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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

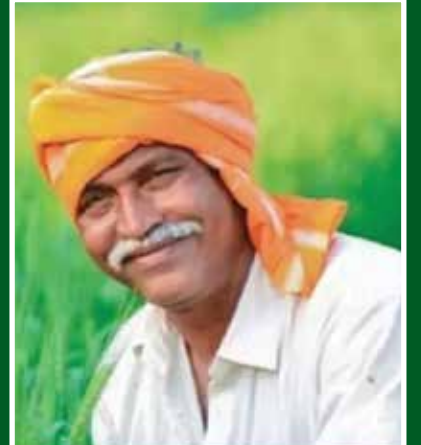
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GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

PUTTING FARMERS FIRST



NEED FOR REFORM

- * Disparity between Agriculture & other sectors despite economic liberalisation
- * Fragmented and insufficient markets with high market fees & charges
- * Inadequate infrastructure and credit facilities
- * Information asymmetry
- * Restriction in licensing

FARMER'S PRODUCE TRADE AND COMMERCE (PROMOTION AND FACILITATION) ACT, 2020

- * Freedom of Choice of sale & purchase of farmers' produce at remunerative prices
- * Efficient transparent and barrier free inter and intra-state trade and commerce outside physical premises of APMCs
- * APMCs will continue to function: Act provides farmers with additional marketing channels
- * No bearing on MSP
- * Payment has to be made to farmers on the same day or within 3 working days where procedure so requires
- * Permits online trading

FARMERS (EMPOWERMENT AND PROTECTION) AGREEMENT ON PRICE ASSURANCE AND FARM SERVICES ACT, 2020

- * Legal framework for agreements between farmers and sponsors for purchase of farming produce and provision of farm services entered into before harvest
- * Guidelines for model farming agreements by Central Government
- * Price of the produce will be clearly mentioned in the contract
- * Clearly specified dispute resolution mechanism: Protecting rights of both farmers and buyers

ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2020

- * Act invoke only in an extraordinary situation:
 - ⇒ War
 - ⇒ Famine
 - ⇒ Extraordinary price rises
 - ⇒ Natural calamities
- * Imposition of stock limits only be based on price rise and can only be imposed if there is 100% increase in retail price of horticultural produce and a 50% increase in the retail price of non-perishable produce

BENEFITS OF FARM REFORMS

- * Single unified market
- * Freedom for farmers to sell their produce to whom they want and where they want
- * End of APMC cartel monopoly
- * MSP continues to act as safety net for farmers
- * Legal framework protecting farmer rights
- * Reduction in market fees, taxes etc. and better price discovery
- * Development of infrastructure close to farm gate
- * Contract farming: Form of price assurance and boost linkages with food processing sector

FARMING CAN BECOME PROFITABLE EVEN FOR SMALL & MARGINAL FARMERS

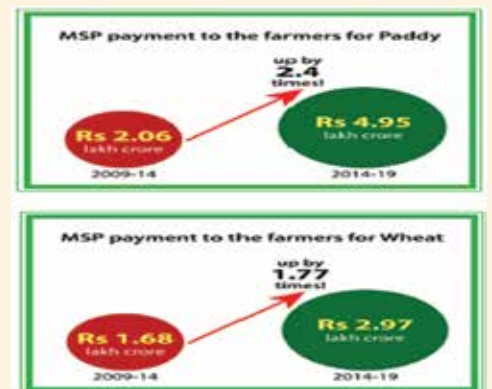
S.No.	Before Reforms	After Reforms
1	Can sell notified farm produce only in APMC Mandi Monopoly of middlemen Cartels of traders could keep prices artificially low	Freedom of choice to sell in APMC mandi or choose any other seller Multiple options to sell Better price realisation through Competition
2	Once produce brought to mandi, farmer has to accept whatever price is offered	Can bargain for price even at door step
3	Pay mandi, fee, commission, and other charges borne by producers and consumers	No fee, no commission Large savings to benefit producers and consumers.
4.	Large price spread Fragmented markets Long chain of intermediaries	Higher share of producer in consumer's payment Low cost of logistics Minimum or no intermediary
5.	No opportunity for farm youth to trade agri commodities	Rural farm youth will get opportunity to trade and run supply chain.
6.	Cannot directly sell to consumers bypassing middle men	Can sell directly to anyone by passing middlemen and earn higher price

BENEFITS OF FARM REFORMS

S.No.	Before Reforms	After Reforms
7.	Freedom to sell fruits and vegetables outside of APMC mandi existed in many states	This freedom is extended to all agri produce and all over the country
8.	Small land holders do not have scale and bargaining power in input and output markets	Empowered to access to modern input, services and protection against price risk Farmer Producer Organisations help small farmers' organise for better bargaining power
9.	Contract farming restricted to some pockets and bureaucrat control	Contract on terms favourable to farmers Farmers can get pre-decided prices based upon agreements with buyers
10.	Farmers not part of value chains	Farmers can be partner in value chain
11.	Exports getting uncompetitive due to long chain of intermediaries and poor logistics	Export competitiveness will increase and benefit farmers

INCREASE IN PROCUREMENT FROM FARMERS

- * Compared with 2009-10 to 2013-14, MSP payment increased during last 5 years by
 - ⇒ 2.4 times for paddy (Rs. 4.95 lakh crores)
 - ⇒ 75 times for pulses (Rs. 49,000 crores)
 - ⇒ 10 times for oilseeds and copra (Rs. 25,000 crores)
 - ⇒ 1.77 times for wheat (Rs. 2.97 lakh crores)



MYTH VS REALITY

Myth	Reality
Farmers will not benefit from Farm Laws	Farmers can choose their buyers and decide their price
No scope for dispute resolution for farmers	Act promotes dispute resolution in a time bound manner with minimum cost at the level of local SDM's
Farmers won't get timely payment	Buyers to pay farmers on the same day or within 3 days on agreement
Farmer organisations will not benefit	All Farmer Organisations will be treated as "Farmers" and they will get the same benefits
MSP will not continue	MSP will continue as before
FCI will stop procurement from farmers	FCI and other Government agencies will continue procurement from farmers as before

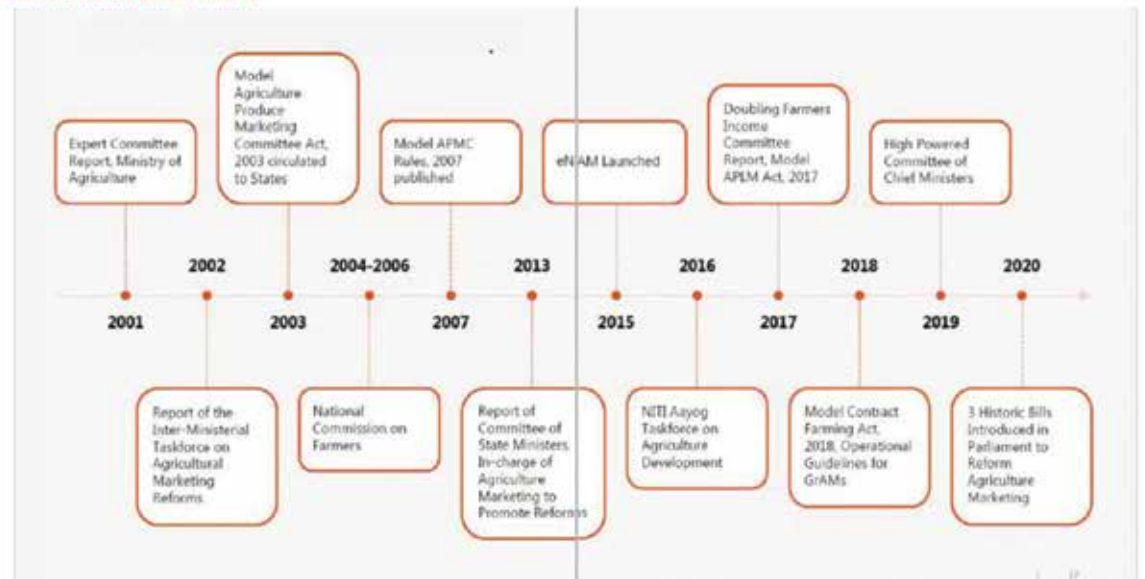
MYTH VS REALITY

Myth	Reality
Farmers need license to sell outside APMC mandis	Farmers can sell produce outside mandis to buyer who gives best price; without registration/ transaction fee
APMC mandis will close down in future	Mandi system will continue as before
Act invades rights of State APMCs	Act does not dilute APMC Act. It allows for additional trade outside mandis
Act doesn't safeguard farmer payments	Act provides sufficient guidelines to safeguard farmers interests
Act will lead to agriculture land acquisition by corporates	Act bars transfer of farmer land/ permanent structure.

CONSULTATION PROCESS

- * Stakeholder consultations on agriculture issues have continued for past two decades by various Governments
- * Expert Committee (2000) under Shri Shankarlal Guru suggested inter-alia repeal of Essential Commodities Act, 1955, promotion of direct marketing and involvement of private sector in marketing extension services
- * Inter-Ministerial Task Force (2002) recommendations include revitalisation of marketing system, reforms in APMC Act and encouraging contract farming
- * Model APMC Act, 2003 on agriculture marketing formulated in consultation with State Governments: Model APMC Rules formulated in 2007
 - ⇒ Model APMC Act, 2003 adopted by 18 States
- * National Commission on agriculture under Shri M.S. Swaminathan (2006) recommended promotion of Unified National Market
- * Committee of State Ministers in charge of agricultural marketing constituted for extensive consultations (2010)
- * Formulation of Model APLM Act, 2017 to remove fragmentation of market and promotion of National Market for Agriculture Produce
 - ⇒ Adopted by 5 States
- * Regular engagement with States has continued before promulgation of the Farm Ordinances (June 2020)
- * Extensive steps taken to sensitise farming communities, FPOs and cooperatives for awareness of One Nation, One Market

CONSULTATION PROCESS: TIMELINE



Mamata Banerjee takes fight with Visva Bharati officials to University Road

KOLKATA, 28 DEC

[NDTV]: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said today that the Public Works Department (PWD) will take back control of a road near the Visva Bharati University's campus. The 2.9 km long road connects two campuses of the university -- Santiniketan and Sriniketan -- and the university authorities were given possession of it in 2017.

"There are many complaints from local people that they are not being allowed to use the road and it was causing inconvenience. So, the PWD will now take control of it," Ms Banerjee said at an administrative meeting at Bolpur in Birbhum district.

Around 3,000 locals reside in the area near the road which also runs past the houses of Nobel laureate Amartya Sen and painter Nandalal Bose.

Locals say the frequent closure of this road by university authorities causes problems as they are forced to take a roundabout bypass instead. Around 60 families had written to the chief minister in September complaining about the inconvenience and urging her government to take possession of the century-old heritage road as they fear that access to it might be blocked.

Mamata Banerjee's decision to hand it back to the PWD today comes amid her confrontation with university Vice Chancellor Bidyut Chakrabarty over an event and her support for Amartya Sen over reports that he is on the Visva Bharati University's list of illegal plot holders.

