



KANGANA RANAUT REACTS TO
ARNAB GOSWAMI'S VIRAL LEAKED
CHATS TERMING HER 'S*XUALLY
POSSESSED WITH HRITHIK ROSHAN'

pg 08

LET'S GIVE THE YOUNG A
LIBRARY

pg 04

AFTER ACCUSING SAJID KHAN OF
SEXUAL HARASSMENT, SHERLYN
CHOPRA SAYS SHE JUST WANTS
PUBLIC APOLOGY FROM HIM

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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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[Courtesy: Health of Sikkim]

COVID-19 vaccination began in Mangan, North Sikkim, today.

Daily cases continue in single-digits for Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 JAN:

Five persons tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 24 hours in the State taking the state's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported so far to 6,062.

Meanwhile, the figure of recovered Covid patients reached 5,688 with the discharge of 17 more Covid patients on Wednesday.

The number of active Covid cases in Sikkim has further come down to 148, of whom three are currently admitted in the ICU facility of the COVID-dedicated STNM Hospital.

In his daily health bulletin on Thursday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia informed that the five new cases were picked up in the testing of 241 samples on Wednesday.

...turn Pg2

CM calls on Amit Shah, submits memorandum seeking ST status for left-out communities

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 JAN:

Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang called on Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi today, a press communiqué from the Chief Minister's Office informs.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister submitted a memorandum on behalf of the State Government and the people of Sikkim seeking Tribal status for the 12 left-out communities of Sikkim.

This was in follow-up of the Government Resolution passed by the Sikkim Legislative Assembly recently endorsing the demand.

In the memorandum submitted today, the CM is informed to

have underlined the socioeconomic condition of the 12 communities, including the cultural traits of the left-out communities which are similar to all the sections of the society in Sikkim, including those already accommodated in the Scheduled Tribes list.

At the meeting, the CM is also informed to have indicated provisions of Article 371F of the Constitution of India, the Tripartite Agreement signed between the Chogyal, Government of India and political leaders of Sikkim in 1973 and terms of the merger with India.

Similarly, he requested the Union Home Minister for reservation of seats for the Limboo and



Tamang communities, a constitutional right awaited ever since the two communities were recognised as Scheduled Tribes in the year 2003.

The Chief Minister also thanked the Union

Government for allowing the XVIIth Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje, Head of the Kagyu sect of Tibetan Buddhism, to visit Sikkim.

Besides the above issues, the

Chief Minister also discussed the various topics and subject matters relating to Sikkim, the press release issued by Secretary to the CM, SD Dhakal, adds.

Govt announces Rs 47 lakh scholarship for 50 IAS aspirants to receive coaching

ALS SETS ASIDE ANOTHER RS 23 LAKH, RAISING NUMBER OF SIKKIM STUDENTS RECEIVING UPSC COACHING ON SCHOLARSHIP TO 75

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 JAN:

Additional Chief Secretary, GP Upadhyaya, today shared the decision of the State Government to award scholarships worth Rs 47 lakh under the Chief Minister's Civil Services Coaching Scheme for the academic year 2021-22. Thanks to this initiative of the State Govt formalized today, 50 IAS aspirants will receive the opportunity to undergo coaching from ALS IAS with their fees covered by the scholarship.

ALS IAS is India's largest IAS coaching network, a press release from the Education Department informs, and has more than 75 centers across the country including 25 in the North East.

The coaching institute has seen more than 3,000 of its students clear the UPSC till date, 170 of them doing so last year itself.

ALS has also received similar scholarships from the governments of Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya and

Manipur in the past.

Meanwhile, ALS National Sales Head, Prateek Bhattacharya, has announced scholarship worth Rs 23 lakh for 25 aspirants under the institute's CSR Initiative for youth of Sikkim.

With this, 75 IAS aspirants from Sikkim will be able to receive coaching at ALS free of cost this year.

The Scholarship Exam will be conducted on 31 January at all the District Headquarters of Sikkim under the supervision of the respective District Collectors.

Application forms will be made available online on bit.ly/A-SAT2021 from 22 January onwards with 28 January being the last date for submissions.

Results will be generated on 03 February and batches will begin coaching from 08 February at Nar Bahadur Bhandari Degree College.

AIDS awareness to leverage the power of oral storytelling



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 JAN:

Sikkim State AIDS Control Society [SSACS] has been reaching out to the people through various digital events due to the pandemic. In continuation of its series of virtual events, SSACS has announced the Online Story Telling Contest 2021 to create wider awareness about HIV and AIDS by inviting people to talk about HIV and AIDS.

SSACS is organizing this state-level virtual event in collaboration with The Beat Entertainment on the theme 'Global Solidarity Shared Responsibility'.

Addressing a press conference here today, SSACS Project Director, Dr DS Kerongi, informed that SSACS has been running various HIV/ AIDS programmes under the National AIDS Control Organization to control HIV/ AIDS in the State through mass awareness and prevention programmes.

He stated that HIV/AIDS was also connected to various health and social issues so it was important to work with different sections of the society through various mediums.

...turn Pg2

Why are Our Young Politicians Angry All the Time?

ViewPoint

JIWAN RAI

The Sustainable Development Solution Network publishes a World Happiness Report based on their survey of the state of global happiness. In their 2020 report, India ranked 144 out of 156 countries. The report was published in March 2020 which was much before the crushing pandemic maimed the world. I hope they will bypass the 2021 survey. This grieving world doesn't need anyone to share how happy it has been during the dark days of 2020.

However, it is worthwhile to ask hypothetically, if there was a similar survey to measure national anger and frustration, where would our country feature in the ranking? Media, entertainment and politics - the three megaphones of Indian society indicate how angry and frustrated India is right now. Most of the news shows seem like a horror show anchored by news readers who seem to be irritation, annoyance and frustration personified. How do they manage to breathe normally after shouting their lungs out? Our

entertainment is obsessed with savage brutality of the highest degree. Violence is the new virtue promoted by Bollywood. What can we say about Indian politics? It feels as if all the most frustrated and angry people have banded together to start an institution called politics. Constipated looks, raised index fingers, acerbic language and angry voices are the essential qualifications of an effective politician in contemporary India.

What do local politics look like? Of late, I have been watching a number of political rallies in the Darjeeling-Kalimpong hills and Sikkim recently. The political rallies in Darjeeling have been overwhelmingly attended by young people. Many young leaders have been addressing the rallies. Likewise, many young Sikkimese men and women have been seen speaking from political platforms. For the hills that have been obsessively wanting to see youth participation in politics, these are probably good signs. However, a closer look at this youth participation will bring to mind several causes for concern. Almost every one of those youth

leaders has compulsorily learnt to speak into the mic angrily and sometimes nastily. Their speeches sound like the expression of an angry mind. Their body language suggests how impatient, angry and frustrated they are. They continually shout at the top of their lungs with their index figure raised and anger written all over their young faces. Is that a good sign of politics? How well nurtured can a society be that is exposed to such angry emissions coming from the highest pedestal of politics?

What is lacking among these youth leaders is control over their emotions, depth in their utterances and vision in their outlook. The hill politics need youth for sure. However, what the hill politics needs even more is cool and calm headed youth who can think harder, deeper and smarter. Our politics doesn't need to be driven by anger and hatred. We need to initiate a reason-driven, discourse-driven, studies-driven and wisdom-driven politics. We do not need trigger happy, angry shouters who have no control over their emotions. We need patient and deep thinkers who think with their mind,

empathize with their hearts and speak from their conscience. Genuine smiles, sympathy, grace, love and respect must mark our young aspiring leaders. These traits are the hallmark of humanity in a civilized society.

Undoubtedly, there are hundreds of reasons behind the widespread frustration and lack of happiness in our country. It will take a tremendous effort on our part to transform India into a happier country. However, the first thing we must do is to discard the politics of anger and hatred. The hills must do the same. Darjeeling should have learnt by now what anger-driven politics has done to the hills. Sikkim must learn from the rest of India as well.

"Youth power" doesn't mean ranting and raving and blowing one's top all the time. Nor does it mean issuing threats and diatribe. Youth power is all about bringing a transformation in our overall thinking by way of advocacy, discourse and actions which will lead to a better and happier life. They must espouse to a thought revolution. Read eclectically and compulsorily. Listen to the world's great

leaders in different fields. Learn how they speak. Try to appreciate the depth of their knowledge, fathom the weight of their substance and appreciate the beauty of their articulation. Power does not lie in the loudness of our noise. Nor is it expressed in anger. Great speeches are not shouted out at the top of one's lungs. Adding to this, character building is an absolute must. Honesty, meekness, trustworthiness and integrity make leadership genuinely powerful. Many cannot speak the truth because they lack these traits. Success achieved by speaking lies and empty threats are fleeting and often self-destructive. We only need to look at the now former US president to learn this lesson loud and clear.

When we talk about youth participation in politics, we must also be clear about the quality of their participation. Youth in itself has no potential. Youthfulness is equidistant from great wonderful possibilities and great disastrous tragedy. Therefore, it would be a disaster to catapult young people into positions of power and responsibility when they are more temperamental than intellectual.

Intra Himalayan Open Volleyball Tournament



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 JAN:

Two matches were played on the second day of the Intra Himalayan Open Volleyball Tournament organised by Border IX at Rangpo Bazaar.

Play Ground today, a press release informs. In the first match, Rangpo Police defeated AYC Singtam and Dipankar Chettri from Singtam was declared as Man of the Match.

The second match was played between Daramdin and Sagar Club Monsong, in which Daramdin emerged victorious. Both the teams have reached the

2nd phase of the tournament. The first match on 22 Jan, will be played between Rangpo Police and NBC, while the second match will be played between Six Star and 17 Restaurant.

Journo launches Facebook page

BIKASH CHETTRI

NAMCHI, 21 JAN:

Senior journalist Nam Dixit launched a Facebook page which is under her own name in a program held in Namchi, South Sikkim, today.

The Facebook page was gifted to the senior journalist on her birthday in 2017 by her reader and follower, graphic designer, Prashant Lamichaney, who hails from Temi bazaar, South Sikkim.

Although the page was created in 2017,

it is being launched today with the theme of the page 'Information. Insight. Inspiration.' Ms Dixit said that the page is dedicated to her parents for being her inspiration all through her life.

The program today was organized by the well-wishers of Ms Dixit from around Namchi, South Sikkim. Present in the launch were the team of Voice, well-known sportspersons, social workers, vlogger Siddharth Sherpa, and website and graphic



designer Prashant Lamichaney.

After the offering of khadas to her parents in the morning, a short event was organized in Namchi

bazaar for a few guests.

During the program, she said that the page is going to cover news from Sikkim and offer news that inspires.

SKM-West preps for party's 9th foundation day celebrations

PRITAM LAMA

GYALSHING, 21 JAN:

The West District Committee of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha convened a district-level coordination meeting at the West District party office here today regarding the celebration of SKM's 9th foundation day on 04 February.

The meeting, chaired by SKM vice president in-charge, DB Gurung, was attended by a host of senior office-bearers of the party, including CLC presidents of all the eight constituencies of West Sikkim.

