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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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*Covaxin
phase-1 trial
clears Lancet
review, phase-3
trial ongoing*

NEW DELHI, 22 JAN [NDTV]: Covaxin, India's first indigenous vaccine against COVID-19, showed enhanced immune response without any serious side effects in the Phase 1 trials, according to the results published in well-respected Lancet Infectious Disease journal on Friday.

Similar peer-reviewed studies for the Phase 2 are still awaited and Phase 3 trials are ongoing even as the government continues to give out the jabs to lakhs of front-line workers. While the first two phases of vaccine trials usually focus on their safety, the third stage generally determines its efficacy.

Developed by Bharat Biotech in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune, Covaxin has been granted emergency use authorisation in clinical trial mode by the Indian government.

The vaccine, which uses an inactivated virus to trigger an immune response, had raised concerns among experts over its emergency approval earlier this month by India's drug regulator while the Phase 3 trials are still underway.

The vaccine, code-named BBV152, was well tolerated in all dose groups with no vaccine-related serious adverse events, noted the authors of the Lancet study funded by Bharat Biotech.

The same results were earlier published in the preprint server medRxiv in December.

However, there has been no new data released in the public domain which could demonstrate further its safety and efficacy.

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High Court Bar Assoc revived



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 JAN:**

The Sikkim High Court Bar Association, which had reportedly fallen dormant, has revived with a slight tweak to its name and with Additional Advocate General of Sikkim, Dr Doma T Bhutia, as its president.

The association held its first general meeting today and constituted a working committee for a tenure of two years.

The committee, headed by Dr Bhutia as the president, also has OP Bhandari as vice-president, Jigmi P Bhutia as secretary, Laxmi Gurung as joint secretary, Santosh Kumar Chettri as treasurer and a senior advocate and former MLA, Rajendra Uprety, as advisor.

Addressing a press conference today, the office-bearers informed that while the association was formed twice

in the past, it did not remain consistently active for various reasons.

Responding to media queries, Dr Bhutia informed that all members of this revived association were also members of the Bar Association of Sikkim [elections to which held recently], since the bar of the Sikkim High Court had its own organization as well, a new committee was formed to run it.

She reiterated that the organization was not new and that it had remained inactive and was hence being revived.

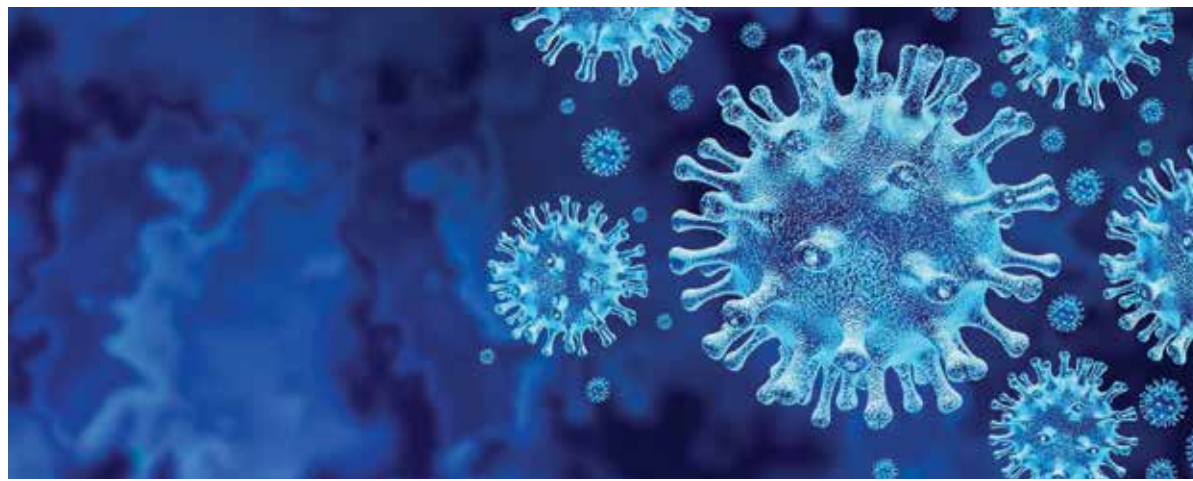
Likewise, other members of the new committee have clarified that to form the new committee of Sikkim High Court BAR Association was not to counter BAR Association of Sikkim. They added that the association would take strong action in case of any issue faced by advocate members.

Only one new Covid case and infections continue to drop in Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 JAN:**

Only one new case of novel coronavirus was reported in the State in last 24 hours continuing Sikkim's reassuring record of daily cases remaining below 20 since 29 December, 2020, and notching up more and more days with single-digit new cases without any drop in the number of tests being conducted.

This comforting statistic, coupled with the arrival of the Covid vaccine, will help assuage the Sikkimese who ended 2020 with some stressful months of the virus on the rampage. Fatalities have also noticeably fallen, as have the number of patients requiring ICU admission because of Covid.



The one case reported today is of a person from 9th Mile Gyalshing in West District.

Sikkim's tally of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 now stands on 6,063, of which 5,697 patents have already been discharged from home and facility isolation.

Also today, confirma-

tion arrived that nine more Covid patients recovered on Thursday. The number of active cases of novel coronavirus in Sikkim has accordingly further dropped to 140, of whom three are currently in the ICU facility of the COVID-dedicated STNM Hospital.

In his daily health

bulletin on Friday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia further informed that the one case was picked up from the testing of 165 samples on Thursday.

The Gyalshing resident tested positive in rapid antigen testing of 43 samples, while RT-PCR testing of 116 sam-

ples and TrueNat testing of six samples all returned negative.

While providing details of the COVID vaccinations carried out on Friday, Mr Bhutia informed that 187 persons received their first dose of the vaccine on Friday - 37 in North District, 90 in East District and 60 in West Sikkim.

23-yr-old arrested for burglary in Namchi

**BIKASH CHETTRI
NAMCHI, 22 JAN:**

A 23-year-old was arrested by Namchi Police here today on charges of burglary.

The youth was picked up at around 3pm near Namchi Post Office in connection with the theft of around Rs 1.50 lakh from the home of a Kazitar resident. The 31-year-old victim of the burglary had reportedly informed police that someone had broken into his home on Thursday and made away with the cash.

SI's Laku Lepcha and Sunil Rai, arrived upon



a CCTV footage during the course of investigation leading them to the 23-year-old suspect.

During interrogation, the youth is reported to have admitted to the crime and led the police to where he had hidden the stolen money. When the stolen case was recovered from the cache at one the

accused person's friends house, it was discovered that he had already spent around Rs 19,000.

Be that as it may, he has now been booked for the burglary and investigation is reportedly underway to uncover whether he is involved in any more thefts in the area.

New NHPC CMD calls on RDD Minister



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 22 JAN:**

CMD, NHPC, AK Singh, arrived today on his maiden visit to Sikkim since taking charge as CM and called on Rural Development Department Minister, Sonam Lama.

An NHPC press release informs that Mr Singh discussed pend-

ing issues related to the 520 MW Teesta-IV hydel project with the Minister and also apprised him on the status of other NHPC projects in the State, including the 500 MW Teesta-VI HEP.

The Minister, the release states, assured his full support and cooperation to NHPC.

"Now, Arrest Me": Tejashwi Yadav dares Nitish over new order

NEW DELHI, 22 JAN [PTI]: Nitish Kumar, who has often displayed a short fuse when it comes to criticism on social media, has ordered action against "offensive" posts against his government in Bihar. Bihar's Econom-

ic Offences wing, the agency in charge of cybercrimes, has asked all state departments to report any "defamatory, wrong" posts against ministers, MPs, MLAs or officials.

Soon after the decision came to light this morning, opposition leader Tejashwi Yadav threw up the first challenge, with an all-out attack on Twitter dubbing Nitish Kumar as the "Bhishma Pitamaha of corruption".

"The perpetrator of 60

scams, Nitish Kumar, the Bhishma Pitamaha of corruption, the protector of criminals, the weak chief of an immoral and unconstitutional government. Bihar police sells liquor: I challenge the Chief Minister to arrest me under this order."

The RJD leader also compared the Chief Minister to Hitler and said: "Protesters cannot protest. Jail for those who write against the government. People are not allowed to take their complaints to the oppo-

sition leader.. Nitish ji, we know you are completely tired, but have some shame."

Bihar is one of the few states that have rarely acted against offensive views and comments on the internet.

A letter written yesterday by the chief of the Economic Offences Wing, Nayyar Hasnain Khan, to all secretaries of the state government, however, changes that.

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Yak riding at -20 degrees is part of the Ladakh experience

LEH, 22 JAN [NDTV]: Ladakh is one of the most sought after tourist destinations for all who love the mountains across the world. A picture postcard landscape, surrounded by the snow-capped Zaskar and Karakoram ranges, Ladakh just raised the bar in tourism with the Khelo India - Zaskar Winter Sports and Youth Festival 2021, where Yak riding is one of the key activities. "This area used to remain cut off from the rest of the world for five/six months due to heavy snow but no more now," union sports minister Kiren Rijiju tweeted, adding tourists can now "experience the beauty of Zaskar" and the warmth of the Ladakhi people.

In Ladakh, this is the first big Khelo India event, the sports ministry's flagship programme to encourage sporting activities as part of daily fitness. The 13-day festival includes ice climbing, trekking on the frozen



Zaskar River, ice hockey and snow sculpture. An ethnic food fest is an added attraction.

Here's a look at what Yak riding at nearly 12,000 feet and minus 20 degrees can be: Jamyang Tsering Namgyal, a sports enthusiast and BJP MP from Ladakh tweeted a video and photos of the winter sports fest. "I was for-

tunate to get the opportunity to lead a three-day Chadar trek," he wrote on Twitter. The Chadar trek mostly covers the frozen area of Zaskar river and throughout the route trekkers walk on the rugged and icy terrain.

Addressing the inauguration of the Khelo India Zaskar Winter Sport and Youth Festival,

Mr Rijiju said his ministry will promote Ladakh as a centre for ice hockey and soon a centre for archery and polo will also be opened here. Leh, in Jammu and Kashmir, is the biggest city in Ladakh and one of the coldest deserts in the world. The terrain and the rivers attract trekkers and climbers from across the world.

New building appointed for Topung Primary School

PRITAM LAMA

YUKSAM, 22 JAN:

Deputy Speaker, Sangay Lepcha, inaugurated a new building for Government Primary School Topung here on Thursday.

Speaking at the inaugural function, Mr Lepcha contended that enrolment in government schools had declined "dramatically" during the 25 years of SDF Government, and now, under the SKM Government, earnest efforts were being made to develop and improve government schools to deliver quality education.

The new building for the primary school at Topung, he said, was one example of the priority being placed on education by the State Government and appealed to all concerned to help revive the school and ensure that it grooms young students well.

The Deputy Speaker, who is also the area MLA, assured all required support to the school on behalf of the state government.

Also on the occasion, the land donor of the school and Education Department officials were felicitated by the School Management Committee.

Three govt agencies launch probe in Serum Institute fire

PUNE, JAN 22 (PTI): Top officials from fire wings of three Maharashtra government agencies on Friday launched a probe to ascertain the cause of the blaze that killed five workers at Serum Institute of India's premises here.

Heads of fire departments of the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), Pune Metropolitan Region Development Authority (PMRDA) and Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) are part of the joint probe team.

Five contractual labourers had died in the fire which broke out in a five-storeyed under-construction building in the Serum Institute of India's Manjari premises on Thursday.

The fire damaged the top two floors of the building located in 'SEZ 3' area of the premises of the vaccine major.

Devendra Potphode, Chief Fire Officer, PMRDA, said officials from the planning and development authority, PMC, and MIDC have come together to ascertain the cause of the fire in the building.

Meanwhile, police have registered an accidental death and burning incident case with the Hadapsar police station, said Deputy Commissioner of Police (Zone 5) Namrata Patil.

"As we are seeing today, the entire floor (4th and 5th) has been damaged. We are trying to ascertain the cause of the fire as well as how the fire spread," said Potphode.

