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# Summit **TIMES**

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## CM visits Bamboo Handicraft Training prog, meets trainees

**GYALSHING, 05 MAR**

**[IPR]:** Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang [Golay] visited the Bamboo Handicraft Technical Training programme, promoted by Development Commission (handicraft), Government of India, at Ratomatay Barthang under Gyalshing Bermiok constituency today.

He was accompanied by the Gyalshing Bermiok MLA, Lok Nath Sharma, and other dignitaries.

During his brief visit, the CM applauded the crafting skills of the trainees and extended his best wishes for their future endeavours.

He encouraged the



trainees towards entrepreneurship and advised them to develop their crafting skills to become self reliant and secure a sustainable livelihood.

Bamboo Consultant, Horticulture Department, Dr Tika Sharma, informed about the various aspects of the training programme, including the provision of

financial incentives of Rs 300 per diem for the participating trainees.

A total of 40 participants are attending the two month long training.

It has been informed that the training programme has created an enormous range of opportunities for interested unemployed youths in the sector of bamboo handicraft.

## CID Sikkim busts out-of-state cybercrime racket

**SAGAR CHETTRI  
GANGTOK, 05 MAR:**

**C**ID Branch of Sikkim Police has busted a cybercrime racket where a group of people were impersonating employees of e-commerce sites to dupe people. Following a complaint filed by a woman from Sikkim, CID Sikkim Police has arrested five persons so far from in and around Kolkata, West Bengal. The woman was duped of Rs 4.96 lakh by the accused.

Addressing a press conference here today, Sikkim Police Superintendent of Police [CID], Tenzing Loden Lepcha stated that CID police had registered the case on 11 Dec last year under section 419, 420 and

120B IPC with section 66 (c) (d) of IT Act.

He mentioned that after registration of the case, a six-member team led by PI Abishek of the Cyber Crime Cell as the investigation officer and assisted by PI Vijay Basnett, Lance Naik Sanjay Subba, Lance Naik Yogesh Rai and constables Pranay Tamang and Che Wong Bhutia immediately began investigation.

He informed that the police have arrested Amit Shaw, Sujit Singh, Md Shahnaz and Binay Kumar Gupta, all from Titagarh in West Bengal and Dipak Das of Shalpatha Bagan, Belghoria, West Bengal, in the case.

The SP stated that the investigating team



has found that there are more than 20 persons involved in the case which includes some powerful persons. He further added that the case is still under investigation and other suspects in the case are currently absconding.

The SP thanked his counterparts, DCP Central and DCP North of Barrackpore Commissionerate for their sup-

port in the case. He informed that the police have already frozen 20 bank accounts so far and will continue to freeze more as the investigation progresses.

While giving details of the case, it is mentioned that the complainant usually shopped from thee-commerce site Amazon and had played a few contests on the site. She had recently played

several such quizzes and results were to be declared on 11 November.

It is added that she received a call from Amazon on 11 November wherein she was told that she had won a prize. She was then asked to buy some items amounting to Rs 5000 and then further asked to pay GST amount of the prize amounting to Rs 11,999 which

turn to pg03

## 43 file nominations in East



**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 05 MAR:**

**O**n the fifth day of filing for nominations, a total of 43 candidates have filed their nominations for Municipal Election 2021 at the Office of Municipal Returning Officer East, today.

The highest number of nominations today was filed for Rangpo Upper Bazaar ward in Rangpo Nagar Panchayat wherein 5 candidates filed their nominations. The second highest number of four candidates filed nomination papers

for Arithang II ward of Gangtok Municipal Corporation.

It may be mentioned that the Nominations will be accepted on 06 March 2021 (Saturday) from 11am to 3pm at the office of Municipal Returning Officer, East.

## NO-COST/ LOW COST TEACHING LEARNING METHOD DEVELOPMENT COMPTT HELD FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN SOUTH SIKKIM

### Unemployment is the new form of drop-outs: Indrahang

**SUMMIT REPORT**

**NAMCHI, 05 MAR:**

**E**ducation Department organized a 'District Level No-cost/ Low-cost Teaching Learning Method (TLM) Development Competition for Primary School Teachers of South Sikkim' here at the Central Park today.

The motive behind the event, Deputy Director, Education Department, South, DB Subba, explained was to "trigger minds and attitudes of primary school teachers" to embrace current teaching methods and incorporate creative and interesting methods to teach primary school students.

Stalls for eight BACs of south district were installed at Central Park.

Schools which could not included in these installed stalls placed their TLMs on tables provided at the Park.

Altogether, 1,200 teachers from 216 Primary Schools of



South District who prepared 4000 TLMs for the event, displayed their works.

That said, a lot more TLMs were prepared by these schools, but only the selected ones were exhibited at the event.

The TLMs were selected by a panel drawn from among the Namchi DIET faculty which had been screening entries since 01 March.

Lok Sabha MP, Indrahang Subba, was present as the chief guest today, accompanied by Additional Chief Secretary, Education Department, and Addi-

tional Advisor to the Chief Minister, as special guests.

In his address, the Additional CS praised the initiative of the Department and the work of the teachers for their hard work and innovative preparation of TLMs.

The MP echoed the sentiments and stressed that education was the most effective way to develop a country and that government primary schools have the potential to move forward with teaching enhancement and provide great support to the new education policy and its implementation.

He also remarked that while the dropout rate may have fallen in the last three decades and education has become more accessible, it is now required for quality education at primary and secondary schools to reduce unemployment, which, he said was a new form of dropouts.

Unemployment in Sikkim, he said was only partly due to the inability to generate employment, and also due to unemployable candidates in the state.

"Policies of education can be made, remade, and henceforth, but it is required for schools to implement them ably and make policies a success," the MP said.

Also today, the DC-South donated books to select primary schools which have established reading corners.

The annual magazine of Namchi Senior Secondary School was also released by the MP during the event.

## CM interacts with Rinchenpong public



**GYALSHING, 04 MAR (IPR):**

**O**n the fourth day of his West Sikkim tour, Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang (Golay) interacted with the public of eight GPU's under Rinchenpong Constituency at SPWD Bungalow, Rinchenpong, West Sikkim, today.

During the four-day extensive tour, the CM visited Yoksum-Tashiding Constituency and Rinchenpong Constituency and directly interacted with the rural public of all the GPU's to gather first-hand information from them.

Speaking to the people, he mentioned that now the opportunity of state building has been given to him by the general public hence, he would take it as a challenge and as an opportunity. He also mentioned that he is thankful to Sikkimese people for putting their trust on the government. He added that as the Chief Minister of Sikkim he is ready to serve the state with utmost sincerity and for the good of the entire Sikkimese people. The CM stated that in the field of development the state government is working in a dedicated manner.

Highlighting the health sector, he informed about the availability of specialist doctors in STNM and the district hospitals across the state in addition

to several other facilities like dialysis, tertiary cancer care unit, availability of ample medicines in all health centres as well as refrigerators and X-ray machines by the new government. He also urged the people to know the value of these specialised health workers and the facilities and to have optimal use of their potentiality, specially meant for the poor and helpless people of far-flung corners of the state.

The CM extended his gratitude to the government officials for their relentless service towards the public. He further added that more facilities would be provided to government employees so that they can, in return, serve the public more efficiently. The CM reiterated that district HOD's should now be monitoring all the works in the district and the government in turn will ensure every necessary support to the district.

Earlier this morning, the CM visited Shivalaya Mandir in Rimbi and Rinchen Chholog Monastery at Meghi Dara, Rinchenpong West Sikkim. He was accorded a warm welcome by the committee members where he offered prayers and interacted with the committee and assured every possible support towards their development.

## Symposium in Sikkim to deliberate LGBTQIA+ and the Law

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 05 MAR:**

**S**ikkim will be hosting a symposium to talk about and deliberate on issues and laws related to the LGBTQIA+ community.

This regional-level symposium, 'LGBTQIA+ and The Law', a first for Sikkim, is being organised by Sikkim High Court BAR Association [SHCBA] in the collaboration with Rainbow Hills Welfare Association of Sikkim [RHWAS] and is scheduled for 09 March.

Retired Chief Justice of Delhi High Court, Justice AP Shah, and LGBT activist and Judge of Lok Adalat, Joyita Mondal, will be here as the main resource persons for the symposium.

Addressing a press conference here this afternoon, SHCBA president, Additional Advocate General of Sikkim, Dr Doma Tshering Bhutia, highlighted that every person has an equal right to live with dignity in the society irrespective

of their gender, but the LGBTQIA+ community suffers because of ignorance in the society.

On the same, she stressed that the symposium will seek to highlight the discrimination and injustice being faced by the LGBTQIA+ community and try to generate awareness on the rights and welfare of this section of the society.

"Such deliberations will help create a suitable environment for the LGBTQIA+ in the society by confronting and eradicating the taboo and discrimination they face. Our objective is to change the mindset and perceptions of the people towards the LGBTQIA+ community," Dr Bhutia added.

She mentioned that Justice Shah will mainly speak on legal rights and other legal issues related to the LGBTQIA+.

She added that the first transgender judge of the Lok Adalat, Joyita Mondal, who has been working actively for the



welfare of the community for a long time, will share her experience at the symposium. She added that the symposium will also provide a platform to other people who are working in the community to share their experiences.

Dr Bhutia informed that this regional-level symposium will have lawyers, college and university students, social workers and members of social organisations from Sikkim, Manipur, Assam and parts of West Bengal as participants.

"It is high time the people accepted and treated everyone equally," she remarked. She stated that the

symposium was a good start to sensitize the people on this sensitive issue and will also extend a supporting hand to help, legally and through other means, members of the community.

RHWAS president, Tshering Wangchuk Lepcha, in turn highlighted that lifting ignorance and prejudices were the only tools to eradicate discrimination and that the community has to take the initiative by themselves.

He added that members of LGBTQIA+ community have been facing discrimination and going through trauma and suffering because of the negative perception to-

wards them. He added that such events help highlight issues related to the community and will also help members of the community come forward openly.

Likewise, founder, Sikkim Chronicle, Yougen Tamang, expressed that the symposium will provide a clear picture and message on this very sensitive issue. He added that the symposium was an intellectual move on this sensitive issue and that the media could play a big role in sensitizing people and also help boost the morale of members of the community to come openly in the society.

## CM visits Atma Nirbhar Sikkim stalls by students



**HEE, 05 MAR (IPR):** Chief Minister of Sikkim, Prem Singh Tamang visited the stalls of Atma Nirbhar Sikkim which were set up by the students of Hee Yangthang Senior Secondary School at Hee Bazaar, West Sikkim, today.

The CM interacted with the students and stated that they must be ready to face challenges after finishing school and try to be productive and self-reliant. He reiterated that entrepreneurship is the best option for the educated youth.

The CM also informed about several schemes initiated by the government for the welfare of the common people and

encouraged everyone not to hesitate to opt for any entrepreneurship for their livelihood.

The programme was organised by the students under the guidance of the Principal and staff of the school. It may be mentioned here that, under the direction and guidelines of District Administration West and Nehru Yuva Kendra, a three-day programme of Atma Nirbhar Sikkim was initiated at Hee Bazaar, West Sikkim, today.

This programme is about the concept of self-reliance for educated unemployed youth. In order to empower the youth to stand on their

own feet through Atma Nirbhar Sikkim, this programme acts as a bridge and agent to train the budding entrepreneurs after completion of their studies. Several food items were prepared and displayed by the student entrepreneurs.

Dignitaries present on the occasion were IPR Minister, LN Sharma, M.L.A, KS Lepcha, Political Secretary to CM, Jacob Khaling, Advisor GOS, Birendra Tamling, Chairman GOS, JB Limboo, SP West TW Bhutia, SDM Dentam, Principal Hee Yangthang Sr Sec School, SDPO Gayzing, BDO Dentam alongside Panchayat and local gentries.

## Women's Commission tours West and South Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT NAMCHI, 05 MAR:**

A team of the Sikkim State Commission for Women led by the Chairperson, Chung Kipu Lepcha conducted a two-day tour of West and South Sikkim. They attended a legal awareness programme funded by the Sikkim State Commission which was organised by Mangsari Mangerjung GPU at Soreng, West Sikkim, on 03 Mar, 2021.