The meeting decided to organise constituency-

level foundation day celebrations this year.

"We won the last election with a thin margin and our party workers must focus on ensuring a huge win in 2024. We shouldn't discriminate people on the basis of political

party affiliations as all the people of Sikkim are our own people and it's our responsibility to keep them safe and united," Mr DB Gurung said.

Speaking to this correspondent, the SKM West District Coordinator, Nandu

Gurung, informed that as directed by the SKM party president, Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang, the party, in light of the Covid pandemic, will be celebrating the foundation day at the respective constituencies this year.



Webinar discusses economic value-adds of festivals of NE States

GANGTOK, 21 JAN (PIB):

Cultural Festivities are opportunities to experience 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat', experts opined in a Webinar organised by Press Information Bureau, Guwahati on the topic 'Economic Value-adds of Festivals of North Eastern States to Society and its prosperity' here today. Experts from Industry, entrepreneurial fraternity, Government sector along with academicians deliberated and discussed about the potential of North East from cultural, socio-economic growth, development and policy perspective.

Former senior official, Anupoma Das, Regional Outreach Bureau, Guwahati said that the Jonbeel Mela in Assam during Magh Bihu exemplifies the economic trade and commerce activities of communities. She said that it is a very strategic place so that all the people come together for the mela and the place is beside Jagiroad in Morigaon

district.

She said that ambience and environment is so enthusiastic that experience of talking of people adds to cultural vivacity. She said that Bihu celebration in Assam after the harvesting of crops is salubrious environment for employment opportunities. She said during the Bihu, the dance with Mekhela adds to the vibrance and joy of the occasion.

She further said that Muga Silk cultivated in Assam has utilisation in various textiles which are another arena which is employment intensive.

Talking about 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' where Assam and Rajasthan are grouped together, Shri Hemanta Rabha, senior official, Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship, Guwahati said that just as the festivals in Rajasthan, be it Camel festival in Pushkar, Udaipur Mewar Festival, Teej festival or Desert Festival in Jaisalmer, the festivals in Assam such as Rongali or Bohag Bihu, Kongali

or Kati Bihu and Bhogali or Magh Bihu demonstrate the zest and zeal of people. He said that training and employment opportunities are vital aspect in these cultural and societal festivities.

He said that these are opportunities for eco-tourism and festival or cultural tourism which provides means to appreciate others culture.

Beauty Pageant winner Mrs India East IAB (2019), Swagata Paul, said the festivals are demonstrates the structured connect which people of this country has for each other citizens. She said that festivals are also an occasion to experience the joy of diversity and to feel the vibrance of enthusiasm among people.

Former Regional Director (E) for India Tourism Kolkata, JP Shaw, Ministry of Tourism said that not only the agricultural, textile and tourism industry, but also the logistics and allied value added industries are having the advantage during the festivals

because of increase in trade and commerce in Assam.

Information Assistant, Barnali Mahanta, PIB, Guwahati said that festivals such as Bihu are also an opportunity to look at the talents and human resources potential. She said that cultural programmes during these festivities also demonstrate the emotional and cultural talent and value-add on in family and societal system.

Professional Sarod player, Mayukh Gangopadhyay said that festivals are also an occasion when all family members come and enjoy the celebration and appreciate the talents.

Professional Sitar player, Kaustav Majumder said that festivals help develop a society with high family values leading to prosperity and development of society and nation.

Advocate Delhi High Court, Abdur Rahman Mallick said that Celebration of Republic Day and festivals in 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' is

an opportunity to reminisce the efforts of stalwarts who worked tirelessly for the prosperity and well-being of society and the nation.

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

The interactive Webinar had enthusiastic participation of students, academicians and Industry fraternity of Assam and North East. Field Publicity Officer, Sucharita Sahoo, Field Outreach Bureau, Barpeta welcomed the experts as the webinar delved into details on the various aspects of the topic such as Culture, Infrastructure and socio-economic development of North East, among others.

Along with students, eminent journalists and other government senior officials from Doordarshan Guwahati, Regional Outreach Bureau, Guwahati, All India Radio Guwahati were also present on the occasion.

Ad-hoc HeeBermiok Tourism Association formed

RUDRAKAUSHIK

GYALSHING, 21 JAN:

The tourism wing of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha party convened a meeting today at HeePatal under Gyalshing Bermiok constituency in West Sikkim.

The meeting was chaired by general secretary of the state level tourism wing of SKM, Ganesh Chettri. Also present were constituency level president of SKM tourism wing, Sanbir Subba, and tourism stakeholders of Gyalshing Bermiok constituency.

Various aspects of tourism development in Gyalshing Bermiok constituency with collective effort and participation of the youth were some of the topics brought forth and discussed in the meeting. HeeBermiok Tourism Association,



an ad-hoc working body was also formed in the meeting.

The ad-hoc association will work to promote and propagate the tourism potential of Gyalshing Bermiok constituency through collective effort. Area MLA and Agriculture Minister, Loknath Sharma will head the association as the chief patron along with Barun Sharma as the

president.

Similarly, Meena Sharma was appointed as vice president and Niren Tamang as general secretary of the association. The members of the newly formed association assured to work for development and upliftment of tourism sector in Gyalshing Bermiok constituency. Tourism spoke about

the need for promotion and encouragement in development of homestay tourism in rural areas of the constituency so that the benefits of the tourism sector can reach the villagers as well. The tourism stakeholders also pressed for providing opportunity and support to the youth so that they can be self-reliant.

AIDS awareness to leverage.....

About the online storytelling contest, Dr Kerongi mentioned that the storytelling contest is being held for the first time not only in Sikkim but the entire north-eastern region.

He expressed hope that such creative activities will bring a positive change in the people.

He informed that interested participants can submit their entries online from 25 Jan to 28 Feb and that the finale is scheduled for 08 March.

The competition will be held in open category.

Participants are required to send their videos narrating stories at least 3 minutes long and 7 minutes at most. A three-member jury will first shortlist the top-10 finalists and then the top-three winners of the competition.

The Jury comprises of Dr Santosh Sharma, Bishal Darnal and Dr Sudarshan Tamang.

Beat Entertainment proprietor, Shivraj Shivakoti, in turn informed that entries can be submitted in Nepali, Hindi or English along with the script and proper sub-titles.

The top-10 finalists will be invited to perform off-line on 08 March at Gangtok.

SSACS Assistant Director [IEC], Lubhana Rai, added that results of the short film competition will be announced on Friday.

She further informed that SSACS was also gearing up to organize its popular Red Fest Multimedia Campaign in February and March. She urged interested participants to visit the SSACS website for further details about the campaign.

Daily cases continue...

He stated that all the cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 172 samples, while all nine samples in TrueNat and 60 in rapid antigen testing returned negative for COVID-19.

While providing details of the new cases, Mr Bhutia informed that one person from Sama-Lingdum and one from Tadong in East District and one person from Wok-Tumlok, one from Thangsey Road and one from Kamrang in South District were found positive for COVID-19.

As for the vaccination carried out on Thursday, he informed that a total of 291 persons were vaccinated today - 99 in East District, 66 in West District and 54 in North District.

He added that 792 persons have been vaccinated so far in Sikkim.

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

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ANTHYESTI KRIYA



The Anthyesthi Kriya of late Shri Man Bahadur Chettri (Roka) who left for heavenly abode on 10th January 2021 falls on 22nd January 2021 (Friday).

All relatives, family, friends and well wishers are requested to join us

in offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence Lower Samdur, Ranipool, East Sikkim. We also express our gratitude to all those who stood by us during our time of bereavement.

Bereaved Families:

Bishnu Maya Chettri Roka (wife)

Hem Bdr Chettri (son), Srijana

Chettri (daughter-in-law),

Pratima Chettri (daughter), Suraj

Sapkota (son-in-law),

Sony Chettri (daughter), Bhakta Bdr Roka (

brother), Kharka Bdr Roka (brother), Tara Bdr

Roka (brother), Indra Bdr Roka (brother)

and entire Roka family.

Contact- 9609906181, 9775445161, 8670765399

ANTHEYSTHI KRIYA



The 13 day Anthyesthi Kriya of Late DK Khati (Dil Kumar Khati) ex Chairman, S/o Lt. Padam Singh Khati, R/o Pavitra Bhawan, Opposite Daffodils School, Development Area, Gangtok, East Sikkim. DOB - 5th June 1937 left for his heavenly abode on 13th

January 2021 falls on 25th January 2021 at our residence Pavitra Bhawan, opposite Daffodils school at Development area. All family friends and well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the deceased. We also take this opportunity to thank all those who stood by us during our time of bereavement.

Karuna Khati (Daughter).

Roshan Khati (Son).

Dhiraj Khati (Son).

Srijana Khati (Daughter)

Phone: 9434137305/9734009999

Timro Muskan Ley beams on premiere

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 JAN:

A short musical film, Timro Muskan Ley, received a good response from audiences on its premier show here on Thursday. The film, which was also released simultaneously on Mountain Stories' Youtube Channel this evening, had already received around 17,000 views within just four hours of getting uploaded.

Around 16 minutes long, Timro Muskan Ley is the debut film of Sushma Productions and is produced by Sushma Gurung and written



and directed by Anmol Gurung.

The film has a popular Nepali actor, Saruk Tamrakar and another experienced artist, NSD

graduate Riya Bhujel and marks the debut appearances of Pramila Chhetri and Sahil Lama from Sikkim.

Pramila is Femina

Miss India Sikkim 2018 while Sahil is Mr Sikkim Manhunt 2018 finalist.

The premier show of the film had

UD&HD Minister, Arun Uprety as the chief guest accompanied by officers from IPR and Tourism & Civil Aviation departments.

MYM Gangtok celebrates All India MYM's 37th Foundation Day

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 JAN:

Marwari Yuva Manch [MYM], Gangtok Prerna Branch celebrated the 37th Foundation Day of All India MYM today by visiting old age homes and distributing essentials, a press release informs.

Members of MYM Gangtok visited Lee Aal Old Age Home and Mamtalaya in Gangtok. They donated water filter, chocolates,

baby milk powder, sanitary pads, etc. The team provided 2 bags of rice, 1 carton of milk, 16kg oil, 15kg wheat, soaps, 2kg Til seeds, 14pkts of puffed rice, some masalas, 5kg pickles, 5kg flattened rice, 24pkts of WaiWai, some sweets, 10kg potato, 5kg onion, 7kg tea leaf, 7kg sugar, etc.

MYM Gangtok is the only women's branch under Paschim Bengal-Sikkim MYM.



Mani Trust to hold Mega Health Camp in Gangtok

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 JAN:

Mani Trust is planning to hold a two-day Mega Health Camp in collaboration with the Government of Sikkim in Gangtok, Sikkim on 20 and 21 Mar, 2021, a press release informs.

Founder chairman of Mani Trust, Subash Mani Singh met Health Minister, Dr Mani Kumar Sharma, on 20 Jan, 2021 with a proposal to hold a Mega Health Camp in Sikkim in the month of March which they have been conducting with Super Specialty hospitals of the country. The most recent Mega Health Camp

was held at Kalimpong on 21 and 22 Sept, 2019 with Super Specialty Hospitals from West Bengal and Hyderabad.