Several types of equipment were damaged in the blaze, he said.

LT seats not possible until State Govt proposes formula to Centre: LTVC

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 JAN:

Limboo Tamang Voluntary Committee [LTVC] president, Yehang Tshong today asserted that reserved seats for the Limboo and Tamang communities cannot be secured until the State Government prepares a formula on it and submits it to the Centre.

Since no such proposal has been made, claims that the demand has been placed with the Centre were distractions.

On the same, he demanded that the state government immediately finalise a feasible formula for LT seats and pass it in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly and then take up the matter with the Centre.

Addressing a press conference here this afternoon, Mr Tshong stated that LTVC has placed



various memorandums to different Ministers of the SKM government but has seen no developments of consequence on the issue.

A memorandum to the Centre without a formula was just an eye-wash, he contended.

He added, "the SKM government has neither withdrawn the Burman Commission Report nor the 40-seat Assembly

formula proposed by the previous SDF government... and nor has it proposed its own formula on how the LT seats can be apportioned."

"LTVC's stand is clear in this regard - the best and easiest solution is to provide seats from the 32 existing seats. We are seeking our seats as LT [ST] seats under Article 371F (f) and Sikkim

Subjects Act 1974 where caste-wise seat reservation is mentioned and is possible. Remedy of LT seats solution must be sought within the framework of Article 371F which is a constitution of its own for solution and Sikkimese people," Mr Tshong asserted.

He added that there should be increase in LT seats in case the Sikkim

Legislative Assembly's strength is increased from 32 to 40.

He said LTVC would oppose any move to merge Limboo-Tamang seats with the new Scheduled Tribes in the future and the organization also wants the Burman Commission Report withdrawn along with the SDF government's 40-seat assembly proposal.

SKM begins constituency-wise tour with Chujachen



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 JAN:

Senior office-bearers of the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha began the first leg of the party's constituency-wise tour, starting with Chujachen today.

An SKM press release informs that the initiative is in pursuance of directions issued by the party president, Chief Minister PS Tamang. SKM's touring team is being led by senior vice president, Political Advisor to the CM, T N Dhakal, and includes the party's general secretary [Press & Media HQ], Boom Tshering Yonzon.

The main objective of the tour is to take stock of the constituency, collected the grievances of the people and discuss strengthening of party and party activities, Mr Yonzon informs.

Today, the team began with a visit to the party's

constituency-level office at Rongli Bazaar and met party workers there.

During the course of interaction, developmental projects for the constituency and party activities were discussed, the release informs.

The team also visited Premlakha-Subhaney GPK office and met with panchayats there and then moved on to Tal-kharaka, South Regu GPU and concluded the day's interactions at the party's block-level office at Aritar.

During the course of interactions, the party members praised that the Government Resolution seeking Scheduled Tribes status for the state's 12 leftout communities and the SKM Government's continuing efforts to work in the interest of the people of Sikkim.

GJM takes up tea garden worker issues with officials

SMRITA KHAWAS

SILIGURI, 22 JAN:

The trade union wing of the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha [Binoy] has taken up issues handicapping tea garden workers in Darjeeling with the Labour and Provident Fund Commissioners today.

Working president of the GJM's trade union JB Tamang informed a press conference today that the problems of workers engaged at North Takvuur and Singtam tea estates ever since these were shut down were raised at the meeting.

"We have submitted a memorandum and appealed to them to reopen the tea gardens as soon as possible," Mr Tamang informed while adding



that a follow-up meeting in this regard is scheduled for 08 Feb at the Dagapur office of the Labour Commission.

Before that, the party also plans to meet the owners of the Singtam tea garden as well.

He added that workers at the Runglee-Rungliot tea garden were also in distress since the garden opens only for six months a year.

The party is demanding that if the tea garden

owners cannot keep the facility open throughout the year, the Labour Commissioner allow for a committee to appointed to run the garden.

GJM's trade union had also learned that the provident fund of workers of Chota Pooboong and Bansal tea estates have not been cleared and were informed in today's meeting that these dues will be cleared within a few days.

SDF observes Membership Day



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 JAN:

Sikkim Democratic Front celebrated its 'Membership Day' on Friday.

An SDF press release informs that the Membership Day was an important programme of the party to

renew memberships and add more members.

The release states that the day was observed in grand manner at the party headquarters here at Bye-Pass Road and also observed at the district party of-

ice at Namchi and other parts of the State.

Senior vice-presidents, vice-presidents, general secretaries and office bearers of various frontal organization of the party joined the observance, the release states

Covaxin phase...

The authors said that all adverse events were mild and moderate, and were more frequent after the first dose, adding that one adverse event was reported but was unrelated to the vaccine.

The randomised Phase 1 trial was carried at 11 hospitals across India. Adults aged 18-55 years who were deemed healthy by the investigator were eligible. Two intramuscular doses of vaccines were administered 14 days apart.

The most common adverse event was pain at the injection site, followed by headache, fatigue, and fever.

India began one of the world's biggest vaccination programmes on Saturday, using the two locally-made shots Covaxin and Covishield, licensed from Oxford University and pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca.

The vaccination drive will inoculate 3 crore health-care and other front-line workers first in the queue, followed by about 27 crore people older than 50 or deemed at high-risk because of pre-existing medical conditions.

Known as the pharmaceutical capital of the world, the country has gifted vaccines to neighbours and partners such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Seychelles, Mauritius and the Maldives. It is starting commercial shipments to Brazil and Morocco on Friday.

"Now, Arrest Me..."

"It has come to light that certain persons and organisations have been making defamatory and offensive comments on social media against the government, respected ministers, parliamentarians, legislators, and government officials," Mr Khan wrote.

"This is against prescribed law and comes under the category of cybercrime."

Nitish Kumar has been increasingly prone to angry outbursts when confronted with criticism or attacks from critics, mainly Tejashwi Yadav.

In almost all his public speeches, the Chief Minister has alleged that social media is full of "misinformation" against his government.

Cong to elect party president by June 2021: CWC

NEW DELHI, JAN 22 (PTI): The Congress party will have an elected president by June 2021, with the party's working committee on Friday approving holding the internal election after the assembly polls.

The committee after a three and a half hour meeting authorised incumbent party chief Sonia Gandhi to schedule the internal election after the conclusion of assembly polls in five states.

Addressing a joint press conference, Congress leaders K C Venugopal and Randeep Surjewala said elections to the CWC will also be held but it remains to be seen whether they can be scheduled before or after the election to the Congress chief's post.

Sources said the Central Election Authority has proposed the holding of polls for electing the party president and AICC session on May 29 and the working committee discussed the dates, but authorised Sonia Gandhi to schedule them after the assembly polls.

The CWC passed three resolutions demanding a repeal of the three agriculture laws, a time-bound JPC probe into the alleged violations of national security and Official Secrets Act and another to ensure

that the government ensures free time-bound COVID-19 vaccination for the poor and oppressed sections.

"The CWC decided that there will be an elected Congress President by June 2021 at any cost," AICC general secretary K C Venugopal said.

He said the little change of schedule depending on the state elections will be decided soon.

"The CWC discussed the schedule of Congress president's elections in May-end, proposed by its election authority. All CWC members unanimously requested Congress president that the internal elections should not interfere with the assembly elections."

He said the Congress president was requested unanimously to reschedule AICC Plenary Session to the end of June 2021 and the Congress chief's election would be concluded by June 2021.

"We will conduct elections as per the Constitution of the party. We need a change of schedule due to assembly polls as counting would be underway in May," he said.

Asked about any dissenting notes on the holding of elections, Surjewala said, "There was no dissent at the meeting."

PIB -Guwahati hosts discussion on teachings of Subhas Chandra Bose

GANGTOK, 22 JAN (PIB): Experts opined and described Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose as a stalwart leader of this era of youth of this country and his aspiration as progressive for his high-valued visionary societal and national leadership.

PIB and Regional Outreach Bureau, Guwahati organised a discussion on the topic 'Teachings of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and its ever-growing relevance for youth in Nation building' here today. Experts from Industry, entrepreneurial fraternity, Government sector along with academicians deliberated and discussed about Netaji from cultural, socio-economic growth, developmental and his efforts on patriotic and empowering youth perspective.

Padma Shri Pravin H Parekh, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India and President of Indian Society of International Law, New Delhi said that this discussion one day before the birthday anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose is to reminisce with reverence the efforts of a stalwart who with a disciplined and arduous effort worked for progressive India.

Talking about Netaji, Director, Prof (Dr) Manoj Kumar Sinha, The Indian Law Insti-

tute, New Delhi said that his efforts for freedom struggle and vision for a planned and a social economic and cultural vibrant India, is a lesson for all youth. He said that Netaji had a simple life with emphasis on personality development of individuals. He further said that Netaji optimism on youth potential were telling instances of motivation, discipline, hard work and punctuality. He said that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose had a very optimistic and planned way of doing things. He said that resource optimization and efficient planning for better management were some of the qualities which a leader exemplifies.

Galaxy of dignitaries in the discussion included Prof (Dr) ZR Azad, Aligarh Muslim University, Uttar Pradesh who said that Netaji was person who had huge respect for all national leaders of the time and said that because of which many leaders respected him. He said that Netaji also was a leader who all reminisce as a person who had worked for high social and cultural value system in this country. He said that Subhas Chandra Bose was national leader with the patriotic fervor and zeal and worked tirelessly for women empowerment.

He said that he was charismatic leader and a leader who believed in his vision for betterment of humanity.

Abdur Rahman Mallick, Advocate Delhi High Court said that, when one reminisces about the stalwarts who worked tirelessly and consistently for the well-being of fellow citizens, Netaji was a leader who exemplified that aspirations of youth and the leaders whose vision for a progressive and successful 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' who are cultural and emotionally working in tandem for growth and development of country. He said that Netaji was a diplomatic and cultural leader of the country where he utilised his talent to leverage the relations between people and countries in the international arena.

Also, in the discussion, many senior officials of Regional Outreach Bureau, Shri Vipul Gaur, Assistant Director, SnDD, Guwahati, Field Exhibition Officer, Hiramani Das, Regional Outreach Bureau, Guwahati, Aminul Haque Jwadder, Exhibition Assistant, Regional Outreach Bureau, Guwahati talked about Netaji and how he worked for a comprehensive growth and progress of the country. Talking about Netaji,

they discussed about his teachings and lessons from which his efforts are instances which demonstrate the vibrance, zeal and gusto of all Indians working for development of society and country.

The webinar was managed and coordinated by Shri Samrat Bandyopadhyay, Joint Director, PIB, Guwahati. The interactive Webinar had enthusiastic participation of students, academicians and Industry fraternity of Assam and North East. Shri Arijit Chakraborty, Assistant Director, Regional Outreach Bureau, Guwahati welcomed the experts as he said that discussion is to revive the stalwarts of the era such as Swami Vivekananda and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

The discussion delved into details on the various aspects of the topic such as his leadership on economic, disciplined, nationalistic and patriotic, cultural growth and societal and socio-economic development of humanity, among others. Along with students, eminent journalists and other government senior officials from Doordarshan Guwahati, Regional Outreach Bureau, Guwahati, All India Radio Guwahati were also present on the occasions.

SAATHI community outreach at Yangang-Rangang



SUMMIT REPORT

NAMCHI, 22 JAN:

SAATHI [Sikkim Against Addiction Towards Healthy India], supported by Titan Co, organized a community outreach program at Yangang-Rangang GPU in South Sikkim today and brought together 43 local community groups to the event, a press release informs.

BDO [Yangang], Bishnu Prasad Thapa, was present as the chief guest.

The objective of the event was to make the youth aware about the ill-effects of substance abuse in personal and family lives.

The event also highlighted the role of family & community in handling

the challenge of substance abuse.

The program began with a welcome note by staff of Yangang-Rangang GPU, followed by an orientation session on SAATHI by the Project Manager, Dikila Bhutia.