The programme had participants from Gram Panchayat Units, self-help groups, school students, staff of one stop centre and Anganwadi workers. The objective of the programme was to highlight the existing issues related to domestic violence, trafficking, POCOS, mental health and also to disseminate information on various social welfare schemes for women being implemented by the State Government.

Resource persons for the programme were SDPO Soreng, Mahendra Pradhan, Counselor-Health, Rinku Rai, Counselor-One stop Centre/West, Tsepal D Yong-



da and Member Secretary, Yousa Lachenpa.

Chairperson, Chung Kipu Lepcha highlighted the role and importance of self-help groups for community development and also for empowering women. Furthermore, she also emphasised the support that the State Government has provided to women for their empowerment through various skill development trainings and social welfare schemes. She urged the participants to be vigilant against social evils existing in our society.

The team had a co-ordination meeting with the District Collector, M

Bharani Kumar and OSC Centre Administrator, Sangita Gurung in his office to discuss the status of functioning of the One Stop Centre at Jorethang on 04 Mar, 2021. The one stop centre is where immediate assistance is provided to victims/survivors of domestic violence, abuse and any other form of violence against women and children.

Thereafter the team visited the sub jail at Boomtar, Namchi and interacted with the Sr SP (Prison) regarding the status of women inmates lodged in the jail. The team also met with the inmates and assured

them support through vocational training programmes to them. The team then also proceeded to the Lungchok Kamerey GPU, VAC wherein they were witnessed to the initiatives being taken up by the Panchayats, chief among them being initiative to start the Women and Child Empowerment Centre which will provide all necessary assistance to women and children in the area.

A presentation on various activities undertaken by the GPU was made by Panchayat President, Deoraj Rai. Chungkipu Lepcha in her address assured the full

support of the Commission to the GPU for taking up further activities towards ensuring women's empowerment.

The Commission, during the course of its visit, received 5 complaints at Soreng and 2 complaints at Namchi. Necessary Counselling was provided to the complainants with further assurance of assistance to them.

The team comprised of Chungkipu Lepcha, Chairperson Norjha Begum, Member, Yousa Lachenpa, Member Secretary, Karma Sonam, Counselor along with other staff members of the Commission.

## 8 file nomination in West

**GYALSHING, 05 MAR (IPR):** On the fifth day of filing nomination, a total number of eight candidates have filed their nominations at the office of Assistant Returning Officer, West today.

Rinzing Bhutia have filed his nomination for 01-Kyongsa ward, Sandu Darjee and Praveen Darjee have filed their nomination for 02-Byadong ward, Akki Doma Bhutia and Laki Doma Bhutia



have filed their nomination for 03-Nayabazar ward, Khina Maya Tiwari and Jyoti Darjee have filed their nomination

for 04-Central Gyalshing ward, and Indra Bahadur Karki has filed his nomination for 05-New Gyalshing ward.

**NAMCHI, 05 MAR (IPR):** On the fifth day of filing nominations a total of fourteen candidates filed their nominations for Municipal Elections, 2021 at the office of the Municipal Returning Officer (South) today.

The nominations filed today under Namchi Municipal Council are as follows:

Samika Tamang Chettri and Nima Choden Lepcha have filed their nomination from 01 Gangyap ward. The said ward is reserved for UR (Woman) candidate.

Sailendra Chettri has filed his nomination from 02 Dambuda-

ra ward. The said ward is reserved for OBC (State List) candidate.

Gyamtso Wangdi Bhutia has filed his nomination from 03 Upper Ghurpisey. The said ward is reserved for ST candidate.

Soma Tamang has filed her nomination from 05 Upper Boomtar ward. The said ward is reserved for ST (Women)

candidate.

Prem Raj Gurung has filed his nominations from 06 Upper Singhithang ward. The said ward is reserved for OBC (Central List) candidate.

The nominations filed today under Naya-Bazar Jorethang Nagar Panchayat are as follows:

Sunil Kumar Gupta has filed his nomination from 01 Shantinagar

ward. The said ward is reserved for UR candidate.

Manjari Rai and Jyoti Rai have filed her nominations from 02 Trikaleshwar. The said ward is reserved for OBC (Central, Women) candidate.

Punam Chettri has filed her nomination from 03 Daragaon. The said ward is reserved for OBC (State List) candi-

date.

Asis Subba, Bandan Tamang, Samten Moktan (Tamang) have filed their nominations from 04 Majigaon. The said ward is reserved for ST candidate.

Uma Sunar (Biswakarma) has filed her nomination from 05 Nayabazar. The said ward is reserved for SC (Women) candidate.

Nominations for the Municipal Elections, 2021 will be done at the office of the Municipal Returning Officer on 06 Mar, 2021 from 11.00am to 3.00pm. However, the last day for filing nominations for the Municipal Elections, 2021 is on 08 Mar, 2021.

## NIT Sikkim conducts workshop on NEP 2020



**SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 05 MAR:** NIT Sikkim in association with AICTE, Government of India, successfully conducted a five-day faculty development program titled "National Education Policy 2020: Towards Holistic Education" from 01-05 Mar, 2021, a press release informs.

The program was inaugurated on 01 Mar by chief guest, Prof RL

Raina, Vice Chancellor, JK Lakshmi Pat University, Jaipur. Director of NIT Sikkim, Prof Mahesh Chandra Govil introduced the workshop, encouraging the speakers and participants to debate on various facets of NEP 2020 and exchange ideas for its implementation.

All the five days of the workshop saw inspiring and insightful talks by

eminent speakers across India comprising directors of NITs and IITs that provided a comprehensive understanding and the ethereal essence of the National Education Policy 2020, the release mentions.

The workshop ended with performance evaluation, feedback and valedictory session on 05 Mar, 2021. Faculty from all over India participated in the workshop.

## Blood Donation Camp at Namchi Government College

**SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 05 MAR:** A voluntary blood donation camp was organized by NSS unit, Namchi Government College, Kamrang on 05 Mar, a press release informs.

The camp was organized in co-ordination with District Blood Bank Namchi and VBDAS. A medical team headed by Dr. Rachana Lamichaney and Senior T.O, Bhaichung Bhutia and President, Kishore Baniya (VBDAS) Namchi con-



ducted the camp.

The blood donation was started by Principal of the college, Deepak Tewari and faculty of the college. There was an overwhelming response from students and other donors and a total of 84 units of blood was collected from the camp.

There were 47 male and 37 female donors in which 10 were faculty members.

This voluntary Blood Donation Camp was specially organized to support the blood requirement of Namchi District Hospital, as the NSS unit of the college has been regularly donating blood at Namchi Hospital.

A certificate of appreciation, badge, donation card, refreshments were given to each donor as a token of gratitude.

## Aatma Nirbhar Sikkim held in Gyalshing



**GYALSHING, 05 MAR (IPR):**

The three-day program on Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan with the name 'Aatma Nirbhar Sikkim' was inaugurated here at Gyalshing Bazaar today. ADC/West, Agawane Rohan Ramesh was the chief guest who was accompanied by district officials of different departments and representatives of Nehru Yuva Kendra, West.

It is pertinent to mention that Aatma Nirbhar Sikkim is a joint initiative of District Administration and Nehru Yuva Kendra, West Sikkim under the flagship programme, 'Aatma Nirbhar Bharat' of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India to inculcate entrepreneurship skills among the students and youths with the aim to encourage them to achieve full potential and

skills in a progressive manner.

ADC West along with Officials and NYK representatives visited different stalls set up at the periphery of Gyalshing bazaar. He interacted with the students and motivated them to work in a team so as to bring the best out of such exposure. He further asked them to strictly follow the Covid-19 guidelines while carrying out such program.

## Suspension of 5 Cong MLAs from Himachal Assembly revoked

**SHIMLA, MAR 5 (PTI):** The suspension of five Congress legislators from the Himachal Pradesh Assembly was revoked unanimously on Friday, Speaker Vipin Parmar said.

Leader of Opposition

Mukesh Agnihotri and MLAs Harsh Vardhan Chauhan, Satpal Raizada, Sunder Singh and Vinay Kumar were suspended from the Assembly on February 26 for allegedly manhandling Governor

Bandaru Dattatreya.

A resolution moved by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Suresh Bhardwaj for the revocation of their suspension was passed unanimously in the House.

## Two new COVID-19 cases in Andamans; tally at 5,024

**PORT BLAIR, MAR 5 (PTI)** Two more persons have tested positive for COVID-19 in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, taking the tally in the Union Territory to 5,024, a health department official said on Friday.

The fresh cases were detected during contact tracing, he said.

The death toll remained at 62 as no new fatality due to the infection was reported in the last 24 hours.

One person was cured of the disease on Thursday, taking the total number of recoveries in the archipelago to 4,953, the official said.

The Union Territory

now has nine active cases.

Altogether, 7,779 health and frontline workers have been vaccinated, he said.

The overall COVID situation is under control in the archipelago as the local administration has been strict to ensure that health safety protocols are followed to contain the spread of the disease, the official said.

People arriving here by flights or reaching by ships from Kolkata or Chennai are mandatorily required to show a negative coronavirus report before the authorities allow them to enter the islands.

### LOST

I Nuben Tsh. Lepcha of St. Joseph's School, Rhenok, East Sikkim, bearing Index No - 1195621/013 have lost my ICSE Migration Certificate of the year 2019. if found kindly contact : 9547092369

### ANTHYESTI KRIYA

All relatives, friends & well wishers are requested to join us in offering prayers for the departed soul of Shri Ramayan Prasad Residence, Reshi Bazar West Sikkim.

We also like to express our gratitude to all those who stood by us during time of our bereavement.

Contact : 9609988195 / 9933827853 / 7866832906



## SFFB chairperson meets film crew from Nepal, assures all support



**GANGTOK, 05 MAR (IPR):** Chairperson, Sikkim Film Promotion Board, Pooja Sharma, accompanied by Bikash Basnet, Confidential Secretary to the Chief Minister,

met prominent film personalities from Nepal here today to discuss matters pertaining to shooting of an upcoming Nepali film in Sikkim.

Actor Vinaya

Shrestha, Producer and Director Rajiv Gurung, and Line Producer Arun Regmi sat in the meeting with officials from Sikkim Film Promotion Board.

Mr Gurung informed

that they propose to shoot 50% of their film in Sikkim

Ms Sharma accorded them a warm welcome and assured all possible help and assistance to the crew.

## Two SPU scholars defend PhD theses on MGNREGA and Climate Change in Sikkim

### SUMMIT REPORT

**GANGTOK, 05 MAR:**

Vinayaka Missions Sikkim University [Sikkim Professional University] research scholar, Ash Bahadur Subba, defended his PhD thesis titled, 'Paradigm Shift in Planning, Implementation, Transparency and Accountability in MGNREGA in Sikkim: An Impact Study,' on 25 March, an official press release informs.

Mr Subba carried out his research under the supervision of Prof Jaswant Sokhi, Pro-Vice Chancellor, and Dr PK Mishra, Principal, Surya Sen Mahavidyalaya, Siliguri.

The release informs that the study explores the implementation of an innovative planning



strategy adopted by the state government to strengthen implementation of the scheme and to assess the impact of Social Audit in maintaining transparency and accountability.

Similarly, another research scholar of the university, Sundeep

Chettri of Samdur, East Sikkim, also successfully defended his PhD thesis titled, "Impact of climate change on Human Health and Society: A case study of East Sikkim."

His research was supervised by Prof Jaswant Sokhi and the

work highlights the issue of trending Climate Change and its relationship on Human Health and Society.

The Doctor of Philosophy degrees will be awarded to them during the forthcoming convocation of the University, it is informed.

## Gandhi Shilp Bazaar begins in Gangtok



**GANGTOK, 05 MAR (IPR):**

Secretary for Commerce and Industries Department, Government of Sikkim, HK Sharma inaugurated the Gandhi Shilp Bazaar 2020-21 Exhibition at the premises of Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom in Gangtok today. The Secretary was accompanied by Director, DHH, Binita Thapa along with media personnel and officers and staff of DHH.

