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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ON 31 MARCH

# 2 Municipal Councils become Nagar Panchayats, GMC gets 2 more wards

**SAGAR CHETTRI**  
**GANGTOK, 25 FEB:**

Elections to the 7 Municipal bodies in Sikkim will be held on 31 March this year. This will be the first non-party based Municipal elections in the state which means no political party can field candidates.

The State Election Commission today announced the dates for the Municipal Elections while the official notification is scheduled to be issued on 01 March following which the mod-

el code of conduct will immediately come into force in municipal areas.

It may be mentioned that the current government amended the Sikkim Municipalities Act 2007 in November last year to make it non-party based. As per the amendment, a new section '14 A' was inserted after the section 14 of the said Act stating that "No person shall contest the election to any municipality with the support, direct or indirect of any political party."

The last date for fil-

ing of nomination is 08 March, which will be followed by scrutiny of nomination on 09 March and the last date for withdrawal of candidatures is 11 March. The date of polling is 31 March and the counting of votes will take place on 03 April. The entire election process has to be completed by 06 April.

Addressing a press conference here this morning, State Election Commissioner, Nima L. Yethenpa, informed that following delimitation

the number of wards under Gangtok Municipal Corporation has increased to 19 from 17. The newly created wards under GMC are Bojoghari 2nd Mile and Pani House.

On the other hand, two Municipal Councils have been demoted to Nagar Panchayats. Gyalshing Municipal Council in West Sikkim and Naya Bazaar-Jorethang Municipal Council in South Sikkim have been converted to Nagar Panchayats with both seeing a reduction in the

number of wards from 7 to 5. This means that the total number of wards going to poll in the state has come down from 53 to 51 this year.

Only Namchi Municipal Council which has been selected for the Smart City Project has retained the Municipal Council status out of the three that Sikkim had till now.

Interestingly, for the first time the number of male voters [42341] is more than the number of female voters [40475]. Voting will take place through



90 polling stations in the different wards.

The district-wise details of existing and new-

ly delimited Municipal wards are 19 wards in Gangtok Municipal Corporation, 7 wards in

Namchi Municipal Council and 5 wards each in Singtam Nagar Panchayat,

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## Only one new case and 927 more vaccinations in Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 25 FEB:**

The number of active cases of novel coronavirus in Sikkim dropped further to 43 with the discharge of five more COVID patients from isolation facilities in the last 24 hours today.

The number of recovered cases has accordingly improved to 5,858.

In the meanwhile, only one new case of novel coronavirus was reported in the last 24 in Sikkim taking the state's tally of confirmed cases reported so far to 6,133.

In his daily health bulletin, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyalshing Bhutia, informed that the one new case, a JP Company employee stationed at Sirwani-Singtam, was picked up from the testing of 174 samples on Wednesday. As for the ongoing

vaccination drive, 927 persons, which includes 277 healthcare workers and 650 frontline workers, were vaccinated for COVID-19 today.

Mr Bhutia informed that 130 healthcare workers and 10 frontline workers received their shots at Central Referral Hospital, 70 frontline workers at Rhenock SSB camp, 160 frontline workers at Pangthang, 75 at ITBP Sang, 91 healthcare workers and one frontline worker at STNM Hospital and 08 healthcare workers and 132 frontline workers at Urban PHC, Gangtok in East District.

In North Sikkim, six healthcare workers and 23 frontline workers were vaccinated at Passingthang PHC while 42 healthcare workers and 179 frontline workers received their shots at Jorethang CHC in South District.

## JAC formed to press demands of 'Pre-Merger Left-out People of Sikkim'



**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 25 FEB:**

A Joint Action Committee of "Pre-Merger Left-out People of Sikkim" was formed today at a meeting held here at Chokasum Hall, Namnang.

The meeting was attended by people who have been residing in Sikkim since before the merger and want to be

treated at par with Sikkim Subjects.

Today's meeting nominated Prem Goyal as chief convenor and Hemant Niroula as joint convenor of JAC.

A press release from the committee informs that the meeting unanimously passed the resolution to place the demand seeking equal rights

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## Why the joining could benefit and hurt the SKM and the SDF?

**JIWAN RAI**

There is no doubt that the SDF does not stand on a higher moral ground to condemn its leaders and workers shifting loyalty to the ruling SKM party by way of 'mass joining'. The SDF had become an oceanic party where almost every political leader parked once upon a time. As a matter of fact, the percentage of leaders who have never joined the SDF over the course of their political career would be extremely slim - maybe less than 5 percent. Nor does the SKM have good reasons to celebrate these mass joinings as victory. The disturbance in the in-house equation and power balance is something that any party must seek to resolve carefully.

However, both the major local political parties - the SKM and the SDF have a much graver task at

hand. The SKM must not celebrate the joining overmuch as it doesn't strengthen the core of its political structure. The SDF must not waste its time in condemning the joining and grieving the departure of its leaders and workers as that hardly

this breed of politicians is heavily outnumbered by the selfish breed who have joined the party purely for personal gain. The unfaithful can never be faithful no matter what you give them. They are here today and they themselves have

## VIEWPOINT

helps the party to rebuild itself.

Both parties have the same question to mull over - namely, in what way has the joining benefited or harmed the SKM? The ruling party has definitely gained numerical strength. Some of these sincere new joiners will surely help the party to boost the morale and the popularity of its leadership. Some of them will work at the grassroots to help the party widen, if not deepen its roots. But

no idea where they will be tomorrow. They are not driven by the strength of fortitude but they are tossed about by the frivolous aim of fortune-seeking.

Moreover, SKM had benefited in the last election, not necessarily from anti-Chamling votes. The SDF party had garnered more popular votes than the SKM which simply proves that. Also many traditional SDF voters had left that party as they

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## 15-yr-old made Panchayat President for a day



**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 25 FEB:**

In a unique initiative, 15-year-old Priyanka Rai from Lungchok ward was made Panchayat President of Lungchok-Kameray in South District for a day.

In a function organized today, the class X student of Sumbuk senior secondary school took oath of office and placed proposals to organise awareness programmes on drug

abuse, women's empowerment and child abuse issues. She also suggested organising Bal Mela where youngsters get opportunities to explore hidden talents.

Panchayat President of the day, Priyanka Rai expressed her gratitude to the sitting Panchayat President, Deoraj Rai for believing in her and giving her the opportunity to serve the GPU as Panchayat President for a day.

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**Virtual Event**  
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# Hill of the Minister

## WANGEL LAMA

It gives me immense pride that my mother tongue 'Nepali' figures as one of the official Indian languages in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. I only wish the nomenclature would not raise doubts, aspersions and confusion about my nationality. 'Nepali or Gorkha' has been a hotly contested topic ever since the Gorkhaland agitation of the 1980s.

In the aftermath of the Agitation, two college mates, Subhash Ghising and Nar Bahadur Bhandari emerged as the brightest stars of the Indian Gorkha identity and idea. Both stalwarts in their own right, they played their roles in disparate ways but with a common ideal. Despite numerous informal dialogues between them on the Nepali vs Gorkha nomenclature, with both refusing to cede any space to the other, a common ground was never found, so, we ended up calling ourselves Indian Gorkhas while speaking the Nepali language. Add to that the Sikkimese Nepalis.

Whatever said and done, the inclusion of Nepali in the 8th Schedule was a landmark moment for all of us. Special credit and mention go to one of our own, Dil Kumar Bhandari, who segued effortlessly from a housewife to a member of parliament, overcoming many

personal shortcomings through sheer grit and determination.

But that's all in the past.

Now, under the tutelage of the GNLF and taken forward by Raju Bista, something momentous looks to be in the offing for the Indian Gorkhas. Yet again, a failure to cede space by many in our political front,

however, appears to be placing unnecessary hurdles on the way. "Jyan dinchau, pran dinchau", is often dished out talking of Gorkhaland, in reality, forget lives, even overcoming petty personal differences and ego appears to be an insurmountable mountain for our politicians.

There is a resounding call for Gorkhaland and yet there does not appear to be a singular Gorkha idea and that has been the bane of the Indian Gorkha. We are up against a strong and well-oiled anti-Gorkha establishment but are we fielding our best and brightest in turn? For as simple as a TV discussion when there is the eloquent and articulate Mohua Mitra with her strong anti-Gorkhaland narrative, we have had a fumbling and mumbling Roshan Giri at the other end. Have we even done the necessary homework to push forward our issues effectively?

On a positive note, we have an increasing number of scholars among us. From gundruk to potatoes to kinema, research appears to be conducted on every front in our Hills but how many has been done on us, about our past and our future? We have some promising names like Dr. Mona Chettri doing valuable

work on ethnicity, society and politics in our Hills, but they are far and few and their work remains limited to the academic realm. We also have the few who have pertinent fact-based insights on our history and yet again, their thoughts fail to move on to the common rhetoric and remain in the pages of their limited run publications. As a result, when it comes to really making a point at the national stage, we fumble at best.

The agenda against our dreams and aspirations has been in play much longer than we envisage. From the xenophobia against Nepalis in some parts of the North East in the late 1980s to the Development Boards of now, this agenda has been manifesting in different forms. It's sad that we, led by some of our politicians, have been guilty of legitimizing these nefarious designs ourselves.

History is being made every

day. In parallel, it is also being fabricated at the same pace. All our Gadhs/Gadhis have changed to Guris in the very recent past. Gairidhura has become Garidhura. Shivmandir, which did not exist till the late 1960s, now has a pandal every Durga Puja that is miraculously in its 100+ edition.

We have Gorhaland in our mouths and India in our blood. So, why are we still squabbling over small, petty stuff and failing to paint a strong, united Gorkha idea? We need critics for balance and checks. Chronic critics though appear to be our Achilles heel. The Enos Das Pradhans and the perennial naysayers, CK Shresthas need to wake up and start saying yes to things that are genuinely for the benefit of our people. As much spunk as it takes to criticize it takes even more to agree, publicly, to what is right. Yes, they may be ceding some of their political space by doing so but that is the need of the hour. It may well be the difference between getting a constitutional permanent political solution and another sham of an administration.

Are the Gorkhas so selfish, ignorant and bereft of ideas and talent that we settle for a "Hill of the Minister" than aspiring for, and working together towards, something much, much more?

*[Wangel Lama is a pseudonym]*

## Incredible India training for 700 Darjeeling Homestay Owners



**DELHI, 25 FEB (PIB):** A three-day Incredible India Mega Homestay Development & Training Workshop was held in Darjeeling from February 22 to 24, 2021 to enrich the hospitality skills of the Homestay owners of the region and to ensure a better experience for the tourists. Workshop was organized by the Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India's Regional Office (East), India tourism Kolkata in association with Eastern Himalayas Travel & Tour Operator Association as Resource Partner and IIAS School of Management as Knowledge Partner.

The Workshop was inaugurated by Union Minister of State for Tourism & Culture (Independent Charge) Prahlad Singh Patel on 22 Feb, 2021 in presence of Member of Parliament from Darjeeling, Raju Bista and Additional Director General (Tourism), Rupinder Brar, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. On this occasion Union Minister of State for Culture & Tourism (Independent Charge), Prahlad Singh Patel said, "Development of homestays through

hospitality skill upgradation will make local communities Atmanirbhar".

As a whole 725 Homestay Owners from Darjeeling, Kalimpong and foothills of Dooars participated in this three-day Mega Workshop where they have been trained in marketing, sales, attitudinal development, product knowledge etc. to make them self-reliant in promoting their Homestays in more efficient manner. The training would not only ensure a better hospitality experience for the tourists, but also establish Eastern Himalaya and Dooars as a preferred destination for the Domestic and Inbound Tourists. This would help the local tourism economy in near future enormously and also contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Ministry of Tourism and UNWTO. Union Minister of State for Culture & Tourism (Independent Charge), Prahlad Singh Patel also said, "An Atmanirbhar self-reliant tourism based economy will provide opportunities to the youth of the region for gainful employment".

## JAC formed...

[at par with Sikkim Subjects] before the concerned authorities.

It adds that the JAC will submit a memorandum to the Government of Sikkim.

"The demand will be on the basis of a petition filed by Prem Goyal referring to 145th report of the Committee of Rajya Sabha [06 August 2013] and another petition dated 22 August 2008," the release informs.

These petitions demand recognition for this section of the Sikkimese society at par with the Sikkim Subjects given the years that these families have lived in the State.

