



NARGIS FAKHRI "HAD TO BE STRONGER" - SO SHE IS. READ HER NOTE
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BHAGYASHREE WISHED HUSBAND HIMALAYA DASSANI ON HIS BIRTHDAY LIKE THIS
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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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"Only group of farmers protesting": Government in Farm Laws repeal note

NEW DELHI, 27 Nov [NDTV]: Two days before it is to table a bill in Parliament to scrap the farm laws, the government issued a note on 'Objects and Reasons' for its U-turn over laws that triggered a nearly 15-month protest by tens of thousands of farmers, led to severe criticism of the ruling BJP, and made headlines globally. The note, released to members of Parliament, blames a group of farmers for standing in the way of "the endeavour to improve the condition of farmers, including small and marginal...", and says the government "tried hard to sensitise farmers on the importance of the farm laws".

"Even though only a group of farmers are protesting against these laws, the government has tried to hard to sensitise farmers on the importance of the farm laws and explain the merits through several meetings and other forums," the note, signed by Agriculture Minister Narendra Tomar, said.

It said the laws were "to enable farmers to sell produce at higher prices and benefit from technological improvements... (and get) access to markets to help increase income...". The laws, the note said, could have allowed farmers "freedom to sell produce to any buyer at any place of their choice..." and enabled them to engage directly with retailers and bulk buyers (by skipping middlemen at mandis), as well as benefit from "a legal framework for farming contracts". "For years, this demand was constantly made by farmers, agricultural experts, agricultural economists, and farmer organisations..." Mr Tomar wrote in the note.

Sections of the note - specifically the bit about "a small group of farmers" - echoed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement from last week, when he announced the scrapping of the laws.

"Only a section of them (the farmers) was opposing the laws, but we kept trying to educate and inform them," the Prime Minister had said, expressing his "regret" at not convincing them. The recall was forced by anger against the BJP - something it can ill-afford with multiple elections due next year, including in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, where farmers' votes are key.

The 'farm laws' refers to a set of three bills passed by Parliament last year amid unprecedented ruckus and chaos, and slammed as "black" laws by protesting farmers and the opposition.

145 HOME GUARDS REGULARIZED AS SECURITY GUARDS AND OFFICE ASSISTANTS; 11 COPS FELICITATED

NAMCHI, 28 Nov (IPR):The 125th Raising Day of Sikkim Police was held at Bhairu-chung Stadium, today. Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang attended the occasion as the chief guest. He was accompanied by Cabinet Ministers, Director General of Police, SD Negi, dignitaries and police personnel from various parts of the state.

At the outset, the Chief Minister inspected the parade and visited the display of Arms and Equipment at the stadium, premises.

Addressing the gathering chief guest extended his congratulations on the 125th Raising Day of Sikkim Police



and said that Sikkim Police is known for being smart, disciplined and effective.

He also highlighted the honour given to Sikkim Police in the IPF Smart Policing

Index the Sikkim Police has been ranked 5th with a 7.18 Index score.

Along with this, he appreciated Pakyong Police Station, which was listed in the 7th

position in the top 10 best-performing police stations across the country for the year 2020. He also said that these achievements have brought laurels to the state and its po-

licing system is known to be one of the best in the country and added that the people of Sikkim should be proud of this accomplishment.

During the occasion, the

Chief Minister distributed a total of 145 appointment letters to home guards, wherein, the trained home guards have been given the appointments letter of security guards and untrained home guards have been given the appointments letters in the capacity of office attendants and office assistant, respectively.

He further suggested that the Police Department should plan year-long activities to commemorate the 125th Raising Day at various places in the state. These activities should be combined with the ongoing Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, which is an initiative of the Government of India to celebrate the 75th year of progressive India and the glorious history of its people, culture and achievements.

He also informed that a Sikkim Police Memorial will be set up soon and for the same, a proposal needs to

turn to pg02



AGRI & HORTI DEPT DONATES BLOOD TO MARK SAMVIDHAN DIWAS:

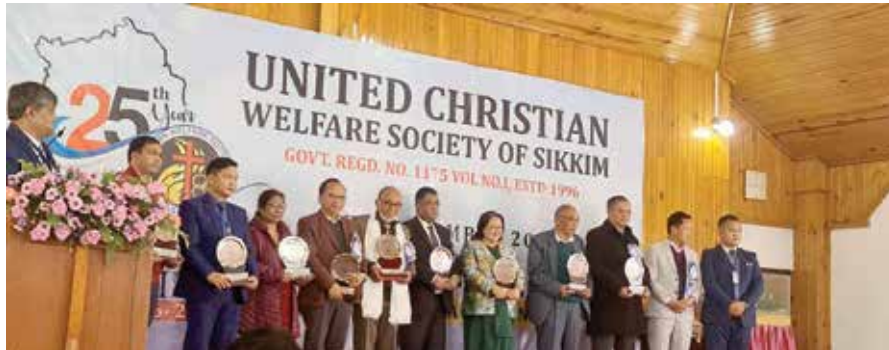
Minister LN Sharma, Secretary, Agriculture Department, Rinzing Chewang Bhutia, Special Secretary Annapurna Alley, Directors Tilak Gazmer and SR Bhutia, and Joint Directors of the Department after donating blood at a special camp held at Raj Bhawan yesterday as part of Constitution Day celebrations.

UCWSS celebrates silver jubilee

SUMMIT REPORT GANGETOK, 27 Nov: United Christian Welfare Society of Sikkim [UCWSS] celebrated its silver jubilee in grand manner here at the EPCS jubilee hall on Saturday.

Political Secretary to the CM, Jacob Khaling, was present as chief guest for the function which was also attended by pastors and leaders of different churches of Sikkim.

On the occasion, the UCWSS felicitated four sports persons for their achievements in international and national levels - national boxing coach and Dronacharya recipient Sandhya Gurung, national table tennis player, Sylvanus Sherpa, national kickboxer Rahul Stephen Chaudhary and national taekwondo player, Joyce



K Tenzing.

The society also felicitated architect Sachin Dewan for contributing towards the designing of UCWSS projects.

Likewise, the society honored its former executive members for their contribution towards bringing UCWSS to its present position since its establishment in 1996.

Speaking to media persons, the Political Secretary to the CM congratulated the entire

team at UCWSS on the completion of 25 years and further conveyed his best wishes to the society to work continuously by taking the Christian community together and in serving the society.

He mentioned that Sikkim Krantikari Morcha government has been constantly working with equal focus on every community and section in the society by providing equal protection, justice and opportunities.

He added that the government has always kept religion above politics while working for the people.

Mr Khaling mentioned that the SKM government has addressed many long pending demands of the Society and churches.

Likewise, UCWSS president, Elder Patrus Gurung thanked every individual and organisation for supporting the UCWSS.

No Covid deaths for eighth consecutive day in Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGETOK, 27 Nov:

Sikkim's daily test positivity rate was registered at 1.2% on Saturday with four new cases detected from the testing of 319 samples yesterday. In further reassuring news, Sikkim has now completed eight days without any Covid deaths and the toll has held at 403 since 18 Nov.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of Health Department, while three new cases were picked up in RT-PCR testing of 204 samples, one person tested positive in rapid antigen testing of 114 samples.

Of the four new cases,

three were reported in East District and one in South District.

Sikkim's tally of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 has now reached 32,211.

In the meantime, eight more COVID patients were discharged from home isolation on Friday after making full recoveries to further improve the State's figure of recovered cases to 31,354. Sikkim has a current recovery rate 98.4%.

There are 114 active cases of Covid-19 in the State, 15 of whom are in hospital and 99 on their way to recovery under home isolation. There is no under-18 year old in hospital. Although

some minors have been testing positive, clearly, none of them currently has symptoms severe enough to require hospitalisation.

Of the 15 in hospital, two are in the ICU. Even this is an improvement. A day earlier, there were three Covid patients in ICU and a day before that, four.

On the vaccination front, a total of 680 people received Covishield jabs on Friday, 627 of them completing their vaccination schedule with the second dose and 53 receiving the first dose. 90.27% of the State's adult population is now fully vaccinated against Covid.

Farmers defer march, Bill to scrap farm laws in Parliament on Monday

NEW DELHI, 27 Nov

[NDTV]: Farmers on Saturday deferred their 'sansadchalo', or 'march to Parliament' call, two days before the government is to introduce a bill cancelling the farm laws that have triggered protests nationwide.

"We are postponing the 'Parliament march' for November 29. The government has promised us that the laws will be repealed in Parliament on the 29th," farmer leader Dr Darshan Pal told reporters this afternoon, after a meeting of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha, a group of farmer unions spearheading the fight against the three "black"

farm laws. "We had written a letter to the Prime Minister, in which we had made many demands. We had demanded that (police) cases against farmers should be quashed... MSP (minimum support price) to be guaranteed... (families of) farmers martyred in this movement should get compensation... (cases filed against farmers for) stubble burning and electricity bills should also be cancelled," he said.

"We will wait for the Prime Minister's letter till December 4... we will announce our next action then," Dr Pal said.

Earlier today Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar urged

farmers to end their agitation, saying he saw "no point" in it continuing now that the government had agreed to scrap the laws. Mr Tomar also said a committee would be constituted to discuss issues raised by the farmers, and that the government had accepted demands to drop stubble burning cases.

The Agriculture Minister, however, made no specific reference to a bill promising MSP, which remains a core demand for protesting farmers.

Last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the farm laws would be rolled back, and asked farmers to stand down and return home.

Tripura CM orders review of terror cases against journalists

TRIPURA, 27 NOV [NDTV]: Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb today asked Tripura's top cop to review cases filed against journalists and lawyers under a controversial anti-terror law.

102 people, including lawyers and journalists, were recently charged with sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for allegedly sharing fake visuals of violence in Tripura last month, which the police claim disturbed the peace in the state and created a law-and-order challenge.

The Supreme Court had on November 17 granted relief to three people who had filed a plea demanding the UAPA cases against them

be cancelled. Journalist ShyamMeera Singh was charged for posting a tweet that said "Tripura is burning".

Supreme Court lawyers AnsarIndori (from the National Confederation of Human Rights Organisation) and Mukesh (from the Peoples' Union of Civil Liberties) were part of an independent fact-finding team that had visited the state to assess the situation on the ground and prepare a report. The SC had issued a notice to the Tripura government and said that no coercive action was to be taken against the three until further orders.

On the CM's direction, the state's Director General of Police V.S. Yadav has asked the Additional

Director General of the crime branch of Tripura police to review cases filed against lawyers and journalists under UAPA.

Various journalists' bodies and civil liberties groups had slammed the Tripura government for trying to "intimidate and silence" the media and demanded immediate withdrawal of these cases.

The Indian Women's Press Corps (IWPC) had said it was "shocked and dismayed" by the act of Tripura Police of booking ShyamMeera Singh, a journalist, along with others under the UAPA. "Singh has alleged that he has been booked for tweeting, 'Tripura is burning'.

It is a journalist's job to inform, to highlight, and present the true pic-

ture of events. It is not the journalist's job to please people in power," the journalists' body had said.

The Editors Guild of India had also released a statement expressing shock and demanding a fair and impartial inquiry into the circumstances of the violence. The Guild asked the state not to "penalise" journalists.

"This is an extremely disturbing trend where such a harsh law, where in the processes of investigation and bail applications are extremely rigorous and overbearing, is being used for merely reporting on and protesting against communal violence," their statement said.

The People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL)

had condemned the FIRs and demanded the police to withdraw the cases.

"...police have invoked the draconian provisions of UAPA law only because of the findings of the FFT that the large scale violence which destroyed numerous homes, shops, mosques and other properties of Muslims in many towns in Tripura was the result of orchestrated violence unleashed by Hindu majoritarian groups like VHP and HJM, against minority Muslims with the tacit connivance and conscious abdication of their duties by the Tripura Police," a press release signed by National President of PUCL Ravi Kiran Jain and national general secretary Dr V Suresh said.

