there as well," he said.

Lingmoo-Payong meets to eliminate TB from GPU by June



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 07 FEB:

In its effort to eliminate tuberculosis completely from the GPU by June 2020, Lingmoo Payong Gram Panchayat Unit in South Sikkim organised a leadership development programme for its volunteers at the Gram Prasashan Kenndra hall on Friday.

The programme was organised in collaboration with the NGO, Stars of Hope, under its JEET [Joint Effort for Eliminating TB] initiative supported by the State TB Cell.

The programme was


chaired by Panchayat President Yogesh Bhandari and was attended by Kishore Thapa, BDO Yangang; Dr Nirmal Gurung, APO, State TB Cell; Dr Anju Rai, DTO, Namchi; Dr Anesh Biswakarma, MO, PHC Yangang; Bikash Thapa Chairperson, SOH; staff of Lingee PHSC and Lingmoo PHSC, representative of schools, ASHA, AWW and Helpers, GPU staff and student interns from Sikkim University.

The BDO urged for collaboration by all stakeholders to accomplish the task of eliminating tuberculosis from the GPU.

Dr Nirmal Gurung made a power-point presentation on TB. The Medical Officer from Yangang PHC assured to provide all support to interventions undertaken by the GPU for this initiative.


Dr Anju Rai, APO, in turn assured to provide all support from the district level to help the GPU achieve its target.

On the occasion, the guests and panchayat members released the official calendar of the GPU for 2020. The programme was coordinated and conducted by PRI members from the GPU.



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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.

<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 5px;">Symptoms of nCoV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fever ● Difficulty in breathing ● Dry Cough ● Severe acute respiratory syndrome ● Pneumonia - like symptoms 	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 5px;">Precautions to Prevent nCoV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wash 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.
<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #00ff00; color: black; padding: 5px;">Treatment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition. ● No vaccinations available as of now. ● Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected. 	

If you seek help, you may call :

-Toll free no. 104

District surveillance Officer

EAST : 7029372100

WEST : 9593297800

NORTH : 9641957468

SOUTH : 7407691463

New STNM

AMS : 9434711402

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE

GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

To Defeat Insular Designs, Get Communal for Real

It is wrong to confuse belonging to a community with being sectarian

In our country, the word “communal” has too many negative connotations associated with and nothing illustrates the short-sightedness of the society and politicians more than this calumny. The word has been misrepresented from its definition of “belonging to a community” to being understood as “sectarian” and even its larger connotations of being a “shared” experience have been completely lost.

Misrepresentation is one thing, but what is worse is that as a people we have become increasingly compartmentalised. At a time when the world talks of a global village, it is sad that what occupies our collective imagination is an obsession with parochial divisions on caste, community, ethnic and geographical lines. And now, even political leanings. While this shortsightedness serves hateful politicians and their politics rather well, it causes too much damage to traditional relationships and co-dependence between communities. It goes without saying that these divisions need to be ended, but since calls for amity and mutual respect seem to be falling on deaf ears, may be the word communal needs to be returned to its original definition and in the resultant confusion then, perhaps, the sectarian bhakts will begin to flounder.

Yes, if the trend is to be reversed, the word needs to be understood afresh. If one were to keep an open mind, then there is nothing wrong with being ‘communal’, sans the paranoia of course. To continue with the argument in support of being communal, it is an urgent necessity if the communities are interested in preserving their distinct identities in the face of modernisation and its growing pressure for homogeneity. Into the mix has now arrived the impositions of majoritarian politics.

What one can't ignore is that the preservation of cultures [or for that matter, even political rights] need not necessarily involve confrontation. Communalism, as in the collective experience that we concern ourselves with here, and not the lynch mobs and statue-smashing hordes that the word connotes for most, is about sharing and looking inwards and preserving. It is not about mere posturing, and should have never been allowed to grow beyond the bounds of individual communities because then would become a societal concern and not a communal issue. The point being made here is that people should remain communal till the time it concerns only their community, and the moment it attracts liabilities on others, the representation and voices should become societal and more encompassing.

In the Sikkim context, cries alleging evil designs attempting to divide the Sikkimese society on caste and community lines, now muddled with citizenship issues as well, echo what the dividers in Delhi are peddling, but what one forgets is that society has always been segregated on these lines and will remain so for some time to come. While this might be an uncomfortable truth, it cannot be denied. Where Sikkim has delivered well is that it has never allowed these ‘designs’ to actually tear the people apart. Of course, the rhetoric will continue as groups seek to tease the natural differences and traditional prejudices into deeper fault lines. The people have not fallen for these designs yet, but that is thanks to the inherent pragmatism of the people. Unfortunately, in the absence of debates on important issues in the public domain, the field remains open for posturing to slip in a victory some day. Many a leader has managed to incite passions with half-truths, selective amnesia and blinkered projections. These have succeeded essentially among closed groups, but as mentioned, since clear defences have not been erected, the suspicions could spread. The best defences will come from deeper enquiry into issues of identity and history and sharper debates on received wisdoms and ground realities. The young need to approach these issues more keenly because they will be inheriting the load of unresolved issues and little understood legacies.

In the meanwhile, it should be a communal face that Sikkim presents to the Centre – a people communal as Sikkimese and not as Sikkimese BLs and Sikkimese Nepalese or Sikkimese Byaparis. The States hands are already tied given its small size and further segregation will only make the Sikkimese voice even more feeble and incoherent in Delhi. Let's accept it, a lot that needs to be done in and for Sikkim needs to make its way from Delhi. If anyone is to take Sikkim seriously, everyone here needs to speak in the same voice. This will require Sikkim to not only shed its prejudices and take everyone into confidence, but also compare notes and speak more earnestly for each other.

That digression aside, it is important that people belong to a community with pride – something that come only with security and confidence – instead of being divided by fear. When we become communal on these lines, the hate of sectarian divisiveness will find no takers.

WRITE US:

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Fighting Coronavirus Fear With Empathy: Lessons learned from how Africans got blamed for Ebola

KEVIN J.A. THOMAS
theconversation.com

With coronavirus cases exploding in China, the U.S. is once again responding to a global epidemic. Five years ago, when the Ebola virus infected more than 28,000 people in 10 countries, many people were surprised to learn that four of these cases were diagnosed on U.S. soil.

Based on research I conducted for a book about the Ebola crisis and prejudice against certain groups of people associated with it, I fear that Americans might make immigrants the villain instead of the virus during the coronavirus epidemic.

There's reason for concern. Since the first case of the coronavirus was discovered in December 2019, it has affected more than 20,000 people, including 11 in the U.S.

If the U.S.' experience with epidemics tell us anything, it is that these events will be followed by increased public attention aimed at immigrants from China. This is because during epidemics, attention is typically focused on groups from countries where they started. And, this attention is rarely accompanied by an understanding of immigrants' complicated experiences.

More often, it is about blame. Chinese immigrants in Canada already are reporting examples of xenophobia. Several students at the University of California, Berkeley complained about what they considered to be a xenophobic Instagram post from the university after news of the coronavirus; the university deleted the post.

As I argue, based on research presented in my book “Global Epidemics, Local Implications: African Immigrants and the Ebola Crisis in Dallas,” the experience of African immigrants during the Ebola epidemic in 2014 can provide us with important lessons about how the U.S. and its people should respond.

This does not imply that the Ebola virus and the new coronavirus are similar. Yet, there are important facets of African immigrants' experiences during the Ebola crisis that can inform how Americans think about the current experiences of Chinese immigrants.

FEAR AND CONCERN FOR LOVED ONES FAR AWAY

For starters, the public tends to ignore the fears and traumas experienced by immigrants who see

epidemics unfolding in their origin countries.

Some immigrants experience the devastation firsthand, because they had traveled to their countries of origin when the outbreak occurred. During the 2014 Ebola epidemic, for example, African immigrants visiting West Africa when the outbreak began lived through the ensuing social disorder, witnessed the rising death toll and feared infection from the deadly virus.

More often, however, immigrants experience outbreaks from afar. During the Ebola epidemic, my research shows that immigrants who remained in the U.S. were not spared from these emotional experiences. While advances in global travel and communications technology have helped immigrants maintain connections with these countries, they also provide channels through which the consequences of disease outbreaks abroad are experienced.

News of the mounting deaths of family members created a paralyzing feeling for immigrants in the U.S. who knew that they couldn't risk traveling to the endemic countries abroad. At the same time, they felt being guilty about their inability to participate in customary burial rites.