## Vendor Development Prog held for entrepreneurs

### AARON RAI

**KARFECTAR, 25 FEB:**

The MSME Division and DIC units of South and West districts, Department of Commerce & Industries, conducted a Vendor Development Program for SC & ST Entrepreneurs at the conference hall of SIRD Karfectar today.

The main objective of the program was to help and encourage entrepreneurs and held the expand their businesses.

Also, the meet sought to inform more youth about the government's plans and schemes available to help them start



their own businesses.

Man Bahadur Chhetri, Chairperson, Department of Commerce & Industry, was present as chief guest.

Most of the entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs shared that while they were keen to take advantage of the

various schemes available to them, securing bank loans remained a major hurdle which defeated enterprise. The process of getting a licence for operations was also flagged as problem delaying their plans and sapping their energies.

## Block Level Inter School Junior Olympic Games at Sumbuk

### BIKASH CHETTRI

**NAMCHI, 25 FEB:**

South district Department of Sports and Youth Affairs with the support of Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, Government of India is organizing a four-day Block Level Inter School Junior Olympic Games in Mellidara Senior Secondary School, Sumbuk Block, South Sikkim under the banner of 'Sports for Peace and Development'.

The event, which started today, will continue till 28 Feb and young talents will be selected from this event for district level and eventually for state level. The sportspersons selected in state level to be held this year will take part in national level sports tournament of 'Khelo India 2021-22'.

The Olympic Games for under-17 and under-14 boys and girls cat-

egories are played under the disciplines of athletic, archery, boxing, football, table tennis, taekwondo, badminton and karate.

The panchayat president and member panchayats of the Sumbuk Block were present at the venue today. On the opening day of this event, only athletics was organized and the rest of the sports disciplines will be organized in the days to follow.

## Sikkim thrashes Manipur by 8 wickets



### SUMMIT REPORT

**GANGTOK, 25 FEB:**

The Senior Men's Cricket Team of Sikkim thrashed Manipur by 8 wickets and registered their first win today in the Vijay Hazare Trophy at, IC-Gurunank College Ground, Chennai. This was the Sikkim team's third match in the tourney.

As per a press release, Manipur won the toss and elected to bat

first. In the first innings, they were all-out for 162 runs in 40.1 overs. Anureet Singh and Md Saptula took 3 wickets each, Anwesh Karan Sharma took 2 wickets and Varun Sood took 1 wicket. Md Saptula built the pressure on the opponent from the beginning by breaking the opening partnership and sending both the opening pairs back to the pavilion.

In the second innings, Sikkim gave a good start. Ashish Thapa scored 43 runs, Robin Bist 85 not-out, Nilesh Lamichaney 14 runs and Varun Sood remained not-out at 5 runs. Sikkim won the match in 36.1 overs by 8 wickets and gained 4 point(s) for the win.

Sikkim will be playing a total of 5 matches in the tournament and they will be playing against Assam on 27 Feb at the same venue.

## Directions passed to complete link road from TNHS to Bypass by 31 March

### SUMMIT REPORT

**GANGTOK, 25 FEB:**

Secretary, Urban Development Department, has directed the contractor engaged for the construction of the link road from Tashi Namgyal Senior Secondary School to Indira Bypass, to at least make the stretch a fair weather road by 31 March.

An official press release informs that the Secretary led a team of officials from the Department along with the contractor to an inspection of the work which links

up to the bypass near Manbir Colony.

The release informs that road cutting on the Indira Bypass Road side has almost been completed and widening of the existing road on the TNHS side is under progress.

The presence of water supply lines, sewer lines, power lines etc have delayed progress and shifting of utilities is under process and will take about a month's time to complete, it is informed.

The major pending

work is the construction of culverts and cross drains, which are being constructed simultaneously with widening of the road after which carpeting will be completed before monsoon, the release adds.

The Department is confident that once the Adampool to Ban Jhakri Falls road is completed, residents of Upper Sichey, Development Area, Baluwakhani, etc, can bypass the vehicular jam of NH-10 and reach Adampool much faster.

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## 15-yr-old made...

The programme, organized by Lungchok-Kameray GPU, was attended by District Child Protection Officer, South, Roshnita Gurung as the chief guest. It was also attended by Principal, GP Sharma, Assistant Director Sumbuk BAC, Ganga Dahal among others dignitaries.

During the programme, the sitting Panchayat President highlighted all the activities and developmental works carried out in the GPU through a power presentation.

In her address, DCPO South appreciated the initiative of the GPU for setting an example by involving the younger generation in the affairs of Panchayati Raj. She also informed that SIRD Karfectar will be sponsoring Child Empowerment Centers in 25 GPUs across the state.

The DCPO informed that Suhana Rai and Priyanka Rai from Lungchok Kameray GPU have been selected as members of District Child Parliament

## 2 Municipal Councils...

Rangpo Nagar Panchayat, Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat, Mangan Nagar Panchayat and Naya Bazaar-Jorethang Nagar Panchayat.

The Commissioner mentioned that the State Government has amended the relevant portion of the Municipalities Act, 2007 which dissolved the existing members of the Municipalities and deferred the Municipal Election for a period of six months and was scheduled to be held during October-November last year. However, elections could not be held due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is informed that the segregation and preparation of Municipal ward wise electoral rolls is under progress in the districts as per the newly delimited municipal wards and the final publica-

## Why the joining...

disliked the candidates and the coterie of the SDF leadership at various levels. Now that many of those leaders are shifting to the SKM, this has, in a sense, made the party less attractive for those who moved away from the SDF because of them.

Another area for the SKM to be cautious is to check the party from becoming top-heavy. That causes obesity in the party. That was the SDF's one major problem. A new ruling party that has come to power through the hard work of its grassroots cannot afford too many high maintenance leaders.

The push and pull factors of joining can have detrimental repercussions for the party. Some of the new joiners are shrewd and well connected, endowed with quick adeptness and an ability to mobilize resources to move closer to the top, thus sidelining older party workers.

The SDF has to answer the same question with their 'hand on their chest' to use their own jargon. Conceding the loss would be an honest confession. Painting everyone who has left

to be held in Namchi on 28 Feb.

"This year we sent a 16-year-old Swastika Manger from Poklok-Denchung GPU to represent Sikkim at National Inclusive Children's Parliament, where she bagged second highest votes to get elected as Deputy Prime Minister. We will be sending Priyanka Rai from this GPU next," she informed.

She also assured to ensure that proposals made by Priyanka Rai are implemented and announced to organize a Personality Development Programme in the month of April.

In his address, Panchayat President, Deoraj Rai stated that the main objective of organizing a programme of One Day Panchayat was to motivate and inspire young talents like Priyanka Rai towards serving the society and involve them in rural governance. He also highlighted the activities carried out in the GPU like cleanliness drive, blood donation camp, awareness programme and tourism development programmes.

tion of Municipal electoral rolls will be done on 26 Feb, 2021.

Responding to media queries, the Commissioner stated that a handbook will be provided to contestants and observers will look after all election processes to ensure free and fair elections in the State. She stated that interested candidates should file their nominations with their respective District Collectors, who have been designated as the Municipal Electoral Registration Officer [MERO] for the election.

She added that this is the first non-party based Municipal election in the State and no person can contest the election with the support of any political party and the observers will keep a close watch on this.

the SDF with the same brush is wrong. Many may have left for personal benefits but there are some who left because they have been genuinely hurt by the SDF. Will the party be honest enough to own up to it?

However, the loss has given the SDF an unprecedented opportunity to rebuild the party. The vacuum created by those who left is an opportunity to refill. How the SDF refills this vacuum will be central to how they rebuild. Will they fill the vacuum with new energy, new ideas, new voices and new minds? Let me hasten to add that an overemphasis on newness and total rejection of the old is too whimsical and often fatal. The SDF party, by virtue of being the oldest surviving active party in the state, is and should be heavily dependent upon the foundation provided by senior leadership. That is a privilege, if and only if there is a genuine bridge between the old and new. The compartmentalization of the old and new will strangle the party to death. The bottom-line is – how is the SDF going to work around this osmosis?



# Darj Himalaya Initiative to host Sustainable Mountain Development Summit-X in Nov 2021

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 25 FEB:**

The Integrated Mountain Initiative's Sustainable Mountain Development Summit-X shall be organised in the Darjeeling-Kalimpong Hills for 2021 and will be hosted by the Darjeeling Himalaya Initiative.

The summit brings together mountain people of the Indian Himalaya Region and is hosted in a different mountain state each year with the first one being held in Nainital, Uttarakhand in 2011.

This year, the theme of the Summit is, "One Health and resilient mountains".

"Darjeeling Himalaya Initiative, the state chapter of Integrated Mountain Initiative is pleased to announce that we are hosting the Sustainable Mountain Development Summit X in Darjeeling and Kalimpong this year. We believe that the summit will provide critical conversation spaces that will contribute to the sustainable development pathways to Darjeeling, Kalimpong and the Indian Himalayan Region," Praful Rao, President, Darjeeling Himalaya Initiative, shared at a meeting of the organisation held today at Aapas Residency, Kalimpong.



IMI is a civil-society led forum working across the Indian Himalayan Region with a vision of "Making India proud of our Mountains" and seeks to bring mountain concerns centrestage in regional, national, and global agendas through sustained and informed dialogue among all stakeholders and also enables action by following up on the deliberations with policy makers, implementers and communities.

IMI operates through an ecosystem of state and regional chapters who are aligned to IMI's vision. These chapters are made of individuals and institutions who work in their state and region. The Darjeeling Himalaya Initiative was formed as the state chapter of Integrated Mountain Initiative in 2013 and has grown as a platform represented by various civil society organisations and individuals. "One health is a very pertinent theme given the unprecedented situation brought about by the COVID 19 pandemic in the world," stresses Dr

Sarala Khaling, Darjeeling Himalaya Initiative, Executive Committee Member. President, IMI, former MP from Sikkim, PD Rai, has welcomed the move to Darj-Kpg Hills and remarked, "Ever since the 2nd SMDS was held in Gangtok 2012, it was an aspiration of holding the SMDS in Darjeeling/Kalimpong. I am so glad that it has happened and that, through this dialogue and conversation, we will be able to contribute to the body of knowledge on the Himalaya from one of foremost mountain cities and

regions of the Himalaya." Each year, the Sustainable Mountain Development Summit brings together a diverse group of stakeholders to discuss relevant themes warranting immediate attention of the mountains. Conclusions and recommendations emerging from this exercise are pursued by Integrated Mountain Initiative subsequently for actionable outputs that includes the Meet of the Mountain States with key policy makers. The Mountain Legislators' Meet and the Indian Himalayan Youth Summit are two events which are integral components of the annual summit.

"It is a matter of great pride for Darjeeling - Kalimpong to host the Sustainable Mountain Development Summit that has by now traveled to most mountain states. Beyond larger mountain issues, the past summits have deliberated on those pertinent to the host state, and the 10th summit shall be a great opportunity for us to highlight and reflect upon some of our key issues," said Priyadarshinee Shrestha, Secretary Integrated Mountain Initiative.

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## Gyalshing Girls School wins dist-level Science, Math & Environment Exhibition contest

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 25 FEB:**

A daylong district-level Science, Mathematics and Environment Exhibition, organised by SCERT-Gangtok in collaboration with DIET-Gyalshing, was held at DIET Gyalshing on Thursday, a press release informs.

Gyalshing Girls Senior Secondary School won the exhibition followed by Darap SSS on 2nd position, Mangalbaria SSS on 3rd, Dentam SSS on 4th position and Yuksam SSS coming 5th. They will now be representing the district at the State Level



Exhibition scheduled to be held in Gangtok on 09 March 2021.

The theme for this year's exhibition was 'Technology & Toys' and featured exhibits by 19 schools from West District and had Additional Director, Education Department, KC Gyatso, as the chief guest accompanied by Rajesh Thapa, Headmaster, Langang SS as special guest.

The exhibits were judged by a panel comprising of Mukesh Dahal, BDO-Gyalshing, Udenla Bhutia, Assistant Professor, Gyalshing Degree College, Suman Tamang, Assistant Professor, Chakung Science College.

## Music video of Nepali song 'O Priye' released

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 25 FEB:**

A Nepali music video 'O Priye' by popular Nepali singer, Thupden Bhutia was released here on Thursday. The music has been composed by Rapden Bhutia, lyrics are by Dhiraj Pradhan and the video has been directed by Sonam Pakhrin.

The music video of the song features Dikpal Karki and Anju Chaulagai, which has been shot in Kathmandu. The video will be premiered on popular OSR digital platform and will be released on YouTube in Kathmandu at 5 PM Friday.