Coordinator from Sikkim Drug Users Forum, Prashant Sharma, who was present as a

resource person, spoke on the topic, "Family and their responsibility."

He stressed that substance abuse was a disease which requires treatment not scorn.

Panchayat President Deo Kumar Rai shared that sports & games can help divert young minds away from addiction.

The chief guest spoke

on various societal issues arising across Sikkim like alcohol and now even harder drugs like brown sugar. He stressed that support of the family was important in treating addiction.

The two-hour long program ended with a vote of thanks by Sumitra Chettri, Assistant Project Manager SAATHI.

Awareness camp on malnutrition-free Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT

NAMCHI, 22 JAN:

An awareness camp and counseling session on 'Malnutrition-Free Sikkim' was organized by the Nutrition Cell of Social Justice and Welfare Department, here at the Officers Club today.

Parents of seven children from in and around Namchi along with their children were invited to the camp and coached on nutritional meals they can prepare at home and informed about government schemes in place to support them.

The program organized as part of the Poshan Maah [Nutri-



tion Month] schemes under the Government of India.

Sikkim Commission of Protection and Child Rights chairperson, Roma Tamang, was present as the chief guest for the camp which included the Deputy Director, Nutrition Cell, Sonam Bhutia, demonstrating

the preparation of nutritious meals, and District Health Education Officer Tenzing Chettri, Children's Development and Protection Officer Laxuman Tamang speaking about services and schemes under the Integrated Child Development Scheme for nutrition.

Cops in uniform stop UP jeweller for 'checking,' rob him

LUCKNOW, 22 JAN

[NDTV]: Four policemen have been arrested for allegedly robbing a jeweller under the pretext of a checking drive on a highway in Uttar Pradesh's Gorakhpur. The four were posted in Basti district, 200 km from state capital Lucknow.

Two informants who helped the policemen track the jeweller before making their move have also been arrested, the Gorakhpur police said in a statement.

Sub-inspector Dharmendra Yadav and three other constables posted

at the same police station in Basti have been identified as the accused.

The jeweller and his assistant had taken a bus from Gorakhpur to Lucknow on Wednesday.

The four policemen, still in their uniform, stopped the bus on the highway that leads to Lucknow, boarded it and asked the jeweller and his assistant to get down under the pretext of checking them. The jewellers were then taken to an isolated area where they were robbed, the police said.

The Gorakhpur police

said they have recovered ₹ 19 lakh in cash; gold and silver worth ₹ 16 lakh and a car used in the crime. During questioning, the police said the four accused were also involved in a similar crime in the city last month, when men posing as customs officers robbed a jeweller.

The four accused will face charges under the stringent National Security Act, the police said. All the four will be sacked from the police, Gorakhpur police chief Jogendra Kumar said in a statement.

Safai abhiyan at Rongli Bazaar



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 JAN:

A daylong cleanliness drive was organised at Rongli Bazar by Sikkim Police stationed there with the support from the Fire Station, differ-

ent social organizations and driver associations on the initiative of SHO Tashi Chopel Bhutia. The drive was organised under the Slogan - "Ek Kadam Swachhata Ki Aur," a press release informs.

SMIT Asst Prof completes PhD from SMU

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 JAN:

Assistant Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering, SMIT, Dr Dhruva Kumar, successfully completed his PhD from Sikkim Manipal University on 11 Dec, 2020 under the guidance of Dr Ashish Sharma of SMIT and Associate Professor, NIT-Manipur, Dr Bibhu Prasad Swain, an official press release informs.

Dr Kumar's PhD thesis was, "Study of Mechanical Properties and Role of Hydrogen and



Nitrogen on Silicon Carbide-Nitride Thin Film."

The Doctor of Philosophy degree will be awarded to him during the next convocation of SMU, the release adds.

SPYF backs demands of B.Ed. College applicants

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 JAN:

Sikkim Progressive Youth Forum has backed the apprehensions raised by a section of admission-seekers to the Govt B.Ed. College, Soreong, about the selection process.

A press release issued by the SPYF central executive committee today shares that issues raised by the applicants was "very serious as the sanctity of Higher Education of the State is in question."

SPYF stands with the demands of the applicants, the release informs.

A section of the appli-

cants, it may be recalled, had recently voiced apprehensions about the admission process since the merit list released by the college mentioned only the application ID numbers of the selected candidates and did not mention their graduation marks.

SPYF adds that despite repeated requests and visits by the applicants, the department has not disclosed details of the selection process.

SPYF has sought immediate intervention and appropriate action by the Government and has also written to the Additional

Chief Secretary, Education Department, the Education Minister and the Chief Minister registering their support for the apprehensive applicants and reiterating their demands.

The Forum wants the department to disclose details of the selection process, the names of the selected candidates and the basis of their selection along with details of reservation roster followed; and demanded that if any anomaly is found in the process, the merit list released on 13 Jan be withdrawn and a new list be released "with highest level of transparency."

Third Minister quits Mamata Banerjee's govt, breaks down on camera

KOLKATA, 22 JAN [NDTV]:

West Bengal Minister Rajib Banerjee today quit the government citing a change of portfolio two years ago and broke down on camera, saying: "I never thought a day would come when I would have to take such a difficult step". He is the third minister to resign this month in the middle of an exodus from Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress ahead of elections.

Mr Banerjee did not respond to questions on whether he was headed to the BJP, like dozens of Trinamool Congress leaders before him.

As he emerged from the Governor's house Raj Bhavan after handing over his resignation, he told media persons that he was hurt when he learnt from TV, one fine day, that he had lost the Irrigation ministry and had been moved to Forests. On the belated response to something that happened two years ago, he said he did not take any step as he was stopped by senior leaders.

"There is no problem with the changing of portfolio, but I was hurt by the way it was done," Mr Banerjee said. "I am grateful to Mamata Banerjee for guiding me for all the years. I reiterate my commitment towards working for the people of Bengal." While there is no

formal announcement, Mr Banerjee is widely expected to join the BJP on January 31, when one of the party's top leaders, Home Minister Amit Shah, is scheduled to address a rally in Howrah.

His resignation comes days after he had complained about "some leaders in the Trinamool Congress (TMC)" carrying out propaganda against him. He had struck several discordant notes against the government and the party over the past two months. Senior TMC leader and minister Partha Chatterjee met with his at least twice, to try and bring him around.

"There are a few leaders in the party who only exploit workers. They run false propaganda against me using some party workers," he said on January 16 during a Facebook Live session, according to an ANI report. He, however, did not reveal any names.

In the bitter run-up to the Bengal election due by May, scores of leaders and workers have left the Trinamool for the BJP.

In December, Mamata Banerjee lost her top aide Suvendu Adhikari, who first quit as minister after an extended period of uncertainty, then immediately joined the BJP. Over 40 more leaders and workers followed him out of the Trinamool.

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Don't Build Walls, Demolish Boundaries Instead

Accept it, political and geographical borders never thwarted movement and exchange

Anyone who has seen the unabashedly jingoistic and chest-thumpingly chauvinistic Chinese film, Seediq Bale (Warriors of the Rainbow), irrespective of what they thought of the movie itself, would have noticed how the “tribes” of Taiwan (yes, Taiwan has tribals too) are uncannily similar to the Nagas of the Northeast in their traditions of sovereign villages and penchant for lopping off heads. Stay with the movie slightly longer, and the Taiwanese tribe starts sounding eerily like the Lepchas, not just in how they speak and intone, but also in how they interpret the world around them and how they invoke and worship their Gods. Oh! And by the way, they even have a Mayel Lyang of their own. Lose the bright colours of the boutique-fresh costumes and the basic patterns, the coarseness of the fabric and the practicality of the traditional dresses also become obviously similar. All this is not to suggest that all the three groups mentioned above are somehow related, but an attempt to drive home the point that people, their tribes and their ‘nations’ have more in common than modern boundaries and chauvinistic politics would have us believe. Of course, all primitive tribes will have similar myths, legends and beliefs and all hill tribes will have similar habitations, and if they are hunter-gatherers, will have similar customs, beliefs, rituals and world-views. But we tend to forget this as we crawl into our respective pigeon-holes and start believing that political boundaries are somehow physical walls which have always been in place. Much as this attitude makes us insular and parochial, it also compromises our understanding of our pasts.

People are inherently the same the world over. It is only natural then that the civilizations and cultures that people believe to be indigenous and unique are actually similar and shared as well. When this common link can be stretched from Sikkim to Taiwan, imagine how strong they could be in closer domains. Imagine how many cultural aspects could be understood better if neighbouring histories could be studied unencumbered by the political boundaries of recent make. Take the immediate surroundings for example. Tibet, Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and Darjeeling are mostly studied in isolation, whereas, if a more complete understanding of history and developing cultures is required, the area of study should sweep (at least) from Afghanistan to Burma (and on both sides of the Himalaya). People complain often of how modern lifestyles have diluted traditions and customs, when, in fact, greater damage has been wrought by the segregation of cultural heritage and their study into political boundaries. Khye Bumsa is a celebrated icon in Sikkim, but very little is known of him apart from the swearing of blood brotherhood with Thekong Tek. Had the cultural linkages between Chumbi and Sikkim not been cut off by the Sino-Indian conflict, his stories would have continued to travel from Chumbi to Sikkim and more would have known of how the people of Ha in Bhutan hold an annual festival celebrating Khye Bumsa’s heroic feats. Eastern Nepal now has no surviving cultural links with Sikkim because it falls on the other side of an international boundary. The boundary existed even in the past, but never stopped cultural exchange, which is why there are monasteries beyond West Sikkim, inside Nepal devoted to Lhasun Chempo, one of the three monks who brought Buddhism to Sikkim and arrived here via Eastern Nepal. There used to be a time when monks from Pemayangtse would make an annual pilgrimage to these monasteries to offer prayers. Not anymore. The political distancing of Tibet has also resulted in everyone being told that Sikkim’s royal family comes from Kham Minyak, but no one knows where Kham Minyak is, or that even the Sherpas and the Limboos (at least one strain) also draw their roots from the same place. Historiography within political boundaries can present very warped narratives. Indian history books in schools stretch from Mohenjodaro (in Pakistan) to Assam and run silent on Sikkim and Bhutan even though access to the northeast was through the doors (Duars/ Dooars) controlled by these countries.

Students and researchers should be encouraged to look beyond international boundaries and geographical obstacles because these have never stopped either the movement of people or the exchange of cultures, it is thus best that they did not limit academic enquiries either.

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Pollinators: Neonicotinoid Pesticides Stop Bees and Flies From Getting a Good Night's Sleep

KIAH TASMAN
Theconversation.com

Neonicotinoids, the most commonly used pesticides in the world, were banned in the EU in 2018. More than 99,000 people petitioned the UK government to support the ban amid a wealth of scientific evidence linking this group of chemicals to poor health in bees, from the reduced production of bumblebee queens to slashed sperm counts among male honeybees.

The UK government had pledged to keep the EU’s restrictions post-Brexit, but recently granted a special exemption to allow farmers to use the neonicotinoid thiamethoxam on sugarbeet throughout 2021, and possibly until 2023.

If this signals the government’s intention to roll back regulations on agricultural chemicals now that the UK has left the EU, the consequences for pollinating insects could be dire. Research into the effects of these pesticides on pollinators is still ongoing, but new harmful effects are discovered all the time.

In a new study, my colleagues and I have uncovered the most recent example. We looked into the effect of these pesticides on the body clock and sleep of flies and bumblebees. Just like us, insects need sleep. And, like us, they have an internal sense of time – more commonly known as a body clock – which helps them synchronise their activity and sleep patterns with the rest of the world. Your body clock might allow you to wake up just a few minutes before your alarm goes off. For insects, it ensures they’re able to forage in the day when flowers are open and sleep at night when it’s usually too dark to fly.

Using lab-based colonies of buff-tailed bumble-

bees, the most common British bumblebee species, we showed that a neonicotinoid pesticide called imidacloprid turns night into day for bees. Foraging bumblebees were fed concentrations of imidacloprid that were similar to what they might encounter in the wild (around ten parts per billion). After exposure, the dosed bees were more likely to try to forage at nighttime and sleep in the daytime, and they were more sluggish overall, going on far fewer foraging trips than normal.