Yoga session for ATTC Bardang students



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 27 NOV:

A yoga session was organized by Rotary Club of Gangtok in association with SARVA, Mumbai for 1st year students of ATTC, Bardang on 26 Nov, 2021 which was attended by almost all the students of 1st

year along with Rotarians, a press release informs.

This practice was introduced to the first year students of ATTC, Bardang in today's session delivering yoga as a science of holistic living and not merely as yoga postures. During the ses-

sion the students were taught the basic concepts of Yoga for wellness.

The energy flow gift demonstrated by the Trainer, Radhika Arora from SARVA, combined with enthusiasm of the students, will help make a positive impact on the community, the release states.

Bihar village votes for dead candidate to honour dying wish. He won

JAMUI, 27 NOV [PTI]: A dead man in Bihar has won the Panchayat polls held on Wednesday riding on a "sympathy wave" generated by his own death.

The real-life tragedy unfolded in Bihar's Jamui district - about 200 km from state capital Patna - when officials handed over certificates to candidates who won the polls held on November 24.

At the ceremony, one of the winning candidates SohanMurmu was nowhere to be found.

"On enquiry, we learnt that Murmu had died on November 6, over a fortnight before the voting took place," Block Development Officer (BDO) RaghavendraTripathi.

Deepakarhar, from where Murmu won, happens to be a remote hamlet situated along the state's border with Jharkhand, which perhaps explains the demography of the village which has a predomi-

nantly tribal population.

Old residents also recall that this was the village to be hit by Naxal activity in the 1990s in the district that later became one of the worst-infested by ultra-Left insurgency, according to a list published by the Union Home Ministry a few years ago.

"Family members of Murmu, who defeated his rival by 28 votes, said it was his last wish to win the election. So they kept quiet. No resident of the village informed us either. It appears that they all voted in his favour to honour his last wish", said the BDO.

The naivete of the family members of Murmu and the fellow villagers has brought on more work for the officials.

"The winner's certificate cannot be issued to anybody. We are going to write to the state election with the request that election for the ward concerned be nullified and fresh polls be held", said Mr Tripathi.

Cracks in opposition unity as Trinamool to stay away from joint meeting

NEW DELHI, 27 NOV [NDTV]: The Trinamool Congress will not participate in any meeting called by the Congress party ahead of the winter session of parliament starting Monday, sources have told NDTV. The Goa unit of the party wants them to stay away from any direct meeting as they are fighting both the Congress and the BJP in the state, they said.

Trinamool Congress leaders who did want to be named said there would be opposition unity on the floor of the house but attendance at morning meetings and being seen together will be difficult.

Leader of Opposition MallikarjunKharge has called for a meeting of all opposition parties in his chambers on Monday morning. He has cited the success of unity amongst all parties in the monsoon session of the parliament as the reason and is expected to build consensus ahead of the winter session. Responding to charges by

Congress leaders that the Trinamool is helping the BJP by weakening their party, they say that they can't be accused of playing into the hands of the BJP as everyone has seen how West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee fought the BJP in the state.

Trinamool staying away from the meeting may trigger other parties like the AamAadmi Party and Samajwadi Party, among others who are not part of the UPA to stay away from the meeting. In the last session, most opposition parties barring the BahujanSamaj Party were seen united, cutting across differences to stall parliament to demand a discussion on the Pegasus snooping issue, among others.

This move comes as a blow to the Congress which has been calling for opposition unity even amid flashpoints in Goa and Meghalaya where the Trinamool Congress have managed to sign up Congress leaders.

Awareness programme for Lachen handicrafts artisans



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 27 NOV:

Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Handicrafts Service Centre Gangtok, organized a Chaupal (Interaction Programme with Handicrafts Artisans) at Lachen Dzumsa, North

Sikkim today, a press release informs.

The purpose was to create awareness among artisans of wood carving and carpet/blanket weaver's about the schemes of O/O the DC (Handicrafts) Ministry of Textiles Govt of India, Pehchan Card(Artisan

Identity Card), Mudra Loan, e-Commerce Portal/Gem Portal, Handicrafts Helpline Number.

In-charge DHH Office Lachen, A Golay, AD(H), Shashikant Gupta, Tshering Namgyal Lachenpa and Panchayat Members were present during the Chaupal.

Cong demands revising COVID-19 death toll in Assam

GUWAHATI, NOV 27 (PTI): The Opposition Congress has demanded that the Himanta Biswa Sarma government reveal updated and the correct COVID-19 death toll in the state.

It also demanded compensation of Rs 4 lakh for next to kin of COVID-19 victims as per guidelines of National Disaster Management Act (NDMA).

In a letter to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Debabrata Saikia asked for revising the COVID-19 death register with immediate effect.

He alleged that negligence and inefficiency of the government has cost several lives in the pandemic.

Accusing the government of going to great lengths to hide the actual death figures, Saikia wrote, "We demand a detailed survey to create an authentic COVID-19 death register so that all those excluded can rightfully access compensation."

He further asked the

Central government to ensure that Rs 4 lakh is paid as compensation to families of COVID-19 victims as permissible under the NDMA, since the ongoing pandemic has been notified as a disaster under the Act by the Centre.

He said that the Central government had committed to disbursement of ex-gratia of Rs 4 lakh per victim in March 2020, but it was later revised and brought down to Rs 50,000 per victim.

Refusing to accept the Central government's contention that paying Rs 4 lakh would leave it with insufficient capital to deal with COVID-19, Saikia questioned how the Centre continued to collect taxes through rising petrol prices and provide relaxation to corporates but deny relief to the citizens.

He appreciated the state government's gesture of paying ex-gratia of Rs 2.5 lakh to families of the deceased and demanded that the Central government should give its share of Rs 3 lakh

per victim. As per rule, the compensation under NDMA is shared on a 75:25 ratio between Centre and state, with the former mandated accordingly to pay Rs 3 lakh and the remaining Rs 1 lakh by the state.

"We demand that steps to be taken by the Central government to give the Central share of Rs 3 lakh as ex-gratia," he added.

The Assam government had announced in its Budget for this fiscal of providing one-time financial assistance of Rs one lakh to families of people who have died of COVID-19.

Earlier, a Chief Minister's COVID-19 Widows Support Scheme' under which women whose husbands have died due to the infection are being given Rs 2.5 lakh each, if their annual family income is less than Rs 5 lakh, was rolled out in July this year.

The government had also launched a scheme to provide Rs 3,500 every month to children orphaned by the pandemic.

Uttarakhandvillage sliding downhill due to road construction, soil weakening: Geologists

PITHORAGARH, 27 NOV [PTI]: Dar - the first village of the Darma valley in Uttarakhand's Dharchula sub-division - is gradually sliding down the slope as the land beneath continues to weaken, making it unfit for human habitation, a geologist who surveyed the village on the orders of the district administration said.

"At least 35 families out of a total of 150 living in the village need to be shifted immediately as the houses they live in are slowly sliding down the slope," said Pradeep Kumar, who led a team of geologists to the village for a survey recently.

The cause of the downward slide is the widening work on the Sobla-Tidang road besides underground water bod-

ies that are making their way downhill, weakening the land on which the village is situated, he said.

These water bodies went underground after being buried under tonnes of landslide debris around 200 years ago and they are gradually receding further down making the upper layers of the soil even weaker, Mr Kumar said.

"The village is situated on landslide debris which already has weakened the soil as it has no hard rocks beneath," he said.

Nearly 200 villages of the Dharchula and Munsyari sub-divisions are situated on debris that had accumulated following landslides in the surrounding hills over centuries and are highly

sensitive to landslips, he said.

Gram Pradhan of Dar village Savita Devi had written to the administration complaining about the sliding slope of some houses in the village. A team of geologists led by Pradeep Kumar was sent by the district administration to the village for a survey following her complaint.

"The families living in endangered houses need to be immediately shifted to safe places as a calamity might occur any moment," she warned.

Dharchula sub-divisional magistrate AK Shukla said further action will be taken after he receives the survey report from the team of geologists and studies the report in detail.

CM announces...

be submitted. He further updated that the State Government will invariably provide resources and other facilitation to strengthen different Police infrastructure by upgrading and if needed constructing Police Stations, Police Training Centre's will be also done.

The Chief Minister also informed about various resources that the State Government has started for the holistic betterment of the Police Department, namely, increasing of stipend of rations for IRBns in Delhi, Children's education allowances for personnel's posted in Delhi, Creation of Inspector General (IG) post for personnel's from Sikkim State Service, installation of CCTV's at Police Stations and many more.

He added that the State Government will always work for the professional growth and another advancement of Sikkim Police as they are the ones who are responsible for maintaining law and order. He also appreciated their relentless work during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and applauded their assistance.

Speaking during the occasion, Director General of Police, SD Negi gave an overview of Sikkim Police, wherein he said the first Police Station was set up in Aritar, Rhenock on 27 November 1897 consisting of one head constable and five other constables. He highlighted how Sikkim Police has reformed itself with changing times. The department has become more efficient, transparent, sensitive, trained and technosavvy and added that it will continue to serve the citizens equitably.

During the programme, Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang felicitated following various levels of Police personnel's who have contributed immensely and brought laurels to the state: DySP Sabitri Pradhan, SI Joy Gurung, ASI Bhanu Bhakta Pradhan, Head Constable Navin Kumar Pradhan, Head Constable Anil Subba, Naik Ganga Ram Pradhan, Lance Naik Pawan Singh Dharwal, Lance Naik Umesh Tamang, Lance Naik Suman Tamang, Constable Eksha Hangma Subba, and Home Guard Manisha Tiwari.

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BEDAN KR. CHETTRI

02.04.1965
17.11.2021

ANTHYESTHYI KRIYA

The anthyesthyi kriya of Late Shri. Bedan Kr. Chettri who left for heavenly abode on 17.11.2021 shall be take place on 29.11.2021.

All the relatives, well-wishers and friends are hereby requested to join us in the offering prayers for the departed soul at our own residence in Bhurung, Central Pandam.

BEREAVED FAMILY MEMBER

1. Smt. Arati Chettri (Wife)
2. Mr. Abin Chettri (Son)
3. Mr. Bebek Chettri (Son)
4. Smt. Pranita Chettri (Daughter in law)

PH. NO:- 9593576435, 8101447015

Yuwa Baral conferred Lalmaan Sancharaani Memorial Award

GYALSHING, 27 Nov (IPR): Paschim Sikkim Saahitya Prakashan in collaboration with Shrasta family conferred the prestigious Lalmaan Sancharaani Memorial Award and Shrasta award for the year 2021, at the Indian Nepali Literary and Cultural Research Centre, Kyongsa today. The Minister PHE, Bhim Hang Limboo chaired the event as the chief guest and he was accompanied by Janak Gurung, Chairman, SIDICO.

The event also saw the presence of the SDM, Gyalshing, Santosh Kumar Alley; SDM HQ, Gopal K Chhetri; Additional Director, Education, P.L Subba; JD Horticulture, J.P Chhetri; dignitaries from District Administration Centre, Rabdentse, West District Zilla Panchayat, panchayats, Principals, teachers and students from Kyonsha Girls Senior Secondary School and Gyalshing Senior Secondary School.

Chairman, SIDICO, Mr Gurung, in his address, congratulated the recipient of the awards and pointed out their notable work in the respective genre and praised them for their impeccable con-



tributions. He applauded the Paschim Sikkim Sahitya Prakashan for their relentless efforts in the preservation of the language, he further informed that they had not only made names for themselves in the state, but also the world. They have been able to create a space for themselves which in turn have allowed the world to acknowledged the literary gems of the Sikkim. He further mentioned that it is a proud moment

to cherish and work even more with much enthusiasm and zeal.

Speaking upon 'Shrasta', a periodical Newspaper which primarily focuses on the literary publication of the aspiring writer and poets, congratulated on its long run and aspired it to be epic in near future.