Ms Banerjee's Trinamool party had recently accused the University authorities of not inviting the chief minister to its centenary celebration event attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. On Friday, the chief minister also came out in support of Mr Sen over his ancestral property at the Visva Bharati University's campus in Santiniketan and in a letter addressed to him said some "nouveau invaders" are raising baseless allegations.

Ms Banerjee today said the BJP is out to destroy Bengal's greatest institutions and to attack Bengal's greatest icons.

The chief minister is scheduled to hold a roadshow down the main street of Bolpur tomorrow as part of her election outreach. Her roadshow comes around a week after BJP leader Amit Shah visited Bolpur and the university campus.

Three-day training for Pakyong farmers

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 28 DEC:

Citizens Foundation conducted a three-day training programme on Improve Package of Practices (IPOP) and Farm Management under HDFC Parivartan for the lead farmers from 10 villages of the project area under Pakyong Sub-division at Hotel Zing Zang from 28 to 30 Dec, 2020.

As per a press release, the objective of the programme is to provide technical knowledge to the lead farmers on non-pesticide management and to improve the package of practices on organic inputs with locally available resources.

A total of 40 participants attended the training programme.



Project Manager - SOULS, Sangita Dahal, inaugurated the programme and briefed about the objective of the training programme. Technical Consultant, APM- Supply Chain and Marketing, Lekharam Kar-

ki along with APM- Agriculture, Suman Ghimiray briefed about the agenda of the training programme and flow of presentations. Technical Consultant, Laxmi Prasad Khatiwada, SIRD, Govt of Sikkim

along with Block Technology Manager, ATMA, Yogesh Gautam, joined the training programme as resource persons.

On the last day of the training programme, the trainees will be provid-

ed field demonstration and practical training on on-farm organic input e.g.: preparation of Jeeva Amritam, Bija Amritam, Agni Astra, Neem Astra, Butter Milk Solution, Ruler Compost, Vermicompost, etc.

SKM opens office in Tashithang

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 28 DEC:

A ward-level party office of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha was inaugurated at Tashithang ward under Loosing-Pacheykhani GPU in Rhenock constituency by the area MLA, Bishnu Kumar Khatiwada on Monday.

The area MLA also visited Tashithang School today and heard out grievances shared by the headmaster, an SKM press release informs.

The release adds that a ward-level committee of the party was also constituted followed by a ward-level coordination meeting.

One arrested with brown sugar



SUMMIT REPORT

NAMCHI, 28 DEC:

Acting upon credible source information, one Md. Habib, 31 yrs, r/o Siliguri, West Bengal was intercepted at Namchi and 19.47 grams of

brown sugar was recovered.

Accordingly a criminal case under relevant sections of NDPS Act 1985 is being registered against the accused person.

New Chairperson takes charge of Women's Commission

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 28 DEC:

Chungkipu Lepcha, newly-appointed Chairperson for Women's Commission, Government of Sikkim, took charge of her office today. She was accorded warm welcome by the office staff and well-wishers.

A retired Headmistress, Ms Lepcha had also contested the 2019 assembly election from Dzongu on a Sikkim Krantikari Morcha ticket.

On her way back home, she was given a grand reception by youth and supporters at Kabi in North Sikkim.

COVID-19 vaccination dry run begins in 2 Gujarat districts

AHMEDABAD, 28 DEC

[PTI]: A two-day dry run to check the preparedness of health authorities for a future nationwide COVID-19 vaccination programme began on Monday in Rajkot and Gandhinagar districts of Gujarat, officials said.

Gujarat is one of the four states chosen by the Centre to conduct the mock COVID-19 vaccination drive.

"In Gujarat, the dry run is being carried out in Rajkot district, Rajkot city, Gandhinagar district and Gandhinagar city," State Immunisation Office Dr Nayan Jani told reporters.

He said local health officials of these districts and cities will engage in administrative work on the first day of the drive.

"The actual field vis-

its will begin on Tuesday," Mr Jani said, adding that actual (potential) vaccine shots will not be administered on people during the dry run.

Gandhinagar Municipal Corporation (GMC) has identified 125 beneficiaries in the city who will be covered during the mock drill on Tuesday, said GMC Health Officer Dr Kalpesh Goswami. He said a total of 50 health personnel will visit the identified beneficiaries at five different sites in the city.

"On Monday, we will be doing only administrative and paper work, such as uploading data of beneficiaries, manpower and cold chain infrastructure on Co-WIN (a central software application developed for the vaccination drive)," he said.

ABSS Vidhya Bharati holds coordination meet



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 27 DEC:

Akhil Bharatiya Sikcha Sansthaan Vidhya Bharati held a coordination meeting at Ridang-based Saraswati Shishu Niketan, West Sikkim, today, a press release informs.

President, School Management Committee, Hari Prasad Ghimirey, Treasurer, Ram Chandra Dhital, Principal, Sunita Pradhan and parents attended the meeting.

The meeting started with the ceremonial lamp lighting and prayers

followed by information about the annual examination which starts from 04 Jan, 2021.

The meeting was also overseen by Sikkim Coordinator, Vidya Bharti, Mohan Sharma and office Secretary, Surya Dhital.

Foundation laid for pavilion at Lingi Payong School



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 28 DEC:

The foundation for construction of pavillion at Lingi Payong Secondary school was laid today by Tulshiram Adhikari (Headmaster at Government JHS Lingee Karjee, South Sikkim), a press release informs.

Present during the function were school in-charge, staff members and some local gentries.

The pavillion is being constructed in memory of Late Sunita Adhikari, wife of TR Adhikari, Sunitale, Lower Payong, South Sikkim.

TR Adhikari has assured support till the completion of the pavillion's construction which

may cost him around Rs 3 lakh. He had already provided Rs 1 lakh for the initial works, the release mentions.

The responsibilities of construction of the pavillion has been handed over to Raj Kumar Gautam (Raj Kumar) and Manorath Gautam. Further, Gafur Alam, mason who is also looking after construction of 8 roomed school building has been given the task of completion of the pavillion.

The site selection and other modalities for the construction was managed by school staff Chetaram Khatiwara, Rohit Acharya, Arjun Koirala, S Singh in consultation with

few SMC members and senior members of the village.

TR Adhikari is an alumnus of Lingi Payong Secondary School, who worked as teacher and headmaster (JHS) and headmaster I/c (SS) and has been an active member of the civil society. He had also started fellowship for students of Lingi Payong School who secure more than 60% marks in CBSE/AISSE exam.

Headmaster of the school, Suraj Kumar Sharma on behalf of Lingi Payong Secondary School family expressed heartfelt gratitude to TR Adhikari and wished him a blessed life ahead.

SKM forms WLC for Satam in Rangang Yangang

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 28 DEC:

The final phase of the ongoing Sikkim Krantikari Morcha Ward Level Committee formation meeting for Rangang Yangang Constituency was conducted for Satam Ward today wherein 21

families joined SKM, a press release informs.

The meeting was held under the chairmanship of Area Incharge, RK Basnet, and was attended by CLC President, Tengayla Namka Bhutia, Chalak Morcha, State Coordi-

nator, Phula Bhutia, Social Media Coordinator, South West, Milan Basnet, amongst others.

With today's meeting SKM Rangang Yangang concludes the WLC formation programme in the Constituency.

CM's greetings on Pughal Parim

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 28 DEC:

Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang has extended his warm greetings and best wishes to the people of Sikkim on the occasion of Pughal Parim, a press release informs.

It is also known as udhauli and is one of the important festivals of the Bhujel community in Sikkim where people offer food prepared using recently harvested grains, pulses, roots, tubers and fruits to their ancestors. The celebration begins from the day of the full moon in the month of December (Mangshir Purney

to Mangshir Panchami) and is observed for five days signalling the beginning of the harvest. The main highlight of the festival is a ritual dance called Chudka performed by a large group of the community in their traditional attire.

In his message, the Chief Minister states that the festival offers the people an opportunity to rejoice and celebrate their rituals and traditions which is a gift from the ancestors and offer their prayers to Mother Nature. He wishes for happiness, good health and abundance for all the citizens of Sikkim on the occasion.

Team of officials inspect Rangpo Police Check Post



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 28 DEC:

SDM Rangpo along with SDPO Rangpo and DE-Power, Rangpo Sub-Division inspected the status of Police Check Post and Composite Check Posts in Rangpo today, a press release informs.

The team inspected the condition of the tower light and other lighting at the gateway and found them working. The tower lights shall be switched on and switched off daily at 5.00pm and 6.00am respectively.

The sanitation at the

Check Post will be monitored by Rangpo Nagar Panchayat and also watering of road especially at the Check Posts shall be done by Rangpo Nagar Panchayat for which installation of water tanks will be taken up.

The estimate for the replacement of ceiling, roof including new internal electrification of the Police Check Post has also been framed by the Assistant Engineer-Singtam, Buildings and Housing Department.

~ SummitTIMES ~ CLASSIFIEDS

LAND FOR SALE

Two plots available - 30X40 sq ft and 50X30 sq ft
Junkeri Dara, Samlik Marchak

Price negotiable

Contact : 6296366498,
9641878315, 9593262407

LAND FOR SALE

A land measuring an area for 50x32 1/2 at Roadside just below housing colony is for sale. It is just a one minute walking distance from Namchi bazaar taxi stand. Interested party may contact 9593373387 and 9434406761

LAND FOR SALE

An area measuring 1 acre at Sadam South Sikkim near Loretto Convent School at Gupti road. Price negotiable any one interested can contact:
78640-04501, 62970-03235, 98320-48410

FOR RENT

Two and half storeyed (1st to 3rd floor) complex is available for rent in the heart of Ranipool Bazaar (Opposite UCO Bank). The building area is 35'x60' appx. in each floor and is fit for offices, shopping complexes, guest houses, banks etc. Contact: 8509755220, 8348007688.

GENERAL LAND FOR SALE

General land sale at Lower Sichey, suitable for construction, good locality, near the road, Total size: 90x55ft, (30x55ft each plot). genuine person may contact@9734122366.

BUILDING FOR SALE

A two storey building constructed on plot area 50x40 ft. at Upper Phong near Phong SS ,Namthang South Sikkim is on sale. Cost Rs 60 Lakhs (Negotiable). Interested may contact : 8145829309, 7864937800, 9749897695.

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

email us: news@summittimes.com

CM chairs meeting with Poklok-Kamrang Panchayats and party reps

“WILL TOUR CONSTITUENCY IN JAN”

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 DEC:**

Chief Minister and Sikkim Krantikari Morcha president, PS Tamang chaired a co-ordination meeting with Zilla Panchayats, Panchayats, SKM CLC president and party functionaries from Poklok-Kamrang at Samman Bhawan today.

In a Facebook post, Mr Tamang informed that he expressed gratitude to the public of Poklok-Kamrang for bestowing their trust on him and electing him as their representative.

“We were unable to execute several of our programs as planned due to the pandemic which also restricted our movement to meet the public,” he wrote.

Mr Tamang who is also the Poklok-Kamrang MLA informed that, “... starting next year, we will be pushing forward in full steam to fulfil the demands and aspirations of our citizens.”



He informed that gathering about his three-day tour of Poklok-Kamrang planned for next month wherein he will meet the public of his constituency.