The Gandhi Shilp Bazaar 2020-21 is being organised by Sikkim Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation

Ltd under its Marketing Support and Services Scheme, sponsored by the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles, Government of India at the DHH premises, Zero Point from 04 to 13 March.

The Exhibition-cum-Sale of handicrafts items features a large contingent of artisans, SHGs and Co-operative Societies from Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Rajasthan, Jammu & Kashmir and Sikkim. A total number of 70 stalls

have been allotted to all the participants.

Chief guest, HK Sharma visited all the stalls and interacted with the participants and expressed keen interest and happiness in the various activities.

It may be mentioned that the Gandhi Shilp Bazaar is an annual feature of Sikkim Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation Ltd. calendar. It has been providing a platform for artisans, sellers and buyers to converge and create awareness vis-a-vis the handicraft sector as an employment and income generation industry.

## Printing Dept delivers textbooks to Govt schools



**GANGTOK, 05 MAR (IPR):**

The Printing and Stationery Department (Sikkim Government Press) was entrusted to print the school textbooks for Class I and II for the academic session of 2021 by the Government of Sikkim for the first time on a trial basis.

Commissioner cum Secretary, Printing and Stationery Department,

Ambika Pradhan informed that with the upgraded machines and trained manpower, the department has successfully ensured timely delivery and high quality textbooks for the Government School children in all the four districts of Sikkim for the academic session of 2021 in collaboration with the State Education Department.

## TMC MLA opts out of Bengal assembly polls

**KOLKATA, MAR 5 (PTI):** Amid exodus of a number of public representatives and workers, another Trinamool Congress MLA Samir Chakraborty said on Friday that he would not like to contest the West Bengal assembly elections.

The TMC leadership said that they will talk to Chakraborty on the issue.

"I have informed party supremo (Mamata Banerjee) that I don't want to contest the elections but will campaign for the party," Chakraborty said in a Facebook post.

Chakraborty, a first time MLA from Taldangra constituency in Bankura district, is a familiar face in vernacular television news channel talk shows

representing the TMC's views on various issues.

BJP leader Sayantan Basu said that in the 2019 Parliament elections, TMC was way behind the BJP in Taldangra assembly segment, which is part of the Bankura Lok Sabha constituency that was won by the saffron party's candidate Subhas Sarkar.

## CID Sikkim busts....

the caller said would be refunded instantly. However, the caller then said that the refund could not be processed due to server or network issues.

The victim was again asked to make another transaction with an assurance that the previous amounts would also be refunded. When she tried to do this the transaction failed a couple of times following which they asked her to pay using Paytm. After this, instead of money being credited, it started getting debited from her account and finally she ended up losing Rs 4.96 lakh.

The SP mentioned that the investigation reveals that it is like another 'Jamtara' racket now growing in Titagarh, West Bengal. He added that the Sikkim CID investigating team had met police teams of other states at Titagarh investigating the same type of cases. Cyber-crime has become very organised as it is very lucrative, he added.

Investigating Officer, PI Abishek of Cyber Crime Cell mentioned that the arrests were made on 21 February and then they were brought to Gangtok. He added that the accused have already been placed before the court and are currently in police custody.

Several electronic devices like smartphones, laptops have been seized and forensic examination of these phones containing SMS records of transactions from various banks is being conducted. Several passport size photos of different persons along with Aadhaar details have been recovered from the laptop and mobile.

While congratulating the team, the SP mentioned that the case was cracked due to continuous electronic and technical surveillance by the team and they were linked through tracking of call data records and IP data records along with records from bank statements, ATM withdrawals, recharges etc.

Police from other States have also registered cases against the same group involved in this case, said the SP further adding that these accused may have cases in other states too.

"We are in continuous touch with sister agencies and have discussed having a joint operation next time," he said.

Further, the SP mentioned that Sikkim has been seeing around 20 cases related to cyber-crime every month and many people are being duped by fraudsters using well known e-commerce sites. On the same, he added that with the increase in cyber-crime related in Sikkim, the CID branch has made SOPs for cyber-crime related cases in the state and sent them to all police stations.

These SOPs will help police stations to deal with cyber-crime related complaints in their respective areas and people need not come to CID, he said. He appealed to the people to stay alert and not to fall for such fraud offers.

## 2954 vaccinated, 3 new cases

### SUMMIT REPORT

**GANGTOK, 05 MAR:**

A total of 2954 persons were vaccinated for COVID-19 at 19 different places of Sikkim on Friday. Continuing the vaccination drive, 1070 healthcare workers, 451 frontline workers, 155 persons aged 45 to 59 years with comorbidities and 1278 persons aged 60 years & above were vaccinated today in the State.

In the meanwhile, Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 has reached 6157 with three new cases of novel coronavirus in the last 24 hours. The figure of recovered cases of COVID-19 of Sikkim has remained unchanged with no new recovery in the State in the last 24 hours. There are 35 active cases of novel coronavirus in the State.

In his daily health bulletin on Friday, Health Department State IEC Officer, Sonam Gyaltsen Bhutia mentioned that three new cases of novel coronavirus were reported from the testing of 151 samples on Thursday. He added that two cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 133 samples, while one more person tested positive for COVID-19 in the rapid antigen testing of 09 samples.

He informed that one person from Amdo Golai, Gangtok, in East District and one person from Pelling in West District tested positive for COVID-19.

The sample of one 27-year-old woman from Gangtok also reported positive for COVID-19 but has remained untraceable over the given phone numbers. He has urged the woman to immediately contact the concerned authority.

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## Native Speakers without a Language

*Unfortunately, that could happen sooner than we feared*

The People's Linguistic Survey of India released 11 volumes in its planned 50 volume survey of the country's languages recently. The volumes, published by Orient BlackSwan, covered languages from the states of Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Maharashtra, Assam, West Bengal, Bihar and Karnataka. Yes, Sikkim is not in this initial set, but several of the languages spoken in the region must have figured in the linguistic survey. What should also be worrying is that the regional languages, what we also know as mother tongues, here must be in as precarious state as the survey has found in the ten states in question. The People's Linguistic Survey of India (PSLI) raised the alarm during the launch of the volumes when it shared that as many as 780 languages are spoken in India, at least 400 of which are at risk of dying in the next 50 years. That's an average of eight languages every year! That should have everyone worried, but clearly, the disinterest and the indifference which brought so many languages to the brink is too pervasive. There is not much happening, anywhere, at any level to save the languages at risk of being lost. May be whatever little is being attempted to avert such extinction is driven by the emotion of "save" and that is why it is failing. Perhaps we should consider nurturing instead of saving or protecting because while the latter can make the efforts insular and imperil the language even more, the former option of "nurture" allows languages space and opportunities to grow, adapt and remain relevant.

The PSLI surveyors also discovered that 250 languages were lost in the last five decades in India. The extinction is obviously picking up pace, and who knows, the timeframe of 50 years for 400 languages might actually shrink as the extinction snowball gathers more momentum as it hurtles to the abyss and who knows, maybe even obliterates more languages along the way. It is a worrying scenario. But is it? Because, as mentioned earlier, it does not appear to have generated too much concern.

The Survey, now already eight months old, might or might not resuscitate the fate that awaits regional languages, but offers us a chance to ponder more seriously on where we are going wrong with our efforts at keeping languages and dialects alive. Languages are essentially about communication and then they take on aspects of culture and invariably underline the very ethos of a people. That said, a language obviously ceases to be one when there is no one left speaking it. This does not necessarily happen with the complete annihilation of a people and is most times caused by the language becoming redundant as a communication tool. There is also the whole generational challenge. While it is not rare to, say, catch some old folk from different communities chatter away in Limboo language in parts of West Sikkim, it is already rare to find even Limboo kids speaking to each other in their mother tongue. The same applies to some other languages as well, all of which appear to be surviving, but because they are not being passed on, are already imperiled.

But there has to be more to it. How does a language die? Past experience proves that the moment "outsiders" stop trying to learn a language, it is already on death-row. It is not enough for only native speakers to continue using a language because we do not lead closed lives anymore and need to interact all the time with people from other communities, speaking different languages among themselves. And outsiders stop learning a language when they feel no need for it as a tool for communication. For instance, all old members of the plainsmen business community speak fluent Tibetan. They had to pick up the language if they wanted to trade with Tibet which is what most of them were engaged in till six decades ago. Everyone in Sikkim, including those who have been here barely a year, speaks Nepali. They have to because they need to get their message across. Similarly, any Sikkimese going out for studies comes back equipped with at least passable Hindi-speaking skills. The Chinese are introducing English in their schools because they want to now converse with the world. That more or less settles what is actually a settled argument that language is first about communication.

Being solely about communication, however, imperils a language because the link-language keeps changing as our networks widen or as new technologies become popular. Languages, hence, also need to remain relevant and important, and this they can achieve by patronizing high literature and the sharing of important thoughts and ideas in their respective languages. One misses that in Sikkim. There is so little quality literary work in regional languages that even the aesthetic appeal of learning them is being lost. We have to strive to make it worth the while for those learning regional languages by making it about more than just chatting. For that, those who complain about losing their language need to create more awareness, produce more literature, get a pop-culture going in their languages, make it more vibrant.

## Why Repressive Saudi Arabia Remains a US Ally

JEFFREY FIELDS

THECONVERSATION.COM

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman "approved an operation ... to capture or kill Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi," according to a scathing new report from the Biden administration. Yet President Joe Biden says the U.S. will not sanction the Saudi government, calculating that any direct punishment could risk Saudi Arabia's cooperation in confronting Iran and in counterterrorism efforts.

Like his predecessors, Biden is grappling with the reality that Saudi Arabia is needed to achieve certain U.S. objectives in the Middle East.

This is a change from Biden's criticism of Saudi Arabia on the campaign trail. He said his administration would turn this repressive kingdom – a longtime U.S. ally – into a global "pariah."

The Khashoggi affair highlights a persistent oddity in American foreign policy, one I observed in many years working at the State Department and Department of Defense: selective morality in dealing with repressive regimes.

A PANOPLY OF DICTATORS

The Trump administration was reluctant to confront Saudi Arabia over the killing of Khashoggi, a Washington Post columnist who lived in Virginia. Beyond revoking the visas of some Saudi officials implicated in Khashoggi's death, Trump did nothing to punish the kingdom for Khashoggi's torture, assassination and dismemberment.

Trump and other White House officials reminded critics that Saudi Arabia buys billions of dollars in weapons from the U.S. and is a crucial partner in the American pressure campaign on Iran. Biden has taken a slightly tougher line, approving the release of the intelligence report that blames bin Salman for Khashoggi's murder and sanctioning 76 lower-level Saudi officials.

Saudi Arabia isn't the only nation to get a free pass from the U.S. for its terrible misdeeds. The U.S. has for decades maintained close ties with some of the world's worst human rights abusers. Ever since the United States emerged from the Cold War as the world's dominant military and economic power, consecutive American presidents have seen financial and geopolitical benefit in overlooking the bad deeds of brutal regimes.

Before the Islamic revolution in 1979, Iran was a close U.S. ally. Shah



Reza Pahlavi ruled harshly, using his secret police to torture and murder political dissidents.

But the shah was also a secular, anti-communist leader in a Muslim-dominated region. President Nixon hoped that Iran would be the "Western policeman in the Persian Gulf."

After the shah's overthrow, the Reagan administration in the 1980s became friendly with Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. The U.S. supported him with intelligence during Iraq's war with Iran and looked the other way at his use of chemical weapons.

And before Syria's intense bloody civil war – which has killed an estimated 400,000 people and featured grisly chemical weapon attacks by the government – its authoritarian regime enjoyed relatively friendly relations with the U.S.

Syria has been on the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism since 1979. But presidents Nixon, Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton all visited President Bashar al-Assad's father, who ruled from 1971 until his death in 2000.

WHY SAUDI ARABIA MATTERS

Before the alleged assassination of Khashoggi by Saudi operatives, the 35-year-old crown prince was cultivating a reputation as a moderate reformer.