BUT WORST OF ALL, BLAME

In addition to fear and guilt, however, immigrants often experience a great deal of blame. During the Ebola crisis, negative responses from Americans who used caricatures of immigrants' ethnicity to stigmatize them as carriers of disease only worsened immigrants' stress and fear. For example, many heard racist tropes about Africans' presumed penchant for kissing corpses and their habit of consuming exotic beasts.

In this current coronavirus epidemic, we have already begun to see the rise of xenophobia and the use of ethnic stereotypes about Chinese consumption of exotic meats to link the presumed cultural practices of Chinese immigrants with the spread of the virus.

Such negative reactions are not new. They are similar to past public reactions that blamed Russian Jews for the 1892 typhoid epidemic and Italians for the spread of polio in 1916.

Stigmatizing immigrants does nothing to contribute to the fight against epidemics. Instead, such actions are usually counterproductive because they fail to incorporate immigrants into broader efforts

to combat the spread of disease.

HOW IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES HELP

Immigrant communities provide a critical line of defense for detecting, monitoring and preventing the spread of the disease, as I discuss in my book. With Ebola, these included the development of strategies to prevent the spread of the virus and improve public health by African immigrants after the first case of Ebola was discovered in the U.S.

Accordingly, African immigrant communities promoted initiatives to discourage travel to affected countries. They also helped develop systems for ensuring that Africans returning from these countries abide by quarantine period required by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Beyond these actions, West African immigrants took other practical steps to reduce person-to-person transmissions of Ebola, while also supporting efforts to address the consequences of the disease abroad. In addition, these immigrants promoted the practice of frequent hand-washing with chlorine-based solutions and discouraged social norms of hand-shaking within their communities. These actions were complemented by efforts to assist in contact tracing, the identification of people who may have come in contact with infected persons.

Building on these initiatives, they also collaborated with local businesses and other mainstream institutions to care for families affected by Ebola and assisted humanitarian organizations working to combat the spread of disease in West Africa.

When a nation responds to epidemics by stigmatizing immigrants, it misses opportunities to build strategic coalitions for preventing the spread of viruses. Now that the first person-to-person transmission of the coronavirus has been confirmed in the U.S., the need for such coalitions has become more urgent.

In my view, our nation's response to Chinese immigrant communities should be based on actions informed by facts and not fear. Without such actions, we risk failure in our attempts to build the resilient communities needed to prevent the occurrence of a greater public health emergency within our borders.

[the writer is Professor of Sociology, Demography, and African Studies, Pennsylvania State University]

Deported to Death: US sent 138 Salvadorans home to be killed

MNEESHA GELLMAN
theconversation.com

At least 138 people deported from the United States to El Salvador since 2013 have been killed, according to a new report by Human Rights Watch, which investigates human rights abuses worldwide.

The 117-page report also says researchers identified at least 70 deportees who were sexually assaulted, tortured or kidnapped. Many victims were asylum-seekers attacked or killed by the gangs they originally fled.

The findings show that “the U.S. is repeatedly violating its obligations to protect Salvadorans from return to serious risk of harm,” Human Rights Watch says.

The group used court records, police reports, interviews with victims and their families and news articles to document the fates of deportees. It is the first systematic effort to find out what happened to Salvadorans whose asylum claims were rejected in U.S. immigration courts because they failed to demonstrate “credible fear” of violence in El Salvador.

International asylum laws created after the Holocaust require countries to take in people who are persecuted for their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

El Salvador has one of the world's highest homicide rates. It is one of the main sources of migration to the U.S.

As part of its immigration crackdown, the Trump administration in September signed an agreement with El Salvador requiring the Central American country to keep asylum

seekers there while they await the results of their asylum claims.

But the murders of 138 deportees belie any notion that El Salvador can protect citizens who are under threat.

ROOTS OF IMPUNITY

Roughly the size of New Jersey, El Salvador is densely populated and highly connected by cellphone service and social media. The vulnerable groups protected under international asylum law cannot easily go under the radar or relocate if targeted by gangs, corrupt police or domestic abusers.

Hundreds of Salvadorans are killed every month. Murders, disappearances and tortures almost always go unsolved in El Salvador. Criminals, especially those with access to power, are rarely punished for their wrongdoing.

I have documented this culture of impunity across Central America and Mexico, focusing on the indigenous people, women and political dissidents who are so often victims of political violence.

This violence dates back centuries, to Spain's bloody conquest of the Americas. As in the U.S. colonial-era brutality has lasting impacts on the region's race, class and gender divisions.

In 1932, the massacre of indigenous Salvadorans and leftists who rebelled against dictator Maximiliano Hernández Martínez left between 10,000 and 30,000 dead.

Communist Party member Farabundo Martí, who led Salvadoran peasant farmers in their revolt against political corruption and unjust resource allocation, was assassinated after the massacre. But the struggle continued.

By the 1970s, dissident factions

again organized against state oppression. United as the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, these groups eventually waged war on the ruling ARENA party, which they blamed for oppressing the Salvadoran working class.

The subsequent Salvadoran civil war killed 75,000 people. In 1992, with intensive military support from the United States, ARENA defeated the rebels.

The 1992 El Salvador peace accords, overseen by the United Nations, were meant to bring national reconciliation. A truth commission documented widespread human rights abuses committed by state and paramilitary forces during the war. But days after the report was released, in 1993, El Salvador's ARENA-controlled congress passed an amnesty law that excused most government and military officials.

As a result, the root causes of El Salvador's conflict – particularly, unequal access to insufficient resources – still plague society. So does the very weak rule of law that allowed civil war criminals to go unpunished.

Neither the rightist or leftist governments that have held power since have managed to change this.

El Salvador's defense minister recently assessed that there are more gang members than soldiers in his country. Police in El Salvador are extremely aggressive in pursuing them, and civilians can get caught in the crossfire, Human Rights Watch finds.

The resulting dangerous disarray sent 46,800 residents to seek asylum in the U.S. last year. Risking the unknown violence of migration over

guaranteed violence at home is, for many Salvadorans, a logical decision.

HUMAN SECURITY

Crime and violence in El Salvador has declined since President Nayib Bukele took office in June 2019, according to the government.

The president credits his tough-on-gangs policing with improving security in the country. But some crime analysts say the apparent drop in homicides is actually a manipulation of crime data. The government recently changed how it counts murders, eliminating deaths that result from confrontation with security forces – police killings – from the homicide category.

In any case, levels of violence in El Salvador are still among the world's highest.

Police regularly turn a blind eye to violence by gang members, including both MS-13 and Barrio 18 gangs, either due to corruption or concern for their own safety. As a result, Salvadoran police frequently fail to meaningfully protect people from gang violence.

In these circumstances, deporting Salvadoran asylum-seekers may violate an international law called “non-refoulement.”

According to the 1954 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees, which both the U.S. and El Salvador signed, states cannot expel refugees to a territory “where his life or freedom would be threatened.”

Migrants know El Salvador can't protect them. That, of course, is why they flee. Now the United States government has to know that, too.

[the writer is Associate Professor of Political Science, Emerson College]

Odisha woman set ablaze by in-laws over dowry, dies

KENDRAPARA (ODISHA), FEB 7 (PTI): A 21-year-old woman, who was battling for life for nearly a week after being set ablaze by her in-laws in Odisha's Kendrapara district over dowry, succumbed to the burn injuries, police said on Friday.

Rashmita Sahu, who sustained more than 60 per cent burns, died on Thursday night at the SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack, they said.

Police said they have already arrested her parents- in-law and a sister-in-law, while two other suspects are still absconding.

The five persons allegedly tied the woman to a cot and set her on fire after pouring kerosene on Saturday, police said, adding that she was rescued by her neighbours.

Police have recorded her dying declaration, based on which a case of murder has been registered.

The woman's husband is working as a plumber in Oman and was not involved in the crime, police said.

The woman was tortured for dowry by her in-laws since her marriage in June 2018, they said.

Detention without charges worst abomination in democracy: Chidambaram on PSA on Omar, Mehbooba

NEW DELHI, FEB 7 (PTI): Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Friday slammed the government for invoking the Public Safety Act against former Jammu and Kashmir chief ministers Mehbooba Mufti and Omar Abdullah and said detention without charges is the worst abomination in a democracy.

Mufti and Abdullah, besides two political stalwarts from the PDP and its arch-rival National Conference, were booked under the stringent Public Safety Act (PSA) by the administration on Thursday, officials in the union territory said.