Mr Singh apprised the Minister that this year due to COVID-19 pandemic the Mega Health Camp which is normally held in the month of September was postponed.

"Considering the way Sikkim has been progressing under the visionary Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang (Golay), our Trust Board has decided to hold this year's Mega Health Camp in Sikkim so

the people of Sikkim may benefit from the expertise of Specialist and Health Experts from Super Specialty Hospitals from Hyderabad, Kolkata Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and others. The proposed camp will be organized in collaboration with Dept of Health & Family Welfare, Govt of Sikkim and with Press Club of Sikkim as the media Partners," the release states.

The main objective of this initiative is to bring the major hospitals from across the country under one roof and to provide

medical consultation services so that patients who do not possess the financial capacity will also be able to access medical facilities from these hospitals.

"Under our Mission: Health is Wealth we have an initiative Mega Health Camp during which the patients will be able to consult eminent Medical Consultants and Surgeons from various Departments such as Cardiologists, Pediatric Cardiologist, Endocrinologists, Oncologists, Nephrologist, Neurologists, Orthopedic, Gastroenterologists, Obstetrician -

Gynecologist, Dermatologist and Ophthalmologist to get a further understanding of their difficulties and to connect for their further treatment," the release mentions.

The meeting was attended by Summit Times Editor, Puran Tamang, Senior Journalist and Summit Times Video News Editor, Bhim Rawat, Vice Chairman, Arvind Pradhan, Secretary, Utpal Kumar Roy, Trustee, Rizwan Rehman, Assistant General Manager, Pankaj Dahal and Health Officer, Kiren Subedi.

Film Promotion Board chairperson meets I&B Secy

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 21 JAN:

Sikkim Film Promotion Board chairperson, Pooja Sharma, met the Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Amit Khare at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi today, a press communiqué from the chairperson's office informs.

Ms Sharma was accompanied by Resident Commissioner, Joint Director IPR, Bishal Khawas and External Advisor of Sikkim Global



Film Festival 2021, Anita Gupta, the release adds.

Ms Sharma informed the Secretary about the establishment of Sikkim

Film Promotion Board and its future plans. He accepted the invitation to attend the upcoming Sikkim

Global Film Festival in Gangtok scheduled to be held in the first week of April 2021 and extended support

to the State for the event.

Ms Sharma also led a delegation to call on the Secretary, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), Dr Inderjit Singh.

During the meeting, Ms Sharma informed him about Sikkim's initiative to establish an Eco-Heritage Film City. Dr Singh extended full support to the State and accepted the invitation to attend the Film Festival as well.

Avian Influenza in poultry birds confirmed across six states so far

NEW DELHI, 21 JAN

[PTI]: The centre on Wednesday said bird flu in poultry has been confirmed so far in six states -- Kerala, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Punjab. Across all birds, avian influenza has been reported in 12 states.

"Till 20th January, 2021 outbreaks of Avian Influenza have been confirmed in 6 states (Kerala, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra,

Chhattisgarh and Punjab) for poultry birds and in 10 States (Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Rajasthan and Punjab) for crow/migratory/wild birds," an official statement said.

Avian Influenza has been confirmed in poultry samples from Dera Bassi, SAS Nagar, Punjab. The disease has also been confirmed in crow in Punjab (SAS

Nagar and Pinjore, Panchkula).

"Control and Containment Operations are going on in the affected epicentres of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Haryana," as per the statement by the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying.

The central team formed for monitoring the situation in the affected areas of the country has visited Satara, Latur, Parbhani and Beed

districts of Maharashtra to monitor the epicenters of the outbreak and is conducting epidemiological studies.

"All the States are reporting to the Department on daily basis regarding the control measures adopted by the States/UTs based on the Revised Action Plan for Preparedness, Control and Containment of Avian Influenza 2021," it added.

The Department of Animal Husbandry is taking continuous efforts

to generate awareness about avian influenza through platforms, including social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook handles.

"Further, at the Department's behest, Ministry of Civil Aviation has requested DGCA to advise the airlines to allow transportation of samples suspected for Avian Influenza to NIHSAD, Bhopal for confirmation of the disease," it said.

Top fashion brands at rock bottom prices at Brand Factory



Gangtok, 21 Jan: Get ready to march with the fashion brigade, 'coz Rock Bottom Days are here! Enjoy a big FLAT 50% on your favourite fashion brands and get an additional 20% off on purchase of apparels worth Rs.3500/-. Offer valid only till 31 Jan, 2021, at Brand Factory stores across India!

This fashion sale is a special tribute to our shoppers for Republic Day; giving everyone the right to fashion and the

freedom to choose from top International and National brands. Also, it's more the merrier, so delight yourself and your loved ones with this mega offer of Flat 50% off + Additional 20% off and wave the fashion flag high!

Choose from our wide range of trendy apparels - western or ethnic; formal, casual or festive; for men, women and kids; from top brands such as Twills,

Spykar, Wrogn, Vishudh, Zara, Colors, Killer, Highlander, Tokyo Talkies, Buffalo, The Privilege Club, Bare Denim, Bare Leisure, Scullers, Knighthood, Lee Cooper, Umbro, SBPRC, John Miller, Iktara, Morpankh, Hey, Jealous 21, Alice & Mae, Pink & Blue, DJ&C, 612 League, Crocodile and John Miller Hangout; because there's no better time than now to grab these brands at rock bottom prices!

Kumbh Mela 2021: Uttarakhand Asks Centre For More Covid Vaccines

HARIDWAR, 21 JAN

[NDTV]: The Kumbh Mela is underway at Haridwar now. This year the Mahakumbh is taking place after 12 years. Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the Uttarakhand government has asked the centre for an additional 20,000 vaccines for the Kumbh Mela.

The state government has sent a request to the centre for more vaccines,

Dr Abhishek Tripathi, state Covid control room chief told news agency ANI. The Covid-19 vaccination drive began in Uttarakhand on Saturday, with healthcare workers getting the first shots at the Doon Hospital in the presence of Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat.

Millions of pilgrims are expected in Haridwar over the coming weeks during the Kumbh Mela

amid the pandemic.

An organisation in the temple town has launched a campaign to send the waters of the Ganga to people who may not be able to visit the Kumbh due to coronavirus-linked restrictions in place. The campaign, "Aapke Dwar Pahuncha Haridwar" (Haridwar comes to your doorstep) was launched on Makar Sankranti.

Government of India Ministry of AYUSH

Financial assistance in the form of Interest Subsidy for the establishment of AYUSH Super Specialty Hospitals/ Day Care Centres under Champion Services Sector Scheme for Medical Value Travel

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2. The eligible private entrepreneurs may submit complete applications in prescribed format along with the required documents/ information to the Ministry of AYUSH. The detail of guidelines is available on the website of the Ministry of AYUSH i.e. <https://main.ayush.gov.in/schemes/central-sector-scheme>

3. The applications in triplicate duly spiral bound and completed in all respect along with check list should reach to the Advisor (Ay.), Champion Services Sector Scheme Medical Value Travel, M/o AYUSH, Room No. 207, 2nd Floor, Ayush Bhawan, B-Block, GPO Complex, INA, New Delhi-110023 within 45 days from the date of publishing in the news paper.

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Let's Give the Young a Library

Private collaborations to help children access the world of books

It has been close to a year of restricted movement and no school for all practical purposes. The chill in the air of late is not helping matters much either. The Sun will eventually come out and the weather will grow warmer. What is not guaranteed however is the collective guilt the Sikkimese must feel for not having factored in anything for the young when the crores were being apportioned for infrastructure development or policy being finalized to contain the virus. Face it, children in Sikkim do not have much to choose from by way of safe and healthy outdoor spaces even when the outdoors are open to them. And now that the children are forced indoors, another denial that the younger generation is suffering comes into focus – it is bad enough that Sikkim denies its young with convenient outdoor spaces, but the situation only worsens in the face of the fact that they are even denied literary escapes.

Not only is there no presence of children's literature of consequence either in the local publishing scene or substantially enough in the book-stands (we speak of 'local' reading material here), but even access to a decent public library remains limited to the one big one at Mannan Bhawan. Even this largest library of the State, the one housed in the erstwhile Gangtok community hall has only recently moved into the space appointed for it after it has been appropriated by the VIPs for far too many years. Hopefully, the complex will now be allowed to become the multipurpose community hall to serve more purposes for the young than its diversion as a single-purpose drab space for government office. That process is hopefully underway but the missing continues for more reading rooms and libraries in Sikkim.

This is not a new theme for this section and has been visited often and will definitely keep resurfacing until things improve. The absence of libraries is unfortunate because libraries, even though they are going under the world over, remain the only window available to most children to access the world of words and inspire creative thinking. And no, Facebook and Wikipedia cannot make up for that loss. The failure, like with most things in the State, is not so much of the government as it is of the society at large. Libraries and reading rooms or even child-specific activities need not necessarily come from the State exchequer. In fact the more successful endeavours have come from private initiative.

It is apt here to cite the example of the Bakul Children's Library in Odisha. This library in the Satya Nagar residential area of Bhubaneswar houses more than 20,000 books, includes a multimedia section, has internet access and stocks substantial educational material. All of these have come from community partnership. Everything is donated, children are charged no membership fees and access is free for every child. When it started about a decade ago, it was single-unit operation. Within a few years it had 8,000 books. Now, as mentioned, it has 20K titles and has opened its doors to general readers, yes, even grown-ups. It is managed by volunteers and children throng to it, as much to browse and borrow as to attend story-reading sessions, creative thinking workshops, staging of plays by other kids and everything else that children do. The library was born from a campaign in the year 2006 to collect books for free sharing with children. In its first attempt itself, the volunteers received pledges for book donations from 1,000 people! Not just books, people also pledged time and professional skills to set up the library and sustain it. Its operations now include a mobile library which routinely services 24 villages in Odisha. The model works because the society got involved. They operate on the motto: "If not us, who? If not now, when?"

The feeling to do something for the young surely exists in Sikkim as well, but like in Bhubaneswar, it requires a core group to take the initiative and harness the desire. Surely, there are enough 'donors' around to stock a decent library to begin with. What will a library achieve? It will open a window for the young in what is becoming an increasingly claustrophobic and consumerist environment. A children's library is not only about books, it is about sharing, learning and even escaping; experiences and options that every child should have access to.

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'Male' vs 'Female' Brains: Having a Mix of Both is Common and Offers Big Advantages

YI ZHANG

THECONVERSATION.COM

From advertising to the workplace, it is often assumed that men and women are fundamentally different – from Mars and Venus, respectively. Of course, we all know people who are more androgynous, having a mix of personality traits that are stereotypically considered to be male or female. Importantly, such "psychological androgyny" has long been associated with traits such as better cognitive flexibility (the mental ability to shift between different tasks or thoughts), social competence and mental health.