Salman has made newsworthy changes in the conservative Arab kingdom, allowing women to drive, combating corruption and curtailing some powers of the religious police.

Still, Saudi Arabia remains one of

the world's most authoritarian regimes.

Though women may now obtain a passport without the permission of a male guardian, they still need a guardian's approval to get married, leave prison or obtain certain medical procedures. And they must have the consent of a male guardian to enroll in college or look for a job.

The Saudi government also routinely arrests people without judicial review, according to Human Rights Watch. Citizens can be killed for non-violent crimes, often in public. Between January and mid-November 2019, 81 people were executed for drug-related crimes.

Saudi Arabia ranks just above North Korea on political rights, civil liberties and other measures of freedom, according to the democracy watchdog Freedom House. The same report ranks both Iran and China ahead of the Saudis.

But its wealth, strategic Middle East location and petroleum exports keep the Saudis as a vital U.S. ally. President Obama visited Saudi Arabia more than any other American president – four times in eight years – to discuss everything from Iran to oil production.

AMERICAN REALPOLITIK

This kind of foreign policy – one based on practical, self-interested principles rather than moral or ideological concerns – is called "realpolitik."

Henry Kissinger, secretary of state under Nixon, was a master of

realpolitik, which drove that administration to normalize its relationship with China. Diplomatic relations between the two countries had ended in 1949 when Chinese communist revolutionaries took power.

Then, as now, China was incredibly repressive. Only 16 countries – including Saudi Arabia – are less free than China, according to Freedom House. Iran, a country the U.S. wants Saudis to help in keeping in check, ranks ahead of China.

But China is also the world's most populous nation and a nuclear power. Nixon, a fervent anti-communist, sought to exploit a growing rift between China and the Soviet Union.

Today Washington retains the important, if occasionally rocky, relationship Kissinger forged with Beijing, despite its ongoing persecution of Muslim minority groups.

American realpolitik applies to Latin America, too. After the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the U.S. regularly backed Central and South American military dictators who tortured and killed citizens to "defend" the Americas from communism.

US NOT 'SO INNOCENT'

U.S. presidents tend to underplay their relationships with repressive regimes, lauding lofty "American values" instead.

That's the language former President Barack Obama used in 2018 to criticize Trump's embrace of Russia's authoritarian president, Vladimir Putin, citing America's "commitment to certain values and principles like the rule of law and human rights and democracy."

But Trump defended his relationship with Russia, tacitly invoking American realpolitik. "You think our country's so innocent?" he asked on Fox News.

As Trump alluded to, the U.S. has maintained close ties to numerous regimes, and still does, whose values and policies conflict with America's constitutional guarantees of democracy, freedom of speech, the right to due process and many others.

It has for decades.

Saudi Arabia's crown prince had a dissident journalist killed. American realpolitik explains why the tight U.S.-Saudi relationship will likely continue anyway.

*[the writer is Associate Professor of the Practice of International Relations, USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences]*

## Yes, export bans on vaccines are a problem, but why is the supply of vaccines so limited in the first place?

DEBORAH GLEESON

THECONVERSATION.COM

News of the blockage of a shipment of 250,000 COVID-19 vaccines from Europe to Australia has caused concern and outrage.

The immediate problem will probably be quickly solved through diplomatic channels. Even if it is not, onshore manufacturing of the AstraZeneca vaccine will soon make up for any shortfall in Australia's vaccine supply.

But to avoid these types of supply shortfalls in future, it's important to address the underlying problems behind this example of vaccine nationalism. Australia is both a victim of these problems, as well as a contributor.

WHY HAS AUSTRALIA'S SHIPMENT OF VACCINES BEEN BLOCKED?

Italy has blocked the shipment of AstraZeneca vaccines based on export authorisation rules introduced by the European Union in January. These rules require vaccine manufacturers in the EU to seek authorisation to export vaccines to some countries outside the bloc.

This is the first time this process has resulted in a planned delivery of vaccines being blocked. The EU could have objected to Italy's action, but did not.

The EU introduced the authorisation requirement due to concerns it was not receiving the quantities of the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines that the companies had agreed to provide within certain time frames.

HOW MUCH OF A PROBLEM WILL THE BLOCKAGE BE FOR AUSTRALIA?

The immediate problem will probably be quickly solved through diplomatic negotiations. The EU is also likely to face intense criticism and pressure from other countries that fear the more widespread use of export restrictions.

So, it's unlikely the export ban on these 250,000 vaccines will remain in place for long, or that Australia will face further export restrictions.

Even if the shipment never arrives in Australia, onshore manufacturing of the AstraZeneca vaccine by CSL will soon fill the gap, with the first locally produced doses expected to be available around the end of March. Any resulting delay in the roll-

out of Australia's COVID-19 vaccination program is likely to be shortlived.

But the blockage of a vaccine shipment points to bigger problems that threaten to undermine the global distribution of vaccines and the world's recovery from the pandemic.

THE BIGGER PICTURE OF VACCINE NATIONALISM

The global distribution of COVID-19 vaccines has so far been extremely inequitable. By November 2020, governments had negotiated pre-purchase agreements for almost 7.5 billion doses, 51% of which had been reserved by wealthy countries representing only 14% of the global population.

In mid-January, the director-general of the World Health Organization warned of a "catastrophic moral failure". He said that 39 million vaccine doses had been administered in high-income countries at that time, but just 25 doses had been provided in "one lowest-income country".

At this rate, it could be 2023 or 2024 before vaccination brings the pandemic under control globally.

Studies by the RAND Corporation and the International Chamber of Commerce have found that hoarding of vaccines by wealthy countries could cost the global economy trillions of dollars.

Uncontrolled transmission of the virus in some parts of the world also raises the risk of more variants emerging that are resistant to existing vaccines.

THE UNDERLYING PROBLEM OF ARTIFICIAL SCARCITY

Much of the reporting on vaccine nationalism tends to focus on the hoarding of vaccines by particular countries. But we should question why the supply of vaccines is so limited in the first place.

This comes down to privately held monopolies on the intellectual property and other types of knowledge, data and information needed for making vaccines. While there is manufacturing capacity available globally to ramp up vaccine production, the exclusive rights to make and sell the vaccines are held by a small number of companies. This is despite a huge investment of public funding in the development of many vaccines.

The intellectual property rights that impede rapid scaling-up of vaccine production are en-

shrined in the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). This agreement requires that WTO members make available 20-year patents for new pharmaceutical products, along with other types of intellectual property protection.

TRIPS includes safeguards like compulsory licensing, which governments can use to enable patented inventions to be produced without the consent of the patent owner in situations like a public health emergency.

But these are time-consuming and difficult to use, and they only apply to patents and not the other types of knowledge, data and information that are needed to manufacture vaccines.

AUSTRALIA'S SUPPORT NEEDED FOR GLOBAL SOLUTIONS TO VACCINE SCARCITY

Two important mechanisms have been proposed to solve this problem of artificial vaccine scarcity and enable production of COVID-19 medical products to be rapidly scaled up. Neither has received Australia's support to date.

India and South Africa put a proposal to the WTO in October 2020 that certain intellectual property rights in the TRIPS agreement be waived for COVID-19 medical products during the pandemic. This proposal, known as the "TRIPS waiver", is supported by many developing countries, but opposed by the EU, US and other wealthy countries, including Australia.

The World Health Organization has also set up a mechanism for sharing intellectual property, knowledge and data for COVID-19 products, known as the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP).

C-TAP has been endorsed by 40 countries and many inter-governmental and civil society organisations, but lacks support from many high-income countries, including Australia. So far, it has been unused.

To address the real problems underlying the current supply blockage, Australia will need to reconsider its opposition to these proposed global solutions.

*[the writer is Associate professor, La Trobe University]*

## Mamata releases TMC list for 291 assembly seats, to contest from Nandigram

**KOLKATA, MAR 5 (PTI)** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Friday confirmed her candidature from Nandigram seat as she released the list of Trinamool Congress candidates for the upcoming assembly polls for 291 seats with emphasis on youths, minority, women and backward communities.

Three candidates of the Bimal Gurung faction of Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), an ally of the TMC, will be contesting from the remaining three seats in Darjeeling.

Affirming her candidature from the high profile Nandigram seat, Banerjee will vacate her traditional Bhowanipore seat in Kolkata, as she threw a challenge to her protegee-turned-rival Suwendu Adhikari, who crossed over to the BJP in December.

"I will contest from Nandigram as I stick to my words.

From Bhowanipore constituency, Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay will be contesting in the upcoming Assembly elections," Banerjee said while releasing TMC candidate list for the state polls.

"On March 9 we will release our manifesto. On March 10 I will file my nomination for Nandigram seat," she told reporters.

In January this year, Banerjee had announced that she would contest elections from the Nandigram seat in Purba Medinipur district.

When asked about



Adhikari likely to be pitted against her from the Nandigram, she declined to comment on it.

This will be for the first time that Banerjee will be in the poll fray from Nandigram constituency represented by Suwendu Adhikari in 2016 and another TMC candidate in 2011.

Though Suwendu Adhikari has time and again expressed his desire to take on his former boss directly in Nandigram, the saffron party leadership is yet to take a decision on it.

Banerjee and Adhikari were the prominent figures of the anti-land acquisition movement in Nandigram in 2007 that ultimately catapulted the firebrand Trinamool Congress supremo to power in West Bengal in 2011 ending 34-year-old rule of the Left Front.

"This time we have stressed on more youths and women candidates. Around 23-24 sitting MLAS have been dropped and there are names of

about 50 women, 42 muslims, 79 SC and 17 ST candidates in the list," Banerjee said.

Exuding confidence of returning to power for the third consecutive time, Banerjee termed it as the "easiest" election the TMC has ever faced.

"This would be a smiley election for us. We would win it," she said when asked whether this will be the toughest election ever the party had faced since Trinamool Congress inception in 1998.

"After we come to power we will create Vidhan Parishad (Legislative Council) to accommodate senior and experienced leaders. We could not accommodate everybody especially those above the age of 80 years," she said.

Listing out names of candidates, Banerjee sought the blessings of the people of the state and urged them to have faith in her.

"I seek the blessings of people. I appeal to Maa Maati Manush for your

faith. Have faith in me, will protect the state and take it to new heights," she said, turning to the slogan that first brought her to power in 2011.

State Finance Minister Amit Mitra won't be contesting elections due to poor health, the TMC supremo said.

Purnendu Bose is another elderly minister missing from the TMC list of candidates and so is veteran legislator Jatu Lahiri from Sibpur.

"We will support GJM in the hills and they will support us in the plains," she said.

Banerjee also challenged Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah to deploy as much central force as they want, but the TMC will still emerge victorious.

She also thanked Hemant Soren of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and Sharad Pawar of NCP for extending their support to TMC.

"After RJD, SP and Shiv Sena, TMC has re-

ceived support from JMM and NCP for Bengal assembly polls. We would like to thank all of them," she said.

Though electorally not much relevant in Bengal, the prominent opposition parties- RJD, SP, Shiv Sena, JMM and NCP of Sharad Pawar have preferred TMC to Congress-Left parties and announced their support to Banerjee in the battle royale for Bengal.

Actress Sayantika Banerjee, Koushani Mukherjee, film director Raj Chakraborty along with several other actors and actresses have been given nominations.

Cricketer Manoj Tiwari will contest from Shibpur constituency in Howrah district.

Prominent ministers-Partha Chatterjee, Firhad Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee have been retained from their traditional seats.

Banerjee released her party candidate list from the same lucky room in her Kalighat residence from where she had done so in 2011 and 2016 assembly elections.

In the 2019 general election she had announced candidates names from a different place within her residential premises which proved unlucky for her.

The BJP had won 18 Lok Sabha seats in last Parliamentary poll out of total 42 constituencies in Bengal, only four less than TMC's tally of 22.