While, encouraging all concerned for the collective efforts, he conveyed the message comprising of assistive

gesture of the State Government towards holistic conservation and outlined the approaches and initiatives. He then even assured for every possible assistance from his context and showed his keen interest in respect to the upliftment of the language.

At the Award ceremony, Lal Man Sancharani Memorial award was conferred to Yuwa Baral for his work 'Chichimerah'. The 'Shrasta' award was conferred to

the following individuals and their respective fields: Indra Kumar Rai, Essay writing; Amar Baniya, Poem writing; Ashok Roka, Story writing.

During the program colourful cultural extravaganza were performed by the students of Kyongsa Girls Senior Secondary School and Gyalshing Senior Secondary School.

Lastly, during the program a total of eight books were official released.

Southern Enfielders ride against addiction



BIKASH CHETTRI NAMCHI, 27Nov:

Sixty members of Southern Enfielders, a club of Royal Enfield riders, and others in collaboration with the South District administration undertook a 'NashaMuktaBharat Abhiyan' rally through South Sikkim towns today.

Starting from the DAC-Namchi complex, the riders moved through Damthang, Temi and Rabongla from where they disbursed after lunch.

Along the ride, the Southern Enfielders distributed awareness pamphlets and even made a stop-over at the Temi Autumn Festival celebrations where a short

speech on de-addiction was delivered.

Moses Sereng, a recovering addict from Namchi, shared his experience of spiralling into addiction and of how he was now fighting the dependence. He and his friends were felicitated at Temi Autumn Festival by the day's chief guest, Urban Development Minister ArunUpreti.

DC-South, M Bharani, while flagging off the bikers, derved on the objectives of the NashaMuktaBharat Abhiyan. The Southern Enfielders presented him and the ADC with the club's leather waistcoats and felicitated letters. The ADC-South joined the bikers on the tour today as well.

Powerlifting team returns with silver from National benchpress c'ship

SAGAR CHHETRI GANGTOK, 27 Nov: Sikkim Powerlifting Association [SPA] team has returned with a silver medal from the 30th National Men & Women Equipped & Classic Bench Press Championship 2021 held from 16 to 20 November in Goa.

Devendra Basnet clinched a silver for Sikkim in the master's category. Sikkim was represented at the tournament by a 15-member SPA team.

Speaking to media persons here this afternoon, Devendra Basnet informed that more than 1,600 athletes had participated in the championship and that the competition was very tough in every category.

"To win a medal for the state in such a competitive national championship is a matter of pride for me and I am thankful to SPA for consistently encouraging and supporting me," he said.



He mentioned that the association has also been trying to bring the national bench press championship to Sikkim.

State team assistant coach, SonamKarthak, shared that he was also proud of the effort put in by the rest of the team.

He informed that the state team will also be participating in the upcoming national power-

lifting championship scheduled to be held in February next year in Kerala.

On the same, he invited interested athletes to attend the selection trials to be held in December.

"Competition is very stiff in the national level so we will take the best of the best after a proper training camp," he said.

In Congress vs Trinamoolover greater reach, opposition unity gets ajolt

NEW DELHI: The opposition unity to fight the BJP seems to have run into rough weather as the Trinamool and the Congress are at daggers drawn over the recent instances of "poaching" by the Mamata Banerjee-led camp, with the grand old party finding itself in a tight spot.

Despite a show of bonhomie during the August 20 meeting convened by Congress president Sonia Gandhi, the camaraderie fizzed out as the Trinamool, which is taking long strides to expand its footprint across the country, left no chance to vilify the party for its alleged failure to take on the saffron camp.

According to sources in the Trinamool, party supremo Mamata Banerjee, who has emerged as the toughest opposition face after winning one of the toughest elections of her career, apparently seeks to take up a larger role in national politics, possibly of the leader of the opposition coalition, a position held by the Congress since the BJP stormed to power in 2014.

Lashing out at the ruling camp in Bengal, Leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha, Adhir Chowdhury, said, "I have been stating this from the very beginning that Mamata Banerjee is the trojan horse of the BJP. TMC's activities indicate that her main aim is to weaken the Congress and help the BJP. But mind you, no one has ever succeeded and no one will ever succeed in wiping out the Congress." The issue of the opposition leadership and Trinamool's zealous efforts to establish its presence nationally, even if that happened at the expense of the Congress, seems to have thrown a spanner in the process of building a united opposition front.

According to sources in the Trinamool, assertions by a section of senior Congress leaders like Salman Khurshid that the party is still in a position to win at least 120-130 seats in the next Lok Sabha elections in a direct contest with the saffron camp did not go down well with the Banerjee camp.

Since then, gloves in the opposition camp seem to be coming off, with the two parties firing salvos at each other on multiple occasions, as BJP leaders watched the show, probably with a chuckle on their faces.

In a deviation from the past, the Trinamool has decided against engaging in any form of floor coordination with the Congress during the upcoming winter session of Parliament, the sources said.

"The Congress has done nothing to fight the BJP in the last seven years. It is the TMC that put up a battle against the BJP. We have never talked of stitching an opposition alliance without the Congress. But the Congress has to realise that its big brother attitude will no longer be accepted. The party is having an existential crisis in many states," Kunal Ghosh, the general secretary of Bengal's ruling camp, said. The Trinamool has not just termed the Congress as an

"incompetent and incapable" party in the past but also hit out at Rahul Gandhi over his defeat in Amethi in the last parliamentary polls, while emphasising that Banerjee, and not Gandhi, was the face of the opposition. It has been going all out to gain foothold in BJP-ruled states, many of which have the Congress as the main opposition force.

The Mamata Banerjee-helmed party, with no sign of contriteness, feels that it has every right to expand nationally even if that comes at the cost of the Congress.

Several leaders of the grand old party such as Sushmita Dev, former Goa chief minister Luizinho Faleiro, as well as cricketer-turned-politician Kirti Azad have joined the Trinamool recently.

The Congress further received a massive jolt earlier this week as it lost the main opposition status in Meghalaya with 12 of its MLAs, including former CM Mukul Sangma, switching over to the Trinamool.

TMC's national vice president Yashwant Sinha, still optimistic about opposition unity, however, underlined that it's too early to write its obituary.

"It is true that people now are looking up to the TMC, and the Congress has weakened in last few years. Nevertheless, there is still 2.5 yrs to go before the next general election, and things may just evolve," he said.

Amid the wrangle, the BJP has almost certainly found time and opportunity to sharpen its knives, after having experienced setbacks in some states in the recent past. "The ongoing fight for supremacy between the two parties has exposed their lack of integrity. The TMC and the Congress will end up nowhere," BJP national vice president Dilip Ghosh claimed.

According to poll observers, born out of the womb of the Congress in 1998, the TMC, just like any other political outfit which are breakaway factions of the grand old party, has to keep their "anti-Congressism" alive even when the BJP is their main threat.

"These parties – the TMC, NCP -- were born out of the Congress. So they need to keep their anti-Congressism intact for survival and growth. If the Congress gets weakened nationally, these parties will try to step into its shoes. Also, after the West Bengal poll victory, the three-term as Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee can be seen aspiring for the prime minister's chair," political analyst Maidul Islam said.

Biswanath Chakraborty, a political scientist, warned that the tussle between the opposition forces may work in favour of the BJP.

"The more the TMC and the Congress engage in fights over leadership, the better for the BJP. If the Congress is cornered, it will be virtually impossible for the opposition front to reach the magic figure in Lok Sabha. If the front manages, somehow, it won't be able to sustain as the Congress is the glue for such alliances," he stated.

Public hearing held for JSW project in Odisha

PARADIP, Nov 27 (PTI): A public hearing was held for Jindal Steel Works' proposed integrated steel plant in Odisha's Jagatsinghpur district, officials said.

The JSW has proposed a world-class 12-million-tonne-per-annum (MTPA) facility, 900 MW power plant and a captive port in 3,000 acres of land at an estimated cost of Rs 50,000 crore.

The POSCO site near the port town of Paradip was chosen by the administration for setting up of the JSW project as the South Korean steel company has withdrawn its proposed plan to set up a mega steel project.

The JSW had earlier held tripartite meetings this month at the district level, and Gadakujang, Nuagaon and Dhinkia gram panchayat.

The first village-level meeting was hosted at Govindpur in Ersama block on Friday morn-



ing with participation from 200 villagers, district administration and JSW, the steel conglomerate said in a release.

District Collector Parul Patwari, Superintendent of Police Akhileshwar Singh, local MLA Raghunandan Das and others attended the hearing. Das said he would ensure that the villagers get their due.

Villagers demanded a job for at least one person from a family, construction of a sea wall to check erosion and compensation for those affected people who depend on betel vine orchards for livelihood, officials said.

Though there was huge noise at the public hearing venue, there was no such violence, a

police official said.

Police had to chase away some of the vocal villagers who prevented others from putting forth their views in the meeting.

The JSW said alternative livelihood and employment, health and education intervention, environment and water came across as the topmost concerns among villagers. It announced a roadmap to initiate livelihood engagement for people at the project site.

There is a plan to engage 1,000 youths from the affected area across different JSW projects in India depending on suitability and requirement, according to the firm.

The company has announced to spend Rs 196 crore for periphery development, Rs 57 crore for skill development of local people and Rs 52 crore for creating mangrove forest, health and drinking water projects.

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Noninvolvement Feeds Arrogance

...a prescription which poisons democracy

The dictionary defines “noninvolvement” as a lack of emotional engagement and failure or refusal to become involved.

In most contexts, this term takes a more policy/ political term in that it applies to nations in the line of “nonalignment”. When so practiced, it is mostly a good thing so long as it is about distancing from “politics” and not humanitarian situations because had it been followed, USA would not have been fighting so many wars instigating the creation of monsters like ISIS and then so overtly undermining the significance of the UN... or even ignoring the science of climate change for that matter, or not even opting for a fig leaf excuse in ignoring the brazen murder of a journalist by an offensive regime on foreign soil.

The same principle, however, does not apply to the citizenry with the same merits. In fact, non-involvement among a people has the opposite effect of what it does on nations. When a people refuse to engage, democracy gets reduced to election cycles, accountability is replaced by bombast and the sense of service among representatives is subsumed by the arrogance of “leaders”. When things come to such a pass, policy decisions become diktats, the noxious fringe crawls out from under the rocks and dances madness in the public domain. And no, social media activity does not really qualify as involvement; if anything, it is a false equivalent for public participation because what it seeks to do is abuse/ shout discourse into meek acceptance or vent into an echo chamber and think humanity has been served. And as the troll army wins more and more battles, it helps create a mob of bots programmed not to analyse or challenge but applaud the demagoguery of flag-waving chauvinists and end up subverting democracy so much that the idea of supreme and all-powerful leaders does not offend anymore and no one even blinks when the term in office of an elected government is referred to as “rule”.

A people self-assured in their ignorance make for easy pickings when it comes to seeding fears because when one refuse to get involved and hence get informed, they cannot handle complexities anymore and gravitate towards the black & whites of the alt-Right. We know we are in trouble when hate can be peddled as righteousness and not even get called out. You know democracy is being compromised when dictation replaces consultation and no one has a problem with it.

Democracy is supposed to ease people’s minds, allowing them their disagreements and differences and still providing the space where they can be themselves without having to constantly look over their shoulders. Fail to remain involved, and every expression of democracy becomes conditional and violence punctuates the lives of lay people more often than should ever be allowed. We have seen this trend gather pace in the recent past when suspicions, bans, deregulation, demonization (okay, also demonetization), forced nationalism, increased supervision bordering on surveillance and pulpit-mongering have come to define governance and gain meek acceptance. Arrogance is an undesirable quality in anyone, but when it comes to leaders, it is dangerous. And we continue feeding it with our noninvolvement.