At the same time as we were experimenting on bumblebees, we were also studying the response of fruit flies to neonicotinoids. Scientists often use fruit flies as a model to help understand other animals, as we have a deep understanding of their genes and the ability to edit them. In our study, we labelled the brain cells which set the pace of the fruit fly body clock with fluorescent dye, to see if the pesticides could be directly affecting them.

In a normal fly, these cells collect information from the eyes and other light-sensing organs. The cells then change shape between daytime and nighttime and release signals to other parts of the body to ensure that sleep and other activities happen at the right time of day. But neonicotinoids appeared to interfere with both of these processes, freezing the body clock cells in daytime mode. Given how similar these cells are between fruit flies and bees, this process may be behind the effects on sleep and foraging that we saw in bumblebees.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

If bees can’t synchronise their foraging with the dawn, when nectar and pollen are most abundant, this will limit the amount of food they can gather, stunting the colony’s ability to grow and produce more bees.

The body clock is also an important part of

communication in bees. Honeybees have a dance language which lets them tell each other where the best flowers are. They use the position of the sun in the sky as a tool for navigation, which means that honeybees need to be able to keep track of the time of day within the darkness of the hive. If their body clock is disrupted, it could affect their ability to communicate vital information to each other and reduce their ability to forage and pollinate.

The changes to sleep that we saw in the buff-tailed bumblebees are also worrying. Sleep during the night helps bees form memories, and so if neonicotinoids are disrupting their sleep, it could cause problems with remembering important information, such as the route back to the hive. The correct timing of sleep is also really important for childcare in the colony. When bumblebees are looking after their young, they have to tend to them and feed them round the clock, taking little naps between feeds. If neonicotinoids change their sleep patterns in a way that they can’t control, adult bumblebees may struggle to properly care for the next generation. All of these effects could potentially prevent colonies from growing and reproducing properly, threatening their long-term survival.

Bumblebees, like honeybees and other bees, are important pollinators for 84% of crops and 80% of wild flowering plants in Europe. Neonicotinoids pose a real threat to not only the health of these pollinating insects, but the agriculture and ecosystems they support. As a scientist who studies the effects of these chemicals, I hope that the “emergency use” that was recently granted by the UK government isn’t a sign of worse things to come.

[the writer is Teaching Associate in Physiology, Pharmacology and Neuroscience, University of Bristol]

Poirot at 100: The Refugee Detective Who Stole Britain's Heart

CHRISTOPHER PITTARD
theconversation.com

A hundred years ago, Agatha Christie introduced British readers to a small man with an impeccably maintained moustache who, with the help of his “little grey cells”, was very good at solving crimes. That man, of course, was Hercule Poirot, who made his debut in Christie’s first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, in 1921.

Though potentially the second most famous detective in British culture (after Sherlock Holmes), Poirot is not British at all but a refugee. Coming to England as part of a group of Belgians displaced by the first world war, his origins lie in Brussels. Writing about this retired Belgian police officer solving cases around the UK and across the globe, Christie was able to explore (and at times poke fun at) the complexities of Englishness and its relationship to continental Europe.

EUROPEAN FLAIR

On the surface, Christie’s novels resemble a nostalgic retreat to the pastoral and to the English stately home. They can be read as a possible turning-inwards thanks to an emphasis on closed rooms and detailed floor plans of grand buildings. But such appearances are deceptive.

The opening of borders, both literal and intellectual, shapes Christie’s England. It was her understanding of the work of European thinkers that gives her detective an edge. Where an English detective, like Sherlock Holmes, looks for external pieces

of evidence that can be analysed, Poirot solves the case by realising the hidden implications of people’s behaviour – including his own. Poirot’s



Freudian focus on the psychology of suspects enables him to see that simple mistakes and slips of the tongue can hide deeper meanings. In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, a crucial clue is revealed when Poirot realises the importance of his own almost unconscious instinct to tidy.

In Christie’s world, the typically English common sense of policemen is not enough to solve the mystery. Instead, a dash of continental theory sheds light on what lies beneath the surface.

Another of Poirot’s trademarks is his occasional struggle to find the correct English word or idiom. In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, he even misquotes Hamlet. Yet it would be a mistake to read these moments as simple errors. Instead, Poirot knowingly plays into the trope of the “funny foreigner”, using difficulties with

language to disarm suspects and allay fears of suspicion (how could such a comic figure be so great a detective?). In the famous scenes where Poirot

of Englishness, those who cannot tell the difference between the French and the Belgian.

Likewise, as literary scholar Alison Light notes, Poirot’s popularity coincides with the expansion in travel, as the English increasingly saw themselves as tourists abroad. Several of Poirot’s most famous cases occur on modes of transport and in exotic locations, like *Death on the Nile*. However, while the English in these stories might be abroad, class relations from home still manage to play out wherever they might be. England follows them, and that inward-looking Englishness runs deep.

While Christie might have poked fun at England and Englishness, she managed to capture the hearts of British readers with her small, smart Belgian. Poirot was so loved by readers that Christie wrote 33 novels, two plays, and more than 50 short stories about him between 1921 and 1975. ITV’s adaptation of many of these stories, *Agatha Christie’s Poirot* starring David Suchet, ran for 25 years (1989-2013) and is also now considered a classic of British TV. Few fictional detectives have had their complete adventures adapted for the screen. In this regard, Poirot makes a strong claim to being Britain’s most loved detective.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer in English Literature, University of Portsmouth]

BNepal's domestic airlines struggle to remain in air by discounting fares

SANGAM PRASAIN

KATHMANDU, 22 JAN [KATHMANDU-POST]: Before the coronavirus, domestic aviation was on a high as Nepalis, lured by cheap tickets, took to the skies like never before and filled planes to capacity.

On some routes, price competition between carriers reached a point where the cost of air travel came close to the price of a bus ticket, to the great joy of travellers.

All that changed after the pandemic grounded flyers and airlines. In less than a year, the virus wiped out more than half of the domestic passenger traffic.

Tribhuvan International Airport statistics show that domestic carriers lost 1.73 million passengers last year that translates to a loss of more than Rs5 billion in passenger revenue, excluding losses in cargo revenue.

Domestic passenger traffic at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport in 2020 fell to its lowest level since 2009. But airline officials said that domestic carriers had recovered close to 90 percent of pre-Covid passenger numbers.

According to the statistics, domestic airlines carried 1.45 million passengers in 2020, a 54.28 percent plunge from the 2019 figure.

Aircraft movements also dropped to a multi-year low of 38,610 takeoffs and landings, representing a steep 57.94 percent fall from the year before.

When the pandemic started spreading, the government shut down all scheduled international and domestic flights from March 24, 2020.

"The heavy losses in passenger numbers has eroded the financial status of domestic airlines. We're living with the hope that flyers will come back," said Anil Manandhar,



corporate manager at Shree Airlines.

He added that passenger movement had picked up, but revenues were small as the tickets were priced very low. Airlines are charging fares that they charged a decade ago, he said.

"It's basically a survival strategy. The prices we are charging currently does not even cover the cost of fuel," he said.

Domestic airlines returned to the air on September 21 after keeping their aircraft in the hangar for nearly six months.

"The passengers are coming back. While international airlines are struggling to get passengers, the occupancy on domestic flights has been better than expected," said Pratap Babu Tiwari, general manager of Tribhuvan International Airport. "The trend shows that domestic airlines are making a faster recovery due to cheap tickets."

According to airlines, they are receiving around 7,000 passen-

gers daily. Before the pandemic, the number of domestic air travellers averaged 8,735 persons daily.

A Buddha Air official, which has been flying nearly 5,000 passengers daily, said that domestic airlines had recovered to 90 percent of the pre-Covid level in terms of passenger occupancy.

"It's all because of the low fares," said the official. "This shows that the price factor has remained a crucial booster of passenger occupancy for domestic airlines." Buddha Air is slated to add another ATR-72 plane to its fleet on Friday.

According to Tiwari, it was estimated that the fear of catching Covid-19 from fellow passengers would impact commercial travel. "But the situation has reversed."

On September 15, 2020, the government announced that domestic airlines would be allowed to resume services from September 17, but only if they kept half of the seats empty.

Private operators were quick

to oppose the decision, saying they could not fly the planes half-empty. They warned that they would not conduct any scheduled passenger flights until the government rolled back its decision. The government was forced to back down, and airlines started flying from September 21.

"The Dashain, Tihar and Chhath festivals helped airlines to fill their seats in October and November. This was followed by the wedding season," said Manandhar.

But with the winter season in full swing, which has seen many flight cancellations because of bad weather, particularly in the Tarai, airlines have currently halved their flights, said Manandhar.

Traveller movement has been fluctuating since 2009 due to the airfare structure and safety concerns, but the domestic airline industry went on a record breaking spree after the 2015 earthquake.

Domestic passenger movement dropped to an eight-year low of 1.36 million in 2015 following

the disaster that caused a severe economic downturn. But the very next year, passenger movement rebounded by 28.9 percent to 1.75 million. The sun shone brightly for domestic airlines in 2017 too, and they recorded a 39.47 percent jump in domestic air passenger movement as they expanded their fleets to cater to growing travel demand.

Domestic airlines flew a record 2.45 million passengers in 2017 as travellers chose to fly rather than drive over bumpy national highways which seem to be perpetually under repair.

The year 2018 was another bumper year for domestic airlines when they flew 2.84 million passengers, up 19.22 percent from the 2017 figure. The carriers received 459,169 new flyers attracted by their low-fare schemes.

In 2019, although international passenger numbers at Tribhuvan International Airport dropped for the first time in four years, domestic passenger traffic increased by a

solid 11.96 percent to 3.18 million.

According to operators, flying to Janakpur today costs Rs1,800 while travel by surface transport costs Rs2,000.

Buddha Air was the clear winner in passenger movement in 2020 although the pandemic had caused the carrier to lose half its passengers.

It recorded a steep 51.88 percent loss in passenger numbers last year, flying only 765,708 passengers.

Buddha's closest rival, Yeti Airlines, saw its passenger numbers plunge 54.38 percent to 380,379 in 2020.

Nepal's largest helicopter operator, Shree Airlines, which diversified into fixed-wing services in April 2017, flew 230,646 passengers, down 51.44 percent year-on-year, to take the third spot in terms of passenger carriage last year.

The year 2020 was a painful one for Nepal Airlines as it decided to ground all its six Chinese-made planes in a bid to cut losses. The national flag carrier flew 23,657 passengers, down 68.13 percent year-on-year.

Saurya Airlines, which started operations in November 2014, carried 16,459 passengers, down 79 percent.

Yeti subsidiary Tara Air, which only operates on remote sectors, also observed a sharp decline of 70.59 percent in passenger movement. It flew 9,755 passengers last year.

Summit Air, another airline serving remote destinations, saw passenger numbers drop 42.39 percent to 9,236.

Sita Air flew 4,905 passengers, down by 66.12 percent. Simrik Airlines flew 4,331 passengers, down 84.61 percent.

Book lays out foreign policy vision for India

NEW DELHI, JAN 22 (PTI): A new book by foreign affairs consultant Mohamed Zeeshan argues that India needs a more coherent strategy for its relations with the outside world in order to fulfil its domestic development needs and global leadership aspirations.

"Flying Blind: India's Quest for Global Leadership" seeks to explain why the ordinary Indian citizen should care about foreign policy and how a more proactive foreign policy can deliver economic growth at home. "It details out the dilemmas plaguing India's foreign policy today - each of which have led to several inconsistencies in India's foreign policy practice and have consequently impacted India's interests," publishers Penguin Random House said.

Faced with threats from China along its borders, and in need of solutions for its economic problems in this globalised world, Zeeshan argues that India needs a more proactive foreign policy.