## Nepal's importers turn to sea to escape vagaries of northern border



**KRISHANA PRASAIN & BALARAM GHIMIRE KATHMANDU, 05 MAR [KATHMANDUPOST]:**

Most importers of Chinese consumer goods have been bringing their shipments through India as Chinese authorities still have not reopened the northern border or resumed issuing visas, traders said.

"Because of the hassles created by repeated closures of check points on the northern border, almost 70 percent of traders have been using Indian sea ports as transit points, even though it is a long way round and means higher freight charges," said Bharat Karki, senior secretary at the Nepal Trans Himalayan Border Commerce Association.

It normally takes two months for goods ordered from China to arrive in Nepal by sea freight, and two weeks by container truck overland across the northern border.

According to Karki, the cost increases significantly by around Rs1.2 million per container when importing goods by ship.

Traders are willing to spend the extra cost and time since there is no risk of their shipments being held up at the border for months on end, as has often happened at the northern border.

Naresh Katuwal, president of the Nepal National Traders' Federation, said most traders had not yet placed orders for new summer goods this year. "As China has not started issuing visas to traders, they have not been able to order goods from Chinese suppliers," he said.

The summer shopping season has started, and traders are worried they might not have adequate inventory, he said.

According to Katuwal, they are planning to meet with Chinese Ambassador Hou Yanqi to discuss the problems Nepali traders have been facing for a long time.

China has been saying it will ease trade, but there has been no noticeable progress, he said.

Nepali traders even accused China of conducting an 'undeclared trade blockade' as their merchandise-laden container trucks have not been allowed to cross the border into Nepal for the past 17 months.

China permitted only a few trucks to enter Nepal for the last festive season, and importers were forced to re-route their goods through Kolkata port in India, adding tremendously to their transportation costs.

Traders said that most summer and winter goods like garments, cosmetics, footwear and consumer electronics, among others, are imported from China.

There are two key trade routes—Rasu-wagadhi-Kerung and Tatopani-Zhangmu—between Nepal and China. The Rasuwagadhi-Kerung border crossing has remained closed since January 2020, initially due to snowfall blocking the roads in the bordering region and later due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Karki said that the Rasuwagadhi-Kerung transit point re-opened on Tuesday, but container trucks still had not started leaving for Nepal. But five goods carriers have been departing from the Tatopani-Zhangmu transit point daily, he said.

Most of the goods stranded on the Chinese side of the border have been dispatched as a few goods carriers have been allowed to cross into Nepal, but it is taking time to clear the remaining consignments, Karki said.

Trader Dharma Poudel said that a lot of goods ordered in August last year were stuck in warehouses in Khassa, Nyalam Dhangri, Shigatse and other places north of Kerung in China.

Dhiraj Shrestha, president of the Ranjana Traders Association, said they had not ordered summer garments from China this year, and instead were sourcing their requirement from Nepali garment manufacturers.

Ram Prasad Regmi, Chief Customs Officer at the Rasuwa Customs Office, said that the border restrictions had not only caused losses to traders but the government too. The customs office has collected only 17 percent of the targeted revenue in the first seven months of the current fiscal year.

The office had set a target of collecting Rs11.33 billion in customs duty and fees in the current fiscal year, but it has been able to collect only Rs2.38 billion in the first seven months of the current fiscal year that started mid-July.

"Revenue collection has been hit due to the low volume of imports," said Regmi.

According to the Trade and Export Promotion Centre, imports from China dropped 12.4 percent year-on-year to Rs116.12 billion in the first seven months of the current fiscal year.

## Indian killed in firing by Nepal Police: Pilibhit SP

**PILIBHIT (UP), MAR 5 (PTI):** A young man was killed after the Nepalese Police allegedly fired at three Indians who had gone across the border from Pilibhit district.

Pilibhit SP Jai Prakash Yadav said the incident took place on Thursday evening at the Belori market in Nepal's Kanchanpur where Bhumidan Raghavpuri Tilla Chaar village residents Govinda Singh, Gurmeet Singh and Pappu Singh had gone to a fair.

According to the Hazra police in Pilibhit district, the Nepalese authorities have alleged that the three were Indian smugglers and they had recovered "brown

sugar", a pistol and a machine used to print fake currency notes from the youth who was killed.

However, the Pilibhit SP said though Nepalese officials are terming it a case of smuggling, the locals have said the firing took place following a minor argument.

"The Nepalese Police cordoned them off and opened fire around 7.30 pm, in which Govinda Singh (24) was seriously injured. He succumbed to his injuries at the Belori primary hospital. The body is in the custody of the Nepalese Police," Yadav said.

Pappu Singh was seriously injured and was

admitted to a Palia hospital in Lakhimpur Kheri district from where he was referred to a Lucknow hospital for treatment on Friday.

According to the SP, Gurmeet Singh had said to have fled from the spot and returned to the Indian territory but his whereabouts are not known. Police are looking for him, the SP said.

The SP said Nepalese officials have been contacted to bring back the victim's body and talks are being held over it.

Yadav said there is peace at the border with Nepal even as more police have been deployed as a precautionary measure.

## Unless Tottenham get their balance right they will not finish in top four

**DAVID HYTNER LONDON, 05 MAR [THEGUARDIAN]:**

Hugo Lloris seemed to point towards fatigue. Others have wondered whether it might be tactical - a manifestation of José Mourinho's more defensive instincts, although the Tottenham manager has hotly denied this. Could it be related to mentality, the lack of killer instinct? Whatever the reason, at Fulham on Thursday evening, it happened again.

Spurs were 1-0 up at half-time, having played well. One of the game's principal features was Mourinho's selection of Gareth Bale, Dele Alli, Son Heung-min and Harry Kane at the outset in a front four for the first time and they played as a four, pressing high, with Alli joining up with Kane in the middle. There was a sharpness to some of their interplay, a tempo about it and they looked as if they might score more than the one that Alli forced in via a deflection off Tosin Adarabioyo.

Defensively, they kept Fulham at arm's length, apart from the moment on 45 minutes when Antonee Robinson tore past four players and Mario Lemina ended up lifting a golden chance high. The move was not down to a structural problem for Spurs. But then everything changed.

In four previous Premier League games this season, Spurs had been 1-0 up at half-time only to draw 1-1. One was the reverse fixture against Fulham and another was away to Crystal Palace; Spurs face them at home on Sunday night. This time,

they flirted with the 1-1, aggressively so. They dropped deep, Fulham pressed on to the front foot, creating chances, and only an unlucky VAR intervention after the hour denied Josh Maja the equaliser. The technology applied the letter of the law to rule on a handball against Lemina in the buildup. On Friday Ifab said that from 1 July such an accidental handball would no longer be considered an offence.

Spurs escaped, although it should be noted that after Mourinho made his three substitutions - two on 68 minutes, the other on 75 - his team closed out the game with a degree of comfort. The manager felt that the replacements, Moussa Sissoko, Lucas Moura and Érik Lamela, brought greater intensity and he was right.

That was encouraging and so is a look at the table, which shows Spurs are five points behind fourth-placed Chelsea with a game in hand. But until they can perform consistently across the full 90 minutes, until they can get the balance right, they will not be able to fulfil their ambition of qualifying for the Champions League.

"In the way we play, if we don't press well, unfortunately we have to drop because our midfielders and our defence start to be exposed and there's a lot of space behind to cover," Lloris, the goalkeeper and captain, said. "We played very well in the first half. I don't think we played the second half that we wanted."

## Rijiju bats for hosting Olympics in India

**NEW DELHI, MAR 5 (PTI):** Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju on Friday pitched for hosting the Summer Olympics in the future, saying the Olympic movement is not complete till India hosts an Olympic Games. We are taking this very seriously," the Minister said during his keynote address.

On the occasion, Rijiju also highlighted his ministry's two big initiatives -- the Khelo India and Fit India programmes.

He appealed to corporates to launch the Fit India movement in their offices.

Rijiju also appealed to the business fraternity to help in making sports a vibrant industry in India.

"Sports is a big industry, if we really take it

forward, it can become a big part of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), sports can give big direction to our youth. The CII can play a role in making sports a vibrant industry. The industry can set a target of what should be the share of sports in GDP," he said.

"After the lockdown, tournaments have resumed across the world and they are happening successfully.

"We have the Shooting World Cup in Delhi later this month and the Badminton Super Series is scheduled for May this year. I want to tell the industry to contribute through Corporate Social Responsibility for organising international events in India.

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# Saracens ready for the Championship and the Championship is ready for us

WILL HOOLEY

**LONDON, 05 MAR [THEGUARDIAN]:** When the referee, Mike Hudson, called time at the end of Coventry's victory over Doncaster Knights at Castle Park on Saturday 14 March, none of us knew that 358 days would pass before the next competitive game was played in the Greene King IPA Championship. It's been a long, and frustrating, wait for players and fans, but the new season finally kicks off this weekend with my own club, Saracens, joining the league for the first time.

English rugby's second-tier clubs will be excited at the prospect of denting the ambition of the three-times European champions and welcoming Owen Farrell, Maro Itoje and Billy Vunipola to a parallel rugby universe. If there is one game Championship clubs will analyse, put in an extra training session for, then Saracens will be that "cup final" for all.

Let's get one thing straight: the Championship is a very tough league. I should know, having played nearly three seasons with Bedford Blues. Championship teams play with intensity, commitment and tactical intelligence. Pre-season games against Ealing Trailfinders, Doncaster and Coventry have left our squad in absolutely no doubt of the challenge that awaits them. We are up against proud men, many with



a huge amount of experience, all vying to show Saracens what they can do.

There is genuine ambition in this league. Ealing convincingly won the pre-season Trailfinders Challenge Cup. Run by their astute director of rugby, Ben Ward, and generously backed by Mike Gooley, the team are full of dynamism and tenacity. They are serious contenders for the league title and a side to be wary of.

Ealing will not be the only team to think the matchup against Saracens is their showpiece fixture. A first trip to Cornish Pirates for many in the Saracens squad will be one to relish. Penzance, with its own microclimate, will welcome us for our first league game of the season on Saturday. The Pirates are unquestionably one of the strongest teams in the league, particularly with their understanding of the contours of Mennaye Field

and the mental battle that comes with it. I have always loved playing there in the fresh sea air, even though it can take an eternity to get there.

At Saracens we are all going to have to swap the familiar for the unfamiliar as we seek to bounce back into the Premiership. A voyage to the south-west will mean heading way beyond Exeter's Sandy Park; our most northerly rivals will be Doncaster rather than Newcastle and a London derby will involve Richmond instead of Harlequins. New friendships will be forged and club ties strengthened. We will be better for it.

All the clubs are itching to get going. Most have faced grave financial challenges, relying on the furlough scheme to pay the wage bill and crowdfunding to cover their overheads, especially the cost of Covid testing. I take my hat off to all the supporters who have dipped into their pockets to help their lo-

cal clubs, especially at Amptill and Bedford. It shows just how important rugby is within local communities. Players know, and appreciate, what has been done. I am sure they will start to repay that debt on the pitch this weekend.

And what of the past nine months at Saracens? The Premiership's restart in August felt like a breath of fresh air. Accepting our fate, we played as a group committed to giving everything for each other, particularly those legends whose time at the club was coming to an end. I loved getting into the thick of things, going from weekend to midweek games, the whole squad playing its part. With the European Cup as the focal point, it was extraordinary to be involved in a group that battled against the odds and just came up short in the semi-finals. Some familiar faces bade farewell, closing a remark-

able chapter in English and European top-flight rugby.

Since then, there have also been changes on the coaching side. Alex Sanderson has become director of rugby at Sale after 17 successful years with Saracens but Kelly Brown has just returned as an assistant coach. The ability to manage change is part and parcel of every successful club but the basic principles remain the same. Saracens is a club where everyone is encouraged to maximise their potential every day in training. It is that level of continuity that breeds confidence among the players and success on the pitch.

If there is one thing I have learned in my time at Saracens, it is that the whole organisation is built on togetherness, exactly the characteristic needed to navigate our way through an intense three months of Championship rugby. The whole squad is genuinely excited at the prospect of visiting some of the traditional strongholds of English club rugby, while being warm hosts to those who visit us.