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How the COVID pandemic changed digital journalism

JAMES MAHON
theconversation.com

In the last decade, smartphones and mobile technology have altered newsrooms, transforming news gathering, live broadcasting and content distribution. Trained on an iPhone 4s at the University of Sheffield in 2011, I was one of the first mobile journalists in the UK. Over the course of my career broadcasting live, from war zones in Iraq to tornados in the US, mobile technology has been the primary vehicle for capturing, curating and distributing packaged and live content.

Now the media world has again shifted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with new challenges, different restrictions and innovative storytelling approaches emerging.

Research by journalists and academics from around the world confirms that technology and social trends are driving changes in how and where news is created and consumed. These changes have had an impact on the way journalists operate, namely enabling them to working alone or remotely. Reporter requirements have also altered, with sharp social media and digital skills expected as the norm.

Some of the smartphone journalistic trends that were gaining momentum before COVID were accelerated during the pandemic. This means greater autonomy for reporters, but also more pressure and responsibility, more ways to broadcast live and greater audience involvement in the news cycle.

AUTONOMY AND FREEDOM

Newsrooms have been downsizing in the UK and US over the last 15 years. In newspapers for example, publishers have had to face the spiralling decline of print sales, forcing them to embrace new platforms and technologies. With fewer specific roles and multi-skilling key to surviving in the industry, many reporters find themselves becoming videographers, editors and social media producers all rolled into one.

So much more is now being asked of broadcast and digital journalists, but with that has come greater freedom to source and create stories. Fewer editors, videographers, lighting and sound

technicians mean journalists are more in control of the way they weave and distribute their news. Coupled with that is the removal of traditional PR “gatekeepers” and the rise of media-savvy figures who understand the importance of being accessible via social media and directly engaging with journalists.

Dutch media scholar Mark Deuze has cautioned against this shift from specialised roles, describing it as “leaving newsrooms full of empty chairs”. Deuze believes that asking more of fewer journalists results in a loss of identity, teamwork, mentoring and guidance.

In the course of my research, I interviewed more than 40 journalists in India, Switzerland, the US and the UK between 2018 and 2021. All had the same concern: while this freedom was welcomed, reporters feared the lack of support would put pressure on their ability to gather stories and create content.

REPORTER SKILLS

Post-pandemic, many journalists are expected to focus on mobile journalism and develop new skills in smartphone technologies and deal with new technical and editorial challenges. In some cases this has put older journalists under increasing pressure to get to grips with new technologies.

With the transition to remote working, Zoom interviews and mobile and app editing, younger content creators excelled during the COVID crisis while older and less tech-savvy journalists were marginalised. The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) in the UK has supported these reporters in their efforts to bridge the gap through streaming online classes. Some national broadcasters, including ITV, have provided remote and office-based workshop training in production and editing skills for new staff.

The huge demand for constant content and live streaming has turned traditional TV reporters into walking cameras. This may enhance coverage and encourage audience engagement on social media, but it also places added strain on young, inexperienced and overworked reporters who have entered the field during a time of uncertainty, resulting in health risks and safety concerns. It is para-

mount that cub reporters are properly inducted, mentored and guided to produce balanced and rounded news-gathering.

ENGAGED AUDIENCES

Whether self-shooting at home, filming video interviews on the go or making novelty content with their pets – a huge hit for sports commentator Andrew Cotter – TV, radio, podcasting and social media audiences have themselves become more creative and involved during the pandemic.

Broadcasters have capitalised on user-generated content throughout COVID – video interviews on phones, tablets and laptops became the norm, as once-passive news consumers became producers. In sports broadcasting the absence of crowds allowed for fan-generated media to bridge the gap and satisfy supporters’ appetite while club media became more dynamic, offering insights into players and coaches’ personal lives.

These trends were already evident in my research in 2018 and 2019, but during 2020 and 2021 the landscape shifted. Media educators and news organisations now must work more closely to align teaching and work experience to support graduates into the media industry’s newsrooms – whether real or remote.

Trust in news media has been in decline since the Leveson inquiry examined the ethics, culture and practices of the British press. But data on social media journalism and trust from the latest Reuters Digital Report demonstrates that the pandemic put journalists back to a place of respect in homes and communities – where it had previously been waning.

Newsrooms need to continue the good practices established during the pandemic, which saw editors and producers supporting and harnessing the skills of younger and more dynamic reporters to create balanced and ethical content.

It is crucial good practice feeds down into higher education, so that this accelerated digital transformation of newsgathering, broadcasting and content creation maintains ethical standards and ensures the well-being of reporters if young people are to be encouraged into the industry.

[the writer is Lecturer in Mobile and Broadcast Journalism, University of the West of Scotland]

Black Friday for Amazon workers: the human costs behind consumer convenience

TOM VICKERS
theconversation.com

With the holiday shopping season upon us, many people will be taking advantage of the low prices and speedy delivery promised by Amazon. The online retail giant is more popular than ever, and it is bringing on thousands more employees to meet demand.

But available evidence suggests that the process by which Amazon fulfils our orders can harm its workers. It also suggests that this problem is getting worse, and has even been exacerbated by the introduction of automation and robots to the fulfilment process.

Our team in the Work Futures Research Group reviewed over 500 sources of information about Amazon. We looked at media reports, academic publications, Amazon’s own published materials and blog posts by Amazon employees. We also spoke to the trade unions who organise Amazon workers in the UK.

We attempted to speak to Amazon to get their response to our findings, but they did not respond.

Our findings paint a possible picture of harmful working practices inside Amazon’s fulfilment centres or warehouses. During periods of peak demand – Black Friday, Cyber Monday and Prime Day sales and Christmas – Amazon drafts in thousands of additional staff. This year, the company is offering sign-up bonuses of up to £3,000 to attract seasonal workers.

During these peak times, the length of the working week can increase to as much as 60 hours, and the average rate of ambulance callouts allegedly increases, Business Insider reported in 2019. However, an Amazon spokeswoman told Business Insider that they knew “for a fact that recordable incidents do not increase during peak” times, though they did not provide records. The company also said that using ambulance callout rates to assess workplace safety is “simply wrong because it does not take into consideration hours worked, population-size and whether the requests were work-related or not”.

The evidence of physical harm that Amazon’s warehouse workers can experience is alarming. The New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health, a membership organisation of workers, unions, activists and health and safety professionals, surveyed 142 of the 2,500 workers at Amazon’s Staten Island warehouse.

Of those surveyed, 66% said they “had experienced physical pain while performing their regular work duties”, and 42% “continued experiencing pain

even when they were not at work”. The researchers concluded that these reports constituted evidence of “work-related musculoskeletal disorders”.

A similar survey by the UK’s GMB trade union found that 87% of respondents reported both constant and occasional pain. It found 10% experienced only occasional pain and only 3% did not experience any pain.

The GMB also obtained information from UK local authorities about accidents that Amazon warehouses had reported to health and safety authorities. The annual total increased from 152 in 2016-17 to 240 in 2018-19.

AUTOMATION AND INJURY

Amazon has claimed that the introduction of digitisation and automation to the work process improves worker safety. But there is evidence which suggests that these innovations may actually contribute to warehouse injuries.

Globally, Amazon has deployed hundreds of thousands of robotic drive units to its warehouses in recent years. This has increased the speed with which Amazon fulfils orders, but it also means human workers must keep up with the machines. Amazon also uses digital programmes to track workers’ movements, keeping human and robotics elements in sync to maximise productivity and efficiency.

A former senior operations manager at Amazon told investigative journalism nonprofit Reveal that when robots were introduced, “the productivity expectations for workers more than doubled”. Pickers, the workers charged with grabbing and scanning items, had their target raised from around 100 items to 400 items per hour. In an investigation including internal Amazon documents, Reveal found that:

- The rate of serious injury increased by 33% from 2016-19;
- In each of those years, the highest rates of serious injury occurred during the weeks of Prime Day and Cyber Monday
- In 2019, the rate of serious injury was 7.7 per 100 employees – nearly double the average rate for general warehousing and storage in the US;
- The rate of serious injury in warehouses operating with robotics from 2016 to 2019 was more than 50% higher than in older warehouses operating without robotics.

In 2019, an Amazon spokesperson told Reveal that during Prime Day and the holiday season, the increase in injuries is due to increased numbers of employees, but that the average rate of injury “has historically decreased or been stable” during those times.

A year later, a company spokesperson told Reveal that in 2020, Amazon spent over US\$1 billion (£0.75 billion) on safety measures related to technology and COVID-19 safety. They said, “[Amazon’s] investments in safety training and education programs, in technology and new safety infrastructure are working.”

A faster pace of work has been found generally to lead to increased risk of musculoskeletal disorders and stress, especially when workers have limited control over their pace of work. This finding challenges the idea that robotics and automation reduce physical demands on workers.

In May 2021, Amazon introduced a wellbeing programme focused on improving workers’ individual resilience through measures like healthy eating and “body mechanics”. We have seen no evidence that Amazon managers have considered decreasing the rate of work as a way to improve worker wellbeing.

There is less evidence about the impact of working at Amazon on mental health. Journalistic reports have found examples of anxiety, mood disorders and stress.

Organise, a worker-led network with more than a million members, surveyed UK-based fulfilment centre workers and found that 57% of respondents said they had become “a lot more anxious” since they started working at Amazon. Many reports have cited workers’ accounts of the stress of meeting targets.

MEETING TARGETS

This pressure is systematically enforced by an automated system reportedly threatening the bottom 10% of workers with disciplinary action, ranked according to their productivity against targets. This has been corroborated by trade union officials we interviewed from the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union, which has represented workers in many Amazon warehouses in the UK.

Similar allegations have been made by other publications and workers’ direct accounts – sometimes referring to the bottom 5%, sometimes 10%. Workers can allegedly be disciplined for taking too much “time off task” or failing to work at their “target speed”.

The Verge reported that legal documents it had obtained showed that Amazon in the US fired hundreds of workers in a year at a single warehouse on grounds relating to their productivity. An Amazon spokesperson told The Verge, “In general, the number of employee terminations have decreased over the last two years at this facility as

well as across North America.”

The Verge also cites Amazon as saying that when more than 75% of workers are meeting their target, targets are increased. So, if workers work too slowly, they face losing their job – but if they work quickly enough, they face being made to work even faster.

One of the documents obtained by The Verge was a letter signed by an attorney for the company, confirming that an automated system tracks rates of individual productivity and generates warnings or terminations “without input from supervisors”.

In June 2021, Amazon US announced it was refining its time off task policy, which the company said can be “easily misunderstood”. The company said the system is intended primarily to understand problems with operational systems, and “only secondarily to identify under-performing employees”. Amazon said it would average time off task over a longer period of time, a change that would help it achieve the vision of being “Earth’s safest place to work”.

LOCAL INVOLVEMENT

In the UK, many of Amazon’s warehouses are located in smaller local authorities, such as Cannock Chase, home to Amazon’s Rugeley fulfilment centre. “Partnership arrangements” have been seen by some as implying that the local authority acts, in effect, as Amazon’s agent, in relation to third parties making requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

Given that Amazon will be a major provider of jobs within the local authority area, and may also be paying fees to that authority for the provision of advice, there are risks that its role in regulation may be compromised.

Cannock Chase Council said that the partnership arrangement does not compromise their ability to regulate Amazon in any way and does not result in Cannock Chase Council acting as agents for Amazon. It said that if Freedom of Information requests are made to them then they are legally bound to respond to these – and that does not form any part of the agreement with Amazon.

The increasing risk to the wellbeing of Amazon’s fulfilment centre workers calls for action, but solving this problem is far from straightforward.