“It will not be fair if I engage with people from other constituencies on those days, therefore I request all to refrain from travelling so that the day

is reserved for citizens of that constituency, adding that we will be visiting every part of the State in days to come,” he said.

The SKM president further appealed to the gathering not to delve on the past and unite for the common goal of uplifting and developing the area in order to set an example for other constituencies to follow.

He also extended

gratitude to all those individuals working towards the welfare of the area and informed the gathering that he will have people in the area who will correspond with the Chief Minister's Office and serve as a bridge between the public and the Chief Minister's Office.

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COVID-19: Over 20,000 new infections reported in single day

NEW DELHI, DEC 28 (PTI): India's COVID-19 caseload rose to 1,02,07,871 with 20,021 infections being reported in a day, while recoveries have surged to 97.82 lakh, according to Union Health Ministry data updated on Monday.

The death toll increased to 1,47,901 with 279 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 97,82,669, pushing the national recovery rate to 95.83 per cent, while the COVID-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent.

The COVID-19 active caseload remained below 3 lakh for the seventh consecutive day.

There are 2,77,301 active coronavirus infections in the country, which comprise 2.72 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11,

80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and crossed the one crore mark on December 19.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), 16,88,18,054 samples have been tested up to December 27 with 7,15,397 samples being tested on Sunday. The 279 new fatalities include 66 from Maharashtra, 29 from West Bengal and 25 from Kerala.

The 1,47,901 deaths reported so far in the country include 49,255 from Maharashtra followed by 12,069 from Tamil Nadu, 12,062 from Karnataka, 10,453 from Delhi, 9,598 from West Bengal, 8,306 from Uttar Pradesh, 7,094 from Andhra Pradesh and 5,299 from Punjab.

The health ministry said that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

“Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research,” the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

Chauribotey in finals of 6th T-20 Cricket Tourney



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 DEC:**

The semi-final match of the 6th T-20 Cricket Tournament at Rangpo Bazaar Playground was held between Chauribotey and Alkem today, a press release informs.

The tournament was attended by International Human Rights Council president, Ganesh Sharma as chief guest and

Cheena Pradhan as special guest. The match was won by the Chauribotey, thus qualifying for the finals of the tournament.

The patron of the organising committee, Srijana Subba informed that the final match will be held on 03 Jan, 2021 wherein the winners of the match will be awarded with trophies and cash prize.

COVID claims 36-year-old woman



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 DEC:**

After single day spikes went as high as 115 some days back, the state saw no new cases of COVID-19 in the last 24 hours ending Monday morning. However, this is due to the low number of tests conducted in the last 24 hours. Since the VRD Lab remains closed on Sundays, no RT-PCR tests were conducted and only 22 samples were tested via Truenat and Rapid Antigen Testing.

There are now 531 active cases of novel coronavirus in the State, of which four are currently in the ICU facility of STNM hospital. With no new cases, Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 remained at 5845, of which 5094 have been discharged from home and facility isolation.

It has to be mentioned here that out of the 22 samples tested on Sunday, 04 were tested by TrueNat and 18 were tested by rapid antigen testing.

In the meanwhile, one 36-year-old woman from Pachey, Pakyong in East District passed away here at STNM hospital on Sunday. This is the 126th

COVID related death in Sikkim.

In the daily health bulletin on Monday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia informed that the patient was admitted in STNM hospital on 23 Dec after testing positive for COVID-19 in rapid antigen testing. He informed that she passed away at around 1:30 PM on 27 Dec due to Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome and COVID pneumonia.

This is a COVID death with comorbidities as the patient was diabetic, Mr Bhutia stated.

ASGTBS to host state-level Tamu Lochhar celebrations at Mannan Kendra



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 DEC:**

Akhil Sikkim Gurung Tamu Boudh Sangh is all set to host the state-level celebration of Tamu Lochhar in a grand manner here at Manan Kendra on Wednesday.

Chief Minister PS Tamang is scheduled to attend as the chief guest for the celebrations which will include the felicitation of leading personalities of the community.

Addressing a press

conference here this afternoon, Advisor to the CM, Rohit Raj Maharaj, who is also chairing the celebration committee, informed that members of the Gurung community from different parts in the State will be attendance as will representatives from different organizations of different communities and religions.

He mentioned that the association will also be felicitated the CM for his work for the better-

ment of the community and to unite all communities of the State.

Rohit Raj Maharaj added that Mannan Bhawan will also be decked with a traditional Rodhi Ghar model and artifacts of the community and other stalls to showcase the culture, traditions and practices of the community.

Akhil Sikkim Gurung Tamu Boudh Sangh was established in 1994 and has more than 50,000 members.

Sikkim wins first ever medal in Zonal Athletics C'ship

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 DEC:**

Rinchen Lepcha won Sikkim's first ever medal in the East Zone Junior Athletics Championship held recently at Guwahati, Assam.

Rinchen won a silver medal for Sikkim in 1000 meters Run in U-20 men's category on Monday in the ongoing 32nd East Zone Junior Athletics Championship 2020. He completed the run with a timing of 35:40.9 seconds. Rinchen hails from Upper Sichey, Gangtok.

It has to be mentioned here that a nine-member team of Sikkim Ama-



teur Athletic Association [SAMA] represented Sikkim in the championship, which started on 27 Dec at Guwahati. The team is led by RB Subba as the team coach.

While congratulating Rinchen, SAMA general secretary, Thupden Ravgal mentioned that this was the first ever medal

for the state in the East Zone Junior Athletic Championship. He mentioned that other athletes of Sikkim will participate in other events on 29 Dec, the last day of the championship and the association is hopeful that Sikkimese athletes will win more medals in their events.

STI-based developmental measures being explored for Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 DEC:**

Dr D Dutta, Advisor/Scientist, Ministry of Science and Technology, called on the Chief Minister at Mintokgang, today, a press communiqué from the Chief Minister's Office informs.

Various Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) based developmental measures were discussed as possible tools to augment socio-economic development in the state through dynamic workmanship and implementation of new efforts and technological methods via the State Science & Technology Department, the release adds.

The discussion included the initiation of Science and Technology Cells in all districts of Sikkim to facilitate socially-relevant STI interventions.

The meeting also discussed starting mission-mode programmes for the welfare of special-needs section of the



society viz. differently abled persons, women and youth of Sikkim, the release adds.

The initiation of mission-mode projects for new technological solutions for State-specific requirements to augment agricultural productivity in collaboration with international partners like UNDP was also discussed today.

Dr Dutta was accompanied by Director, Science and Technology, DT Bhutia and Joint Director Suman Thapa.

The Chief Minister gave a patient hearing to the details of the proposals placed and extended his support for the people-centric initiatives of the department.

The proposal to establish a District Science Centre in and around Jorethang was also welcomed by the Chief Minister who thanked the team for their visit and assured every possible support towards the proliferation of STI-based initiatives.

SAATHI Community Outreach Program at Chuwatar



**SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 28 DEC:**

SAATHI supported by Titan Company Ltd, organized a Community Outreach Program at Center for Addiction Medicine, Chuwatar, today, a press release informs.

The objective of this event was to provide medical support to the facility, the release mentions.

The program began with a welcome note by representative from the centre, Dr Birendra Chettri, followed by

experience sharing by special guest Counselor of SRDS, Nimtar, Udai Rai, where he shared his personal experience and emphasized that it is up to the individual to have a troubled life or a trouble free life.

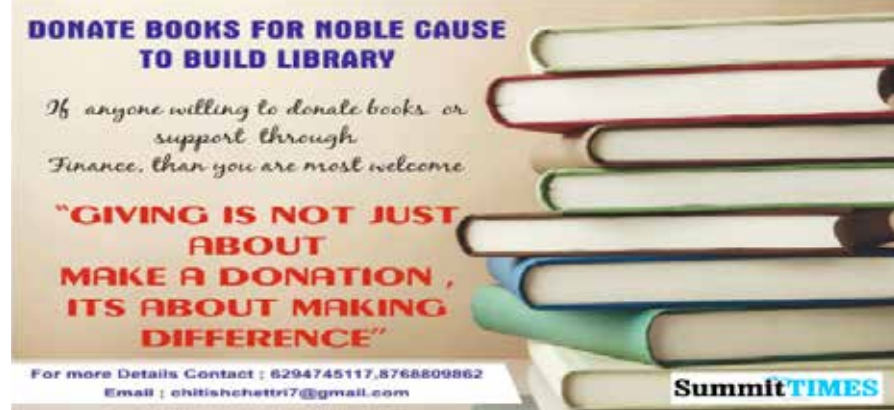
As a gesture of support, SAATHI team provided medical aid of approximately 20,000 to the facility. This was followed by a group song by the patients of the facility.

CMO, Singtam District Hospital, Tempo Gyaltsen

Bhutia, was the chief guest of the program and felicitated Udai Rai for his commendable service and dedication towards the society.

A friendly volley ball match was held between the in-house patients and the staff along with a painting competition. The winner of the volley ball match and painting competition were awarded prizes by the chief guest.

The program ended with vote of thanks by SAATHI team.



Facilitate Reading Among the Young

Come together to put together more libraries

The weather has packed up and the sales of room heaters have spiked. What the pall of winter weather has also achieved is that it has alleviated some of the guilt Gangtokians must collectively feel for not having factored in anything for the young when the crores were being apportioned for infrastructure development. With the stadium acquired for the tourist fest, the hordes of youngsters have lost the only proper ground they could play and train on. And Gangtok children already did not have much to choose from by way of safe and healthy outdoor spaces. But now that the children are forced indoors by the combined assault of Covid and Cold, another denial that the younger generation is suffering comes into focus – it is bad enough that Sikkim denies its young with safe outdoor spaces, but the situation only worsens in the face of the fact that they are even denied literary escapes.

Not only is there no presence of children's literature either in the local publishing scene or substantially enough in the book-stands, even access to a decent public library remains largely non-existent. The State Library is now lodged in a more indulgent space, rescued from the corner it had been tucked into when what was budgeted as a Community space was appropriated to accommodate the secretariat. Hopefully, the babus will completely evacuate and allow Mannan Bhawan to become the Community Complex it was envisioned as. And that will be an exciting exercise because the handsome complex has tremendous potential as such a facility. Of course, the library is continuing with its task and, until the pandemic upset too many plans, also hosted storytelling sessions. Here's to hoping that when Mannan Bhawan is fully reverted to its original role as a multipurpose cultural complex, and before the space is sliced up for the grown-ups, a considerably appointed section for young readers is carved out.

The dearth of libraries is unfortunate because libraries, even though they are going under the world over, remain the only windows available to most children to access the world of words and inspire creative thinking. And before anyone suggests that internet essays that role now, please make a rough survey of where the young travel online and one will realize that the internet has become more about distractions and venting than reading or learning. Returning to libraries and books, their shortage, like with most things in Sikkim, is not so much a failing of the government as it is of the society at large. Libraries and reading rooms or even child-specific activities need not necessarily be bankrolled by the State exchequer. In fact the more successful endeavours have come from private initiative. It is apt here to cite the example of the Bakul Children's Library in Orrisa. This library in the Satya Nagar residential area of Bhubaneswar houses some 8,000 books, includes a multimedia section, has internet access and stocks substantial educational material. All of these have come from community partnership. Everything is donated, children are charged no membership fees and access is free for every child. It is managed by volunteers and children throng to it, as much to browse and borrow as to attend story-reading sessions, creative thinking workshops, staging of plays by other kids and everything else that children do. The library was born from a campaign in the year 2006 to collect books for free sharing with children. In its first attempt itself, the volunteers received pledges for book donations from 1,000 people! Not just books, people also pledged time and professional skills to set up the library and sustain it. The model worked because the society got involved.