The release function had Minister, Sanjit Kharel as chief guest, who was accompanied by Political Secretary to the CM, Jacob Khaling as the guest of honour. The function was also attended by MLA, Sonam Venchungpa, former Minister, T Lachungpa as special guests among other dignitaries.

In his address, the Minister congratulated the entire team of 'O Priye' for bringing out a beautiful music video and assured to provide all possible support in any project in the future. While saying that everyone loves music, he stated that many legendary singers have passed away but their song and music are still alive among the people. He encouraged young people not to limit their talents but to hone and develop their talent to reach the pinnacle of success.

Mr Kharel mentioned that there are lots of talents in all corners of the State in various fields and the State government has been working to promote these talents by providing them wide platforms.

"How much money we earn in life is not important but what we contribute to society is more important as people will remember our works and contribution even after our demise," said Political Secretary to the CM, Mr Khaling.

While congratulating the team of 'O Priye', he



stated that such work in the field of art and culture would remain forever and inspire people to contribute to the society. Mr Khaling mentioned that the State government has been supporting young artists of Sikkim to take them to the next level in their respective fields. He stated that the government would continuously work for the development of art and music in the State.

The function started with the welcome address by Dhiraj Pradhan and concluded with the vote of thanks by Rapden Bhutia. The function also witnessed the performance by singer, Thupden Bhutia and the stage was also shared by another singer, Beenu Subba and young dancer, Emansi Gurung. The programme was conducted by Neelam Neopany.

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## Culture Dept distributes sound systems to orgs



**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 25 FEB:**

The Culture Department, Government of Sikkim, organized a programme today for distribution of Sound Systems to various social organizations and Institutions.

As per a press release from the department, the programme was attended by Culture Minister, Samdup Lepcha, as the chief guest and Chairman, Sikkim Culture, Heritage and Communal Harmony Board, Sonam Sherpa along with the Secretary, officers and staff of Culture Department. The programme was also attended by some of the beneficiaries who were handed over tokens by the chief guest.

Chairman, Sonam Sherpa, who led the Sikkim contingent for the Sikkim Utsav organized by North East Zone Cultural Centre, Kolkata from 12 to 14 Feb 2021, was felicitated at the programme. Similarly, Preservation Officer, L.N. Sharma and troupe leader of the Sikkim Contingent for the Tableau at the Republic Day Parade 2021 at New Delhi, Yangchok Lachenpa, were felicitated. The Manan Hall attendants, who are the driving force behind the upkeep and maintenance of the Hall, were also felicitated at the event.

The Minister in his address apprised the gathering on the various initiatives undertaken

by the State Government for the preservation and propagation of the culture and heritage of the different ethnic communities of the State. He further appealed not to make any individual applications for issue of sound system but only those coming from registered organizations would be entertained. He lauded the efforts of the artistes and the troupe leaders for presenting a befitting performance which highlighted the social and cultural aspect of Sikkim in the national arena.

Earlier, the welcome address was proposed by Secretary, Culture Department, Sherap Shenga.

## SMU host 1st Zonal NAAC Meeting

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 25 FEB:**

Sikkim Manipal University is hosting the 1st Zonal Meeting of National Assessment & Accreditation Council On 'All India Analysis of Accreditation Report' for North Eastern Region from 25 to 27 Feb, 2021, a press release informs.

Chief guest, Education Minister, Kunga Nima Lepcha, inaugurated the meeting today and in his address said that the "eco-system of higher education in the country is of utmost importance as it prepares our students for a meaningful and cooperative role in the society, and ready to work in a multi-cultural globalized environment. Therefore, the role of NAAC for accreditation of HEIs is that of great importance."

"I am very confident that the entire higher education fraternity of Sikkim and the North Eastern Region shall immensely benefit from the discussions and deliberations during this meeting in terms of setting benchmarks, improvement of their infrastructure and developing an environment of healthy competition," Mr Lepcha said.

The meeting is being organised in both the virtual & physical modes in view of the COVID-19 protocols. Secretaries of Education departments of North East States, Vice-Chancellors, Deans, Directors and Principals of HEIs of the North Eastern Region and Sikkim, distinguished dignitaries and officials from Government of Sikkim, faculty and staff of SMU were present on the occasion.

Prof. S.C. Sharma, Director, NAAC who was the guest of honour on the occasion delivered his address on the online digital platform from Bangalore. Prof Sharma.

"National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has made several recommendations to usher in quality framework environment in higher education in our country. One of the key components of NEP -2020

recommendations is about developing accreditation ecosystem. Taking note of these visionary suggestions and counting on 25 years of pioneering experience, NAAC has initiated process of review & reforms to adapt and align their focus based on the progressive recommendations of NEP-2020," Prof Sharma said.

Additional Chief Secretary, Department of Education, Government of Sikkim, G.P. Upadhyaya, addressing the function as the special guest said, "HEIs in the North Eastern region, have been long facing challenges in terms hiring experienced and qualified faculty. It is unfortunate that not many want to work in the North-East region. The shortage of teaching faculty, especially in HEIs, is not conducive to growth and improvement of quality education in the region. This is a crucial context that NAAC think-tank should deliberate upon on priority."

Mr Upadhyaya mentioned that Sikkim has been associated with the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) since 2014. He extended all support of the Government of Sikkim to NAAC in the preparation of the 'All India Analysis of Accreditation Report' For North Eastern Region.

Dr. Wahidul Hasan, Sr. Communication cum Publication Officer, NAAC, in his address, said that the vision of NAAC is "to make quality the defining element of higher education in India through a combination of self and external quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance initiatives."

A special cell for the North-east region has also been created within NAAC to focus attention on the unique constraints and challenges faced by HEIs in the region and to address these appropriately.

Dr. S. Srikantha Swamy, Academic Expert, NAAC, presented an overview of the "The All India Analysis of Accreditation Report' For North Eastern Region. Earlier, Vice-Chancellor, SMU, Dr. (Lt. Gen) Rajan S. Grewal, gave the welcome address.

## 'Jiwan' wins SSACS short film contest

**SHRAVAN CHETTRI  
GANGTOK, 25 FEB:**

The result of the short film contest organized by Sikkim State Aids Control Society was declared today during a program held in the capital.

The contest was organised in two categories; students and open. A total of 33 entries in open category and 13 entries in student category were submitted.

In the student category, 'A Silent Diary' by Aman Rai bagged the first prize followed by 'HIV Sanga ko jeewan' by Arun Kumar in second place and 'Bhagya ko bidambana' by Shristi Pradhan in third place.

In open category, 'Ji-



wan' by Dilip Rai won the first prize followed by 'Pretty woman' by Deepankar Shakya in second place and 'Awareness steps at home' by Biswas Timsina in third place.

Prize money of Rs 90,000 for student category and Rs 2.2 lakh for open category was

awarded to the winners.

The film contest was themed "Knowledge is bliss" targeting HIV AIDS awareness.

The program was attended by Advisor Health department, KB Gurung, Filmmaker, Chunnal Ghimire, Filmmaker, CP Giri and Deependra Mohra amongst others.

## RUCHI DIAGNOSTIC CLINIC

Behind telephone Exchange Near Old STNM Hospital. Gangtok

PH: 03592-203333, 204876, 8509373970

### EXISTING FACILITIES:

- ULTRASOUND
- DIGITAL X-RAY
- ECHOCARDIOGRAPHY
- COLOR DOPPLER
- PATHOLOGY
- MICROBIOLOGY
- BIOCHEMISTRY
- ENDOSCOPY
- B M D
- E C G
- DENTAL O P G
- GASTRO CLINIC
- PAEDIATRIC CLINIC
- MEDICAL CLINIC
- ORTHO CLINIC
- E N T CLINIC
- GYNEA CLINIC
- PHYSIOTHERAPY
- SPECIALISED TESTS

### BLOOD COLLECTION CENTRES AT :

- Sushruta Medical, Ranipool.
- Arihant Medical, Opp. CRH gate, 5th Mile.

### COMPLETE E N T FACILITIES UNDER ONE ROOF

**ENT O P D Monday to Friday**  
10.00 am to 2.30 pm

1. ENT OPD CLINIC
2. ENT ENDOSCOPES
3. MICROSCOPIC PROCEDURES
4. MINOR O T PROCEDURES
5. VERTIGO MANAGEMENT
6. AUDIOMETRY, TYMPANOMETRY AND HEARING AIDS.

### CONSULTANT ENT SURGEON DR. ONGDEN GYATSO, MS (AIIMS)

**GASTRO CLINIC & O P D**  
8.00 am to 9.00 am

**MEDICAL CLINIC & O P D**  
9.30 am

**ORTHO AND GYNEA CLINICS & O P D**  
3.00 pm

**PAEDIATRIC CLINIC & O P D**  
8.00 am And 6.00 pm  
**VACCINATION CLINIC**



## Find Time to Rethink Waste

*Awareness and engagement on garbage management*

Gangtok has for long been a tourist town unique for its general cleanliness. Being the capital of a State to which modern waste management is a recent experience and garbage a recent (a decade and a half old) problem, this is an impressive achievement. Admittedly, it's still relatively small size helps keep things in better nick, but Gangtok has also been witnessing a sustained population boom and the capital is now a contiguous stretch of buildings from Tashi View Point to Ranipool and now has two more wards carved out of this spread. Urban planning, however, still rambles along lost between being woefully inadequate to blissfully absent, and the one eyesore where this is most noticeable is in the civic sense of the residents. The waste management system of the town is reasonably well serviced, but that is no thanks to people's engagement but is driven primarily by the GMC-UDD combine and its interventions.

Many years ago, it was again an outside agency's top-down initiative that introduced garbage management in Gangtok through an AusAud programme. When they left, so did the resuscitated civic organisations. Since then, the municipal corporation, save the current interregnum when there is none, has been trying to help Gangtokians dispose and segregate their waste more responsibly. What is missing, however, is spontaneity among the stakeholders. There is no surprise there because people even had problems when asked to drop off their garbage to the collection trucks. To have expected them to take with any real interest to segregating waste was always a tall ask.

One had hoped that the municipalisation of Gangtok and some other towns in the State would have facilitated such engagements and awareness and hope flickers occasionally when municipal councilors make the occasional public appearance in cleanliness drives and overseeing jhora-cleaning operations in their respective jurisdictions. What remains unfortunately missing, at least in the public initiatives and statements coming out of the GMC, is a reassuring signal that it understands the garbage management problems confounding Gangtok in particular and Sikkim in general. The priorities appear to be mixed up, with supporting initiatives gaining primacy over policy and planning measures. When councillors arrive at cleanliness drives, they contribute not with their sweeping skills but by underlining, with their presence, the need for public participation for such initiatives. For instance, CCTV cameras at jhoras might work as strong deterrents against irresponsible dumping, but deterrence has a limited shelf-life and for responsible disposal, waste management needs to become a habit at every home. The existing models for awareness drives are not delivering the required results and maybe it is time to devise something more earnest and genuine – like involving the children instead.

Meanwhile, it is also important that the safai karamcharis are better looked after. It is not enough to remember them once a year with felicitations and gifts. They serve Sikkim despite everything, so the least that can be offered them is a safer work environment. The rubber gloves and masks issued to garbage handlers and sweepers wear out within a week and it is disturbing to see them handle all the filth with the flimsiest of protections. They should ideally also receive a special medical package for their hazardous working conditions and then some more extra emoluments over and above their salaries for the hours they spend keeping Sikkim clean.

The logistics and humanity of garbage management apart, one expects the urban body representatives to also deliver the State a coherent and sustainable garbage management policy. They should not just inherit and continue with the system passed on to it by the UD&HD. Because they are more accountable to the people, one hopes they will tweak this system, scratch that, replace it with something which is more in sync with the image that Sikkim aspires to project. At present, waste management continues to be managed with disposal seen as the only option. The speed with which the dump at 32 Mile has been over-run, and the one at Marchak before that, should convince all that waste needs to be examined as part of a cycle of production-consumption-recovery, with the last aspect of "recovery/ recycling" being the one which will ensure overall sustainability.

Without it, new garbage dumping grounds will need to be found every few years. And no, one recycling plant at Lall Bazaar will not suffice. Why, even the 32 Mile land-fill did flirt with composting for a short while, but the machinery and the prospects were lost to departmental disinterest. Waste can actually become wealth and has tremendous potential not only for generating livelihoods for the urban poor but can also enrich the earth through composting and recycling rather than spreading pollution as has been the case. Compost is only one part of recycling. The tons of plastic and other non-biodegradable waste can also be recycled profitably into ply-boards and other products which can become a niche and wellpatronised industry. These are only stray ideas; fact remains that garbage management needs a rethink of a policy-shift scale and not just token displays and gimmickry.