Initiatives by Amazon workers, trade unions and campaigners to hold the company to account have to be part of the solution.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Convenor of the Work Futures Research Group, Nottingham Trent University]

LOK SABHA SPEAKER ON THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA ON SAMVIDHAN DIWAS

Cornerstone of Our Democracy, Timeless Ideals Teamed With Resilient Framework

OM BIRLA

India is the largest functioning democracy in the world, not only by virtue of its size, but also because of its pluralistic character and democratic values and spirit which have stood the test of time. Democratic traditions and tenets have remained an integral part of the glorious legacy of Indian civilization. The virtues of equality, tolerance, peaceful coexistence and democratic values have always been a way of life and an intrinsic part of our society for centuries. In fact, democracy is deeply rooted in our socio-political conscience. That is why, even when our country witnessed changes in the governance system in the course of time, democratic ethos that has guided our society continued to remain strong.

Our freedom struggle was a mass movement based on the doctrines of Truth and Non-violence. Countless freedom fighters dreamed of a free and prosperous India and an inclusive society based on social and economic justice. Our freedom owes a lot to their hardships and sacrifices. After a long drawn struggle, we gained independence and that collective spirit guided us during the post-independence era. Several other nations in the world also won their freedom, but our freedom struggle and independence

have always been beacons of democratic governance to the world community.

Post-Independence, when our national heroes and leading luminaries framed the Constitution, they incorporated the cardinal values of liberty, equality, fraternity and justice in the Constitution. Given the size and diversity, it was an enormous task for the founding fathers of our Constitution to frame the sacred document which would guide the nation on the path of unity and prosperity while preserving its democratic framework. They had primarily three goals - safeguarding the unity and integrity of the nation; establishing the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity among the people and establishing the rule of law; and laying the groundwork for institutions focussed on paving the way for economic and social equality. With their prudence, wisdom, conviction and deep association with the people, our founding fathers were not only successful in drafting a modern and enlightened contract between the state and its citizens but bequeathed us a Constitution which while retaining an inviolable core, is at the same time flexible to adjust the requirements of changing times.

We, as a nation, have faced numerous challenges of diverse nature, but our Constitution has helped us surmount these chal-

lenges successfully. As an embodiment of people's hopes and aspirations, our Constitution has been the guiding light for the nation over the years. It not only establishes the rule of law in the country, but also serves to distribute powers between the Union and the States, strengthen democratic Institutions and empower the most vulnerable and marginalised. The success of India's Parliamentary democracy rests on the robust edifice and institutional framework that the Constitution of India has laid down. Twenty Sixth of November holds a special significance for us as a nation, as in 1949, this was the day on which our Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution running into Ninety thousand words.

In 2015, on the occasion of 125th Birth Anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar, Chairman of the Drafting Committee of Constitution, the Union Government declared 26 November to be observed as Samvidhan Divas or the Constitution Day.

The most distinctive feature of the Constitution of India is its timeless ideals teamed with a resilient framework. Our Constitution is not merely an intangible ideal, but a living document. The Indian Constitution has enabled us to establish social and economic democracy along with political democracy. It has been the most

powerful instrument of social and economic change. Our Constitution has been responding to the hopes, aspirations and circumstances arising from time to time. In fact, it has been evolving with the course of time.

Our parliamentary democracy has grown from strength to strength in the last 72 years. As we look back at our journey spanning the seven decades, we feel proud for not only having upheld the Constitution, but also revitalized

ViewPoint

it and strengthened its democratic tenor. People have always been at the centre of our constitutional democratic polity and as such, our nation is seen as a shining example of a vibrant and pluralistic culture flourishing in an ever-evolving parliamentary system. Our governance structure is focused on directing our policies and programmes towards building an inclusive and prosperous State as envisaged in the preamble to the Constitution. It is this approach that has helped empower common people as confident citizens of a proud nation and no longer passive observers or mere 'beneficiaries'.

It goes to the credit of our constitutional governance structure

and the credibility that it enjoys that after each of the seventeen general elections and scores of elections in State Legislatures, transition of power from one party to another has always been smooth and seamless. Thus, each election has only served to further strengthen our democracy and re-inforced people's faith in our Constitution.

Our Constitution lays down the roadmap for the process of nation building, but it is up to us as citizens to decide the quantum and pace of that development. It is up to us to show our true commitment to our Constitutional values by contributing to the huge endeavors of governments to reach the benefits of social, economic and political development to those at the lowest rung of the society. Each of us will have to understand our Charter of Duties laid down in the Constitution. Our Constitution provides for a unique balance between Rights and Duties. After 75 years of Independence, it is time to reaffirm our commitment for our fundamental duties. If we discharge our responsibilities sincerely and diligently with commitment towards the attainment of national goals in consonance with the Constitutional mandate, our nation will be able to take rapid strides on the path of progress and our democratic pol-

ity will be further enriched.

As we are celebrating Azadi-kaAmritMahotsav, it is time for every citizen to introspect how we can contribute to the process of nation building so that our nation can be a major player in the global economy with an inclusive and egalitarian society, as a responsible member of the comity of nations. I have no doubt that the Constitution of India will be our guide, friend and philosopher in this task.

Our Constitution is the sacred document and everyone should be fully committed to its ideals. The Constitution imposes a sacred duty upon all the organs of State to be sensitive to the hopes and aspirations of the common man as these organs have been envisaged to safeguard the interests of the people. For the smooth functioning of our parliamentary system, it is important for the three organs of the State – Judiciary, Legislature and Executive to work within the ambit of constitutional mandate without infringing on each other's power and in close coordination with due respect for the independent functioning of each other.

On the sacrosanct occasion of Samvidhan Divas, let us recommit ourselves to the goals of our freedom movement and the ideals, dreams and visions of our Founding fathers and resolve to fulfill them.

[The writer is Speaker, Lok Sabha]

219 new COVID-19 cases, 3 deaths in Odisha

Bhubaneswar, Nov 27 (PTI):Odisha's COVID-19 tally surged to 10,48,492 as 264 more people tested positive for the infection, 45 more than the previous day, a Health Department bulletin said on Saturday.

Three new COVID-19 fatalities pushed the death toll to 8,406, it said. The deaths were reported from Bolangir, Jharsuguda and Kalahandi districts.

Of the 264 new cases, 41 are children. Khurda district of which the state capital Bhubaneswar is a part registered the highest number of new cases at 127, it said.

Ten out of the 30 districts of the state did not record any new infection and nine districts have

active COVID-19 cases in single digits.

The state now has 2,424 active COVID-19 cases, while 10,37,609 patients have recovered from the disease, including 222 in the last 24 hours, the bulletin stated.

As many as 56,034 samples were tested in the last 24 hours with a positivity rate of 0.37 per cent. Fifty-three other patients have died due to comorbidities so far, according to official data.

On Friday, Odisha had reported 219 new COVID-19 cases and two fatalities.

Over 2.76-crore people have been inoculated with the first dose of COVID vaccine and nearly 1.52 crore have received both doses of the vaccine.

2 new cases push Arunachal's COVID-19 tally to 55,260

ITANAGAR, Nov 27 (PTI): Arunachal Pradesh's COVID-19 tally rose to 55,260 on Saturday as two more persons tested positive for the infection, a senior health official said.

The coronavirus death toll remained unchanged at 280 as no fresh fatality was registered, State Surveillance Officer (SSO) DrLobsang-Jampa said.

The state now has 33 active cases, while 54,947 people have been cured of the disease so

far, including three on Friday, the official said. The recovery rate among the COVID-19 patients stood at 99.43 per cent.

The administration has tested over 11.97 lakh samples for COVID-19 to date, including 271 on Friday, Jampa said, adding that the positivity rate stood at 0.73 per cent.

State Immunisation Officer DrDimongPadung said that a total of 14.03 lakh people have been inoculated thus far, including 4,024 on Friday.

Cong demands revising COVID-19 death toll in Assam



GUWAHATI, Nov 27 (PTI): The Opposition Congress has demanded that the HimantaBiswaSarma government reveal updated and the correct COVID-19 death toll in the state.

It also demanded compensation of Rs 4 lakh for next to kin of COVID-19 victims as per guidelines of National Disaster Management Act (NDMA).

In a letter to Chief Minister HimantaBiswaSarma on Friday, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly DebabrataSaikia asked for revising the COVID-19 death register with immediate effect.

He alleged that negligence and inefficiency of the government has cost several lives in the pandemic.

Accusing the government of going to great lengths to hide the actual death figures, Saikia wrote, "We demand a detailed survey to create an authentic COVID-19 death register so that all those excluded can rightfully access compensation."

He further asked the Central government to ensure that Rs 4 lakh is paid as compensation to families of COVID-19 victims as permissible under the NDMA, since the ongoing pandemic has been notified as a disaster under the Act by the Centre.

He said that the Central government had committed to disbursement of ex-gratia of Rs 4 lakh per victim in March 2020, but it was later revised and brought down to Rs 50,000 per victim.

Refusing to accept the Central government's contention that paying Rs 4 lakh would leave it with insufficient capital to deal with COVID-19, Saikia questioned how the Centre continued to collect taxes through rising petrol prices and provide relaxation to corporates but deny relief to the citizens.

He appreciated the state government's gesture of paying ex-gratia of Rs 2.5 lakh to families of the deceased and demanded that the Central government should give its share of Rs 3 lakh per

victim.

As per rule, the compensation under NDMA is shared on a 75:25 ratio between Centre and state, with the former mandated accordingly to pay Rs 3 lakh and the remaining Rs 1 lakh by the state.

"We demand that steps to be taken by the Central government to give the Central share of Rs 3 lakh as ex-gratia," he added.

The Assam government had announced in its Budget for this fiscal of providing one-time financial assistance of Rs one lakh to families of people who have died of COVID-19.

Earlier, a Chief Minister's COVID-19 Widows Support Scheme' under which women whose husbands have died due to the infection are being given Rs 2.5 lakh each, if their annual family income is less than Rs 5 lakh, was rolled out in July this year.

The government had also launched a scheme to provide Rs 3,500 every month to children orphaned by the pandemic.

Odisha: Four boys drown in Mahanadi near Cuttack

CUTTACK (ODISHA), Nov 27 (PTI): Four boys have drowned in the Mahanadi River near Cuttack city of Odisha, police said on Saturday.

Their bodies were fished out of the river on Friday, a police officer said.

The boys, aged 12-14, hailed from Potapokhari locality of the city. They had gone to play near the river on Thursday afternoon, he said.