But how does this relate to the brain? Are people who are more androgynous in their behaviour going against their biological nature, doing things that their brains are not optimised for? It's long been unknown whether there is such a thing as brain androgyny. But our new study, published in Cerebral Cortex, suggests it does exist – and it's common.

Psychological androgyny is thought to be psychologically protective. For example, we know it is associated with fewer mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. It has also been linked to higher creativity.

We're all familiar with the traits that are stereotypically classified as male or female. Men, for example, are not encouraged to express feelings or cry when upset. Instead they are expected to be tough, assertive, rational and good at visuospatial tasks such as map reading. Women, on the other

hand, are often expected to be more emotional, nurturing and better at language.

But these differences are likely to be partly down to social norms and expectations – we all want to be liked, so we conform. If a girl is told that it is rude or unbecoming to be assertive, for example, she may change her behaviour to accommodate this, affecting her future career choices. Female adolescents, for example, may not be encouraged by friends and family to consider rewarding but dangerous careers such as the military or policing.

SEX IN THE BRAIN

Scientists have long argued over how different male and female brains really are. There are many reports of differences between male and female brains in the literature. Other researchers, however, argue that these differences are tiny and the categories are anything but absolute. One study suggested that, psychologically, most of us are in fact probably somewhere on a spectrum between what we stereotypically consider a "male" and a "female".

But does that mean that the people who fall somewhere in the middle are more androgynous in their brains as well as their behaviour? To test this, we created a brain continuum using a machine-learning algorithm and neuroimaging data. While male and female brains are similar, the connectivity between different brain areas have been shown to differ. We used these connectivity markers to characterise the brains of 9,620

participants (4,495 male and 5,125 female).

We discovered that brains were indeed distributed across the entire continuum rather than just at the two ends. In a subsample, approximately 25% of brains were identified as male, 25% as female and 50% were distributed across the androgynous section of the continuum. What's more, we found that participants who mapped at the centre of this continuum, representing androgyny, had fewer mental health symptoms, such as depression and anxiety, compared with those at the two extreme across.

These findings support our novel hypothesis that there exists a neuroimaging concept of brain androgyny, which may be associated with better mental health in a similar way to psychological androgyny.

WHY ANDROGYNY BENEFITS US

To learn new things in order to adapt to the ever-changing global environment, we need to be able to be attentive to the world around us. We must also have mental wellbeing, flexibility and be able to employ a wide range of life strategies.

These skills enable us to rapidly understand external context and decide on the optimal response. They help us take advantage of time-limited opportunities and instil resilience. Therefore, these skills confer an advantage for people with androgynous brains, with others being less likely to flourish.

But why is this the case? A meta-analysis of 78 studies of about 20,000 participants revealed

that men who conform to typical masculine norms, for example never relying on others and exercising power over women, suffered more psychiatric symptoms than others, including depression, loneliness and substance abuse. They also felt more isolated, lacking social connections to others.

Women who try to conform pay a price too, perhaps opting out of their dream job because the industry is dominated by men or taking on the majority of tedious household chores. An androgynous person, however, is not influenced by gender norms to the same extent.

That doesn't mean that there's no hope for those at the extreme ends of the spectrum. The brain is changeable (plastic) to an extent. It is likely that the androgynous brain is influenced both by genetic and environmental factors, as well as an interaction between the two. Our own study has suggests people's level of brain androgyny may change over the life course.

Future research is required to understand the influences on brain androgyny across the life span and how environmental factors, such as education, may affect it. Given that we have found that an androgynous brain offers better mental health, it follows that, for optimal performance in school, work and for better wellbeing throughout life, we need to avoid extreme stereotypes and offer children well-balanced opportunities as they grow up.

[the writer is Visiting PhD Candidate, University of Cambridge]

Joe Biden's Inaugural Address Gives Hope to the Millions Who Stutter



RODNEY GABEL

THECONVERSATION.COM

President Joe Biden called for American unity after four years of political divisiveness and the "raging fire" it provoked. He promised to be a president for all Americans. "I will fight as hard for those who did not support me as for those who did," he said.

It was a message of hope and optimism. And while his intent was clearly to speak to all of America, his speech spoke in a different way to a particular community. The new president stutters, and his speech, made with the whole world watching, was a powerful example to those millions of Americans who, like me, stutter.

When I was 11 years old, my speech-language pathologist told me: "Look, John Stossel (the television personality) stutters, and he speaks beautifully. You will be able to do that, too."

My therapist was trying to motivate me, but the message was that my goal should be to speak perfectly.

For me, that was not the case. By age 14, I already knew my stuttering was not going anywhere. Although I'm a fairly strong communicator, I continue to experience stuttering – a neurological condition that impacts the fluent, forward flowing production of speech.

Like me, roughly 1% of the world's population stutters. That translates to more than 70 million people worldwide and over 3 million people in the United States, including Biden.

Biden's experience with stuttering is a compelling one. What inspires me is the way he talks about his experience as a person who stutters. For people who stutter, the presidential campaign, Biden's election and his inauguration mark an important change in how we discuss stuttering.

A NEED FOR UNDERSTANDING

People who stutter often suffer discrimination at work, as students and in social relationships.

Several studies show that the general population knows very little about stuttering. Many Americans also believe that people who stutter are less intelligent, less competent and more anxious.

Although I was surrounded by good friends, it felt very lonely to be a child who stutters. I was bullied and teased by my peers. People imitated how I spoke, interrupted when I was talking and even laughed when I stuttered.

Unfortunately, most role models were not helpful. Mel Tillis, the American country singer who used his stuttering as part of his stage persona, and Porky Pig, a cartoon character who stuttered, were the targets of jokes.

My goal became clear around my fifth birthday: I must find a way not to stutter.

Today, many children who stutter receive this message, although there is no "cure" for stuttering. Therapy and group support can help. But for many, stuttering requires attention for their entire lives.

BIDEN STANDS UP TO BULLIES

Biden has spoken about his struggles with stuttering during speeches for the National Stuttering Association and the American Institute for Stuttering.

But he had spoken sparingly about his stuttering in the mainstream media until his campaign for president began in 2019. Throughout the campaign season, President Donald Trump and his surrogates began seizing on hesitations and other characteristics of Biden's speech.

During the campaign trail, Trump called Biden "Sleepy Joe" and said he was out of touch. He said Biden suffers from dementia. These insults were due partially to Biden's age but also to the differences in his speech.

Biden responded to former White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders, who mocked his stuttering during a 2019 Democratic presidential

debate.

"I've worked my whole life to overcome a stutter. And it's my great honor to mentor kids who have experienced the same. It's called empathy. Look it up," Biden said via Twitter.

During a CNN town hall in February 2020, he said he continues to stutter when he is tired.

This was good for me to hear, and I believe good for other people who stutter. Talking about stuttering, instead of trying to hide it, is an important part of coping.

Biden also chose Brayden Harrington to speak at the virtual Democratic National Convention. Harrington, a teenager who stutters, shared how Biden had helped him in 2019 by telling him it was OK to stutter.

He also shared how the former vice president continued to stay in touch. "Joe Biden cares," Harrington said during his speech.

To me, it felt as if stuttering was finally being discussed in public and in a positive manner.

THE FIRST PRESIDENT WHO STUTTERS

Certainly, Biden's election as president matters for many reasons.

I suspect there have been more news articles and opinion pieces about stuttering published in major newspapers in the past 18 months than in the prior 18 years.

This is important because it raises awareness of stuttering and helps those in the stuttering community feel connected with others who also stutter, thus helping all of us understand their struggles.

Biden is an important role model because he has begun to talk openly about stuttering and because he has demonstrated that one can still stutter while communicating well and achieving astonishing goals.

[the writer is Professor and Founding Director, Binghamton University, State University of New York]

“We are Indians”: Protests break out in Arunachal Pradesh over Chinese village



GUWAHATI, 21 JAN [NDTV]: Protests have broken among section of people in Arunachal Pradesh's Upper Subansiri District following NDTV's expose of China having constructed a whole new village on territory that part of the state. Locals carried out a march today, carrying placards and burning effigies of Chinese President Xi Jinping even as they raised various pro-India, anti-China slogans.

On Monday, it was

reported that China had constructed a new village in Arunachal Pradesh, around 4.5 kilometres inside of the de facto border on the Indian side. The village consists of about 101 homes, satellite images accessed exclusively by NDTV show.

Though this area is Indian territory, according to official government maps, it has been in effective Chinese control since 1959. However, earlier only a Chinese military post

existed, but this time a full-fledged village that can house thousands has been built.

The village, located on the banks of the River Tsari Chu, lies in the Upper Subansiri district, an area which has been long disputed by India and China and has been marked by armed conflict.

Today, locals of Upper Subansiri district took part in the protest organised here at Daporijo town

by various youth and other organisations such as the All Tagin Youth Organization, the All Giba Circle Vigilance Forum, and New Market Welfare Association.

Those who marched in protest raised slogans such as “Bharat Mata Ki Jai”, “We Are Indians”, and “China Go Back”. They carried banners and placards, too, expressing similar sentiments. At the end of the march, they burnt the effigy of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Inter-State gang dealing in stolen luxury cars busted

DIMAPUR, 21 JAN [THESENTINEL]:

In a major success, the Gurugram Police with help from Nagaland Police busted a gang that stole luxury cars from Delhi, the NCR region and Rajasthan and then sell them in Nagaland. The gang was unearthed when two members identified as Ankit of Hisar and Zalal of Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh were arrested by the Crime unit Sector-10 of Gurugram Police recently. The accused later confessed that the gang used to sell high-end luxury cars in Nagaland to an illegal car dealer named Kikheto in Nagaland.

Later, the police nabbed Kikheto from Dimapur district in Nagaland. Kikheto too confessed before the police that he had sold 50 luxury cars. Revealing the modus operandi of the gang, Gurugram Police said that they used to change the numbers of



engines of the stolen cars, chassis and registration, before selling them in the north-eastern States. The police also seized two such number plates, one tablet (used to unlock the vehicles), three sockets, a lead, a plate instrument, a device emulator and a master key from the duo.

Meanwhile, Kikheto also spilled the beans of fabricating the numbers of the stolen car engines, their chassis as well as registration.

Police has seized a tablet, four fake

engines and chassis as well as number plates (of Arunachal Pradesh) from the dealer's possession. On December 26, the car dealer was produced before a Gurugram Court, which sent him to 13-day police remand. On January 12, he was again produced in the district Court which again sent him to four-day police remand.

Preet Pal Sangwan, ACP (Crime) said, “During interrogation, the kingpin revealed

that after buying stolen vehicles on a large scale from various States including Haryana, Delhi, the NCR region, and Rajasthan, he fraudulently changed the engine numbers and chassis numbers of those vehicles.

“After making fake registrations, he used to sell those vehicles. The accused also confessed that around 50 such luxury vehicles have been sold in Gurugram. Further probe is underway.”

People excluded from NRC can vote in Assam assembly election 2021

GUWAHATI, 21 JAN [THESENTINEL]: The Election Commission of India said people of Assam whose names are excluded from the National Register of Citizens (NRC) will be able to vote in the upcoming Assam Assembly Elections 2021.