He points out the pressing concerns that India has been burdened with from the past to the present, while also examining the various strengths that India enjoys - which, if intelligently utilised, will help India emerge as a global power in the coming decade.

The title 'Flying Blind' alludes to the absence of a coherent strategy in making full use of these advantages. Through travels and debates across continents, and a series of discussions with diplomats, thought leaders and academics from around the world, Zeeshan lays out a much-needed foreign policy vision for India to champion the global good.

The author says in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the clamour for development institutions around the world will only get louder.

"Countries suffering from weak governance capacity and - worse - civil war and violence are a natural threat to global health, development and security. Global cooperation will necessarily need to address these gaps in public systems worldwide," he writes.

So what does all this mean for New Delhi?

"For years now, India has stood out in the postcolonial world as one among very few stable democratic states, with an economy that has long been on the move. If Indian strategists are wondering what role New Delhi should play on the world stage, they should look no further than India's own long-standing and globally recognised strengths," Zeeshan says.

"As one might say about domestic politics, just so even in international politics: give the people what they want," he adds. He also argues that no democracy - whether India or the US - should take its institutions and rights for granted. "The resilience of democracy is not due to divine intervention; it is due to the persistent efforts of the citizens themselves to continue their democratic traditions. In India, the democratic culture seems to be well and truly deep-rooted. But Indians must keep it that way," he writes.

Politicisation of Nepal's univs takes toll on credibility

BINOD GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, 22 JAN [KATHMANDU-POST]: A group of campus chiefs and directors under the Madhya Paschim University resigned en masse on Thursday accusing Vice-Chancellor Nanda Bahadur Singh of using derogatory words against them during a meeting.

Chiefs from four colleges and directors from two departments under the university said they thought it was better to quit rather than work under Singh, who doesn't respect the dignity of his colleagues and academic institutions.

Singh, who is considered an ally of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, was appointed to the position in March.

This is not the first time that people appointed to high offices in various universities have been accused of corruption and misdeemeanor.

In 2017 a team under the University Grants Commission had found irregularities at the Lumbini Buddhist University when it granted affiliations. The study conducted by a five-member committee had found that most of the colleges granted affiliation had not ful-

filled all criteria set for affiliated colleges. Though the university, established in 2006, was authorised to provide education on Buddhist Philosophy, Literature and Culture only, it was found to have granted affiliations to engineering and basic science programmes without any expertise in such subjects.

The report said, "The university acted over influence and pressure and that it was also involved in irregularities while granting the affiliations."

Similarly, Tirtha Khaniya, former vice-chancellor at Tribhuvan University (TU) was accused of plagiarism. While he headed the English Education Department at Tribhuvan University in 2006, Khaniya had lifted a section of an article written by Ferit Kilickaya, associate professor at Middle East Technical University and Mehmet Akif Ersoy University, Turkey.

In an email conversation with the Post in 2015, Kilickaya had said he was shocked to see that a major chunk of his article was lifted by Khaniya. "I tried to get in touch with Khaniya, but could not reach him. I couldn't file a legal case as I am unaware of Nepal's legal system," he told the Post.

Gold worth ₹ 28-Cr seized at Indo-Myanmar border

NEW DELHI, 22 JAN [PTI]:

In a major gold smuggling bust, the Delhi Zonal Unit of the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) has seized 55.61 kg of foreign-origin gold valued at ₹ 28 crores from eight persons at two locations - Delhi and Lucknow, said the Ministry of Finance on Thursday.

According to an official release, the DRI received specific inputs regarding the smuggling of a huge quantity of foreign origin gold from Myanmar into India through the Indo-Myanmar border.

"Five passengers were intercepted by officers of DRI, Delhi Zonal Unit near Delhi, and three passengers were intercepted by the officers of DRI, Lucknow Zonal Unit at Lucknow. A search of the persons resulted in the recovery and seizure of 335 gold bars, weighing 55.61 kg. The said eight persons have been apprehended," it added.

Keeping constant vigil over these routes, and with a view to thwarting any large-scale smuggling efforts, the Ministry said that the officers of DRI have made a string of spectacular gold seizures in the past six months. These include the seizure of 51.33 kg of smuggled gold in November 2020

by the DRI Guwahati Zonal Unit, seizure of 84 kg and 66 kg of smuggled gold in August and November 2020, respectively, by the DRI Zonal Unit.

"The spurt of economic activity seen after the lifting of COVID-related lockdowns throughout the country, combined with the pent-up demand for gold, coincided with a surge in such smuggling activities. The blocking of air routes through the lockdown period also saw a significant shift in the modus operandi of smugglers from the air routes to the land route through the Indo-Myanmar border," the Ministry said.

IRCTC to resume e-catering services from next month

NEW DELHI, JAN 22 (PTI): In a big relief to passengers, IRCTC will resume its e-catering services from next month, a statement from the railways' catering arm said on Friday.

Due to onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent unprecedented lockdown, e-catering services were suspended on March 22, 2020.

IRCTC, the catering and tourism arm of the Indian Railways, is going to restart its e-catering services for passengers travelling in the special trains that are currently operating.

IRCTC had started

this unique service in the year 2014 whereby passengers could order an array of food of their choice from reputed brands as well as popular regional and local delicacies on phone or online while travelling on trains and get the same delivered to their seats at the railway station.

During the pre-COVID period, IRCTC had started clocking 20,000 e-catering orders per day.

Now, with the gradual resumption of passenger train services and amidst the new normal, wherein IRCTC is serving only 'Ready To Eat' meals to passengers on trains, there has been

an increase demand for resumption of e-catering services. With the permission from the Railways Ministry coming in, IRCTC is ready to resume the e-catering services in a phased manner from February, the statement said. Initially services will be started in around 30 railway stations catering to approximately 250 trains.

"IRCTC is ensuring that all its e-catering partners ensure proper health and hygiene protocols while serving the meals to the passengers.

"The passengers shall avail the services of e-catering through www.ecatering.irctc.com.

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After resurgence, Kerala Blasters face tough FC Goa test

BAMBOLIM, JAN 22 (PTI): Bolstered by two wins in three matches, a resurgent Kerala Blasters would look for another positive result when they face FC Goa in an Indian Super League match here on Saturday.

Kerala Blasters are enjoying a much better phase in the ISL. With their victory against Bengaluru FC, Kibu Vicuna's team grabbed seven points from their last three games compared to six in their first nine matches.

However, the Spaniard accepted that the fixture against FC Goa on Saturday would be a much more difficult test.

After struggling for goals initially, Kerala's attack has come together in the last four matches, scoring eight times. In those four games, Kerala attempted 24 shots on target at an average of six shots per match.

"We are competing in every match till the end. In the last three matches, we competed well. We played well and we got the points," Vicuna said.

However, they will take on a side that has dominated games with maximum possession, having remained unbeaten in the last five games.

"It's true that tomorrow is a different game. It's against a good team that plays good football but we are trying to recover the players and prepare for the game as much as possible," said Vicuna.

"They are a good team. They have very dangerous players. (Igor) Angulo, (Jorge) Ortiz and Romario Jesuraj are playing well. I hope that tomorrow in the game, we are going to be better. And also creating more chances than at the beginning of the season," he added.

Kerala are currently ninth but they are just four points away from fourth-placed Hyderabad FC and Vicuna sounded optimistic.

"We are happy that we are close (to the top four) after the last game but we are focusing on the next game."

FC Goa have been in top form as they have clawed their way back to the top three, putting up impressive performances.

Juan Ferrando's men are the comeback kings of the league, having earned 10 points after conceding first.

"We play as a team. We fight until the last minute. Each player has to fight. They know that they will not be in the squad if they don't do that. You will win some or lose some, but fighting is the most important thing," said Ferrando.

"It will be a very difficult game (against Kerala). They have been trying to play good football. They have different plans and are making the most of free spaces. They have a good squad," he said.

SID LOWE

MADRID, 22 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: "Javi Antón is crying," said Vicente Parras, and he wasn't the only one. The manager of Club Deportivo Alcoyano looked across the pitch at El Callao with its whitewashed walls, "Morale" splashed alongside the little blue door in the corner and saw his players still on the grass long after the final whistle. Some of them held white shirts, most of them held phones.

"They're all out there calling home," he said: endless messages and dozens of conversations starting the way his had a few minutes before. Parras's son couldn't come to the game; no one could. "I just wanted to make sure he had seen it," he admitted.

Not all of them had. José Juan Figueiras's wife and his daughter were in tears when he called overwhelmed by it all, but his five-year-old son was in bed, asleep. It was late and he had school tomorrow; he'd have to find out what had happened in the morning, just what his dad had done, why everyone was suddenly talking about him.

What had happened was this: tiny Alcoyano, the club that had not been in the first division for 70 years and were now in the semi-professional third tier with its 102 teams and 10 groups, had just beaten the biggest of them all, knocking Real Madrid out of the Copa del Rey. With 10 men, no fans and in extra-time.

At last, the legend had been fulfilled. Más moral que el Alcoyano, the phrase runs and it is one that goes well beyond football to become a popular saying: more morale than Alcoyano. Any time someone took on the impossible, whenever they refused to accept the inevitable, determined not to give up however hopeless, however absurd, any time they believed they could do something that, let's face it, they couldn't, they'd be told they had more morale, fight, spirit or faith than Alcoyano – the benchmark for belief.

No one really knows for sure where its origins lie, but probably some time in the 1940s when they went from regional football to the first division in five years, finishing ahead of Madrid in 1947-48, the only season they survived in the top flight. Or the ear-



ly-1950s when they were last there but when they also beat Madrid. There's talk of an era of wild games when anything could happen, matches always finishing 5-4 or 4-5. Of a victory over Athletic Club after a 3-3 draw at San Mamés. There's a story too about a play-off against Espanyol in 1943 when they were losing 7-1 and players surrounded the referee demanding more added time because they could still do this. There's also a suggestion of an attempted fightback at 13-0 down once, although it's not certain that game even took place.

This one did, the evidence on tape, and it was almost as absurd: the happiest night in the life of what, right now, might be the saddest city in Spain. Alcoy is isolated, everything shut. According to El Mundo, a care home there has been closed after 73 of its 139 residents died, and that's representative of something bigger and even more concerning. Alcoy has the highest coronavirus rate in the country, 2,402 cases per 100,000. The football team had not avoided the impact, either: in October they had been put in quarantine, games cancelled.

Here, at last was some hope, or at least a distraction. "There is no better medicine than Madrid coming," the coach said, yet few were likely to see them. Hopes that even 150 might be able to go to the ground, which holds 4,850, went unfulfilled. Denied gate

receipts – salvation at this level – Alcoyano sold commemorative, symbolic tickets signed by the squad, more historic, more valuable now than anyone dared imagine. The club's president and secretary could not go: they had both tested positive. The mayor didn't attend either, to set an example, and nor did anyone else. There was a call to chant the team's name from balconies at kick-off time and some flags went up, but history was made before a handful of journalists, a few alcoyanos in flats nearby and some lads perched precariously on a wall.

When José Juan left the house on Wednesday afternoon, he bade farewell with: "Let's see how it goes." Hours later, he told Cadena Ser radio: "And look how it went." One-nil down to Éder Militão's header, Alcoyano barely saw the ball – possession was down below 20% and the shot count read 5-25 – but with 10 minutes to go, defender José Soler equalised from a corner to take the game into extra-time. As the players gathered, someone joked they'd need to get the paperwork to justify that they were out after the 10pm curfew and everyone laughed. No one had thought of that before; no one had imagined this, a miracle already.

With five minutes left, exhausted and down to 10 after the sending off of Ramón Lopez, with penalties looming if they were lucky enough to get that far, something extraor-

dinary happened. Madrid were deep in their area. Then, suddenly, the ball was clear and they were up and running. A wonderful counter-attack took them up the other end. There, Juanan Casanova, scored the winner. The same Juanan who, gripped by cramp, could barely move, but who before the game had announced: "If I score, it will be the absolute business."