In a series of tweets, Chidambaram said, "Shocked and devastated by the cruel invocation of the Public Safety Act against Omar Abdullah, Mehbooba Mufti and others".

"Detention without charges is the worst abomination in a democracy. When unjust laws are passed or unjust laws are invoked, what option do the people have than to protest peacefully?" the former home minister tweeted.

Hitting out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chidambaram said, "the PM says that protests will lead to anarchy and laws passed by Parliament and legislatures must be obeyed. He has forgotten history and the inspiring examples of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela".

Unjust laws must be opposed through peaceful resistance and civil disobedience. That is satyagraha, he added.

PM attends celebrations on signing of Bodo Peace Accord at Kokrajhar in Assam

Bodo Agreement to usher in a new dawn for Assam, says PM

GANGTOK, 07 FEB [PIB]: In a fervent appeal the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi today gave a clarion call to those pursuing the Path of Violence to lay down their arms and return to the mainstream like the Bodo Cadres.

Prime Minister was participating to participate in the celebrations of the signing of the Bodo Agreement at Kokrajhar in Assam today.

This is his first visit to the North-East since the signing of the historic accord on the 27th of January 2020.

"For those who continue to have faith in arms and violence either in the North East, or Naxal areas or Jammu Kashmir, I request them to learn and draw inspiration from the Bodo Youth and return to the Mainstream. Come back and start celebrating life", he said.

In his address Prime Minister recalled the contribution made by leaders BodofaUpendranath Brahma Ji, Roopnath Brahma Ji.

Bodo Accord – A reflection of Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas Sabka Vishwas Prime Minister praised the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), Hagrama Mahilare, the Chief of BTC and the Government of Assam for playing a very positive role in the Bodo agreement.

"Today is the day for the entire North East including Assam to welcome a new beginning in the 21st century, a new dawn, a new inspira-



tion. Today is the day to take a pledge that development and trust would continue to be our mainstay and that they would be further strengthened. Let us not be engulfed by the darkness of violence ever again. Let us welcome a Peaceful Assam, a New Resolute India", he said.

He termed the signing of the Bodo Accord as all the more significant as India is celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi this year.

"Gandhiji used to say that whatever be the fruits of non-violence, they would be accepted by all", Prime Minister added.

Dwelling on the Bodo Accord the Prime Minister said that it would benefit the entire people of the region. He said that the Powers of the Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) have been enhanced and strengthened under the accord. "Everybody is a

winner in this accord, peace is a winner and humanity is a winner in this accord", he said.

A commission would be formed to determine the boundaries of the Bodo Territorial Area Districts (BTAD).

Prime Minister announced a package of Rs 1500 Crore to benefit Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri of the BTAD.

"This would help in all round development of Bodo Culture, Region and Education", he said.

Stressing on the increased responsibility of the BTC and the Government of Assam, the Prime Minister said that the motto of development would be only through SabkaSaath, SabkaVikas and Sabka-Vishwaas.

"Today, in the Bodo region, new hopes, new dreams, new spirits have been communicated, the responsibility of all of you has increased. I

am confident that the Bodo Territorial Council will now develop a new model of development by taking every society here. This will strengthen Assam and strengthen the spirit of India, a superior India", Prime Minister added.

Prime Minister said his Government wants to implement the Clause 6 of the Assam Accord and that it is waiting for the report of the committee.

New approach to meet aspirations of Northeast

Prime Minister said that the Government had adopted a new approach to deal with various issues plaguing the North East.

He said such an approach was possible only after a deep understanding of the aspirations and the emotional issues of the region.

"The solutions were found through deliberations and discus-

sions with all concerned and with empathy. They were found as we dealt with everyone as our own and not as outsiders. We conversed with them and made them feel one of our own. This has helped reduced extremism. Earlier, there were about 1000 killings in the North-East due to extremism but today, on the whole, the situation is normal and peaceful.

North East is the Growth Engine of the country

"Over 3 thousand kilometers of roads have been built in the North East in the last three-four years. New national highways have been approved. The entire North East rail network has been converted into broad gauge. There is also a focus on strengthening the youth of the Northeast with new institutions of education, skill and sports. Apart from this, new hostels have also been created for students of North East in Delhi and Bangalore", Prime Minister added.

Prime Minister said that infrastructure does not mean a combination of mortar and cement. It has a human side to it. It makes people feel that someone cares for them.

"When lakhs of people get connectivity due to the completion of many projects hanging for decades like Bogibeel bridge, then their confidence in the government increases. This all-round development has played a very big role in turning separation into attachment. When there is attachment, when progress starts reaching out to everyone equally, people also get ready to work together. When people get ready to work together, even the biggest issues are resolved", Prime Minister added.

Five naxals held in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh



DANTEWADA, FEB 7 (PTI): Five naxals including three girls were held from separate places in Chhattisgarh's insurgent-hit Dantewada district on Friday, the police said.

Security forces had received information that naxals were planning attacks on police in urban areas of the district, Superintendent of Police (SP) Abhishek Pallava said.

Combined teams of the police's District Reserve Guard (DRG), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and local police conducted raids in Kirandul, Dantewada and Geedam, rounding up nine suspects including seven minors, he said.

Two of them were identified as Sodhi Bhima (29) and Sodhi Nanda (20), who were part of "action teams" of Maoists while three girls were members of the rebels' 'Jan militia', Pallava said.

Remaining four minors were released as they were found to have no connection with Maoists, the SP said.

Bhima and Nanda were allegedly involved

in the killing of a villager in Nilawaya forests on January 31, planting Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) to target security forces in Potali area during the recent panchayat polls, and attacks on police and CRPF personnel, the official said.

Both were carrying a reward of Rs 2 lakh each on their heads.

Maoist literature, a detonator and 100 gm gun powder were recovered from their possession, he said.

The three Jan militia members, aged 12-17 years, were allegedly involved in reconnaissance of security forces and planting explosives and iron spikes to target them, he said.

Naxals had planned attacks in view of 110th anniversary of 'Bhumkal revolt' between February 4 to 10, he said. They had recruited minor boys and girls for use as human shield, the SP claimed.

'Bhumkal revolt' refers to a rebellion by tribal farmers in Bastar region against British rulers in 1910.

Bidar now in aviation map of India

BENGALURU, FEB 7 (PTI): Bidar on Friday was put on the aviation map of India after the first direct flight from the city to Bengaluru under the UDAN scheme was launched by Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa and civil aviation secretary Pradeep Singh Kharola.

TruJet will operate the daily flight to and from Bidar and Bengaluru.

It will leave Bengaluru at 11.40 AM and reach Bidar at 1.05 PM. The return flight will leave Bidar at 1.25 PM and reach Bengaluru at 3.15 PM, an official release said.

It said the airport has been remodeled at a cost of Rs 11 crore under the union government's Regional Connectivity Scheme-Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik (RCS-UDAN). The cost was shared

jointly by the state and central government, it said.

Kharola said the newly built airport inks the "commitment and perseverance" of the Ministry of Civil Aviation to establish substantial air connectivity in India.

The inauguration of Bidar airport marks the operationalisation of the eighth airport in the Karnataka region, said the press release.

Prior to Bidar, flight services from Kalaburagi to Bengaluru had been started last year.

The release said MoCA undertook the task of remodeling Bidar Air Force Station for commercial aviation purposes as people frequently had to undertake a 11 hour journey by either train or bus to Bengaluru for all administrative work.

MYM Dalkhola organizes blood donation camp



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 07 FEB:

Marwari Yuva Manch, Dalkhola Branch under Paschim Bengal Sikkim Prantiya Marwari Yuva Manch in association with Sri Sadhu Margi Jain Sangh,

Dalkhola organised a voluntary blood donation camp at Dadi Bhanwan.

It is informed that 47 units of blood was collected and was deposited to Lion's Terai Blood Bank Siliguri.

Real Madrid dumped out by Real Sociedad in Copa del Rey thriller

MADRID, 07 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: Somewhere amid the din the final second slipped away, the final whistle went and Real Madrid were defeated for the first time in 22 games, eliminated from the Copa del Rey by Real Sociedad.

Having gone 3-0 and 4-1 down, Madrid seemed to be going out without a fight but there is always a fight here. A goal from Rodrygo with nine minutes left and another from Nacho in stoppage time gave them hope of a dramatic comeback, the Bernabéu roaring. In the end, though, Madrid ran out of time, leaving the Basque side heading into the semi-final with a 4-3 win.