## Five Ways Boredom Could Be Changing Your Behaviour, for better or worse

WIJNAND VAN TILBURG  
*theconversation.com*

Many of us have probably felt bored at some point in the past year. Restrictions on social gatherings, travel and plenty of other activities may have been necessary to control the pandemic, but have left lots of us with little to do.

On the surface, boredom may seem rather trivial; an experience reserved for those of us with the luxury of having too much time. But it turns out that boredom affects people in many ways. This raises the question: on balance, is boredom a vice or virtue? According to science, the answer might be a bit of both.

### 1. IMPULSIVENESS

Boredom comes with a desire to find a more satisfying activity. It increases our impulsiveness and disrupts the ability to attend to the task at hand. Instead, we turn to distractions such as snacking or playing with a mobile phone.

While the occasional distraction may be innocuous, chronic boredom plays a role in many problematic behaviours, including pathological gambling, drug abuse and dangerous driving. In context of the pandemic, boredom turns out to be a key reason why people break lockdown and social distancing rules.

### 2. POORER MENTAL HEALTH

It is normal to feel bored every now and then. But frequent or unresolved boredom is reason for concern. Research shows being prone to boredom is a predictor of poor mental health, such as depression and anxiety.

People who get bored easily report that they find life less meaningful. They are more likely to drop out of school, stop coming into work, or have less satisfying romantic relationships.

### 3. AGGRESSION

So far, it may seem that boredom is primarily a problem for the person experiencing it. But it turns out that one person's boredom can also be another person's problem. Boredom can cause aggression.

In an experiment, we presented Irish participants with a story about an Englishman who had allegedly beaten up a fellow Irishman. We asked our participants how long the prison sentence for the English perpetrator should be. Our Irish participants demanded substantially longer sentences if they'd first worked on a boring writing task compared to a control group. What's more, we found the same did not happen when the offender had been described as Irish, suggesting boredom caus-

es hostility to members of other groups.

A 2020 study tested if boredom might cause sadistic aggression. The researchers made participants watch either a 20 minute long boring video of a waterfall or a much less boring documentary about the Alps. While watching these videos, participants could drop, if they wanted, three living worms that were given the names "Toto", "Tifi", and "Kiki" into a shredder. Participants who watched the boring video shredded significantly more worms than the others. It seems bored people do things like this partly because they crave excitement.



### 4. NOVELTY SEEKING

But there are also positive sides to boredom. Instead of seeking solace in impulsive behaviour or aggression, boredom can cause people to seek out new situations or challenges.

People who get bored easily can express greater curiosity. In an experiment in 2019, participants were offered the opportunity to look at photographs they had seen already or photographs that were unfamiliar to them. Those who were bored showed a stronger preference for unfamiliar photographs, even when they knew these new photos would show them unpleasant things like cockroaches or dirty dishes.

### 5. FINDING MEANING IN LIFE

Perhaps one of the most surprising aspects of boredom is related to finding meaning in life. People who feel bored report that their current situation is devoid of any purpose. In response, they actively seek out ways in which they can make life feel meaningful again.

For example, boredom causes people to cling

more strongly to their ideologies. In one experiment, participants who worked on a boring word copying task reported more extreme political beliefs than a control group. Such more extreme political beliefs can give people a sense of purpose in their lives, for better or worse.

Boring activities also cause people to dwell on nostalgic memories. Nostalgia combines positive feeling such as security, with negative ones such as a sense of loss. Importantly, these nostalgic memories make people feel more connected to others, which helps give them to find more meaning to their own lives.

It works the other way, too. People who derive a sense of meaning in life from their religion get less easily bored in menial tasks. Perhaps one of the most surprising findings is that momentary boredom can increase people's willingness to give to a charitable cause, painting a very different picture to that of boredom as a cause of sadistic aggression.

Boredom, as with many emotions, seems to play an integral role in psychological functioning. It can turn us away from meaningless and unexciting activities and towards what feel like worthwhile courses of action. This may result in activities that offer a sense of meaning or novelty – but it may also trigger in behaviour that's more dangerous and destructive.

Boredom appears to be an emotional state that prompts us to change our behaviour – whether that's a positive or negative outcome depends entirely on the individual and their situation.

*[the writer is Lecturer, Department of Psychology, University of Essex]*



## Coronavirus: The Price of Global Pandemic Responses Has Been to Make Many Other Diseases Worse

AGNES ARNOLD-FORSTER  
*theconversation.com*

We are living through an age of untold suffering. Over 500,000 people have died from coronavirus in the US alone, over 120,000 in the UK, and over two million worldwide. With COVID-19 dominating the news cycle, you would be forgiven for forgetting that other diseases still exist. And yet we know full well that diseases don't stop just because one is hogging all the limelight.

There have been plenty of reports on the troubling cost of the pandemic and associated lockdowns or shelter-in-place orders on people's mental health. For example, it has had a profound effect on those living with obsessive-compulsive disorder. Studies from Europe show that between a third and half of those suffering from OCD had their symptoms worsen during the pandemic.

Young adults seem to have been particularly affected by the emotional burdens of isolation and insecurity. In a recent survey, conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the US, 63% of 18-to-24-year-olds reported symptoms of anxiety or depression, with 25% report-

ing increased substance use to deal with stress, and 25% saying they'd seriously considered suicide.

Crucially, these issues won't abate as soon as the pandemic is over. Even when the crisis recedes, Dr Shekar Saxena of the Harvard School of Public Health suggests that 10% of these young people will have to live with the long-lasting effects of the mental illnesses they are currently enduring.

The damage done by the pandemic to mental health has already attracted well-deserved attention. It has highlighted the importance of looking beyond coronavirus deaths to assess the success of global pandemic responses. Cancer tells a similar, and equally distressing, story.

CANCER CARE IN THE PANDEMIC Throughout 2020, hospitals across the UK, US and Europe cancelled or postponed urgent cancer operations because they could not cope with the rising number of desperately ill coronavirus patients. Determining cancer prognosis is complex, but early evidence suggests that even a four-week delay in treatment can raise the risk of death by up to 10%.

The danger is not just physical, but psychological too. Despite these

distressing figures of cancellations and waiting times, we don't yet know much about the emotional toll these delays will have on people living with cancer today. Stories are, however, starting to emerge. One man, diagnosed with stage-4 bowel cancer in June 2020, had his December surgery postponed, and then "cancelled indefinitely".

Even in the 19th century, doctors and patients alike were acutely aware of the importance of timely treatment. As I argue in my book, *The Cancer Problem*, the "do not delay" principle in cancer treatment has its origins in the early 1800s. Surgeons implored cancer sufferers to seek their advice as soon as they had identified any unexpected lumps or bumps. And in their writings, patients expressed extreme distress at waiting for a diagnosis or cure.

Doctors lamented the patients who, "because of their praiseworthy modesty", consulted too late for effective treatment. Medical textbooks designed to be read by patients told their readers that "were proper means used in due time, a cancer might often be prevented; but after the disorder has arrived at a certain height it generally sets all medicine at defiance".

Looking at this longer history of cancer reminds us of the emotional and physical costs of any delays. After all, even if these waits have only minimal effects on patients' survival or long-term health, we must also think about the psychological trauma of living in limbo. Particularly when that limbo is associated with cancer, a disease that has long carried with it a sense of profound anxiety, so much so that in the 19th century it was often termed "the dread disease". It is often understood as an alien invader, now very much outstaying its welcome.

As the COVID-19 crisis slowly abates, we must not just look back with regret at the number of people killed by the virus or celebrate the success of vaccines. We must instead assess the pandemic's impact in the round and consider the physical as well as emotional costs of a disease that turned our world upside down. When the next pandemic comes, we must be prepared to not only treat the victims of epidemic disease but to continue to provide the fundamental healthcare services we need to stay both healthy and happy.

*[the writer is Research Fellow, History of Medicine and Healthcare, University of Bristol]*



# As FIFA World Cup 2022 draws closer, Nepalis continue to die in event hosting Qatar

**CHANDAN KUMAR MANDAL**  
**KATHMANDU, 25 FEB [KATHMANDU POST]:** Hundreds of Nepali migrant workers have lost their lives in Qatar since the country won the right to host the World Cup 10 years ago, a new investigation has shown. An investigation by the Guardian has shown that out of 6,500 migrant workers from the South Asian countries who lost their lives in Qatar in the last decade, as many as 1,641 were from Nepal.

An average of 12 migrant workers from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have died every week since the night in December 2010 when Qatar was named the host nation for FIFA World Cup 2022, the British paper has reported.

These death figures have once again highlighted the plight of migrant workers recruited by the Gulf nation in the run-up to the global football extravaganza.

"The latest Guardian report doesn't surprise me at all. It merely states that deaths of migrant workers have continued as before," Barun Ghimire, a human rights lawyer, told the Post.

He says migrant workers will continue to die and suffer if the concerned governments do nothing to address the situation.

This is not the first time the Guardian has reported on the sorry state of millions of migrants working in unsafe conditions, leading to their untimely deaths.

In 2013, the paper had investigated and uncovered similar working and living conditions of migrant workers, calling them World Cup 'slaves'. The Guardian report had predicted that at the current death rate, the construction of all FIFA stadiums would leave 4,000 migrant workers dead.

Nepali migrants working on FIFA World Cup projects and elsewhere in Qatar have been subjected to various forms of exploitation.

In the period of 11 years between 2008-2019, a total of 7,467 Nepalis have died while working abroad, according to the data of the Foreign Employment Board, the government body that works for the welfare of migrant workers. Of the total deaths of Nepali migrants abroad, 1,461 deaths—the second-highest number—was reported from Qatar.

The latest Guardian report states that most deaths of Indian and Nepali migrant workers in Qatar were reported as 'natural deaths', often attributed to a sud-

den and unexplained heart or respiratory failure. The investigation found that 48 percent of Nepali workers' deaths were classified as 'natural deaths'.

According to Rameshwar Nepal, a labour migration researcher and executive director at Equidem Research Nepal, a human rights research organisation, these so-called 'natural deaths' are in fact not natural at all.

"Young and healthy Nepalis dying every year cannot be seen as natural. These workers are dying in road accidents, workplace accidents, of suicide, from falling from heights and even sudden cardiac arrest, which is related to working in the heat outside and sleeping in air-conditioned rooms," said Nepal. "These deaths also show the inadequacy of pre-departure orientation training."

The Post investigation in 2020 had also shown that hundreds of young and healthy Nepalis die sudden deaths in labour destination countries like Qatar but what is killing them remains largely unknown.

"For several years, we have known that these are preventable deaths and an act of homicide. The concerned governments have

to be responsible for preventing such deaths and finding out what is killing them," said Ghimire. "Responding to our petition, the Supreme Court had ordered that the government work to minimise the risk of migrant workers' deaths and make post-mortem compulsory in case of natural or sudden deaths. However, reforms have not been implemented and responsible authorities have not acted to minimise such deaths."

Ghimire, the human rights lawyer, says the Nepal government's inaction to protect its workers and the host nations' failure to safeguard the rights of migrant workers are the main reasons behind the continued deaths of workers abroad. Over the years, Qatar has invited massive international criticism for the ill-treatment of migrants on its soil who are building the required infrastructure for the Gulf state.

Nepali migrant workers too have been subjected to similar exploitations, like payment denial by their employers and unsafe living conditions.

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has further worsened their conditions, as several reports have called Qatar a 'coronavirus prison'

after workers were trapped inside their camps with higher chances of infections. In mid-April, amidst the pandemic, Amnesty International had also accused the Qatari authorities of using the global pandemic as a cover to expel over 400 Nepali workers illegally.

Later, the same rights group found that dozens of migrant workers from several countries, including Nepal, working for a FIFA World Cup stadium project in Qatar were unpaid for several months.

The incident showed that not much had changed for migrant workers in the gas-rich country despite its commitment to improve the conditions of migrant workers.

The Human Rights Watch, another rights group, in a report in August last year said as the World Cup dates draw closer, Qatar has made little progress in protecting migrant workers on its soil despite its commitments.

Nepali migrant rights activists say deaths of migrant workers will continue if nothing drastic takes place, which is very unlikely since the FIFA event is just around the corner. According to Ghimire, at a time when the host nation has failed to protect workers, partic-

ipating countries and footballers should come forward to secure the rights of poor migrants who are building the stage for them.