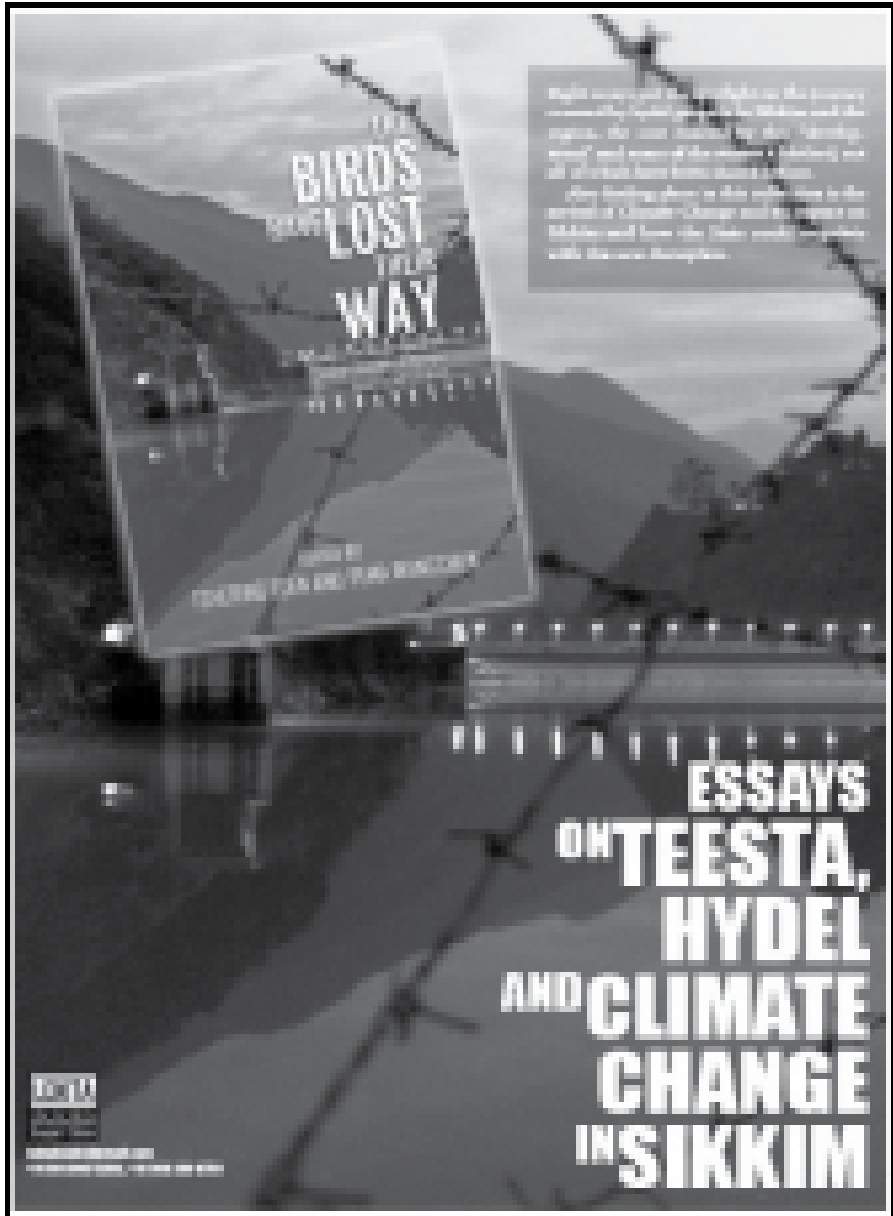
When the boys did

not return home by evening, family members launched a frantic search in the area and found their bicycles on the riverbank near Gandhipalli, around 2 km from their residences, Deputy Commissioner of Police Prateek Singh said.

Police was informed around 9 PM and fire brigade and Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force personnel launched a search operation, and found one body around

1 km downstream from where they had gone missing at 11 PM, he said. The search operation went on throughout the night and the remaining bodies were traced on Friday morning, Chauliaganj police station Inspector S Rout said.

It is yet to be ascertained how the boys had drowned, he said, adding that the autopsy was conducted and the bodies handed over to their families, he added.



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Booker, Suns extend win streak to 15, beat Knicks 118-97

NEW YORK (AP): The Phoenix Suns are taking a 15-game winning streak to Brooklyn for a showdown with the Nets. It feels like a big game — just not to the surging Suns.

“We do it one at a time. We know we have a tough opponent tomorrow that’s been waiting on us, well-rested,” All-Star guard Devin Booker said. “So, we just have to come in with the same mentality, play the type of basketball that we do, defend at high level, put ourselves in good shape to get it done.”

Booker scored 32 points and the Suns beat the New York Knicks 118-97 on Friday night to match the second-longest winning streak in franchise history.

Chris Paul had 14 points and 10 assists for the Suns, who improved to 16-3. The reigning Western Conference champions will try to wrap up a perfect four-game trip Saturday against the Eastern Conference leaders.

“When you been in the league a long time, this ain’t a playoff game tomorrow,” Paul said. “It’s good for us to go out there and compete ... We’re just trying to build. It’s not about winning a game in November.”

Phoenix also won 15 straight during the 2006-07 season. The Suns won a franchise-best 17 in a



row later that season. Deandre Ayton finished with 14 points and 13 rebounds. Booker was 14 for 27 from the field, making four 3-pointers. He did not attempt a free throw.

The Suns had to work hard to pull out victories in San Antonio and Cleveland to start the trip, but were in control most of the way at Madison Square Garden. They were ahead for the final three quarters and led by as much as 24 points.

Kemba Walker scored 17 points for the Knicks, who have lost seven straight games to the Phoenix since beating them twice during the 2017-18 season.

New York shot 9 for 18 from the floor in the

first quarter, but the Suns were just a bit better, shooting 14 for 22 from the field for a 33-27 lead.

“If you give them the shots that we gave them, they got a lot of confidence early,” Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said. “Once they get confidence early, they’re going to be tough to stop.”

Booker scored 21 points over the first two quarters for the Suns, who shot 24 for 45 (53%) to lead 57-44 at halftime.

The All-Star guard led an 8-2 run midway through the second quarter and capped it off by finding an open Mikal Bridges for a dunk that extended the lead to 48-34 with 4 minutes left in the second quarter. And

when Walker closed the deficit to 67-57 with 7:31 remaining in the third, Booker hit a 17-foot jumper and a 3-pointer in a stretch of a minute to extend the Suns’ advantage to 72-57.

TIP-INS
Suns: Jae Crowder chipped in 11 points. ... The Suns are an NBA-best 8-1 on the road. ...

Knicks: G Derrick Rose missed his second straight game due to a sprained right ankle. ... C Taj Gibson (sore groin) missed his third consecutive game.

STAYING GROUNDED
Phoenix has a pair of nationally televised showdowns against the Nets and then at home against Golden State on Tuesday. Suns coach

Monty Williams knows his team is well aware of the marquee matchups that are coming up, but stressed the importance of focusing on the present and not looking past any opponent.

“You know it’s a long season,” Williams said. “You understand that every NBA team can give you trouble. For me, I can’t look to Golden State. I am thinking about tomorrow. But I am sure the guys do that and you naturally do it and then you focus on the next right thing that you have to do. There is so much parity in the league right now, that you can’t walk into a game and say, ‘I got this.’ You’re going to get clipped.”

No. 5 Duke holds off No. 1 Gonzaga for 84-81 victory



Blue Devils.

Gonzaga (6-1) battled back from a nine-point deficit thanks to Julian Strawther’s offensive prowess early in the second half. He scored eight of the Bulldogs’ first 14 points to help them get within two. But Gonzaga suffered through a 0-for-5 span down the stretch and turned the ball over three times to allow Duke to close the game on a 13-9 run.

“We felt like if we played our best and did what we do best, we were going to have a real shot for the win,” Banchemo said.

Wendell Moore Jr. scored 20 points and Mark Williams added 17 points and 9 rebounds for the Blue Devils.

Strawther led Gonzaga with a career-high 20 points and 10 rebounds, including shooting 57.1% from the floor in the second half. Drew Timme added 17 points,

Chet Holmgren had 16 points and Rasir Bolton chipped in 15 for the Bulldogs.

“The beautiful thing is we all believe in each other,” said Strawther, who registered his second career double-double. “Even if I miss a couple of shots, they’re going to keep looking for me. That’s what really keeps me going. They showed a lot of belief in me after I missed a few.”

Gonzaga, however, had 17 total turnovers for the game.

The Bulldogs did claw their way back to a 53-52 lead, and the game quickly became a battle of Duke’s relentless defensive pressure and Gonzaga’s precise passing through lanes the Bulldogs created on the fly.

“It felt like a Final Four-type game,” Timme said. “The atmosphere was great and it was two Goliaths going at it.”

After Gonzaga took an early 4-0 lead, Duke quickly established dominance with a 17-6 run, with Banchemo and Williams putting on a show for the heavily favored Duke crowd.

The Bulldogs closed the gap to three, 19-16, but Banchemo scored 13 of Duke’s next 21 points. Holmgren, who had to sit midway in the first half due to foul trouble, returned with 1:27 left in the half and drained a soft one-handed jumper followed by a 3-pointer by Strawther.

Duke held a 45-42 lead at halftime.

STAR-STUDDED SEATING

Among the record crowd: former boxing champion Floyd Mayweather, former Cy Young winner and World Series champion Orel Hershiser, PGA golfer Brooks Koepka, former NBA player Marcus Banks and sports agent Rich Paul.

Victorious return: US women’s soccer team beats Aussies 3-0

SYDNEY (AP): After 21 years since last playing in Australia, the United States women’s soccer team needed only 24 seconds to score against the Matildas on Saturday.

Turns out that was all the new-look American side needed in a 3-0 win at Sydney’s Olympic stadium before a Matildas-record crowd of 36,109.

Ashley Hatch scored her first international goal when Australia’s defense failed to clear the ball from the opening kickoff. Hatch found herself one-on-one with goalkeeper Teagen Micah, and Hatch calmly slotted a low shot to the right of Micah.

Hatch, the 2021 Golden Boot winner as top scorer in the National Women’s Soccer League for the champion Washington Spirit — 10 goals in 20 matches — was making just her third appearance for the U.S. and first since 2018.

Rose Lavelle scored the second American goal in the 49th minute and captain Lindsey Horan finished the scoring from a penalty in the

68th. Australia dominated much of the first half after Hatch’s first-minute goal. U.S. goalkeeper Casey Murphy — in her international debut — was the player of the opening 45 minutes as she saved a half-dozen chances, including two from Australia veteran Sam Kerr.

The best Australian chance came from Kyah Simon, who missed from inside the six-yard box when the goal was open.

“As a striker, you pride yourself on scoring goals and I take full responsibility that I should have finished that,” Simon said. “The game (would have been) 1-1 at that point, so that could definitely change the momentum of the game.”

It was the first time since April 9, 2013, that the U.S. had a starting XI with every player under the age of 30. The average age of the starting side Saturday was 26 years, making it youngest starting lineup to take the field for the USWNT since April 5, 2018.

Horan and Tierna Davidson were the only

players in this starting side who started in the most recent match with the Matildas in the Olympic bronze medal game on Aug. 5 in Tokyo, a match won 4-3 by the Americans. Lavelle and Emily Sonnett also saw action in that match as second-half substitutes.

The U.S. women have won the World Cup four times, including the last time in France in 2019. Australia and New Zealand will co-host the next World Cup in 2023, with the tournament’s first match scheduled for 600 days from Saturday.

The last time the Americans played in Australia was while winning the silver medal at the 2000 Olympics.

The win was the 28th for the U.S. over Australia, with one loss and four draws. After six straight matches between the teams were decided by two or fewer goals, Saturday’s match marked the USWNT’s biggest win against Australia since a 4-0 victory in October 2013.

The teams will meet again Tuesday in Newcastle, north of Sydney.

Macao detains Suncity boss after over illegal gambling

BEIJING (AP): Macao police on Saturday detained the head of Macao’s biggest junket organizer and others after Chinese authorities issued an arrest warrant for them over accusations that they ran an illegal cross-border gambling syndicate.

The arrests in the gambling enclave came after prosecutors in Wenzhou, in the eastern province of Zhejiang, on Friday accused Suncity Group CEO Alvin Chau and another person, Zhang Ningning, of leading cross-border gambling operations and setting up casinos across China.

Casinos and most forms of gambling are illegal in mainland China, and Macao is the only Chinese city allowed to operate a casino. Mainland visitors are able to travel to Macao to gamble but are required to obtain a visa.

“Based on evidence obtained from previous criminal investigations, the (Macao) police brought the criminal suspect Chau and other persons involved back to the police station for investigation in accordance with the

law this morning,” Macao’s government said in a statement on Saturday.

Authorities said they had been investigating the case since July last year. They said that the gambling syndicate has 199 shareholder representatives, over 12,000 agents that promoted its gambling operations and more than 80,000 gamblers in its network.

The syndicate also set up asset management firms to assist gamblers with cross-border fund transfers and to recover debts they owed, authorities said.

In 2019, China’s official Xinhua news agency accused Suncity of targeting mainland gamblers with online gambling and proxy-betting operations based in Cambodia and the Philippines. Suncity denied the allegations.

Authorities said the syndicate “severely damaged the social order of the country” and on Friday urged Chau to turn himself in in exchange for a more lenient punishment. Hong Kong-listed Suncity Group could not be reached for comment by phone and did not immediately reply to email inquiries.