The competition has been reborn this season,

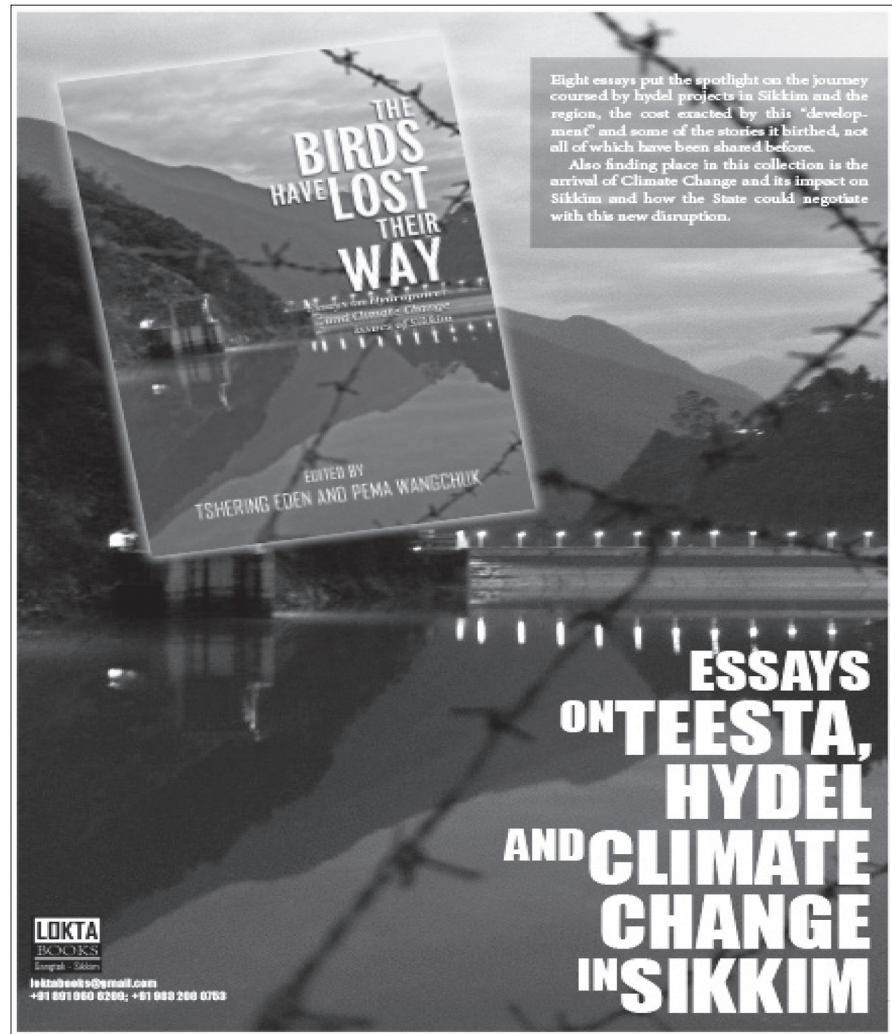
with plenty of upsets after the format was changed to favour the underdog. And yet, the game where there was no advantage for the supposed weaker side delivered perhaps as big a shock as there has been – not least in the way it happened.

Madrid, until their late rebellion, were taken apart by a young, dynamic and hugely exciting team that dominated the ball and the chances – so much so that there were two ovations from the home fans, both for visiting players. Martin Ødegaard, on loan from Madrid, was applauded off and so was Alexander Isak, who scored twice.

Between them those two players had given Real Sociedad a lead that they ended up being sur-

prisingly close to losing. They had performed superbly, too. Ødegaard did not celebrate the opener 22 minutes in – his shot clipping under the body of Alphonse Areola in goal – but there was no stopping his teammates.

Sociedad had deserved that opener and might have added to it, too. A second was ruled out by VAR and a handful of first-half opportunities were wasted. When Isak finished brilliantly twice early in the second half – the first an acrobatic volley, the second a shot smashed into the roof of the net – it was an act of justice. Marcelo scored for Real soon after to suggest there might still be a game after all, only for Mikel Merino to make it 4-1 with 20 minutes to go.



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Serena in Fed Cup fourth decade under pressure from young pretenders

PARIS, FEB 7 (AFP): Serena Williams enters her fourth decade as a Fed Cup player with the United States on Friday and Saturday as the 2020 qualifiers get under way.

The 38-year-old icon teams with newly-crowned Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin and teenage star Coco Gauff as the US tackle Latvia in Everett, Washington.

In total, there are eight ties with the winners earning places in the new-look Fed Cup finals in Budapest from April 15-17 where 2019 champions France, runners-up Australia, hosts Hungary and wildcard Czech Republic will be waiting.

SERENA'S SENIOR SER-VICE

It was back in 1999 that Serena Williams made her Fed Cup debut in a semi-final win over Italy.

Teammate Sofia Kenin was just eight months old while Coco Gauff was still almost five years away from being born.

Williams has a 100 percent record in singles in the Fed Cup, winning 13 out of 13 rubbers.

However, despite her



longevity, her relationship with the tournament has been very much on-off, playing only in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2012, 2013, 2015 and 2018.

Kenin, now the top-ranked US player at seven in the world after her stunning Grand Slam breakthrough in Melbourne, has a Fed Cup singles record of 1-3 while 15-year-old Gauff has yet to make her debut.

OSAKA EYES JAPAN BREAKTHROUGH

Two-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka is making her first Fed Cup appearance since

helping Japan defeat Great Britain in the 2018 World Group II play-offs.

The world number 10 has won five out of six singles ties she has contested since her 2017 debut.

However, Japan, whose best Fed Cup run was a semi-final spot in 1996, have a tough task this weekend, facing Spain in La Manga.

Japan lost to the Spanish in a World Group II tie last year when Osaka opted to rest.

"I am really happy to be back," said Osaka at Thursday's draw which pitted her against world

number 78 Sara Sorribes Tormo in Friday's opener.

"It would be very special to reach the finals, everyone has worked hard to get this far.

"We lost last year but I hope I can make the difference. That's why I am here. Even if it's on clay and everyone knows I am a hardcourt player.

"I'm trying to learn it."

Clay courts play easily into the comfort zone of a Spain team led by Carla Suarez Navarro, her nation's top player in the absence of Australian Open runner-up Garbine Muguruza.

It will be an emotion-

al week for 31-year-old Suarez Navarro as the world number 55 is in her final season as a professional, 12 years after her Fed Cup bow.

Spain are five-time champions, behind the USA (18), Czech Republic (10) and Australia (seven) on the all-time list.

OLYMPICS ARE FED CUP FACTOR

Places at the Tokyo Olympics are also up for grabs on Friday and Saturday in the eight ties.

Under Fed Cup rules, players are required to be part of a nominated team on at least three occasions in a four-year Olympic cycle.

That excludes players who have represented their nation 20 or more times in their careers, who must be nominated on at least two occasions in the Olympic cycle.

Crucially for this week, all players must be nominated at least once in the 2019-20 cycle.

Serena was 2012 Olympic champion in London while Rio 2016 gold medallist Monica Puig comfortably fulfils the basic qualifying criteria despite a current lowly world ranking of 83.

In-form Bayern out to 'boss' Leipzig in Bundesliga showdown



BERLIN, FEB 7 (AFP): After getting a mid-week "wake-up call" in the German Cup, Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich are relishing the chance to prove their might in a top-of-the-table clash at home to RB Leipzig on Sunday.

Bayern's sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic insists the defending champions want to show nearest rivals Leipzig "who is the boss" at Munich's Allianz Area.

Salihamidzic said the hosts are embracing "the role of favourites", adding that Leipzig had been "weakened a bit" by poor results.

Bayern swept to the top of the table last weekend for the first time since October and have won their last eight games.

However, Hoffenheim found plenty of space to attack in Wednesday's German Cup third-round tie as Bayern conceded two goals in the final 10 minutes as a comfortable 4-1 lead became a nervy 4-3 victory.

"Perhaps it's quite good to realise before the Leipzig game, that things won't simply work of their own accord," admitted Bayern midfielder Joshua Kimmich.

Head coach Hansi Flick called the narrow win a "wake-up call".

Leipzig, who spent more than a month over Christmas top of the table, have had cold water poured on their title aspirations in recent weeks.

A shock 2-0 loss at Eintracht Frankfurt a fortnight ago cost them a four-point lead. Then Bayern went a point ahead at the top after Leipzig's 2-2 draw at home to Borussia Moenchengladbach last Saturday.

Another loss at Frankfurt in midweek, when top-scoring striker Timo Werner and playmaker Emil Forsberg both started on the bench, saw Leipzig dumped them out of the German Cup.