Citizens will be able to vote if they have names in the voters' list.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sunil Arora while addressing media persons said that Bihu festival dates as well the CBSE board exams in the state will be taken into consideration before

deciding on the schedule of election and is likely to be over by May 4.

Meanwhile, according to NRC data, around 19,06,657 people have been excluded from the list in Assam out of 3,30,27,661 applicants while a total of 3,11,21,004 names were included.

CEC Sunil Arora has been in Assam along with two other Election Commissioners on a three-day visit to review the poll preparedness.

Further CEC added, “In view of COVID-19 social distancing norms, the Commission has specifically revisited some extant norms. As

a result, the maximum number of electors at a polling station has been reduced from 1500 to 1000.”

“Accordingly for Assam, the number of polling stations would go up by about 5000 and are likely to be more than 33000 for forthcoming elections,” he added.

During the three-day visit at Guwahati, the CEC will hold separate meetings with the Chief Secretary, the Home Secretary, the DGP and other senior officials of the State; Chief Electoral Officer and Police Nodal Officer of Assam; leaders of political parties; election-related Central

and State Regulatory authorities.

CEC Sunil Arora will also interact with the District Election Officers and SPs of the State.

The other members of the delegation are Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra; Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar; DG, ECI Dharmendra Sharma; DEC Chandra Bhusan Kumar; ADG, PIB and spokesperson Sheyphail BSharan; Senior Principal Secretary Narendra N Butolia; Director of Expenditure Pankaj Srivastava and EVM Consultant Vipin Katara, a press release said.

Assam logs 2 more COVID deaths

GUWAHATI, JAN 20 (PTI): Assam's COVID-19 death toll

increased to 1,077 with two more persons succumbing to the disease on Wednesday, while 32 new cases took the tally to 2,16,919, a bulletin issued by the National Health Mission said.

The current death rate is 0.49 per cent

while 1,347 corona positive patients died due to other reasons.

The state reported 32 new cases including eight from Kamrup Metropolitan district and five each from Dibrugarh and Nagaon, the bulletin said.

The state now has 1,313 active cases.

The number of COVID-19 patients

who were discharged during the day is 98 while the recovery rate currently is 98.28 per cent.

The total number of recovered patients is 2,13,179 and three have migrated out of the state, the bulletin said.

Altogether 15,795 samples were tested for coronavirus during the

day, taking the number of such tests to 63,14,289.

Meanwhile, the total number of people who were vaccinated in the state is 7,585, an official said adding that no vaccine was administered on Wednesday.

Assam received 20 boxes of Covishield vaccine from Serum Institute, Pune, during the day.

Dalai Lama congratulates US President Joe Biden

DHARAMSALA (HP), JAN 21 (PTI): Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama on Thursday congratulated Joe Biden for being sworn in as the 46th President of the United States and thanked him for his long-standing support for the Tibetan people.

He also expressed confidence that Biden will contribute to shaping a more peaceful world in which those suffering from “hunger”, “disease” and “violence” will find help.

Biden was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States on Wednesday at a historic inaugural ceremony, pledging to unite the country and calling on Americans to end the “uncivil war” that has

fractured the deeply polarised nation.

Kamala Harris was also sworn in as America's first woman Vice President in a time-honoured ceremony on the steps of the US Capitol, amidst unprecedented security following the January 6 mob attack in Washington D C by supporters of former US president Donald Trump.

In a letter written to the US president, the Tibetan spiritual leader said, As someone deeply concerned with the ecological crisis our planet faces, I am so pleased that you are elevating the issue of climate change to your highest priority and that the United States is rejoining the Paris Climate Accord. Global

warming is an urgent threat to the whole world and to the survival of our species.

May I also commend you for other measures you are taking towards the betterment of the United States of America. I have long been an admirer of your great country, the bastion of liberty, democracy, religious freedom and the rule of law. The whole world places its hope in the democratic vision and leadership of the United States.

“In these challenging times, I am confident that you will contribute to shaping a more peaceful world in which those suffering from hunger, disease and violence may find help. The need

to address these issues is indeed pressing,” the letter read.

The Dalai Lama also hailed the encouragement of American people and their leaders in efforts to preserve ancient Buddhist culture.

“... I take this opportunity to express our gratitude for your long-standing support for the Tibetan people. It has been our good fortune to have enjoyed the friendship and encouragement of the American people and their leaders in our endeavour to protect and preserve our ancient Buddhist culture, a culture of peace, non-violence and compassion,” he said in the letter.

BSF threatening voters in border areas: Trinamool complains to election body

KOLKATA, 21 JAN [PTI]: The ruling Trinamool Congress in West Bengal on Thursday met the full bench of the Election Commission of India (ECI) and alleged that the BSF is threatening people in the border areas of the state to cast their votes in favour of a particular political party.

The Border Security Force (BSF) is yet to issue a reaction to the TMC's allegation.

The full bench of the ECI, led by Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora, arrived in the state on Wednesday evening on a two-day visit ahead of the assembly polls, the dates of which are yet to be announced.

“We have informed the CEC and other ECI officials that the BSF is threatening voters in border areas. We have received inputs

that officers of the paramilitary force are visiting various villages and asking people to cast their votes in favour of a particular political party.

“This is a dangerous situation and the ECI must look into it,” TMC secretary-general Partha Chatterjee told reporters after meeting the ECI delegation in Kolkata.

The ECI officials

are meeting the representatives of various political parties before holding discussions with officials of central and state regulatory agencies.

There will also be a review meeting with divisional commissioners, district election officers and senior police officers over the assembly elections in the state, sources in the state poll panel said.

Fire breaks out at Hastings Jute Mill in West Bengal

KOLKATA, JAN 21 (PTI):

A fire broke out at the over 140-year-old Hastings Jute Mill in West Bengal's Hooghly district on Thursday morning, officials said.

The blaze is likely to have caused severe damage to stock of raw jute in the godown, though the exact extent is yet to be ascertained,

they said.

Three fire tenders were pressed to service and the situation is now under control, the officials said.

Nobody was injured in the mishap and mill operations are normal, a Hastings Jute Mill official said.

The mill started operations in 1875 with 230 looms.

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Olympic athletes and officials ponder vaccine dilemma as Tokyo Games loom

KIERAN PENDER
LONDON, 21 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Steve Solomon, a 400-metre sprinter and co-captain of the Australian athletics team, has plenty to think about. The postponed 2020 Olympics are now just six months away and, barring a Covid-19 outbreak in Australia, Solomon will compete in the national championships in April before beginning final preparations for Tokyo. But there is one thing that the sprinter insists is not front of mind for him and his teammates: the coronavirus vaccine. “Everyone is just focused on making sure we are physically and mentally ready for the Games,” he said.

Solomon’s thoughts may be elsewhere, but plenty within the Olympic movement in Australia and overseas are pre-occupied with how the world’s biggest sporting event can take place safely in the midst of a pandemic. The Games are scheduled to begin on 23 July; the International Olympic Committee and the Japanese government insist it will go ahead, despite a recent spike in cases in Tokyo. If the Olympics are to proceed, the vaccine offers a potential solution.

“My preference would be to get vaccinated before I go to Japan, certainly,” Solomon said. “If I am not vaccinated by then, I will still go. That is a risk I am willing to take to represent my country. I firmly believe that the vaccine needs to be given first to those parts of the population that are most vulnerable to the coronavirus. Athletes are not part of that population.”

Therein lies the problem for sporting organisations that desperately want the Olympics to go ahead. Olympians are typically young, fit and healthy – not a group at high-risk from Covid-19. High-profile IOC member Dick Pound recently called for athletes to jump the vaccine queue, but the IOC has not publicly sought priority from governments. Its official position remains that vaccination will be preferred but not compulsory. The optics of queue-jumping – while thousands in high-risk categories die daily from the virus – are extremely poor.

The Australian Olympic Committee is trying its best to strike the right balance. With the vaccine due to be rolled out in Australia from February, the government’s vaccination campaign will be well underway by the time athletes would need to be vaccinated to ensure immunity in Tokyo.

“The AOC supports the IOC position that vaccination, while not compulsory for the Tokyo Games, is strongly recommended for the safety of athletes and the Japanese community,” said an AOC spokesperson. “We are encouraging our athletes to be vaccinated accordingly.”

However, under the government’s phased

national roll-out strategy, more than 13 million Australians in various risk categories will need to be vaccinated before the balance of the general adult population becomes eligible. Given supply chain uncertainties and the unprecedented nature of the roll-out, it is unclear whether that threshold will be reached before July.

“We fully support the national rollout strategy as articulated by the government,” said Dr David Hughes, chief medical officer at the Australian Institute of Sport and the chief doctor to the Australian Olympic team. “The vaccine has to go first to those that are most vulnerable. While of course it would be preferable to have the Australian Olympic team vaccinated before the Olympics, at this stage all our plans are based on the assumption that it is unlikely we will have the team vaccinated prior to Tokyo.”

One way in which Australian athletes could get priority is if they are deemed high risk workers (who will be vaccinated in the second phase of the roll-out). The AOC told Guardian Australia that it has not sought this status for its athletes. “The AOC is continuing to liaise with the IOC, federal and state governments on a range of health and safety initiatives to ensure our athletes can safely prepare for and compete in Tokyo this year,” said a spokesperson.

Professor Adrian Esterman, chair of biostatistics and epidemiology at the University of South Australia, said the vaccine priority issue poses an “interesting ethical dilemma”. However, he added that Australian Olympians would arguably be “putting themselves at high risk of infection [by competing at the Olympics], and acting as a role model demonstrating that vaccination is safe, encouraging others to get vaccinated”. Esterman added: “I think from both of those angles, vaccination could be justified.”

Given the relatively small numbers involved – around 500 Olympians, plus coaches and staff – giving Olympians priority would make minimal practical difference; in the first phase of the roll-out alone, almost 700,000 individuals will be vaccinated. “There is no reason, being fit and healthy, why they shouldn’t get the AstraZeneca vaccine,” Esterman says. “We have ample doses available that vaccinating them first would have no impact on the rollout.”

The federal sports minister, Senator Richard Colbeck, told Guardian Australia the government’s vaccine roadmap did not currently prioritise Australia’s Olympians. He added: “The government will be consulting with the representatives of the AOC and national sports bodies on the rollout of the vaccine over coming months and understand their needs in the lead up to the Olympics.”

European roundup: Real Madrid crash out of Copa del Rey to third-tier Alcoyano

MADRID, 21 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Real Madrid have sensationally been knocked out of the Copa del Rey by Alcoyano, a third-tier Spanish side, who scored a dramatic winner in extra time after being reduced to 10 men.

Zinedine Zidane rested some key names for the last-32 tie but still started with a host of international players, including Marcelo, Karim Benzema, Federico Valverde, Éder Militão, Vinícius Júnior, Casemiro, Lucas Vázquez and Isco.

Militão headed in a Marcelo cross at the back post to give Madrid a first-half lead but the minnows fought back in the second period, with José Solbes equalising to send the match into extra time.