"If nations cannot, then global football stars like Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi, who are also the goodwill ambassadors of various social campaigns, should speak up to bring the issue to the global attention," Ghimire said.

Both Ghimire and Nepal feel the upcoming football event will be watched by families of migrant workers who lost their lives with heavy hearts.

"While celebrating the mega event, it will remind labour-sending countries like Nepal of the thousands of workers who died so the event could come to life," said Nepal. "The FIFA World Cup will haunt the families and friends of those migrants for a long time." The showdown will begin from November 21 to December 18 in 2022. Qatar will be the first country in the Arab world to host the event.

"Years later, people will regret in retrospect for not speaking up against the workers' exploitation. For me, the blood of these migrants will remain in the World Cup trophy forever," Ghimire told the Post.

## Mizoram registers 14.07 pc GSDP growth in FY19: Survey

**AIZAWL, FEB 25 (PTI)**

Mizoram registered a 14.07 percent growth in Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) during the 2019-20 fiscal with an impressive performance by agriculture, mining and industry sectors. According to the Economic Survey 2020-21 presented by Chief Minister Zoramthanga in the Assembly on Thursday, the primary sector, comprising agriculture and allied industries, contributed 26.08 per cent to the Gross State Value Added(GSVA).

The industry sector, including mining and quarrying, manufacturing, construction, electricity, gas, water supply and other utility service accounted for 30.64 per cent of the GSVA. The GSDP at current prices was estimated at Rs 26,502.56 crore in 2019-20, up by 18.91 per cent from Rs 22,287.41 crore in the previous year.

The GSDP grew by 13.04 per cent in FY19, over the preceding fiscal. However, the service sector continued to have the highest contribution to the GSVA at 43.28 per cent. The per capita income of the state for the fiscal 2019-20 was projected at Rs 2,01,741 as against the previous years estimate of Rs 1,76,620.

According to the Economic Survey, the state government has given high priority to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the states flagship programme Socio-Economic Development Policy (SEDP), and Central programmes have substantially contributed to the progress of the state.

The SEDP is a flagship programme of the Mizo National Front (MNF) government which aims at bringing sustainable development by accelerating progress in key sectors through exploration and judicious use of resources and maintaining equality and equity among the citizens.

## Modi attacks Mamata over "cut money", insulting Bengali pride



**CHUCHURA (WB), FEB 22 (PTI)**

Launching a frontal attack on the Mamata Banerjee government, Prime Minister Narendra Modi alleged on Monday it has perpetuated "syndicate raj" in all spheres of life in West Bengal where no work gets done without common people having to pay "cut money".

He accused the TMC government of pursuing "appeasement politics" to protect its vote bank while neglecting its cultural heritage and icons.

"The state government's cut money culture has vitiated the atmosphere to such an extent that you cannot

even take a house on rent without paying it.... you cannot rent a house without the syndicate's permission," he said.

He attacked the Banerjee government for not allowing central schemes like the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi and Ayushman Bharat, depriving farmers and the poor of its benefits.

"I have been told the house where Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay conceived and wrote 'Vande Mataram' is in an abysmal condition. The man who injected new life into the freedom struggle amid pervasive gloom of slavery... his house is a victim of

neglect. It's an insult to Bengali pride," Modi said addressing a public rally here in Hooghly district.

He also accused the TMC government of neglecting industrial development, including the state's once thriving jute industry.

"The people of West Bengal have made up their mind to usher in 'asol poribartan' (real change). The BJP will give Bengal a government that will ensure development of all but appeasement of none," he asserted.

Repeatedly attacking the state government, Modi said, "Development

of Bengal is not possible as long as cut money culture, tolabbaji persists.

"Development of Bengal is not possible as long as the state administration patronises goondas, development of Bengal is not possible as long as the rule of law is not established."

Modi said once the BJP forms its government in Bengal, people will be able to preserve and protect their culture and nobody will be able to scare or suppress them.

He said there was no dearth of potential investors but the threat of the syndicate and cut money dissuaded them from investing in the state.

## Nepal seeks another 5 million doses of Covishield from India vaccine maker

**KATHMANDU, 25 FEB [KATHMANDU POST]:** The government has requested the Serum Institute of India to sell an additional five million doses of its Covishield vaccine to Nepal.

The five million doses are required to administer a second dose to those receiving the first dose of vaccine, officials at the Ministry of Health and Population say.

"We are awaiting response from the Serum Institute of India to our proposal," Dr Roshan Pokhrel, chief specialist at the Health Ministry, told the Post.

The serum Institute of India produces Covishield vaccine, developed by the University of Oxford and AstraZeneca, the British-Swedish multinational pharmaceutical and biopharmaceutical company. Covishield is the preferred choice of Nepali authorities, as the country's existing system supports storage and supply of the vaccine.

The government has already purchased two million shots of Covishield vaccine at \$4 per dose from the Serum Institute of India, paying 80 percent of the total amount in advance. The company has already supplied one million doses and officials say another million doses will arrive within a week.

The government started the first phase of immunisation on January 27 with the one million doses provided by India in grant. According to the Child Health Section of the Family Welfare Division under the Department of Health services, 429,705 people took the jab in the campaign, meeting 85.65 percent of the target. So far, 1.4 percent of the total population has received the first dose of vaccine. Meanwhile, public health experts say that identifying virus variants spreading in the country is equally important to lessen the risk of new waves of contagion.

"We need to know the virus variant, whether or not the vaccine is working," Dr Anup Subedee, an infectious disease expert, told the Post. "To contain the spread of infections and to know if the vaccines are working, it is important to know the virus variant."

Several new variants of the coronavirus have been spreading in countries across the globe. Some of them are the UK variant, the South African variant and the Brazilian and Japanese variants. After a consistent decline in new cases in India, numbers have picked up in at least four states again due to new variants of the virus. According to the Times of India, the number of coronavirus cases is surging, particularly in Punjab, Maharashtra, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh.

At least two new coronavirus variants—N440K and E48K—are spreading faster in some states, according to timesnownews.com.

Nepal too had recorded three cases of a new variant of the coronavirus, the one identified in the United Kingdom in

December.

"We don't know if the UK variant of the virus was present only in the three people or is spreading in society," said Subedee. "New variants of the virus can develop within the country also and the vaccine being used may not work on them."

The Epidemiology and Disease Control Division said that at least 13 suspected cases of the new variant have been found in Kathmandu and Pokhara. Samples of those people, who came in close contact with the people returning from abroad, were found positive in the polymerase chain reaction tests but negative for s-gene targets. S-gene target or spike protein is one of the key biological characteristics of SARS-CoV-2, which enables the virus to penetrate host cells and cause infections.

Without spike protein, the coronavirus cannot infect people but doctors say that if the polymerase chain reaction tests are failing to detect the spike proteins in the swab samples of the infected people or negative s-gene target, there is a possibility that the virus may have undergone mutations or the virus could be of a different variant than the one commonly found in the country.

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"We need to conduct whole-genome sequencing on a regular basis," Dr Prabhakar Adhikari, an infectious disease and critical care expert, told the Post. "It will be costly for the country if we only focus on the vaccine and forget the risks." According to Adhikari, even if the state-run laboratories do not have the capacity to perform gene sequencing, authorities should use the capacity of the private sector.

Along with studying the gene of the virus, authorities should also enforce safety measures, which is still effective in lessening the spread of infections.

Meanwhile, the Health Ministry on Wednesday said that deaths of an additional 619 people were responsible for Covid-19 infection. With this, death toll from the coronavirus infection in the country has reached 2,684.

"We found that data of people who died at home due to coronavirus infection were not included in the ministry's record but were recorded in the Covid-19 Crisis Management Center's system," Dr Jageshwor Gautam, spokesperson for the Health Ministry, told the Post.

## Seven bills introduced in Arunachal Pradesh Assembly

**ITANAGAR, FEB 25 (PTI)**

Seven government bills were introduced in the state Assembly on Thursday, the first day of the Budget session. Chief Minister Pema Khandu introduced the Arunachal Pradesh Civil Courts Bill 2021 while Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein, who holds the Finance, Planning and Investment portfolios, introduced three bills Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (Amendment) Bill, Ease of Doing Business Bill and Goods and Service Tax (Amendment) Bill respectively.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Alo Libang introduced the Arunachal Pradesh Indian Medicine Council (Amendment) Bill, while Parliamentary Affairs Minister Bamang Felix introduced the Arunachal Pradesh Legislatures



Members (Prevention of Disqualification) (Amendment) Bill 2021.

Town Planning and Urban Local Bodies minister Kamlung Mosang introduced the Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Bill. The bills would be taken up for discussions and passing in the house.

Mosang during the day, also laid in the House the Arunachal Pradesh Food Commission Rule 2018 and the chief minister laid the Financial Statement of Arunachal Pradesh State Legal Service Authority from 2007-08 to 2017-18 respectively.



*Lionel Messi double helps Barcelona ease past Elche and cut gap to Atlético*

**BARCELONA, 25 FEB [REUTERS]:** Lionel Messi scored twice as Barcelona overcame an uninspiring first half to beat struggling Elche 3-0 at home in La Liga on Wednesday and keep the leaders Atlético Madrid in their sights.

The home side created little in one of their worst first-half displays at the Camp Nou this season but found a breakthrough early in the second half when Martin Braithwaite released Messi with a classy backheel and the Argentinian did the rest.

Barcelona, who failed to hold on to a narrow lead in a 1-1 draw at home against Cádiz on Sunday, got an all-important second goal in the 69th minute when Frenkie de Jong received the ball after some clever play from Pedri. The Dutchman burst through the middle of the pitch and laid the ball off for Messi to finish. It was his 18th league goal of the season, extending his lead at the top of the scoring charts.

The left-back Jordi Alba struck the third goal from another Braithwaite assist to round off a victory which took Ronald Koeman's side back above Sevilla and up to third in the La Liga table on 50 points, five behind Atlético but having played a game more.

The frustrating home draw on Sunday had interrupted a seven-game winning run in the league and added to the pain of a 4-1 routing at home by Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League last week.

"This will help our confidence a lot," said Alba. "The draw was a huge blow to the whole team and showed that if we are not at our 100% best we find it very hard to win. We struggled on Sunday and in the first half here too but we were better in the second and the goals arrived."

The hosts looked shaken by their recent form in an insipid first half during which they were fortunate not to fall behind when the Argentinian forward Lucas Boyé caught a clear sight of goal inside the area for Elche but blasted over the bar.

Francisco Trinçao was Barça's liveliest player in the first half and the Portuguese winger was twice denied by the Elche keeper Édgar Badia, who also did well to keep out a header from De Jong, with Alba somehow missing the target on the rebound.

Barça regained their composure after the break and opened the scoring thanks to clever combination play between Braithwaite and Messi but were let off the hook moments later when Boyé again missed the target for Elche, who stay in the bottom three after defeat.

Messi's second goal calmed their nerves and they were hungry for more even after Alba's strike. The substitute Antoine Griezmann hammered the crossbar from just inside the area and then missed the target from an even easier position moments later.

# Rapinoe brace opens floodgates as USA rout Argentina to win SheBelieves Cup

**LONDON, 25 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]:** Megan Rapinoe scored twice and the United States clinched the SheBelieves Cup title with a 6-0 victory over Argentina on Wednesday night.

The US are undefeated in 37 games in a row overall and 53 on American soil. Under Vlatko Andonovski, who succeeded Jill Ellis as the team's manager in 2019, they are a perfect 16 wins from 16 matches.

Carli Lloyd, Kristie Mewis, Alex Morgan and Christen Press also scored, and the US women also become the first team to have three straight shutouts in the SheBelieves Cup, the annual round-robin competition which is in its sixth year.

"We wanted to come out fast as always," said Rapinoe, the 2019 Ballon d'Or winner who plays for OL Reign of the NWSL. "It's always dangerous to leave teams hanging around, so we were able to do that today. Just tried to find the space, be aggressive. Found myself in the middle a little bit more. The nines better be careful, leaving me out there scoring goals. Just trying to get up there and take the chances."

The United States shut out Canada in Thursday's tournament opener behind a late goal from Manchester City playmaker Rose Lavelle, who was named the competition's Most Valuable Player, before downing Brazil 2-0 on Sunday. Earlier Wednesday, Brazil beat Canada 2-0 at Explo-



ria Stadium to clinch second place. "Honestly I don't know how I won that," Lavelle said. "It's always nice to be recognized, but I think there were other people that deserved it more."