"Leipzig will want to show a reaction," Kimmich said.

Sunday's clash will also see the league's leading scorer Robert Lewandowski, who has 22 goals in 20 games,

go head-to-head with his nearest rival Werner, who is on 20.

Before Bayern and Leipzig slug it out, third-placed Borussia Dortmund could go top on Saturday with a win at Bayer Leverkusen.

Erling Braut Haaland, 19, has a record eight goals in his first four games for Dortmund, who were knocked out of the German Cup in midweek when they went down 3-2 at Werder Bremen.

Sports director Michael Zorc slammed the team for playing "listlessly, comfortably and slowly".

Haaland has yet to play a full 90 minutes for Dortmund as he works his way back to full fitness after a knee injury in December.

ONE TO WATCH: Thomas Mueller

Lewandowski is making the headlines with 35 goals in 29 games after scoring two more in Wednesday's cup win against Hoffenheim.

However, a big factor is the space and chances being created behind him by Mueller, who has seven goals and nine assists in the 14 games since Flick replaced Niko Kovac as head coach in November.

Mueller's form has sparked debate in Germany over whether head coach Joachim Loew should recall the player for Euro 2020 despite telling the 30-year-old last March that his international career is over.

KEY FACTS

180 - The minutes Haaland has needed to score eight goals in four games for Dortmund.

22 - The goals Lewandowski has scored in 22 league games. Only Gerd Mueller, in the 1972/73 season, has ever scored as many goals in the same number of games.

17 - The age of Dortmund midfielder Giovanni Reyna, who scored his first goal for the club in Tuesday's cup defeat at Bremen when he beat two defenders and curled his shot into the top corner.

44 - The goals Lewandowski and Mueller have scored between them for Bayern in all competitions this season.

We've to be little bit more attacking against Indian spinners: Guptill

AUCKLAND, FEB 7 (PTI): New Zealand opener Martin Guptill on Friday said his team will look to pump up the aggression against Indian spinners during the second ODI here on Saturday in pursuit of an early series win against the fancied visitors.

The Black Caps chased down their highest-ever total in ODI cricket at Seddon Park on way to their four-wicket win in the first ODI for a 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

Guptill said the key to New Zealand's victory was playing well against the spinners. Kuldeep Yadav and Ravindra Jadeja were taken to the cleaners in Hamilton by Kiwi batsmen and leaked 148 runs in all.

"It's completely different conditions, isn't it? You have to be a little bit more attacking here I guess and have the confidence that the ball will probably will not spin past your edge as much. You know the odd one might as it did the other night," he said.

"I thought the way we handled the Indian spinners in Hamilton was some of the best we have done it in a long time. So we can take confidence from that going forward in the series."

Guptill also warned his side against complacency, saying it cannot afford to take a world class team like India lightly.

"I don't think you can count India out. They are a world-class side, they have got match winners batting and bowling. So, we still have to put up a very good performance tomorrow to be get another win under the belt and take the series," he said. "Come tomorrow, hopefully we will play well and showcase our skills again."

The 33-year-old opener also discussed the unique challenge of

facing Jasprit Bumrah.

"Don't know (it ever gets) comfortable facing him (Bumrah). But you certainly get used to him. He has got a unique action, he comes in and he is very good with his skills. I thought we played him well on the other night.

"He bowled very well with the new ball and when the time came to take boundaries off him I thought the guys in the middle did that really well and negated him and (did not allow him) to take early wickets," he said.

Guptill said the odd dimensions of Eden Park will play a part in the second ODI and he along with his new opening partner Henry Nicholls will look to build the innings just like they did in Hamilton.

"This ground is different, isn't it? You want to go out and start the way we can and stay as positive as possible. It could be 70 for no loss or it could be 40 for no loss. You just don't know until we go out there and assess the conditions. Once we get out there tomorrow, we see how we get on," he said.

"You want to go out there being positive. Unfortunately in the game of cricket if you lose couple of wickets early you have to rebuild. But if Henry (Nicholls) and I can get across the 10-over mark then hopefully take it as deep as possible."

Guptill also heaped praise on stand-in skipper Tom Latham, who smashed a 48-ball 60 to take the game away from India in Hamilton.

"I thought Tom played brilliantly. He gave himself some time to get in and then flipped the switch when he needed to and took the pressure a little bit off Ross (Taylor). It allowed Ross to settle into his own innings as well," he said.

Pune 7 Aces face Bengaluru Raptors in second semi-final

HYDERABAD, FEB 7 (PTI): An exciting battle will be on the cards when Pune 7 Aces take on defending champions Bengaluru Raptors in the second semi-final of the fifth Premier Badminton League here on Saturday.

After 18 days of thrilling action, the fifth season of the League has reached the knockout stage where North Eastern Warriors will face Chennai Superstarz in the first semi-final on Friday.

North Eastern Warriors and Pune 7 Aces are the only two teams, who made a remarkable turnaround to emerge as the strongest title contenders this season after failing to qualify for the semi-finals

last year. In 2019, Pune had failed to make it to the knockout stage by a whisker but this time Hendra Setiawan and Chirag Shetty ensured that the Aces make their intentions clear right from the start.

They are here to settle for nothing less than the trophy and their talismanic men's doubles pair's five wins from six appearances certainly validate that.

Young Rituparna Das' fearlessness worked wonders for the team when she stunned World No. 14 Beiwen Zhang apart from showing her skills against Michelle Li and the Commonwealth Games champions Chris and Gabrielle Adcock too played a pivotal role in

Pune's journey.

But Pune takes on a team that started slowly only to accelerate towards the end and make their way to the top.

The Bengaluru Raptors showed exceptional resilience as they remain in the hunt for their second consecutive title.

World No. 2 Tai Tzu Ying has won all her six matches while World Championships bronze medallist Sai Praneeth has got back to winning ways to take the team into the semifinals.

With Brice Leverdez delivering for the team as well and with Olympic silver medallist Chan Peng Soon in the squad, it would be hard for anyone to topple the Season 4 champions.

Barcelona crisis grows as Athletic Bilbao knock them out of Copa del Rey

SID LOWE

LONDON, 07 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]: Athletic Bilbao poured fuel on Barcelona's fire. A late, late goal exposed them once more, eliminated from the Copa del Rey in the week in which their captain publicly called out their sporting director, divisions coming to the surface, civil war declared, the collapse complete. Lionel Messi had accused Eric Abidal of "dirtying" the players. Here, offered the chance to make a point with their play, they did so themselves. "Talk to me about the football, please," their coach, Quique Setien, said before this game but, when it came to the football, it was not much better. There was no hiding place on the field. At San Mamés their players were thrown to the lions again. And what awaits them now may be even worse.

A 94th-minute goal from Iñaki Williams defeated Barcelona in the quarter-final of the Copa del Rey. Obviously they will not win the cup but it takes a leap of faith to believe they will win anything at all. The crisis continues, deeper now. It is institutional but it is sporting, too. Though Unai Simón saved Athletic a couple of times, Barcelona could not really claim they deserved better. They could have won but they

could also have been beaten sooner.

Away from home their results are calamitous, their vulnerability painfully clear, with one coach or the other. There is little to hold on to, little to believe in – maybe, horrible though it is to hear, not even Messi. For so long they have relied on him to rescue them; here it looked as if he might again. But instead there was impotence, frustration, the smell of failure. At the final whistle the Argentinian held his head in his hands, wearing an all too familiar face. He had the chance to win it – to win the argument – and wasted it. Williams on the other hand, did not. He became a hero.

It took a long time for the goal to arrive but it could have come earlier. Ansu Fati had two shots in the first eight minutes. What was most striking, though, was how fast Barcelona lost control, how complicit they were in the game tilting away from them, escaping them like so many others this season. Athletic's best opportunities began at Barcelona's feet rather than their own, gift-wrapped for them. Marc-André ter Stegen passed to Athletic players twice in two minutes, Dani García sending the first opportunity wide, Unai Núñez unable to make the most of the second. Ter Stegen then got away with a third, fear rising.

When Gerard Piqué and Ter Stegen bumped into each other, it was illustrative of their ills. So, too, the moment when Frenkie de Jong, played clean through by Messi, with Simón off his line, took the baffling decision to dive rather than continue past the goalkeeper. The referee did not need the VAR to rumble him. De Jong went over again soon after, buffeted in the box: this was no dive but nor, the referee decided, was it a penalty. Still, there was no way through. Antoine Griezmann, on as a sub, hit Simón's legs with the best chance – another one wasted.