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

WRITE US:

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A Year of Blursdays: How Coronavirus Distorted Our Sense of Time in 2020

RUTH OGDEN
theconversation.com

Does it feel like 2020 went on forever? Did lockdown drag, and can you even remember how you spent your time when you weren't living under coronavirus restrictions? You are not alone. For many, 2020 has been the year in which the constancy of time was lost to the upheaval of coronavirus.

Objectively, time passes at a constant, linear rate. Subjectively, however, time waxes and wanes with our activities and emotions. Sometimes, it flies by, other times it drags so slowly that it almost stands still.

This is backed up by research I conducted in April, which explored how the early months of the coronavirus pandemic had affected people's experiences of the passage of time. Of particular interest was how quickly time felt like it was passing during lockdown in comparison to "normal" (that long-ago time before lockdown).

I surveyed 604 people about how quickly time felt it was passing that day and that week in comparison to before the lockdown. Participants also answered questions about their mood, family life and how busy they were to give context on the factors, which made time more likely to speed up or slow down for different people.

TEMPUS FUGIT?

My results showed that there was widespread distortion time during lockdown, with more than 80% of people reporting that time felt like it was passing differently. But lockdown did not distort time in the same way for everyone. Instead, time sped up during lockdown for 40% of people and slowed down for the remaining 40%.

Why was this? My analysis suggests that the

perceived speed of time during the day was affected by a person's age, how satisfied they were with their level of social interaction, how stressed they were and how busy they were. In general, the days passed more quickly for younger people who were socially satisfied, busy and experiencing low levels of stress. Conversely, the day passed more slowly for older people, particularly those over the age of 60, who were socially dissatisfied, stressed and lacking tasks to occupy them.

Similar patterns were observed for the subjective speed of the week. A fast week was associated with being younger and more socially satisfied, whereas a slow week was associated with being older and less socially satisfied.

A second unpublished study I conducted during the November lockdown revealed that, of the 851 people surveyed, more than 75% experienced distortion to time and 55% reported that the start of the first lockdown felt longer than eight months ago. A slower second lockdown was associated with shielding, dissatisfaction with social interaction and greater depression and boredom.

The UK is not alone in its loss of time during lockdown. Studies conducted in France, Italy and Argentina also show widespread distortion to the passage of time during periods of strict COVID-19 restrictions.

Unlike in the UK, in France and Italy lockdown passed more slowly than normal for most people rather than being split 40/40 as in my April study. As in the UK, however, boredom was an important predictor of time slowing down in Italy and in France. In France, time also passed more slowly with increasing sadness.

EMOTIONS AND TIME

Why does being older, bored, stressed and so-

cially dissatisfied make time pass more slowly? This question is difficult to answer.

Unlike other senses, we don't have an obvious organ for time. Instead, time is experienced as part of other sensory inputs, such as sight and hearing, and this has made it difficult to identify precisely how the brain processes it.

One possibility is that when we are bored and socially dissatisfied we have lots of spare cognitive capacity and that we then use some of that capacity to increase our monitoring of time. This increased monitoring then results in time passing more slowly than normal, simply because we are more aware of time than normal. Another possibility is that the emotional consequence of lockdown altered the way the brain processes time.

In particular, the negative emotions associated with isolation, boredom, sadness and stress may have contributed to a slowing of time. However, inconsistent effects of depression and anxiety across studies suggests that the effect of emotion on time is complex.

So what of 2021? Will time regain its regular rhythm? It is difficult to say. With the first vaccines currently being deployed, we maybe more hopeful than ever that normality is just around the corner. The reality may be that normality is many months away.

Regardless, while we can't change the actual time it takes for the vaccination programme to be completed, there are some things which we can do to speed up the wait. By keeping busy, minimising stress, engaging in as much face-to-face or online social interaction as we can and by reducing our stress levels, we can help the journey back to normality pass more quickly than normal.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer in Psychology, Liverpool John Moores University]

Five ways to help your child develop a love for reading

ISANG AWAH
theconversation.com

A love for reading can be hugely valuable for children. The benefits of leisure reading include increased general knowledge, a positive impact on academic achievement, enhanced reading ability and vocabulary growth.

Indeed, research suggests that time spent reading for pleasure could be a key indicator for the future success of a child – even more important than their family's socio-economic status. It is therefore not surprising that many parents are interested in getting their children hooked on books.

But certain reading practices used by parents and teachers could end up putting children off reading. On the other hand, though, there is compelling evidence that children who may not want to read for pleasure can be influenced to take it up.

My PhD research, which explored the reading habits of a group of children in a book club aged between nine and 12, uncovered ways to entice children to develop a love for leisure reading.

READ ALOUD (AND MAKE IT EXCITING)

Reading aloud fosters a love of books in children, and helps children get hooked on books as they associate reading with pleasure.

My study supports this. Each day, a staff member at the book club read aloud to the children. Most of the children said that they enjoyed being read to, and that having someone read to them stirred their interest in the book. A boy in my study said his parents regularly read aloud to him when he was little, and that this led to his love for reading.

However, some children pointed out that how books are read aloud

could affect their enjoyment of the reading. It is important that the reading be done in an enthusiastic way that children find engaging.

ENSURE ACCESS TO BOOKS



Children who have easy access to engaging texts do more reading.

Although there were a few exceptions, the children in my study who had many reading materials at home and at school did more leisure reading and were more engaged readers than those who had challenges in accessing books. A little girl said she loved comics but could not get hold of them easily. She believed she would do more reading if she could readily get the books she liked.

Parents who may not be able to buy books for their child could take the child to a public library and assist the child in borrowing books. Another option could be downloading suitable free e-books for children to read.

CREATE A SPACE FOR READING

It is important to establish a com-

fortable space and conducive atmosphere for reading as well as set aside time for leisure reading.

The reading engagement of the children in my study was affected by

did not always enjoy the reading and sometimes did not read the books. A girl complained that she usually did not like the books her class teacher selected for leisure reading. "Sometimes I manage it, sometimes I don't read it," she said. Other children had similar complaints.

The freedom to select books leads to a positive attitude towards reading, better engagement with the book, and a more enjoyable reading experience.

Additionally, children should be allowed to read whatever materials they find interesting, be it comics, magazines, or poetry. Doing otherwise may reduce their potential to engage in recreational reading.

TALK ABOUT BOOKS

Having discussions about books is another way to spark children's interest in reading and in books. However, these should centre on books that might appeal to the child rather than on the books you as an adult find engaging.

Many of the children in my study said that book discussions with parents, friends, and staff members of the book club had led them to read certain books. Some of the them reported that they enjoyed reading the books recommended by one staff member or the other.

Children who may not be interested in reading will have subjects and topics that they are excited about, such as sports, movies or animals. Discussing books on a topic or subject that the child finds exciting will likely whet their appetite for that book.

When children find reading fun and enjoyable, they are likely to repeatedly spend time with books, become engaged readers, and gain the benefits of leisure reading.

[the writer is Project Manager in the Department of Social Policy and Intervention, University of Oxford]

Adivasi leader from tea belt joins TMC,

hails Mamata

KOLKATA, DEC 28 (PTI): Rajesh Lakra, an adivasi leader from the Dooars-Terai belt of north Bengal, joined the Trinamool Congress on Monday, insisting that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's initiatives for tea workers of the region inspired his move.

TMC leader and the state's Minister for Labour and Law Moloy Ghatak said Lakra, popularly known as 'Tiger', has been the main leader of the tea belt.

"I have joined the TMC and we are happy with the government's programmes for the welfare of the tea workers. The chief minister has developed Terai and Dooars like no other previous government," Lakra said.

Ghatak said the state government has increased cash component of the tea garden workers' wages from Rs 67 to Rs 176 and this will be revised upwards again, for which negotiations are underway.

The minister also said work on the scheme - 'Cha Sundari' - to build houses for tea workers has already started.

"Banerjee has a special affection for the adivasis...

the tea workers will get their own houses," Lakra added.

12 new COVID-19 cases push Andamans tally to 4,924

PORT BLAIR, DEC 28 (PTI): Twelve more persons have tested positive for COVID-19 in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, pushing the coronavirus tally in the Union Territory to 4,924, a health department official said on Monday.

All the new cases were detected during contact tracing, he said.

Nine more people were cured of the disease in the last 24-hours, taking the total number of recoveries in the archipelago to 4,798, he said.

The Union Territory now has 64 active COVID-19 cases, while 62 people have died so far due to the disease, the official said.

A total of 1,76,895 samples have been tested for COVID-19 so far in the Union Territory and the positivity rate is 2.78 per cent, he added.

Why will legally mandated MSP create more problems for the farmers?

VIEWPOINT

VIJAY SARDANA [PIB]

New agri-trade laws have provided options to farmers to choose their buyer and the prices to sell their produce with or without commission. This freedom of trade gives bargaining power to farmers. In order to protect their monopoly on commission and other commercial interests, the commission agents and traders mobilised some farmers leaders to oppose a news law and to build farmers sympathy and support introduced the demand of legally mandated "Minimum Support Price (MSP)".

Background: There is no denying that in the last 70 years farmers of India remained poor but middlemen and commission agents are among the richest people in the society. Please look around in your society and cross verify this fact. It means the existing system is not benefiting the small farmers but benefiting the middlemen. After 56 years of existence of APMC and FCI in Punjab and other protesting regions, if farmers are still feeling helpless without FCI procurement and unable to stand on their own feet, it means something is seriously wrong with the system. In which country of the world even after 56 years of tax payers regularly supporting a section of society remain underdeveloped and few 100s have become rich at the cost of many million poor farmers.

Now, there are views that the government assurances on MSP do not convince the farmers because they are witness to the dismantling of the APMC mandis as the bills came into force for the last few months. For example, out of 259 APMC mandis in Madhya Pradesh, 47 have recorded zero business in October and 143 have seen a trading drop by 50 per cent in the last 6 months. The solution proposed is to make it legally mandated MSP at higher rates

Implications of this demand:

In the business world consumers do not work with emotions. Farmers, when they go shopping like any consumer, they also look at value for money like any buyer. Are they not buying Chinese products in place of products of Indian companies? Why do they do this?

The points which we should consider are:

- Today, the MSP of most crops in India is higher than world market prices. That is why we are losing in the export market.

- Many APMC markets are getting less

volume because same traders buying outside man dies because now they do not have to pay taxes.

- Farmers are selling outside APMC because they are getting a better price than APMC markets.

- If it is legally made binding, what will be the liability of the government if private trade also develops a cartel and refuses to buy. Where is the budget to buy the material from all farmers?



- No one is telling what will be the quality for MSP rates. Who will buy the material which is substandard and what should be the price for that material?