Argentina, a late addition after Japan dropped out because of coronavirus concerns, did not win a match but did impress with gritty performances. The Argentines at No 31 were the lowest-ranked team in the field behind the top-ranked Americans, then Brazil and Canada, who are tied for the eighth.

Rapinoe scored in the 16th minute with a well-timed strike on a through ball from

Lavelle for the early lead.

Rapinoe added another in the 26th minute, tapping in a cross from Lloyd. The 35-year-old winger is the top all-time SheBelieves Cup goalscorer with seven goals, including three in this edition.

Lloyd added a goal in the 34th. It was the New Jersey native's 124th international goal and it came in her 299th appearance with the national team. Lloyd is one away becoming the third American and third player ever, male or female, to play 300 or more times for her country, joining former USA teammates Kristine Lilly and Christine Pearce Rampone. Kristie

Mewis scored on an angle into the far corner for her fourth career international goal in the 41st minute, and the United States took a 4-0 lead into the intermission.

Morgan scored in the 84th, her first goal since giving birth to her daughter Charlie last May. It marked the 108th international goal for Morgan, who scored twice in a brief five-game spell with Tottenham in the fall before returning to the NWSL's Orlando Pride, moving her past Michelle Akers into sole possession of fifth place on the USWNT's all-time leaderboard. "I'm very excited to get my first goal back with

the national team and join the list of moms on the team who have scored goals and played as a national team player," Morgan said. "I just want to be an example for other female athletes who are moms or want to become moms, knowing that they still belong in the game."

Press scored on a header a short time later for her 11th goal in her last 15 games. The Manchester United forward has been directly involved in 28 goals in her past 29 appearances for country, scoring 13 goals and assisting 15 more.

The Americans, who piled up a 27-1 margin in shots on

the night, improved 4-0 all-time against Argentina. Jane Campbell did not make a save as the US extended their shutout streak to six matches. They have conceded all of once in their last 15 outings.

"Overall, very happy with how we performed and how we were able to unlock Argentina early in the game, and how we finished the game as well," Andonovski said.

Afterward, Rapinoe spoke about her excitement to rejoin OL Reign for the NWSL season ahead of the Tokyo Olympics after opting out of the 2020 campaign.

"[I'm] really excited to get back into the NWSL," said Rapinoe, who became the first player to score more than two goals in a single SheBelieves Cup tournament and topped the leaderboard of this year's competition with three. "Obviously I took all the time I could possibly take last year. I think it really did do me well. I think the NWSL and all the teams and players have done incredible jobs with the protocols and keeping everybody safe. Looking forward to getting back on the team."

"As far as we know, the Olympics is happening. So preseason will be good for us. Couple games coming up in April then really looking forward to starting the season so we can get that consistent play. I think that's the next thing that I am really looking forward to, just those consistent games and that consistent training environment for us all to play in."

## Imperious Manchester City hypnotise Mönchengladbach into compliance

**JONATHAN LIEW**

**LONDON, 25 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]:**

The critical passage of this game, you felt, arrived around an hour in, when Borussia Mönchengladbach – 1-0 down and having just enjoyed a rare shot on goal – threw on two attacking players in attempt to wrestle back control. On came Marcus Thuram and Valentino Lazaro, jogging on to the pitch with vim and purpose, pointing in various directions for no reason, in the way that substitutes often do.

At which point, with Ederson in possession, Manchester City simply walked the ball up the pitch and scored. Ten passes in total, broken only by a desperate sliding clearance from the midfielder Florian Neuhaus by his own penalty spot. Then 16 more passes, ending with João Cancelo's pinpoint diagonal, Bernardo Silva's header across goal and the finish from Gabriel Jesus. Thuram and Lazaro had been on the pitch for two minutes. Neither of them had yet treated themselves to a touch of the ball.

This, perhaps, was the perfect distillation of City in the early part of 2021: a team fuelled entirely by their own volition, a team who ultimately don't care if you're there or not, a team playing a game that doesn't really require you to participate. Here, Marco Rose's side were essentially treated as ball-feeders, shadow runners: choreographed patsies whose sole purpose was to make City look like they were trying.

Perhaps we should have expected nothing less from a meeting between the best team in the Premier League and the eighth-best team in the Bundesliga.

But even in City's mesmerising dominance there was an element of this display that felt partly acquiescent: a sense that at least in part Gladbach were simply hypnotised into compliance. City attack builds. City attack threatens. City attack breaks down. Here, City: have the ball back and try again.

Thus did City cruise their way to a 12th consecutive away win,



a record for an English top-flight team in all competitions. At which point we should probably point out that both teams were playing away from home here. And as such, with no crowd and even the familiar comforts of Borussia Park left behind, perhaps Gladbach simply reasoned that an empty Puskas Arena in Budapest may as well be an empty Etihad Stadium in Manchester, only at one of them your away goals count for extra.

In part, the idiocy of Uefa's adherence to the away goals rule in the Covid era explains Gladbach's caution here: the conservatism of a team minded only to avoid a trouncing. And granted, there are any number of scorelines in Manchester that would still see them progress. But in order to do so, they will need to display the sort of ambition and bravery on the ball that was so lacking here.

From the start, City's high press swaddled Gladbach like a baby, forcing the ball-player to take the path of least resistance: inevitably back to Yann Sommer in goal, or a hopeless punt up the field to a light blue shirt. At which point, your problems really begin.

The trouble with trying to win the ball off City, you see, is that you don't just have to win it once. Such is the intelligence and aggression with which they swarm around the ball in numbers that even when you get the foot in, force the error, they gather up the second ball and come again. And so winning the ball off City really means winning it three

or four times, by which time you are not only disorganised and a bit tired, but now surrounded by City players.

In the face of this onslaught, Gladbach simply disintegrated like a malfunctioning Wallace and Gromit contraption: players passing to teammates who weren't there, players tripping over themselves, players dribbling the ball sideways, players making inexplicable errors. City's first goal resulted from just such an implosion: two mistakes in quick succession from Christoph Kramer – a World Cup winner with Germany in 2014 – presenting the ball to Cancelo, who crossed for Silva to score.

Briefly, fleetingly, Gladbach threatened. But the chances were just too slight, too rare for a team who you sensed deep down just didn't believe they were good enough. And yes, City have an expensively assembled squad, a fine manager, a well-drilled system. But for a team who were basically in disarray three months ago, none of this was inevitable. What Pep Guardiola has done is to restore not just City's principles and philosophy, but the aura too: the immeasurable assurance and control that makes opposition teams do stupid things.

We have been here before, of course: Dynamo Kyiv in 2016 and Basel in 2018 and Schalke in 2019, imperious knockout performances that presaged disappointment. But what we can say with confidence is that Gladbach do not have the tools to trouble them. Perhaps the only side left who can still derail City's Champions League dream is City themselves.

## Old and new are intertwined at India's fortress in familiar tale for England

**ANAND VASU**

**AHMEDABAD, 25 FEB [THEGUARDIAN]:**

Inside Indian cricket's newest stadium, a tale as old as Test cricket itself unfolded as India took control of the third Test, bowling England out cheaply once more. England's fear of the turning track came to the fore and India's spinners again showed it is the straight ball that can prove most dangerous when there is turn on offer.

The first sign of novelty appeared before a ball had been bowled when Ram Nath Kovind, the president of India, inaugurated the refurbished facility that has a capacity of 110,000, and revealed that the ground would be called the Narendra Modi Stadium.

There cannot be too many instances of a stadium's name being changed before it has even been used once, but these things happen in India.

But things felt quite old, at least twice during the course of the first day, when the lights at the stadium failed. They spent £80m redeveloping this facility but apparently can't get the lights to stay on all evening.

In the seventh over of the innings India resorted to an old ploy and brought the spinner on. But it was the new man, Axar Patel, who was thrown the ball. The first one he sent down was too good for Jonny Bairstow, and India were on their way. Joe Root went back deep into his crease to a flighted ball from Ravichandran Ashwin, and was pinned lbw in front of the stumps.

From here on Patel did a near-perfect impression of Ravindra Jadeja. Tying down one end, refusing to hand the ball back to his captain, he wheeled away. Every now and again Patel would get one to grip, and the batsman would gawk, wide-eyed, wondering what further devils the pitch would have in store.

With the seed of doubt planted, Patel merely had to stick to the basics. After all, the left-arm orthodox spinner bowling long spells and using the seam to get the ball to grip the surface is a traditional ploy that captains have used down the ages. There was no rocket science, no mystery balls, no trying anything new.

But the pink ball added a new dimension. The extra coat of lacquer on the ball, applied to ensure it retained

shine and colour for longer, meant that each time it landed on the leather it skidded through, going on with the arm rather than turning. What was new to England's batsmen was that Patel was bowling the arm ball without even trying.

In the space of two Test matches, he has gone from being a Twenty20 specialist to a bowler with a Test five-for and six-for in the bag. If this was new to him, it did not show in the manner in which he handled himself.

And perhaps that is because Patel is an old hand at handling adversity. Only two years ago, Patel's father was involved in a road accident in Nadiad, a town some 60 kilometres from Ahmedabad. A late-night jaunt for a cup of tea with friends became nearly fatal, and Rajeshbhai required four months of hospital treatment and expert medical care to survive. Needless to say, through it all, Patel put all his resources into getting his father back on his feet.

Young Axar may have earned his international stripes, and Indian Premier League riches, but that has not changed him quite as much as you might expect. He still retains his old room in the family home, taking refuge in video games when not on cricket's global treadmill.

England made the old mistake of carrying their baggage from the Chennai pitch out to the middle in Ahmedabad, and with the cobwebs of the mind still far from blown away, did not allow for anything new to happen to them. By the close of play India were right on top, with Rohit Sharma batting, as usual, as though on a different surface.

It was Emerson who said that "old and new make the warp and woof of every moment. There is no thread that is not a twist of these two strands." In Ahmedabad, old and new were deeply intertwined, and the only thing that unravelled here was England.

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# China celebrates official end of extreme poverty, lauds Xi

**BEIJING (AP):** The ruling Communist Party is celebrating the official end of extreme poverty in China with a propaganda campaign that praises President Xi Jinping's role, part of efforts to cement his image as a history-making leader who is reclaiming his country's rightful place as a global power.

The propaganda apparatus has been linking national successes to Xi, including fighting the coronavirus, China's rise as a technology creator and December's successful lunar mission to bring back moon rocks.

The party announced in November, with little fanfare, that China no longer had anyone in extreme poverty. That was down from an official estimate of almost 99 million living on annual incomes of less than 2,300 yuan (\$355) per person a decade ago.

The full-scale propaganda campaign launched this month has filled state-controlled newspapers and airwaves with reports on the anti-poverty milestone and Xi's personal role in it.

They credit Xi with launching an initiative shortly after taking power in 2012 that enabled China to beat by a decade the 2030 target set by the World Bank for eliminating extreme poverty. A report by the party newspaper People's Daily this week on the "historic leap" refers to Xi by his full name and title as party leader 121 times.

"General Secretary Xi Jinping has stood at the strategic height of building a well-off society in an all-around way and realizing the Chinese dream of the great reju-



venation of the Chinese nation," the newspaper said. The event gives the ruling party a political trophy ahead of this year's celebration of the 100th anniversary of its 1921 founding. It comes at a time when China's economy is growing again following the coronavirus while the United States, Europe and other areas are still struggling with outbreaks.

The party said it reached the milestone despite having to take the unprecedented step of shutting down most of China's economy in early 2020 to fight the coronavirus.

On Thursday, Xi cited anti-poverty work as a sign of the effectiveness of the ruling party's system.

"We have finished the arduous task of eradicating absolute poverty and created a miracle that shall go down in history," Xi said at a ceremony honoring people who worked on the initiative.

Xi presented medals, certificates and plaques to ten individuals and ten groups honored as anti-poverty "role models."

He acknowledged the "material foundation" built up over four decades of market-style reforms that have transformed China into the world's second-largest economy and a middle-income society but mentioned no other officials or earlier leaders by name.

The event gives Xi, who has amassed more personal power than any leader since Mao Zedong, communist China's founder, a new opportunity to assert his historical importance.

Abroad, Xi is pursuing an assertive foreign policy that has increased China's diplomatic influence but roiled relations with its neighbors and with the United States and Europe.

The poverty milestone gives Xi ammunition to shore up power that some foreign analysts suggested was eroded by the coronavirus outbreak that began in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019.

Anti-poverty campaigns also are aimed at narrowing the politically volatile gulf between an

elite who have profited most from economic reform and the poor majority.