Krunal Pandya quits Baroda captaincy

VADODRA, Nov 27 (PTI): Mumbai Indians and India all-rounder Krunal Pandya has stepped down as Baroda captain following the team’s underwhelming campaign in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy.

Baroda Cricket Association AjitLele told PTI that Krunal communicated his decision to the state body on Friday but did not give any reason

for leaving the leadership role.

“He will remain available as a player. He communicated his decision to the president. His successor will be named after the selectors meeting tomorrow,” said Lele.

The 30-year-old has played five ODIs and 19 T20s for India.

KedarDevdhar is among the frontrunners to succeed Krunal start-

ing with the Vijay Hazare Trophy next month.

Baroda finished with the least amount of points, 4, from Group B alongside Services with one win and four losses in the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 Trophy.

IPL regular Deepak Hooda had left Baroda team last year after claiming that he was abused by Krunal. He now plays for Rajasthan.

New Zealand all out for 269 against India on day 3

KANPUR, Nov 27 (PTI): New Zealand were all out for 269 in reply to India’s first innings total of 345 on the third day of the opening Test here on Saturday.

India grabbed a 49-run lead for their effort as left-arm spinner Axar Patel (5/62) snapped five wickets to emerge the most successful bowler for the hosts

while Umesh Yadav (1/50), Ravichandran Ashwin (3/82) and Ravindra Jadeja (1/57) scalped one wicket each.

Tom Latham (95) was the top-scorer for New Zealand while his opening partner Will Young scored 89.

Resuming the day at 129 for no loss, New Zealand couldn’t build up any partner-

ship with Patel rocking the visitors with three wickets in the post-lunch session.

Kyle Jamieson scored 23 down the batting order.

Brief Scores:
India 1st Innings: 345 in 111.1 overs.

New Zealand 1st Innings: 269 all out in 142.3 overs (Will Young 89, Tom Latham 95; Axar Patel 5/62).

Big flotilla of illegal gold miners splits up in Brazil

ON THE RIO MADEIRA, BRAZIL (AP): Hundreds of barges of illegal miners dredging for gold were navigating along the Madeira River in the Brazilian Amazon on Friday, and researchers said they posed a threat of pollution — including toxic mercury — for the broader environment.

The barges were spotted this week by the municipality of Autazes, some 120 kilometers (70 miles) from Manaus, the capital of Amazonas state.

Smaller gatherings of barges are common along rivers in the region, but the latest collection drew international attention this week when Greenpeace and news media published images of several rows of rafts.

Brazilian Vice President Hamilton Mourão announced an imminent police operation in the area, prompting the miners to depart early Friday and head elsewhere along the river.

Miner Thiago Bitencourt Gomes, wearing just a pair of shorts and some flip flops, told The Associated Press on Friday that about 400 barges — some 3,000 people — congregated in the area after one miner found gold there and alerted the others.

“Here everybody knows each other. We’re all friends, we’re all related,” said the 28-year-old whose father, uncles, aunts and cousins were



also part of the contingent.

The wood-walled rafts, some equipped with satellite internet and air conditioning units, were tied together, forming rows of houses on the wide and muddy Madeira River, a large tributary that flows into the vast Amazon downstream from Manaus. Miners and their families live, eat and work on the barges, some accompanied by their dogs and other pets.

“We know that in the law, we’re illegal. But we all need to provide for our families,” Gomes said, adding that the miners had repeatedly called on politicians to legalize their activity — in vain. Another

miner said a barge collected about 60 grams of gold — worth roughly \$3,500 if pure — over 40 hours of work. Workers often took turns to work 24 hours a day.

Environmentalists are alarmed by the fact miners use mercury to separate gold from the sediment they suck from the river bottom and the process gives off toxic vapors as well as spilling some into the river.

Once in the river, it falls to the bottom and enters the food chain, contaminating fish, shrimp, turtles and other marine life as far as 500 kilometers (about 300 miles) downstream, said Paulo Basta, a re-

searcher at the government’s Fiocruz science center

Basta said there is strong evidence of mercury contamination linked to cognitive problems, alteration of senses and hypertension, and he noted that the miners themselves have high risks of exposure.

“He takes the mercury in his hand, or puts it inside his bag. It leaks, drops on his leg and he gets contaminated through the skin. But the most serious form of contamination is by inhaling mercury vapor, which gets into the lungs,” Basta said.

Miners told the AP they didn’t release mercury, which is expensive, into the water but

try to recover and reuse it.

Federal prosecutors in Amazonas state called Wednesday for federal and state authorities to coordinate a response and dismantle the illegal settlement within 30 days.

Federal police responded with a brief statement saying they were aware of the situation and evaluating options.

Miners told the AP on Friday that no authorities had come into contact with them. But fearing an operation, they left Autazes and continued along the river. The barges, pushed along by powerboats, headed off in different directions. While local media reported tensions between the miners and residents of Autazes, journalists at the scene saw many locals taking advantage of the arrival of hundreds of visitors by selling food, electronics, diesel, clothes and even perfume.

Mining as a whole has become a sensitive issue, especially since President Jair Bolsonaro assumed office in January 2019 vowing to expand development in the Amazon region and to legalize some types of now-banned mining operations.

It is one of several factors driving deforestation, which began an upward trend in 2014 and has accelerated under Bolsonaro, whose father once worked as a wildcat miner.

Japan PM vows to step up defense amid China, NK threats

TOKYO (AP): Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, at his first troop review Saturday, renewed his pledge to consider “all options,” including acquiring enemy base strike capability, and vowed to create a stronger Self-Defense Force to protect the country amid growing threats from China and North Korea.

Kishida said the security situation around Japan is rapidly changing and that “the reality is severer than ever,” with North Korea continuing to test-fire ballistic missiles while advancing its capability, and China pursuing a military buildup and increasingly assertive activity in the region.

“I will consider all options, including possessing so-called enemy base strike capability, to pursue strengthening of defense power that is necessary,” Kishida said in an address to hundreds of Ground Self-Defense Force members in olive-colored helmets and uniforms.

Kishida, who took office in October, served as top commander for the first time at Saturday’s Self-Defense Force troop review held at the main army base Camp Asaka, north of Tokyo. About 800 troops gathered for the inspection, according to the Defense Ministry.

“The security environment surrounding Japan has been rapidly changing at an unprecedented speed. Things that used to happen only in science-fiction novels are today’s reality,” Kishida said. He said his government will lead “calm and realistic” discussions to determine what is needed to protect people’s lives and gain their understanding.

The possibility of possessing so-called enemy base strike capability has been a divisive issue because opponents say

it violates Japan’s war-renouncing Constitution.

Kishida has shifted his dovish stance to a more hawkish one, apparently to please influential leaders within his governing party, including former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, and to strengthen his grip on power. He now advocates increasing Japanese military capability and spending.

On Friday, Kishida’s Cabinet approved a 770 billion yen (\$6.8 billion) request for an extra defense budget through March to expedite the purchase of missiles, anti-submarine rockets and other weapons amid rising concern over the escalation of military activities by China, Russia and North Korea.

The request, still pending parliamentary approval, is a record for an extra defense budget and will bring Japan’s military spending for the current year to a new high of more than 6.1 trillion yen (\$53.2 billion), up 15% from 5.31 trillion yen in 2020. The combined budget for 2021 will be just over 1% of Japan’s GDP, keeping its customary cap.

Kishida has said he is open to doubling Japan’s military spending to cope with the worsening security environment. Critics also say Japan, as the world’s fastest-aging country with a shrinking population, should allocate more money toward health care and other services.

Compared to past troop reviews, which included 4,000 soldiers, more than 200 vehicles and dozens of warplanes, Saturday’s event was significantly scaled down to minimize the impact on regular troop activity, officials said. There was no parade or public viewing, and only nine tanks and other vehicles participated in the online event.

South African scientists brace for wave propelled by omicron

JOHANNESBURG (AP): As the world grapples with the emergence of the new highly transmissible variant of COVID-19, worried scientists in South Africa — where omicron was first identified — are scrambling to combat its lightning spread across the country.

In the space of two weeks, the omicron variant has sent South Africa from a period of low transmission to rapid growth of new confirmed cases. The country’s numbers are still relatively low, with 2,828 new confirmed cases recorded Friday, but omicron’s speed in infecting young South Africans has alarmed health professionals. “We’re seeing a marked change in the demographic profile of patients with COVID-19,” Rudo Mathivha, head of the intensive care unit at Soweto’s Baragwanath Hospital, told an online press briefing.

“Young people, in their 20s to just over their late 30s, are coming in with moderate to severe disease, some needing intensive care. About 65% are not vaccinated and most of the rest are only half-vaccinated,” said Mathivha. “I’m worried that as the numbers go up, the public health care facilities will become overwhelmed.”

She said urgent preparations are needed to enable public hospitals to cope with a potential large influx of patients needing intensive care.

“We know we have a new variant,” said Mathivha. “The worst case scenario is that it

hits us like delta ... we need to have critical care beds ready.”

What looked like a cluster infection among some university students in Pretoria ballooned into hundreds of new cases and then thousands, first in the capital city and then to nearby Johannesburg, South Africa’s largest city.

Studying the surge, scientists identified the new variant that diagnostic tests indicate is likely responsible for as many as 90% of the new cases, according to South Africa’s health officials. Early studies show that it has a reproduction rate of 2 — meaning that every person infected by it is likely to spread it to two other people.

The new variant has a high number of mutations that appear to make it more transmissible and help it evade immune responses. The World Health Organization looked at the data on Friday and named the variant omicron, under its system of using Greek letters, calling it a highly transmissible variant of concern.

“It’s a huge concern. We all are terribly concerned about this virus,” Professor Willem Hanekom, director of the Africa Health Research Institute, told The Associated Press. “This variant is mostly in Gauteng province, the Johannesburg area of South Africa. But we’ve got clues from diagnostic tests ... that suggest that this variant is already all over South Africa,” said Hanekom, who is also co-chair of the South African COVID Variant Research Consortium.

Solomon Islands police find 3 bodies after violent protests



CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA (AP): Solomon Islands police found three bodies in a burned-out building and arrested more than 100 people in this week’s violence sparked by concerns about the Pacific nation’s increasing links with China.

Australian media reported the bodies were recovered late Friday after riots and protests subsided. No other details were given.

Authorities imposed a curfew in the capital Honiara, after a 36-hour lockdown ordered by the embattled Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare ended Friday.

Sogavare blamed outside interference for stirring up the protests calling for his resignation, with a thinly veiled reference to Taiwan and the United States.

Sogavare has been widely criticized by leaders of the country’s most populous island of Malaita for a 2019 decision to drop diplomatic ties with Taiwan in favor of mainland China. Beijing claims the self-ruled island of Taiwan as part of its territory.

His government, meanwhile, has been upset over millions in U.S. aid promised directly to Malaita, rather than through the central government on the largest island

of Guadalcanal, where Honiara is located. The two islands have been rivals for decades.

Andrew Yang, a professor at Taiwan’s National Sun Yat-sen University and former deputy defense minister, said China’s efforts to win diplomatic recognition from the Solomon Islands are part of a competition for regional dominance with the United States and its ally, Australia.

The Solomon Islands, with a population of about 700,000, are about 1,500 kilometers (1,000 miles) northeast of Australia. They are best known for the bloody fighting that took place there during World War II between the United States and Japan.

Riots and looting targeting Honiara’s Chinatown and downtown precincts erupted Wednesday out of a peaceful protest in the capital by people from Malaita. Police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at the demonstrators, who set fire to the National Parliament, a police station and many other buildings.

Critics also blamed the unrest on complaints of a lack of government services and accountability, corruption and Chinese businesses giving jobs to foreigners instead of

locals. Since the 2019 shift in allegiance from Taiwan to China, there has been an expectation of massive infrastructure investment from Beijing — locally rumored to be in the range of \$500 million — but with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic shortly after the shift, none of that has yet materialized.