- MSP is an ever-increasing cost with the demand to hike. MSP will always be there and the world market will become cheaper and cheaper. In case the private sector will import more in place of buying from Indian farmers, who will buy the crop of Indian farmers? The classic case is edible oils. 70% of edible oil is imported. Sunflower crop has virtually vanished because it was unsustainable to compete with imported crops. Demand for sesame and groundnut oil has reduced drastically. What this indicates.

- The sugar sector is suffering due to ever-increasing mandatory FRP and now without subsidy, we cannot export. First pay subsidy to grow sugar cane, then pay a subsidy to exports. Is this good economics? Is this good

for the national economy? Whose money is getting blocked and who is benefiting?

- Look at the case of maize, Indian was exporting 45 lakh tons of maize every year now it is less than 5 lakh tons due to rising MSP. Maize is 50% cheaper in the world market. Expensive maize means opening the floodgate for poultry imports. Poultry will suffer means maize farmers will suffer more.

- In the last few years imports are becoming cheaper and growing at faster rates

than exports from India. As the Indian rupee becomes stronger, imports will come cheaper.

- India had to quit RCEP because our agriculture cost of production is so high due to the ever-rising MSP that today, we cannot be part of any international trade agreement.

- The MSP formula proposed by the Swaminathan committee only encourages inefficient production, higher the cost of production, higher will be the MSP. Zero Budget Agriculture and organic agriculture needs fewer resources and has a lower cost of production but saves the environment and consumers health. According to CACP based Swaminathan Formula, they should get less MSP, because their cost of production is low because they claim that there is no loss of productivity. Is this logical?

Way Forward:

No one can ensure sustainable profit other than consumers. Most of the Consumers

Assam MLA Pabindra Deka resigns from assembly

GUWAHATI, DEC 28 (PTI): MLA Pabindra Deka, who recently quit the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and joined the newly-floated Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP), on Monday resigned from the state legislative assembly.

Deka told PTI inside the assembly complex that he resigned from the House because he did not want anyone to make an issue out of this.

The three-day winter session began on Monday and 11 bills were tabled on the first day.

Deka has represented the Patancharkuchi constituency thrice -- 1985, 2001 and 2016. He is one



of the founding members of AGP and served as a cabinet minister during 1985- 1990 in the first AGP government, led by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta.

The senior politician had resigned from the party on December 15 and joined the AJP the next day. On December 17, he was elected as

the working president of the AJP.

With his resignation, the number of AGP members in the House has come down to 11.

Speaker Hitendra Nath Goswami said Congress MLA Ajanta Neog had resigned from the assembly on December 25 and it was accepted

on the same day.

Neog, who was also expelled from the party, had met Union Home Minister Amit Shah during his recent two-day visit to the state.

A powerful Congress leader of Upper Assam, Neog later told reporters that she would join the BJP soon.

Neog, who represented the Golaghat constituency, was a close confidante of former chief minister Tarun Gogoi and a part of his cabinet in all the three terms since 2001.

In the 126-member Assam Assembly, the Congress now has 21 members.

Centre will "dismantle" Puducherry's separate status, warns CM

PUDUCHERRY, 28 DEC [PTI]: The NDA government at the Centre will dismantle the separate status of Puducherry and merge it with neighbouring states, Chief Minister V Narayanasamy claimed, even as he asserted that his party workers will not remain silent and sacrifice their lives to protect it.

Mr Narayanasamy said the Centre had already reduced Jammu and Kashmir from being a state to a Union Territory and asked the people here to ensure that the Congress-led alliance was elected to power in the 2021 Assembly polls also.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi is turning his eyes towards Puducherry and would dismantle the separate status of Puducherry and merge it with neighbouring states," he claimed, addressing the 136th foundation day celebrations of the Congress.

Puducherry would face a situation of being deprived of its separate status as a Union Territory and there is need for caution and care on the part of party workers

and people in general, he said.

"We will not remain silent spectators and would even sacrifice our lives to protect the separate status of Puducherry," he said.

Party workers should put in hard work to ensure that Congress-headed alliance is elected again to rule the Union Territory, Mr Narayanasamy said.

On the Prime Minister's recent barb that without holding civic polls in Puducherry, the Congress was preaching him democracy, Mr Narayanasamy again alleged Lt Governor Kiran Bedi was blocking initiatives aimed at elections.

"The fact is that it is Kiran Bedi who is responsible for the delay in reviving grassroot level democracy in Puducherry and Prime Minister pinning the blame on Congress government for civic polls not taking place is unwarranted and unacceptable," Mr Narayanasamy said and challenged the PM for a debate on who is responsible for delay in holding the polls.

He said the government was now facing a difficult situation

with the Lt Governor interfering in routine administrative decisions of the elected government on the one hand and the Centre's attitude to "let down the government here."

There is hardly any issue where there was no interference by the Lt Governor, the chief minister claimed.

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"Implementation of free rice scheme, posting of a State Election Commissioner, decisions to hike old age pension and extending welfare measures to the people under various schemes for example are all blocked by Kiran Bedi," he said.

"Our decision to post a retired IAS officer (as SEC) could not see the light of the day as she went ahead to post a retired IFS officer. The rule clearly says that no retired Forest Officer could be the SEC. We have challenged Kiran Bedi's interference in deciding the SEC in the Supreme Court and the petition is pending disposal," Mr Narayanasamy said.

Amartya Sen thanks Mamata Banerjee for her support

KOLKATA, DEC 28 (PTI): Nobel laureate Amartya Sen Monday thanked West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for supporting him after his family was accused by the Visva Bharati of being in "illegal" possession of land on the campus, and said her strong voice is a tremendous source of strength.

In his letter, the eminent economist thanked Banerjee for taking out time from her busy schedule, and "reassuring people under attack".

"I am very happy indeed to get your wonderfully supportive letter. I am not only most touched, but also very reassured that despite the busy life you have to lead, you can find time for

reassuring people under attack. Your strong voice, along with your full understanding of what is going on, is for me, a tremendous source of strength.

"May I send you my deep appreciation of the warmth of your extremely kind letter. I also take the liberty of conveying to you as my thanks as well as my personal affection and admiration," he wrote.

A huge controversy had erupted last Thursday, the day Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the centenary celebrations of Visva Bharati when media reported that the university has written to the West Bengal government alleging dozens of land

parcels owned by it were wrongfully recorded in the names of private parties, including Sen.

The Nobel laureate had said that the university land on which his house stands is on a long-term lease, which is nowhere near its expiry. The chief minister had reacted angrily to the media reports, saying Sen was being subjected to "such vicious attack by the present university authorities because of his ideological anti-BJP stance".

Banerjee had offered apology to Sen on behalf of the state and also wrote a letter to him, asking him to consider her a "sister and friend" in his war against "intolerance and totalitarianism".

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Football tactics take a step back amid pandemic's pressing concerns

JONATHAN WILSON

LONDON, 28 DEC [THEGUARDIAN]: For football, this was the year evolution went backwards. It began with further victories for the high press, with Hansi Flick's Bayern Munich surging to the Champions League and the Bundesliga, and Jürgen Klopp's side giving Liverpool their first league title in 30 years, but it ended with a widespread reversion to a more cautious style.

A dozen years ago, Pep Guardiola led the rise of press-and-possess football; recently, the pressing element has come to be prioritised – and then Covid-19 arrived. There are those who will dismissively point out we had pressing in the 80s. And we did – we've had it since the 60s – but we also had computers in the 80s, it's just that they were nowhere near as sophisticated or powerful as they are today.

Modern pressing is relentless and it is finely tuned to adjust to the internal rhythms of the opposition. It demands fit and fresh players but also time on the training field so it can be tweaked game to game. With the truncated pre-season, players are not as fit in this campaign as they usually are. With two games every week, fatigue is an even bigger issue and there simply isn't time for detailed bespoke preparation.

The result in the early weeks of the season was a wildness. Going into the October international break, when most teams had played four games, the average goals per game in the Premier League was 3.79. Liverpool had lost 7-2 to Aston Villa, Manchester United had lost 6-1 to Tottenham and Manchester City had lost 5-2 to Leicester.

Since then, as teams have begun to settle for a more cautious style of play, goals per game have slipped back to 2.91. The average for the past decade is 2.74, so there is every chance that by the end of the season goals per game will not look especially unusual.

But the way teams are play-



ing has clearly changed. This season each team averages 134.2 pressures per game; in 2018-19 that figure was 173.7. Teams are pressing 22.7% less than they were in the last pre-Covid season. To put that in context, nobody presses more than Leeds this season, but their 164.1 pressures per game is more than only four sides in 2018-19.

As pressing recedes, so an older form of football returns. The goalless draws between Manchester United and Chelsea, Chelsea and Tottenham, United and Manchester City and even the final stages of the 1-1 between City and Liverpool, were a throwback to two decades ago or more, with teams so reluctant to expose themselves to a possible counterattack that in effect nothing happened. (Set against that is any game involving Leeds, who press with abandon whatever the circumstances and so are thrilling and fragile in equal measure.)

In that generally cautious world, coaches whose ideas were previously considered almost extinct re-emerge. Most notable has been José Mourinho, whose Tottenham managed to pick a few pockets

before the limitations of their approach became apparent. Even in this regressive environment, hedgehogs, which do one thing well, tend not to be as well-equipped to win titles as foxes, which have a greater range of knowledge.

What is remarkable is how quickly that reversion has come. Even with the three-month shutdown, last season was another triumph for pressing. Liverpool had the title as good as won by the turn of the year and although they never attained the heights in the final weeks of the campaign they had achieved before the break there was no doubting their style or how effective it was.

Liverpool's slightly freakish elimination by Atlético Madrid in the last 16 meant Klopp wasn't there, but three other German coaches reached the Champions League semi-finals: Flick, Julian Nagelsmann at RB Leipzig and Thomas Tuchel at PSG. 2019-20 was a season dominated at elite level by the German school of pressing.

The high line makes such an approach a high risk, particularly against teams who are adept on the break, as was seen most clearly in RB Leipzig's 5-0

defeat at Manchester United. Even Bayern, frequently leaving Manuel Neuer alone in his own half, often seem vulnerable, but the nature of their press is so overwhelming that they are rarely exposed.

That's the gamble of the style, one that led to the spark between Roy Keane and Klopp after Liverpool's victory against Arsenal in September.

The other notable feature of last season's Champions League semi-finals was the absence of a Spanish club for the first time since 2007. Barcelona were obliterated by Bayern, Real Madrid were entirely unable to cope with City and Atlético were dismissed relatively straightforwardly by Leipzig.

The suggestion for a little while had been of a decadence to La Liga, and this seemed confirmation that Spanish sides cannot cope with the physicality of the hard-pressing sides of the Bundesliga and the Premier League.

Which made it all the more striking when Spain beat Germany 6-0 in the Nations League, a game that suggested the continuing excellence of Spanish youth development and the way Joachim Löw, the

national manager, has failed to keep pace with the rapid advances in pressing within the German game.

In Italy, meanwhile, where judgments have to be tempered by the richest club by far, Juventus, having invested a fortune in an essentially immobile striker and then handicapped themselves by appointing a novice coach, the triumph of pressing is best seen in the way Atalanta continue to punch above their weight.