Zidane brought on Eden Hazard and Marcos Asensio and Madrid looked likely to win the tie when Alcoyano’s Ramón López was given a red card in the second half of extra time. But Juanan Casanova nipped in at the near post to volley a 115th-minute winner and send Zidane’s team out of the competition – Madrid’s worst cup defeat since being knocked out by Alcorcón in 2009-10.

“It’s not an embarrassment, it’s something that can always happen in football,” Zidane said after the match. “Something like this can



happen in a footballer’s career but I take responsibility for it and we’ll keep on working. We’re not going to go crazy over this.”

When asked whether he feared for his position as manager, Zidane replied: “When you lose people always talk about that but I take responsibility and whatever will be will be. I’m very relaxed, our players want to win every game, they always try to but sometimes something else happens.”

Cristiano Ronaldo arguably became football’s all-time leading goalscorer by firing Juventus to Italian Super Cup glory against Napoli. The match is played to contest the winner between the champions of last season’s Serie A and Coppa Italia.

Lorenzo Insigne had a chance to ruin Ronaldo’s milestone moment but missed an 80th-minute penalty before Álvaro Morata wrapped up the win for Andrea Pirlo’s

side deep into stoppage time.

Ronaldo registered the 760th strike of a remarkable club and international career in the 64th minute to help reigning Serie A champions Juve claim the trophy with a 2-0 win. The 35-year-old former Manchester United and Real Madrid forward moved one goal ahead of Czech player Josef Bican, who officially managed 759 strikes between 1931 and 1955.

There has been some contention over scoring records in recent weeks. Lionel Messi became the all-time top scorer for a single football club after scoring his 644th Barcelona goal in December, surpassing Pelé’s previous record tally for Santos, but the Brazilian club hit back by claiming Pelé’s total club tally actually stands at 1,091, adjusted to include goals scored in one-off games during the tours of the 1960s. These

exhibition matches are not widely accepted to be part of official records, although the fixtures were often against the best teams of the age.

Bundesliga top scorer Robert Lewandowski struck a first half penalty to help Bayern Munich earn a nervous 1-0 victory at Augsburg on Wednesday and stay four points clear at the top of the table at the season’s halfway mark.

Lewandowski put the visitors in front with a 13th minute penalty, his 22nd league goal, the most for any player halfway through a Bundesliga season. He has featured in 16 of Bayern’s 17 league games this season.

The striker had several more chances to add to his record-breaking goal haul and also hit the post in a dominant first half. Instead of scoring again, however, to make sure of the three points, Bayern were far too passive and conceded a 75th-minute penalty. They had a lucky

escape when Alfred Finnbogason sent his spot kick onto the post.

The Bavarians are on 39 points, four ahead of RB Leipzig, winners 1-0 over Union Berlin, and seven ahead of third-placed Bayer Leverkusen. Leipzig’s Emil Forsberg drilled in a second-half winner after a neat one-two with Dani Olmo to break the deadlock in the 70th minute.

At the other end of the table, Schalke remain rock bottom after conceding a dramatic stoppage-time winner in the 2-1 loss to fellow strugglers Cologne.

Schalke’s Matthew Hoppe cancelled out Rafael Czichos’s opener to level for the hosts but Jan Thielmann struck at the death to inflict defeat. Cologne, however, remain in the relegation zone after Fabian Klos, an own goal from Marc- Oliver Kempf and Ritsu Doan gave Arminia Bielefeld a thumping 3-0 win over Stuttgart.

Keven Schlotterbeck’s second-half own goal secured Eintracht Frankfurt a 2-2 draw at Freiburg. Roland Sallai and Nils Petersen had turned the contest in the home side’s favour following Amin Younes’s early opener.

In La Liga, Villarreal missed the chance to go third after Paco Alcácer missed a stoppage-time penalty in the 2-2 draw with Granada.

Alcácer’s failure from 12 yards, following the dismissal of Yan Eteki,

prevented the hosts moving above his former club Barcelona. Veteran striker Roberto Soldado and Chelsea loanee Kenedy earned Granada a point by scoring either side of Rubén Peña’s goal and Moi Gómez’s spot-kick.

Sergio Canales’s double cancelled out Santi Mina’s goal to give Real Betis a 2-1 success over Celta Vigo, while Huesca remain bottom after a second-half strike from Mauro Arambarri condemned them to a 1-0 defeat at Getafe.

In Serie A, Luis Muriel’s fine equaliser earned Atalanta a 1-1 draw at Udinese, stretching his side’s unbeaten run to nine league games.

Udinese took the lead after 23 seconds with Kevin Lasagna finding Roberto Pereyra who stabbed the ball home to score his side’s fastest Serie A goal since November 2014. The hosts almost held out until halftime, but Muriel’s strike – his 11th Serie A goal of the season on his sixth start – levelled things up in the 44th minute.

In France, Lens moved to within a point of sixth-placed Marseille courtesy of Simon Banza’s second-half goal securing a 1-0 win at the Stade Velodrome. Saturday’s game at Nîmes with Lorient has been postponed because of a Covid-19 outbreak in the visiting side.

Clock ticking for Frank Lampard as Chelsea identify possible replacements

JACOB STEINBERG
LONDON, 21 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Frank Lampard is running out of time to save his job after Chelsea’s defeat by Leicester prompted the board to start identifying possible replacements for their manager.

Chelsea have grown alarmed after five defeats in eight Premier League games and Lampard finds himself on increasingly thin ice. The 42-year-old is under no illusions about his precarious situation. He does not have long to convince the hierarchy, who have started to consider succession plans, that he can turn the situation around.

The disappointing display against Leicester did little to suggest that

Lampard, who has 18 months left on his deal, is capable of bringing the best out of his squad after spending more than £200m last summer. Chelsea lie five points below fourth-placed Liverpool, who host Burnley on Thursday, and the owner, Roman Abramovich, could act if he senses that Champions League qualification is slipping away.

Chelsea, who host Luton in the fourth round of the FA Cup on Sunday, have been alerted to Thomas Tuchel’s potential interest in taking the job if it becomes vacant. The German led Paris Saint-Germain to the Champions League final last season but is out of



work after being sacked last month.

There is a doubt over Tuchel because of his struggle to deal with PSG’s internal politics. Yet there is a feeling that a coach with experience of the Bundesliga could revive Chelsea’s struggling German

stars, Timo Werner and Kai Havertz. In that context Ralf Rangnick, regarded as one of the most innovative figures in German football, could arrive on a short-term basis given that Julian Nagelsmann, the RB Leipzig manager, is unlikely to be available

until the summer. Chelsea could choose to wait until the end of the season even if they decide to remove Lampard, as they did with Maurizio Sarri and Antonio Conte.

There is no guarantee that Chelsea will go down the German route if Lampard departs. Max

Allegri remains available following his departure from Juventus 18 months ago and the Italian has a wealth of experience. Ralph Hasenhüttl, who managed Werner at Leipzig, has also been mentioned after impressing at Southampton.

Lampard is clinging on for now and is line to face pivotal home games against Wolves and Burnley before visiting Tottenham on 4 February. There are doubts over his team’s tactics and lack of identity. Chelsea were awful against Leicester and it is understood that the mood in the dressing room was low after the game. Lampard faces a fight to restore the squad’s confidence.

Raw talent plus IPL cash point to an era of Indian dominance on cricket’s world stage

ANDY BULL
LONDON, 21 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: The ground has moved after India’s win in Brisbane, lifted, shifted and settled again, so the game’s landscape looks a little different today. The premise of the World Test Championship seems a little redundant all of a sudden, because it’s addressing a question that has just been settled.

New Zealand are still top of the official rankings, for now, and since they swept India aside 2-0 at home last February, they deserve the chance to try and beat them again in the final in England later this year. But whether they (or Australia, or England) qualify for that match or not, the future belongs to India, just as surely as the recent past did to Australia and, before them,

West Indies.

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It is not just that India beat

Australia at the Gabba, where they hadn’t lost since the 1980s, or that they won the series after being bowled out for 36 in the opening game at Adelaide, but that they did it all when their captain was home on paternity leave, when one of their all-rounders and two of their best fast bowlers were absent while recovering from injuries, when another of their best batsmen was missing with a damaged wrist, a third and fourth had both injured their hamstrings, another of their fast bowlers broke an arm, another suffered a calf injury, another a side strain, their best spinner came down with back spasms, and his understudy broke his thumb.

Only two of the squad managed to play in all four Tests of the series, while a cast

of 18 filled the spaces around them. The bowling attack they sent out for that final match was cobbled together from the net bowlers they brought on tour to keep their batsmen in trim. Two of the five, Thangarasu Natarajan and Washington Sundar, were making their debuts, the other three (Mohammed Siraj, Shardul Thakur, and Navdeep Saini) had played four Test matches and taken 11 wickets between them.

It was the most inexperienced Test match bowling unit they had put out since 1933. No one else in world cricket has anything like such strength in depth. Right now, India have enough about them that even at such a low ebb, they were good enough to beat Australia at their best.

After this, it is hard to

imagine how they will start a series as underdogs again, wherever they play. It’s not just that, as Justin Langer said after the match, “there’s 1.5 billion Indians” to pick from. They have always had the numbers. But now they have the system to winnow and hone the best players from the largest talent pool on the planet.

In the last decade, for instance, India have developed a formidable ‘A’ team programme, led by the head coach Rahul Dravid. They’ve played 33 first class games in the last five years, which is more than twice as many as either Australia A or the England Lions have managed. And it is paying off. Siraj had taken 70 first-class wickets for India A in the last three years, Saini 34, Thakur, 23.

Amid crippling sanctions, Iran traders seek lifeline in Iraq

DOHUK, IRAQ (AP): Piles of plush carpets line the floors of a northern Iraq shopping center hosting traders from neighboring Iran who hope the spangle of their ornate handicrafts might offer a lifeline out of poverty. In their own country, the economy is in tatters amid crippling U.S. sanctions.

“Our money is so devalued, so when we come to this side — apart from the cultural exchange that we share — from a financial perspective it’s more profitable for us,” said Iranian Ramiyar Parwiz, the organizer of the exhibition who is originally from Sanandaj. “The money we receive ... whether in dollars or dinars has a higher value on our side and it’s worth a lot.”

At least 24 businesses from 15 Iranian cities set up shop this week in the city of Dohuk in the Kurdish-run northern region of Iraq. From Sanandaj to Bijar, they brought luxurious carpets. From Isfahan, Yazd and Hamadan, precious gems, copper and pottery.

Iran is among Iraq’s largest trading partners and this cooperation



has deepened since 2018 amid the Trump administration’s maximalist policy on Iran that has seen the U.S. pull out of Tehran’s 2015 nuclear deal with world powers and levy punishing sanctions on the country.

Tens of thousands of Iranian pilgrims visit holy sites in Najaf and Karbala every year, boosting Iraq’s fledgling tourism sector. Over 100 trucks ferry construction materials, food, medicine and appliances into Iraq every day.

The dependence on Iraqi markets has only deepened as economic conditions worsen in Iran. U.S. sanctions bar American companies and foreign firms

from dealing with Iran affecting Iran’s energy, shipping and financial sectors, causing foreign investment to dry up.