He did. And it was. When the ball went in, there was an incredulous smile on Zinedine Zidane's face. Madrid had one man more than Alcoyano and the men they had included Karim Benzema, Toni Kroos, Eden Hazard, Casemiro and Marco Asensio, those he trusted to avoid exactly this fate. "This is unbelievable," José Juan said, not so much David against Goliath as David against Goliath, Goliath's big brother and all his mates, all of whom are nails. Alcoyano's entire annual budget is a little more than €700,000. What Madrid paid for Álvaro Odriozola alone could keep them going for 42 years. The four subs Madrid sent on cost 317 times that. .

These are different worlds, colliding for one night, a certain purity prevailing. Alcoy's winning goalscorer Juanan sidled up to Kroos at a corner and told him he liked him and asked if he could have his shirt. Juli Cerdá had been asked by his son to get Luka Modrić's. Alcoy's hero was goalkeeper José Juan. He is 41.

No one older has ever beaten Madrid in the cup, and he is three years ahead of anyone else. His career stretches back to last century and takes in just 27 first division minutes, in which the first thing he did was pick the ball out of the net, having come on as a sub for Celta Vigo against Racing Santander. Apart from that there are six games sitting on the bench, watching. On one of those days, he watched Ronaldo, Luis Figo, David Beckham, Raúl, Roberto Carlos and Zidane, unable to actually get near them.

Now he had. "Look what we've gone and done," he said afterwards.

A lot of damage, for a start. This was the fourth time Madrid have been knocked out by a Second Division B team on the pitch and it might even be the worst of them. Asked if this was a disgrace, something to be ashamed of, Zidane replied: "That's your word, not mine." It was just about everyone's. That and others like it, as if the press was all on the same page of the thesaurus. "No one escapes this embarrassment," said the front of Marca, the coach striding centre stage. AS went for the same word: "embarrassment", calling this "another stain on Madrid's history". It was, said El Mundo, "a shameful Madrid". "Humiliation," cheered El Mundo Deportivo, enjoying this immensely. "Real failure," they called it, claiming Madrid had hit "rock bottom". They

had been ridiculed, Sport gloated.

Describing this as "one of the blackest nights in memory" and calling it a "crisis", Marca asked whether it might be a decisive blow to Zidane. Madrid have won just one of their last five games and have seen two trophies slip through their hands in a week after getting knocked out of the Super Cup. It is made worse by the timing: on the morning of the game, Madrid awoke to news that Martin Ødegaard wants to leave, another young player not integrated into the team, another source of tension between coach and club. Last weekend, Luka Jovic returned to Germany and scored more goals in 27 minutes than in a year and a half at Madrid. Zidane's praetorian guard protects him, but the president resents that too. And meanwhile, the coach's grip on the dressing room and the fans loosens a little.

"We don't like to lose but we're not going to go mad," Zidane said, speaking only for himself. "I accept responsibility and what has to happen will happen. When you lose, there's talk."

When you win there is too, or there should be. Particularly when you're the team that wins like that against a team like Madrid. "I cried. This is incredible. A thousand things had to fall into place for this to happen and they did," Juanan insisted. Alcoyano's president admitted there were no win bonuses, because no one had thought they could win. "For a moment people in Alcoy have been able to cheer us on, even if from home," Juli said. "We're up in the clouds right now; we won't realise what we've done for four or five days," Juan José added. "These things happen once in a lifetime, if that."

"The club, the city and the fans deserve it because they've been through such a bad time. Down in the mud, football has these things," Vicente Parras said, looking beyond the empty stands and across the pitch where his players were still trying to take it in, calling home to make sure families and friends, stuck indoors like the rest of the city, had seen it, sharing the moment with them. "You want to know what más moral que el Alcoyano is?" he asked. "It's this."

Chess: Carlsen starts well but slows while little-known Swede impresses

LEONARD BARDEN

LONDON, 22 JAN [THEGUARDIAN]: Magnus Carlsen launched his campaign at Tata Steel Wijk aan Zee, the "chess Wimbledon" in style as the world champion elegantly defeated the rising star Alireza Firouzja, 17, by an imaginative attack.

Then the script went awry, as Carlsen's next four results were all grinding draws against lower ranked opponents, while his limelight was stolen from an unexpected quarter.

Nils Grandelius, 27, Sweden's No 1 but regarded as just a journeyman grandmaster, surged at the start with three wins including an impressive crushing of France's world No 5, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave.

After five of the 13 rounds Grandelius led with 3.5/5, followed by the world top two of Carlsen (Norway) and Fabiano Caruana (US), Pentala Harikrishna (India) and Anish Giri (Netherlands) all 3/5.

Carlsen's performances throughout 2020 were commanding, nine online tournament victories plus first prize over-the-board in Stavanger, until right at the end of the year when America's Wesley So upset his planned 30th birthday victory celebration, followed by the "deep funk" checkmate from Russia's Daniil Dubov.

The world champion's spoken thoughts in a pre-tournament interview gave a clue to his mood at Wijk. He was uncharacteristically introspective and downbeat, talking in terms of maintaining his standard in his

30s and retiring by 40 rather than seeking out new peaks and new records. Were his replies a premonition of the missed chances in those grinding draws to put his opponents under sustained pressure? Perhaps. What is sure is that the world champion now has plenty to prove before the tournament ends on 31 January.

The Norwegian can be watched in action as the games are screened live and free with running grandmaster commentaries on major chess websites from 1pm daily, excepting for rest days on 20, 25 and 28 January. Carlsen's crunch game against Caruana, who is also finding wins difficult to come by, will be in the 10th round (of 13) on Wednesday.

Despite his late 2020 setbacks, Carlsen has little to prove online. Across the board it is a different matter. His record 125 games without defeat ended at Stavanger, while his official rating is still around 35 Fide points short of his peak of 2889 set in 2014.

Carlsen's interview suggests that his overall performance target has shifted towards pragmatic stability and edging tournaments by small margins. In late 2019, before the pandemic, he was aiming ambitiously for a new surge towards his 2889 record and then on to the summit of a 2900 rating.

"I feel that it should be possible to maintain a very high level as long as I am in my 30s," Carlsen said. "The margin of

error does become smaller and smaller, and that means you have to keep working harder and harder, but with the right motivation, I should be able to maintain a level where I feel that it's worth keeping going. I don't think it will be possible for me to keep playing at the top level if I struggle to score 50% in top events."

What could be the "right motivation"? There used to be arguments over whether Bobby Fischer, Garry Kasparov, or Carlsen was the greatest of all time but Fischer now has fewer supporters due to his minimal period as an inactive world champion, while for many Kasparov gets the vote because of his long period at the top.

Kasparov became world champion when he defeated Anatoly Karpov 12.5-11.5 in Moscow on 9 November 1985, and lost his title when he was beaten by Vlad Kramnik 8.5-6.5 in London on 2 November 2000. That is one week from a 15-year reign.

Carlsen won the crown from Vishy Anand when he took a winning 6.5-3.5 match lead in Chennai on 22 November 2013. To surpass Kasparov's duration as champion, he will probably need to have defeated another four challengers by mid-November 2028.

Can he do it? In his optimum form, for sure. Would it be enough to make him the greatest in the eyes of the majority of chess fans and fellow grandmasters? That is less certain. Kasparov played fewer events, and

the overall impression is that he had few real setbacks in tournaments, matches or individual games, and that he was always liable to blow rivals away with a dominating performance. For Carlsen, the big picture looks slightly but significantly more uneven.

Britain's national chess league, the 4NCL, has tapped a rich vein of popularity as it begins its third lockdown season with more than 250 teams of four competing in the 4NCL Online in seven divisions. Matches are once a fortnight on Tuesday evenings, played to a comfortable time limit allowing up to three hours per game. A separate junior league has hundreds of players.

The pre-pandemic 4NCL had teams of eight who played on weekends at a central hotel venue, which proved too difficult for some distant teams. The over-the-board version has been dominated by Wood Green and Guildford for most of its 28 years. In contrast, the online version has surging numbers, is attracting teams from Cornwall to Dundee, has two seasons a year rather than one, and is a more open competition at the top.

4NCL Online looks set to stay even if or when the pandemic is over, and its fourth season, expected to start this summer, should continue its rapid expansion. Its participant numbers are already comparable with the weekend congress Fischer boom of the 1970s.

3707: 1...Qb4+ 2 Kd5 Be4+! 3 Qxe4 Qc5 mate.

Brazil announces incoming vaccine cargo amid supply concerns



RIO DE JANEIRO, JAN 22 (AP): Brazil's health ministry announced Thursday that a shipment of 2 million doses of coronavirus vaccine is coming from India, a report coming as public health experts sound the alarm over insufficient supply in South America's biggest nation.

The vaccine, developed by AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford, will clear customs in Sao Paulo on Friday before being flown to Rio de Janeiro, where Brazil's state-run Fiocruz Institute is based, the ministry said. Fiocruz has a partnership with AstraZeneca and Oxford for the vaccine's distribution and production.

A flight from India planned for last week

was delayed, derailing the federal government's plan to begin immunization with the AstraZeneca shot.

Instead, vaccination began using the CoronaVac shot in Sao Paulo, where the state's Butantan Institute has a deal with Chinese biopharmaceutical company Sinovac.

Neither Fiocruz nor Butantan have received the technology from their partners to produce vaccines domestically, and instead must import the active ingredient.

The announcement of the 2 million doses from India comes as increasingly vocal Brazilian experts express concern about the influx of raw materials from Asia needed to produce vac-

cines for the nation of 210 million people.

Counting doses from Butantan and those from India, there isn't enough vaccine and there is no certainty about when Brazil will have more, or how much, M rio Scheffer, professor of preventive medicine at the University of Sao Paulo, told The Associated Press.

It will interfere with our capacity in the near-term to reach collective immunity.

The Indian Embassy in Brasilia didn't immediately respond to a request for comment about the announced shipment nor the cause for last week's delay.

Butantan made available 6 million CoronaVac doses it imported from China in order to kick off

Brazil's immunization, and it used materials imported from China to bottle an additional 4.8 million shots.

The health regulator must approve use of the latter batch before it can be distributed to states and municipalities across Brazil.

Scheffer estimated in a report he published Jan. 18 that the government will need 10 million doses just to cover front-line health workers, leaving the elderly and other at-risk Brazilians included in priority groups without any vaccines. The government's own immunization plan doesn't specify how many Brazilians are included in priority groups.

Brazil has recorded 212,000 deaths related

to COVID-19, the second-highest total in the world after the United States, and infections and deaths surging again.

While Brazil has a proud history of decades of immunization campaigns, in this pandemic it has struggled to cobble together a complete plan and suffered multiple logistical pitfalls.

The vaccination plan is badly done, in general, said Domingos Alves, adjunct professor of social medicine at the University of Sao Paulo.

It's important that the information be transparent and clear for the population to know how this vaccination process will be done. There has been some speculation on social media that diplomatic snafus namely those stemming from allies of Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro who criticised the Chinese government might explain the delay behind getting the required inputs.

Oliver Stuenkel, an international relations professor at the Getulio Vargas Foundation, a university, told AP that such a reading is overly simplistic amid heightened global demand.

Of course, since Bolsonaro isn't on good terms with the Chinese government, he doesn't really have the direct access, Stuenkel said from Sao Paulo.

Russia welcomes US proposal to extend nuclear treaty



MOSCOW (AP): The Kremlin on Friday welcomed U.S. President Joe Biden's proposal to extend the last remaining nuclear arms control treaty between the two countries, which is set to expire in less than two weeks.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said that Russia stands for extending the pact and is waiting to see the details of the U.S. proposal.

The White House said Thursday that Biden has proposed to Russia a five-year extension of the New START treaty.

"We can only welcome political will to extend the document," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters. "But all will depend on the details of the proposal."

The treaty, signed in 2010 by President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, limits each country to no more than 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 700 deployed missiles and bombers, and envisages sweeping on-site inspections to verify compliance. It expires on Feb. 5.