Another concerning image followed: Piqué pulled down Williams, desperately grabbing on to his shirt as the Athletic forward tried to escape up the right. Williams was far, far too fast for the centre-back, who even got dragged along the floor for a few metres as he hung on, his vulnerability cruelly, comically exposed. Piqué was booked for the 15th time this season and was soon removed, limping.

Williams, by contrast, kept running. There were two minutes left when Messi was played in by Arthur. Collecting the ball by the six-yard box, he shot straight at Simón. In the 89th Williams had a chance of his own, with Barce-

lona's defence again exposed, but he scuffed his volley from a similar position. There was to be one more, though, and this time he turned his header into the net. It was another dagger in Barcelona's back. San Mamés exploded. Barcelona already had.

Setien 'satisfied' despite late heartbreak Quique Setien and Gerard Piqué both tried to accentuate the positives after the game. "We are leaving this competition, it is painful, but the image of the team has been very good," Setien said.

"Everything went well today except the result ... I am quite satisfied," he added. "We dominated the whole of the second half, but the penalty is not to get ahead with one of those chances. Sadly, the goal has come to us at a time when there was no chance of a reaction."

Piqué brushed off questions over Messi's row with Abidal, saying "it's not the time to dig up dirt. What I can say is that our confidence is at its highest, we're happy with the way we've played and reacted to the outside noise."

"It's really hard because we were eliminated [but] we took an important step, we had a very positive feeling," Piqué added. "It was a very important step forward."

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US announces launch of International Religious Freedom Alliance

WASHINGTON, FEB 7 (PTI): The US has announced the launch of a 27-nation International Religious Freedom Alliance, which will try to adopt a collective approach in protecting and preserving religious freedom across the world.

It is an alliance of “like-minded partners who treasure, and fight for, international religious freedom for every human being”, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in his address during the formal launch.

Among the prominent countries to join the alliance are Austria, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Israel, Ukraine, the Netherlands and Greece.

“Defending the right of all people to live their lives according to their conscience is one of this administration’s top priorities. Indeed, we must affirm, and fight for, that truth now more than ever. More than eight in 10 people in the world today live where they cannot practice their faith freely,” “Pompeo said in his address on Wednesday.

“We condemn terrorists and violent extremists who target religious minorities, whether they are Yazidis in Iraq, Hindus in Pakistan, Christians in northeast Nigeria, or Muslims in Burma,” he said.

“We condemn blasphemy and apostasy laws that criminalise matters of the soul. We condemn the Chinese Communist Party’s hostility to all faiths. We know several of you courageously pushed back against Chinese pressure by agreeing to be part of this Alliance, and we thank you for that,” Pompeo said.

The top American diplomat said the alliance was off on the right foot as countries do their parts to advance this mission.

During the launch meeting, participating countries are to discuss kind of areas that they are going to work and focus on, according to a senior State Department official.

“The areas will include things like technology and religious oppression, blasphemy and apostasy laws, for instance. Toolbox will include things like, whether it’s putting out statements, actions that can take place in international bodies that the group can come together and hopefully come behind, the possibilities of sanctions being used,” the official said.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that it was a consensual body. Every nation is not bound to join in each of the items that come forth.

“But as countries look at this and say that’s something we’re interested in, then they can join. And if they decide, look, that’s not one we’re interested in, then they won’t, and there is no penalty or foul for any of participation or nonparticipation,” the official said.

China’s novel coronavirus toll soars to 636, total confirmed cases over 31,000

KJM VARMA

BEIJING, FEB 7 (PTI): The death toll in China’s novel coronavirus epidemic has risen to 636 with 73 new mortalities reported, mostly from the worst-affected Hubei province, while the total number of confirmed cases has crossed 31,000, Chinese health officials said on Friday.

Hubei province and its provincial capital Wuhan, the epicentre of the virus outbreak, reported 69 deaths on Thursday while Jilin, Henan, Guangdong and Hainan provinces reported one each, China’s National Health Commission said.

As many as 73 people died on Thursday, while another 3,143 new cases of infection were reported, taking the total number of confirmed cases of infection to 31,161 from 31 provincial-level regions, the commission said.

A total of 1,540 patients infected with the virus have been discharged from hospital after recovery by the end of Thursday, it said, highlighting that a large number of people are getting cured.



The Chinese officials said 19 foreign nationals living in the country had been confirmed of contracting the novel coronavirus as of Thursday, but did not disclose their nationalities.

The deceased on Thursday also included Chinese doctor Li Wenliang, one of the eight whistle-blowers who warned other medics of the coronavirus outbreak but were reprimanded by the police.

Li, the 34-year-old doctor, died due to coronavirus on Thursday in Wuhan.

He was the first to report about the virus back in December last year when it emerged in Wuhan.

He dropped a bombshell in his medical school alumni group on the popular Chinese messaging app WeChat that seven patients from a

local seafood market had been diagnosed with a SARS-like illness and quarantined in his hospital.

Soon after he posted the message, Li was accused of rumour-mongering by the Wuhan police.

He was one of the several medics targeted by the police for trying to blow the whistle on the deadly virus in the early weeks of the outbreak.

Meanwhile, China on Thursday opened a new 1,500-bed makeshift hospital especially built for virus patients, days after a 1,000-bed hospital started functioning with prefabricated wards and isolation rooms in Wuhan.

Chinese officials argue that the death toll and confirmed cases are rising in Hubei province because of lack of enough hospitals and beds.

Officials also started setting up tent hospitals and mobile clinics to treat the growing number of patients.

China also lodged diplomatic protests to countries over cancellation of flights to China due to virus fears.

“As some countries have taken such excessive steps as suspending flights, ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organisation) has also issued bulletins and encouraged all countries to follow WHO recommendations,” a spokesperson said.

“We deplore and oppose those countries who went against WHO’s professional recommendations and ICAO’s bulletins and have lodged stern representations with them,” she said.

Several international airlines, including Air India and IndiGo, have cancelled flights to China over fears of the virus spreading across the world, a move which Beijing described as being against WHO guidelines.

Many countries including India and the US have also announced travel bans.

‘Hero who told the truth’: Chinese rage over coronavirus death of whistleblower doctor

VERNA YU

HONG KONG, 07 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]:

The death of a whistleblowing Chinese doctor who was punished for trying to raise the alarm about coronavirus has sparked an explosion of anger, grief and demands for freedom of speech among ordinary Chinese. Li Wenliang, 34, died in the early hours of Friday local time after he was infected during the fight against the outbreak, said Wuhan central hospital, where he worked, in a statement.

Li warned colleagues on social media in late December about a mysterious virus that would become the coronavirus epidemic and was detained by police in Wuhan on 3 January for “spreading false rumours”. He was forced to sign a police document to admit he had breached the law and had “seriously disrupted social order.”

“They owe you an apology, we owe you our gratitude. Take care, Dr Li,” said a Weibo post from Xiakedao, an account under the overseas edition of Communist Party’s People’s Daily.

“Good people don’t live long, but evil lives for a thousand years,” said another post mourning Li’s death, with a candle emoji. An image also posted on Weibo showed a message, “farewell Li Wenliang”, carved into the snow on a riverbank in Beijing.

His death crystallised the outrage and frustration felt across China over the initial cover-up of the deadly virus. On Friday, China’s social media was awash with posts expressing immense anger and grief. Li’s death became the top-read topic on China’s microblogging site Weibo overnight on Friday, with more than 1.5bn views, and was also heavily discussed in private WeChat messaging groups, where people expressed outrage and sadness.

Even blog posts from state media outlets mourned his death and issued veiled attacks on the Wuhan authorities who censured him.

The strong public reaction appeared to have drawn the top leadership’s attention. The central commission for discipline inspection, the Communist party’s powerful internal anti-corruption body, and the national supervisory commission, the country’s highest anti-corruption agency, issued a one-sentence statement on their joint website that investigators will be sent to Wuhan to carry out “a comprehensive investigation into the problems reported by the public concerning Doctor Li Wenliang.” Fearing that the uproar over



Li’s death could spill over onto the streets, the authorities quickly deleted posts calling for action. A post forwarded on Wechat but now deleted said: “I hope one day we can stand on the street holding Li Wenliang’s picture.”

In Li’s last blog post on Weibo, China’s Twitter-like microblog, on 1 February, Li poignantly wrote: “The test results come out positive today. Everything is settled. It is confirmed.”