Oil exports have been hardest hit and Iran’s economy contracted with dreary forecasts for the future. Unemployment rose and rural populations were disproportionately affected.

The exhibition of Iranian businesses is typically held every year in the city of Sulimaniyah, which borders Iran. This is the first year the traders have ventured to Dohuk, which shares closer economic ties to neighboring Turkey, in hopes of enticing new customers and creating greater demand for Iranian goods.

Parwiz said the Dohuk venture was the result of desperation.

“There is huge pressure on people (in Iran), and the cost of living is unimaginably high,” he said. “We can’t afford to buy anything, we cannot even afford to buy medicine.”

For Iranian businessmen experiencing difficult times, Iraq has always offered hope for respite.

Haji Tousi, a businessman from Mashhad, sells his fine carpets at a lower price than local Iraqi traders. He knows the dollars he takes back home to Iran will keep him afloat.

“The type of carpet we are selling here is

\$200, whereas the same carpet in the market here is sold for \$300-350,” he said.

But, to the dismay of many Iranian traders, the impact of Iraq’s own economic troubles was in plain sight: The exhibition attracts crowds of visitors but many can’t afford the marked-down items.

“There are many visitors who have warmly welcomed this expo but economic problems have kept them from (purchasing),” said Maryam Mradi, a businesswoman from Sanandaj.

Iraq is grappling with an unprecedented liquidity crisis brought on by low oil prices. That has slashed state coffers in half and led the government to borrow from the central bank’s foreign currency reserves to make salary payments.

Some of the Iranian vendors were skeptical their goods would be well received in Dohuk and other areas of Iraq, where Turkish brands dominate shopping isles.

“The people’s demand is mainly for Turkish goods,” said Shireen Mohammed, a local resident.

EU to hold video summit to assess new virus restrictions



BRUSSELS (AP):

Worried that the new coronavirus variants could result in another surge of deaths across the European Union and push hospitals to the verge of collapse, the 27-nation bloc’s leaders will hold a video summit Thursday to assess such measures as further border restrictions, better tracking of mutations and improving coordination of lockdowns.

The highly contagious nature of the variants is a major source of concern and has already led some EU countries to strengthen restrictions by imposing stricter curfews and more stringent mask requirements on public transport and in shops.

In a bid to avoid another wave of panic similar to the one that saw unilateral border closures threaten the flow of goods across the bloc when the coronavirus first hit the continent last spring, the European Commission has issued this week a series of recommendations “for a united front to beat COVID-19.”

The EU’s executive arm believes that the sanitary situation is at a critical point and urged member states to step up the pace of vaccination, to ensure that at least 80% of those over age 80 are vaccinated by March, and that 70% of the adult population across the bloc is protected by the end of the summer.

But since the EU doesn’t expect vaccines to be readily available before the month of April, leaders should in the meantime find efficient ways to contain the new variants. The commission believes that

better tracking the virus’ mutations with genomic sequencing, coupled with an increased use of rapid antigen tests, will be crucial.

According to the bloc’s executive arm, several EU nations are testing under 1% of samples. It has proposed to “urgently” increase genome sequencing to at least 5% of positive test results and would ideally see that figure reach 10% to detect the variants.

Portugal, which holds the EU’s rotating presidency, said that an agreement to “ensure a common approach to the use and validation of rapid antigen tests as well as the mutual recognition of COVID19 test results across Europe” has been found by all member states and will be approved by leaders.

The coordination of lockdown measures seems trickier, with a myriad of initiatives coming from members states. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has warned that new border checks might be needed if they don’t coordinate.

Merkel said she doesn’t expect Thursday’s videoconference to produce “conclusive” results, and that EU interior ministers will likely have to talk about practical details. She said it’s important to develop “test regimes” for cross-border commuters and that Germany is in touch with its neighbors on that.

“I can say that Germany is looking for a cooperative approach, that extensive border controls would be a last resort for us too and that we will do a lot to try to prevent that,” she

told reporters in Berlin. “But they also can’t be ruled out completely, if someone has completely different ideas.”

In Belgium, Prime Minister Alexander De Croo has proposed a temporary ban on nonessential travel during the February school break and will make a proposal to his counterparts to adopt it across the bloc.

“It is important to be clear that this does not mean that we close the borders,” De Croo told local broadcaster RTBF. “Essential travel must continue to take place (...) But non-essential travel, which we can do without now, such as tourism, clearly we can no longer take that risk.”

Discussions will also focus on the disruption of vaccine deliveries after Pfizer last week announced a temporary reduction that has affected all EU countries. The EU has sealed six vaccine contracts for more than 2 billion doses, but only the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines have been approved for use so far.

The EU now expects Pfizer to deliver across the EU 92% of what was expected over this week and the next one. The missing 8% is expected to be recovered during the week of Feb. 15.

Leaders will also weigh a Greek proposal to issue vaccination certificates to ease travel. But with doubts about whether the people vaccinated could still be contagious, and only a small fraction of the EU population already vaccinated, several member states have expressed reservations.

Twin suicide bombings rock central Baghdad, at least 28 dead

BAGHDAD (AP): Twin suicide bombings ripped through a busy market in the Iraqi capital Thursday, killing at least 28 people and wounding 73 others, officials said. The rare suicide bombing attack hit the Bab al-Sharqi commercial area in central Baghdad amid heightened political tensions over planned early elections and a severe economic crisis. Blood smeared the floors of the busy market amid piles of clothes and shoes as survivors took stock of the disarray in the aftermath.

No one immediately took responsibility for the attack, but Iraqi military officials said it was the work of the Islamic State group.

Iraq’s military said at least 28 people were killed and 73 wounded in the attack and said some of the injured were in serious condition. Several health and police officials said the toll might be higher. They

spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

The Health Ministry announced all of its hospitals in the capital were mobilized to treat the wounded.

Maj. Gen. Tahsin al-Khafaji, spokesman for the Joint Operations Command, which includes an array of Iraqi forces, said the first suicide bomber cried out loudly that he was ill in the middle of the bustling market, prompting a crowd to gather around him — and that’s when he detonated his explosive belt. The second detonated his belt shortly after, he said.

“This is a terrorist act perpetrated by a sleeper cell of the Islamic State,” al-Khafaji said. He said IS “wanted to prove its existence” after suffering many blows in military operations to root out the militants.

The suicide bombings marked the first in three years to target Baghdad’s

bustling commercial area. A suicide bomb attack took place in the same area in 2018 shortly after then-Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi declared victory over the Islamic State group.

No one immediately took responsibility for Thursday’s attack, but Iraq has seen assaults perpetrated by both the Islamic State group and militia groups in recent months.

Militias have routinely targeted the American presence in Iraq with rocket and mortar attacks, especially the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad’s heavily fortified Green Zone. The pace of those attacks, however, has decreased since an informal truce was declared by Iran-backed armed groups in October.

The style of Thursday’s assault was similar to those IS has conducted in the past. But the group has rarely been able to penetrate the capital since being dislodged by Iraqi forces

and the U.S.-led coalition in 2017.

IS has shown an ability to stage increasingly sophisticated attacks across northern Iraq, where it still maintains a presence three years after Iraq declared victory over the group.

Iraqi security forces are frequently ambushed and targeted with IEDs in rural areas of Kirkuk and Diyala. An increase in attacks was seen last summer as militants took advantage of the government’s focus on tackling the coronavirus pandemic.

The twin bombings Thursday came days after Iraq’s government unanimously agreed to hold early elections in October. Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi had announced in July that early polls would be held to meet the demands of anti-government protesters.

Demonstrators took to the streets in the tens of thousands last year to

demand political change, and an end to rampant corruption and poor services. More than 500 people were killed in mass demonstrations as security forces used live rounds and tear gas to disperse crowds.

Iraq is also grappling with a severe economic crisis brought on by low oil prices that has led the government to borrow internally and risk depleting its foreign currency reserves. The Central Bank of Iraq devalued Iraq’s dinar by nearly 20% last year to meet spending obligations.

Romania activist urges people to do something good every day

NUCSOARA, ROMANIA (AP): A gentle hero to many in Romania, Valeriu Nicolae says that, at heart, he is more like former NBA star Michael Jordan — highly competitive and eager to improve in what he does best. In Nicolae’s case that is helping others.

The Romanian rights activist has earned praise for his tireless campaign to improve the lives of the Balkan country’s poorest and least privileged residents, particularly children. This is a daunting task in the country of 19 million where hundreds of thousands of children lack basics and are unable to attend school.

Romania is a member of the European Union but bad management and widespread corruption have stalled economic and social progress.

Nicolae told The Associated Press that for society to change, individuals should, too. He also thinks it should become mandatory for politicians to help someone before they take public office.

“It should be the basics: do good things for others!” he said. “Even a tiny bit of good for someone around you, and no bad at all.”

Since starting in 2007, Nicolae’s humanitarian organization Casa

Buna, or Good House, has taken upon itself to support and supervise 315 children. The group provides aid and backing for the children and their families, including clothes, computers or books — but on condition they do not drop out of school.

Nicolae is a strong advocate of education to keep children off the streets and prevent them from straying later in life into alcohol or drugs. His work has gained further importance during the coronavirus pandemic that has increased social isolation and made life even harder for the poorest around the world.

On a frosty and snowy

day this month, Nicolae’s team visited villages at the foot of the Carpathian mountains, some 200 kilometers (120 miles) northwest of Bucharest, to deliver aid such as flour, sugar or hygiene products to people enduring the cold winter weather.

Many holding children, the residents of Nucsora came out of their homes to greet Nicolae. Most of the houses in the village are unfinished, and families live cramped in small rooms. Among the necessities Nicolae brought along were toothbrushes, and he showed some of the children how to use them properly.

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PLANE POSING! The actor, Michael B Jordan is spotted looking handsome during a photoshoot in St Barts.

Justin Timberlake Promises “Better Days” Are Ahead With Soulful 2021 Inauguration Day Performance

Justin Timberlake joined Ant Clemons for a performance of the optimistic “Better Days” as part of the prime-time special for Joe Biden’s 2021 presidential inauguration.

Justin Timberlake offered a hopeful message during the festivities for Joe Biden’s 2021 presidential inauguration.

As part of the live “Celebrating America” prime-time special that aired on Jan. 20, the superstar teamed up with R&B vocalist Ant Clemons for the song “Better Days.”

This segment was filmed in Timberlake’s hometown of Memphis, Tenn. and featured the singers starting out indoors before making their way to the streets, where they danced with a small group of students and alumni from the city’s Stax Music Academy. The performance took place at the Stax Museum of American Soul Music, which stands at the site of the former studio where Otis Redding and other iconic musicians have recorded.

Clemons, who is nominated for a 2021 Grammy for his EP Happy 2 Be Here, told NBC New York that Biden’s team reached out to the pair after hearing them debut the tune as part

of Stacey Abrams’ “Rock the Runoff” virtual event in December 2020.

“A few months ago @AntClemons and I wrote BETTER DAYS,” Timberlake tweeted on Jan. 13. “This song was our way of doing what little we could to encourage everyone to stay hopeful and to keep working towards a better future. I’m honored to announce we’ll be performing it for the Inauguration.”