We will show respect to our opponents and work hard to earn it from them. Even without fans for most of the season, the level of competition will illustrate to supporters and the RFU just how important this league is. We have had to be patient for the opportunity but, finally, the waiting is over.

## Boxam International Boxing: Satish, Ashish enter semis



**NEW DELHI, MAR 5 (PTI):** Olympic-bound Indian boxers Satish Kumar (+91kg) and Ashish Kumar (75kg) entered the semifinals of the 35th Boxam International Tournament in Castellon, Spain with impressive victories.

Also advancing to the last-four round was Sumit Sangwan (81kg) after a 4-1 triumph over Mohor El Ziad of Belgium.

Satish, the first super heavyweight from the country to qualify for the Olympics, defeated Denmark's Givskov Nielsen

5-0 in his last-eight bout late on Thursday.

Asian silver-winner Ashish, on the other hand, got the better of Italy's Remo Salvatti in a split 4-1 verdict to make the medal rounds.

With this the Indian representation in the semifinals touched 10 -- six men and four women.

Earlier on Thursday, Mohammed Hussamuddin (57kg) and the Tokyo-bound duo of Manish Kaushik (63kg) and Vikas Krishan (69kg) advanced to the medal rounds with impressive

victories.

However, world number one Amit Panghal (52kg) bowed out with a stunning loss to European Games gold-medallist Gabriel Escobar.

Among the women, six-time world champion M C Mary Kom (51kg), Asian champion Pooja Rani (75kg), Simranjit Kaur (60kg) and debutant Jasmine (57kg) are in the last-four stage.

Boxers from 17 countries, including Russia, USA, Italy, and Kazakhstan are participating in the event.

## Kieron Pollard becomes third player to hit six sixes in an international over



**ANTIGUA, 05 MAR [THEGUARDIAN]:** Kieron Pollard hit six sixes in an over to guide West Indies to a comprehensive four-wicket win against Sri Lanka in the first game of their three-match T20 series.

Sent in to bat at the Coolidge Cricket Ground in Osbourn, Antigua, Sri Lanka scored 131 for nine, with the debutant Pathum Nissanka top-scoring with 39 from 34 balls.

As the home side began their chase, leg-spinner Akila Dananjaya took a hat-trick in the fourth over in dismissing Evin Lewis for 28 and then Chris Gayle and Nicholas Pooran.

But in the sixth over

the spinner was pummeled in all directions by Pollard, who joins India's Yuvraj Singh in hitting six sixes in a T20 international over. He also became the third player -- along with Herschelle Gibbs -- to record the achievement in any format of the game at international level.

Pollard was trapped lbw to Hasaranga de Silva in the following over to finish with 38 from 11 deliveries. De Silva dismissed Fabian Allen with the next ball before a block from Dwayne Bravo denied the Sri Lankan the second hat-trick of the innings.

Bravo and Jason Holder, who scored 29 not out, rallied to see the

hosts home at 134 for six in just 13.1 overs, with Holder securing the win with the 15th six of his side's innings.

"I felt after hitting a couple of sixes, I understood how the pitch plays, it was important to be positive and play your shots," said Pollard. "Back yourselves to clear the boundary."

"A couple of things went through my mind before the sixth ball, I thought: should I go for the six or take the 30 runs in the over? He went around the wicket and bowled it on to my pads, I told myself: 'Wait Polly, take a chance.' That's how I have played my cricket all along, especially against the spinners."

## Aaron Finch fires again as Australia send T20 series in New Zealand to decider



**WELLINGTON, 05 MAR [THEGUARDIAN]:** Australia levelled the T20 series with New Zealand, skittling the Black Caps for just 106 in Wellington to set up a do-or-die finale on Sunday. In blustery conditions on Friday night, Aaron Finch smacked 26 off Kyle Jamieson's final over to power Australia to 156-6 at an empty Sky Stadium.

The total was well short of their 208-4 at the same venue on Wednesday but proved enough for a 50-run victory over an out-of-sorts New Zealand.

Australia squeezed the hosts by front-loading their attack with spin. Fresh from his Australian

record 6-30, Ashton Agar (2-11) opened the bowling as Finch kept the ball in his tweakers' hands for nine of the opening 13 overs.

Agar had Martin Guptill (7) caught in the deep early, while Glenn Maxwell (2-14) lured Kane Williamson (8) into an errant sweep.

Under pressure to up the run rate, Glenn Phillips (1) ran himself out to leave the Black Caps stranded at 41-4 after 10 overs. From that point, New Zealand were effectively out of the contest, ruing a loose finish with the ball that turned the match.

Finch was plodding

for most of his innings, reaching his half-century off a pedestrian 47 balls. At 130-6, he unloaded in the final over, crunching two sixes over extra cover, another over long-on and putting the final ball of the innings into the stands over midwicket.

The captain finished with 79 off 55 in a superbly judged innings, coming after his fine 69 on Wednesday night. Finch's final over brought more runs than every partnership he shared with Australia's established batters, as Matthew Wade (14), Josh Philippe (13), Maxwell (18) and Marcus Stoinis (19) all struck out trying to up the run rate.

Agar, in at six ahead of Mitch Marsh, looked at sea and was bowled for a third-ball duck, with Marsh following shortly after for six. At that point, Finch realised the innings was on his bat, upping his strike rate beyond 100.

The 34-year-old also moved past the absent Dave Warner to become Australia's all-time leading T20 international run scorer and just the fifth man to clock 100 international T20 sixes.

The series will be decided at the same venue on Sunday, with fans allowed back in the stands after the easing of New Zealand's Covid restrictions.

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## Liverpool slumps to historic 5th straight loss at Anfield

**LIVERPOOL, MAR 5 (AP):** Five straight home losses for the first time in the club's 128-year history. More than 10 hours since a goal from open play at Anfield.

The stadium that was once a fortress for Liverpool is the now the scene of a scarcely believable implosion by the soon-to-be-deposed English champions.

Liverpool's 1-0 loss to Chelsea on Thursday continued a staggering run of home form over the past six weeks, after Jurgen Klopp's team had previously gone 68 games in a row unbeaten at Anfield.

Formerly the owner of one of Europe's most devastating attacks, Liverpool only managed one effort on goal against Chelsea - a weak header in the 85th minute. Mo-

hamed Salah was substituted after barely an hour; Sadio Mane and Roberto Firmino barely threatened either.

Mason Mount scored the winner in the 42nd minute, cutting in from the left and curling home from the edge of the area for a goal that sent Chelsea into the top four and dropped Liverpool to seventh place.

It was a first win at Anfield since 2014 for Chelsea, which is a team transformed under Thomas Tuchel and has gone 10 matches unbeaten since the German arrived as Frank Lampard's replacement.

Qualifying for the Champions League looks to be increasingly unlikely for Liverpool, which is four points adrift of Chelsea and even behind Merseyside rival Everton.

"It's a massive blow," Klopp said. "If you lose that many games, you don't have the right to go to the Champions League."

Eight months after winning the Premier League by 18 points, Liverpool is 22 points behind first-place Manchester City.

"To get back to where you get these moments, you have to work, be stubborn and fight hard," Klopp said. "We will get there again because it is still in the boys."

**NEW-LOOK ATTACK**  
For the first time this season, Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho started a match with Harry Kane, Son Heung-min, Gareth Bale and Dele Alli as the team's front four.

None of the quartet scored, with Tottenham instead relying on an own-

goal to edge past Fulham 1-0.

Two of Spurs' new-look attack played a key role in the goal, Son crossing from the left and Alli providing the deft flick that was heading wide only for the ball to deflect into the net off Fulham defender Tosin Adarabioyo.

Alli started a league match for the first time since the opening day of the season and might have done enough to keep his place in the team as Tottenham pushes to qualify for the Champions League. A second straight win left Mourinho's side five points off Chelsea.

Fulham, which would have climbed out of the relegation zone with a win, was denied an equalizer in the 62nd after Josh Maja scored with a low shot just inside the area.

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## New Tokyo Olympic president tries to assure Japan on safety

**TOKYO (AP):** The new president of the Tokyo Olympic organizing committee has begun holding weekly news conferences hoping to win over a doubting Japanese public with the postponed games opening in just under five months.

Seiko Hashimoto is trying to assure everyone that the Olympics will be safe and secure, a phrase she repeated a dozen times Friday in her inaugural news conference.

Polls show about 80% of Japanese think the games should be postponed again or canceled amid the pandemic.

"The situation around coronavirus doesn't go easy on us," Hashimoto said. "I understand there are a lot of people in Tokyo and in Japan who have concerns about the games in Tokyo this summer. I'd like to share my thoughts and alleviate some of those concerns."

She also needs to ease fears about the torch relay, which is set to begin on March 25 from the northeastern prefecture of Fukushima. The relay involves 10,000 runners and goes to every corner of Japan.

The Olympics open on July 23, followed by the Paralympics on Aug. 24. They will include 11,000 Olympians, 4,400 Paralympic athletes and tens of thousands of judges, officials, sponsors, volunteers, VIPs, media and broadcasters.

"People need to start to build confidence in the safety of the games," Hashimoto said. "It will be very difficult without that."

Hashimoto said she has appointed CEO Toshiro Muto to head the relay effort. The Olympics were postponed a year ago just as the torch relay opened. If the relay falters with crowding, cheering spectators and unprepared local authorities, the Olympics could go down with it.

Early conjecture hinted at calling off the relay, but it is heavily sponsored by Coca-Cola and Toyota. Sponsors and the sale of broadcast rights account for 91% of the International Olympic Committee's income.

Hashimoto has promised to make a decision on admitting fans from abroad by March 25, or at least by the end of the month. The Mainichi newspaper reported this week, citing an unnamed government source, that foreign fans will not be allowed. IOC President Thomas Bach also hinted at the decision going that way.

Hashimoto has not confirmed it.

# Amid pandemic, pope goes to Iraq to rally fading Christians

**BAGHDAD (AP):** Pope Francis was headed to Iraq on Friday to urge the country's dwindling number of Christians to stay put and help rebuild the country after years of war and persecution, brushing aside the coronavirus pandemic and security concerns to make his first-ever papal visit.

Iraqis were keen to welcome him and the global attention his visit will bring, with banners and posters hanging high in central Baghdad, and billboards depicting Francis with the slogan "We are all Brothers" decorating the main thoroughfare. In central Tahrir square, a mock tree was erected emblazoned with the Vatican emblem, while Iraqi and Vatican flags lined empty streets.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein said Iraqis were eager to welcome Francis' "message of peace and tolerance" and described the visit as a historic meeting between the "minaret and the bells." Among the highlights of the three-day visit is Francis' private meeting Saturday with the country's top Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, a revered figure in Iraq and beyond.

The government is eager to show off the relative security it has achieved after years of wars and militant attacks that nevertheless continue even today. Francis and the Vatican delegation are relying on Iraqi security forces to protect them, including with the expected first use of an armored car for the pope's mobile-loving pontiff.

Tahsin al-Khafaji, spokesman for Iraq's



joint operations, said security forces had been increased.

"This visit is really important to us and provides a good perspective of Iraq because the whole world will be watching," he said. The high stakes will give Iraqi forces "motivation to achieve this visit with safety and peace."

Francis is breaking his year-long COVID-19 lockdown to refocus the world's attention on a largely neglected people whose northern Christian communities, which date from the time of Christ, were largely emptied during the violent Islamic State reign from 2014-2017.

For the pope, who has often traveled to places where Christians are a persecuted minority, Iraq's beleaguered Christians are the epitome of the "martyred church" that he has admired ever since he was a young Jesuit seeking to be a missionary in Asia.

In Iraq, Francis is seeking to not only honor its martyrs but deliver a message of reconciliation and fraternity. The few Christians who remain in Iraq harbor a lingering mistrust of their Muslim neighbors and face structural discrimination long predating both IS and the

2003 U.S.-led invasion that plunged the country into chaos.

"The Pope's visit is to support the Christians in Iraq to stay, and to say that they are not forgotten," the Chaldean patriarch, Cardinal Luis Sako, told reporters in Baghdad this week. The aim of Francis' visit, he said, is to encourage them to "hold onto hope."