It's not entirely certain pressing will return in quite the same way as the calendar settles down (although that will be a while, given the international tournaments next summer and a winter World Cup in 2022). It may be that teams adopting a more cautious approach find it suits them and that in a world that had become obsessively attacking being able to defend offers a competitive advantage.

But for the moment the game is in a period of curious limbo, responding to the crisis by reverting to an older, simpler form of the game. One route of development has been paused and it's far from certain where football will go next.

The Kieran Trippier case and why some betting markets should not be allowed

Barry Glendenning

London, 28 Dec [theGuardian]: Eighteen years ago, shortly after Mick McCarthy had lost his job as the Republic of Ireland manager for the first time, some friends and I became privy to some inside information regarding the likely identity of his successor. It was so long ago I can't remember how or where we learned the Football Association of Ireland mulling over a left-field appointment and ready to replace McCarthy with Philippe Troussier, a Parisian whose CV read more like that of a French foreign legion recruit than that of a jobbing manager.

A 20-year career that had begun in France had taken Troussier on footballing tours of duty to the Ivory Coast, South Africa, Morocco, Nigeria, Burkina Faso but now, we were assured, he was about to take over Ireland. Seeing him priced up at double-figure odds with the bookies, we piled on. It was the time to bet like men, to borrow and slightly mangle a phrase from the celebrated Observer racing correspondent Richard Baerlein. Or at the very least men of extremely limited financial means for whom winning several hundred quid would prompt scenes of unbridled jubilation.

When news of the FAI's interest in Troussier became public, his odds shortened dramatically and he became the unlikely favourite. Our trip to the payout window increasingly looked a formality. We waited impatiently for the outcome until finally, in late January 2003, white smoke billowed out of the chimney over FAI HQ signalling the successful appointment of Ireland's new manager. It was Brian Kerr.

Due in no small part to his position as national treasure, generally good humoured salt of the earth and pillar of the Irish football community who had achieved unprecedented and extraordinary success managing the country's underage teams, few Irish football fans begrudged Kerr his crack at the main job. Few except those of us left wailing and gnashing our teeth because he wasn't Troussier.

The Frenchman, despite what was by all accounts a last-ditch snub, kept plugging away and his peripatetic career currently has him in Vietnam, following stints in China, Tunisia, Japan, Morocco France and Qatar. Largely unknown to the average European football fan, his is a name that remains seared across my brain as a byword for the dangers of dabbling in the kind of sports betting markets where possession of a little insider knowledge can be a very dangerous thing.

Last week, Kieran Trippier became the latest high-profile player to learn that lesson. An ever-present in the Atlético Madrid team who are top of La Liga, the full-back was fined £70,000 and banned from all football activities for 10 weeks after being found guilty of four breaches of Football Association betting rules related to his transfer from Tottenham to Atlético in July 2019. While the reasons for the judgment have yet to be published, Trippier insists he did not gamble, or encourage or advise anyone else to gamble on his move to the Spanish capital.

While we cannot be certain what exactly happened, it seems he has been found guilty of nothing more serious than revealing to some friends he was moving to Atlético, a revelation that prompted them to place wagers on the relevant betting market safe in the knowledge they were going to make themselves some easy money.

If, as seems likely according to sources close to Trippier, that is what happened he has every right to feel hard done by. Hard done by his idiot friends who ought to have known what they were doing could have serious consequences for their mate and hard done by FA regulations so strict they preclude footballers from telling those closest to them about momentous, life-changing career moves until after they have signed the contract and posed alongside Diego Siméone holding a red and white striped jersey.

We must presume Trippier was at least allowed to keep his wife briefed on his move to the Spanish capital. As the mother of the couple's young children it probably would have been nice for her to be consulted and kept in the loop. But what, for the sake of argument, if she told somebody close to her? And then they told somebody? And that somebody told a Spurs-supporting somebody else who decided to fill their boots at the expense of the bookies? At what point along this chain of what ought to be fairly inconsequential chatter does the dissemination of information regarding her husband's imminent transfer stop being his fault?

Set to miss at least 13 games and forbidden from even watching his teammates from the stands or joining them on the training ground, Trippier will have plenty of time to ponder the apparent unfairness of his punishment and could be forgiven for arriving at the conclusion that he would not have found himself in hot water if the kind of betting markets from which his nearest and dearest are alleged to have profited simply did not exist.

In a sport that has a famously unhealthy relationship with gambling, the availability of odds-on player transfers, next club manager and the famous "sack race" simply cry out to be exploited by opportunists who are "in the know".

Rather than complain to the authorities when they think they have been unfairly rinsed by somebody who knows more about the next move of Kieran Trippier, Philippe Troussier or any other player or manager than they do, perhaps the bookmaking fraternity would be better served by simply refusing to offer the kind of niche betting opportunities that are wide open to often hapless or potentially career-damaging abuse.

Messi not interested in coaching, prefers sporting director role



BARCELONA (REUTERS) - Lionel Messi has no plans to become a coach when he retires from playing, saying he is more interested in being a director of football than working in the unforgiving world of football management.

The 33-year-old Argentine forward has about six months left on his contract with Barcelona and the football world is on tenterhooks over whether he will stay at the club where he has spent the last 20 years or look for a new challenge.

"I don't see myself as a coach, perhaps a sporting director to hire players I want or that the club that I'm at needs," Messi said in an interview with Spanish network La Sexta on Sunday.

Messi, six-times world player of the year, will wait until the end of the season before making his mind up but said he would like to return to Barca, regardless of what he does next.

"I would like to tell the Barca fans that I'm not sure whether I'll leave or not but hypothetically speaking, I would like to leave in the best way possible," he said.

"I'd like to return one day, I would like to return to the city, to work for the club and contribute. I haven't thought about it too much but it will be something related with football, because that's what I like and what I know."

Messi, who moved to Barca aged 13 and has become their all-time top scorer and most decorated player, acknowledged he had hurt the club's supporters when he tried to leave last summer.

"Fans will cheer for their player as long as he is at their club but they do not forgive everything," he said.

"My relationship with the club and the city is a story of love. However it ends, it should not stain what I've lived in my career."

Liverpool miss chance to stretch lead, Tottenham held at Wolves

LIVERPOOL, 28 DEC (REUTERS): Liverpool's hopes of opening up a menacing five-point lead at the top of the Premier League were scuppered in unlikely fashion as struggling West Bromwich Albion snatched a 1-1 draw at Anfield to leave manager Jürgen Klopp scowling on Sunday.

Leading through Sadio Mané's early goal, Klopp's side appeared to be heading for an eighth successive home league win but a late header by Semi Ajayi left Liverpool frustrated.

Not that the weekend's most odd result will cause Klopp a sleepless night, even though it left them with only a three-point lead over neighbours Everton.

With Leicester City and Manchester United sharing the spoils on Saturday, Tottenham Hotspur had the chance to move into third spot on Sunday but conceded a late goal in a 1-1 draw away to Wolverhampton Wanderers.

Liverpool lead the

standings with 32 points from 15 games, with Everton on 29, Leicester on 28 and United on 27.

Tottenham have 26 points alongside Manchester City.

Leeds United beat Burnley 1-0 on Sunday with an early penalty by Patrick Bamford while Brighton and Hove Albion twice led at West Ham United but had to settle for a 2-2 draw with Tomas Soucek scoring late on for the hosts.

The hectic Christmas programme continues on Monday with the stand-out game being Everton's home clash with Manchester City.

Klopp criticised West Brom's defensive approach at Anfield but what soured the taste of his Christmas was the way his side tossed away two points by failing to kill off the game.

"The problem that I have is I think West Brom deserved the point -- it's our fault, but they deserved a point in the second half," Klopp conceded. "We don't live in

dream-land and just win football matches because we want to win them: we have to work for it and we have to play for it and we have to finish the situations off and we have to pass in the right moments."

Klopp's mood was hardly helped by a groin injury to central defender Joel Matip -- one of his few options with Virgil van Dijk and Joe Gomez long-term absentees.

"It is a massive worry but it is not a new worry," former Liverpool defender and Sky Sports pundit Jamie Carragher said, saying Klopp must sign a defender in January.

While West Brom remain in deep trouble having picked up only eight points from 15 games, the result will give the fans some hope that new manager Sam Allardyce, who has never experienced relegation with 11 previous clubs, can inspire a great escape.

Jose Mourinho's Tottenham have now gone four games without a

Premier League win and once again their defensive tactics came under scrutiny against Wolves.

Tottenham were given a perfect start when Tanguy Ndomeble thumped home a shot after 57 seconds but they spent most of the game thereafter soaking up Wolves pressure.

They failed to have a shot on target from the 21st minute onwards. Wolves were rewarded for their relentless attacking when defender Romain Saiss glanced in a header from a corner in the 86th minute.

Wolves almost snatched all three points when Fabio Silva headed a glorious chance straight at Hugo Lloris.

"One point against Wolves normally wouldn't be a bad result because they are a strong opponent," Mourinho said.

"But scoring in the first minute and having 89 minutes to score more, there's a sense of feeling frustrated. We didn't have that ambition or desire to go for more."

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Avalanches kill 12 in mountainous area near Iran's capital

TEHRAN, DEC 28 (AP): Iranian rescue workers have ended their search for survivors following a series of avalanches that killed 12 people in a mountainous area north of the capital, state TV reported.

The avalanches struck in four different areas on Friday following strong winds and snow-fall a day earlier.

The Alborz mountain range where the avalanches occurred is a popular weekend destination for hiking and climbing. Fridays are a day off for most Iranian workers.

State TV aired footage showing emergency crews using a helicopter to search for the missing. Iran's Red Crescent Society also released photos of rescue workers unloading body bags from a helicopter on Saturday. The report said 11 people were found dead, and one died after being transferred to a hospital. It said rescue teams found 14 missing people during the operation.

Authorities said many had disregarded reports by the meteorological office about possible strong winds on Friday.

Deadly avalanches are a rare phenomenon in Iran. In 2017, two avalanches killed 11 hikers.

Russian fishing trawler sinks in Barents Sea, 17 missing

MOSCOW (AP): A Russian fishing trawler sank Monday in the northern Barents Sea and 17 of its crew are still missing, emergency officials said. Two other crew members have been rescued.

According to a statement by the Russian Investigative Committee, the vessel with 19 crew members on board capsized and sank on Monday morning. A criminal probe into the incident has been launched and a search operation is underway.

Several vessels and an aircraft have been deployed to look for the missing crew members, Russian news agencies reported.

Russia's Emergency Ministry initially suggested that an accumulation of the ice on the trawler could have caused it to sink, but later said the vessel was more likely to have heeled over while pulling up the fishing nets, "scooped up water and sank."

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Niger votes in presidential, legislative elections - (A)

NIAMEY (NIGER), DEC 28 (AP): Niger voted Sunday in presidential and legislative elections that could see the West African country's first democratic transition of power since independence amid a growing threat from jihadists in the region.

A good turnout was seen in the capital throughout the day, said observers.

Equipment was well installed and the first voter was able to vote, just after 8 a.m. at the Diori school in Niamey, according to the head of the polling station there, Khadija Hassan. Everything has been going normally.

Other voting centers in the capital reported successes as well, with COVID-19 restrictions in place.

Some 7.4 million Nigeriens were registered to vote to elect legislators and the successor to President Mahamadou Issoufou.