Russia has long proposed to prolong the pact without any conditions or changes, but President Donald Trump's administration waited until last year to start talks and made the extension contingent on a set of demands. The talks stalled, and months of bargaining have failed to narrow differences.

"Certain conditions for the extension have been put forward, and some of them have been absolutely unacceptable for us, so let's see first what the U.S. is offering," Peskov said.

Mikhail Ulyanov, the Russian ambassador at the international organizations in Vienna, also

hailed Biden's proposal as an "encouraging step."

"The extension will give the two sides more time to consider possible additional measures aimed at strengthening strategic stability and global security," he tweeted.

Biden indicated during the campaign that he favored the preservation of the New START treaty, which was negotiated during his tenure as U.S. vice president.

The talks on the treaty's extension also were clouded by tensions between Russia and the United States, which have been fueled by the Ukrainian crisis, Moscow's meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and other irritants.

Despite the extension proposal, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Biden remains committed to holding Russia "to account for its reckless and adversarial actions," such as its alleged involvement in the Solar Winds hacking event, 2020 election interference, the chemical poisoning of opposition figure Alexei Navalny and the widely reported allegations that Russia may have offered bounties to the Taliban to kill American soldiers in Afghanistan.

Asked to comment on Psaki's statement, Peskov has reaffirmed Russia's denial of involvement in any such activities.

After both Moscow and Washington withdrew from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 2019, New START is the only remaining deal between the two countries.

Arms control advocates have strongly called for New START's preservation, warning that its lapse would remove any checks on U.S. and Rus-

sian nuclear forces. Last week, Russia also declared that it would follow the U.S. to pull out of the Open Skies Treaty allowing surveillance flights over military facilities to help build trust and transparency between Russia and the West.

While Russia always offered to extend New START for five years — a possibility envisaged by the pact — Trump asserted that it put the U.S. at a disadvantage and initially insisted that China be added to the treaty, an idea that Beijing flatly rejected. Trump's administration then proposed to extend New START for just one year and also sought to expand it to include limits on battlefield nuclear weapons.

Moscow has said it remains open for new nuclear arms talks with the U.S. to negotiate future limits on prospective weapons, but emphasized that preserving New START is essential for global stability.

Russian diplomats have said that Russia's prospective Sarmat heavy intercontinental ballistic missile and the Avangard hypersonic glide vehicle could be counted along with other Russian nuclear weapons under the treaty.

The Sarmat is still under development, while the first missile unit armed with the Avangard became operational in December 2019.

The Russian military has said the Avangard is capable of flying 27 times faster than the speed of sound and could make sharp maneuvers on its way to a target to bypass missile defense systems. It has been fitted to the existing Soviet-built intercontinental ballistic missiles instead of older type warheads, and in the future could be fitted to the more powerful Sarmat.

Google threatens to pull search engine in Australia

WELLINGTON, JAN 22 (AP): Google on Friday threatened to make its search engine unavailable in Australia if the government went ahead with plans to make tech giants pay for news content.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison quickly hit back, saying we don't respond to threats. Australia makes our rules for things you can do in Australia, Morrison told reporters in Brisbane.

That's done in our Parliament. It's done by our government. And that's how things work here in Australia. Morrison's comments came after Mel Silva, the managing director of Google Australia and New Zealand, told a Senate inquiry into the bill that the new rules would be unworkable.

If this version of the code were to become law, it would give us no real choice but to stop making Google search available in Australia, Silva told senators.

And that would be a bad outcome not only for us, but also for the Australian people, media diversity, and the small businesses who use our products every day. The mandatory code of conduct proposed by the government aims to make Google and Facebook pay Australian media companies fairly for using news content they siphon from news sites.

Silva said it was willing to pay a wide and diverse group of news publishers for the value they added, but not under the rules as proposed, which included payments for links and snippets.

German virus death toll tops 50,000 even as infections sink

BERLIN (AP): The death toll from the coronavirus in Germany has passed 50,000, a number that has risen swiftly over recent weeks even as infection figures are finally declining.

The country's disease control center, the Robert Koch Institute, said Friday that another 859 deaths were reported over the past 24 hours, taking the total so far to 50,642.

Germany had a comparatively small number of deaths in the pandemic's first phase and was able to lift many restrictions quickly.

But it has seen much higher levels of infections in the fall and winter. Hundreds of deaths, sometimes more than 1,000, have been reported daily in the country of 83 million people over recent weeks. Germany hit the 40,000 mark on Jan. 10.

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier will leave a light shining in a window at his Bellevue palace in Berlin every evening starting Friday in memory of the dead and those fighting for their lives, his office said. He encouraged other Germans to do the same.

Steinmeier plans to lead a central memorial event for the dead after Easter.

The lights are meant as a sign that "the dead in the corona pandemic are not just statistics for us," Steinmeier said. "Even if we don't know their names and families, we know that every figure stands for a loved one



whom we miss infinitely."

Chancellor Angela Merkel echoed those comments this week, describing the recent death figures as "terrible." Still, she said that daily infections are dropping and somewhat fewer people are receiving intensive care than over Christmas.

In Europe, the U.K., Italy, France and Spain, all of which have smaller populations, still have higher death tolls.

The head of the Robert Koch Institute, Lothar Wieler, said this week the explanation for the high death figures is "relatively simple but relatively depressing."

"The increase is simply linked to the fact that the case numbers went up so much," he said.

Wieler said there are still a lot of outbreaks at nursing homes — over 900 at present. Some homes are better-prepared than others to combat the pandemic, he said. There are also large numbers of cases among the over-80s.

Overall, new infections peaked in December. On Friday, the Robert Koch Institute reported

17,862 new cases, down from 22,368 a week ago. Germany's total so far is a bit over 2.1 million. The number of new cases per 100,000 residents over seven days stood at 115.3, after reaching nearly 200 a month ago. It's still well above the government's target of a maximum 50.

There are currently 4,787 COVID-19 patients in intensive care, said Gernot Marx, the head of Germany's intensive care association, DIVI.

That is down from a peak of nearly 5,800 on Jan. 3, he said — "that was the most critical situation, in my opinion, since there has been intensive care in Germany." He added that there has been no sign of a Christmas or new year peak. Germany's current lockdown was extended this week until Feb. 14 amid concern about the possible impact of virus mutations such as the one first detected in England.

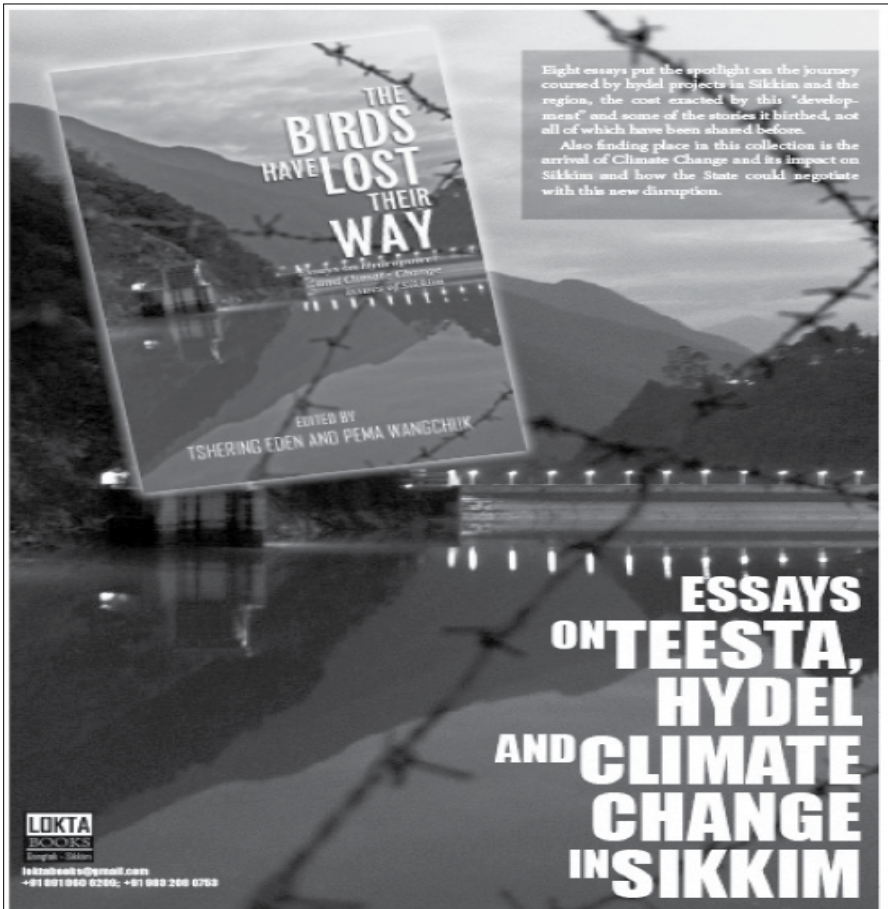
Authorities are trying to encourage more people to work from home, thus reducing the numbers who use public transport. Restau-

rants, bars, sports and leisure facilities have been closed since early November. Schools and nonessential shops followed in mid-December, and professional sports events are taking place without spectators.

Merkel says everyone in Germany will be offered a vaccination by late September. There has been frustration with the slow start to vaccinations. By Thursday, nearly 1.39 million people had received a first dose and over 115,000 a second dose.

Britain has delayed giving second doses for up to three months so it can give the first dose to as many as possible. But Health Minister Jens Spahn signaled that Germany won't follow suit, pointing to concerns over a lack of study data and the need for the most vulnerable and elderly to get "comprehensive" protection.

"We will, according to all the scientific ground-work we have at the moment, stick to the ... recommended rhythm for the second dose," Spahn said Friday.





WALK AND TALK! The songstress, Camila Cabello is seen chatting on her phone during a stroll in Miami.

Ajay Devgn begins shoot for his next 'Thank God'

MUMBAI, JAN 22 (PTI): Bollywood star Ajay Devgn on Thursday said that shooting has started for his next film titled "Thank God".

The slice-of-life comedy is being directed by Indra Kumar, known for comedy film series like "Masti" and "Dhamaal".

The film will also feature actors Sidharth Malhotra and Rakul Preet Singh.

Devgn, 51, shared the news of filming start in a post on Twitter.

"Lights. Camera. Action. The shoot for #ThankGod begins today in Mumbai!" he wrote alongside a picture with Malhotra, Kumar and the producers.

A T-Series Films and Maruti International production, "Thank God" is produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, Ashok Thakeria, Sunir Khetarpal, Deepak Mukut, Anand Pandit and Markand Adhikari and co-produced by Yash Shah. Malhotra and Singh have previously starred together in 2018's "Aiyaary" and

"Marjaavaan" (2019). This will also be Singh and Devgn's third collaboration. They have worked on the 2019 film "De De Pyaar De" and are reuniting for Mayday, which Devgn is directing as well.



Devgn's upcoming releases include period sports feature "Maidaan" and war drama "Bhuj: The Pride of India". He will also make an appearance in SS Rajamouli's Telugu movie "RRR", co-starring NT Rama Rao Jr, Ram Charan and Alia Bhatt.

Family, friends remember Sushant Singh Rajput on his 35th birthday

MUMBAI, JAN 22 (PTI): On Sushant Singh Rajput's birth anniversary, family and friends celebrated the late actor's legacy by sharing photographs, memories and moments from his life.

Rajput, 34, was found dead in his apartment in suburban Bandra in Mumbai on June 14, 2020, leaving the film industry and his fans shocked.

The actor's sister Shweta posted a photo of young Rajput with his mother and wrote on Twitter, This smile can melt every heart Happy #SushantDay.

Shweta also announced a scholarship programme for aspiring students to pursue studies at the Department of Physics at the University of California, US.

I am happy to announce that on 35th Birthday of Bhai, a step has been taken towards fulfilling one of his dreams. The Sushant Singh Rajput Memorial Fund of \$35,000 has been set up in UC Berkeley. #SushantDay, she said.

Rajput's former girlfriend Ankita Lokhande said she would like to remember him as a happy, intelligent, romantic, mad and adorable person.