The visit comes as Iraq is seeing a new spike in coronavirus infections, with most new cases traced to the highly contagious variant first identified in Britain. The 84-year-old pope, the Vatican delegation and travelling media have been vaccinated; most Iraqis have not.

Ahead of the pope's arrival Friday, dozens of men, women and children gathered in a Baghdad church, many not wearing masks or observing social distancing, before boarding buses to the airport to welcome the pontiff.

The Vatican and Iraqi authorities have downplayed the threat of the virus and insisted that social distancing, crowd control and other health care measures will be enforced. The Vatican spokesman, Matteo Bruni, said this week the

important thing is for Iraqis to know that the pope came to Iraq as an "act of love."

"I come among you as a pilgrim of peace, to repeat 'you are all brothers,'" Francis said in a video-message to the Iraqi people on the eve of his visit. "I come as a pilgrim of peace in search of fraternity, animated by the desire to pray together and walk together, also with brothers and sisters of other religious traditions."

Christians once constituted a sizeable minority in Iraq but their numbers began dwindling after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion. They fell further when IS militants in 2014 swept through traditionally Christian towns across the Nineveh plains. Their extremist brand of Islam forced residents to flee to the neighboring Kurdish region or further afield.

Few have returned, and those who have found their homes and churches destroyed.

Returnees have had to contend with more struggles. Many cannot find work and blame discriminatory practices in the public sector, Iraq's largest employer. Since 2003, public jobs have

been mostly controlled by majority Shiite political elites, leaving Christians feeling marginalized.

While hard numbers are hard to come by, there were an estimated 1.4 million Christians in Iraq in 2003. Today the number is believed to be around 250,000.

During his visit, Francis will pray in the Baghdad church that was the site of one of the worst massacres of Christians, the 2010 attack by Islamic militants that left 58 people dead. He will honor the dead in a Mosul square surrounded by shells of destroyed churches and meet with the small Christian community that returned to Qaraqosh. He will bless their church, which was used as a firing range by IS.

The Vatican and the pope have frequently insisted on the need to preserve Iraq's ancient Christian communities and create the security, economic and social conditions for those who have left to return. But that hasn't necessarily translated into reality.

"I am the only priest in Mosul. Every Sunday I hold mass at 9 a.m., and only around 70 people attend," said the Rev. Raed Adil Kelo, parish priest of the Church of the Annunciation in the one-time de-facto IS capital.

Before 2003, the Christian population was 50,000, he said. It had dwindled to 2,000 before IS overran northern Iraq. He doesn't expect more to return, but he said Francis' visit would have immeasurable importance for those who stayed.

"This visit will bring peace to Iraq" he said.

## YouTube removes Myanmar army channels; UN to meet on crisis

**YANGON, Myanmar (AP):** YouTube removed five channels run by Myanmar's military for violating its guidelines, it announced Friday, as demonstrators defied growing violence by security forces and staged more anti-coup protests ahead of a special U.N. Security Council meeting on the country's political crisis.

YouTube said it is watching for any further content that might violate its rules. It earlier pulled dozens of channels as part of an investigation into content uploaded in a coordinated influence campaign. The decision by YouTube followed Facebook's earlier announcement that it has removed all Myanmar military-linked pages from its site and from Instagram, which it also owns.

The escalation of violence by security forces has put pressure on the world community to act to restrain the junta, which seized power on Feb. 1 by ousting the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Large protests against military rule have occurred daily in many cities and towns. Security forces escalated their crackdown this week with greater use of lethal force and mass arrests. At least 18 protesters were shot dead on Sunday and 38 on Wednesday, according to the U.N. Human Rights Office. More than 1,000 people have been arrested, the independent Assistance Association for Political Prisoners said.

Protests continued in the country's biggest cities, Yangon and Mandalay, and elsewhere on Friday, and were again met by force from police. Many cases of targeted brutality have been captured in photos and videos that have circulated widely on social media. Videos have shown security forces shooting people at point-blank range and chasing down and savagely beating demonstrators.

The United States called the images appalling, the U.N. human rights chief said it was time to "end the military's stranglehold over democracy in Myanmar,"

and the world body's independent expert on human rights in the country, Tom Andrews, urged Security Council members to watch the videos before their closed-door consultations on Friday.

While many abuses are committed by police, there is even greater concern about military forces being deployed in cities across the country that are notorious for decades of brutal counter-insurgency tactics and human rights abuses.

In Yangon, members of the army's 77th Light Infantry Division have been deployed during anti-coup protests. The 77th was also deployed in Yangon in 2007 to suppress anti-junta protests, firing upon protesters and ramming them with trucks, witnesses told Human Rights Watch.

The 99th Light Infantry Division has also been deployed, including in Mandalay. It is infamous for its counter-insurgency campaigns against ethnic minorities across the country, including spearheading the response that led to a brutal crackdown that caused more than 700,000 Rohingya Muslims to flee from Rakhine state to Bangladesh. It also has been accused of war crimes in Shan state, another ethnic minority area, in 2016 and early 2017.

Any kind of coordinated action at the U.N. will be difficult since two permanent members of the Security Council, China and Russia, are likely to veto it.

Even if the council did take action, U.N. special envoy to Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener cautioned this week it might not make much difference. She said she warned Myanmar's army that the world's nations and the Security Council "might take huge strong measures." "And the answer was, 'We are used to sanctions and we survived those sanctions in the past,'" she said. When she also warned that Myanmar would become isolated, Schraner Burgener said, "the answer was, 'We have to learn to walk with only a few friends.'"

## Australia asks EU to stop blocking vaccine exports

**BRUSSELS (AP):** Australia is seeking assurances from the European Union's executive arm that future shipments of vaccines will not be blocked, after Italy banned a large export of the AstraZeneca coronavirus shots.

The shipment to Australia of more than a quarter-million doses was blocked from leaving the 27-nation bloc — the first use of an export control system instituted by the EU to make sure big pharma companies respect their EU contracts.

The ban was requested by Italian authorities and approved by the EU in a move that frustrated the Australian government.

"The world is in uncharted territory at present, it's unsurprising that some countries would

tear up the rule book," finance minister Simon Birmingham told Sky News Australia on Friday. Birmingham acknowledged, however, that Australia received 300,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine last week, and "that will see our current distribution plan work."

Australia's immunization program began last month and the government expects the vaccine will be made available to anyone who wants it by October. The country has secured 53.8 million doses of the vaccine made by AstraZeneca and Oxford University, 50 million of which will be made in Australia in a partnership with Melbourne-based biopharmaceutical company CSL.

"We are obviously disappointed and frus-

trated by this decision," Birmingham said. "It is very much a reminder of the desperation that exists in other parts of the world, compared with the very good position we found ourselves in here in Australia."

According to Australian media, Health Minister Greg Hunt has asked the European Commission to review the Italian decision.

The shipment ban was the latest development in the dispute between the EU and AstraZeneca over delays in deliveries.

Faced with shortages of doses during the early stages of the vaccine campaign that started in late December in the bloc, the EU issued an export control system for COVID-19 vaccines in late January, forcing com-

panies to respect their contractual obligations to the bloc before commercial exports can be approved.

The EU has been specifically angry with AstraZeneca because it is delivering far fewer doses to the bloc than it had promised. Of the initial order for 80 million doses to the EU in the first quarter, the company will be struggling to deliver half that quantity.

The EU thought it had made excellent preparations for the rollout of vaccines. With its 450 million people, the EU has signed deals for six different vaccines. In total, it has ordered up to 400 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine and sealed agreements with other companies for more than 2 billion shots. But only 33 million

doses have been given so far, and only 11 million Europeans have been fully vaccinated. Despite the current difficulties, the EU's goal remains to vaccinate 70% of the adult population in the bloc by the end of summer.

## Japan to extend virus emergency for 2 weeks for Tokyo area

**TOKYO, MAR 5 (AP):** Japan's government will extend a state of emergency in the Tokyo region for another two weeks because its medical systems are still strained by COVID-19 patients, the minister in charge of virus response said Friday.

"For two more weeks, we will keep the measure in place... so that we can firmly ease strains on hospitals"

to meet conditions for lifting the emergency measures, economic revitalization minister Yasutoshi Nishimura told reporters.

Nishimura said the government has received preliminary approval from experts to extend the emergency through March 21 for Tokyo and three neighbouring prefectures. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga is to for-

mally announce the plan Friday night after parliament approval.

He said medical systems in the region are still burdened with COVID-19 patients and more hospital beds have to be freed.

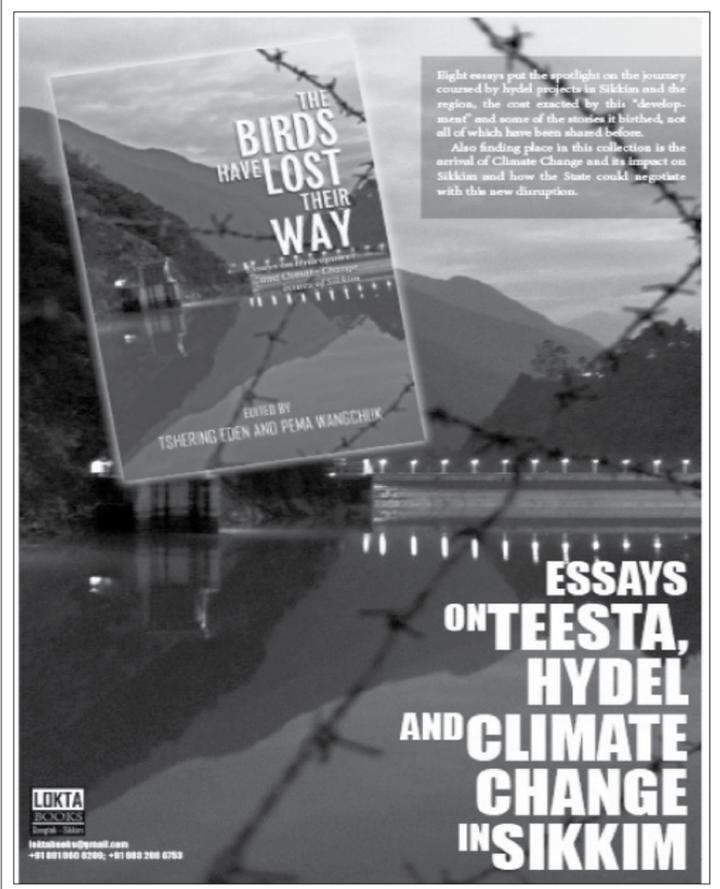
Suga declared a monthlong emergency on January 7 for Tokyo, Kanagawa, Saitama and Chiba that was later ex-

tended through March 7. An emergency that applied to other urban prefectures was lifted last week, underscoring the government's eagerness to allow businesses to return to normal as soon as possible.

The state of emergency, which is a non-binding request, centres around asking restaurants, bars and other businesses to voluntarily close at 8

pm. Japan has never had a mandatory lockdown, but has managed to keep infections relatively low with social distancing and such voluntary measures.

Controlling the spread of the virus, along with progress in vaccination, is considered key for Japan as Tokyo is to host the Olympics, delayed by one year because of the virus, starting July 23.



## 'Fast & Furious 9' pushed to June 25



**LOS ANGELES, MAR 5 (PTI):** The ninth installment in the "Fast & Furious" action franchise will hit the theatres on June 25.

Action star Vin Diesel shared the new release date of film via teaser he posted on Instagram.

"Finally! Blessed and grateful," he captioned the clip.

Directed by Justin Lin, "F9" also features WWE wrestler-turned-actor John Cena, Michelle Rodriguez, Tyrese Gibson, Chris "Ludacris" Bridges, Jordana Brewster, Nathalie Emmanuel, Sung Kang, Helen Mirren, and Charlize Theron.

"F9" was originally scheduled to release globally in May, 2020, but Universal Pictures pushed the project to April

2, 2021 and then to Memorial Day, May 28, 2021, in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

Universal has also delayed Minions: The Rise of Gru, the fifth installment in the Despicable Me franchise. The animated family film, which was set to open on July 2, 2021, will now release theatrically on July 1, 2022.