Li was one of eight people who were detained for “spreading rumours” about the deadly disease’s outbreak – the fates of the other seven, also believed to be medical professionals, are not known.

Images of Li were ubiquitous on Weibo and messaging app WeChat; a last photo of him lying on his hospital bed wearing a breathing mask; a pencil sketch of Li; a photo of the humiliating police warning document on which he signed “I understand” to admit “spreading false rumours” along with images of candles and white flower.

Many posts referenced his “confession”, with people posting photos of themselves wearing surgical masks emblazoned with the words: “I don’t understand”. Others swore “We will not forget.”

The outpouring of grief quickly turned into demands for freedom of speech, but those posts were swiftly censored by China’s cyber police. The trending topic “#we want freedom of speech” had nearly 2m views on Weibo by 5am local time, but was later deleted. The phrase “#Wuhan government owes Dr Li Wenliang an apology” also attracted tens of thousands of views before it too disappeared.

Caixin, a Beijing-based financial publication, posted a black-and-white selfie of Li wearing a mask with the title “A healthy society shouldn’t have just one voice: Novel Coronavirus whistleblower Li Wenliang dies”. In its Weibo post, the Economic Observer, a state-affiliated financial newspaper, demanded the vindication

of all of the Wuhan “rumour mongers”. “Dr Li is telling us [through his death] what kind of future we will face if we lose the ability to express ourselves. In the eyes of the people, Dr Li was the hero who bravely told the truth,” the post said. “Wuhan [authorities] should vindicate them and pursue those who abused their powers to suppress the ‘rumour mongers’.”

Elsewhere, posts from ordinary Chinese people continue to direct their outrage towards the authorities.

“You and I both know that the ones who killed were not bats,” said one. “The virus has infiltrated those people high up,” said another. “Those who won’t let you speak won’t let you live either,” fumed another.

Johnny Lau, a veteran China watcher and former journalist at Beijing-backed Wen Wei Po, said Li’s death has become an emotional flashpoint amid the tight control of speech under Xi Jinping’s rule.

“Here is a doctor with a conscience ... people on the frontline have been sacrificed but the officials have not been held to account,” he said. “It is an example of how evil has triumphed over the good.” He said the quick deletion of posts demanding speech freedom has aroused further anger.

“The authorities are anxious that his death would trigger a huge wave of anger, so felt the need to maintain stability and suppress people’s voices,” he said. “But this has aroused further pushback.”

Sarah Cook, a senior research analyst at China Media Bulletin Director at Freedom House, said the public outcry over Li looked “widespread and unified”, but it still unclear how big a turning point it could be.

As many inside China seethed, the death toll inside the country passed 630, with more than 31,000 people infected. Another 41 people on a cruise ship quarantined off Yokohama in Japan tested positive for the virus.

New virus cases in UK, Germany, Italy put Europe total at 31

LONDON, FEB 7 (AP): Britain, Germany and Italy have announced more cases of the new virus from China, bringing the total number of confirmed cases in Europe to 31. In Germany, all but two cases are related to auto parts supplier Webasto, whose headquarters near Munich was visited by a Chinese colleague.

Germany’s 13th confirmed case of the new coronavirus, announced by Bavaria’s health ministry, was the wife of an employee previously diagnosed with virus.

Two of their children are among those infected. Neither they nor their mother are showing any symptoms.

Germany’s two other cases tested positive after arriving on an evacuation flight from China last weekend.

British authorities confirmed the country’s third case, saying the patient did not contract the virus in the UK. They did not elaborate. The two other cases are a Chinese student studying at York University in England and a relative of that student. Italy announced the first case of an Italian

citizen confirmed to have the virus. A government health institute official, Giovanni Rezza, said the 34-year-old man contracted the virus in Wuhan, where he was living. The man was one of 56 Italians who arrived in Italy on Monday via an Italian air force plane that evacuated them from Wuhan.

All the evacuees were put in quarantine at a military facility near Rome, but the man was moved to Rome’s Spallanzani infectious disease hospital after test results Thursday indicated “a suspected case” of the virus.

That is the same hospital where a Chinese couple in their 60s were admitted last week with confirmed virus cases. They are in intensive care with pneumonia.

In Geneva, the head of the World Health Organization said it is convening an international research conference next week to identify promising drug and vaccine candidates to be fast-tracked for development against the new virus.

At a news conference, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the UN health agency will be

inviting scientists from around the world, both in person and virtually, next Tuesday and Wednesday to identify research priorities and coordinate the effort to find effective drugs and vaccines.

On the travel front, Air France announced it was prolonging by more than a month its suspension of flights to mainland China, which won’t now restart before March 16 at the earliest because of the new virus.

The company’s current suspension of all flights to Shanghai and Beijing was meant to last until this Sunday. Air France and partner airline KLM plan to gradually resume services to China on March 16, together offering one daily flight to both Shanghai and Beijing, either on Air France from Paris or on KLM from Amsterdam.

Air France says all of its flights to mainland China should resume beginning on March 29, including to Wuhan, the epicenter of the epidemic.

Spain’s national airline Iberia says it has extended its suspension of flights between Madrid and Shanghai until the end of April.

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VIDEO NEWS SECTION

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SPOTTED! The rumored couple and Euphoria actors, Zendaya & Jacob Elordi, are spotted out and about in NYC sharing smiles and good conversation.

Vidhu Vinod Chopra Tries To Do A Balancing Act But It's Lopsided

It goes without saying that it has usually been beyond the ambit of mainstream Bollywood to fully comprehend and encompass the multiple skeins that constitute the old, intractable Kashmir imbroglio. It is, therefore, not surprising at all that Shikara, intended to be an elegy to a lost paradise, falls short of its avowed goal. It tells the Kashmir story from the point of view of those that were forced to leave the Valley when militancy erupted there in the late 1980s. Inevitably, the film is limited in its scope. No matter how hard director Vidhu Vinod Chopra tries to do a balancing act, it cannot be anything but lopsided.

Shikara is a love story set against the backdrop of the exodus but it floats largely in shallow waters and stays away from the mud-died whirlpools that are inevitable when the unrest in the Valley has continued as long as it has. The film revolves around an idealistic couple who pines for their lost home without letting hate and distrust rob them of their humanity. They cling to the hope of returning some day to the land of their birth, reflecting the yearning of all victims of conflict, not just Kashmiri Pandits.

It would be pertinent to question the timing of Shikara. Kashmir, where much of the action is set, has been under lockdown for several months now and the rights of the people of the Valley have been summarily curtailed. It redounds to Chopra's credit that the Hindu-Muslim binary at the heart of this

fictionalized account "based on true events" isn't manipulated to overtly tar a whole group of people with the same brush although the film has a couple of defining moments where the them and us divide comes to the fore and determined the flow of the narrative.

In trying to pull of the tightrope walk, the screenplay takes recourse to sweeping means. We see grainy footage of Benazir Bhutto (on a black and white television set) addressing a rally and exhorting Kashmiris to fight for freedom. In another scene, news of an agreement between George Bush Sr. and Mikhail Gorbachev is flashed on TV. One character, in reaction to the second bit of news, scoffs at the idea of world peace. He blames the Americans for pumping arms into Afghanistan to help the Mujahideen fight the Russians and then diverting weapons to militants in Kashmir. Another says that politicians aren't interested in a lasting resolution in Kashmir, all they want is to win elections.

That is about it. By pinning the blame for the rise of militancy on external geopolitical forces and on domestic politicians who thrive on fishing in troubled waters, Shikara ignores a local history of exploitation and suppression that extends back into the 19th century. But then Chopra recognizes the limits of a two-hour film and does not claim that he is presenting an exhaustive portrait of Kashmir in the run-up to, and in the aftermath of, the exodus of Pandits from the Valley.

Lili Reinhart Admits to Feeling "Intimidated" By Riverdale Co-Stars After Weight Gain

On Thursday, Lili Reinhart took the time to respond to a fan who posed a very complex question about body image and how the cast of Riverdale feels about portraying such chiseled physiques while playing teens. Lili could have brushed off the question, but instead chose to open up to the fan in a very honest way about her experience over the course of her time on the teen drama.

"Actually, not everyone on this show is perfectly chiseled," she started off her Twitter thread. "And even I feel intimidated by the physique of my surrounding cast mates sometimes when I have to do bra/underwear scenes. I've felt very insecure due to the expectation that people have for women on tv, what they should look like. But I have come to terms with my body and that I'm not the kind of person you would see walking on a runway during fashion week. I have bigger boobs, I have cellulite on my thighs/butt, and my stomach sticks out rather than curves in."