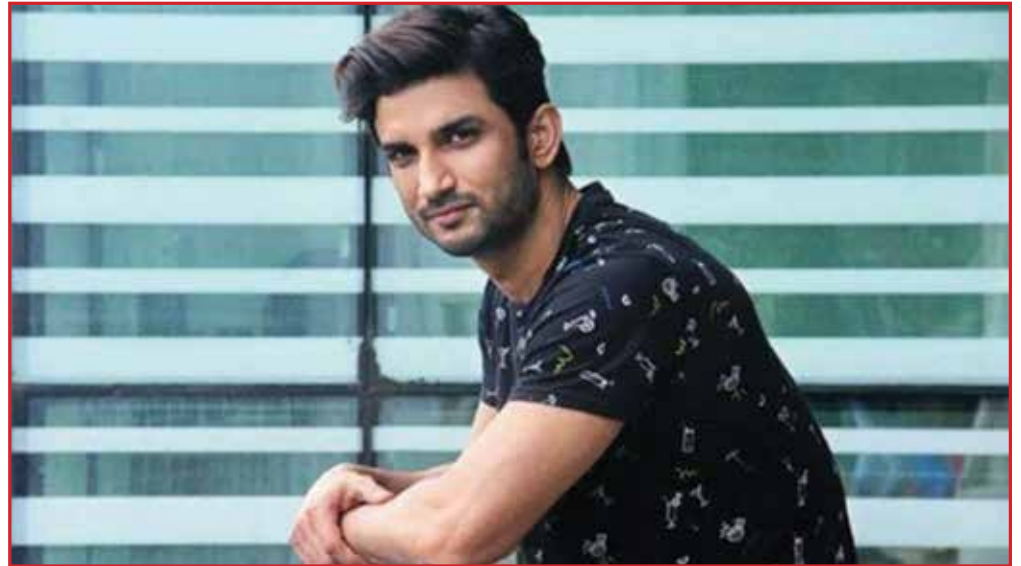
Sharing a throwback video of Rajput playing with his dog in their house, she said, I don't know how to start and what to say but yes today I'm gonna share few of your old videos Sushant to celebrate you. These are the only memories I have with you and I will always remember you Like this happy, intelligent, romantic, mad and adorable #HappyBirthdaySSR.

Rajput's friend and co-star Kriti Sanon said she would like to remember him as a smiling child.

This is how I'll remember you.. Smiling like a child! Happy Birthday Sush. I hope you are smiling and at peace where

ever you are.. Sanon tweeted alongside a smiling photo of Rajput. Actor Manoj Bajpayee shared a poster of Sonchiriya, a film in which he worked with Rajput. Always remember you celebrate you, your work and cherish all the time that we all

ture on his Instagram Stories of the actor playing a guitar with a heart emoji to express his sentiment. Bhumi Pednekar too took to her Instagram stories and shared a picture of a smiling Rajput and captioned the post with a heart emoji.



spent with you Sushant Singh Rajput!! Jahan bhi ho tum khush raho, he wrote.

TV-film producer Ekta Kapoor shared a short video clip of Rajput as Manav from her popular show Pavitra Rishta, which made the actor a household name.

Sushi forever! Shining bright like a star! Love n light wherever u r! Happpie birth on earth day!, she tweeted.

The actor's longtime friend, casting director-filmmaker Mukesh Chhabra, who directed his last film Dil Bechara, posted an animated video of Rajput of all his films and wished him happy birthday and said, Miss you bro.

Filmmaker Abhishek Kapoor, who helmed Rajput's debut film Kai Po Che and later worked again with him on Kedarnath, said he is missing him a lot.

Rajput's co-star from his debut film Kai Po Che Rakummar Rao shared a pic-

The two have worked together in 2019 movie Sonchiriya.

Rajput's death had sparked a debate about the treatment of outsiders in Bollywood with allegations of nepotism. The speculation around the actor's death, however, took a turn when his father K K Singh had lodged a complaint against the actor's girlfriend Rhea Chakraborty for his suicide.

The CBI had taken over the probe from Bihar Police into the alleged abetment to suicide case.

In October, the medical board of the New Delhi-based All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) had ruled out murder in the death of Rajput, terming it "a case of hanging and death by suicide".

Actor Kangana Ranaut, who had accused prominent producers in Bollywood for Rajput's death, took to Twitter to reiterate her claims.

Director Nila Madhab Panda's next to be crime investigative environment project

PANAJI, JAN 22 (PTI): Filmmaker Nila Madhab Panda, acclaimed for projects like "Kadvi Hawa" and "I am Kalam", says he is currently scripting his next, a crime environment film set in the future.

Panda said the yet-untitled film will further his drive to chronicle stories of climate change on screen.

"My next is a crime investigative environment project, set in the future. It's a new genre for me. It's almost like how would you survive without rivers? The writing is going on, it'll take at least a year to go on floors. The idea was with me for a long time but I'm finally working on it," Panda told PTI on the sidelines of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI).

At the festival, Panda's Odiya film "Kalira Atita" was screened in the Indian Panorama Non feature film section.

The 46-year-old filmmaker is known for highlighting social and environmental causes through his work.

While his 2018 release "Halkaa" followed the story of a young slum boy from Mumbai who dreams of owning a toilet, his acclaimed "Kadvi Hawa" was based on true stories from drought prone areas.

The film, which received a Special Mention at the 64th National Film Awards, featured actor Sanjay Mishra as a blind debt ridden farmer.

With "Kalira Atita", too, Panda deals

with the impact of climate change and follows the story of man who has lost his home and family to the sea.

Shot in 2019 with a crew of 60, Panda said the film is a "striking reality", born out of a newspaper clipping he saw where a hand pump was submerged in the sea in Orissa.

"When I did my research, I got to know how four villages were submerged in the east coast of Orissa. We can't even imagine the impact climate change will have in the future. My films talk about this shock value. I may not be able to change people. But at least I can raise questions," he added.

Panda said his 83-minute movie places the emotional trauma of a man at the centre of its storytelling and traces the devastating effects the tragedy has on him.

"The protagonist in my film is a victim of the often overlooked yet most important emotional impact of climate change. It turns out that the sea engulfs his village, after which he comes to think that his family and his village have gone to the sea.

"He starts believing that there awaits a better world for him. My film focuses more on the emotion of that man. 'Kalira Atita' means yesterday's past; my protagonist is literally living in yesterday's past," he added.

Drake delays new LP 'Certified Lover Boy'

LOS ANGELES, JAN 22 (PTI): Rapper Drake has announced that his new album 'Certified Lover Boy' has been pushed back as he is focused on his health recovery. The new album was earlier slated to release on January 20 but in a statement posted on his Instagram story, Drake said that he will announce a new date.

"I was planning to release my album this month but between surgery and rehab my energy has been dedicated to recovery. I'm blessed to be back on my feet and feeling great and focused on the album, but CLB won't be dropping in January," the 34-year-old rapper wrote.

"I'm looking forward to sharing it with you all in 2021," he added.

Though Drake has not shared any details on his surgery, but back in October, he had uploaded a photo of his leg in a brace, which led to speculations that he suffered a knee injury.

'Certified Lover Boy' will mark his sixth full-length studio album and will be the follow-up to 2018's 'Scorpion'. His other albums were -- 'Thank Me Later' (2010), 'Take Care' (2011), 'Nothing Was the Same' (2013) and 'Views' (2016).

Aries: Intoxicants will numb your pain temporarily, but they won't make it go away, Aries. Neither will burying your face in a tub of strawberry ice-cream. It's time to face the music and do the inner work. It's time to let go of not just the pain, but the memories associated with the given person or situation too. The sooner you clear the trash can, the better you will be able to focus on what's really important here. Tip: Confront your shadows.

Taurus: It's all about love and other intoxicants in the Taurus HQ. Some of you are getting ready to tie the knot. Others may be in the process of meeting potential partners. If your nuptials are coming closer, it's a good idea to get the bookings in place. Remember, you can't figure out everything on your own. But you can appoint a team of bridesmaids and groomsmen to get the dirty work done.

Tip: Did somebody say 'wedding bells'?

Gemini: Bottoms up, baby! This is your big day and you have just crossed a significant landmark. Here's the thing, though: this was merely the first hurdle. There is a long way to go from here. So, don't get carried away by fame or

success. Focus on improving the quality of your product/service and outdoing your past self. Tapping into your inner boss man/babe is going to be a big theme for you for the rest of this month.

Tip: You have a long way to go. Focus on the vision board.

Cancer: Up and down. Up and back down. This life of ours moves in circles. Happiness follows sadness follows happiness once again. Both, the shadow and the light, are an integral part of the human experience. So instead of rejecting one aspect and embracing the other, be grateful for it all and know that it is these experiences that are helping you grow on a soul level. PS: Making time for your spiritual practices will help you get through the trials and tribulations of your physical reality.

Tip: Embrace the human experience in its entirety.

Leo: Duality is a way of life in the earthly realm. Darkness follows the light, and the dark night is followed by the light of day. Instead of harping on about what went wrong and where, breathe out the sadness, the grief, the loneliness, and the melancholy too. Trust that the trials and tribulations you've been going through will end soon, making for creative solutions to come through.

PS: Believe in the magic and follow the signs.

Tip: This too shall pass, beloved.

Virgo:

Want to hear a cliché? What doesn't break you makes you stronger. This is the week to give thanks for the challenges you have overcome and the soul lessons you have integrated. You are stepping into your light, Virgo, and boy, oh boy, is it blinding the world! The next phase of your life is about taking the self-love game up a notch. It's time to be who you are unapologetically. It's time to take off the masks and cloaks that have been providing a false sense of security.

Tip: It's time to be who you are unapologetically.

Libra:

Libra, you've been waiting for the perfect moment, the perfect time, the perfect place and the perfect partner. Here's the thing, though: perfection is an illusion. So, let go of your unrealistic expectations and accept with both arms the gifts you are being offered now. Yes, this is a connection worth exploring. But you won't know until you take a chance.

Tip: There is no such thing as perfection. Accept what you're being offered now.

Scorpio:

They've been going behind your back, Scorpio. They've been dishonouring you and your

time by serving you a bunch of half-truths. Your instinct seldom lies. So trust what you're being told by the unseen forces. Trust the signs and symbols being sent your way, even though they don't make sense manytimes. Acting in time will prevent further damage.

Tip: Trust your instinct.

Sagittarius:

You are where you are because you've worked your way to the top, baby! Don't let anybody disrespect you or question your authority in any way. Remembering who you are and what you're worth will change the game for you permanently. As such, this is likely to be a challenging period on the personal front as well. It's a good idea to dedicate yourself to a spiritual practice that will help you build your energy reserves and take the optimism up a notch.

Tip: You are where you are for a reason.

Capricorn:

Capricorn season has been anything but easy. Yes, you have made much progress. Yes, you have let go of the old way of life. However, like any other transformation, this phase of your life requires you to slow down and breathe. Integrating the lessons of the recent past is going to be a big theme for you today. So, breathe. Take it easy. Laze around in the sunlight. Sip on some kombucha. Pore over your

favourite book. What you will realise in the process: The fast life is overrated.

Tip: Slow down. Breathe.

Aquarius:

It's all about the sensual arts in the Aquarius HQ. You're taking charge of your pleasure. You're letting them know how you would like to be treated in the boudoir, and outside. Open and honest communication will take your relationship to a whole new level in the days to come. Single water bearers are likely to stop playing coy. If you want to get to know them better, let them know. They could surprise you by meeting you halfway.

Tip: Drop the coy act.

Pisces:

As you move towards a new beginning, it's important to let the past go. You have been holding a grudge against a certain someone for a long time. While they may not inhabit your conscious thoughts anymore, they still have the power to affect you subconsciously. How about writing a long, detailed letter (one that's for your eyes only) expressing how you have been let down, and then burning the sheets as a sign of release? Remember, you are in charge of your happiness, and the power to redirect your script is within you.

Tip: Forgive. Let it all go.