Issoufou, who has served two terms, is stepping down, paving the way for the first peaceful transfer of power between two elected presidents since Niger became independent from France in 1960. Niger has seen four coups since then.

Issoufou voted Sunday with his wife and the presi-



dent of the National Assembly.

He said he hopes the election will allow Niger to consolidate its status as a model of democracy in Africa and in the world.

More than 6,800 observers from various organizations are deployed around the country, he said.

We are the bearer of an ambition, the ambition to

modernize politics, the ambition to detribalize politics, the ambition to put policy around values and not on identity, he said.

The victory will belong to the Nigerien people.

A peaceful transfer would be significant not only in Niger but also in West Africa, where leaders recently have held on for disputed third terms in

Guinea and Ivory Coast. Nigers next president will have to deal with major problems including extremism, poverty, displacement and corruption.

Attacks by Islamic extremists has affected local elections for weeks. In the most recent incident, the Nigeria-based Boko Haram fighters killed more than 28 people in Toumour in the Diffa region, the

day before the vote.

Niger also faces increasing attacks from fighters linked to the Islamic State group and al-Qaida. Thousands of people have been killed and hundreds of thousands have been displaced despite the presence of thousands of regional and international troops.

Former foreign affairs minister Mohamed Bazoum,

the candidate of the current presidents Nigerian Party for Democracy and Socialism, is among the front runners in the election. A teacher by training, Bazoum has promised to build boarding schools for girls to encourage them to stay in school longer, which he said would help reduce child marriage in a country with many teenage pregnancies.

Another candidate, retired Gen. Salou Djibo, a former head of state who staged a coup in 2010, has said he is best placed to fight extremism.

Ibrahim Yacoubou, a former foreign affairs minister who was kicked out of the ruling party because of indiscipline, is campaigning against corruption. But Bazoums biggest competition comes from former President Mahamane Ousmane, who has the endorsement of opposition leader Hama Amadou, whose candidacy was rejected by the constitutional court because of a one-year prison sentence for charges of baby-trafficking. Amadou denies the charges, calling them politically motivated.

If no one candidate wins more than 50 per cent, Nigeriens will vote in a second round on February 21.

Saudi women's rights activist sentenced to nearly 6 years



DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (AP): One of Saudi Arabia's most prominent women's rights activists was sentenced on Monday to nearly six years in prison under a vague and broadly-worded law aimed at combating terrorism, according to state-linked media.

Loujain al-Hathloul's case, and her imprisonment for the past two and a half years, have drawn criticism from

rights groups, members of the U.S. Congress and European Union lawmakers.

Al-Hathloul was among a handful of Saudi women who openly called for the right to drive before it was granted in 2018 and for the removal of male guardianship laws that had long stifled women's freedom of movement and ability to travel abroad.

State-linked Saudi news outlet Sabq re-

ported that al-Hathloul was found guilty by the kingdom's anti-terrorism court on charges including agitating for change, pursuing a foreign agenda, using the internet to harm public order and and co-operating with individuals and entities that have committed crimes according to anti-terror laws. She has 30 days to appeal the verdict.

A rights group called "Prisoners of Conscience" that focuses on

Saudi political detainees said that al-Hathloul could be released as early as the end of March 2021 based on time served. She has been imprisoned since May 2018 and 34 months of her sentencing will be suspended.

The judge ordered her to serve five years and eight months in prison for violating anti-terrorism laws, according to Sabq, which said its reporter was allowed inside the courtroom during Monday's session.

Sabq reported that the judge said the defendant had confessed to committing the crimes and that her confessions were made voluntarily and without coercion. The judge said the verdict was issued in the presence of the prosecutor, the defendant, a representative from the government's Human Rights Commission and a handful of select local media representatives.

China sentences lawyer who reported on outbreak to 4 years

BEIJING (AP): A Chinese court on Monday sentenced a former lawyer who reported on the early stage of the coronavirus outbreak to four years in prison on charges of "picking fights and provoking trouble," one of her lawyers said.

The Pudong New Area People's Court in the financial hub of Shanghai gave the sentence to Zhang Zhan following accusations she spread false information, gave interviews to foreign media, disrupted public order and "maliciously manipulated" the outbreak.

Lawyer Zhang Keke confirmed the sentence but said it was "inconvenient" to provide details — usually an indication that the court has issued a partial gag order. He said the court did not ask Zhang whether she would appeal, nor did she indicate whether she would.

Zhang, 37, traveled to Wuhan in February and posted on various social media platforms about the outbreak that is be-



lieved to have emerged in the central Chinese city late last year.

She was arrested in May amid tough nationwide measures aimed at curbing the outbreak and heavy censorship to deflect criticism of the government's initial response. Zhang reportedly went on a prolonged hunger strike while in detention, prompting authorities to forcibly feed her, and is said to be in poor health.

China has been accused of covering up the initial outbreak and delaying the release of crucial information, allowing the virus to spread and contributing to the pandemic that has

sickened more than 80 million people worldwide and killed almost 1.8 million. Beijing vigorously denies the accusations, saying it took swift action that bought time for the rest of the world to prepare.

China's ruling Communist Party tightly controls the media and seeks to block dissemination of information it hasn't approved for release. In the early days of the outbreak, authorities reprimanded several Wuhan doctors for "rumor-mongering" after they alerted friends on social media. The best known of the doctors, Li Wenliang, later succumbed to COVID-19.

Hezbollah doubled its precision-guided missiles in a year



BEIRUT, DEC 28 (AP): The leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah said Sunday his group now has twice as many precision-guided missiles as it had a year ago, saying Israel's efforts to prevent it from acquiring them has failed.

Hassan Nasrallah, in an end-of-year interview with the Beirut-based Arabic Al-Mayadeen TV, said his group has the capability to strike anywhere in Israel and occupied Palestinian territories.

Nasrallah said that when Israel threatened through a U.S. official to target a Hezbollah facility in the eastern Bekaa region, his group warned it would retaliate to any such attack.

Israel has in recent months ex-

pressed concern that Hezbollah is trying to establish production facilities to make precision guided missiles.

During the four-hour interview, Nasrallah said there are many matters related to his group that Israel has no knowledge of because those are kept in a very tight circle. Nasrallah also said that the last few weeks of the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump are critical and must be treated with care.

He called Trump angry and crazy. Hezbollah is one of Iran's main allies in the region and is a sworn enemy of Israel, with which it has had a series of confrontations, lastly in 2006.

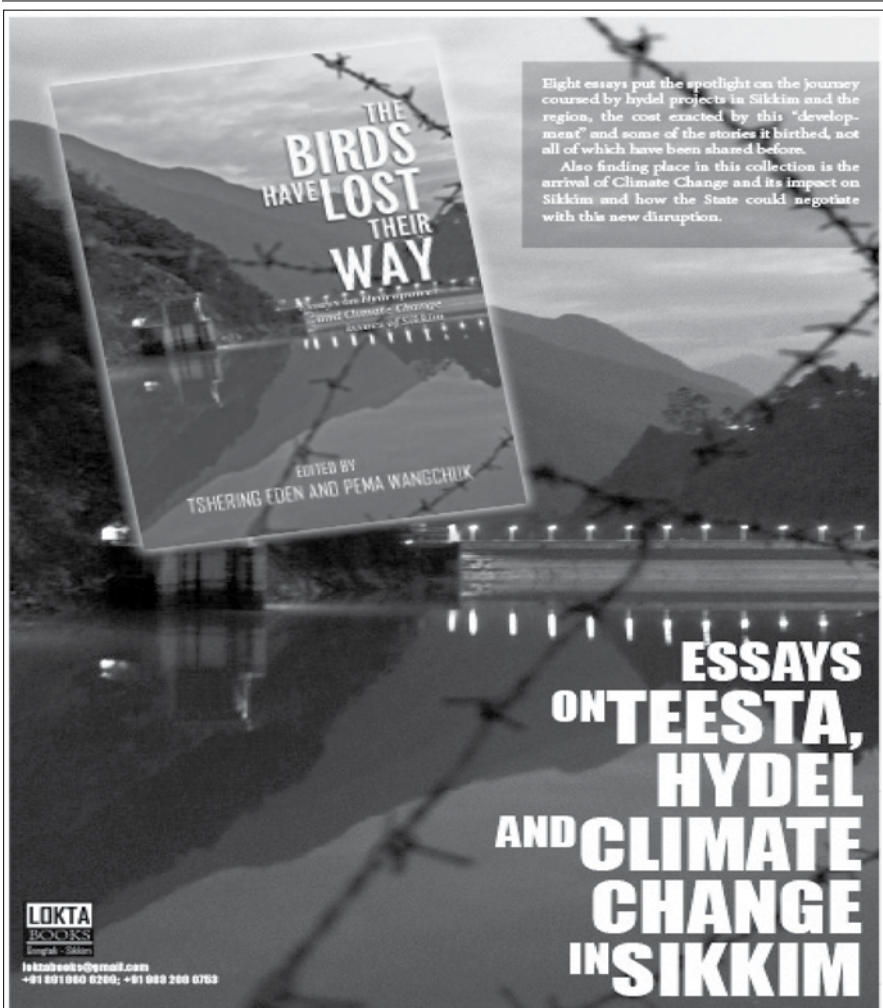
Nasrallah repeated vows that

Iran and its allies will avenge the US killing of the commander of the elite Iranian Revolutionary Guard, Qassim Soleimani, in a drone attack a year ago in Iraq.

That revenge is coming no matter how long it takes, he told Al-Mayadeen TV, sitting with a picture of Soleimani to his left.

Nasrallah also vowed to avenge Israel's killing of a Hezbollah fighter in Syria earlier this year.

Addressing the incoming U.S. administration of President Joe Biden, Nasrallah said Iran would not negotiate with the US on behalf of its allies or discuss conflicts in the region. He said Tehran would talk with Washington only about the Iranian nuclear deal.





CHRISTMAS VACATION! The mother and daughter, Kimora Lee Simmons & Ming Lee Simmons beauties soak up the sun in St Barths.

'Andaz Apna Apna' cinematographer Ishwar Bidri passes away at 87



MUMBAI, DEC 28 (PTI): Veteran cinematographer Ishwar Bidri, best known for his work in popular 1990s films like "Andaz Apna Apna" and "Border", died on Sunday morning due to multiple health issues. He was 87.

The noted director of photography breathed his last at a hospital in Karnataka, his son Sanjeev Bidri said.

"He suffered a cardiac arrest when we were at a marriage function in Belgaum, Karnataka on December 20. We immediately rushed him to KLES Hospital.

"He again suffered a cardiac arrest at the hospital and given his age, it led to multiple health issues. He passed away today at 9.50

am," Sanjeev Bidri told PTI.

Born in Karnataka's Banhatti town, Ishwar Bidri is best known for his collaboration with filmmaker JP Dutta for whom he shot action dramas like "Yateem", "Hathiyar", "Batwara" in the late 1980s and 1998 war epic "Border".

The cinematographer also has movies such as Rajkumar Santoshi's cult comedy "Andaz Apna Apna" (1994) and action thriller "Ghatak" (1996), and "Andaaz", the 2003 romance musical directed by Raj Kanwar, to his credit.