Lili also shared her current struggle with depression and how it has caused her to gain weight, which she's choosing to embrace and use to hopefully empower other women and young girls who are fans of the show.

"This is still something I struggle with on a daily basis. And it doesn't help when I'm being compared to other women. I have gained weight due to depression the last two months and I've felt very insecure about it. But I did a recent bra and underwear scene and felt it was my obligation to be strong and show confidence in my-

self, looking as I do," she wrote. "And I want other young women to see my body on tv and feel comfort in the fact that I'm not a size 0. And I'm not a perfect hourglass shape."



Instead of ending with a witty clap back or shutdown, she chose to call out the unfair standards within the industry and point her followers in the direction of people who are making huge strides regarding body positivity.

"This industry struggles with accurate representation of female and male bodies," she ended. "So I commend the women who have helped our industry take a step in the right ~and authentic~ direction. (Charli Howard being my favorite role model)"

Bruno Mars Teams Up With Disney to Star in Music-Driven Movie

Disney's getting a little bit of 24K magic!

Bruno Mars has set a deal with Disney that will give him the opportunity to develop a music-themed theatrical feature that he will not only star in, but also produce. The details of the project are being kept hush-hush, but according to Deadline, the project will include all original music created and performed by Bruno. The musician took to his Twitter on Thursday to reveal the historic honor in a way that only Bruno Mars can.

"If your heart is in your dream No request is too extreme When you wish upon a Star #MarsMeetsTheMouse #ImGoingToDisneyland #YES!!!," he wrote alongside him playing the tune on a piano. Let's just say, he seems as excited to make the project as we are to see it.

Bruno is a highly successful recording artist with 11 Grammy Awards and 27 nominations, but it looks like he might be going for Oscar gold too in the near future.

Although Bruno has dabbled in film before, he appeared in Honeymoon in Vegas and was a featured voice in Rio

2. So this is his first foray into starring in a feature film. But fans have nothing to worry about! Bruno is an all-around performer who knows how to put on an epic show.

Disney seems to be kicking off 2020 with a bang. The studio announced earlier this week that they would be teaming with Lin-Manuel Miranda for a movie based on his hit Broadway mu-



sical Hamilton. "Disney presents: Hamilton," he wrote alongside all the major details. "With The Original Broadway Cast. Filmed onstage at The Richard Rodgers Theatre. In A Theater Near You. October 15, 2021."

We could all use a little more Disney magic!

Demi Lovato sets talk show series at Quibi

LOS ANGELES, FEB 7 (PTI): Singer Demi Lovato will be headlining a new talk show from upcoming short-form streaming service Quibi.

The streamer has officially green lit the 10-episode series that has been tentatively titled, "Pillow Talk with Demi Lovato".

During the show, the Grammy winner will get into candid and unfiltered conversations with her guests -- both experts and celebrities, as per Deadline.

Their discussions will explore issues such as activism, body positivity, gender identity, sex, relationships, social media and wellness.

"I've always considered myself someone that speaks honestly about issues that face my generation," Lovato said.

"We're excited to bring those frank conversations to a public forum, where people can have the opportunity to relate to the topics and guests, while finding room for laughter and learning," she added.

Produced by Goodstory Entertainment and SB Projects, "Pillow Talk with Demi Lovato" is executive produced by Lovato, Scooter Braun, Allison Kaye, Scott Manson, JD Roth and Adam Greener.

Quibi, co-founded by Hollywood heavyweight Jeffrey Katzenberg and former HP CEO Meg Whitman, will debut in the US in April.

Actor Ian McElhinney to guest star in 'Doctor Who'

LONDON, FEB 7 (PTI): "Game of Thrones" actor Ian McElhinney will guest star in the two-part season finale of BBC's "Doctor Who".

McElhinney, who portrayed Ser Barristan Selmy on HBO's "Game of Thrones", has appeared in movies such as "Rogue One: A Star Wars Story" and "A Patch of Fog".

The British broadcaster also announced that actor Steve Toussaint, best known for starring in Jake Gyllenhaal's "Prince of Persia", will also feature in the last two episodes of the 12th season.

The two-part finale will see Jodie Whittaker's time-travelling Doctor come face-to-face again with one of her most dangerous and relentless enemies: The Cybermen.

The first part is called "Ascension of the Cybermen", while the second part has been titled "The Timeless Children".

"I very much enjoyed my time on 'Doctor Who'. The team were a delight to work with and everyone was very supportive and welcoming. All in all it was a blast," McElhinney said in a statement posted on BBC's website.

Toussaint said, "It was an honour to play a part in the giant of British (and world) TV that is 'Doctor Who'. What's not to like? I had such a great time working with Jodie and 'the Fam'; another one off the bucket list.

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IF YOU ARE HAVING TROUBLE GETTING YOUR COPY OF THE SUMMIT TIMES IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD, PLEASE MESSAGE OR WHATSAPP US YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS AT 9832556698 AND WE WILL ENSURE

ARIES: Some people marry their childhood sweethearts and live happily ever after. Others serendipitously meet their soulmates in the evening of their lives after two failed marriages and several heartbreaks. Then there are those who have the privilege of meeting the one, but they take years and years to find their way into each other's arms. Tip: Trust what's happening behind the scenes for you.
TAURUS: Wise words by Rupi Kaur to give your perspective on what you are experiencing right now: "It was when I stopped searching for home within others and lifted the foundations of home within myself, that I found there were no roots more intimate than those between mind and body that have decided to be whole." Your thoughts exactly. Tip: You are finding a sense of home within yourself.
GEMINI: How we perceive ourselves de-

fines our relationships with not just the self, but also the world. Where are you vibrating at, Gemini? Do you believe you are being of light who is worthy of being loved? Give yourself the love and care you deserve, wild one. Address the old wounds that are keeping you from making space for the one.

Tip: Claim your independence.

CANCER: There is more than enough to go around, Cancer. So where does the feeling of lack arise from? Could our own limited beliefs be creating a sense of mistrust? Awareness is the first step to breaking old patterns and making space for the good stuff to enter. Continue to address the limiting beliefs.

Tip: You are connected to the cosmic flow of Abundance.

LEO: Those who resort to aggression in order to make a point are usually the weakest. Understand the difference between assertiveness and aggression.

Course correct if you have chosen the latter. What Spirit wants you to know: there is a way to stand up for your beliefs without going to war.

Tip: Choose assertiveness over aggression.

VIRGO: Two's a party, three's a crowd. Now that we have this out of the way, let's talk about you, Virgo. What are you going to do with this precious life of yours? Why do you keep selling yourself short or settling for less-than-perfect love? You've been seeing the signs for a while now.

Tip: It's better to fly solo than to hold onto a relationship causing you harm.

LIBRA: Libra, you're a beautiful amalgam of the mother and the crone, offering a warm cup of cocoa and sage advice to your soul circle. While giving unconditionally is truly a gift, today, you're being asked to turn your energy inwards. While, you're at it, refresh your bucket list and do at least one thing that brings you

joy and awakens that spirit of playfulness. Tip: Live a little.

SCORPIO: The trouble is, we save our kindness and compassion for the world, while being unkind to ourselves in private. Pay attention to that inner dialogue, Scorpio. The words you are choosing in order to communicate with yourself. Replace judgements with openness.

Tip: Let your self-talk be a source of empowerment.

SAGITTARIUS: Today, you're in the mood to up your style game as you find a sustainable answer to the eternal dilemma of 'I have nothing to wear'. First things first, Marie Kondo your wardrobe. Donate the things that no longer fit right or spark joy. You always have the option to lend it to a friend who resonates with that particular style.

Tip: Reinvent your style.

CAPRICORN: Your heart isn't breaking, Capricorn. It's simply coming together.

Allow the old wounds to resurface. Consciously work through emotional entanglements in order to find your freedom. You will find that your relationships will evolve in the process.

Tip: Embrace the in-between.

AQUARIUS: What if your experiences have the power to add value to the life of another? Don't shy away from holding space for a circle or sharing your narrative with those who matter. There's a reason storytelling was considered as a form of medicine in ancient cultures.

Tip: Storytelling is a form of medicine, Aquarius.

PISCES: Cosmic truth: everybody experiences emotional pain at some point. Should that keep you from radiating like the sun, or believing that you deserve to be loved in the right way? Anything but. You're at a point in your journey where you are integrating the past lessons and seeing your experiences through the eyes of wisdom.

Tip: A period of deep healing is on the cards.