The song delivers a tone of optimism in line with the general theme of the historic day that saw Biden sworn in as the 46th President of the United States. A line from the chorus includes the lyrics, “It gets worse ‘fore it gets better, but better’s ahead.”

Tom Hanks hosted “Celebrating America,” which featured speeches from Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, along with appearances by Eva Longoria and Kerry Washington.

Some of the night’s prominent performers included Bruce Springsteen singing “Land of Hope and Dreams,” Jon Bon Jovi covering The Beatles’ classic “Here Comes the Sun” and John Legend taking on Nina Simone’s “Feeling Good.”

Kangana Ranaut Reacts to Arnab Goswami’s Viral Leaked Chats Terming Her ‘S*xually Possessed With Hrithik Roshan’

Talking about the conversation with ex BARC CEO, Arnab Goswami allegedly said that Hrithik Roshan told him that Kangana Ranaut has erotomania.

Kangana Ranaut is time and again a part of some controversy. Amid the pandemic itself, one can name a number of feuds that the actress has been a part of. From Shaleen Bagh dad row to Diljit Dosanjh feud and Urmila Matondkar – the Manikarnika actress is upfront. However, the internet was taken aback when her great journalist friend Arnab Goswami called her an erotomaniac.

As most know, Arnab is a prime suspect of the TRP scam. Not just him, his news channel has been long grabbing the eyeballs too. It is not hidden that Kangana time and again appears on Goswami’s channel for debates and her standpoint. She even congratulated and credited the news anchor when Sushant Singh Rajput case was handed over to the CBI.

Recently, some old chats of Arnab Goswami went viral on the internet. The chats are from 2017 when he interviewed Hrithik Roshan for almost an hour. The War actor spoke about Kangana Ranaut and all the allegations she levelled against him.

Talking about the conversation with ex BARC CEO, Arnab Goswami allegedly said that Hrithik Roshan told him that Kangana Ranaut has erotomania. When asked what that means, the news anchor replied, “s*xually possessed with him.”

Everybody had been seeking Kangana’s reaction ever since the chats went viral. Well, that happened yesterday when she indirectly reacted to the chats on Twitter. Ranaut wrote, “Till date, I have never dared to see anyone’s leaked private chats, letters, mails, pictures and videos, no matter whose it has

been. It is a matter of moral values, character and self-respect.



Librus will not understand.”

To this, a user accused Kangana Ranaut of gossiping about several matters including the Sushant Singh Rajput and Rhea Chakraborty row. The actress responded, “Rohini ji, high-level people do not talk about petty things, but petty people only like to talk about petty things. Have it your way, let us gossip a little. Arnab ji just said what Hrithik told him. I first met him in 2019 and he was ashamed of his 2017 interview with Hrithik. Understand?”

She continued, “Do you want more gossip? Why did Hrithik say this, why did the relationship sour, how did Arnab become my friend after being Hrithik’s friend, etc etc? These libru gossip mongers have destroyed the atmosphere of the country. Stop sneakily eating murabba and reading everyone’s chats and emails.”

Amrita Puri on working with Amit Sadh: “I Said Yes Because He Was The Only One I Knew & Trusted”

The series directed by Vishal Mangalorkar also features Sushant Singh, Aly Goni, Mrinal Kulkarni, and Gagan Randhawa. Jeet Ki Zid drops on Zee5 on January 22. Actress Amrita Puri features in the upcoming web series Jeet Ki Zid alongside Amit Sadh, and she says she was looking for an opportunity to reunite with the actor. The two actors had worked together in the 2013 film, Kai Po Che!

“We stayed in touch since ‘Kai Po Che’. In that film, we did not have many scenes together but we always wanted to work together. So, when the makers of the show

called me, though I did not know them well, the moment I heard that I will be cast opposite Amit, I was partially saying yes to the project. Then, after hearing the story, it was a no-brainer. But yes, initially, I said yes because Amit was the only one I knew and trusted, I hadn’t met the director or the producer before,” Amrita.

The series follows the true story of Special Forces officer Major Deep Singh who was left paralysed waist below during the Kargil War, but his relentless attitude helped him bounce back in life. Amit Sadh is cast as the protagonist while Amrita plays his wife.

“I played the character of Jaya Singh, wife of Deep. Jaya met Deep once in her life and got engaged to him, before he left for the war and came back injured. Since doctors declared that Deep would remain wheelchair-bound for the rest of his life, he said to Jaya not to marry him because there was no future. The interesting part is what Jaya did after that — she decided to marry him. She said, ‘what if it had happened after marriage? I would have not leave, so why now?’ Jaya loved Deep and married him. She encouraged him not to give up,” Amrita Puri said.

After Accusing Sajid Khan of Sexual Harassment, Sherlyn Chopra Says She Just Wants Public Apology from Him

Actress and adult content creator Sherlyn Chopra, who has levelled an accusation of sexual harassment against Sajid Khan, has said that she just wants a public apology from the actor-filmmaker.

Sherlyn, who is among several actresses who have levelled sexual harassment charges against Sajid, didn’t seem too keen to initiate legal action.

“What I am going to achieve by doing that (legal action)? I just want him to issue a public apology not just to me but to all those women with whom he has tried to indulge in inappropriate acts. He has been a habitual offender where he asks women to come to his home for discussion about work and then he gets into his shameless acts,” Sherlyn.

Sajid Khan has been accused of sexual harassment by multiple women. Back in 2018, assistant director Sonali Chopra, actress Rachel White and a journalist had accused him of sexual misconduct. Recently, late actress Jiah Khan’s sister Karishma had revealed that Jiah was allegedly harassed by Sajid.

Sherlyn brought fresh #MeToo charges against the filmmaker and accused him of flashing his privates while discussing a role. In recent tweets,



she also alleged that he asked her to touch his private parts.

It is not cool to cross the line decency. We have made laws in this country that there must be consent between two persons before getting into a physical relationship.”

Talking about the incident, Sherlyn said: “In April 2005, I lost my father and after a few days, I went to Sajid Khan’s place to discuss a film role. I wanted to keep myself busy with work so that I could forget the pain of losing a parent.

When I went to meet him, he randomly asked me to touch his private parts.”

“I told him that it’s not right and I left his place. I was terrified by that incident and all these years, I was blaming myself, thinking that I shouldn’t have gone there to meet him. I feel meeting him is one of the unfortunate events of my life. I have decided to talk about it because if not me then some other woman would have gone through such an incident, so I feel it’s my responsibility to show his true side to people,” she added.

ARIES:

Let’s take a trip down quarantine lane. What are the tips and tricks you learned during your time away from the matrix? How did you feel about going back to things you enjoyed when you were little? Maybe there’s more to a certain something that you’re dismissing as merely a passing phase. The cards are asking you to dedicate yourself to your craft, to practice every day, until perfection is achieved. Trust that you will soon be able to add a new skill to your repertoire.

TAURUS:

You’ve been working on yourself, Taurus, and the transformation is visible. Do you really want to go back to where you started? The cards are urging you to take the next step carefully, lest you slip and fall into the old way of life. For some of you, the temptation to get back with somebody you parted ways with a long time ago will be strong. Remember why things didn’t work out when you’re overcome with emotions. Chances are, they still can’t meet you halfway.

GEMINI:

“I am beautiful.” “I am powerful” “I am gifted in many ways and I’m about to take over the world.” Now, how’s that for your daily affirmations, Gemini? Today, the Universe is asking you to reaffirm the good in yourself and your life (even if it makes you feel a bit delusional in the beginning). The winds of change are helping you bring about a drastic shift within yourself, which is sure to reflect in all that you are creating.

CANCER:

It’s okay to not have all the answers. Nobody does. The good thing is, you can always turn to your mentor or guide at a time like this. So don’t hesitate to reach out. Their words of wisdom (combined with a few truth bombs) will give you the motivation you need to keep going. PS: Turning to your favourite self-help book or guru could also help alleviate your troubles.

LEO:

Some people marry their childhood sweethearts and live happily ever after. Others serendipitously encounter their soulmates in the evening of their lives just when they’re about to give it all up. Then there are those who have the privilege of meeting ‘the one’ early on, but take years and years to find their way into each other’s arms. It doesn’t matter where you are, Leo. The only thing that matters is that your love is real and that your story has been written in the stars. So, don’t let temporary conditions disillusion you, especially when the Universe is in the mood to surprise you in more ways than one.

VIRGO:

“I flow easily with the new experiences, new challenges, and new people who enter my life.” A Louise Hay affirmation you want to repeat when you find yourself pushing against the flow. The cards want you to know you are where you need to be, and that there is a lot that’s happening behind the scenes for you. Trust this and keep moving forward. You’ll soon look back at this phase in your life as a turning point.

LIBRA:

It may seem like everything is working against you at the moment. That Spirit is going out of its way to sabotage the game for you. But the truth is, you are where you need to be and you are protected and taken care of. So, trust the path and keep moving forward. Trust yourself to navigate the roadblocks. Big manifestation energy surrounds you, Libra, and there is a lot you will be able to add to your repertoire by the end of the year.

SCORPIO:

They say when you feel good, you look good—a mantra you want to swear by for the rest of 2021. So, take a closer look at your dietary habits and your lifestyle. Make a conscious effort to cultivate habits that support not only your physical, but also your mental and emotional well being. For instance, limiting your screen time or replacing your Netflix binge with an hour of meditation and journaling. Working with a holistic nutritionist who can understand what works for your body and what doesn’t will also alleviate your life conditions.

SAGITTARIUS:

Dance is not just about movement. It’s about freedom and expression. It’s about accessing the portal to the other dimension. Connecting with higher realms whilst your feet are still firmly planted on the ground. Today, the cards are encouraging you to dedicate some time to movement meditation with your favourite anthem playing in the background. The feel-good hormones that will be released

as a result will transform you into a beacon of light and love.

CAPRICORN:

“2021 is my year, baby! I’m going to live it large.” It’s a livin’ la vida loca kind of day in the Capricorn HQ, and you’re whispering all the right things into the multiverse. You’re more than excited at the prospect of what the new year is going to bring, and are willing to do what it takes to make your dreams real. Get up and show up, even on the days you’re struggling to. Yes, it’s that simple. PS: The mysterious forces above and below are helping you create your best life—now!

AQUARIUS:

You can have the best ideas in the world, but they would mean nothing unless you’re willing to get your hands dirty in the process. Keep the big vision in mind, Aquarius, but also think about the smaller details and everyday tasks. Dividing the project into phases will help you set realistic goals, which in turn will help you get the work done in an effective manner.

PISCES:

Despite what social media would like to have us believe, there’s no such thing as an overnight success. It takes blood, sweat, tears and a handful of shattered dreams to get where you want to. However, you’re willing to risk it all. You’re willing to hustle harder than ever before. So, work tirelessly towards the dream. Keep practicing your newly acquired skills, even if it feels monotonous sometimes. Before you know it, you will have crossed all hurdles and made it to the finish line successfully.