Xi's predecessor, Hu Jintao, and then-Premier Wen Jiabao started that process by stepping up spending on rural schools and health care to spread prosperity from the thriving, export-powered east coast.

China's official definition of extreme poverty is an income per person of 11 yuan (\$1.70) per day. That is lower than the World Bank's standard of \$1.90, but the National Bureau of Statistics says that due to differences in rural living costs, the Chinese standard is slightly higher.

In some areas, low-income ethnic minority communities have been moved out of remote valleys into newly built towns. In others, officials went door to door signing up poor families for job training, grants to start businesses and other aid.

Nearly 10 million people moved into new homes and those of 27 million more have been renovated, according to

Xi. He said the government has spent a total of 1.6 trillion yuan (\$250 billion).

Average income per person among the "rural underprivileged" rose from 2,982 yuan (\$356) in 2015 to 10,740 yuan (\$1,665) last year, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

Some experts suggest China might be less successful than it claims because Beijing is still using standards for the poorest countries long after graduating to middle-income status. The World Bank's middle-income poverty standard is income of \$5.50 per person per day.

In a report in January for the Brookings Institution, former World Bank expert Indermit Gill argued China is almost as well off as the United States was in 1960 when it became a high-income country. But Gill said that based on the U.S. income standard from that era, as many as 90% of China's people would be considered poor.

"If our numbers are correct, China is years — if not decades — behind schedule," Gill wrote.

## For Israel's allies, road to vaccines runs through Jerusalem

**JERUSALEM (AP):** When it comes to obtaining hard-to-get coronavirus vaccines, Israel's friends are discovering the road appears to run through Jerusalem.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday acknowledged sharing coronavirus vaccines with a number of friendly countries that have given favors to Israel in the past. Although he did not identify the countries, a list obtained by an Israeli TV station suggested that a number of them have supported Israel's claim to the contested city of Jerusalem as its capital.

The comments came at a time when Israel faces international criticism for not doing more to share its vast stockpile of vaccines with the Palestinians. They also illustrated how at a time of global shortages, the vaccine has become an asset that can be used for diplomatic gain.

"As the occupying power, Israel is responsible for the health of all the people under its control," tweeted U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders. "It is outrageous that Netanyahu would use spare vaccines to reward his foreign allies while so many Palestinians in the occupied territories are still waiting."

Although Israel does not make its own vaccines, Netanyahu has overseen one of the world's most successful vaccination campaigns by securing millions of doses from drug makers Pfizer and Moderna. Speaking at a news conference, he said Israel has already vaccinated over 5 million people with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and could complete the task of inoculating its 6.2 million adults within weeks.

He also said Israel has an excess supply of hundreds of thousands of Moderna vaccines.

After determining that Israel has "more than enough" vaccines for its own population, he said he personally decided to share what he called a symbolic number of doses with some of Israel's allies.

He said it was done "in return for things we have already received, through many contacts in various areas that I will not detail here," Netanyahu said. "I think it absolutely buys goodwill." Israeli public broadcaster Kan said a total of roughly 100,000 Moderna vaccines are being shipped to some 15 allies.

They include Honduras, Guatemala, Hungary, Uganda and the Czech Republic — countries that have recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital or expressed interest in opening diplomatic offices there following the Trump administration's move of the U.S. Embassy to the city in 2018. Chad, which established diplomatic ties with Israel in 2019, Mauritania, which is believed to be on the cusp of restoring relations, and several other African countries that have close security ties with Israel, including Ethiopia and Kenya, also appeared on the list.

Asked about Netanyahu using their vaccines as a diplomatic tool, Moderna declined comment.

The Palestinians claim east Jerusalem, captured by Israel in the 1967

Mideast war and later annexed, as the capital of a future state. The competing claims to the city lie at the heart of the decades-long conflict, and most of the international community says the fate of Jerusalem must be resolved through negotiations.

Netanyahu noted that Israel has also pledged to share some vaccines with the Palestinians. Israel has delivered just 2,000 Moderna doses to the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority to inoculate West Bank medical workers.

Otherwise, the Palestinians have struggled to procure their own vaccines. The Palestinian Authority received 10,000 doses of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine, while a rival of President Mahmoud Abbas this week delivered an additional 20,000 Sputnik vaccines to the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip after arranging delivery from the United Arab Emirates.

Together, these vaccines will cover just a tiny fraction of the millions of Palestinians. The Palestinian Authority has said it expects to receive more vaccines through the World Health Organization's COVAX program and other deals, but it remains unclear when the medicines will arrive.

Waseel Abu Yusuf, a senior Palestinian official, accused Netanyahu of playing politics with a humanitarian issue.

"He is using the vaccines needed by some countries to get political support for his policies, like moving embassies to Jerusalem," he said. "The amounts of vaccines he is talking about giving to Palestinians in the West Bank is very small."

The inequity has drawn attention to the global disparity in obtaining vaccines between rich and poor nations and prompted some international criticism.

Lawrence Gostin, professor of global health law at Georgetown University, said it's understandable that Israel would want to take care of its own citizens first. But "at some point it becomes ethically grotesque," he said.

He said that beyond having a moral responsibility to the Palestinians, it would be smart to help them.

"The reason it's a smart thing is that it would gain Israel enormous benefits in its reputation in the region and globally," he said. "Failing to share the vaccine won't be forgotten because so many people needlessly die from preventable disease."

U.N. officials and human rights groups have voiced concerns about the inequity and said that Israel is an occupying power responsible for providing vaccines to the Palestinians. Israel says that under interim peace agreements from the 1990s it has no such responsibility. Israel has vaccinated its own Arab population, including Palestinians in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem.

But Israeli public health experts have called on the government to share the vaccines, given the widespread contact between Israelis and Palestinians. Tens of thousands of Palestinian laborers work inside Israel or its West Bank settlements.

## Hunger-striking Ethiopia politicians 'deteriorating' in jail

**NAIROBI, KENYA (AP):** Lawyers representing jailed Ethiopian opposition politicians say they are concerned for the lives of their clients, whose hunger strike has gone on for nearly a month and drawn international attention as they protest their treatment by the government.

"Four of them have continued with their hunger strike and their health is deteriorating quickly," lawyer Tokuma Daba told The Associated Press, saying he last visited them on Monday. "Our concern now is for their lives. We are told by medics that they need a sophisticated medical treatment, which is lacking now. It is really concerning."

The jailed politicians include media mogul-turned-politician Jawar Mohammed, Bekele Gerba, Hamza Adane and Dejene Tafa. They were arrested along with at least 16 others following the killing of a renowned singer, Hachalu Hundessa, in June 2020. Amid outrage over the killing, violence targeting ethnic minorities claimed the lives of several dozen people, mainly in the Oromia region.

Some ethnic Oromos feel their quest for more democratic space and the freedom to choose their leaders has not been fulfilled since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power in 2018. They accuse him of defaulting on some of his promises by arresting some politicians who returned to Ethiopia from abroad, including Jawar, after he assumed power.

The jailed politicians face charges including conspiring to dismantle the constitution by force and other terror-related offenses. They have rejected the charges as politically motivated.

The prisoners' "treatment by the Ethiopian government is exacerbating a serious crisis, especially as their health deteriorates," former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and current Biden administration nominee for foreign aid chief Samantha Power tweeted last week, calling it critical



for the government to "change course before it is too late." The prisoners assert that their arrests were meant to deny them the chance to take part in Ethiopia's upcoming national election in June. On Tuesday, Ethiopia's election board made it clear that politicians behind bars will not be able to present themselves as candidates.

Tokuma said his clients are conducting a hunger strike for several reasons including protesting the harassment and arrests of their supporters and family members. His clients also seek the release of all political prisoners.

The striking prisoners have rejected being treated in government-owned hospitals, preferring a private hospital. Last week Ethiopia's ambassador to the U.S., Fitsum Arega, tweeted that the offer to treat them at the "Ethiopian equivalent of Walter Reed" National Military Medical Center still stands.

On Tuesday, the Supreme Court of Ethiopia ruled that the prisoners shall receive medical treatment from a private hospital but that the treatment should take place inside the Kaliti prison where they are held.

"Imagine physicians carrying X-rays, oxygen tanks and ICU equipment and con-

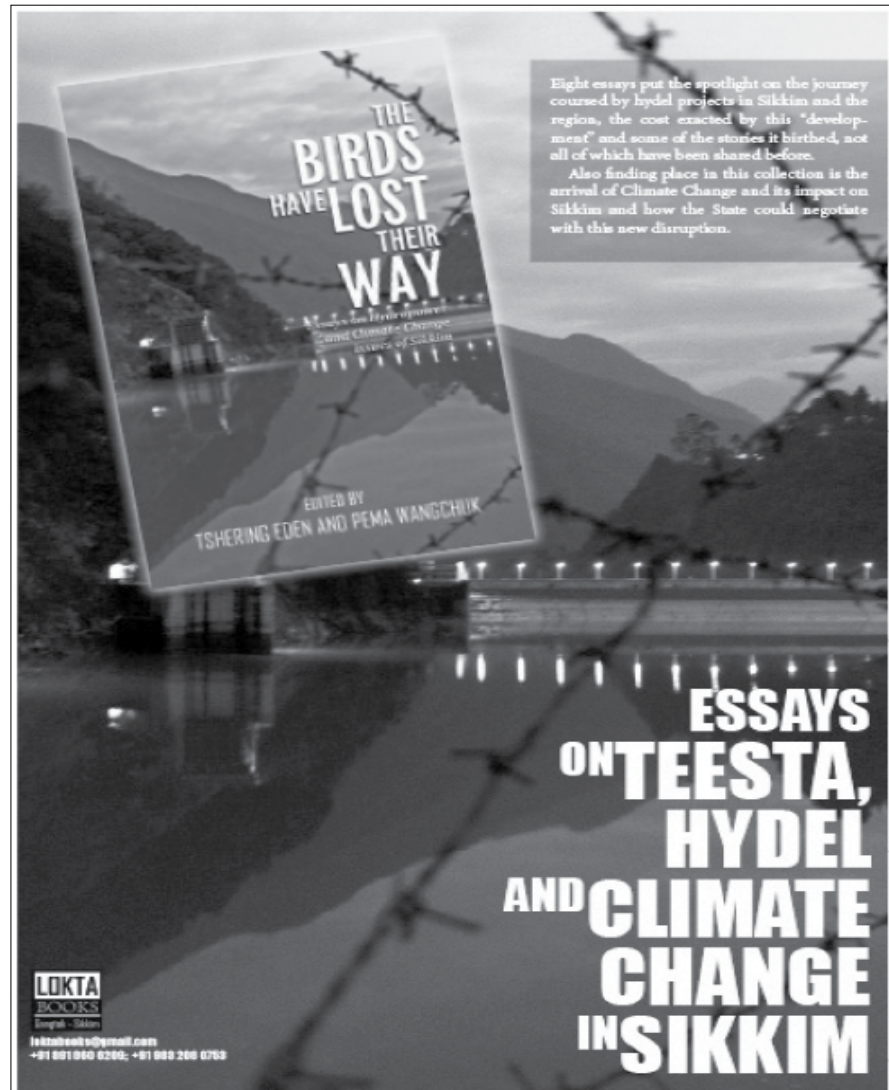
ducting treatment inside a prison cell or in an open field," said another lawyer for the defendants, Tuli Bayissa. "This decision amounts to a death penalty. It's no less harsh than that."

Earlier this month, the head of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, Daniel Bekele, said of the striking prisoners that "very close supervision is required to prevent any grave threat to their health and life and that reasonably justified demands of the prisoners must be addressed."

Quoting Kaliti prison officials, the commission said "most of the demands listed as reasons for the hunger strike are beyond the remit of the administration. And the prison administration does not mistreat the prisoners' visitors."

Henok Gabissa, a former president of the Oromo Studies Association and an observer of Ethiopian politics, said the situation in the Oromia region is "terrible" and asserted that Abiy's administration is deterring Oromo politicians.

"Oromo opposition parties have more legitimacy than Abiy's administration. The public in the region widely support the prisoners and their demands," he said.





## Dear Sir or Madam: Paul McCartney memoir due out in November

**NEW YORK (AP):** Paul McCartney is finally ready to write his memoirs, and will use music — and a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet — to help guide him.

"The Lyrics: 1956 to the Present" will be released Nov. 2, according to a joint announcement Wednesday from the British publisher Allen Lane and from Liveright in the United States.