Ishwar Bidri is also survived by his wife. The last rites took place on Sunday evening in Vijayapura, Karnataka.

Irrfan Khan's Last Film The Song Of Scorpions To Release Next Year

Irrfan Khan's last film The Song Of Scorpions is slated to release next year. Bollywood trade analyst Taran Adarsh, in his latest tweet, announced the news on social media on Monday. "Irrfan's last movie...The Song Of Scorpions - to release in 2021...

Directed By Anup Singh... Presented By Panorama Spotlight and 70mm Talkies," tweeted Taran Adarsh. The Song Of Scorpions, which also stars Iranian actress Golshifteh Farahani and veteran Bollywood actor Waheeda Rehman, had its premiere at the 70th Locarno Film Festival in Switzerland in 2017. However, it has not had a theatrical release yet. Irrfan Khan played the role of a camel trader in the film.

Earlier this year, Irrfan Khan's son Babil shared a throwback picture of the late actor in a still from the film The Song Of Scorpions. In the picture, Irrfan could be seen sitting in front of a camel. Babil wrote: "He had this strange understanding of rain. I cannot compare it to anything that I have ever experienced. He could only explain it to me through the limits within what words would let him, but there was a connection that I cannot envelop

even in the most beautiful language; only the desert could show, oh my god, what the rain did to him."

Irrfan Khan, star of international films such as Life Of Pi, The Amazing Spider-Man, returned to Mumbai some

starred in several critically acclaimed as well as commercially successful films. Maqbool, Haasil, Paan Singh Tomar, Haider, Piku, The Lunchbox, Talvar and the Academy Award-nominated Salaam Bombay! are just a few of them. The ac-



months ago after surgery and treatment in London. Irrfan Khan is survived by his wife and two sons, Babil and Ayan. He died at the age of 53 in Mumbai's Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital on April 29. He had been battling cancer and his health worsened after a colon infection.

Over a span of 30 years, Irrfan Khan

tor who acquired a star status over the years, also featured in international projects like The Namesake, Life Of Pi, Inferno, Slumdog Millionaire and The Warrior among others. His last project was Angrezi Medium, co-starring Kareena Kapoor, Radhika Madan and Dimple Kapadia.

Sonam Kapoor Ahuja's 'Blind' starts filming



MUMBAI, DE 28 (PTI): Shooting for actor Sonam Kapoor Ahuja's upcoming movie "Blind" has started in Glasgow, Scotland.

The action-thriller, directed by Shome Makhija, centres on a blind police officer in search of a serial killer. The cast also features actors Vinay Pathak, Purab Kohli and Lilette Dubey.

The film has Sujoy Ghosh, Avishek Ghosh and Manisha W, Pinkesh Nahar and Sachin Nahar as well as Hyunwoo Thomas Kim on board as producers. The makers are planning a 2021 release for "Blind".

David Henrie, wife Maria Cahill welcome baby boy on Christmas

LOS ANGELES, DEC 28 (PTI): "Wizards of Waverly Place" actor David Henrie and his wife Maria Cahill became parents to their second child together, a baby boy, on Christmas.

Henrie took to social media on Saturday to share the good news.

CHRISTMAS BABY!!! Y'all... WHAT A NIGHT! James Thomas Augustine Emanuel Henrie was born at 9:33pm on December 25th 2020 weighing 8lbs 13oz.

"My wife is a superhero and was able to achieve her goal of having a drug free birth", Henrie wrote alongside a series of photographs of the couple with the new born.

Henrie and Cahill got married in April 2017. They are also parents to almost two-year-old daughter Pia.

Kirti Kulhari takes break from social media, thanks fans for love for 'Criminal Justice'

MUMBAI, DEC 28 (PTI): Actor Kirti Kulhari on Monday said she will be away from social media for a few days. Kulhari took to Twitter and Instagram to inform her fans about her break from internet and also wished them Happy New Year.

"Time for a little break from social media. All you people, have a beautiful end to 2020 and wishing you all a #HappyNewYear #2021," the actor wrote alongside her photograph.

Kulhari, 35, who is garnering acclaim for her performance in season two of "Criminal Justice", expressed her gratitude for all the love coming her way. The show premiered on December 24 on Disney+ Hotstar.

"Thank you for all the love for #CriminalJusticeBehindClosedDoors #keepitcoming #behad-abhaar," she said.

The season headlined by Kulhari, is about Anu Chandra, who has confessed to stabbing her husband

(Jisshu Sengupta).

Titled "Criminal Justice: Behind Closed Doors", it features actors Pankaj Tripathi and Anupriya Goenka reprising their roles as lawyers.

Produced by Applause Entertainment in association with BBC Studios, the eight-part Hotstar Special is directed by Rohan Sippy and Arjun Mukerjee and is written by editor-screenwriter Apurva Asrani.

The show is the Indian adaption of Peter Moffat's hit BBC produced series of the same name, which was previously adapted into the Emmy Award-winning HBO show "The Night Of".

Kulhari will next be seen playing the role of a British cop in the Hindi remake of Hollywood blockbuster "The Girl on the Train", starring Parineeti Chopra. She is also looking forward to begin the shooting of the third season of her International Emmy-nominated series "Four More Shots Please!".

Parineeti Chopra to play covert agent in her next with Ribhu Dasgupta

MUMBAI, DEC 27 (PTI): Actor Parineeti Chopra will be reuniting with her The Girl on The Train director Ribhu Dasgupta for an action-thriller in which she will play the role of an undercover agent.

The yet-untitled film revolves around a covert rescue operation of Indian agents, led by Chopra's protagonist. It is not (set in) an India-Pakistan backdrop. The film has Parineeti as a covert agent, she is leading the operation. The film is also about her personal journey and her revenge, a source close to the film's team told PTI.

According to the insider, the film's ensemble cast also features Rajit Ka-

pur, Kay Kay Menon, Dibyendu Bhat-tacharya and Hardy Sandhu, among others. The project, scheduled to go on floors in March, is produced by Reliance Entertainment. The makers are in the process of scouting locations and getting permissions to shoot amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Chopra, 32, and Dasgupta, known for directing Te3n and Netflix series Bard of Blood, are currently awaiting the release of their Hindi remake of 2016 Hollywood blockbuster The Girl on The Train.

The original American movie, featuring Emily Blunt, was based on Paula Hawkins' 2015 best-selling novel of the same name.

Aries: Word of warning, Aries: things are about to get ugly around here. What you need to keep in mind when you find yourself in the midst of the chaos is that everybody is simply projecting their shadows onto one another—shadows that have nothing to do with you in the first place. Learning to not take things personally is a skill that will serve you well. That, and diplomacy. So, resist the urge to take sides even when you know who isn't playing their cards right.

Tip: Step into the role of the observer.

Taurus: While free will plays an important role in determining the course of our lives, there are certain events that are a part of our pre-birth plan and these events are written in the stars for us. In other words, our Destiny has a way of fulfilling itself—and you're about to see proof of this divine orchestration in your own reality, Taurus. So, step into new with a smile on your face and song in your heart. Watch with awe how your dreams and desires take tangible form. You'll find that the right people are coming to your assistance too. 'Receptivity' is the magic word that will determine where your life will go from here.

Tip: Destiny is about to pull some major strings on your behalf.

Gemini: A series of cataclysmic events could leave you

feeling shaken—literally so. It will be easy for you to blame your circumstances, or repeat the story that terrible things always happen to you. However, what's taking place right now is anything but coincidental. These experiences have been orchestrated by your higher self in order to set the stage for positive change. So, be patient with the forces even if you're unable to understand the higher reason behind what's unfolding. Destruction is a necessary part of the creation process. Remembering this will help you get through it all.

Tip: There are certain cycles that are ending right now.

Cancer: You know what they say, Cancer! Life has other plans—and you'll find that this theme is playing out beautifully in the story of your life. Watch how Destiny intervenes on your behalf and opens the gates that were once tightly secured. Serendipitous encounters and flashes of inspiration are also on the cards for you. So, pay attention to what your guides in the unseen realms are drawing your attention to.

Tip: Hello, Destiny's favourite child!

Leo: It's an 'oversized T-shirt-and-tall cups of cocoa' kind of day in the Leo HQ. There are deadlines to meet and bills to pay before you go off on your holiday. But, your worldly responsibilities can wait for now. What you need the most at this moment is the

time and space to recuperate. Some of you may feel drawn towards the healing arts such as reiki, reflexology, crystal healing, chakra balancing and access bars. Turn to an expert you trust to help you recalibrate your energies.

Tip: Let's forget about those worldly responsibilities for a minute.

Virgo: You're tired of playing the victim in your story. You're tired of repeating the 'things don't work out for me' narrative. Today, you're in the mood to take things in your hands and bring about a monumental shift in your reality. The divine forces are with you, helping you make a fresh start. Remember, it's okay to not know where the road is going to lead you towards. Keep walking with courage and confidence as you face your true north. The help and assistance you require at every step will be provided to you.

Tip: It's time to make a fresh start.

Libra: Extra-dimensional being Bashar, channelled by Darryl Anka, says, "We never change the world we're on. We change ourselves and we actually shift to another version of Earth that already exists and is more reflective of the change we made in us." Libra, you're beginning to understand that you are a part of a multiverse and that parallel realities are available to you in every moment.

Tip: It's time to raise your vibrations.

Scorpio: Scorpio, you've been to hell and back, but you wouldn't have it any other way. You understand that you attracted certain experiences in order to unleash your latent potential and grow on a soul level. This is inner alchemy, baby, and it is taking place within your being right now and in this moment! Regeneration is also showing up as a big theme for you. So, allow yourself to get into yin mode as you integrate all of these new frequencies. What the mysterious forces want you to know: Your life is never going to be the same.

Tip: What you're experiencing right now is inner alchemy at its best.

Sagittarius: Jhumpa Lahiri once said, "That's the thing about books. They let you travel without moving your feet." You're remembering her golden words as you pore over your favourite literary marvels today. You know that each page is a portal to another realm and that every word is helping you open your mind to brand new possibilities. Some of you could be delving deeper into a philosophy that you didn't quite resonate with in the past.

Tip: You're in the mood to hang with your favourite literary geniuses.

Capricorn: It's true that the foundation you have laid is strong. But, your work is by no means over, Capricorn.

There is so much more you are meant to create over the next year. So, don't wait for the Gregorian calendar to change dates before you get into action mode. Recommit to your goals, starting today. 'Down and dirty' is a mantra that will give you an edge over your competition.

Tip: Recommit to your goals, starting now.

Aquarius: Letting go of something you're this invested in is seldom easy, Aquarius. Yet, you've got to do what you've got to do, as there is nothing else that you can contribute here. So, accept that this cycle has come to an end. Express your gratitude, but don't look back. The time for you to redirect your energy towards the next goal has come. Trust that your guides are holding space for you to move in the right direction.

Tip: Time to go.

Pisces: What if heaven is not an abstract concept? What if it exists right here, in this time and space dimension? What if raising your vibration is the secret to bringing about a monumental shift? Pisces, you're being asked to embrace your multidimensionality and remember that you are the creator of your reality. So, choose peace over everything else, and know that in doing so, you will be able to restore balance in your life.

Tip: Choose peace over everything else.