## Fatima Sana Shaikh to star in Hindi remake of Tamil hit 'Aruvi'

**MUMBAI, MAR 5 (PTI):** Actor Fatima Sana Shaikh has been roped in to play the lead role in the the Hindi adaptation of 2017 Tamil blockbuster movie Aruvi, the producers announced on Friday.

Applause Entertainment has collaborated with Faith Films for the remake, which will be directed by E Niwas of Shool fame.

The Tamil-language original, directed by Arun Prabu Purushothaman, starred Aditi Balan, who was seen in the recently released anthology Kutty Story.

The story follows a girl born and brought up amidst the ever growing eco-social-consumeristic environment. She finds it difficult to fit in the society and decides to take it hard on the people.

Shaikh, who was last seen in Suraj Pe Mangal Bhari, said she is thrilled to be part of the project.

I am glad Applause Entertainment and Faith Films have come together with E Niwas to make this great content and I am excited to embark on this journey. I am looking forward to dive deep into the skin of the character of Aruvi, Shaikh said in a statement.

Aruvi, which is a commentary on consumerism and misogyny, among other prevalent issues, saw Balan playing a progressive girl.

Sameer Nair, CEO, Applause Entertainment, said the team was drawn by the unconventional narrative of Aruvi and decided to retell the story for the larger audience.



Equally funny and ferocious, Aruvi is a provocative, feminist social satire that stunned us when we first saw it. We were drawn in by its unconventional narrative, deftly balancing its black comedy leanings, with the beats of a tautly executed thriller, Nair said.

Viki Rajani, founder, Faith Films, said there is a lot of pressure to match up to the level of the original, but he is confident that the team on board will be able to recreate the magic.

Niwas said he feels honoured to direct the Hindi version.

'Aruvi' is not just a story of a hero. It's a triumph over the labyrinths of life. It's totally euphoric and a privilege to explore one of the most beautiful cinematic characters I have come across. Fatima is a befitting choice, he added.

The Hindi adaptation is set to begin filming in mid-2021.

## Kelly Rowland Explains Why She Won't Watch the Britney Spears Documentary

**D**uring her Watch What Happens Live visit, Kelly Rowland revealed why she has avoided checking out Framing Britney Spears.

Although FX's recent Britney Spears documentary has spurred endless debate, one person who doesn't plan to take part in the conversation is Kelly Rowland.

The former Destiny's Child member appeared on Watch What Happens Live on Thursday, March 4, where she explained to host Andy Cohen why she hasn't seen Framing Britney Spears, which focuses on the "Lucky" singer's conservatorship situation with father Jamie Spears. Kelly and Britney both first experienced fame around the same, as Britney's debut album was released in January 1999, while Destiny's Child's breakthrough album The Writing's on the Wall dropped in July 1999.



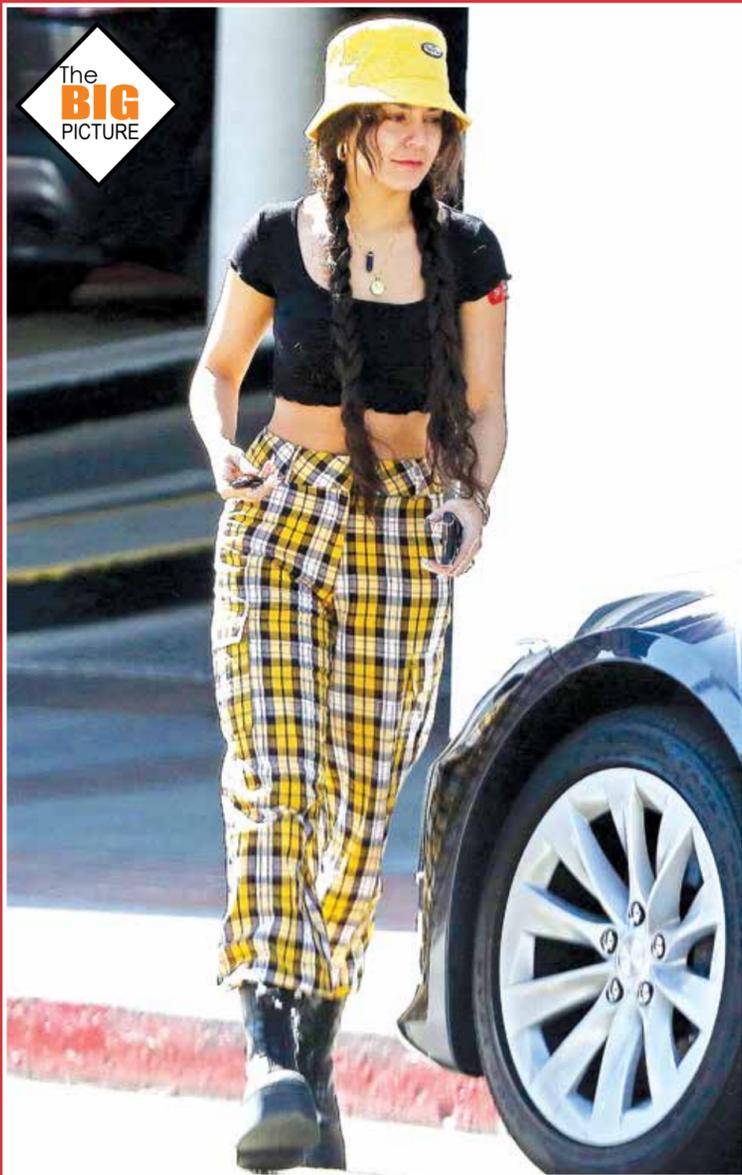
"No, I haven't seen the Britney doc," Kelly, 40, replied. "I'm having a hard time in wanting to watch it, just because I really respect when artists actually say, 'This is a documentary, it's OK to watch it.' I respect their space and their privacy and their point of view, you know what I mean?"

She continued, "And their story, what they feel like their story is from their brains, their hearts, their mouths in which they speak. So I kinda respect that, but everybody says that they really enjoy it, it's great."

Britney has not addressed Framing Britney Spears publicly, but the project's director Samantha Stark previously said it's unlikely the "Circus" star has seen it.

After Andy explained to Kelly that the documentary has shined a light on how Britney had been treated by the media, Kelly compared the scrutiny of the press in the 2000s to the pressures of social media today.

"It is media, but now it's social media, and social media is people," Kelly shared. "From her perspective, it was journalists and all these people in the media, but now social media is people, so people need to just be kind, period."



**BLACK AND YELLOW!** Actress Vanessa Hudgens stepped out in black and yellow checkered pants, a black crop top and a yellow bucket hat in Los Angeles.

## Sarah Niles joins 'Ted Lasso' season 2

**LOS ANGELES, MAR 5 (PTI):** Actor Sarah Niles has joined the second season of comedy "Ted Lasso" as a series regular.

According to Variety, Niles will play the role of Sharon, a sports psychologist who has been brought in to work with AFC Richmond.

Starring Jason Sudeikis, "Ted Lasso" is based on the popular Coach Ted Lasso character the actor played

in NBC Sports videos several years ago.

The series is created by Sudeikis, Lawrence, Joe Kelly and Brendan Hunt

It focuses on Ted Lasso, a small-time college football coach from Kansas hired to work with a professional soccer team in England, despite having no experience of coaching soccer.

The show also features actors Hannah Waddingham,

Brendan Hunt, Jeremy Swift, Juno Temple, Brett Goldstein, Phil Dunster and Nick Mohammed.

The first season of "Ted Lasso" premiered in August last year and became an instant hit. Sudeikis recently won his first-ever Golden Globe for his performance in the series.

Production on season two is currently underway and the show has also received an early season three renewal.

## Shreya Ghoshal announces pregnancy

**MUMBAI, MAR 4 (PTI):** Popular playback singer Shreya Ghoshal on Thursday announced she is expecting her first child with husband, entrepreneur Shiladitya Mukhopadhyaya.

The 36-year-old singer took to Instagram and shared her picture cradling the baby bump.

"Baby #Shreyaditya is on its way! @shiladitya and me are thrilled to share this news with you all," Ghoshal captioned the photo.

"Need all your love and



blessings as we prepare ourselves for this new chapter in

our lives," she added.

The singer tied the knot with Mukhopadhyaya, 37, in 2015 after a courtship of almost a decade.

Ghoshal has sung several popular songs, including "Ghar More Pardesiya" from the 2019 film "Kalank", title track of 2018's "Dhadak", "Deewani Mastani" from "Bajirao Mastani" (2015) and "Bairi Piya" from "Devdas", which marked her debut in 2002.

repeating on loop? What the cards want you to remember: you are loved and accepted for who you are (flaws and all!) and that your family would never judge you for being your most authentic self.

**CANCER:** Be mindful of how you are utilising your time and energy. Saying yes to everything will only add to the burden "and" come in the way of your personal mission. Let go of the need to please everybody, Cancer. On the personal front, this is a time of making amends. A time of owning up to your errors. If there is a conversation you have been avoiding, hold space for it now.

**LEO:** Today, your higher self is asking you a pertinent question: In what manner do you feel called to serve others? You are blessed in so many ways, Leo, and are experiencing abundance in a multitude of forms. So, don't hesitate to share from your surplus. Know that as long as you are giving from a space of love, you will always be taken care of.

**VIRGO:** Emotional baggage does not make for a pretty accessory, Virgo. Instead of carrying the load

around, have a conversation with the person concerned. Give yourself the permission to bare your heart and soul. What you will discover in the process: making yourself vulnerable is not such a bad thing after all! In the realm of work, things are looking good for you. Your commitment to the given project is helping set things into motion.

**LIBRA:** It's been a roller coaster ride, Libra, and that look on your face reveals you're terribly exhausted! So instead of pushing yourself to keep going further, hit the pause button. Take that much needed breather. A yin yoga session or a therapeutic massage are some of the ways in which you can decompress. If spending time outdoors is an option, reconnect with Mother Nature. Meditating in the open is a good way to get your body and being into balance.

**SCORPIO:** In the words of Bashar, channelled by Darryl Anka, "Your purpose is to be "you" as fully as you can and the way that's perhaps most easily done is to act on your highest joy." Yes, it's that simple, Scorpio! Your guidance today is to stay

in the energy of passion (despite the challenges) and to enter into a committed relationship with joy. Yes, you will have to step into the unknown in order to realise your dreams. Yes, you will have to leave all things familiar behind. Yes, you will have to face the judgments of your peers too. Trust that what you will gain by way of your experiences is far greater than what you could potentially lose.

**SAGITTARIUS:** There's always two ways to get what you want: the former involves waging a war, while the latter requires you to give peace a chance. No matter how exhausted you are by the given situation, put on your best smile, get your wit on, and work the room. Being one with the crew will prove to be the secret to your success! Trust what you're intuitively being guided to act upon, Sagittarius. You are on the right track.

**CAPRICORN:** The waning moon sees you consciously clearing your space, making peace with the past, and letting go of that which no longer serves you—both literally and figuratively. There's a newfound optimism within you that comes from accepting the things you cannot change and recognising the

light in every situation, including the ones that threatened to tear you apart. So, what do you want the next chapter of your life to look like? Find that space of stillness within, and set an intention for positive change. PS: It's all going to work out better than fine.

**AQUARIUS:** The cards are indicating the completion of a significant cycle, which in turn is making space for another. So take a bow, Aquarius! You have earned your moment in the sun. That said, charging forward at this point may be a tad bit unrealistic. It's best to take a breather and to give your body the permission to recuperate from the rollercoaster ride. If you're looking for ways to decompress, consider a yin yoga session or therapeutic massage.

**PISCES:** Uh-oh! It's that time again. Everybody around you seems to be triggered. The smallest comment from your side has the potential to cause chaos and conflict. One word, Pisces: disengage. Learn to become an observer of both the inner and outer landscape. Remember, you are not your anger. You are not the sadness. You are not your grief, loneliness or jealousy.