Malaita threatened to hold a referendum on independence over the issue, but that was quashed by Sogavare’s government.

A plane carrying Australian police and diplomats are in Honiara to help local police restore order. Up to 50 more Australian police and 43 defense force personnel were also deployed following a request by Sogavare under a bilateral treaty with Australia. The presence of an independent force, though small, seemed to help quell some of the violence.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has been following the protests “with concern,” his deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said.

“(Guterres) calls for an end to the violence and the protection of hard-won peacebuilding gains. He urges dialogue and ceful means to address differences,” Haq said in a statement on Friday.



Nargis Fakhri "Had To Be Stronger" - So she is. Read Her Note

NEW DELHI: NargisFakhri is here to sprinkle some “good vibes” on our feeds. The actress is known for her positive mindset. And, she also tries to motivate her Instagram family with her thoughts. NargisFakhri has penned a “you must never give up” note. The actress has touched upon various aspects of life. From how she became stronger to no one is perfect, NargisFakhri’s latest upload is the right motivation we need before stepping into the weekend. Read it here. “I am stronger because I had to be, I am smarter because of my mistakes...Happier because of the sadness I have known and now wiser because I learned. No one is perfect and we all go through experiences that shape us in different ways. But one thing you must never do...You must never give up.”

In the reply box, Nargis-Fakhri has also added a set of hashtags, “Move forward, always learning, always growing, life experience”, to amplify the post.

NargisFakhri has shared the note along with a stunning pic of herself. Here, she is looking away from the camera.

Before this, NargisFakhri had uploaded a video of her throwback mo-

ments and spoke about the true meaning of love. “Soon you will realize that many people will love the idea of you but will lack the maturity of handling the reality of you. Too many people are focused on the outside of a human & create a fantasy of who they are, then

caption. For the hashtags, NargisFakhri went with “soulmates”, “peace”, “love” and “happiness”

Then, NargisFakhri wanted to say something about holidays. This time, the actress had asked us to mention the name of the place we are “dying to visit”.



become disappointed with the person when they don't live up to that fantasy that was created. To love the surface will only last so long as we all will grow old and wrinkly. Love deeper for that will last a lifetime,” the actress said in the

“Travel is the only thing you buy that makes you richer. What is your favourite destination? Or where is one place you are dying to visit? Let me know.”

NargisFakhri is known for her roles in films like Rockstar and Madras Cafe.

Jennifer Lawrence got high on the set of 'Don't Look Up'

In a bid at method acting, or just a way to covertly chill out on set, actor Jennifer Lawrence has recently revealed that she got high on the set of Netflix's Don't Look Up whilst playing the character of Kate Dibiasky, a scientist and stoner.

Directed by Adam McKay, the same mind behind Anchorman, Step Brothers and The Big Short, his brand new feature film stars a staggering ensemble cast including, Leonardo DiCaprio, Jonah Hill, TimothéeChalamet, Ariana Grande, Meryl Streep, Tyler Perry and many more. Discussing the film at a Q&A in LA, the director began explaining how Lawrence embodied her character by smoking on set, as reported by Yahoo! Movies. Asking permission from McKay before getting high on set, Lawrence smoked before appearing in a scene that featured no dialogue, with the director stating, “So Jen was like, ‘Are you gonna throw me some improv?’ which we always do...And I was like, ‘No, you can get high”.

Continuing, Adam McKay added, “I kept turning to my script supervisor, Cate Hardman, and was like, ‘I just want to say, ‘Hey Jen. I think I have a monologue idea for you.’ And I would look at Jen and was like, ‘I can't do it. It would be too mean. So I left you alone.’ Understandably on a set that included so many comedians and Hollywood stars, Jennifer Lawrence also stated, “I was a real target,” before adding, “Everyone was fucking with me... I guess because I was high. Easy to fuck with”.

The film itself revolves around Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Lawrence, a pair of astronomers who become aware of a comet heading straight for earth and try to warn government officials, Meryl Streep's president and Jonah Hill's chief of staff. A highly-anticipated Christmas release, Don't Look Up hopes to be the comedy hit of 2021 when it premieres on Netflix worldwide on December 24.

Madhuri Dixit to SaniaMirza: Everyone's joining this iPhone trend



A new trend on Instagram is sweeping the Internet and celebrities are joining it like a pro. Called the “iPhone Lock Screen” trend, a number of Bollywood celebrities like Madhuri Dixit, Gauahar Khan and KarishmaTanna have already tried it. These celebs had shared their videos on Instagram Reels with the lock screen filter on. All it requires you to do is to stay still in front of your phone camera for a few seconds as a peppy number plays in the background. And, then make a gesture at the drop of the beat to debunk the idea that the viewer was looking at an image.

Since the lock screen challenge has gone viral, many celebrities have aced it. The USP of the trend is its signature tune “Banna Re”.

Tennis ace SaniaMirza tried this in her car. And, like a pro, she remained still until the beat dropped and blinked her tired eyes. “When you have a sick kid and are functioning on 2 hours of sleep. Going with the trend though,” she wrote

in the caption.

Now, we have the ever-smiling Madhuri Dixit. The actress gave the challenge a twist. What did she do? Madhuri Dixit just winked and twirled in a chair. “Real to Reel,” she said. Her take on the trend has racked up a staggering 49.5 million views on Instagram.

Actress MunmunDutta of Taarak Mehta KaOoltahChashmah fame stood still with one finger on her cheeks and then suddenly broke into a smile. Her video has been viewed over 27 million times.

In an Instagram Reel shared by ZaidDarbar, his actor-wife Gauahar Khan too nailed the trend like a pro. She stood still by the wall and as the beat dropped, Zaid jumped into the scene to break the monotony. “Guess what's my actual lock screen pic? Keep the fun in your relationship. My crazy partner,” Zaid wrote.

Actress KarishmaTanna tried it “because it's trending”.



'TIS THE SEASON! The Bling Empire star, Christine Chiu gets into the holiday spirit while Christmas tree shopping in Los Angeles.

Bhagyashree wished husband Himalaya Dassani on his birthday like this

NEW DELHI: Bhagyashree decided to wish husband Himalaya Dassani on his birthday with a special greeting. The actress shared an Instagram Reel on Saturday morning, which has a set of mushy pictures of the couple. She captioned the video: “Happy birthday love. Moments and memories... always special with you.” She accompanied the post with the hashtags #birthdayboy, #birthday-wishes and #happymood. Bhagyashree added the song Tu Hi YaarMera along with it. The comments section of her post was filled up with greetings from her fans.

A few days ago, the actress had a mini Maine PyarKiya reunion with Salman Khan on the sets of Bigg Boss 15. She shared the pictures and wrote: “Kuch log, kuchbaa-tien, kuchkahaniyakabhina-hibadalte. Dosti for a lifetime.”

Bhagyashree became a star after starring in SoorajBarjatya's 1989 film Maine PyarKiya, opposite Salman Khan. She has also featured in TV shows such as KachchiDhoop, Kaagaz Ki Kashti and LautAao Trisha. She featured in the Kannada film AmmavraGanda. She was

last seen in KanganaRanaut'sThalaivii. She will next be seen in a film with Prabhas.

The actress married Himalaya Dassani in a private ceremony, in the presence of her Maine PyarKiya co-star Salman Khan



and the film's director SoorajBarjatya. The couple are parents to a son named AbhimanyuDassani and a daughter named Avantika Dasani. The former made his Bollywood debut with the 2019 film MardKo-DardNahiHota.

Aries:

We're all built differently, Aries. You will never fully understand the other person and they may never fully be able to understand you. But, that doesn't mean you cannot love them unconditionally or accept them as they are. It's time to bring the gift of love into the equation, and watch how your relationship blossoms with you.

Tip: You're more connected than you give yourself credit for.

Taurus:

This is a period of cleansing, Taurus. You're paying off age-old debts and loosening the grip that karma has had on you for some time now. Yes, this is what true freedom looks and feels like. Something tells us there's a lot more where that came from! Some of you may be seeking a loan in order to invest in a property or car. Be confident, and ask for what you need. The Universe has a way of coming through unexpectedly.

Tip: Ask for what you need.

Gemini:

You've been to hell and back, Gemini. You've been to hell and back. But, it won't get better until you decide to get better. So, take the time out you need, address the pain and release the old. Work-

ing with a healer or therapist will help you a great deal at this time. If the pain ailments you're dealing with are more physical than mental or emotional, consult a medical practitioner you trust.

Tip: You will get better when you decide to get better.

Cancer:

Your manifestation abilities are heightened at this point, Cancer. Harness this power to bring movement into the areas of your life that have been stuck for a while and call in a miracle or two. Don't just think about yourself, though. Keep those around you and the world at large in your thoughts and prayers. The more selfless you are in your thoughts and actions, the more you will receive from the mysterious forces above.

Tip: Manifest mindfully.

Leo:

You're coming from a space of love, Leo, but not everybody is on the same level of realness as you are. In other words, your thoughts are likely to trigger a negative reaction within them sooner or later. So, act mindfully and tap into that space of love. Find a way to convey what matters in honest manner without making it sound like you're out to attack the other person.

Tip: Meditate on how you can convey the truth without

hurting or harming the other.

Virgo:

Wipe your tears, dust your knees and get ready to get back in the game for the only way to go from here is up! We're talking big manifestation energy, Virgo. We're talking about dreaming in HD *and* going after what you want with unabridged passion. Something tells us that you are at a turning point. Your creativity is also heightened at this point. So, make sure you maintain a diary to record all the weird and wonderful ideas that are coming through from your subconscious mind.

Tip: Dream in HD, baby!

Libra:

You're a kind and loving soul, Libra, and you can put a lot behind you. But, not this time. Not this time. Forgiveness is a virtue, yes, one that you're being advised to work towards. However, rushing the process or telling yourself you need to be a certain way is not going to help you in any way. Step back. Give yourself the time and space you need to assimilate the given experiences. You'll know when you're ready to reinitiate that conversation.

Tip: Take the time you need to assimilate the given experience.

Scorpio:

For a relationship to be balanced, there must be equal amounts of give and take. If you're the one constantly watering their garden, then it's a problem. If they're the ones who are constantly overextending themselves for you, it's a problem again. So, see how and where you need to readjust the scales. See how and where you're being called to show up for them in a manner that's unconditional. This could just be the secret to bringing about a magnificent shift in your relationship.

Tip: Find balance.

Sagittarius:

Doing anything for the first time can be intimidating, and that includes initiating a certain conversation. But, you've got to do what you've got to do, Sagittarius. You've got to tell them how you really think *and* feel about the given situation. This is the only way to clear the air and start afresh. On the upside, the cards are speaking about the gift of clarity. rsation you've been thinking about.

Capricorn:

Windfalls are cool, Capricorn. But, a steady flow of income? That's the real deal. The good thing is, you're manifesting the latter for yourself *and* experiencing the stability you have been yearning for for some time now. Expect a definite and positive change on the finance front. What's more, some of you might be

feeling a little bit indulgent as well. Allow yourself to splurge, but in moderation.

Tip: Expect a definite and positive change on the finance front.

Aquarius:

To quote a famous internet meme: “If it doesn't bring you energy, inspiration or orgasms, it doesn't belong in your life.” Now, how's that for some Saturday morning inspiration? Today, you're being reminded that a certain degree of selfishness doesn't have to be a bad thing, and that we're all allowed to pick and choose who we give our time and attention to.

Tip: The process of elimination, Aquarius.

Pisces:

It's time to pause and breathe. Time to pause and breathe, Pisces. The cards are urging you to assess the things that have and haven't worked for you as you. The process of eliminating what hasn't will help create space for the things that truly matter. On the interpersonal front, you're being encouraged to ponder over the experiences you've had in the recent past. Not all of them have been pleasant, yet they taught you important life lessons. This is something you want to be grateful for as you move forward.

Tip: Assess the things that haven't worked out.