McCartney, 78, will trace his life through 154 songs, from his teens and early partnership with fellow Beatle John Lennon to his solo work over the past half century. Irish poet Paul Muldoon is editing and will contribute an introduction.

"More often than I can count, I've been asked if I would write an autobiography, but the time has never been right," McCartney said in a statement.

"The one thing I've always managed to do, whether at home or on the road, is to write new songs. I know that some people, when they get to a certain age, like to go to a diary to recall day-to-day events from the past, but I have no such notebooks. What I do have are my songs, hundreds of them, which I've learned serve much the same purpose. And these songs span my entire life."

Financial terms for "The Lyrics," which has a list price of \$100, were not disclosed. Publishers have long sought a McCartney memoir, even though he has spoken often about the past and has participated in such projects as Barry Miles' biography "Paul McCartney: Many Years From Now," and the 1990s documentary and book "The Beatles Anthology." The Rolling Stones' Keith Richards has been equally open about himself, but his 2010 memoir "Life" still sold millions of copies.

No Beatle has written a standard,

full-fledged account of his life. Lennon published two works of stories, poems and drawings and was considered the most gifted with words, but he was murdered in 1980, at age 40. Ringo Starr's "Another Day In the Life" is centered on photographs and quotes, because, the drummer has said, a traditional mem-

nouncement.

McCartney has often received more acclaim for his melodies than for his lyrics, but he has written some of the most quoted songs in recent history, including "Let It Be," "Hey Jude" and "Eleanor Rigby." Muldoon said in a statement that their conversations in recent years



oir would require multiple volumes. George Harrison, who died of cancer in 2001, issued the scrapbook/retrospective "I, Me, Mine" in 1980. According to McCartney's publishers, his songs will be arranged alphabetically, and will include McCartney's comments on when and where they were written and what inspired them. The U.S. edition of the book will be broken into two volumes, contained within a single box.

"Presented with this is a treasure trove of material from McCartney's personal archive — drafts, letters, photographs — never seen before, which make this also a unique visual record of one of the greatest songwriters of all time," according to Wednesday's an-

"confirm a notion at which we had but guessed — that Paul McCartney is a major literary figure who draws upon, and extends, the long tradition of poetry in English." Muldoon is known for such poetry collections as "Moy Sand and Gravel" and "Horse Latitudes," and also has a background in music. He has given spoken-word performances backed by the musical collective Rogue Oliphant; published a book of rock lyrics, "The Word on the Street"; and collaborated on the title track of Warren Zevon's "My Ride's Here." He even mentioned McCartney in a poem, "Sideman":

"I'll be McCartney to your Lennon/ Lenin to your Marx/ Jerry to your Ben &/ Lewis to your Clark"

## Marvel's Wanda has a future, but 'WandaVision' fate unclear

**LOS ANGELES (AP):** When "WandaVision" wraps its initial run next month on the Disney+ streaming service, Elizabeth Olsen's Wanda will make her next appearance in the big-screen "Doctor Strange" sequel.

It's storytelling that determines how and when characters from the Marvel Comics universe hopscotch between TV and movies, Marvel Studios chief Kevin Feige said Wednesday.

"All of the crossover between series, between films, will always vary based on the story," Feige said. "Sometimes (a series) will go into a season two, sometimes it'll go into a feature and then back into a series."

Wanda Maximoff, aka Scarlet Witch, plays opposite Benedict Cumberbatch's title character in "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness," planned for a 2022 release.

Feige wouldn't say whether "WandaVision," Marvel Studios' first original series for Disney+, has a future after its March 5 season finale. The riff on generations of TV sitcoms — with the added superhero twist — brought Wanda and Paul Bettany's character, Vision, to the fore from the "Avengers" movie franchise.

"I've been at Marvel for too long to say a definite no or definite yes to anything," Feige replied when asked about the show's future during a virtual panel discussion held by the Television Critics Association. But second seasons are being considered and planned for series, he said, without giving away details.

There's a flurry of potential new Disney+ candidates, including "The Falcon and the Winter Soldier," debuting March 19 with Anthony Mackie and Sebastian Stan reprising their roles from "Avengers: Endgame."

"Loki," starring Tom Hiddleston revisiting his character following the events of "Endgame," debuts June 11. After "Ms. Marvel" arrives on the streaming service (with the date yet to be announced), the character will move to the next "Captain Marvel" movie, Feige said. He was asked if shifting Marvel stories and characters between film and TV might end up cutting into the potential audience.

"I always say when the lights go down and a movie starts, it's a clean slate — forget everything that's come before and be able to enjoy something that's its own self-contained story line," Feige said. He acknowledged that as the studio makes more shows and films and introduces new characters, it "becomes harder and harder" to meet that goal.

"But it is something that all of our writers and filmmakers pay great attention to, to make sure that fans can follow" the latest chapter and that newcomers can enjoy it too, he said.

When the Walt Disney Co. acquired Marvel Entertainment for about \$4 billion in 2009, prior deals left some of its properties with other studios. Asked if Marvel Studios might be able to regain them, Feige said he believes it could happen, but added that "rumors online about things reverting" to Marvel aren't always true.

## Stevie Wonder tells Oprah he's leaving US for Ghana -- permanently

The 'Heaven Help Us All' singer has previously expressed affection for the African nation Stevie Wonder has plans to move on.

The 70-year-old music icon recently opened up for an interview with Oprah Winfrey, where he revealed that he plans to permanently relocate to Ghana, a country in western Africa. "I want to see this nation smile again and I want to see it before I leave ... to move to Ghana," the singer said in a clip published by Punch Newspapers. "Because I'm going to do that." When asked by Winfrey if he's planning to move permanently, Wonder responded: "I am."

"I don't want to see my children's children's children have to say, 'Oh, please like me, please, please respect me, please know that I'm important, please value me,'" he explained.

In 1994, the "Superstition" singer told a Washington gathering of the International Association of African American Music that he had grown fond of Ghana while visiting. According to the Orlando Sentinel, he said he feels that "there's more of a sense of community there."

Wonder was born in Michigan in 1950 and grew up to become a Motown music star and pioneer despite being blind.



**HELLO JENNY!** Actress Jenny McCarthy waved hello in a bright pink dress and tall black boots backstage at The Masked Singer in Los Angeles.

## Carly Waddell Shuts Down "Rude" Body Shamers With Message About Self-Love

Bachelor Nation's Carly Waddell responded after social media users posted negative comments about her body. Carly Waddell wishes she could post a photo to social media without getting feedback about her body.

After returning home from celebrating her brother's wedding in Florida, the 35-year-old Bachelor in Paradise alum shared an Instagram pic of herself on Wednesday, Feb. 24. The mom of two captioned the pre-workout shot, "Ok ok vacation over...move body, stop eating Candy..." Some of her followers replied to the post with critical remarks. One individual wrote, "This is exactly why us normal girls have anxiety. What part of you needs to stop eating candy?"

Another user commented, "Diet no!! Skinny enough." A third person added, "looking very skinny Carly." This led the former The Bachelor contestant, who confirmed her split from husband Evan Bass in December, to take to her Instagram Story and share some thoughts.

"OK, I'm gonna get on a soapbox for a minute—bear with me," she said. "In no way is stopping candy a diet post. That's super weird, so the people that are saying that, that makes no sense. Candy's not healthy for you, like at all." She continued, "And for the people saying I'm too skinny—that's just rude. You're just being rude. I don't understand why wom-

en can't just post a photo of themselves where they feel like they look good without getting a backlash." Carly went on to express a powerful message about women not needing to conform to others' expectations.

"Basically, what I'm trying to say here is



women are beautiful, and they're beautiful in every single stage of their life: in pregnancy, in whatever weight, in whatever form," she said. "And they should be able to post that and make jokes and not have people come after them and say mean things. And they should just feel good about themselves, so I'm going to tell myself that today."

**ARIES:** Everything happens for a reason. We repeat: everything happens for a reason. You are at a turning point in your journey where you are able to perceive the past through the lens of wisdom. You are grateful for each and every one of the experiences, and you wouldn't trade them for a thing. So, keep moving forward with a sense of openness as you adopt 'no regrets' as your mantra.

Tip: The best is yet to come.

**TAURUS:** Everything you need is available to you right here and in this moment. We repeat: everything you need is available to you right here and in this moment. So focus on the good, Taurus, and in doing so, you will give the good in your life the power to multiply. The cards are also bringing your attention to your community and your family ties. Your cup is overflowing, beloved, and your relationships are mirroring the energy of joy and fulfillment.

Tip: When your cup has runneth over!

**GEMINI:**

What you're stepping into is a rather tumultuous period. The things that you have considered sacred could be taken away from you at any moment. What the cards want you to remember is that nothing is inher-

ently good or bad, that everything is taking place for a higher reason, and that you are being protected even in your worst moments. A Dumbledore quote to put a smile where it belongs: "Happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light."

Tip: Trust that everything is taking place for a higher reason.

**CANCER:**

What are the attributes you admire in the other person? Focus on the good, Cancer. Focus on the things that awaken a sense of joy and passion within. Know that in doing so, you will hold space for your relationship to blossom. Those who have been repeating the victim narrative in their head are being reminded that tragic tales are overrated. The best love stories are the ones where the protagonists find a way into each other's arms against all odds. So embody courage and take a great risk!

Tip: Tragic tales are overrated.

**LEO:**

Not everything is in our control, Leo, and that is the truth of the human experience. Given what's taking place right now is tumultuous, you're being asked to let go of your false sense of control. Step into the role of the observer. Become a witness to that which must be offered to the

sacred fire. Remembering that destruction is the first step of the creation process will help you get through this.

Tip: Surrender. Let go of that false sense of control, beloved.

**VIRGO:**

The Magician, as the name suggests, is one of the most magical cards in the major arcana of the tarot. It depicts a magus, standing by his altar, beckoning the mysterious forces that help him turn thoughts to things. What makes him oh-so-special is the fact that he possesses all the tools one needs in order to manifest their wildest dreams. His appearance in your reading is a reminder of your own superpowers, Virgo. It's time to level up, baby! Trust that the resources and assistance you need at every step along the way will be made available to you.

Tip: Go from thoughts to things.

**LIBRA:**

Spoiler alert, Libra: you are only living a percentage of your potential. There is so much you're yet to explore within yourself. The cards are urging you to stop playing small and give those larger-than-life dreams the attention they deserve. Yes, this journey will take a lot from you. Yes, you will have to cultivate focus and discipline. However, what you will gain at the end of it will trump everything else.

Tip: Make focus and discipline your power words.

**SCORPIO:**

You are stepping into a period of endings, Scorpio. But the last stage is never easy, is it now? Challenge yourself to keep moving forward and onwards nonetheless. Remembering what awaits you on the other side will provide you with the motivation you need at this moment. Word of warning: don't make everything in your life about your career, though. Maintaining a work-life balance is the only thing that will keep you from losing your sanity at this point.

Tip: This is the final stage of the project, so keep going.

**SAGITTARIUS:**

There are times we're called to board the flight of fantasy and give the world something it has never seen before. And then, there are times when we're required to play it safe, draw from our past experiences, and make practical decisions. Word for the wise: keeping your feet on the ground will serve you well at this time. While you're at it, cut down on your frivolous expenditure. Maintaining a strict budget will help you create that reserve you need for the future.

Tip: Keep your feet on the ground, Sagittarius.

**CAPRICORN:**

What you're feeling right now is a sense of stagnation, which is adding to your troubles, Capricorn. Here's the thing, though: you haven't reached a dead end. There

is a way out of this dilemma. Exercise your creative muscles in order to find a solution that works for you. No, it won't be easy to get out of this rut. Challenge yourself to bring about a shift nonetheless, knowing that victory will ultimately be yours.

Tip: It's not in you to accept defeat.

**AQUARIUS:**

Maybe you didn't miss out on this opportunity. Maybe the timing wasn't quite right. A love you let go of a long time ago is making its way back into your existence, Aquarius. The suitor at hand has transformed and so have you. So, approach this relationship from a space of truth and honesty. Know that you are being offered the chance to build a foundation that will survive the test of time and tide.

Tip: Approach the given relationship from a space of truth and honesty.

**PISCES:**

You may find yourself reflecting upon why things turned out the way they did, but there are no right answers, Pisces. So, drop the mental gymnastics. Tune in to that space of silence within your heart. The more you let go of the old story, the easier it will be for you to forgive your past. Remember, the process of releasing what no longer serves you is the secret to making space for what is truly a vibrational match for you.

Tip: Let go of the past.